ARTICLE 1

Questioning behaviour in monocultural and intercultural technical business negotiations: the Dutch–Spanish connection

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ABSTRACT This article addresses the issue of asking questions as an important element of international business negotiation where there are differences in cultural background. A Dutch–Spanish difference in questioning was related to differences between the two parties in uncertainty reduction and negotiation goals. All 480 questions in 8 simulated Kelley game negotiations were reviewed: both monocultural (3 Dutch–Dutch in Dutch and 2 Spanish–Spanish in Spanish) and intercultural (3 Spanish–Dutch in English), i.e. 2 cultures and 3 languages (average duration of 30 min of recording per negotiation). This analysis may also allow an illustration of the Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis (Sapir, 1949 and Whorf, 1956) which holds, at least in its weak version, that culture frames language and language frames culture. It may also be possible to determine the extent to which intercultural differences between Dutch and Spanish questioning behaviours – assuming they can be ascertained in comparison with monocultural Dutch and Spanish behaviour – are language bound. In other words, do negotiators use a different typology of questions in their native language (L1: Dutch or Spanish) than in a neutral language (L2)? A comparison of the monocultural and intercultural data makes it possible to illustrate the above hypothesis, and to establish how far the L1-culture connection differs from that of the L2-culture. For another similar test on culture–language relations in South African mathematics texts and their readers, see Prins and Ulijn (1998).

The uncertainty reduction theory (UR) of Berger (1979) and the negotiation models developed by Fisher and Ury (1981) and Mastenbroek (1989) are related to question behaviour, which is analysed with the Verbal Response Mode Taxonomy of Stiles (1981). Pre- and post-negotiation questionnaires (using Likert-scales) were developed and administered to relate the results of the linguistic analysis to the perceptions of the negotiators in order to test the ecological validity of UR. Asking questions appeared to be a critical success factor in both monocultural and intercultural business
1. Introduction

‘The first time I met my Spanish colleague he was in a big meeting in which English was spoken. He participated in the meeting quite actively, using many gestures and often repeating what I said. Two weeks later, however, when I spoke to him by telephone, I discovered that he spoke English much worse than I had assumed after the meeting. On the telephone it was impossible for him to express what he thought until after we had switched to Spanish, and it appeared that he had missed quite a large part of the discussions during the meeting. By immediately repeating what I said, and by the gestures he used, he had camouflaged his uncertainty as to the exact meaning of the words.’

When managers are uncertain about something they often use language to disguise the fact. An efficient way to handle such hidden uncertainty is to ask (direct) questions, but when it comes to directness it seems that what is polite in one language and culture may not be acceptable in another (see Van der Wijst and Ulijn (1995) and Ulijn and Li (1995) for analyses of Dutch, French, Finnish and Chinese
intercultural negotiation discourse). Direct questions seem to be acceptable in Northern and Western cultures, but are considered rather impolite in Southern and Oriental cultures. Misunderstandings resulting from this difference in relational expectations might result in lost business. If the person in this example had not discovered in time that he had made a wrong interpretation of his colleague’s reaction, the business relationship might well have failed. When people communicate, they make predictions about the effects, or outcomes, of their communication behaviour; that is, they choose from a number of communicative strategies based on predictions about how the person receiving the message will respond (Miller and Steinberg, 1975). For choosing appropriate behaviour (consciously or unconsciously), communicators must rely on their knowledge of past events and on their expectations of future events. Culture forms an ‘implicit’ theory, based on norms, rules and values, that communicators use to guide their own behaviour and to interpret that of other people. What happens if differences present themselves, for example in the most obvious observable form of different behaviour: language used in an interaction with members of another culture? When communicators become conscious of their habitual behaviour (which has become automatic in the past) while communicating with people from other cultures, they will notice that they are behaving differently. This difference does not make it easier for them to predict their own behaviour or that of others. This also raises the question of whether there are real verbal cues of differences, and if there are, how do they differ across cultures, and what are the consequences for questioning behaviour? As experienced negotiators will seldom give away any information without being invited to do so, questioning can be a very efficient and effective tool to trigger answers from a business partner. The advantage of questions compared to other speech acts is their persuasive value, since an asked question requires the business partner to produce a response on the topic raised and obliges you to listen to the other party. Do the linguistic frames of Spanish, Dutch, or English, for instance, lead to intercultural differences in questioning, or do intercultural differences in politeness expectations about questioning lead to different linguistic realizations in different languages? Do the linguistic frames of, for instance, the same three languages, lead to intercultural differences in questioning, or do such differences (in politeness expectations about questioning) lead to different linguistic realizations in different languages?

The above may serve as an illustration of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis (Sapir, 1949 and Whorf, 1956) which holds, at least in its weak version that culture frames language and language frames culture. But to what extent are intercultural differences in questioning behaviour language bound, and to what extent are interlinguistic differences in questioning behaviour culture bound? The experimental design used in the following analysis of negotiation discourse might allow us to get away from a ‘chicken and egg’ effect.

**MOTIVES FOR ASKING QUESTIONS**

The first motive for requesting information about a business situation or partner is to develop the relationship in order to reach a profitable and necessary agree-
ment. However, since any question means an intrusion into the life of another person (Mulholland, 1991), questions can cause problems for those who have to answer them, especially if the topic is very difficult, or too personal, etc. Furthermore, asking a question often suggests that the other person would not provide the information voluntarily. This could be annoying to someone who was about to supply it anyway, and then felt unable to do so freely. Graham (1993) stated that his negotiation experiments using the Kelley game consisted primarily of information exchange tactics, such as asking questions (a statement in which the source asks the target to reveal information about him or herself) and self-disclosure (revealing personal information). He identified questions as one of the 12 verbal negotiation tactics in Kelley games played by 10 different cultures among themselves. The decreasing order of percentages used (total all tactics 100%) shows that it is risky to generalize about which cultures are likely to ask more questions: 1. China (Northern, 34); 2. Russia (27); 3. Brazil (22); 4. Korea (21); 5/6 Japan/US (20); 7. France (18); 8. Taiwan, (14); 9. Germany (11). It is safe to say that questions are well used, but their frequency might not predict an East–West or a North–South difference (cf. China and Taiwan, and the small differences between the US and Brazil/France). If this study did not provide evidence of a notable difference in frequency in asking questions between Spanish (a Latin culture) and Dutch (an Anglo–Germanic culture), there might be intercultural differences at work. The strategic use of questions in a negotiation is discussed in more detail elsewhere, in reference to other studies (Ulijn and Strother, 1995, Chapter 7, and Ulijn, in press; see also Section 2.1). If the art of asking the right questions at the right stage of the negotiation process paves the way to a mutually satisfying contract, it is worth an empirical study.

The second motive in requesting information is the need for understanding. Every communicator has a strong need to understand both ‘the self’ and ‘the other’ in an interaction situation (Berger and Calabrese, 1975). That understanding is made possible by reducing uncertainty. One strategy for quickly learning more about a situation or a person is to ask questions. However, we need to consider whether questioning every strategy is the most efficient way to reduce uncertainty or, since it is a very intrusive technique, if an inappropriate use increases rather than reduces uncertainty. Furthermore, if questioning can reduce uncertainty, how can the technique be used to best effect? Obviously, the technique employed in ‘questioning’ to (a) obtain information or (b) reduce uncertainty can be of critical importance when we interact with one another.

Both of the (Dutch) authors of this article (and the Dutch student [Van Dalen] who has helped them with gathering the data through his MS thesis) have substantial experience of working with and speaking in Spanish, one (Ulijn) as a trainer of Dutch/Spanish negotiators and expert in international management and communication research, the other (Verweij) as a production management consultant in international projects, and as a coordinator of various European research projects in this field. Their impression is that in Dutch–Spanish business encounters the two nationalities have different ways of dealing with uncertainty
and the use of questions. Would the Dutch tend to be rather directly focused on the issues (instrumental goals), in an Anglo–Germanic way and the Spanish to be rather relation-concerned?

It was felt that a study for some answers could provide an insight into the use of questioning in intercultural technical business negotiations. We therefore adopt the following general research question for this article:

**How can an insight into the questioning behaviour of Dutch and Spanish negotiators lead to mutual understanding in intercultural technical business negotiations? How can we gain that insight?**

2. Culture, negotiation, and uncertainty: some theoretical aspects

A better understanding of the relationship between language and culture in the Whorfian sense might lead to a better mutual appreciation of negotiators with different cultural backgrounds. This study tries, therefore, to measure the effect of (national) culture on the uncertainty reduction process towards a successful outcome by analysing the language behaviour of asking questions during negotiations (see Figure 1).

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**Figure 1. Possible sources of variables in an intercultural negotiation**
Other aspects might intervene as well, including individual characteristics (age, negotiation expertise, language competence and performance) and process measures, such as credibility, content tenacity, power use, etc. These will be briefly summarized later using the results of a questionnaire administered to the negotiators involved. They do not interact too much with the four main factors of Figure 1, but for an extensive discussion of them see Van Dalen (1995). We found it was possible for culture, negotiation outcome, uncertainty reduction, and questioning behaviour to be rather effectively isolated in our study.

Section 2.1 addresses negotiation profit and asking questions as they relate to outcome variables on individual and joint levels. Culture, uncertainty avoidance and uncertainty reduction by measuring Attributional Confidence, global uncertainty, perceived similarity and uncertainty reduction capacity will be dealt with in 2.2. The research questions to test our model of Figure 1 will be considered in 2.3.

2.1. NEGOTIATION PROFIT AND ASKING QUESTIONS

Negotiation has been defined as a process of mutual dependence in which two or more entities discuss common and (apparently) different interests and objectives in order to reach an agreement or a compromise (contract), because they see benefits in doing so (Ulijn and Strother, 1995). Negotiation is a fundamental activity within interdependent relationships, a process whereby two or more parties who hold – or believe they hold – incompatible goals engage in a give-and-take interaction to reach a mutually acceptable solution (Putnam and Wilson, 1990). Essential characteristics of negotiation are that both parties are mutually dependent and also have conflicting objectives. In order to reach this acceptable agreement they will have to exchange information, because both of them enter the negotiation with limited information, and are uncertain how the other side will react. For this reason they will need to gain information about their opponents’ preferences, goals, expectations, strengths, and weaknesses. The negotiators’ behaviour with regard to exchanging information will be guided by their goals, these being cognitive representations of desired end states that become interaction goals when communication and co-ordination with others are necessary to achieve those states (Putnam and Wilson, 1990). In other words, to gain insight into the complex and indeterminate relationship between the negotiation’s goals and outcome with regard to the information-exchange, it is necessary to refer to these so-called interaction goals.

There are two types of interaction goals. The first is concerned with what is known as the instrumental subject. The second, which refers to the relationship, is also known as the relational subject. These two types of goals have to be separated clearly from each other (Fisher and Ury, 1981; Mastenbroek, 1989). The actual opponent is never the problem, but only a representative of the obstacle. To prevent the threatening situation of the negotiator being seen as the problem – instead of focusing on the real issue – the goals have to be clearly distinguished.

Instrumental goals The two main instrumental goals are to maximize pay-offs
(the individual profit), and to focus on the total available pay-offs by co-operating with the opponent to reach an acceptable settlement (the joint profit). Each goal is represented by a distinct type of bargaining behaviour in the negotiation process. The aim for the individual profit level is linked to competitive behaviour, while the joint profit level relates to the co-operative behaviour. The interdependent relationship between parties in negotiation makes the situation simultaneously co-operative and competitive, and it therefore shapes both parties’ instrumental goals. This has implications for the activities to fulfil the instrumental goals, and probably for the use of questioning techniques as well. The exchange of information will probably need to be more open, clear and accurate in order to ensure that negotiation is more cooperative. It will involve asking for facts and explanations, interpreting and reflecting things in your own words, thinking out loud using rhetorical questions, and searching for crucial information by means of open questions. Competitive bargaining is likely to require carefully-worded and perhaps even a number of deliberately vague or ambiguous questions, requests for descriptive information, and at times several intrusive closed questions.

Relational goals The second set of interaction goals is related to the establishment and maintenance of relationships with the opponent. These goals are also represented by a distinct type of behaviour that shapes the negotiation process. One main aim with regard to relational goals is to increase the degree of confidence. Confidence is necessary because of the positive relationship between the open exchange of information and the resultant uncovering of common interests for maximizing joint gain. Negotiation can be defined as gradually building up and consolidating sufficient trust (Mastenbroek, 1989). Confidence can be built up by showing interest, listening and reflecting on information. Questioning has this positive effect when it involves asking for opinions, and confirming and evaluating each others’ ideas, without adopting the tone of a police interrogation, or otherwise putting things in doubt.

The above instrumental/relational distinction in goal setting for successful business negotiation also applies to the explicit/implicit distinctions in the ‘iceberg’ and ‘onion’ metaphors for culture in general (national, corporate, professional), as they are discussed by Ulijn and Kumar (in press) as being relevant to effective technical and business communication between West (US, Europe) and East (India, Japan and China). Instrumental goals are explicitly obvious in the top of the iceberg and the outer layer of the onion, whereas the implicit domain of relational goals is below sea level, and deep inside the onion.

One of the authors (Jan Ulijn) has 10 years’ experience in the negotiation training of (post)graduates in engineering, including business managers. The art of asking the right questions at the right stage of the negotiation process seems to pave the way for achieving a satisfactory contract for each of the parties. Experienced negotiators never say what they have in mind without being invited to do so. One effect of questioning is to provoke answers which might
enable the questioner to become more certain about specific issues, and about
relations with the other party. Similarly, the seller may decide to ask short, open,
reflective questions to encourage long answers on the part of the buyer. This
may help to narrow down the negotiation or uncertainty space, because both
parties will want to be able to depend on each other, and to be certain about
issues and relationships in a way that will be mutually profitable. In this way, at
the end the closed, leading/suggestive and directive questions (ask for the deal!) may induce short yes or no answers. Questioning may even improve inter-
personal relations during a business negotiation (Be tough on the issues and soft
on the people). On other occasions, personality factors, issues, and the environ-
ment, can affect the type of questioning used during a negotiation even more
than a difference in cultural background. It seems as if the balance between
uncertainty reduction about issues and relation is different across cultures, just
as some questions which may not be asked in some cultures are essential in
others! Real-life simulations of negotiations between Latin (Southern), Oriental
and Western parties gave us the impression that the Chinese tend to ask leading
questions in a positive way to preserve harmony and friendship, whereas in the
Dutch context such questions are more likely to suggest that the questioner (for
instance a journalist) is right, and that the interviewee only has to agree to con-
firm a news item. Oriental and Latin partners may find the direct style of ques-
tioning used by Western colleagues to be rude and impolite. Van Dalen (1995)
also tries to assess interpersonal factors in order to avoid a bias of culture and
language as the main sources of variation, by using a post-hoc questionnaire
for this same study. The fact that interpersonal factors appeared to have less
effect might suggest that relationship building in one (cultural) context may be
of less importance than in others. It seems as if intercultural and other differ-
ences can be found in the way one deals with relational goals, with a tendency
to be rather explicit (Asian, Latin) or rather implicit (Anglo–Germanic).

When experienced negotiators are asked how they usually deal with these
sorts of intercultural differences, their general advice for any culture seems to be:
Start with open questions about the needs of the client as a way to work on the
relationship after a long (Asian, Latin) or short (Anglo–Germanic) introduction
(for more details about the strategic typology of questions see Ulijn and Strother,
1995, Chapter 7); aim to end with directive question to go from the innermost
layers of the onion, then to top of the iceberg, and then to the onion’s outer skin.
Questions restrict the negotiating space more and more on the way to an agree-
ment. In our training experience, the strategic question typology appeared to be
very useful for distinguishing instrumental content-related and relational goals
reflected by the form and the intent of the negotiation, but it lacked the rigour
required for analysing and classifying questions in negotiation discourse. Section
2.3 deals with the Stiles (1981) taxonomy as a possible solution for this problem,
and in particular for analysing form and intent. The strategic level should be seen
as part of the semantics of negotiation discourse, which will be partly used for
analysing content.
2.2 Culture, Uncertainty Avoidance and Reduction, Asking Questions, and the Three Research Questions of This Study

Any attempt to explain cultural questioning behaviour will need a framework based upon previous empirical cultural research related to linguistics. Whereas the notion of uncertainty is well known from the field of intercultural management in general, empirical evidence on the role of cultural factors is scarce. In his first study, Hofstede (1984) extracted four dimensions of cultural variation along which he located his cultural units. One of the dimensions, which involves the lack of tolerance in a culture for uncertainty, is called Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI). The countries most likely to avoid uncertainty are to be found in South America and Southern Europe, while countries low in UAI include the USA, as well as those of Southern Asia, and of Northern Europe, such as the Netherlands.

A comparison of the Dutch/Spanish Hofstede scores show the following results: for power distance: 38/57; individualism: 80/51; masculinity: 63/42; and uncertainty avoidance: 49/86; with uncertainty as the biggest score of intercultural difference (37) and the other dimensions of: individualism, masculinity and power distance being smaller (in that order). From this perspective it is interesting once again to study the Dutch/Spanish connection.

The Uncertainty Reduction (UR) theory framework tries to explain cultural variations in intercultural communication (Berger, 1979; Gudykunst, 1988). Uncertainty reduces when communicators have confidence in their abilities to predict other people’s behaviour in interactions, and are able to explain what is occurring in the interaction. Later research developed operationalizations of uncertainty in an initial interaction through measures of Attributional Confidence. Clatterbuck (1979), Parks and Adelman (1983), and Douglas (1991) claim that the source of uncertainty is the lack of specific information of the other in the interaction like individual-specific information such as emotions, feelings, attitudes, responses and behaviours. Attributional Confidence is defined as the perceived adequacy of information with which to explain behaviour that is occurring and to predict appropriate future behaviours – that is, the converse of uncertainty.

Definition 1: Attributional Confidence (AC) refers to communicators’ certainty to predict and explain their own behaviour and that of others after being acquainted with an unknown person.

Douglas (1991) introduced the Global Uncertainty (also referred to as Global Confidence) construct, which is embedded in a communicator’s conversational history, reflects confidence about acquaintanceship in general, and is not partner-specific. Global Confidence varies among communicators, and is associated with social performances. Although communicators low in Global Confidence (pre-conversation confidence) are comparatively successful in reducing their uncertainty, according to Douglas (1994) they remain relatively less able to predict and explain their own behaviour and that of others during interaction. Douglas found that uncertainty did not change significantly after visual exposure to the partner but that uncertainty reduction was, for the most part, conversationally based.
Definition 2: Global Confidence (GC) refers to the communicators’ certainty to predict and explain their own behaviour and that of others in general acquaintanceships, measured before being acquainted with an unknown person.

The reduced uncertainty, or, put another way, the increase of confidence, is the increase in the amount of certainty of an individual, as measured by subtracting Attributional Confidence from Global Confidence (see Figure 4).

Definition 3: The Uncertainty Reduction (UR) refers to the difference between the communicator’s amounts of certainty before and after being acquainted with an unknown person.

Douglas (1994) suggested further research into the relationship between Global Confidence and the communicator’s sensitivity to extended interactions (e.g. work-related situations). Negotiation, a typical work-related situation, is an example of such an extended interaction. Berger (1979) states that individuals try to reduce uncertainty about one another when they can provide rewards, such as profits in negotiations. These statements make it interesting to combine UR with negotiation research.

Figure 1 suggests an effect of national culture not only on uncertainty reduction (2.2), but also on negotiation outcome; a mutual effect not only between negotiation outcome and questioning behaviour, but also between uncertainty reduction and questioning behaviour, as indicated by Berger (1979), Douglas (1994) and Gudykunst (1985 and 1988). This article addresses only the direct effects of national culture on negotiation outcome, question behaviour and uncertainty reduction in the context of three research questions. Data on the other relations are reported elsewhere (Van Dalen, 1995) and will be summarized here only briefly. In connection with our general research question, the more detailed ones can be formulated as follows:

Research question 1 (RQ 1): To what extent do Negotiation Outcome variables, individual and joint profit levels differ between cultures?

Research question 2 (RQ 2): To what extent do negotiator’s/Attributional Confidence (AC), Global Confidence (GC) and Uncertainty Reduction (UR) differ between cultures?

Research question 3 (RQ 3): To what extent does Questioning Behaviour regarding form, intent and content differ between cultures?

How are we to measure these effects? RQ1 can use the Kelley game (Graham, 1993) to distinguish individual and joint profit. Campbell et al. (1988) could demonstrate a cultural effect on negotiation profit in such a game involving 138 US, 44 UK, 44 German and 48 French businesspeople in a monocultural situation. Americans focus on the issue by taking a problem-solving approach in their negotiations, whereas status or role is crucial for success in the UK. In
Germany there is an inverse relationship between the seller’s profit and the client’s satisfaction: the lower the profit of the one, the higher the satisfaction of the other. In France, to have a profitable relationship the personality and background of the negotiators should be the same. This study allows us not only to compare Spanish and Dutch monocultural negotiations using the same simulation, but also intercultural ones between Spanish and Dutch businessmen. RQ2 may use the extensive UR tools (see the above authors). RQ3, however, needs an extensive discussion of how to analyse and classify questions in the, intercultural negotiation discourse studied here.

2.3. HOW TO ANALYSE AND CLASSIFY QUESTIONS IN NEGOTIATION DISCOURSE (INCLUDING SOME VALIDITY ASPECTS)?

To analyse and classify questions we can use qualitative coding, which helps to understand and describe relationships between cultural values as conveyed in language. Stiles (1981) developed a reliable and valid coding system to classify communication behaviour in which different categories exclude each other completely. According to Stiles it is possible to use a general-purpose system in isolation. An investigator interested (like us) in Questioning Behaviour might focus on questions alone, and still have the advantage over an ad hoc category because results are directly comparable across other studies.

Questioning Behaviour will be classified on three levels: form (literal level); intent (pragmatic level); and content (semantic level). The form and intent of questions are codified by means of the Verbal Response Mode (VRM) taxonomy of Stiles, using categories of speech. Content questions are codified by means of the content tendencies from Kellerman’s elaboration (1987). This taxonomy also has the advantage that if one were starting from a linguistic description of questions, it would still be possible to trace the communicative process involved back to both the instrumental and relational goals of negotiation.

The VRM Taxonomy, question form and intent The taxonomy of VRM has a core of three principles of classification: source of experience; presumption about experience; and frame of reference. All three principles are dichotomous, each can take the value ‘speaker’ or ‘other’, and all eight \((2 \times 2 \times 2)\) combinations of them are possible. Each combination defines one of the modes, as shown in Table 1. The VRM scoring unit is the utterance.

The VRM taxonomy codes each utterance at the literal level (form) and the pragmatic level (intent). As a notational convention, the form is written first and the intent second. Form is what the utterance says, based on the dictionary meaning of the words and the standard meaning of the grammatical construction. The question form is interrogative, either using inverted verb–subject order, or interrogative words such as who, what, or how. Intent is what the speaker intends the utterance to mean on the occasion of its use; it deals with what is meant, regardless of how it is said. To simplify reference in the application of the VRM taxonomy to question form, we will add a Q next to the previously mentioned mode
indications, so that Q + D (disclosure), for instance, becomes QD, QE, QA, and so on. We will also add the Q in order to have the intent followed by the question form: DQ, EQ, AQ, and so on. Hence, QD means the form of the question disclosure, DQ means that the intent of the question is disclosure.

The question form and intent combinations which relate to this research include one pure mode called Direct Questions (QQd), in which Form and Intent coincide (with Closed questions QQc and Open questions, QQo), and what essentially amount to 14 mixed modes, in which they differ. For example, Would you roll up your sleeve? is coded QA, which is read as ‘Question in service of Advisement’ (the Question Form is an inverted subject–verb order) but this utterance has an Advisement Intent (AQ: Guiding the other’s behaviour – for more details see Van Dalen, 1995). Another example is QQd, a Question taking on a Direct form with an intent to get a direct answer, as in Can we draw up a contract?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of experience</th>
<th>Presumption about experience</th>
<th>Frame of reference</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Applied to form</th>
<th>Applied to intent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaker Speaker</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>DISCLOSURE (D)</td>
<td>QD</td>
<td>DQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Reveals thoughts, feelings, perceptions, or intentions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>EDIFICATION (E)</td>
<td>QE</td>
<td>EQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>States objective information.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>ADVISEMENT (A)</td>
<td>QA</td>
<td>AQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Attempts to guide behaviour: suggestions, commands.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>CONFIRMATION (C)</td>
<td>QC</td>
<td>CQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Compares speaker’s experience with other’s: (dis)agreement, shared experience, or belief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>QUESTION (Q)</td>
<td>QQd</td>
<td>QQc</td>
<td>QQo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Requests information or guidance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (K)</td>
<td>QK</td>
<td>KQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Conveys receipt of or receptiveness to other’s communication: simple acceptance, salutations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>INTERPRETATION (I)</td>
<td>QI</td>
<td>IQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Explains or labels the other: judgements or evaluations of other’s experience or behaviour</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>REFLECTION (R)</td>
<td>QR</td>
<td>RQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Puts other’s experience into words: repetitions, restatements, clarifications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| TABLE 1. Taxonomy of Verbal Response Modes |
In addition to the VRM taxonomy, each question intent can be coded at the semantic level by the sort of information (content) it seeks. The usefulness of separating speech acts categories (like questions) and the contents of interest (like facts or opinions) is to understand and predict related types of interaction, for instance in intercultural negotiations. Van Dalen (1995) discusses three content dichotomy tendencies suggested by Kellerman (1987): explanatory vs descriptive, clear vs ambiguous and factual vs opinionated. In this study we use one – clear vs ambiguous – which might lead to clear or ambiguous answers as well. The direct form and intent might reflect an open, closed and reflective content, categories which are used both by Stiles and by Ulijn and Strother (1995). Open questions (QQo) serve to obtain information, and start with Who, what, where, why, when, which, or how? Reflective questions (QR) help students to gain a clear understanding of backgrounds that lead to a certain position.

(a) I don’t think the terms of the settlement are satisfactory.
(b) You don’t think they are satisfactory?

Closed questions (QQc) determine the exact indication within a category with an agreed extent. These are often questions that can only be answered by yes or no. They overlap with the form category of direct questions (QQd). QQo questions merge with direct ones, but their intent is less directive, since they can help to open up the negotiation space. After all, it is more difficult to make a clear distinction between content and intent than between form and intent.

What is the validity of a VRM analysis and our experimental design (for which a reliability check will be given as part of our results)? VRM has proved to be a valid tool for classifying speech acts without too much semantic interpretation (see Van der Wijst and Noordman, 1998 and the uses by others he refers to), but it mainly contributes to the linguistic content or construct validity of questioning behaviour. Since this construct also has to be ecologically valid in the sort of business negotiation settings described here, an experimental design could bring about psycholinguistic factors of such questioning behaviour as well. This combination of analysis and experiment could then provide insightful suggestions for real-life business practice, as we had intended.

3. Design and implementation

This section reports the research design (3.1); the subjects and materials chosen (3.2.); the data-gathering procedure (3.3); the reliability of the survey and observation tool; and the transformation from qualitative to quantitative data and the statistical analysis used (3.4).

3.1. Research design

In order to gain insight into the questioning behaviour of Dutch and Spanish negotiators without having specific expectations for hypotheses, an exploratory
study method with a broad approach (an experiment combined with a survey) was used. It employed a $2 \times 2$ pre-experimental design with nationality (Dutch and Spanish) and cultural settings (monocultural vs intercultural) as independent variables and questioning behaviour as a dependent variable. The negotiation language(s) used (Dutch/Spanish/English) served as a covariate (see Table 2).

The experiment design consisted of eight negotiation simulations in which the negotiators played an improved Kelley game (Van der Wijst and Hendriks, 1991). Sixteen experienced business negotiators were involved in eight one-to-one negotiations: three Dutch people negotiated with three other Dutch people in a monocultural setting, and three other Dutch people with three Spanish people in an intercultural setting (total: 9 Dutch). Two Spanish people negotiated with two Spanish people and three other Spanish people with the same Dutch people as above (total Spanish: 7). To avoid learning effects, no negotiator played the same game twice. The game involved a buyer and a seller, who had to negotiate over the price of three technical commodities: laser-printers, monitors and software. Different profit-levels, types of background information, and settings were included. Both negotiation partners received their individual instructions with their own price–profit table. The prices were replaced by letters, and only in one case – i.e. if they agreed on an I-E-A combination (with a $340,000 profit for both) – did they win a bonus. In order to make the I-E-A deal the negotiators (a) had to be creative, and (b) had to make a loss on one of the products. This last point, and the obligation to make a package deal of 1000 pieces of each product, stimulated explorative behaviour. The game was simple enough to learn quickly, but complex enough to provide on average half an hour of face-to-face interaction. An important factor was the time limit of 45 min, which helped to increase pressure. To control external characteristics, the buyer/seller distribution of the units was equated to make sure that both Dutch and Spanish acted in an equal number of cases as a buyer or seller in an equal number of mono- and intercultural settings. To avoid another influential variable, such as the gender effects evidenced by Lee and Boster (1991), we deliberately limited our selection to males. We did this in order to control the size of the design, and to compensate for the difficulty of finding Spanish businesswomen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Monocultural</th>
<th>Intercultural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch (N=9)</td>
<td>3 Dutch–3 Dutch (Dutch)</td>
<td>3 Dutch–3 Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish (N=7)</td>
<td>2 Spanish–2 Spanish (Spanish)</td>
<td>(English)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Pre-experimental design with 16 subjects in 8 negotiations
A sample of experienced Dutch and Spanish technical business negotiators was selected on the basis of experience, culture and unfamiliarity between the negotiators. Many of the negotiators were interested, and prepared in principle to cooperate, but they were too busy to participate, so that the sample population became relatively small. The use of experienced negotiators instead of students, however, increased the ecological validity of this study. We managed to match three Dutch mono-cultural, two Spanish mono-cultural, and three Dutch/Spanish intercultural negotiations. Because of the exploratory nature of this study we considered that this sample would be feasible, although we had no means of testing its representativeness for the whole population of Dutch and Spanish business negotiators.

To obtain an integrative research design we combined two methods of collecting data from the negotiators: survey and observation. This dual approach to sources was necessary because questioning behaviour can be observed in an experiment but cannot be measured by means of a survey, and uncertainty can be measured by means of a survey but cannot be observed in a negotiation experiment. The characteristics of the negotiators participating in the experiment were collected by means of one pre- and one post-survey questionnaire. The poll was composed of structured closed questions with five or six points items. To improve reliability, most of the measuring instruments used were existing and practically proved scales. The UR variables and negotiation outcome variables described in Section 2 are presented in more detail elsewhere (Van Dalen, 1995) with their measuring instrument; here we have selected only the most crucial elements of Figure 1 and Table 1.

We used observation as a tool to register actual behaviour, rather than self-report questionnaires. The advantages of observation of this approach are repeatability (if recorded) for judgement afterwards, and non-necessary presence. The disadvantages are complicated interpretation, difficulty in understanding motives, and time consumption, although we could keep those under sufficient control. The negotiations were audio-recorded and partly transcribed to provide the questioning behaviour data. The limitations of having only audio-recording did not have serious consequences for the study described here. The observed questioning behaviour was made operational in a category system with questioning characteristics (see Figure 2), and the behaviour frequency was measured (qualitative data) to make our study as objective as possible.

All negotiations took place in quiet offices and classrooms. Subjects introduced themselves to each other (this was their initial interaction). They were given instructions to fill in an introductory questionnaire, which took about 15 min. On average, the negotiation sessions lasted for 36.5 min., with a range of 19 to 45 min. The negotiators reported having slight difficulties with the lack of a starting level, that is to say the fact that they had no references as to what should be the
first bid, the restriction to sell only 1000 pieces of each product, and the prohibi-
tion against talking about price levels. However, we do not think that this pre-
sumed lack of authenticity seriously affected the ecological validity of our data.
After they had reached an agreement, they had to fill in the post-survey ques-
tionnaire before starting to talk about what happened during the negotiations.

As mentioned earlier, to measure global and Attributional Confidence and
uncertainty reduction (GC, AC, and UR) one pre- and one post-questionnaire was
used in a survey (for details see Van Dalen, 1995). The VRM system was adopted
as an observation tool for the questions used. This system codes what people do in
verbal interaction – their speech acts – but not what they think. Coding was done
directly from audio-tape because that made it easier to understand what the speaker
meant (or intended), and because natural speech, elliptical, incomplete and
ungrammatical utterances require reference to the context. Theoretically, the
modes are coherent and distinct categories. In other words, Disclosure, Questions,
Reflection, and so forth are easily recognizable categories of utterances. In
addition to knowledge of the immediate context and the relationship, VRM
coding requires familiarity with the cultural and linguistic context of the disc-
ourse. Insofar as speakers use conventional or idiomatic expressions, or assume
that their audience share particular understandings, coders may need to know
the conventions and share the understandings in order to code accurately. To

\[ \text{FIGURE 2. Question classification checklist} \]
measure the question characteristics of Dutch and Spanish negotiators, the coder of this study used the graphical checklist in Figure 2.

An utterance such as *So we have a deal?* may or may not be classified as a question, because an interrogation mark is not always audible. If the context leads to **Yes, a question**, the content can be analysed, as well as the answer to the question.

3.4. THE RELIABILITY OF THE SURVEY AND OBSERVATION TOOLS, THE TRANSFORMATION FROM QUALITATIVE TO QUANTITATIVE DATA, AND THE STATISTICAL ANALYSES USED

The data obtained had to be prepared for statistical analysis. We will discuss briefly the check on the reliability of our survey and observation tools, and the correction of the number of questions for time.

The data in Table 3 should be read as in the following example:

*Global Confidence (GC)* was assessed by the 9 items in the revised version of Clatterbuck’s Attributional Confidence scale (1979). The average of this distribution was 28.3, with a standard deviation of 7.7. The scores were distributed normally (kurtosis = −0.2, skewness = 0.1). The reliability of this index was estimated by a coefficient alpha, and found to be .87.

Similarly, the other variables in Table 3, *Attributional Confidence (AC)* and *Uncertainty Reduction (UR)* should also be read:

In sum, both *Global* and *Attributional Confidence* scales, as measured over eight negotiations, seemed to be high (the maximum of Cronbach’s α is 1.00), but the single item of the *Uncertainty Reduction* seemed to be insufficiently reliable. Therefore, we defined UR as AC-GC (see above and Figure 4) and did not use this item.

The eight negotiations lasted 290 min. in total (M = 36.5) and 480 questions were abstracted as they came in the samples (see Table 4 for distribution), just to have a coherent number.

The qualitative data of the questioning behaviour measured was transformed into quantitative data to compute the correlation between the variables; in this way, every question category became a variable. To treat the questions as averages they had to be corrected for time, which we standardized at 30 min. For instance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negotiation time:</th>
<th>41 min.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions:</td>
<td>11 QAs asked (questions with the form Advertisement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correction:</td>
<td>11 × 30 / 41 = 8.1 QAs asked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 3. Calculation of Cronbach’s α reliability coefficient over 16 subjects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Cronbach’s α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GC</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28.31</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>−0.23</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33.25</td>
<td>7.56</td>
<td>−0.74</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>6.84</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analysis of the quantitative data consists of comparisons between cultures and tests on a linear correlation. To illustrate the question forms and intents as they show up in this study we refer the reader to the Appendix. We selected one of the original English transcripts with the best distribution of question types, omitting the rest of the dialogue to avoid translation problems (from Spanish and Dutch) and to save space. Inspection of our data demonstrates that there is some idiosyncrasy in the questioning behaviour of one speaker which makes it impossible to find all the question forms and intents in one transcript, even when two negotiators were present.

Depending on the nature of the data, we selected the following means to evidence significant differences, correlations and variation. The effect of National Culture (Spanish vs Dutch) on Negotiation Outcome (RQ 1, see Figure 3 below) and on Questioning Behaviour (RQ 3, see Table 7) was measured by a Kruskal Wallis 1-way ANOVA for comparisons. For the effect of culture on Uncertainty Reduction (RQ 2) a Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed ranks test was used to compare the two national groups for both Global and Attributive Confidence (RQ 2, see Table 6). To

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question form*</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Question intent*</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>AQ</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QC</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>CQ</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QD</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>DQ</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QE</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>EQ</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QI</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>IQ</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QK</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>KQ</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QQd</td>
<td>44**</td>
<td>QQc and QQo</td>
<td>44** and 109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QR</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>RQ</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>202**</td>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>320**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All acronyms in this table are explained in Table 1 and on p. 152
** Since QQd and QQc refer to the same 44, the total is 522 – 44 = 478.

The analysis of the quantitative data consists of comparisons between cultures and tests on a linear correlation.

To illustrate the question forms and intents as they show up in this study we refer the reader to the Appendix. We selected one of the original English transcripts with the best distribution of question types, omitting the rest of the dialogue to avoid translation problems (from Spanish and Dutch) and to save space. Inspection of our data demonstrates that there is some idiosyncrasy in the questioning behaviour of one speaker which makes it impossible to find all the question forms and intents in one transcript, even when two negotiators were present.

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illustrate the Whorf hypothesis about the link between culture and language in this study, a further refinement on the linguistic level was needed. If language plays a separate role from culture in the context of the three factors of Figure 1, it would be interesting to measure the effect of culture on the negotiation outcome (profit), being the ultimate purpose of any negotiation, but also of the linguistic form of questioning behaviour on that outcome. A Spearman’s rank correlation allowed a regression analysis on those data (see Table 5).

Although the original study by Van Dalen (1995) consists of mutual effects and correlations between all different sources of variation in intercultural negotiation (see Figure 1), in this study we limit our discussion about the reliability and further assessment of the used survey, observation and statistics tools to our three research questions involving the role of national culture (Spanish vs Dutch). We may expect that for this purpose, and for the nature of data we gathered, those tools are sufficiently reliable, and can lead to valid conclusions with respect to the cultural and linguistic aspects of questioning behaviour.

4. Results and discussion

This section presents the results on the theoretical elements of negotiation, uncertainty reduction, and questioning behaviour. Only the significant outcomes are presented in the tables.

Research question 1: To what extent do Negotiation Outcome variables, individual and joint profit levels differ between cultures?

According to many businesspeople, the individual and joint profit are the most important variables in a negotiation outcome. After all, nobody negotiates only to maintain the relationship, but also to reach a mutually acceptable solution. Figure 3 presents the average individual profit level of both Dutch and Spanish negotiators, with the optimal best deal situation given as a criterion for the perfect win–win outcome.

No significant differences were found in profit levels between cultures (Kruskal–Wallis 1-way ANOVA). The Spanish had to make more concessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question behaviours</th>
<th>Individual profit</th>
<th>Joint profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct questions</td>
<td>.68 (.00)</td>
<td>.51 (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open questions</td>
<td>.48 (.06)</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed questions</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>.48 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective questions</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>.58 (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous questions</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>.64 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous answers</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>.50 (.05)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
than the Dutch (8.78) mainly because the Spanish first bid was higher (44.4) than the Dutch bid (40.4). The final Dutch result (31.4) was slightly better than the Spanish result (30.0). This insignificant result means that both the Dutch and the Spanish had the same opportunities to reach a satisfying agreement. The joint profit level which is absent from Figure 3 shows a small, but not significant profit for the Spanish (62.0 vs 61.3 points). Hence, starting from more extreme individual profit expectations (the Spanish expecting higher profits than the Dutch) both parties came close to the ‘best deal’ situation, with the Spanish having a slight profit over the Dutch for the joint profit, and the Dutch having a slight profit on the individual profit.

Thanks to the combined proposal of Ulijn (in press) and Kellerman (1987) presented in Section 2.3, we could relate some important question behavior categories, mainly based upon strategic content to negotiation outcome (see Figure 1). The result of such a correlation coefficient might lead to some practical recommendation for a more effective use of questions in both mono- and intercultural negotiations.

An examination of the relationship between negotiators’ questioning behaviour and their individual and joint profit level showed some interesting results. The individual profit level is higher if more direct questions are asked ($r = .46, p = .08$), especially closed questions ($r = .48, p = .06$). This confirms the expectation that questioning behaviour can influence the individual profit level. Furthermore, this result could also show a causal relationship, since the individual profit level is only affected by individual characteristics. The joint profit level also increases if more direct questions are asked, but remarkably enough this is not the case with closed questions, while open questions correlate with joint profit ($r = .48, p = .06$). A strong relationship ($r = .58, p = .02$) between joint profit and reflection questions demonstrates the advantage of reflecting phrases in other words. After noticing that the total amount of question intents also correlates ($r = .46, p = .07$), a relationship between open exchange of information and joint gain is ascertained.

The correlation between joint profit and the requests for factual information ($r = .52, p = .04$) as well as the relationship between joint profit and requests for explanatory information ($r = .58, p = .02$) which is reported elsewhere (Van Dalen, 1995) are explainable with the open exchange relationship. More remarkable results were found in the coherence between joint profit and ambiguous answers ($r = .50, p = .05$) as well as with ambiguous questions ($r = .64, p = .01$). The correlation between ambiguous answers (which we coded as ambiguous, because they did not clearly contain the requested information), ambiguous questions (often requests which were not clearly formulated) and joint profit are a measure of openness and trust. These last two qualities are necessary for uncovering common interests, but they are also intertwined to such an extent that without trust no openness will appear. This means that exploring in an initial interaction (i.e., one which is devoid of trust) the tactic of vagueness can be used. Ambiguous questions receive significantly more ambiguous answers. While these answers may not clearly contain the requested information, it is possible that they uncon-
sciously hold more valuable information than one would ever have received by asking a direct question. Just like the ambiguous questions, ambiguous answers can be more valuable than expected.

Competitive tasks, such as the negotiation examined here, constitute an excellent situation to study how negotiators reduce their uncertainty, starting from a certain level of global confidence to attribute confidence to their counterpart. Research question 2 allows us to do so.

Research question 2: To what extent do negotiators’ Attributional Confidence, Global Confidence and Uncertainty Reduction differ between cultures?

Table 6 shows the results of the second research question for Dutch and Spanish partners.

Table 6. Differences in global and attributional confidence and uncertainty reduction between Dutch and Spanish negotiators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dutch</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GC</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.84 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>3.44 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UR</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As many studies have shown, Global Confidence \( \chi^2=9.84, p=.00 \) and Attributional Confidence \( \chi^2=3.44, p=.06 \) differ significantly between cultures. GC and AC indicate that the Dutch are more confident than the Spanish before and after being acquainted with their opponent. The pre-conversation uncertainty GC score is also significantly associated with the post-conversation uncertainty AC score \( r=.53, p=.03 \). The results are in line with Hofstede’s Uncertainty Avoidance Index, which indicates that the Dutch avoid uncertainty less than the Spanish. Global Confidence did not affect the negotiation process or outcome, since no further correlation between GC and other variables were found, whereas AC did (see Van Dalen, 1995).

The UR scores indicate that Dutch negotiators reduce uncertainty less than the Spanish, although not significantly so. Using GC and AC’s means, Figure 4 shows that the negotiators’ uncertainty changed significantly over a period of time \( Z=2.66, p=.01 \): compared to the Spanish, the Dutch appeared to make less use of the negotiation period to reduce their uncertainty; they also seemed to need less help than the Spanish to avoid uncertainty.

The results demonstrate that negotiators do reduce uncertainty in negotiations – even when they are extended and highly competitive. The results are also consistent with Douglas (1994), who found that actors low in Global Confidence are comparatively successful in reducing their uncertainty, but remain
relatively less able to predict and explain their own behaviour and that of others during interactions. As Ting-Toomey (1989) believes that not all individuals have the same baseline desire to reduce uncertainty, an interpretation problem appears: Are actors who are low in Global Confidence less able to reduce uncertainty, or do they have less desire to do so? This could mean that while individuals may have sufficient capacity they have no will or aspiration for Uncertainty Reduction. This has consequences for further research regarding the Uncertainty Reduction theory.

In addition to the comparison between UR variables and cultures, the relationship between UR variables and questioning behaviour was also examined. However, neither AC nor GC appeared to be correlated with a question category. According to these results, uncertainty cannot be reduced by means of questioning. However, the Uncertainty Reduction variable was slightly consistent with the expectations of researchers that UR variables and questioning behaviour are related (see Van Dalen, 1995).

In sum, Attributional Confidence and Global Confidence differ significantly between cultures. The UR variables could measure an individual uncertainty characteristic without having a large quantity of data, while being consistent with the cultural uncertainty tendency. This means that we have probably found a tool to measure a cultural value: How to reduce uncertainty. We have also found that the Dutch do this in a different way to the Spanish.

Research question 3: To what extent does Questioning Behaviour regarding form, intent and content differ between cultures?

We found only two significant differences, which were related to form (1) and intent (1), and were, in our opinion, culture-bound.

What are the real verbal cues of uncertainty in questioning? Firstly, Table 7 shows us that the use of Disclosure Questions (QD) by Dutch and Spanish negotiators is significantly different. Dutch negotiators ask more questions using the Disclosure Form than the Spanish (QD: $\chi^2 = 3.71, p = .05$). None of the other differences are significant. The Dutch are probably more egocentric than the Spanish, and like to put themselves in the centre. According to Hofstede’s (1980)
cultural dimension individualism vs collectivism, the Dutch are ‘programmed’ to be more individualistic than the Spanish (80 vs 51). One might draw the conclusion that for that reason, the Dutch make more use of the first person singular (‘I’), were it not for the fact that Disclosure Questions are also coded Disclosure Questions if the more collectivistic first person plural (‘we’) is used. In ‘we’ the opponent is not included as a referent because it refers to, for example, the company. A more plausible explanation can be found in the fact that the Dutch were more sure of themselves (high Global Confidence), which meant that they were confident, and therefore ready to talk more in the ‘I’-form. Unfortunately, neither Global Confidence nor Attributional Confidence correlated with Disclosure Questions, but that could be due to the small sample. How this cultural difference in disclosing is reflected in the use of Spanish, Dutch or English is dealt with in Table 8.

Table 7 demonstrates the distinction that Spanish negotiators use significantly more acknowledgement intents in their question forms (KQ: \( \chi^2 = 9.60, p = .00 \)). We can use the same explanation as before. The fact that the Spanish were less certain (i.e. had less Global Confidence than the Dutch) may explain why they constantly asked for more Acknowledgement either in Spanish (¿no?, ¿si?, ¿vale?) or in English (right?, okay? and no?). When someone is less certain, their frequent use of acknowledgements could indicate that uncertainty. Although neither Global Confidence, Attributional Confidence nor Uncertainty Reduction correlated with those Acknowledgement intents, they could also be real verbal cues of uncer-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intents</th>
<th>Dutch M SD</th>
<th>Spanish M SD</th>
<th>English M SD</th>
<th>Chi-square ( \chi^2 ) (p)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisement</td>
<td>1.2 0.8</td>
<td>0.4 0.8</td>
<td>0.0 0.0</td>
<td>7.81 (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation</td>
<td>1.0 0.9</td>
<td>0.9 0.7</td>
<td>0.0 0.0</td>
<td>7.80 (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure</td>
<td>5.6 4.6</td>
<td>0.0 0.0</td>
<td>0.4 0.7</td>
<td>12.44 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edification</td>
<td>3.0 2.0</td>
<td>0.2 0.4</td>
<td>0.4 0.9</td>
<td>9.80 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>0.8 1.2</td>
<td>8.6 5.0</td>
<td>3.2 3.8</td>
<td>8.24 (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11.7 5.0</td>
<td>10.3 6.1</td>
<td>2.8 3.7</td>
<td>6.91 (.03)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
tainty in questioning. The other significant differences are due to language conventions, and this becomes clearer in Table 8, where several significant differences were observed between question forms in the Spanish, Dutch and English used in the negotiation. These differences are language-bound because they only appear if one of the three languages in question is used. No significant differences were found between the content of Dutch and Spanish questions.

On the whole, hardly any cultural conventions and values were conveyed in questioning behaviour. The small variations in questioning behaviour can be explained by the existence of common conventions in Western cultures. Gestures and eye-contact are two examples of involuntary non-verbal behaviour which enable the negotiator to ask a question without speaking: for example by wrinkling the forehead, or turning his or her hands upside down in the air. Unfortunately, we did not have videotapes which would have enabled us to study this form of communication in more detail.

So far, all of the relationships implied by Figure 1 have been covered – National Culture, Negotiation Outcome, Uncertainty Reduction and Questioning Behaviour – except for those involving Negotiation Outcome and Uncertainty Reduction, where it was impossible to reach firm conclusions because of the nature of the data. Each of the three research questions testing the cultural effect used an analysis of variance (Kruskal–Wallis 1-way ANOVA) which allows for a verification of a causal relationship between the variables. Although negotiation outcome was hardly affected by National Culture (RQ 1) (no causal effect, both Spanish and Dutch gained about the same profits), and hardly any correlation was found between Uncertainty Reduction and Questioning Behaviour (their questions alone did not reduce uncertainty, some other striking effects could be evidenced. While it was true that all negotiators reduced uncertainty from global (on the issues) to attribution (on the relationship development during the actual negotiation), it was significant that the Spanish did this much more than the Dutch (RQ 2). Their negotiation discourse seems to help them to work on the bottom of the iceberg of culture (feelings, etc.), whereas the Dutch prefer to reduce uncertainty on the top, above the sea level (the issues). This seems to be confirmed by two significant differences of cultural effect on question form and intent (RQ 3): three Spanish prefer to use acknowledgement intents to build their relationships (Do you agree, do I understand you?), while the Dutch work on the issues by using disclosure forms (This is what I think should be done). Open questions help to realize an individual profit. Closed and reflective questions, and ambiguous questions and answers, help to gain a joint profit. Direct questions, however, foster both types of profit – a win–win situation indeed, although a causal effect of direct questions on negotiation outcome is not yet proved! Questioning behaviour seems to be rather language- than culture-bound: the Dutch, Spanish and English languages not only bring significantly different amounts of disclosure and acknowledgement questions, but also questions of advisement, confirmation, and edification. The language variables of Figure 1 appeared to be more active than the cultural ones.
5. Conclusions and recommendations

How do the previously shown results compare with those of other studies, and what are the overall consequences for both research theory and business practice? Section 2.2. orders the three research questions from the effects of national culture on business profit (RQ 1) to those on the language of questioning behaviour (RQ 3), via those on uncertainty reduction (see also Figure 1), going from business practice to communication theory. If culture pur sang does not appear to have much effect on negotiation profit, which is one of the main objectives of any business encounter, RQ 2 and 3 might suggest other major effects, such as the proven link between language and culture. This order is inverted here so that the implications for theory can be presented first (5.1) and then those for practice (5.2). Both subsections will end with some recommendations.

5.1. TOWARDS ASKING QUESTIONS AS A MEANS OF REDUCING UNCERTAINTY: CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC ASPECTS (RQ 2 AND 3)

No significant differences in profit levels between cultures were found. In the end, both cultures reached satisfying agreements. Van Dalen (1995) provides some other results of this discourse analysis. The Dutch and Spanish pre-conversation confidence levels differed significantly between cultures. This could mean that the confidence baseline, measured in terms of Global Confidence, is culture-bound. The ability to predict the attitudes, beliefs and actions of partners in initial negotiations probably varies between cultures. The post-conversation confidence levels, measured in terms of Attributional Confidence, also differed significantly between cultures. Thus, the confidence levels changed significantly over the period of time.

We can therefore conclude that even in competitive and extended interactions, such as negotiations, uncertainty can be reduced. Although both cultures were successful in reducing their uncertainties, the low confidence culture remains relatively less confident. Uncertainty Reduction did not significantly differ between the two cultures. It remains unanswered if this is due to a different level of desire to reduce uncertainty, or to a different capacity to do so. These results reveal that in ongoing initial work-related interactions, uncertainty reduction can be measured.

Eliciting answers to asked questions is certainly not the only way to reduce the uncertainty of negotiators, even if they believe this to be the case. The advantage of the Kelley game is that the effect of important contextual factors and issues outside the negotiation table are excluded, but our design made it impossible to single out the effect of questions, and to keep this separate from other (non-)verbal means of reducing certainty. If the Dutch were to ask fewer questions, we would be unable to say if that was because of a lack of desire to reduce uncertainty in that way, or because they were incapable of doing it. Table 6 and Figure 4 only allow us to see a potential overall effect of questioning behaviour on the result of uncertainty reduction at the end of these negotiations. Tables 7 and 8, however, suggest an interesting explanation of a difference in uncertainty reduction by the
Spanish and the Dutch. Dutch negotiators ask more questions in Disclosure form (‘I’ and ‘we’). Although the negotiator is literally disclosing, pragmatically he or she is asking a question. Spanish negotiators frequently ask for acknowledgments which can be negative, such as ‘no?’ or positive, such as ‘¿si?, ‘¿vale?’ or ‘¿verdad?’. However, the Dutch ‘disclosed’ almost exclusively in Dutch and not in English (when interacting with the Spanish), whereas the Spanish ‘acknowledged’ both in Spanish and in English, but in Spanish much more. It seems as if cultural differences in questioning behaviour, where they occur, tend to be rather native-language-bound. The Dutch do not transfer their disclosure need to English in questions, in contrast to the Spanish, who do transfer their need for acknowledgement from Spanish to English. What prevails: the language or the culture? A Whorfian question indeed. And to what extent – since the Dutch appeared to be more fluent in English than the Spanish – is it dependent on language skill? An acknowledgement question might also serve to check linguistic misunderstandings.

Comparison with other studies  Are the Spanish really relation-builders, and the Dutch so direct or ‘impolite’ in a Spanish–Dutch connection? The iceberg of culture has already been suggested as a possible explanation: Latin and Oriental people might prefer to work on the relationship (below sea level), Anglo–Germanic people on the issues on the surface. Hilgers (1994) could also provide evidence of significantly more acknowledgement forms (using the same Stiles procedure of analysing all utterances, rather than questions only) for the Chinese than for the Dutch in their negotiation. However, in this the Dutch were not more disclosing than the Chinese. (See also Uljin and Li, 1995 and Uljin and St Amant, in press). The ‘impolite’ interruption behaviour is often used by Latins and Orientals (see Uljin, 1995 and Uljin and Li, 1995) to check if the relationship is going well, with the help of one- or two-word acknowledgment sentences. In this sense, what is impolite in one culture may not be so in the other, and vice versa.

Like the studies described, and some other (e.g. Prins and Uljin, 1998 for the effect of English mathematical discourse on native readers of African, English and Afrikaans languages), this study once again illustrates the Whorfian hypothesis, without testing it. Our experimental design did not allow us to disentangle language and culture factors in a way such a test would require. Most cultural differences in Dutch–Spanish technical business negotiations appeared to be rather native-language-bound: the Spanish language seems to bring frequencies of question types that are different to those found in English and Dutch, although the negotiator’s overall questioning repertoire might be universal. The fact that the Dutch speak better English than the Spanish, however, and that English and Dutch are both Germanic languages and Spanish a Romance one, might account for many of the linguistic differences. Language and culture are intertwined, but not every cultural difference between a Dutch and a Spanish negotiator is culture-bound, and not every linguistic difference is language-bound. Asking questions appeared to be a critical success factor in both the monocultural and
intercultural business negotiation in relation with reducing uncertainty towards profit level and interpersonal relation, but most of the linguistic differences in this questioning behaviour were, in fact, not culture-based. However, it continues to be both theoretically and practically interesting to study cultural differences that are not native-language bound.

For further research into intercultural interaction behaviour we might recommend that more attention should be given to the research design: this would involve using fewer variables, larger samples with a wider range of different cultures. We would also suggest using not only simulated interactions (for which the Kelley game is useful), but authentic ones as well. The correlations found to be significant in the present study would require additional verification of causal effects, such as those between negotiation outcome, the language of questioning behaviour and uncertainty reduction. From this point of view, the original study by Van Dalen (from which we used only the relationships suggested in Figure 1) should be considered to be a useful exploratory study covering a comprehensive set of elements of an intercultural discourse analysis of questions. Those experimentally-tested discourse studies might, for instance, use Stiles’ system, which appeared to be a very reliable speech act category method for analysing questions and their answers in Spanish, Dutch and English.

5.2. TOWARDS BUSINESS PROFIT (RQ 1)

Although national culture did not affect Negotiation Outcome (RQ 1), one difference between Spanish and Dutch revealed by this study has been confirmed by some experienced negotiators: it involves the initial bidding and the build up of concessions towards the end of an encounter. The Spanish overbid more than the Dutch do, and as a result they have to make more concessions (though they seem to have fewer problems on that point). For the Dutch, this means that they do not need to panic after an unreasonably high Spanish first bid, because they know that the other party is more prepared to make concessions. The Spanish will have to take into account that the first Dutch bid will be lower, but closer to the final agreement, and that fewer concessions will be made from their side.

An unconscious difference between the Dutch and the Spanish is in their confidence levels. The Spanish Global Confidence level – the level relating to acquaintanceships in general – was lower than the Dutch level. Although uncertainty was reduced, and the negotiation process or outcome was not negatively influenced in negotiations with low-confidence cultures like Spain, more attention had to be paid to gradually building up and consolidating sufficient confidence, as suggested by the iceberg metaphor of culture. This means that, to a certain extent, the opponent must be able to predict and explain both his or her own and the other person’s behaviour. This will take up time, which means that extra time has to be reserved for this issue during negotiations with Spanish businesspeople. Uncertainty can be reduced by asking confirmation questions. By asking for confirmation of the matched ideas or agreements, confidence can be raised, and uncertainty reduced.
What is the best advice to give to the international business negotiator? All types of questions have a positive effect on the joint profit level. Direct questions may lead to a better joint and individual profit, but open, reflective and closed questions produce different results: you want the negotiation to open up in your interest, you should ask open (individual profit) and reflective questions (joint profit); if you want to close a deal (joint profit), you should ask closed questions. Furthermore ambiguous, factual and explanatory requests, as well as ambiguous answers, can have a positive influence on the joint profit level. In other words, a combination of vagueness and openness can be a key to the best deal in such intercultural encounters, giving support to a win–win strategy. To become aware of the usefulness of several communication strategies, negotiators might refer to the (dis)advantages of the different questioning techniques discussed in Van Dalen (1995), such as the persuasive value of rhetorical questions, or the art of thinking aloud without giving away any secrets. Strategically, a ‘universal’ negotiation theory (see Fisher and Ury, 1981; Mastenbroek, 1989) for separating the issues from the relationship may resolve some of the cultural pitfalls of questioning as a way to reduce uncertainty during a negotiation. Open questioning by the ‘West’ and the ‘North’ may call for respect to enlarge the negotiation space and bring more options on the table. If cultures can be tolerant, direct questioning may have universal value to serve the goal of a negotiation: an agreement. Both parties can adjust to another way of questioning: ‘Keep cool’. Moreover, it may be that economic and political factors, for instance, might be so predominant that culture only plays a minor role. The compromise might be as follows: Not your way or my way, but our way of mutual understanding and tolerance for difference in questioning. After all, polite questioning may be used to obtain more details out of curiosity, or from an eagerness to get closer to a deal and to ask check questions. If you have understood well enough to summarize the main issues, including a direct question for the deal may be part of an effective universal questioning strategy.

From our business training experience we might also recommend some future research. This study has covered all the relationships implied by Figure 1 – national culture, negotiation outcome, uncertainty reduction and questioning behaviour – except that between negotiation outcome and uncertainty reduction, which was impossible to ascertain because of the nature of the data. There should be a high causal effect of uncertainty reduction on outcome, but this is a matter of mono- or intercultural perception as well. The Chinese, for instance, continue to look for other competitive offers, even after a deal is closed. In such situations, how do we define a negotiation contract? In Western views it might be considered sacrosanct, whereas other more implicit high-context cultures might attach no more value to it than the paper it is written on! How can further study into the intercultural perception of the role of questions in agreeing on a contract (the explicit top of the iceberg) in a Western way, and into building up a personal relationship between the partners (the implicit bottom of the iceberg) lead to a better mutual benefit in North–South (for instance: Dutch–Spanish) or Western–Oriental business encounters? These questions still await a definitive
answer. In the meantime, this study has clearly proved that asking questions is a critical success factor in both monocultural and intercultural business negotiations.

Appendix

All questions VRM-coded from transcript of Dutch 2–Spanish 2
Kelley game negotiation

W And (he), we heard that you could provide us with these materials? DQ
W So (he), we would be interested to see what are the selling conditions? EQ
F And (he), we and you (he) must consider this value and sacrificer/sacrifice (he) some/some part of the/of the benefit (he) by this value and for the good relation to the companies, okay? CQ
W By the way, if my English is too fast, can you (. . .)?
F Okay, this is a question because (. . .) (he) with this quantities, and (he) I know there are more and other possibilities for you in the market but (he) we must considering the point of view (eh) we have speak before (he) the quality and (he) is/is possible you found (he) in the market another cheaper product okee, but (he) you must consider the other aspects of the other sides of the/of the buy okay? AQ
F To found a critical point (he), good for you and good for me, okay? QK
F And (he) if you prefer we can pass to/to make the composition of the/of the offer, the total level offer, okay? QQ
F You have some (he) some level of price decided or choose/choosed for/for some/some of this product, you have some compilation with the market of the (he) product? IQ
W So, what we have to do is, on one hand, we have to sell good products, and on the other, for a good price, QD
F You think about some level of price in/in this (. . .) , you have some reference of the market? IQ
W As far as price levels I concern, I believe you have the same/the same (inaud) as I have? DQ
F You prefer to start to/to speak about the software? IQ
F But we can speak about the initial letter about the software, have you think about (he) a special letter for the software? QQ
F The H or another letter? EQ
F Okay? QQ
F Have you think about (he) some level of prices? QQo
F We have/we have passed by the monitors without speaken the (. . .)? CQ
W No, we/what we would like it when we by a monitor would be to have a good monitor, good quality, QD
W Let’s go to the laser-printers? QQ
F It is very interesting and it is very interesting in order to maintenance the relation like your company, okay? QQ
F We must maintenance this product, okay? QK
W Do you have in mind a certain price-level for (. . .)? QQ
W We could agree with the price level/level F for laser-printers. (he) if we could make a slight prevention in the price of the monitors. CQ
F In? RQ
F The printer (. . .) the printer? QQo
F The monitors? RQ
I mean if we would decide on price level F for laser-printers? CQ
In according you speak about D or E for the monitors? IQ
Okay, and the software? QQo
I need/I need to make some calculations, okay? QK
But we can try it, okay? QK
Which is the price which you would like to reconsider? QQ
You can speak the F-level/the F level for the printers, the E level for monitors, and the D level for software, alright? QK
My offer is: the F-level for printers, the E for monitors, and the D for software, alright? QK
You are not according with this offer?
Price level G for laser-printers and in combination with price levels C for monitors and C for software would that be acceptable for you? QQc
So, I can offer this other cost, okay? QK
And in according with the G, E, and C, alright? QK
I can offer this with the D, okay? QK
With the D in/in the monitors, okay? QK
D and C for software, alright? QK
So, the G (.) you/you speak about the G, the C, no? RQ
C for monitors and the C for software? RQ
Key: (.)=not filled pause, (he)=filled pause. ( . . . )=passage omitted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We express our gratitude to Hubert Van Dalen, currently working with Origin, Inc. in Singapore. He has an information technology background, but has also showed a strong cultural and linguistic interest throughout his engineering studies at Eindhoven University of Technology. These led him to carry out the literature survey, data gathering and analysis which made this study possible. We also thank Marinela Garcia Fernandez of the Madrid University of Technology (Department of English) who helped with the Spanish part of his MS thesis, which had a distinctive methodological breadth and psycholinguistic thoroughness. Any misinterpretation of his work is, of course, our own responsibility. In addition, we would like to acknowledge the constructive comments on an earlier draft of this article which were provided by Britt-Louise Gunnarsson (Stockholm University, Sweden) and Ulla Connor (University of Indiana, USA). The validity discussion around linguistic description and psycholinguistic verification may be just beginning, but it is clearly worth to pursuing such complementary methods of intercultural discourse research, even if practical business relevance is not sought.

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