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## THE APPLICATION OF ADJECTIVE SEMANTIC SPACE TO THE ASSESSMENT OF THE SELF AND OTHERS AS EFFECTIVE/INEFFECTIVE NEGOTIATORS

The purpose of this paper is to present the findings of the experiment from the area of psychosemantics and psychology carried out among a hundred young managers and designed to measure the selected aspects of self-evaluation and peer evaluation of interpersonal attractiveness along with the effectiveness of a partner when negotiating in pairs. The research findings obtained due to the application of descriptive statistics methods and cluster analysis served to analyze the results in terms of elevation accuracy and differential accuracy. More specifically, the findings were used to investigate the compliance and diversity of self-description and the description made by a negotiation partner by the application of adjective scales.

KEYWORDS: business negotiations, adjective semantic space, self-evaluation, peer evaluation of interpersonal attractiveness, effectiveness in negotiations

### INTRODUCTION

The act of negotiation is a multidimensional, complex and psychologically intriguing arrangement between the participants. Whether it is held internationally or domestically, the key factor that determines the success of the process is *culture*. In a business setting negotiators are participants in *corporate culture* which encompasses values and behaviors that “contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organization” (*The Business Dictionary*, accessed January 10, 2016). Drawing on Holliday’s (1999) taxonomy of cultures, *corporate culture* falls into the paradigm of a *small culture* which “attaches ‘culture’ to small social groupings or activities wherever there is cohesive behavior, and thus avoids culturist ethnic, national or international stereotyping” (Holliday 1999: 237). The notion of a *small culture* includes the vision, values, norms, systems, symbols, language, assumptions, beliefs, and habits typical of a given community. Along these lines, Ravasi and Schultz (2006) argue that *corporate culture* refers to a set of shared assumptions that determine which behaviors are appropriate and which

are not in various situations. It also dictates the pattern of such collective behaviors and assumptions that new organizational members are expected to accept as a way of perceiving themselves and others. It is only natural that organizational culture exerts a significant influence on the way people and groups interact with each other and their clients in a particular business setting.

The ever growing development of international and domestic industries has necessitated an increase in business communication and hence competence in carrying out negotiations. Each process of communication does not only involve discussions of common and conflicting interests of the interlocutors, but also includes an event of self-evaluation and peer evaluation which significantly contributes to the success of a negotiation. As negotiations proceed, participants need to be very observant of changes from their initial expectations, analyze the differences, and adopt their negotiation strategy accordingly. Because of the complexity of the factors involved in the act of negotiation, the phenomenon is frequently analyzed in a broad interdisciplinary perspective which cuts across the fields of Management, Psychology, Communication and Linguistics.

#### PERCEPTUAL ASSESSMENT OF NEGOTIATION PARTNERS

The analyses of the relationships that exist between the participants in the process of negotiations are as interesting as the analyses of the effectiveness of their conversations. As Creamer and Campbell (1988), Möller and Van Zyl (1991) observe, researchers who investigate the issues related to the psychological analysis of the negotiation process mainly focus on the mutual perceptions of individuals involved in this process, both when the conversation is taking place in pairs or in larger groups.

The investigative goal of these analyses is to examine the mechanisms underlying proper and impaired communication between partners, their sense of mutual attractiveness, their preferences for choosing specific strategies to resolve conflicts and their ability to predict the outcome of the negotiations due to the accurate evaluation of the perceived qualities of the partner.

There is a general consensus among researchers such as Hampson (1982), Försterling (1986), Malloy and Albright (1990) that when we process information about another individual we attribute certain characteristics to him/her on the basis of external features (his/her appearance) as well as the internal features which refer to this person's behavior.

The subjective information a person has acquired about the other individual is arranged according to pre-existing *schemata* (which refer to the organized structures

of knowledge a person possesses about the world) and is grouped into the categories of features which are attributed to this individual. In this process, complex descriptive categories, called *attribution schemes* are constituted. These schemes are mental representations of specific features of a partner, as well as of the relationships which are formed between the partners in the act of communication. According to Försterling (1986) *attribution schemes* make it possible not only to analyze currently perceived characteristics, but also enable us to generate the subsequent features of a partner (those which we anticipate seeing on the basis of the previously observed appearance and behavior). In this way not only our subjective image of a partner is created, but also our expectations, fears, and various emotional states associated with this person are formed.

The ability to carefully observe a partner's behavior and consequently, the ability to predict her personality features and patterns of behavior are critical for successful communication to occur. This is a view shared, for example, by a professional called a face reader (this is a person who observes negotiators when they are engaged in the process of negotiation). Careful observation and the ability to predict a partner's behavior are important steps in building one's own negotiation strategy and provide valuable information about the partner's attitude towards the negotiator.

As pointed out by Malloy and Albright (1990), in this type of analysis the issue of the *accuracy* of perception is of critical importance. The perception model proposed by Cronbach (1955) shows that the accuracy of perception is a multi-dimensional variable, which consists of a wide range of components. According to him, the accuracy of perception can be divided into two types: 1) elevation accuracy and 2) differential accuracy. Elevation accuracy measures the congruence of the personality features of a person when she describes herself and when she is described by others (in other words when X describes herself and when Y describes X). Differential accuracy, in turn, measures the discrepancy in the choice of features used in self-description by different individuals (in other words how, by the application of the same scales; X describes herself and Y describes herself).

It is worth noting here that the parallel model, called the Appraisal Framework, was designed by Martin and White (2005) within the tradition of systemic functional linguistics to measure the rhetorical potential of a sender/message. The framework features the types of language applied to evaluate and to position oneself with respect to the evaluations of other individuals. The underlying linguistic theory is explained and justified by the instances of the language use employed to communicate evaluation, to explain how users of English convey attitude (emotion, judgment of people and appreciation of objects), engagement (assessment of the evaluations of other people) and how writers may modify the strength of their attitude/engagement.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Drawing on the Cronbach's (1955) model of interpersonal perception, the purpose of this paper is to present the findings of the research on the perception of negotiators' qualities in the process of negotiation.

The research participants were recruited from the following professional groups:

- 1) from a group of MBA managers who studied at the University of Central Lancashire and at Lublin Business School
- 2) from a group of postgraduate students who studied at the Warsaw School of Economics
- 3) from other groups of professionals employed in various companies and financial institutions.

The study was conducted among 100 individuals making up 50 pairs of negotiators (44 female participants and 56 male participants).

The research participants were assigned the task of using particular sets of adjective pairs which constituted a measuring scale, called the Semantic Differential Scale, both in their self-evaluations and in their assessments of their partners. The scale was adapted by Beata Mazurek-Kucharska from the Semantic Differential Scale originally proposed by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957).

The measuring tool applied in the study consists of 13 dimensions located on continua which feature the following opposite adjectives:

1. stubborn – submissive
2. rigid – flexible
3. submissive – dominant
4. arrogant – polite
5. aggressive – compliant
6. emotional – calm
7. trustworthy-untrustworthy
8. passive – active
9. tense – relaxed
10. general – concrete
11. competing – cooperating
12. hostile – friendly
13. strong – weak

These features were selected from a set of attributes used by other scholars in the analysis of negotiation styles.

The accuracy of the research method was verified in the studies previously conducted by the author.

In the first stage of the study, participants were asked to describe themselves using the Semantic Differential Scale (They were asked to complete the sentence: "As a negotiator, I am ..." (self-evaluation).

In the second stage of the study, the participants were paired and entered a process of negotiations. The negotiations were carried out by the use of the game called NEGOTIA designed by the author (Beata Mazurek-Kucharska) and presented in Fig. 1.

This is a so-called ‘non-zero-sum’ game (this means each participant can achieve a certain part of the intended objective); for comparison, in a ‘zero-sum’ game, a participant gets “all or nothing.”

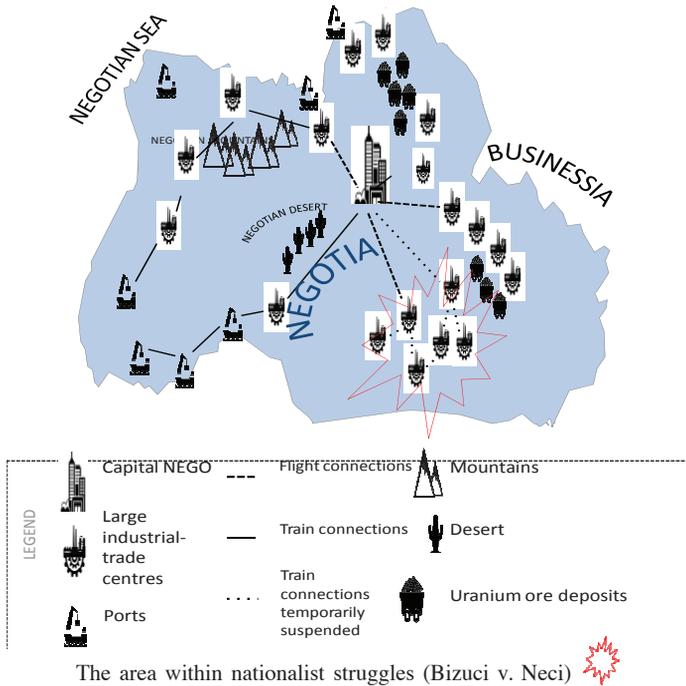


Figure 1. A graphic representation of NEGOTIA board game.

The procedure and the rules of the game are as follows:

First, the partners receive instructions on how to participate in the game. It is assumed that each partner in the negotiation is a representative of a competitive mafia organization which is striving to gain the strongest influence in the hypothetical country called NEGOTIA. Partners receive a board with a map of NEGOTIA. The map features the territory of NEGOTIA and the surrounding lands. In the East and South-East NEGOTIA shares a border with the State called Businessia, while to the East and North it is surrounded by the Negotia Sea. The game takes place only on the territory of NEGOTIA.

The territory of NEGOTIA includes strategic points, such as, the capital of the country, centers of industry and commerce (their number is odd), ports (their

number is also odd), uranium ore deposits, a desert, mountains and railway and flight connections. In the South-Eastern area of NEGOTIA there is an ongoing conflict between two tribes which live on the territory of the country (Bizuci and Neci).

The task of the negotiators is to divide the territory between two mafia organizations which are represented by the negotiators. They can divide the area between each other either by drawing the shortest border line on the map or by establishing zones of influence. In the latter case, they should determine who will control the strategic points of NEGOTIA (for example, ports and factories), who will develop the deserts and mountains etc. They also need to make decisions pertaining to the future of the capital which includes creating the principles for the management of the city by the two tribes.

If both sides accept the rules pertaining to the division of the country the negotiators prepare and sign an agreement.

After the completion of the negotiations, all parties proceed to the third phase of the investigation, which means that they fill out the Semantic Differential scale again. This time around, they evaluate their negotiation partner (“As a negotiator, my partner is ...”) (assessment of a partner).

Due to the application of the semantic space that features thirteen pairs of adjectives two sources of description of a given participant (self-evaluation and the assessment of a partner) are obtained for analysis.

Detailed scrutiny of the data obtained (which included descriptive statistics and a cluster analysis) yielded the following results (which because of space constraints can be presented here only in brief):

1. The pairs of contrastive adjectives are useful in the description of one’s own qualities and the qualities of the partner.
2. In the stage of self-evaluation, characteristics selected on each continuum show that negotiators claim to possess features associated with two main categories: a) readiness to cooperate with a partner and b) strength to carry out negotiations.

**Cooperation**, related to the first category, can be defined as the cluster of qualities described by the adjectives from the following scales:

- trustworthy – untrustworthy (scale number 7)
- general – concrete (scale number 10)
- aggressive – compliant (scale number 5)
- arrogant – polite (scale number 4)
- hostile – friendly (scale number 12)

**Strength**, in turn, related to the second category, is associated with the qualities described by the following adjectives:

- strong – weak (scale number 13)
- submissive – dominant (scale number 3)

3. In the stage of partner assessment, the dimensions related to manners and emotionality were selected most frequently.

**Manners** constitute a group of features described by adjectives which belong to the following continua:

- arrogant – polite (scale number 4)
- aggressive – compliant (scale number 5)
- stubborn – submissive (scale number 1)
- hostile – friendly (scale number 12)

**Emotionality** refers to the features described by adjectives from the following continua:

- emotional – calm (scale number 6)
- submissive – dominant (scale number 3)
- aggressive – compliant (scale number 5)
- trustworthy – untrustworthy (scale number 7)

4. Drawing on the concept of elevation accuracy coined by Lee Cronbach (1955), it can be concluded that when describing themselves with the use of adjectives, negotiators pay particular attention to these dimensions which relate to **cooperation** and **strength** (see Fig. 2), and therefore focus on the evaluation of themselves from the perspective of achieving the goal and completing the task.



Figure 2. A graphic representation of self-evaluation.

Negotiation partners attach particular importance to the description and evaluation of a partner through the prism of her **manners** and **emotions** (see Fig. 3), which are qualities that strongly affect the sense of the partner's security and create an atmosphere of trust during negotiations.

These are two different types of perception. The first one refers to the perception of oneself and is task-oriented, while the other refers to the perception of a partner

and draws on mutual relations. In other words, it can be said that when a person describes herself as a negotiator she puts emphasis on such qualities as readiness to cooperate with the partner and strength to carry out negotiations. However, when a person describes her negotiating partner she pays attention to such qualities as manners and emotionality.

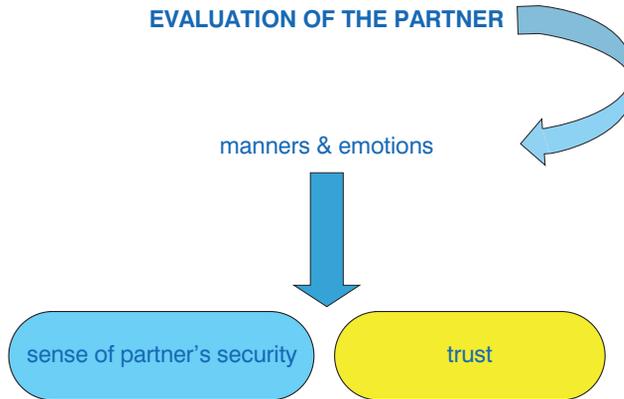


Figure 3. A graphic representation of the evaluation of the partner.

## CONCLUSIONS

An important part of every manager's job is the role of negotiator. For successful negotiation to occur, a negotiator's role should involve activities related to accurate perception including the processes of self-evaluation and peer assessment. In an act of negotiation, participants use their perceptions of their behavior and the behavior of their interlocutors as a basis for interpretation and selection of an appropriate negotiation strategy. Since perception is culturally determined, the corporate cultures in which negotiators participate affect their interpretation of the gathered data. Therefore, valuing diversity, including cultural diversity, has been recognized as a key to effective communication.

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