23 Introduction to the Course Face-to-Face Communication

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The course Face-to-Face Communication is part of the bachelor program in Communication and Information Sciences at Utrecht University, the Netherlands.[1] The course is taught in Dutch and is aimed at Dutch-speaking first-year university students. In this course, students are introduced to pragmatics, specifically "talk in interaction." Students learn (1) about pragmatic theories concerning how we get things done in talk; (2) how one's cultural background and speaking in a second language influence interactional understanding; and (3) how to do research on intercultural interaction in formal and informal settings. In order to achieve these three goals, students not only read a textbook on conversation analysis and papers on studies concerning intercultural face-to-face communication, but they also experience talking to international students themselves. Students start with a research project in the first week of class and are guided through several phases of doing research on intercultural interaction.

In this chapter, we would like to present the **syllabus** of the course, including a list of topics discussed, reading materials, course assignments (such as reflective diary assignments and in-class activities), and a step-by-step explanation of the various phases of the research project in which students learn to do research on intercultural interaction. We will end this chapter with a reflection on internationalizing the face-to-face communication curriculum.

The Course Schedule Week by Week (10-Week Course, 210 Hours)

In the table below, the 10-week course is outlined, including the topics discussed, the literature students read, and the assignments, papers, and exams that are part of the course (see section 3 for more detail). The course consists of one lecture and two seminars per week (6 contact hours per week). Lectures take place in a big lecture hall, whilst seminars take place in smaller groups with a maximum of 25 students.

Internationalizing the Face-to-Face Communication Curriculum

The following four sections further explain what literature, assignment(s), and activities contribute to achieving the course goals, particularly focusing on the intercultural learning goal through internationalizing the face-to-face communication curriculum.

Internationalizing the Face-to-Face Communication Curriculum Through Literature

An overview and short description of the literature contributing to the intercultural course aim is presented in Table 23.2. The main book we use for this course is A. C.

Table 23.1 Course outline

Week	Lecture/ Seminar	Theme	Reading material (read material before lecture or seminar)	Assignment (due before seminar)
1	Lecture 1	Face-to-face communication from 1960 until 2019 and beyond		
	Seminar 1.1	Introduction to pragmatics	Murphy, B. & Neu, J. (1996). My grade's too low: the speech act of complaining.	Diary & reading assignment 1
	Seminar 1.2	Recording (natural) interaction		
2	Lecture 2	Face, politeness, introduction to conversation analysis	Garcia chapter 1 + 2 + 3	
	Seminar 2.1	Face, politeness, introduction to conversation analysis	Nakane, I. (2006). Silence and politeness in intercultural communication in university seminars.	Diary & reading assignment 2
			Bailey, B, (2000). Communicative behavior and conflict between African-American customers and Korean immigrant retailers in LA.	
	Seminar 2.2	Learning to transcribe	Garcia chapter 4	
3	Lecture 3	The "technique" of conversation 1	Garcia chapter 5 + 6 + 7	
	Seminar 3.1	Adjacency pairs, preference	Garcia chapter 8 + 9	Diary & reading assignment 3
	Seminar 3.2	Transcribing your own data		
4	Lecture 4	The "technique" of conversation 2	Garcia chapter 11 + 12	
	Seminar 4.1	Topical continuity, storytelling		
	Seminar 4.2	Data session + choosing a phenomenon	Pomerantz, A. & Fehr, B. J. (1997). Conversation analysis: an approach to the study of social action as sense making practice.	Transcript assignment
5	Lecture 5	Institutional interaction 1: Police interaction and 911 (and 112) calls	Garcia chapter 14 + 15 + 16	

	Session	Topic	Reading	Assignment
	Seminar 5.1	Police interaction and 911 (and 112) calls		Diary & reading assignment 4
	Seminar 5.2	Making a collection and formulating a research question		
6	Lecture 6	Institutional interaction 2: Medical interaction	Garcia chapter 18 + 19	
	Seminar 6.1	Doctor–patient interaction with and without an interpreter	Bolden, G. (2000). Towards understanding practices of medical interpreting; interpreters' involvement in history taking.	Diary & reading assignment 5
	Seminar 6.2	Working on collection		
7	Lecture 7	Summary		
	Seminar 7.1	Group feedback session		
	Seminar 7.2	Group feedback session		
8–10	–	Exam/office hours/final paper due		

Table 23.2 Course literature addressing intercultural communication

Course week	Literature	Literature description
1	Murphy, B. & Neu, J. (1996). My grade's too low: The speech act of complaining. In Gass, S.M. & Neu, J. (Eds.), *Speech Acts Across Cultures: Challenges to Communication in a Second Language* (191–216). Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.	The speech act set "complaining" as performed by American native speakers of English and by Korean nonnative speakers of English are discussed and compared as well as the ways in which American native speakers perceive Korean nonnative speakers' performance of the complaint speech act set.
2	Nakane, I. (2006). Silence and politeness in intercultural communication in university seminars. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38, 1811–1835.	This paper reports on an analysis in which the politeness orientation of participants with Japanese and Australian backgrounds is related to speech and silence in a university classroom setting.
	Bailey, B. (2000). Communicative behaviour and conflict between African-American customers and Korean immigrant retailers in Los Angeles. *Discourse & Society*, 11(1), 86–108.	This paper reports on the analysis of videotaped service encounters involving both African-American and immigrant Korean customers in Los Angeles. The author argues that the contrasting communicative patterns are the result of cultural and linguistic differences as well as social inequality and therefore becomes a source for further intercultural tensions between African-Americans and immigrant Koreans.
6	Bolden, G. (2000). Toward understanding practices of medical interpreting: interpreters' involvement in history taking. *Discourse Studies*, 2(4), 387–419.	In this paper, the role of medical interpreters in structuring the interaction between doctors and patients is examined.
1–6	Garcia, A.C. (2013) *An Introduction to Interaction: Understanding Talk in Formal and Informal Settings*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.	This textbook provides an elaborate introduction to the theoretical perspectives and methods of conversation analysis, an approach to the study of talk in interaction. It provides plenty of examples and teaches readers how to analyze conversations in both informal and formal settings.

Garcia's textbook, *An Introduction to Interaction: Understanding Talk in Formal and Informal Settings*, which not only contributes to the intercultural course aim but also introduces the methodology of conversation analysis and teaches students how to apply this method to all sorts of interaction.

The majority of the literature contributes to the intercultural aim of this course by addressing communication between people from different (language) cultures. Garcia (2013) also addresses interaction between people from different *sub*cultures (e.g., laypersons and professionals). The mainly American examples in Garcia (2013) of, for example, medical interaction or 911 calls were often contrasted with Dutch examples of visiting the local doctor or calling the Dutch emergency services during class. The literature and the corresponding preparatory reading assignments stimulate students to reflect on what makes intercultural communication different from same-culture communication, how interactional rules can differ from culture to culture, and how this might influence face-to-face communication. It also familiarizes students with researchable phenomena within intercultural communication and with transcription and presentation of translated intercultural communication.

Internationalizing the Face-to-Face Communication Curriculum Through Diary Assignments

As part of this course, students write weekly diary reflections in an online environment (only visible to the instructors). In these diary assignments, students reflect on their own and other people's actions and gather examples of everyday interactions. The main aim of the diary assignments is to make students aware of unwritten interactional practices that make it possible to live together in a society. A short description of these diary assignments is presented in Table 23.3.

Apart from the broader aim of letting students explore unwritten interactional norms in society, each diary assignment has a more specific aim. Assignment 3, for example, contributes to the intercultural aim of the course by exploring differences in turn-taking rules and overlap between subcultures. In this way, assignment 3 stimulates students to reflect on how interactional rules can differ from (sub)culture to (sub)culture and the effects this may have on face-to-face communication.

Internationalizing the Face-to-Face Communication Curriculum Through Seminar Activities

The course includes a variety of seminar activities that address intercultural face-to-face communication. An overview and short description of these is presented in Table 23.4.

In general, the activities discussed in Table 23.4 address either one of two types of intercultural communication: communication between people from different linguistic cultures (activities 1–8, 12) or communication between laypersons and professionals (activities 9–11, 13). Together, these activities contribute to the intercultural course aim by:

- stimulating students to reflect on what makes intercultural communication different from same-culture communication. Communication entails norms that we abide by, but what are those norms, and what are their interactional consequences for intercultural communication?

Table 23.3 Diary activities addressing (intercultural) face-to-face communication

Diary assignment number	Diary assignment description
1	**Introduction to face-to-face communication** Observe your own behavior during a whole day. Describe at least ten situations (where you were, with whom, what you did), and describe what you "got done" in those situations through face-to-face communication.
2	**Breaching experiments** Find a partner from your seminar group and search for two breaching experiments on YouTube that you feel comfortable with (!) or think of two breaching experiments yourself. Perform the breaching experiments together. Describe clearly what happened during the experiment: A. What did you do? B. What expectations did you breach? C. How did people around you respond? D. How did it make you feel to carry out this experiment?
3	**Subcultures and turn taking** Garcia (2013:49–50) writes that people from different cultural (or social) backgrounds organize the exchange of turns at talk differently. We can understand culture in a broad sense—a group of people with a shared way of doing things or interests. You are probably part of all sorts of different (sub)cultures. A family culture, a student culture, a soccer, dance, or tennis culture, a faith culture, an animal lover culture, a Utrecht culture, a Frisian culture, etc. Describe three conversations you have recently had with people from your own different subcultures that you belong to. Describe: a. With whom did you have the conversation, and to which subcultures did you belong? b. To which turn-taking rules did you adhere? How smoothly did it go? Did the use of turn-taking rules differ per subculture, and if so, how? c. Was there a lot of overlap? When, or when was there not? How did overlap differ between the three conversations?
4	**Technology in face-to-face communication** Technology plays an important role in (face-to-face) communication within all sorts of institutional settings. 911 operators, for example, pass on the caller's information directly via a dispatch system to get the right aid to the right place. Police officers type up the police report while they interrogate suspects. And GPs search for information in the computer system while listening to the patient. Observe an institutional setting of your choice in which technology plays a role in the interaction. Describe in about 200 words what this setting is, what kind of interaction takes place, how technology plays a role, how technology influences the conversation and vice versa. Just like an ethnographer, try to describe very precisely and objectively what you see and hear.

Table 23.4 Seminar activities addressing intercultural communication

Course week	Activity number	Activity description
1	1	**Assignment Murphy & Neu (1996)** In groups of 3–4 students: Discuss your answers to the preparatory questions about this paper. Use your answers to prepare a 2-minute presentation in which you (1) summarize the article and (2) situate the summary within pragmatics and speech act theory.
	2	**Speech acts across cultures** In duos: 1. Think of three situations (in the Netherlands, in Dutch) in which you would give a compliment in distinct ways. 2. What cultures would be interesting to compare with regard to the speech act of complimenting? Explain your idea. 3. How could you design a study to find out whether people from these different countries compliment differently?
	3	**Introduction transcription** 1. Individually: Make a representation of the audio fragment you are hearing (presented in class). The interaction took place between international students and is in English. 2. Plenary: Teacher discusses the students' experiences and any difficulties in representing interaction before introducing Jeffersonian transcription conventions.
2	4	**How was your week?** Introductory activity. Teacher gives random students a piece of paper with one of various communication styles, e.g., "In your culture, it is polite to speak very softly," "In your culture, people are used to touching each other while speaking," and "In your culture, people appreciate having little space between people they talk to." Students were blind to each other's communication style. 1. In groups of 2–3: Discuss your week while applying your assigned communication style. 2. Plenary: Teacher discusses students' experiences, focusing on norm violation and cultural differences in interactional norms.
	5	**Assignment Nakane (2006) and Bailey (2000)** In groups of 3–4: Choose one of the two articles. Prepare two mini-presentations: 1. a scientific summary 2. a summary in everyday language for everyone to understand
	6	**Transcribe a conversation between international students**
3	7	**Closings in different cultures** Students are given a handout with closings of several Dutch telephone calls. 1. Individually: (a) describe how a routine closing is done in this Dutch example and (b) describe how the elements of this routine closing differ from how a routine closing in American telephone calls is done (see examples in Garcia). 2. Plenary: Discuss results.

Table 23.4 (Continued)

Course week	Activity number	Activity description
4	8	**Analyze your own data set** In research project groups: Analyze one extract of your own data set by applying the steps described in Pomerantz & Fehr (1997). The data set includes conversations between international students.
5	9	**Analyze layperson/professional interaction (1)** 1. In duos: Discuss your answers to the preparatory question about two problematic 911 calls (Garcia). 2. Plenary: Discuss "where things went wrong" in the calls.
	10	**Analyze layperson/professional interaction (2)** 1. Plenary: Watch a 112 call (Dutch 911). 2. Teacher assigns each phase of 112 calls to a different group of 2–3 students. Instruction: Note where your assigned phase starts and ends, and describe the routine elements of your assigned phase that you recognize in this 112 call. 3. Plenary: Discuss phases and routine elements.
6	11	**Interpreting vs. translating** Introductory activity. Plenary: Discuss the difference between interpreting and translating. How can interpreting affect the conversation?
	12	**Analysis of Bolden (2000)** Following up on the previous activity: 1. In groups of 2–3: In Bolden's (2000) analysis, find examples of the six dimensions relevant to institutional conversation analysis (turn-taking organization, overall structure of the organization of the interaction, sequence organization, turn-design, lexical or word choice, epistemological, and other forms of asymmetry). 2. Plenary: Discuss students' findings.
	13	**Doctorability Mr. Kool** 1. Plenary: Listen to the Dutch GP consult fragment between Mr. Kool and his GP (layperson/professional interaction). 2. In groups of 3–4: Construct a short analysis of the phenomenon "doctorability," using the steps of Pomerantz & Fehr (1997) as a guideline. 3. Present your analysis to the group.

- introducing students to reported analyses of intercultural communication. Students get an idea about possible phenomena for research in intercultural communication and familiarize themselves with transcription and presentation of translated intercultural communication.
- having students experience transcribing actual intercultural communication. These activities present a valuable opportunity to discuss with students the difficulties of transcribing nonnative conversation and the importance of the transcription to later analysis.
- practicing analyzing intercultural communication. The complexity of these assignments increases throughout the course.
- stimulating students to think about ways to conduct intercultural communication research. As this activity was situated very early in the course, students mainly proposed to conduct interview or survey research. Discussing their proposals in relation to Murphy and Neu's (1996) approach provided students with an interesting start to their journey of discovering intercultural communication analysis.

Internationalizing the Face-to-Face Communication Curriculum Through the Research Project

Students start with the research project in the first week of the course. Related seminar activities guide students through several phases of doing research on intercultural interaction.

Data collection takes place in course week 1 and 2. Students are instructed to make two 5-minute recordings, one of a Dutch interaction between Dutch students and one of an English interaction between students in which at least one student is an international student. In this phase, students experience being part of an intercultural conversation, arrange ethical approval, and record (Skype) conversations for analytic purposes. Next, students prepare the data for analysis by transcribing the conversations according to conversation analytic standards (week 3). In this phase, students experience the difficulties that can arise when transcribing conversation in a nonnative language (and in most cases by nonnative speakers). In weeks 4 and 5, we focus on data analysis. Students learn to select sequences, identify actions, and build a collection by doing data sessions. Each group chooses a phenomenon for analysis and is stimulated to think about comparative analyses. Students analyzing English interaction learn to look beyond "X is done differently in English." Students conducting comparative analyses learn that features of interaction can be very different depending on the language spoken but especially depending on the intercultural character of the interaction. Each individual student hands in an analysis of one extract from their group's collection before week 7. They receive feedback on these analyses from their teacher during a consultation hour, in which the teacher and group members together discuss the analyses and formulate a research question. Finally, students read additional literature to frame and underpin their analyses. Each group collaboratively writes a research paper, for which they are instructed to use Bolden's (2000) article as an inspiration. Students receive guidance during the seminars and office hours.

In sum, once students hand in their final report in week 9 of the course, they have gained considerable knowledge about and experiences with conducting interaction analysis in an intercultural context. Their fine-grained analyses of everyday interaction opened many eyes to the minute details that together construct intercultural interaction.

Reflection

In their evaluation of the course, students positively evaluated the course content's strong link with real life. Students found it fascinating how the *literature* showed that cultural differences in interactional rules could lead to awkward or even hostile situations. Interestingly, in their exam answers, some students showed that they could relate "divergent" communicative behavior with cultural differences, whereas others labelled these behaviors as "wrong."

Nearing the end of the course, we asked a selection of students to evaluate the *seminar activities*. In general, students very much valued the repeated listening to and analysis of a variety of interaction fragments from different settings. A considerable number of students referred to the communication styles introductory activity (activity 4) as the most instructive activity of all. At the same time, students did not explicitly mention the intercultural communication aim when we asked them what was the most important thing that they had learned.

Reflecting on the contribution of the *research project* to the intercultural communication course aim, two issues are important for consideration. First, although we stimulated students to conduct a comparative analysis of a phenomenon in Dutch and English interaction, the number of groups that chose to do so was limited. Groups mainly selected a phenomenon for investigation in Dutch interaction. Possibly, analysis of interaction in a language that was not their mother tongue held them off. At the same time, students often noticed specific linguistic features that were salient in the international conversations and intuitively felt that these features had an effect on the interaction—a topic that indeed some students discussed in their research projects (for example, the frequent use of "yeah" and continuers such as "hmhm" in the international student talk). Second, the transcription and analysis of *intercultural* interaction seems to add value to the research project. Students experienced difficulties in transcribing the interaction, which appeared to be an excellent starting point for discussion about the value of accurate representation for later analysis.

In sum, a face-to-face communication curriculum can be "internationalized" by carefully choosing literature, guiding students through a research project for which they gather real conversations in both a local and international setting, encouraging students to reflect on their own and other people's intercultural interaction in diary assignments, and designing interactive seminar activities focusing on intercultural communication. Through this curriculum design, students learn about, experience, and do research on face-to-face communication beyond their own culture, language, and context.

Note

1. The course was developed by the first author and taught by all three authors in 2018–2019. The first author would like to thank her former colleagues Marca Schasfoort and Joyce Lamerichs, with whom she developed similar courses at VU Amsterdam, and Marloes Herijgers for helping shape and finalize the course in its current form in 2017–2018.

References

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