Managing informal interaction: stancetaking and alignment in Dutch and Indonesian

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CHAPTER 2

Sharing and collaborating

The social use of language is thought to be both the most primitive and most essential type of language use (Malinowski, 1923:328). Primitive in the sense that one of the primary reasons for language to have evolved might have been to ease maintaining social relationships: as a substitute for one-to-one grooming as groups grew bigger (Dunbar, 1992, 1996, 2016)[1]. An argument that supports the idea of phatic language use as a primitive function of language is that it is the first function of language that children acquire: before they are able to verbally exchange information, they are already trying to establish contact (Jakobson, 1960:356).

The socially oriented function of language, also called the phatic function, is generally said to be found in the margins of interaction (Malinowski, 1923; Jakobson, 1960; Laver, 1975), but this might be too narrow a view. Jakobson (1960) explicitly associates an absence of "informative communication" with the phatic function of language. This is not to say, however, that interactional activity that *is* focused on conveying information is not concerned with managing interpersonal relations (Goody, 1995b:4). All actions taken in social interaction carry consequences to the relationship between interactants (Enfield, 2006:412). As Enfield (2006:422) notes, (not) sharing information is essentially social. The social or interpersonal function of language seems to always play a role in interaction (more on this in section 3.1).

Managing interpersonal relationships could indeed be the single most central use of language (Goody, 1995b:4;, see also Dunbar, 1996). Considering humans

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[1]Dunbar (e.g. 2016) argues language evolved as the last stage of simpler vocalizations like laughter and singing. He disagrees with the view upheld by Tomasello (e.g. 2008) that language evolved from a gestural form of communication

have the species-unique ability to share intentionality and think about what others think or know (Tomasello, 2008:85ff), the possibility that interactants would try to *actively* maintain commonality or even communality during the entire flow of their interaction is not at all improbable (cf. Clark, 1996:92ff; see also section 2.2).[2]

In managing interaction, people build on what came before and anticipate what will come next. To be able to do so, they have to keep track of what they know and believe about the situation at hand; their common ground has to stay updated (Clark, 1996; Enfield, 2006). In a joint effort, they coordinate their interactional moves to reflect their shared understanding and interpersonal positioning. These moves include phatic communicative efforts to signal their interpersonal alignment and mutual involvement in the interaction. An especially interesting aspect of phatic communication is the underlying sense or want of sharing. Participants want others to know something thinking it might help *them* instead of benefit the speaker. This selfless motive of communication is thought to be unique to the human species and is in large part due to our ability to think about others' states of mind and knowledge.

One way in which people coordinate their interaction is by giving hints about what their next move will be, where they want to take the interaction. This allows co-participants to anticipate that move or even prevent it from happening. Prefacing a particular interactional move can help increase the chance of eliciting a preferred response. The study of organizational structures in interaction and the way language is used in them is the primary objective of conversation analysis. Of course, different languages show differences in language use, but the general patterns of coordination are the same cross-linguistically. These abilities to coordinate interpretation and understanding are not dependent on language, they allow language to work.

In this chapter this social side of language use is discussed that at first may seems marginal, but is in fact central to human communication (cf. section 2.1). Section 2.2 explains that using communication to selflessly share knowledge, feelings and information is thought to be unique to humans. The ways in which people coordinate their actions and beliefs and collaborate in interaction is subsequently explored in section 2.3. Underlying, interaction is driven by a special skill set that is universally shared by people. This skill set is what Levinson (2006b) calls the interaction engine, which will be explained in section 2.4. Finally, section 2.6 discusses the influence of cultural preferences on these universal interactional patterns.

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[2]The idea of using language in service of managing interpersonal relationships is found in many approaches to politeness, most notably the ones that view politeness as rapport management (e.g. Spencer-Oatey, 2005); see also section 2.5.

2.1 Phatic communication

The first mention of talk for the sake of talk as a special function of language seems to be Malinowski's study of the people and language of the Trobriand Islands (1923). He studied their "primitive" ways of using language and noticed that a lot of their communicative interaction did not seem to have a clear goal-oriented purpose, but rather was focused on the relationship between the interactants (1923:316). He coined this use of language phatic communion: "a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words" (1923:315). The main function or goal of this type of language use is breaking the silence, forming bonds, enjoying each other's company. Language, then, is not so much used to transfer thoughts, but serves to socially bind the speaker and hearer together (1923:315). Following Malinowski (1923), Jakobson similarly recognizes a function of language focused on the social side of interaction, which he denotes as "set for contact" (Jakobson, 1960:355). Again, this function primarily serves "to establish, prolong, or to discontinue communication" (Jakobson, 1960:355).[3] The phatic function is thus separated from the informational or referential function as Senft (2009) explains:

> "[...] phatic communion is characterized by not conveying meaning,
> by not importing information; thus, phatic utterances are described
> as procedures without propositional contents".
>
> (Senft, 2009:228)

While utterances that serve a phatic function are not focused on conveying informational content, it is not to say they do not convey meaning. This type of language use is not primarily to do with transferring thoughts or information, but with sharing an environment and maintaining a relationship in (and beyond) that particular situation. This is why Laver (1975) describes phatic communication to be an indexical function of language:

> "[...] the prime function of phatic communion is the communication
> of indexical facts about the speakers' identities, attributes, and attitudes,
> and [...] these indexical facts constrain the nature of the
> particular interaction".   (Laver, 1975:217)

The elements used in phatic communication are not referential in nature. Instead, they connect the speaker to his immediate environment - including his fellow interactants and their interactional contributions. The choices made by the speaker are of indexical significance, since they say something about the speaker's stance or relation to the larger interaction. The phatic (and deictic) elements that are used in communication present a claim about the speaker's solidarity with his interlocutor(s) and the relative social status of participants. Laver's analysis of language use in the interactional margins (openings and

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[3]His main focus is on the poetic function of language, which will prove to be relevant in the discussion of alignment and repetition (see 3.1 and 3.3.1).

closings of interaction) showed that all elements used in phatic communion indeed had deictic reference: they related back to something in the immediate environment, the speaker, or the addressee (1975:222-223).

Laver (1975:217) describes the fundamental social function of phatic communion as "the detailed management of interpersonal relationships during the psychologically crucial margins of interaction". Malinowski, too, concentrated mostly on such exchanges as "How do you do" or "Nice day today" in the opening phase of an interaction. He refers to these as "mere phrase[s] of politeness" (1923:313), suggesting that the phatic use of language is - to lay people (i.e. regular users of a particular language variety) - considered to belong to the politeness spectrum.[4] Normative phatic structures are most clearly found in acts that overtly address the interpersonal relation, including compliments, apologies, and greetings (Goffman, 1956:477). This does not mean, however, that phatic language does not follow normative patterns in other interactional environments.

As discussed above, Malinowski defined phatic communion as a tie of union between people that is created by talk or language (1923:315). So far, the term phatic communion has roughly been related with the social side of language, a pragmatic or even polite aspect of language use. It is, in that sense, similar to what Goffman (1956:476) calls ceremonial rules: "conventionalized means of communication by which the individual expresses his character or conveys his appreciation of the other participants in the situation".[5] More broadly, this function of language is referred to as phatic communication (Senft, 2009:227)[6] and involves language use informing the interpersonal relationship.

In this thesis, the more general use of phatic communication is used. Although the term is rather old and no longer regularly found in scholarly work, it is a useful concept for the purposes of this thesis. Phatic communication will be understood to refer to all contributions that (i) communicate affiliation and establish positive interpersonal alignment in informal interaction and (ii) that are not strictly necessary in terms of informational content. All such acts that are designated as phatic contributions are spontaneous reactions that pri-

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[4]The association of language use for social purposes with politeness is not uncommon. A full and uniform grasp of what politeness entails is, however, not that easy to establish and is certainly not something scholars of politeness agree on. See section 2.5 for a more elaborate discussion of politeness.

[5]Goffman concentrated on two components of ceremonial activity, deference and demeanor. The first refers to the expression of appreciation for another participant, the latter concerns the way in which a participant expresses his personal qualities of character.

[6]Phatic communion and phatic communication are not necessarily the same. Simplistically put, communication entails transferring or conveying a particular (intended) message from one party to another. Communion, on the other hand, is thought to be used by Malinowksi with its religious connotation (Ehlich, 1993:317, quoted in Senft, 2009:227), which suggests a stronger bond or unity compared to one established in communication. Although it is good to keep in mind that communion and communication are not always interchangeable, the similarities outweigh the differences. Both phatic communion and phatic communication are used to refer to utterances that are used to build rapport, utterances that serve primarily social functions.

marily serve the construction or maintenance of a shared position between the participants involved.

2.2   What makes us human

From an evolutionary point of view, Tomasello (2008:84-87) describes three general motives for interaction: requesting, informing and sharing. Requesting and informing are both imperative motives that mostly serve the benefit of the speaker. With requests, the speaker wants the hearer to do something, with informatives the speaker wants the hearer to know something (so that they can subsequently do something with that knowledge that will benefit the speaker). Sharing on the other hand, does not seem to be informed by this kind of goal or intention. The speaker does not want the hearer to do anything, but simply shares a feeling, attitude or information for the sake of sharing. The ultimate goal or reason behind this motive of communication is to expand the common ground with others (Tomasello, 2008:86). Sharing thus reflects a social or phatic motive. Of these three general motives of communication, sharing is the one that is unique to the human species.

What is said to distinguish the human mind from other species is our ability to think recursively about our own and other's thinking (cf.Corbalis, 2011). Related to language and interaction, Tomasello (2008:94-95) argues that what makes our (verbal) interaction work is the fact that the creation of common ground, the Gricean communicative intention, and the motivational structure of human communication are all recursive. Cooperation can only be successful, after all, if everyone assumes that everyone assumes (etc.) the same norms of cooperation (Tomasello, 2008:95).[7] Common ground, cooperation, and coordination are essential aspects of our universal system of human interaction (cf. section 2.4).

2.2.1   Common ground

In section 2.1, the phatic function of language was explained to serve the arrangement of social roles and relationships. The possibility that was put forward that people continuously update this social arrangement in interaction is supported by the importance of common ground in communication. Clark (1996:93) defines common ground as "the sum of [the] mutual, common, or joint knowledge, beliefs, and supposition". Common ground, or intersubjective context (Tomasello, 2008:74),[8] thus refers to the knowledge participants see as

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[7]Clark (1996:95) argues against this recursive representation of common ground (CG-iterated in his terms) because it would call for an "infinitely large mental capacity".

[8]The term "intersubjectivity" is not further discussed in this thesis, but is simply understood to refer to the fact that all interaction assumes mutual involvement in the form of shared attention and coordination (cf. Goffman, 1957). This is neatly captured by the very general definition provided by Sidnell (2014:366): "The human form of intersubjectivity, then, centrally involves joint attention and shared intentionality thus allowing two or

relevant to the ongoing interaction. Crucially, it is not one participant's individual belief that something is relevant, but their belief that the other sees it as relevant as well and that they both mutually know that they know this. As neatly summarized by Tomasello (2008):

> "The critical point about common ground is that it takes people beyond their own egocentric perspective of things".
>
> (Tomasello, 2008:76)

The beliefs about what an interlocutor might know or notice assumes a starting point or baseline that both participants share and use to build their common ground. People base their beliefs of common ground on the situation they find themselves in (the location, activity, surroundings, etc.) and on information about the participants that is presented in interaction; information that is accessible to both of them. These bases are believed to be shared (Clark, 1996:94). There is no certainty in them actually having the same awareness or knowledge, they can only index what they believe is in their common ground (Clark, 1996:96).[9]

There are roughly two types of shared bases: knowledge about general cultural communities, which leads to communal common ground and knowledge about personal experience, leading to personal common ground (Clark, 1996:100). Communal common ground encompasses the characteristics (or ideas) people attribute to being part of a particular cultural group and the knowledge or expertise that comes with that membership. Examples of cultural communities that may serve as a base for communal common ground are having a shared nationality, education, or religion or living in the same area or being of similar age (Clark, 1996:100). Personal common ground refers to shared personal experiences and activities, like previous conversations or the immediate surroundings (Clark, 1996:112ff).

In conversation, people keep track of their common ground as it develops over the course of their interaction. They subsequently use the knowledge they believe is shared to design their utterance, make inferences, and arrive at interpretations (Enfield, 2006:405).[10] For example, when you learn your co-participant is an avid football fan - as are you - you will assume that certain

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more individuals to focus on the same object while simultaneously attending to the attention of the other". Especially the latter part of the definition has a central place in this thesis. Participants not only jointly focus on a certain object, they coordinate or negotiate their stance towards that object, and thus to each other. Stancetaking is thus a central aspect of intersubjectivity. This will be further discussed in chapter 3). Intersubjectivity is also found in cognitive (linguistic) approaches to language and interaction, which are not included in the current study (for a cognitive approach, see e.g. Verhagen, 2007; Zlatev et al., 2009.

[9]In this thesis I will follow Clark's (1996) definition of common ground, specifically his understanding of Common Ground as being built from a shared basis (CG-shared). The other two representations he lists, CG-reflexive and CG-iterated, are not discussed here. See Clark (1996:95-100) for a full discussion of the differences between these three representations of common ground. See Tomasello (2008:78-79) for an alternative, but similar, typology of common ground.

[10]To what extent people consciously or explicitly update their common ground is a point

knowledge about the upcoming game, important players or competitions is shared between the two of you and thus does not need introduction or explaining. Aside from shared knowledge and experience that is stored in the (personal) common ground, cultural norms and practices are also part of speakers' (communal) common ground. Participants will use both these sources of assumed shared knowledge to ascribe intentions to interactional moves. This allows them to interpret the goal of an utterance even if the intention is not literally encoded in the message (Levinson, 1995:240).

The most economical way in terms of processing, is to assume the correct interpretation of a particular interactional move is the most likely interpretation. What this most likely interpretation is has to be shared among participants: they have to agree in advance (although not explicitly) that a certain move normally carries a particular intention (Levinson, 1995:241). This default ascription of intention is presumed by the both of them to apply to both of them. A speaker thus recognizes the utterance will likely be interpreted to carry a particular intention and knows to actively make an effort to redirect their partner's interpretation if the utterance was meant to convey something else.

Common ground and overt communication are thought to be complementary: the more knowledge is shared between interactants, the less needs to be overtly expressed (Tomasello, 2008:79). Because common ground allows for inferences about intentions and interpretation, a bigger common ground makes it easier to attribute intentions without needing an explicit message doing so (Enfield, 2006:401-402). Yet, even though a particular piece of information is readily available to both participants, this does not keep people from relaying that piece of information. People oftentimes do state the obvious or repeat what was already said - even if it was just uttered one or a couple of turns before. Establishing or coordinating shared (referential) knowledge or understanding is not necessary at that point, suggesting the purpose of such contributions must lie elsewhere. Participants will always assume such redundant utterances *do* carry meaning and purpose; otherwise, they would not have been uttered. It is the interlocutor's job to determine what that purpose is.

2.2.2 Cooperation

Interactants are generally considered rational individuals that normally try to communicate as efficiently as possible. A seemingly inefficient or redundant utterance must contribute something to the ongoing interaction and there must be a reason for the speaker to use that particular form. Cooperative interaction is marked by the idea that people want to understand each other and will

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of ongoing debate. Clark (1996:153) argues people have to coordinate closely to establish a piece of information as common and thus add it to their common ground. For the opposite perspective see e.g. Pickering and Garrod (2004, 2006) and Wachsmuth, de Ruiter, Jaecks, and Kopp (2013), who argue that mental representations are automatically updated and - due to similar input from the environment - aligned accordingly. The importance of updating common ground in relation to alignment will be explored in chapter 3.

work together to make that happen. The speaker wants the hearer to understand what the speaker wants or knows and the hearer wants to understand what the speaker (wants the hearer to understand what the speaker) wants or knows. They jointly make an effort to reach this shared goal. As Levinson (1995:253) stresses "it is [our] cooperative intersubjective background that makes language interpretation possible". Apart from the actual interactional behavior (the utterance), they will make use of their common ground, and the associated defaults of intention ascription, to come to an interpretation of a particular act. Guiding this effort of reaching a shared understanding - that is ascribing the intention the speaker indeed aimed to communicate - is Grice's (1975) cooperative principle:[11]

> "Make your conversational contribution as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged".   (Grice, 1975:45)

He assumes participants will normally follow this general rule of thumb and its associated maxims that guide rational language use.[12] It allows participants to make assumptions about each other's behavior and interpret a particular interactional move as intended. If the maxims are or appear to be violated, the speaker must have intended to include an implicit message for the hearer to infer: a conversational implicature. Note that this is in line with the default presumption of intention; both speakers will assume a particular interpretation to arise from a certain expression, unless it is made clear something else is going on.

Cooperation more generally thus refers to the effort participants make to calibrate their mutual understanding in interaction. This includes their beliefs about what is and is not shared between them and how to resolve possible discrepancies in their knowledge or expectations. Ultimately, intention ascription is the central aim of their cooperative work. Both speakers benefit from a shared understanding of a particular act, since it will most likely lead to a smooth continuation of their interaction (cf. 1.1).

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[11]This description of rational, efficient, and cooperative interaction has been deemed too narrowly focused on the Anglo-Saxon world, most notably by Clyne (1994) who reformulated the cooperative principle and its maxims to include reference to cultural appropriateness. The original cooperative principle likely was indeed formulated with English in mind. Still, it does leave room to include other cultural or communal norms that influence interaction. Specifically the phrase *as is required* allows for a shift in interpretation regarding what is at that stage of conversation appropriate or expected and to best design the utterance. Although Clyne is right to draw attention to the existing cultural differences in what is considered "required", I would argue it is more fruitful to incorporate that insight in the standing definition.

[12]The Cooperative Principle (CP) is accompanied by four conversational maxims (Grice, 1975:45-46): (i) the maxim of quality - try to make your contribution one that is true, (ii) the maxim of quantity - make your contribution as informative as required, (iii) the maxim of relation - make your contribution one that is relevant, and (iv) the maxim of manner - make your contribution one that is clear. These maxims are all aimed at capturing rational language use and guiding interpretation. They are not rules, speakers may not follow them, but Grice assumes that the CP and the maxims are in principal observed by speakers.

Clark (1996:3) similarly explains the importance of cooperation in interaction and language use as a joint action. To successfully communicate a message and reach understanding participants have to coordinate their behavior. People coordinate their individual efforts when they have common interests or goals that are dependent on coordination to be met (Clark, 1996:62). Language use - and especially its interpretation - is undeniably dependent on such collaborative behavior. Importantly, it is not the sum of the individual activities the speaker and hearer perform that make language use a joint action. This coordination of both content and processes makes it a joint action (Clark, 1996:59). In other words, language is a joint action because participants have a shared orientation towards mutual cooperation and coordination throughout the interaction - as visible in the interconnectedness of participants' interactional moves.

2.2.3 Coordination

Social roles are typically dyadic: parent-child, boss-employee, student-professor. Consequently, social interaction is mapped accordingly. Knowing who carries which role in a particular social encounter helps interactants predict the behavior of their interlocutors thus facilitating their interaction (Goody, 1995b:14). Usually, participants start their actual interaction with a greeting, for example "Hi", followed by (in English) a "how-are-you sequence" (Schegloff, 2007:23), before introducing the reason for their initiation of contact.

Most work on the structural organization of social negotiation has focused on such transitional phases of interaction. It is in these phases that the boundaries between interaction and non-interaction are crossed, which makes them excellent candidates to suspect behavior that is focused on managing interpersonal relationships. A substantial part of the exchanges in these phases are conventionalized, they are what Coulmas (1981) calls conversational routines. It is not just the phrases that are used, like "Good morning" or "How are you today", that are conventionalized, the entire sequence of acts that opens up or closes down a conversation is highly predictable.

When transitioning into interaction one party first has to get another to direct their attention toward them, this is what Schegloff (1968:1080) calls the summons-answer sequence.[13] In this part of the interaction, participants coordinate their availability and roles: who is the (overall) speaker, the one with the question/request/story and who acts primarily as hearer (Schegloff, 1968:1093). This establishment of role structure is an important function of phatic communication (Laver, 1975:219).

These transitional phases of interaction are important in terms of establishing and disengaging from a joint activity. As explained above, people do not simply start or end a conversation by themselves, they have to coordinate with

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[13]Schegloff (1968) mostly discusses telephone conversations, but explicitly notes that the initiating act and a (positive) response by two different parties are necessary and present in the first phase of all kinds of talk.

their interlocutor and jointly decide and establish the changed state of our activity. Joint activities, like having a conversation, are built from joint actions, such as utterances and their uptake or understanding (Clark, 2006:129). To bring these actions, and ultimately the joint activity, to a good end, participants have to establish joint commitment. A joint commitment is the combination of the individual commitments of the interlocutors to a particular joint action (Clark, 2006:130).

Each pair of acts forms a joint action and negotiates or confirms the commitment either participant has to both the singular action and the joint activity as a whole. When a first speaker initiates contact by saying something like "Good morning"this suggests the willingness to interact with the other. If the second speaker responds with a "Good morning to you too" they both commit themselves to that willingness to interact. At this point both parties have committed themselves to participating in interaction and have thus established joint commitment. People negotiate joint commitment in projective pairs: an initiating act or proposal and its uptake (Clark, 2006:132).[14] They jointly brought the projective pair (greeting1-greeting2) to a successful end; the joint action is complete and the first step in their joint activity of having a conversation is taken. Of course there is a possibility the interaction does not extend past the exchange of greetings. This does not change the fact that the two participants both - and jointly - committed to the cause of successfully completing the proposed pair. Whether or not they continue their conversation, a joint commitment was reached. Given that this first exchange of utterances resulted in a joint commitment, participants will more easily assume or try to reach similar results in the future. Their joint commitment to enter interaction compels them to build on that commitment and reach similar results in future exchanges.

As Schegloff and Sacks (1973) first showed, the final part of a conversation is structurally organized into particular acts that are completed in a particular order as well. Commonly, the end of the conversation is marked by a closing initiation (indicating the topic has concluded and it is time to move on to ending the conversation), a terminal exchange (whereby the participants agree on closing the conversation), and a proper closing (to mark the end, a phrase like "Goodbye"). Additional components that can be found in the closing section include arranging the next point of contact, summarizing the main points of conversation, or reaffirming an appointment or arrangement that has been dis-

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[14]This use of projective pairs closely resembles the idea of adjacency pairs as the basic unit in conversation as operated in conversation analysis: two turns that are adjacent to each other. The first pair part consists of the speaker doing some type of act: greeting, questioning, offering, requesting, etc. To each first pair part (the initiating turn) there are a number of "type-connected" second pair parts. The interlocutor that is about to perform the second pair part, then, selects a second pair part that is relevant to the type that was projected in the first pair part (Sacks, 1987[1973]:55-56; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). The difference is that Schegloff and Sacks focus on talk-in-interaction, whereas Clark (1996) intends his notion of projective pairs to be applicable to all kinds of coordinating (and joint) actions, both communicative and non-communicative.

cussed (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973:317). All these elements are potentially, if not explicitly, targeting the relationship between the interlocutors: they help establish that this instance of contact is positively evaluated and the participants will continue their relation later - or at least are open to that possibility. This closing sequence is indeed restricted to the margin of interaction: the transition from interaction to non-interaction or the ending of "a state of talk" (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973:324).

The process of ending a conversation shows how uncommon it is for participants to take unilateral decisions once they are involved in a joint activity (cf. Goffman, 1957). Breaking their commitment, extricating one from the joint activity, is difficult precisely because there have been so many separate commitments over the course of the activity that it is against expectation to suddenly stop with the joint activity and switch back to singular decision making. The commitment they have established between the two of them affects their interpersonal relationship. To continue on the right foot, they have to ensure their relation is still strong even following the conclusion of their current interaction.

When participants do end up having a longer conversation, they will build one joint action - pair of utterances - on top of the other. Each completed pair negotiates and preferably leads to joint commitment. Over the course of their conversation the participants stack one joint commitment on top of the other, while persisting to be committed to each and every one of them (Clark, 2006:138-139). They thus continuously reinforce their joint commitment to the overall joint activity. These continuous reinforcements do not all take place in the margins of interactions. On the contrary, each time a projected pair is completed, the participants are said to have consolidated their joint commitment.

When an initiating act (e.g. a request) strongly compels another participant to respond with a particular type of act (e.g. an acceptance), the relevance between the two acts and the participants' commitment to the combined act is clear. However, not all first acts are as commanding when it comes to the presentation of uptake. A reaction to a telling of someone's personal experience, for example, may be expected, but they are hardly required for the act of storytelling to be completed.[15] These contributions do establish ongoing joint commitment to the conversation. Such display of involvement is presumably more or less appreciated (and expected) depending on the cultural norms that

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[15]Heritage (2011:160) notes that speakers have a moral obligation to respond to such tellings, more specifically to support the stance taken by the first speaker: "[...] when persons report first-hand experiences of any great intensity (involving, for example, pleasure, pain, joy or sorrow), they obligate others to join with them in their evaluation, to affirm the nature of the experience and its meaning, and to affiliate with the stance of the experiencer toward them. These obligations are moral obligations that, if fulfilled, will create moments of empathic communion". However, he does not explain how it is these experiencers oblige the other participant(s) to affirm their affiliation, or when an experience qualifies to hold "great intensity". His discussion of the resources that people have at their disposal to affiliate with the stance presented by the first speaker (i.e. the experiencer), will prove useful in the discussion of stancetaking and alignment in chapter 3.

participants orient towards.

Phatic efforts of communication seem to serve two broad tasks (1) establishing and consolidating interpersonal relationships and (2) crossing the boundaries between interaction and non-interaction (Laver, 1975:232). While the second major function is clearly most easily recognized in the literal margins of interaction, consolidating an interpersonal relationship is not necessarily restricted to the opening or closing of a conversation. Behavior that is aimed at strengthening or enhancing rapport might be even more likely to turn up when the interaction is well on its way in order to update the common ground and reinforcing participants' joint commitment to the conversation and each other. The question then is what phatic language use would look like outside of the margins of interaction.

2.3 Collaboration and anticipation

Language is not something designed for the individual, but rather for the interpersonal.[16] As Dor, Knight, and Lewis (2014:2-3) state, "it's a system for publicly expressing our thoughts to help others imaginatively reconstruct them". This ties back to the idea that using language is a collaborative effort. The most natural use of language is found in spoken informal conversation (Enfield, 2013:11; Levinson, 2006b:61; Goody, 1995b:12). In this type of interaction, the level of institutionalization is very limited and people are thus mostly reliant on their instinctive interactional skills. Part of that instinct is to use their knowledge of common ground and their beliefs about how interaction typically unfolds to reach a shared interpretation and understanding. As noted in the previous section, participants are invested in their joint commitment to the interaction. Their mutual affiliation to the topic of talk and their resulting (positive) interpersonal alignment is not only a marginal concern, but in fact an ongoing matter of attention.

Interactional moves hardly ever appear in a vacuum, there usually is a context in which they occur. An utterance is tightly linked to the situation in which it is uttered, in the sense that the speaker decides in that moment, in that situation, that some thought or action has to be expressed or performed at that point in the interaction. As discussed in 2.2, people assume and negotiate their common ground. At any given point in interaction they have a sense of what they all know. Even intuitively, it would make little sense to assume people would ignore what has been said before and block the knowledge they already have on a particular story or topic. Indeed, in most interactions, the

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[16]Earlier studies of linguistic structure focused on the organization of linguistic elements in the larger structure of a sentence (e.g. Chomsky, 1957). This so-called Chomskyan view upholds that language is an innate ability of the human species. Language is encoded in our genes and should therefore be studied in isolation, language itself the research object, if we want to understand how this process or ability works. The central question in this line of work is not so much what we do with language, but *how* we are able to use language; how the system works.

shared knowledge that is available is used and addressed to anticipate the next course of action.[17] The current speaker designs his utterance in such a way that the targeted hearer most likely will arrive at the intended interpretation. This audience design is informed by the cooperative struggle interactants find themselves in to maintain common referential understanding. To establish mutual understanding, they calibrate their common ground and mutual relation at every step of their interaction (Enfield, 2006:411).

Interlocutors thus closely monitor the unfolding of talk in interaction, among other things to decide when they can take over the turn at talk. Participants recognize when a turn constructional unit is almost completed, at which point they can potentially take over the turn. A turn constructional unit is understood as an intonationally, syntactically, and pragmatically completed unit. This could be a sentence, a clause, or a phrase of any length that is recognizable as having completed a relevant act at that point (Sacks et al., 1974:720-723; Schegloff, 2007:3-4). Participants do not await the current speaker to finish to then only start after a pause (ensuring the speaker was in fact done talking), they use their knowledge of the intonation, grammar, and relevance of the act in context to predict the projected completion. They anticipate the moment they can take turn, thus limiting the overlap and silence in between turns to a minimum.[18] Turn-taking thus requires collaboration and anticipation on all participants' parts. The current speaker knows the other participants will recognize a turn constructional unit to be almost completed and thus anticipates passing on the turn or make an effort to keep the floor. Next speakers anticipate the projected completion and recognize efforts to postpone such moments. This all contributes to the experience of a smooth interaction.

One interactional environment that sees explicit calibration of their mutual position is in the use of prefaces to the main interactional act. Such prefaces increase the likelihood of a preferred outcome and thus preemptively assure the participants that they both know what to expect. Instead of immediately extending an invitation or making a request, participants are shown to start with a preliminary act (Schegloff, 1980) to probe the other's interest or availability to accept the main act. In this way, speakers coordinate their current positions before deciding to perform the main act. This is closely connected to the preference for a proposed project (the invitation or request) to be met with an affirmative response as we will see in the remainder of this section.

Prefacing interactional moves

Acts or moves performed in interaction are often foreshadowed by some other type of interaction unit (Schegloff, 1980; Streeck, 1995). For example, a motion

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[17]See e.g. Goody (1995b) on anticipatory interactive planning and Schegloff (2007) on the sequential organization of interaction.

[18]This has universally proven to be the optimal configuration of turns to interlocutors. See e.g. Sacks et al. (1974) for a detailed account of the organization of turn-taking and Stivers et al. (2009) for a cross-linguistic comparison of the organizational structures of turn-taking.

or change in posture often indicates something is coming up. A social act (or main speech act) in interaction is mostly not singular, but marks the end point of a trajectory that started with the first indication that the speaker is going to (start to) make a move (Streeck, 1995:106). Schegloff (1980) introduced the term "action projection" to refer to this phenomenon. Preliminary moves do not announce which act will be performed, but project possible courses of action giving the interlocutor some idea as to what will come next. One interactional practice that is used to help hearers anticipate future actions is that of prefaces.

While gestures or postural shifts are useful cues to anticipate a change in the interaction, verbal moves are often prefaced by other verbal moves as well. The common practice (at least in English) to preface a question with "Can I ask you something?"[19] or "Are you hungry?" are a case in point. The expression is itself a question, but does not hold the information the speaker is presumably after. It is unlikely the end goal of these questions actually is to find out whether or not the co-participant is open to answering a question or is feeling hungry. Instead, the answers to these question are an incentive to (not) further pursue the main act of asking someone to join for dinner. These preliminary questions thus prepare the other participant for the upcoming act and increase the likelihood of the first speaker receiving an adequate or preferred answer.

As such, prefacing interactional units play a key role in the negotiation and collaboration that is needed to successfully (and jointly!) solve a communication problem. In short "[they] are at the very heart of social collaboration in talk and interaction" (Streeck, 1995:87). Note that the scholars cited here all imply that people *actively* make an effort to maintain the level of social solidarity. They may not explicitly negotiate social roles or attitudes (as with greeting or leave-taking), but people do tend to the established roles and attitudes. The constant update of common ground, keeping track of what is and is not shared and trying to anticipate or hint at what is coming ensures the best possible outcome - both on an informational and relational level. Essential to this way of interacting is the cooperative nature of the human species.

Preference

Preliminaries not only present possible outcomes to the hearer, they increase the likelihood of the actual request or invitation being met with a preferred response. Generally speaking, a preferred move is the type of response that is in congruence with the projected reality (Schegloff, 1988, 2007). For example, when the first speaker requests the hearer to do the dishes this is an attempt to get the other participant to do something. The first speaker's projected or desired reality is that the hearer cleans the dirty dishes. The request is successful when the other participant indeed takes up the requested task. This would be

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[19]This would in fact be called a pre-preliminary act, because it only forewarns a certain act being performed but does not allude to the content of the ensuing question. See Schegloff (1980, 2007) for a full discussion of both preliminary and pre-preliminary acts.

the preferred response. In this action-based sense of preference, the completion of the action is preferred, the decline or rejection of an action is dispreferred.

Preferred responses are usually performed immediately, structurally simple, and convey the message clearly and unambiguously. Dispreferred responses, on the other hand, are often prefaced, delayed and weakened (Pomerantz, 1984:65). Levinson (1983:307) relates this notion of preference to the linguistic concept of markedness: preferred responses are unmarked, simple forms; dispreferred responses are marked by structural complexity.[20] Speakers design their utterance to be met with a preferred response. That is, they anticipate the likelihood of the proposed project actually being met with approval or acceptance and formulate their utterance accordingly. Compare examples (1) and (2).

(1) *Preference*
        Anna   Are you joining us for dinner tonight?
        Esther   (a) Of course!
                    (b) Well, actually, it's kind of busy at work at the moment,
                        I'm not sure what time I will be able to leave...

(2) *Preference*
        Anna   You're not joining us for dinner tonight?
        Esther   (a) No, I can't.
                    (b) Well, actually, I have tonight off; I'd love to join you.

In both (1) and (2) the projected outcome is for Esther to join Anna and her co-workers for dinner. From an action-based perspective, the preferred response would thus be an acceptance of the invitation to come along (1a and 2b). From a design-based perspective, on the other hand, the preferred response is the one in line with the anticipated outcome (1a and 2a). This latter perspective is less concerned with the successful completion of a proposed project, but rather concentrates on the congruence between the anticipated and actual response in terms of design. The focus is on the structural markers, not so much on the content of the utterances or turns. Preference in this sense is not so much related to the personal liking or the participants' psychological states. It is concerned with certain observable regularities in the conversation that are in line with the projected completion (a preferred) or counter to the expected completion (a dispreferred). The asymmetry in preference for both a certain *type* of response and the *design* of that response underlines the bias for cooperation (Levinson, 2006b:48).

Being able to recognize (and anticipate) actions and respond to them in a preferred manner (both action-based and design-based) is an important aspect of constituting a smooth, natural conversation. On the one hand, this means

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[20]Participants may construct their turn to look like a dispreferred response by implementing hedges, delays or reluctance markers, while their turn is in fact preferred based on the content. Or, the other way around, one could very quickly and very directly utter a dispreferred response, making it look like a preferred one in the sense that there are no dispreference markers. As Schegloff puts it (1988), they present the response "as a preferred" or "as a dispreferred", rather than "doing the preferred or dispreferred response".

participants are able to correctly ascribe a particular intention to an act and act accordingly. In other words, they recognize a particular utterance carries an invitation and they know the preferred outcome is for them to accept that invitation. On the other hand, it means participants recognize the projected outcome that is captured in the initiating act and know part of their expected behavior is to respond in line with that projection. Furthermore, they know how to manipulate their response in such a way that it converges or diverges from the first act and what affect that will have on the further development of the conversation. All these steps taken by the responding party are known to the initiating party as well, and are presumably used to both their advantage.

This coordination of interpretation and subsequent actions is a strong indication of a joint commitment to the ongoing interaction. It also suggests participants are indeed using their common ground (including prior contact) to predict as best they can how the other will respond. In formulating an initiating act, the speaker has to think *as* the other participant, anticipating the likely outcome based on the (contextual) information available about that participant. Both the speaker's stance towards the object (the proposed act) and the presumed stance taken by the hearer have to be taken into account to make an accurate assessment of their joint position. Before actually proposing the act, the speaker predicts both their presumed positions to increase the likelihood of success. The connection between preference and social solidarity is explained by Heritage (1984):

> "[...] preferred format actions are normally affiliative in character while dispreferred format actions are disaffiliative. Similarly, while preferred format accounts are generally supportive of social solidarity, dispreferred format actions are destructive of it".
>
> (Heritage, 1984:269)

Responses that are in line with the expected outcome will strengthen the social bond between interlocutors. This is related to their (assumed) interpersonal positioning, which is indeed proven by the correct prediction and subsequent completion of a particular act. They are thus shown to be similar, to share a strong common ground. Dispreferred response, on the other hand, will lead to a feeling of separation, since the continuation of the interaction will not develop as imagined. Of course mutual (dis)affiliation does not depend on a single turn exchange, but the notion of preference is thus associated with how speakers manage their mutual relations and how intersubjective understanding is achieved (Boyle, 2000:548).

The discussion about preference and prefaces above mostly dealt with directives and their projected responses. This is indeed where such practices are often found. As explained in sections 1.1 and 2.1, these responses are not analyzed further in this thesis. While they evidently contribute to interpersonal affiliation and alignment, they are also required contributions in terms of project completion. Their primary goal (or function if you will) is to complete

the project that was set up by the first speaker. This is mostly done in a way to ensure positive social relations, but it is not what they are primarily concerned with. They first and foremost present the information that was targeted by the first speaker (e.g. an answer, acceptance of an invitation, rejection of a request). As such, they are not considered phatic contributions for the purposes of this thesis, even if they do carry a phatic function.

2.4 Universals of interaction

As discussed in paragraphs 2.2.1 and 2.2.3 the negotiation and establishment of common ground and joint goals and commitment are central to successful interaction. The ability to cooperate, coordinate and collaborate with others is believed to be specific to humans.[21] Crucially, these skills do not depend on language, but are (normally) available to all socialized people (see e.g. Levinson, 1995, 2006a,b; Schegloff, 2006; Sidnell, 2007, 2014; Sidnell and Enfield, 2012; Enfield and Sidnell, 2014). All people know, almost instinctively, how to interact with others. They have the ability to think about others' knowledge and situations and are thus able to predict and anticipate certain behavior. This allows them to coordinate their communicative efforts in order to construct and maintain interaction. It also allows them to constitute and prolong a social relationship.

Even if these abilities are not based in language, the use of these skills is evident in structures of language use. Traditionally, the structural organization of interaction is the site of conversation analytic research. As Drew (1990:31) points out, conversation analysis is concerned with "identifying the transindividual, transcontextual, generic properties, patterns and devices associated with how speakers design their contributions". These patterns are normative in character and help speakers achieve mutual understanding and coherence in interaction (Drew, 1990:29-31). They are "conventional reference points" that speakers use to interpret and understand one another's behavior (Bilmes, 1988:162).

The organizational structures that have thus far received most attention include turn-taking, sequentiality and repair organization (Schegloff, 2006:71ff).[22] Earlier findings on interactional organization were mostly based on English data. More recently, the cross-cultural validity of these organizational structures has been established (Sidnell, 2009). Universals of interaction have so far been found in the use and organization of repair (Dingemanse et al., 2014),

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[21]Note that Suchak et al. (2016) disagree with this statement. They observed how chimpanzees solved problems that required a joint effort, proving they are able to collaborate as well. They conclude that "the roots of human cooperation are shared with other primates" (2016:21025). See also Bullinger et al. (2011), Melis et al. (2016), and Schmelz and Call (2015).

[22]For the original work on turn-taking see e.g. Sacks et al. (1974); Schegloff (2000), on sequentiality e.g. Schegloff (1968); Schegloff and Sacks (1973); Schegloff (2007), on repair e.g. Schegloff et al. (1977).

turn-taking (Stivers and Robinson, 2006), and pointing (Sidnell and Enfield, 2017).

Interactional organization

It is not uncommon for one communicative act to be conveyed by different types of signals, for example gestures accompanying speech (Levinson, 2006a:88). Universally, people are able to simultaneously produce and recognize different types of signals belonging to the same message (Deppermann, 2013).[23] This suggests there is indeed a special human cognition for interaction that guides our interactional behavior and understanding.[24] Other interactional patterns that might prove to be universal include (i) a preference for progressivity in interaction, (ii) recipient design, (iii) minimization, for example in turn-taking, but also in using reference terms when the referent is known to either party, and (iv) "nextness", referring to the default assumption that some act relates to the one just prior to it (Schegloff, 2006).

Taking turn-taking as an example, all languages share a preference for the transition from one speaker to the next to be as smooth as possible. The silence between turns is to be minimized and overlap is to be avoided (Stivers et al., 2009:10589). Furthermore, responses that present an answer are produced faster than non-answers and confirming answers faster than disconfirming ones (Stivers et al., 2009:10588). The pattern that preferred actions are performed without delay (see section 2.3) is indeed confirmed cross-linguistically. Although the general turn-taking system is found to be universal, there is some cultural variability in what constitutes the "ideal" middle ground between minimization of overlap and silence. Stivers et al. (2009:10590) suggest this is related to the specific conversational rhythm each language is used to.

By themselves, such universal patterns of interactional organization cannot explain why people interact the way they do. These structures only work if interlocutors assume them to be in effect. Therefore, while they form a great reference point to make inferences about someone's behavior, those inferences have to be based on some other interactional ability. Levinson (1995) argues for a separate interactional intelligence and even an interactional bias in human thinking:

> "Language didn't make interactional intelligence possible, it is interactional intelligence that made language possible as a means of communication".   (Levinson, 1995:232)

This interactional intelligence allows people to infer meaning and intention, to cooperate and coordinate with each other in interaction. The universal - because species specific - ability to think recursively about other's knowledge and

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[23]See the papers in the 2013 special issue of Journal of Pragmatics on multimodality and conversation analysis (vol. 46) for language specific descriptions.

[24]See e.g. the chapters in Enfield and Levinson (2006a) for discussions of different perspectives on the relationship between interaction and cognition.

intentions combined with the observational patterns of interaction mentioned above suggests there is a set of abilities specifically designed for human interaction (Enfield and Sidnell, 2014:93; Goffman, 1983:5). Levinson (2006b:54) proposes "a human interaction engine" to explain the structure of everyday human interaction. In this view, the interactional patterns of turn-taking, sequencing and repair are but one ingredient to successful human interaction.

Human interaction engine

People have a set of heuristics[25] to guide their reasoning process in interaction: based on the type of utterance they encounter they look for the stereotypical interpretation (assuming Gricean intention and the cooperation principle), unless it is somehow marked in the utterance they should take a different approach (Levinson, 1995:233-234). Another set of heuristics is based on sequential expectations that responses are normally tied to what came before (Levinson, 1995:234). Given that people look for relations between turns, it is possible to convey a lot of information with a very limited utterance. To explain how they are able to infer so much from so little explicit input we need a set of core abilities that guide our behavior in interaction. Together these abilities form the human interaction engine.

Central to thinking for communication is the search for mutual salience (Levinson, 1995:246). People coordinate their efforts to find the most likely interpretation of some interactional move. The interpretation that is accessible and likely to either participant, i.e. has features to it that are salient to both participants, makes for a good candidate. This ability to recognize mutual salience at any point in interaction, based in our beliefs about our common ground, is crucial to make interaction work (Levinson, 2006a:51, 54). It allows for coordination without participants having to explicitly communicate they both are in fact aware of some particular piece of knowledge or element in their surroundings.

Related to this reflexive thinking is a second essential ingredient for successful interaction: intention attribution and recovery (Levinson, 2006b:48-49). The ability to infer meaning and goals from observed behavior plays an important role in communication. The assumption that others will try to attribute some intention to a particular behavior and that we are usually able to so, allows for indirect (or less) direct messages. The attribution of intention assumes people have Gricean intentions and are able to recognize them in others (Levinson, 2006b:49-50); the third central element of an interaction engine. People *want* their intention to be recognized, they want others to interpret their behavior or act and infer meaning from it.

These three abilities - recognizing mutual salience, intention attribution and

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[25]Enfield (2013) aptly explains what is meant by heuristics: "rational principles of interpretation that may be generically applied in attributing meaning to tokens of communicative behavior. More generally, a heuristic is an interpretive strategy that applies an easy rule of thumb in order to simplify what might otherwise be a complex decision-making process".

recovery, and Gricean intentions - depend on the presumption that people co-operate (Levinson, 2006b:50, 54). It is only possible to infer meaning, recognize intention or determine mutual salience if the other person is assumed to reason and act similar to you. All participants expect some general rules of interaction to be observed, and all participants are expected to observe those rules. Patterns in the way they structure their contributions to interaction present evidence that these elements of reflexivity are indeed in effect. The final ingredient of an interaction engine is thus a set of practices that are observable in interaction (Levinson, 2006b:54). This includes the universal patterns of interaction, such as the turn-taking system, but also the more language specific communicative routines like greeting and leave-taking (Levinson, 2006a:87).

The abilities or skills to participate in interaction are the basis of all human interaction. But by no means do they suggest cultural uniformity, rather they are "the building blocks for cultural diversity in social interaction" (Levinson, 2006b:62). Considering all acts and their (mutual) understanding form a joint action and thus negotiate joint commitment, Clark (2006:126) suggests that the guiding force behind these general principles of human interaction are joint commitments. It was explained in section 2.2.3 that the joint commitment to a single act projects an expectation of such commitment to future acts, thus creating a buildup of joint commitments. The relationship that is constructed through this collection of acts is (or becomes) a concern it itself. People do not unilaterally leave interactional situations, nor do they suddenly change the direction of the talk. They know they have to *jointly* commit to a certain act and are thus committed to keep the other person involved just as much as they are (compare Goffman's normativity of involvement as discussed in chapter 1). They thus have to actively pay attention to their mutual and joint commitment in interaction, managing their interpersonal relationship.

2.5   Interpersonal relations - a matter of politeness?

Knowing how to appropriately participate in interaction is traditionally associated with the study of politeness. Even though this thesis is not primarily focused on politeness, there is no denying that the type of work interactants do to keep their interaction going smoothly is a principle subject in politeness research. This section will give a brief, albeit necessarily incomplete, overview of insights gained from the ongoing investigation of politeness as relevant to the current study. Assuming a pleasant, smooth, conversation, participants will try to find a balance between being informative and avoid threatening, insulting or offending their conversational partner(s). This balance and specifically the effort people put into their use of language to reach such balance is roughly what is studied in politeness research (see e.g. Watts et al., 2005b; Kádár and Haugh, 2013; Culpeper et al., 2017 for a general overview and introduction of the field.)

A recurring challenge with politeness (and researching it) is that it is difficult to find a clear definition of the phenomenon at hand. Most lay people have a sense of whether a particular utterance is polite or not; they are able to give a description of what they understand politeness to mean. Interestingly, though, instead of providing an actual definition of the target concept, such descriptions are often phrased negatively, listing what behavior or linguistic structure is considered *not* to be polite. Moreover, people usually do not simply identify certain linguistic expression as polite, they assess the behavior in context as being polite; there is thus a sense of evaluation involved in what is understood to be politeness.

Not only lay people have difficulties defining what politeness encompasses. Researchers working in the field of linguistic politeness do not agree on what politeness is either (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003:146).[26] As Fraser (1990) notes:

> "[...] it might seem obvious that politeness is simply a well understood concept that pervades interaction, and that the task of those interested has been relatively straightforward. Not so. While the existence of politeness or the lack thereof is not in question, a common understanding of the concept and how to account for it is certainly problematic". (Fraser, 1990:220)

Even for scholars whose work focuses on the phenomenon called politeness, it appears difficult to define what it is exactly they are researching.[27] From the proposed definitions and approaches to politeness out there, two main characteristics of politeness can be derived i) politeness is concerned with the "something extra" people put into their speech and ii) politeness does not belong to a person or an utterance, but is established in interaction. Not the language (or linguistic item) itself determines whether an utterance is polite, the interlocutors do. As Ehlich (2005:78) points out, we should "recognize polite activity as social activity". Still, the question remains when a particular social activity is to be recognized as a *polite* activity.

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[26]There are some key characteristics, however, that are often associated (or even equated) with politeness, including deference (e.g. Fraser and Nolen, 1981), indirectness (Blum-Kulka, 1987, 1989; House and Kasper, 1981), language use as ritual and routine (e.g. Ferguson, 1976, 1981; Coulmas, 1979, 1981), adhering to the established social norm (e.g. Fraser, 1990; Fraser and Nolen, 1981), consideration for the other (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1987; Arndt and Janney, 1984), establishing and preserving social harmony between interlocutors in interaction (e.g. Leech, 1983, 2007; Hill et al., 1986; Haverkate, 1988a,b; see also the articles in Spencer-Oatey, 2008a). Politeness has also more broadly been described in terms of interpersonal and relational activity (e.g. Locher and Watts, 2005; Janney and Arndt, 2005; Arundale, 2006), as an attitudinal view (e.g. Culpeper, 2012; Haugh, 2007a), as a conversational implicature (e.g. Haugh, 2007b, 2014; Terkourafi, 2005, 2011), or as behavior in excess of what is to be expected given the situation (e.g. Watts, 1989, 2003, 2005; Watts et al., 2005b).

[27]An impression further evidenced by the many publications addressing this issue (e.g. Meier, 1995; Kasper, 1990, 2005; Eelen, 2001; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; Held, 2005; Bousfield and Grainger, 2010; Sifianou, 2011).

Two waves of politeness research

The most widely known theory of politeness is that proposed by Brown and
Levinson (1987). They approach politeness in terms of strategic orientation to
participants' face: the public self-image every speaker wants for himself (Brown
and Levinson, 1987:57).[28] At the heart of the theory is the Gricean presumption
that conversationalists have a working assumption of the rational and efficient
nature of talk. Against this assumption, polite ways of talking turn up as de-
viations, requiring rational explanations on the part of the hearer. The reason
for the speaker's (seemingly) irrational and inefficient behavior is taken to be
grounded in considerations of politeness.[29] As of yet, Brown and Levinson's
(1987) theory of politeness remains influential and as Leech (2014:28) states:
"it is probably still true to say that up to the present time no one as produced
a better one".[30]

While earlier approaches to politeness were heavily based in pragmatics and
focused on the linguistic realization of politeness (Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983;
Brown and Levinson, 1987), recent work on politeness emphasizes a stronger
focus on the interactional and emergent character of politeness (Culpeper,
2012:415).[31] This postmodern or discursive turn emphasizes the relational work

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[28]A number of scholars have challenged their conceptualization of face as consisting of
positive and negative face wants. For example, Mao (1994), Matsumoto (1988), Ide (1989), Gu
(1990), and Nwoye (1992) argue that in, respectively, Japanese, Chinese and Igbo, collective
identity and one's position within a social hierarchy is more important to preserve and protect
than one's individual wants. Moreover, the interpretation of face as something belonging to
the individual, was criticized (e.g. De Kadt, 1998; Ogiermann, 2006) for being too rigid and
not in line with Goffman's (1976) original description of face as an emergent, interactional
construct. In the immediate years after the publication, a number of scholars have tried
to apply Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to data from different languages, not all
without problems (see e.g. Longcope (1995) on Japanese, Terkourafi (2004) on Greek, and
Huls (2001) on Dutch).
[29]Many of the points raised in critique of Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness
are entirely reasonable, but some seem unaware they were already identified by Brown and
Levinson themselves. They argue in their introduction to the revised text (1987) that it
is possible to integrate different kinds of linguistic details regarding social structure and
message construction, since "essentially the framework of politeness is a framework of social
interaction". They do recognize, however, that models that underlie Gricean pragmatics,
speech act theory and Goffman's account of interaction order are not well equipped to take
on the emergent character of politeness. Most notably the focus on isolated utterances -
the prevalent method of analysis in speech act theory - is not able to satisfactorily explain
language in interaction.
[30]This is not for lack of trying, as politeness has become a central interest of study for
many scholars. Some have exposed flaws in the traditional theories (e.g. Eelen, 2001), others
have designed an alternative model of politeness (most notably Leech, 1983, 2014; Terkourafi,
2001, 2005; Usami, 2006; Watts, 2003; Long, 2016), or filled a theoretical gap (e.g. Culpeper,
2011; Bousfield, 2008 with respect to impoliteness), and yet still others theorized about
politeness and its challenges in pursuit of developing the field in general (e.g. Mills, 2003;
Haugh, 2007b,a; Locher, 2015).
[31]The second wave of thinking about politeness was initiated by Eelen's (2001) *A Critique
of Politeness Theories.* He did not present a new theory or approach, but explained what the
first-wave approaches to politeness were lacking: attention for the participants' perspective.
He follows Watts, Ide and Ehlich (2005[1992]) in arguing that politeness research should not

interactants employ in interaction to reach an understanding of the norms of interaction that are relevant then-and-there (Locher, 2006:262). This includes, for example, studies concerned with rapport management and sociality rights and obligations (e.g. Spencer-Oatey, 2005, 2007) that focus on the ongoing balancing act interactants are involved in to maintain their (positive) relationship.[32]

A key position held by discursive studies of politeness is that even the definition of politeness itself is subject to debate (Culpeper, 2012:409). Evaluations of particular utterances against the background of individuals' expectations in the particular context of interaction allow individuals to decide on their appropriateness or politeness (Locher and Watts, 2005:29).[33] These approaches assume there to be a constant, ongoing discursive "struggle" over what constitutes appropriate behavior and what is considered polite (Locher and Watts, 2005:29). This discursive and evaluative understanding is a central claim in postmodern approaches (Locher, 2004, 2006; Mills, 2003), and at the same time its biggest challenge.

Challenges in politeness research

The perspective that politeness is a social practice found in interaction is not contested here. However, locating and analyzing instances of that practice is a complicated endeavor when you cannot (but have to) define what you are looking for. Interactants themselves are able to determine what behavior is expected (unmarked, normal, appropriate) and what behavior may be open to an interpretation of politeness, based on their individual and shared past experiences. It is part of their common ground. However, there are no objective criteria to decide what is and is not appropriate or expected - let alone what is polite. As (Kádár and Haugh, 2013:2) explain, a consequence of this strong focus on participants as the source of understanding politeness, is that "politeness research has been left in somewhat of a theoretical limbo".

Since evaluations are by default personal, politeness is crucially dependent on the understanding of the participants involved in interaction. This understanding might differ between participants; they might not agree on what is or is not polite.[34] The problem hence remains how to talk about or analyze

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focus on linguistic forms and strategies but instead on the evaluation of politeness by the participants involved in the interaction.

[32]The traditional social-norm view and the conversational-contract view similarly draw attention to the expectations, rights and obligations that participants have in interaction (e.g. Fraser and Nolen, 1981; Fraser, 1990). There is a critical difference, however, with the social-norm view. The traditional social-norm view puts forward a prescriptivist agenda, whereas the postmodern and neo-gricean views explicitly assume a descriptive position (see Eelen, 2001; Kádár and Haugh, 2013).

[33]Compare Bourdieu's notion of habitus, defined as "the product of a particular class of objective regularities" (1990:56).

[34]An additional challenge scholars of politeness are confronted with is that the understanding of both appropriate and polite behavior held by participants is normally inaccessible. Interactants do not exchange "politeness beliefs" prior to engaging in interaction; their personal

politeness. Indeed, Mills (2011) argues that the systematic description of linguistic politeness is not a pre-evident objective, and Watts, Ide, and Ehlich (2005a) raises the question whether a theory of politeness is even possible. To counter this problematic status of politeness, it is increasingly viewed as part of a broader interpersonal orientation, moving away from the individual perspective. Politeness might in fact be so difficult to describe (and understand), precisely because the term is used to address different social phenomena and to answer different kinds of research questions (Locher, 2015).

Although the management of interpersonal relationships certainly fits the general description of politeness, this thesis is not written from a politeness perspective. Some of the observations presented in this thesis would probably have been included in a politeness-driven research (e.g. forms of redress, solidarity markers), but others would likely have been omitted (e.g. co-completion of utterances, repetition, paraphrase). A bottom up approach was used to uncover how speakers of Dutch and Indonesian, respectively, (prefer to) construct and maintain their mutual relationship. This allows for an open approach of the linguistic forms and social negotiation that takes place, without the added complexity of whether a particular choice would be considered appropriate or polite (and what either of those mean).

2.6   Effect of culture

As we saw above (in section 2.4), some organizational structures are universally found in interaction. Whereas the "default" patterns might hold cross-culturally, the specific execution is likely affected by cultural habits or beliefs. Referring back to the turn-taking system, the allocation of turns is not always a matter of choice. In court, for example, there are strict rules about who is allowed to speak at which point during the hearing. In this case, it is the "court culture", the institutionalized rules of court, which determines what is and is not allowed. The default organization of interaction is hence both flexible and robust: it allows changes in different social settings and activities while keeping the overall system intact (Schegloff, 2006:70). Similarly, in some cultures there might be norms about who has to extend the first greeting, or can produce initiating acts, thus changing the basic pattern.

Each communicative interaction involves interplay of knowledge and skills that operate at three different levels: the individual, interactional and sociocultural level (Levinson, 2006a:91). The first refers to the cognitive abilities humans possess that allows us to interact, the second refers to the observable patterns and structures in interaction, and the third refers to the cultural organization of society and the constraints that are placed on language use. Although they are interconnected, the organization of actual patterns of verbal

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sense of what is (not) deemed suitable behavior remains implicit. Furthermore, speakers typically do not overtly communicate their appreciation of others' fitting behavior. Only when someone displays (extremely) inappropriate behavior will speakers likely comment on their infringement of an apparent norm (Kasper 1990:193; Watts 2003:8).

interaction at the micro-level is separated from the macro level organization of culture and social institutions (Levinson, 2005). The micro-level patterns of use can reflect certain societal or cultural norms or preferences that are (apparently) upheld by interactants, just as much as the cultural level is influenced by such language usage patterns at the interactional level. In short, to get a full picture of interactional practices within a particular group and social setting both are important to take into account.

In section 2.2.1 it was explained that people try to establish common ground. Part of that common ground are the beliefs they have (or maybe even share) about how one should behave in interaction - not so much related to the cognitive abilities, but to the cultural peculiarities of each group of people and their expectations in interaction. How loud are you supposed to talk? What routines or rituals have to be performed before or during conversation? The cultural level of interaction is thus actively made part of the decision made at the interactional level, that is in the actual interaction itself.

Like language, culture is essentially a social endeavor (Silverstein, 2004:621). It is not something practiced by the individual; cultural beliefs, norms, ideas and habits are shared between people. This sharedness both establishes similarity within a particular social group as separates it from other groups. Cultural backgrounds shape the way people live their lives, what they think is normal and what conventions they abide to. Whereas specific interactional roles and acts are said to be negotiated locally (Schegloff, 2006), culture is felt to be relatively stable (Zegarac, 2008:49). For the purposes of this thesis, Spencer-Oatey (2008b) proposes a useful definition of culture:

> "Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influences (but do not determine) each member's behavior and his/her interpretations of the "meaning" of other people's behavior".
>
> (Spencer-Oatey, 2008:3)

Understanding culture as a fuzzy set of basic assumptions shared by a particular social group allows for some members of the group to be more influenced by or attached to those values than others while still sharing the same culture. Culture is manifested in regularities of belief, behavior and attitudes found in the majority of the members of the social group.[35]

An important difference between culture and the universal cognitive abilities people use in interaction (establish common ground, attribute intention and coordinate understanding, the human interaction engine) is that culture is learned. Like the interdependence between the different elements of the interaction engine, the various aspects of culture are interrelated. One aspect of

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[35]All kinds of groups of people that share and display a particular set of values can be said to represent a certain culture. The term thus refers not just to national cultures, but also to so-called sub-cultures. Gender groups, generational groups, ethnic groups, professional groups etc. could all qualify as different cultural groups provided they meet the above requirements.

culture is interlinked with all other cultural beliefs (Hall, 1976:16). Culture is partially unconscious, and in its hidden form influences our way of thinking (Hall, 1976:3). As entrenched as it is in our daily lives, it is sometimes difficult to see where the influence of our culture(s) ends. Or what we qualify as being cultural. Hall (1976:12, 42ff) explains that a large part of culture is often described as "mere convention". The irony is that conventions *are* cultural entities.

All behaviors, and patterns of behavior, are learned, but because they become a habit so quickly and everyone around us acts the same way, these behavioral or interactional patterns "sink below the surface of the mind" (Hall, 1976:42). We are no longer aware we once learned them even though they are still in effect and guide our everyday interaction. The things we learn in childhood - the things that are "normal" to us - function below our level of awareness. We treat them as if they are innate, while it is in fact learned behavior (Hall, 1976:43). This is in line with Levinson (2006b) who suggests the cognitive capabilities are innate, but the detailing of the execution is reliant on situation specific - and thus culture specific - circumstances. Integrating cultural specific norms in interaction is essentially adapting the general interaction structure to fit a specialized purpose. The universals of interactional structure simply provide the default framework (Levinson, 2006b:62), cultural or societal norms and expectations provide the specifics.

Some cultural influences are more visible than others are, and some interactional patterns are more likely to be attributed to culture than others are. Whereas name taboos, social hierarchies or institutional rules may be unfamiliar, they are easily recognized and one can thus (theoretically) adapt their language use and behavior accordingly. Each of these examples is readily accepted to be a norm within that culture. However, not all cultural interactional habits are that straightforward or readily apparent to the outsider. The effect "hidden" cultural norms can have on the interactional organization is probably most strongly observed in the difference in usage and preference for direct and indirect communication. This is often associated with high and low context cultures and collectivist and individualist societies. These distinctions that are examined in more detail in the following sections.

High and low context cultures

The biggest differences in what counts as "normal", culturally speaking, are often felt to arise between so-called Eastern and Western cultures. These supposed differences between the East and the West have inspired a lot of research, especially in the area of intercultural (business) communication (e.g. Ferraro, 1997; Ismail, 2007; Ismail et al., 2009; Grainger et al., 2010; Nakane, 2006, 2007; Chen et al., 2011). This may seem to suggest there is indeed an irreconcilable gap between these two "cultural regions", but there is no proof to corroborate this. Moreover, it would go against the human cognition for interaction discussed in section 2.4. Of course cultural norms influence expectations about

how interaction unfolds, but as long as the underlying cognitive abilities are the same, the cultural specifics can be learned.

One level at which the divergence between cultures is often described is the level of involvement between members of the cultural group. Most Western cultures are said to be "highly individualized, somewhat alienated, fragmented cultures [...] in which there is relatively little involvement with people" (Hall, 1976:39). These are what Hall (1976) calls low-context cultures, typical examples being Germany, Switzerland and to a lesser extent the United States. On the other end of the scale are high-context cultures: cultures that show high levels of engagement among people and where information is widely shared; in short, cultures where people are "deeply involved with each other" (Hall, 1976:39). Cultures might have a general preference for one or the other way of organizing their social life, this is not to say they are exclusively high-context or low-context (Hall, 1976:91).

The general preferences ascribed to members of high-context and low-context cultures are presumably also applicable to their preferred style of communication. When establishing common ground, the level of context that is assumed to be shared (and relevantly known to be shared) might cause troubles in intercultural communication if participants have different expectations as to what is and is not shared between them. Interaction between a participant who is used to a higher degree of involvement and one that prefers a lower level of involvement possibly leads to conflicting wants and needs. High-context communication reportedly relies heavily on information that is "in the physical context or internalized in the person" (Hall, 1976:91). The actual verbal message is less informative in the sense that it carries little of the information that the speaker wants the hearer to understand. In low-context communication, it is the other way around: the bulk of the information is in the explicitly coded message (Hall, 1976:91). What the speaker wants the other to know is communicated verbally.

It was suggested earlier (in section 2.2.1) that common ground and overt verbal messages were complementary. When participants believed to have a strong common ground, there was less of a need to overtly encode the full extent of their message. Successful high-context communication indeed presupposes a larger or stronger common ground: with only minimal information in the verbal exchange, a complete message is transmitted. Low-context communication is more easily accessible to outsiders since the entire message is verbalized. The risk of low-context communication is that people might tell others things they already know. While this may not sound too bad, they are wasting time and might even insult their interlocutor because they (seem to) assume they do not know certain things by explicitly sharing them. Conversely, in high-context communication there is the risk of sharing too little information leading to long exchanges of repair and explanation.

There is thus a fine balance between telling people things and letting them infer the message. In maintaining that balance, a correct assessment of involvement and common ground is crucial. In low-context cultures, a low degree of

involvement is assumed, leading (or requiring) speakers to make their entire message available in language. The efficient way of communicating, then, is to make your intentions as optimally accessible to your co-interactants. On the other hand, if you have put time and effort in sustaining your social bond, you may not need all that information. In a high-context culture people assume high interpersonal involvement, making speakers rely much more on their (known to be) shared context. The efficient way of communicating is, then, to give only the essential information that is necessary for others to infer the intended message. What is considered essential or optimal - in either of these cultural types - is thus directly related to the level of involvement between interlocutors.

Collectivism and individualism

The degree of involvement with others is often associated with having a collectivist or individualist world-view. These two notions are contrasted based on the core assumption of an individual being independent from others, or mutually bound in groups (Oyserman et al., 2002:4-5). The collectivism-individualism dichotomy is mostly used to describe national cultures, following Hofstede's (1980) influential work on national differences in the workplace. This difference is not meant to suggest an absolute opposition between a focus on personal, individual freedom in individualist societies and a focus on being part of community in collectivist society. Rather, one or the other view is salient in interaction (e.g. Schwartz, 1990; Triandis, 1995). Important to note is that the characterization of a particular cultural group does not mean *all* members of that group necessarily follow a certain behavioral pattern. Needless to say, there are individualists in collectivist societies and collectivists in individualist societies (e.g. Markus and Kitayama, 1991:30). However, the overall trend in collectivist societies is to orient towards and reason from the perspective of the in-group, perceiving closeness between its members, whereas individualist cultures are more likely to perceive, and construct, separateness between social actors (Triandis, 1995:5).

A crucial element in determining the involvement between participants and their closeness or separateness is their construction of self and other. This is not necessarily something people are consciously aware of, but their understanding of themselves in relation to others is implicitly present in patterns of behavior (Kitayama and Uchida, 2005:141; Triandis, 1989). Markus and Kitayama (1991:225) emphasize that the Western notion of self as detached from context is not an adequate description for many cultures of the world. Or as Geertz' (1984) fittingly describes it:

> "The Western conception of the person as bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe - a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background - is, however

> incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the
> context of the world's cultures".   (Geertz, 1984:126)

However self-evident it might seem to many Westerners, their sense of self as
an unbounded, unique, center of action and awareness is not shared by every-
one. People are in fact observed to conduct themselves with a stronger focus on
their own, personal and individual goals and desires, or to take into account the
motivations and wants of the group they feel related to. The first is (amongst
other terms) referred to as an idiocentric, independent sense of self, the second
is usually described as an allocentric, interdependent or relational sense of self
(e.g. Triandis, 1989, 1995; Markus and Kitayama, 1991, 2003, 2010; Kitayama
and Uchida, 2005). These understandings overlap with the notions of collec-
tivism and individualism described above. A collectivist perspective relates to
a relational or interdependent construction of self; an individualist perspec-
tive is connected with an independent understanding of self. These terms are,
however, not interchangeable, they normally apply to different levels of inter-
action. The terms collectivism and individualism are generally used to describe
societies or even nations in their entirety, whereas the construction of self is
relevant to the personal behavior displayed by participants.

   An independent view of self emphasizes autonomy and independence (Markus
and Kitayama, 1991:226). From this perspective, people are described to feel
good about themselves when they conduct themselves as independent entities:
being unique, asserting individual ideas, expressing opinions, goals, desires, etc.
(Markus and Kitayama, 1991:242). An interdependent view foregrounds the
connectedness between self and others instead of their separateness (Markus
and Kitayama, 1991:227). Instead of being motivated by the own individual
desires, an interdependent construction of self receives fulfillment from tasks
that are associated with the relation of interdependence to others: fitting in,
maintaining harmony, promoting others' goals, engaging in appropriate action,
etc. (Markus and Kitayama, 1991:242).[36]

   These different perceptions of self presumably affect the norms of inter-
actional behavior participants (subconsciously) follow. Participants who see
themselves (and others!) as separate, autonomous entities are thought to make
more of an effort to assert their own, personal, view on a particular matter.
That is what reaffirms their status as individual, autonomous entities, after all.
People that attune more to others, whom they feel they are connected with,

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[36]One area that is suggested to reflect a stronger concern for self or other is the expression
of emotions. Markus and Kitayama (1991:235-239; see also Kitayama et al., 2000) connect
an independent understanding of self to emotions focused on ego, such as anger, pride, frus-
tration, reflecting the individual's personal needs or desires, as the primary referent of the
emotion. They predict such emotions to be more frequently expressed by people with inde-
pendent selves. An interdependent understanding of self, on the other hand, is more closely
connected to other-focused emotions, such as sympathy, shame, feelings of communion, re-
flecting the feelings of another person - or the relationship between persons - to be of central
concern. This might be but one explanation for the cultural importance of shame in the
Malay-speaking world (Lindquist, 2004; Fuller Collins and Bahar, 2000), and the reported,
albeit dated, self-assured, moralizing Dutch cultural trait (Van Ginkel, 1990, 1991, 1992).

will likely pay closer attention to their desires, feelings, and views. The relation between the members of the in-group is a core consideration in their individual behavior, since it is this relation that contributes to their sense of self. The expected (or maybe even required) behavior in communities that are accustomed to these different concepts of self and others will thus likely differ as well. Behaving like an able, agentive member of the community is dependent on having necessary knowledge about the code of conduct, which in turn is (at least partly) informed by the cultural construction of self and other.

Understanding agency as the capacity to purposefully and reflectively act upon the world, both individual and relational driven decision can be considered agentive moves (Markus and Kitayama, 2003:17-18). Asserting one's own ideas or acting upon one's own desires can just as much be a purposeful and reflective act as maintaining one's position in a relational web. This leads Markus and Kitayama (2003) to propose two models of agency: a disjoint and a conjoint model. Disjoint agency refers to a focus on personal feelings, uniqueness, autonomy, and individuality. In a conjoint model of agency, the focus is on the reciprocal, interdependent, relation between self and others in a particular context. It is, then, not so much one's own interests, goals, or preferences that are centralized, but maintaining one's status or position and respecting social bonds. What is considered agentive behavior depends on whether the community favors an *in*dependent or *inter*dependent conception of self. That is, whether individuals are reliant mostly on themselves or are collectively responsible for each other.[37]

The conception of self and the associated expression of agency are one aspect of (hidden) culture that might affect how speakers show active involvement and manage interpersonal alignment. Following the general descriptions of the Dutch and Indonesian national cultures, certain tentative predictions can be made about the preferred style of communication in these countries. The Indonesian culture is generally considered collectivist, which would suggest speakers of Indonesian - or more accurately people enacting the Indonesian culture - to have a mostly interdependent or allocentric sense of self. This, in turn, would mean they view themselves and others as interrelated, as being part of a community, leading to a more conjoint form of agency. The corresponding behavior would presumably match what is called a high-context style of

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[37]As Markus and Kitayama (1991:228) point out, an interdependent self is no less agentive than an independent self. An interdependent (or relational) construction of self does not imply people are not able to function on their own, or do not consider themselves responsible or in charge of their own actions. They are just not as concerned with asserting their own thoughts, ideas, or desires as people with an independent sense of self. To maintain the interpersonal relation one is part of - and that is an important aspect of the sense of self - in fact requires a high degree of agency: one needs to purposefully and reflectively act to not disturb that harmony. Not letting one's own, personal, desires, emotions, or opinions interfere with the relationship requires a lot of self-control. It may not be the understanding of "agency" that is usually encountered, it is just as much purposeful behavior as attempting to control the outside world by asserting your personal feelings about that world; see also Kitayama and Uchida (2005).

communication. The Netherlands, on the other hand, is usually classified as an individualist society, which suggests its members to have an independent or idiocentric sense of self and mostly show disjoint agency. Following the presumed separation from others, the sharing of personal thoughts and desires would require a full, verbal, expression; corresponding to a low-context communicative style. As mentioned above, these are most likely conceptions that people are not actively aware of in interaction. It is simply how they "normally" behave.[38]

2.7 Conclusion

It was explained in this chapter that interaction, or even human life in general, is normally social (Goffman, 1983:2). Our whole life is centered around relationships and the management of our place in the social network(s) we are part of. Our thinking is thus predisposed to think in terms of social interaction and relationships Enfield (2013). If the establishment and maintenance of social relations is indeed the central task of language in human communication (Goody, 1995b:4), then surely a large part of communicative activity has to be dedicated to the management of interpersonal relationships - and be recognizable as such. This phatic function of language is most easily recognized in the more routinized parts of interaction, such as greeting and leave-taking, but is in fact strongly interlinked with informational or referential language use (Enfield, 2006).

The knowledge people have about each other and their respective roles or social statuses in a particular interaction is part of their common ground. This knowledge (and the associated beliefs) is negotiated at the start of interaction and remains relevant throughout the ongoing interaction (cf. 2.2.3). Participants are jointly committed to the interaction and each other. Should there be an individual change in attitude or belief in one of the participants which could influence their cooperation, they would presumably signal this to their partner to update the common ground and increase the possibility of successfully coordinating mutual understanding (cf. Clark (1996:98ff) on the relation between coordination and common ground). Keeping the common ground updated is ultimately as much a joint action as using language is.

Assuming all human beings share cognitive abilities to attribute intention, anticipate and coordinate understanding, why would we need to mark the development of our social connection. Is that not part of our common ground? Suppose the affiliation between interactants is indeed presumed to be known to both participants and thus part of the shared base their common ground is built on, then it would be redundant to overtly mark that relationship is

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[38]Keep in mind these should all be regarded as general tendencies. It is not at all suggested that *all* people who consider themselves part of a particular community *always* and *automatically* share the same view of self and agency, nor do they hold particular views at all times and in all settings. These generalizations overlook contextual particularities, but they do so on purpose. Taking a bird's eye view is the only way to hope to find larger patterns of culturally induced behavior and uncover normal and normative practices.

still intact and on track. This line of thinking fits the description of a high-context culture: a great deal of knowledge and understanding can be inferred from the common ground, making explicit reference to that shared knowledge unnecessary. It also suggest participants would need to pay close and ongoing attention to the relevant interpersonal relationships (and knowledge thereof), which would better suit an interdependent view of self. The "absence" of linguistic communication could be an indication of conjoint agency; prioritizing the existing harmony over individual opinions or needs.

On the other hand, keeping the common ground updated is an important step towards achieving mutual understanding, which in turn strengthens the relationship and makes communication as efficient as it can be. Showing your interlocutor that you share his point of view or are keeping up with his train of thought are helpful cues to establish you are on the same page. It reinforces the joint commitment and involvement in interaction. This is especially relevant case in communication between participants with an independent view of self. They would consider themselves separate from others, thus creating a greater need to construct - and sustain - ad hoc bonds based in mutual autonomy. A disjoint agency, asserting personal feelings and desires, and a low-context communication style would correspond to this conceptualization.

Marking the existing bond of solidarity between interactional partners - however minimally - reaffirms their interpersonal relationship. In what way this reaffirmation is marked, crucially depends on the (cultural) preferences upheld by members of a particular community. This study aims to explore culture or language specific preferences when it comes to managing social relationships and positioning of self and other. One area of interaction likely prone to different styles of communication is the spontaneous construction of interpersonal alignment. Taking stance and reacting to others' stancetaking allows participants to make the connection between themselves, the interlocutors and the topic of talk available to others. The experienced degree of sharedness might influence to what extent participants feel it is desired (and required) to explicate that connection. The affiliative nature of stance and its relation to alignment and phatic communication is discussed in the next chapter.