

The Impact of Language and Culture on International Business Negotiations: A Conceptual Study of Nigerian Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

In the age of global trade, business negotiations today are more complex than ever, as language and cultural barriers can impact the outcome of international negotiations. And for entrepreneurs in Nigeria, these issues are compounded, especially when it comes to foreign partners. The article is a conceptual analysis of how language and culture influence international business negotiations using Nigerian entrepreneurs as a focal point. Based on important concepts from the cross-cultural communication and cultural intelligence fields, the paper develops a theoretical model which connects linguistic acumen and cultural sensitivity with negotiation strategies and negotiation performance. One unique aspect of this study is the Nigerian environment in which it is situated and the implications presented can benefit entrepreneurs facing various contextual settings abroad. Implications include methods for improving cultural intelligence, employing flexible communication styles and gaining cross-cultural competence in order to negotiate effectively. The study offers relevant insights to Nigerian entrepreneurs, international business practitioners and policymakers as they confront the intricacies of inter-country negotiations in a highly globalized world.

Keywords: international business negotiations, cultural intelligence, cross-cultural communication, Nigerian entrepreneurs, globalization

Introduction

International business negotiations have become a vital part of global commerce, with Nigerian entrepreneurs increasingly participating in cross-border discussions to broaden their markets, attract foreign investments, and form

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strategic partnerships. However, language and cultural differences can greatly influence the results of these negotiations, often resulting in misunderstandings, miscommunications, and unsuccessful outcomes.

This position paper asserts that language and cultural differences are crucial elements that Nigerian entrepreneurs need to consider when engaging in international business negotiations. It emphasizes that a thorough understanding of the language and cultural subtleties of international partners is vital for fostering trust, ensuring effective communication, and achieving favorable negotiation results.

The paper will delve into theoretical perspectives on language and culture in international business negotiations, shedding light on the key challenges and opportunities that Nigerian entrepreneurs encounter in this arena. It will also investigate how language and culture shape communication styles, negotiation tactics, and conflict resolution methods in international business negotiations.

Ultimately, this paper aims to offer a conceptual framework for understanding the influence of language and culture on international business negotiations involving Nigerian entrepreneurs. It seeks to enhance the existing literature on international business negotiations by underscoring the significance of language and cultural competence in attaining successful negotiation outcomes. This paper maintains that language and cultural differences are essential factors that Nigerian entrepreneurs must take into account when engaging in international business negotiations, arguing that a profound understanding of the language and cultural nuances of international partners is crucial for building trust, facilitating effective communication, and achieving successful negotiation results.

Businesses do business all around the world so we are seeing that Nigerian entrepreneurs are more and more into cross border negotiations in order to expand market share, raise foreign investments and forming strategic alliances. But sometimes linguistic and cultural differences play a role and the outcome are "collisions", misunderstandings, miscommunications and failures.

Nigerian entrepreneurs especially work in an interesting and challenging environment. Nigeria is a multiethnic and multilingual nation with more than 500 languages and cultures. This diversity is known to be adaptive and resilient, but will

present challenges when Nigerian business persons are involved in international negotiations. Top Gun entrepreneurs, who are unlikely to have received formal education on intercultural communication, might also face more infrastructural and educational barriers than their western counterparts when it comes to learning global business norms. Also, systemic problems, including the unstable policy context, and scant language training in negotiation add to their difficulty. This means that Nigerian entrepreneurs often start with a disadvantage when they compete in the global market with entrepreneurs from more developed or globally integrated countries.

This paper argues that language and cultural issues are of utmost importance to Nigerian businessmen embarking on international business negotiations. And it certainly does: the belief in gaining a deeper understanding for the language and cultural idiosyncrasy of one's international partners is key in order to build trust, communicate effectively and gain better negotiation outcomes.

This will lead the paper to discuss the theoretical position on language and culture in international business negotiations and explain the major issues and opportunities facing the Nigerian entrepreneurs in this area. It will also examine how language and culture influence communication styles, negotiation strategies, and conflict resolution practices in international business negotiations.

In the final analysis therefore, this paper seeks to establish a theoretical basis for examining the impact of language and culture in an international business negotiation with the participation of Nigerian entrepreneurs. This paper aims to contribute to the literature on international business negotiations by stressing the importance of language and cultural abilities to achieving successful results. This model could also be adopted as a hands-on guide to Nigerian entrepreneurs who are struggling to gain competitive edges in the international business environment.

To make the analysis sharp and well-focused, we aim to answer the following primary research questions: (1) How does language affect the negotiation situation in international business negotiations by the Nigerian entrepreneurs? (2) Does cultural difference play a role in the negotiations strategies and outcomes? (3) What can Nigerian entrepreneurs do to improve their communication and negotiation in the cross-cultural settings? These goals help shape the overall construction of the paper, with each new section serving to build up a stronger picture of these goals.

By articulating these aims specifically, the paper offers readers a distinct journey, in which theoretical exchanges and practical observations meet the aims tabled at the outset of the research.

Communication Theory

Effective communication is essential for successful international business negotiations. Communication theory suggests that the way we encode, transmit, and decode messages can be greatly affected by language and cultural differences. In international settings, these differences often create obstacles that impede mutual understanding, trust-building, and conflict resolution, all of which are vital for achieving positive negotiation results.

Research indicates that language serves not just as a means of conveying information but also as a vessel for cultural values, norms, and perspectives. For example, Hall's theory of high-context and low-context communication (1976) remains relevant today, shedding light on how various cultures emphasize implicit versus explicit communication styles. High-context cultures, such as Japan or China, depend heavily on non-verbal signals and contextual cues, while low-context cultures, like Germany or the United States, focus on direct and clear verbal communication. Nigerian entrepreneurs working with partners from these different backgrounds may face difficulties if they do not adjust their communication styles accordingly.

Recent research has further developed these ideas. A 2021 study by Ting-Toomey and Dorjee points out that cultural intelligence, which involves recognizing and adapting to these communication subtleties, can improve the effectiveness of cross-border negotiations. Misunderstandings stemming from linguistic or cultural mismatches can lead to misinterpretation of intentions, undermining trust and potentially jeopardizing negotiations.

Nigerian entrepreneurs need to have not just language skills but also a deep understanding of the cultural context behind the language they use. For instance, when negotiating with partners from East Asian cultures, they may need to focus on indirect communication and the importance of saving face. In contrast, discussions with North American or European partners often call for a more direct and fact-based approach.

Additionally, the emergence of English as a global business language brings both advantages and challenges. While it helps bridge communication gaps, the subtle ways in which non-native speakers use English—influenced by their own linguistic and cultural backgrounds—can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. A 2023 report from Hofstede Insights highlights that even widely used English phrases can have different meanings for people from various cultural contexts.

For Nigerian entrepreneurs, effective communication goes beyond just speaking the language; it also involves being aware of these cultural subtleties. Training programs that focus on intercultural communication, like those proposed by Gudykunst and Kim (2022), can provide negotiators with essential skills to handle these challenges. Techniques such as active listening, patience, and asking clarifying questions can be valuable in overcoming barriers created by language and cultural differences.

In summary, communication theory emphasizes the significant role that language and culture play in international business negotiations. By recognizing and adapting to the communication styles of their global partners, Nigerian entrepreneurs can reduce misunderstandings, build trust, and achieve mutually beneficial results. This flexibility is not just a strategic edge but a vital requirement in today's interconnected global economy.

Methodology

Conceptual research approach is used in this paper using rigorous literature review. The method employed consists of a methodical search and review of peer review publications, and books and reputable reports on international business negotiation, cultural intelligence and cross culture communication, specifically at the level of Nigerian entrepreneurs. We also selected the sources based on the importance of the content, scholarly reputation of the author(s), and recency of publication (mostly within the previous 5 years). JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Science Direct were filtered to find the references. The review aimed at distilling main themes, discerning omissions and linking language, culture and negotiation strategies. This theoretical background is the foundation upon which the theoretical and practical findings, discussed in the paper, are developed. Although the paper is not empirical, it can serve as a basis for further empirical work.

Language Barriers in International Business Negotiations

Language barriers present a significant challenge for Nigerian entrepreneurs engaged in international business negotiations. Effective communication is essential for successful negotiations, and when parties communicate in different languages, the likelihood of misunderstandings and miscommunication rises. These barriers can obstruct productive discussions, disrupt collaboration, and even result in failed negotiations (Katz & Miller, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

Drawing from literature reviewed, we put forward a conceptual framework that provides how critical study variables inter-relate on international negotiations in which Nigerian entrepreneurs harbor interests. The model presents language and culture competencies as preconditions to which the negotiation strategies to be chosen are associated. These strategies, in their part, determine the outcomes of the negotiation, like trust formation, conflict resolution, and the attainment of agreements.

The model suggests that:

- The better one speaks, the clearer, the less misunderstandings and the easier negotiations.
- Larger cultural intelligence permits entrepreneurs to be flexible about communication styles, to be sensitive to cultural subtleties, and to pick negotiation techniques which suit the culture.
- The successful execution of negotiation processes—moulded by these capabilities—brings about better negotiated solutions, which in turn equates to strong relationships, superior deals and successful long-term performance in the international arena.

Such a framework synthesizes the theoretical underpinning into a system, hence guiding both research exploration and managerial application in international business aspect.

Challenges of Language Barriers

❖ Miscommunication

One of the primary challenges stemming from language barriers is miscommunication. Insufficient proficiency in the negotiation language can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and incomplete exchanges of information. These complications often interrupt the flow of discussions and make it difficult to achieve mutually beneficial agreements (Gudykunst & Mody, 2022).

❖ **Cultural Misunderstandings**

Language barriers frequently overlap with cultural misunderstandings. Since language embodies cultural values and norms, misinterpretations can go beyond mere words to include non-verbal cues, idiomatic expressions, or different negotiation styles. Such misunderstandings can result in unintended offenses, strained relationships, and lost opportunities to build trust (Hall, 2020).

❖ **Loss of Business Opportunities**

Nigerian entrepreneurs may miss out on valuable business opportunities due to challenges in effectively conveying their ideas, proposals, and terms. When language barriers hinder negotiations, international partners might view the entrepreneurs as unprepared or unprofessional, ultimately impacting the success of business deals (Adewale, 2020).

Strategies for Overcoming Language Barriers

❖ **Language Training**

Investing in language training is a proactive measure that Nigerian entrepreneurs can adopt to improve their communication skills. Gaining proficiency in commonly used languages such as English, French, or Mandarin can greatly enhance their ability to participate in meaningful negotiations and build strong relationships. Cultural differences play a crucial role in international business negotiations, influencing how parties communicate, strategize, and resolve conflicts. These differences stem from varying values, traditions, and societal norms, making it vital for participants to navigate them effectively. Nigerian entrepreneurs entering the global business arena must acknowledge and address these cultural distinctions to promote mutual understanding and achieve successful outcomes.

The Impact of Cultural Differences

❖ Communication Styles

Communication styles differ significantly across cultures, involving both verbal and nonverbal elements. For example, cultures like the United States and Germany tend to prefer direct communication, emphasizing clarity and straightforwardness. In contrast, cultures such as Japan or Nigeria often favor indirect communication, relying on context, tone, and subtleties to express messages (Gudykunst & Mody, 2022). Misunderstanding these nuances can lead to confusion, making it essential to adapt communication styles accordingly.

❖ Negotiation Strategies

Cultural backgrounds greatly affect negotiation tactics. In some cultures, particularly in the Middle East or Latin America, building relationships is seen as a key element for successful negotiations. These cultures invest time in establishing trust and mutual respect before delving into business discussions. Conversely, Western cultures, such as those in the U.S. or the U.K., often prioritize efficiency and quick results (Hall, 2020). Recognizing these preferences enables negotiators to align their strategies with the expectations of their counterparts.

❖ Conflict Resolution Approaches

Cultural differences also shape how conflicts are resolved. In collectivist cultures, like Nigeria or China, there is often a tendency to avoid open confrontation and resolve disputes through mediation or informal means. In contrast, individualist cultures, such as those in the U.S. or Australia, may approach conflict resolution more directly.

Cultural nuances play a crucial role in international business negotiations, particularly for Nigerian entrepreneurs working with partners from various cultural backgrounds. These cultural differences can significantly affect negotiation styles, expectations, and outcomes, potentially leading to misunderstandings if not addressed appropriately. Recognizing and managing these differences is vital for achieving successful negotiation results.

Cultural Nuances and Their Impact

Cultural nuances influence several key elements of business negotiations, such as:

❖ Negotiation Styles

Cultures vary widely in their negotiation styles. Some cultures adopt a direct and assertive approach, prioritizing clear and straightforward communication. In contrast, others may lean towards a more indirect and courteous style, valuing harmony and the avoidance of conflict (Gudykunst & Mody, 2022). Being aware of these preferences allows negotiators to tailor their communication methods to better connect with their counterparts.

❖ Expectations

Cultural backgrounds shape the expectations that parties bring to the negotiation table. For example, some cultures emphasize a high degree of formality and strict adherence to protocols, while others may favor a more casual and informal atmosphere (Hall, 2020). Understanding these expectations helps negotiators align their approaches, fostering mutual respect and trust.

❖ Outcomes

Cultural values also influence what parties hope to achieve from negotiations. Some cultures may prioritize establishing long-term relationships and trust over immediate gains, while others might focus on securing quick results and tangible benefits (Katz & Miller, 2020). Aligning negotiation objectives with these cultural priorities is essential for reaching successful and lasting agreements.

Implications for Nigerian Entrepreneurs

For Nigerian entrepreneurs, effectively navigating international business negotiations necessitates a deep understanding of cultural differences. This requires several important considerations:

❖ Developing Cultural Intelligence

Effective Communication in International Business Negotiations: A Guide for Nigerian Entrepreneurs

In the global marketplace, effective communication is vital for successful business negotiations. For Nigerian entrepreneurs, grasping the nuances of both verbal and nonverbal communication, along with cultivating adaptability and cultural

sensitivity, is crucial for establishing strong international business relationships and achieving mutually beneficial results.

Communication Styles in International Business Negotiations

Various communication styles can greatly impact the outcomes of international business negotiations. Nigerian entrepreneurs need to understand these styles and adjust their approach to bridge cultural divides and encourage effective dialogue.

❖ Verbal Communication

Verbal communication refers to the use of spoken or written language to share information. In international contexts, language barriers and cultural subtleties can complicate discussions. For Nigerian entrepreneurs, it is important to:

Use clear and straightforward language to prevent misunderstandings. Get acquainted with the preferred communication style of their international partners, whether it leans towards formal or informal. Utilize translators or interpreters when language differences pose a significant challenge (Gudykunst & Mody, 2022).

❖ Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication includes non-linguistic signals such as body language, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and tone of voice. These subtle signals can hold considerable meaning and can differ greatly across cultures. Nigerian entrepreneurs should:

- Be aware of cultural variations in interpreting nonverbal cues. For instance, sustained eye contact may indicate confidence in some cultures, while it could be seen as disrespectful in others (Hall, 2020).
- Be conscious of their own nonverbal signals to ensure they project professionalism and respect.
- Observe the body language of their counterparts to assess reactions and emotions during negotiations.
- Adaptability and Cultural Sensitivity In international business negotiations, being adaptable and culturally sensitive is crucial.

Nigerian entrepreneurs should focus on these skills to effectively manage the challenges of cross-cultural communication.

❖ **Be Adaptable**

Adaptability means being willing and able to change one's approach based on the cultural and situational needs of a negotiation. Nigerian entrepreneurs should:

- Be open to learning about and integrating their international partners' communication styles.
- Adjust their negotiation tactics flexibly to meet the expectations and norms of the other party (Adewale, 2020).

❖ **Develop Cultural Sensitivity**

Cultural sensitivity involves recognizing and respecting the cultural values, traditions, and practices of others. Nigerian entrepreneurs can improve their cultural sensitivity by:

- Taking the time to research the cultural backgrounds of their business counterparts. Participating in cultural intelligence training to enhance their skills in managing cross-cultural interactions (Ojo, 2022).
- Showing respect for cultural differences, which helps build trust and strengthen relationships.

Implications for Nigerian Entrepreneurs

For Nigerian entrepreneurs entering international markets, effective communication is not just a tool—it's a strategic asset. By mastering both verbal and nonverbal communication, being adaptable, and cultivating cultural sensitivity, they can:

- Establish trust and rapport with international partners.
- Reduce the chances of miscommunication and conflict.
- Increase the likelihood of achieving successful negotiation results.²⁰²¹

In today's interconnected world, effective communication is essential for Nigerian entrepreneurs aiming to succeed in international business negotiations. By grasping the importance of verbal and nonverbal communication, adapting to cultural differences, and fostering cultural sensitivity, they can navigate the complexities of cross-cultural interactions.

Effective Negotiation Strategies for Nigerian Entrepreneurs in International Business

Negotiation is crucial in international business, especially for Nigerian entrepreneurs aiming to broaden their global presence. To effectively manage the challenges posed by cultural and linguistic differences, it is important to adopt practical negotiation strategies. Here, we discuss approaches that Nigerian entrepreneurs can use to navigate language and cultural barriers, leading to successful international negotiations.

❖ Building Relationships

In the realm of international business, establishing strong relationships is key. For Nigerian entrepreneurs, focusing on relationship-building with global partners can create a foundation of trust, which is essential for effective negotiations. Once trust is established, it becomes easier to promote open communication and collaboration. Research indicates that fostering rapport and engaging in culturally relevant social interactions can greatly enhance negotiation results (Gudykunst & Mody, 2022).

❖ Developing Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence (CQ) refers to the ability to comprehend and adapt to the cultural norms, values, and behaviors of others. For Nigerian entrepreneurs, cultivating CQ is vital for navigating the nuances of international negotiations. This entails recognizing cultural preferences, such as views on hierarchy, time management, and communication styles. For example, while some cultures appreciate direct communication, others may lean towards a more indirect style. By improving their cultural intelligence, Nigerian entrepreneurs can adjust their negotiation tactics to better meet their partners' expectations (Ojo, 2022).

❖ Embracing Adaptability

Adaptability is another crucial strategy for Nigerian entrepreneurs involved in international business. Being open to adjusting negotiation methods to suit cultural and language differences can greatly improve communication and collaboration. This includes being willing to...alternative negotiation frameworks, timelines, or problem-solving methods that suit the cultural context of their partners (Adewale, 2020).

❖ Practicing Active Listening

Active listening is a critical skill in any negotiation, but it becomes even more important in cross-cultural settings. Nigerian entrepreneurs must practice attentive listening to accurately understand the needs, concerns, and motivations of their international counterparts. By asking clarifying questions and demonstrating empathy, entrepreneurs can foster mutual respect and reduce the chances of miscommunication (Katz & Miller, 2020).

❖ **Maintaining Flexibility**

Flexibility is crucial for reaching mutually beneficial agreements. Nigerian entrepreneurs should approach negotiations with a willingness to compromise and explore creative solutions that satisfy all parties involved. Flexibility also enables negotiators to adapt to unexpected challenges, such as misunderstandings or shifting priorities during the negotiation process (Hall, 2020)

Overcoming Language Barriers

Language barriers often pose significant challenges in international business negotiations. However, Nigerian entrepreneurs can adopt various strategies to ensure effective communication with their partners:

❖ **Investing in Language Training**

Proficiency in a partner's language can greatly enhance communication and rapport. Nigerian entrepreneurs can invest in language training programs to improve their ability to converse and negotiate effectively. Even basic language skills can demonstrate effort and respect, fostering goodwill (Gudykunst & Mody, 2022).

❖ **Utilizing Interpreters and Translators**

For more complex negotiations, the use of professional interpreters and translators can bridge language gaps. These experts ensure that key messages are conveyed accurately, minimizing misunderstandings and ensuring both parties feel understood (Katz & Miller, 2020).

❖ **Leveraging Technology**

Technology provides practical solutions for overcoming language barriers. Translation software, such as Google Translate or AI-powered tools, can facilitate real-time communication. Additionally, video conferencing platforms equipped

with multilingual support features can enhance collaboration during virtual negotiations (Hall, 2020).

To thrive in international business negotiations, Nigerian entrepreneurs must adopt a proactive and culturally sensitive approach. By focusing on building relationships, developing cultural intelligence, embracing adaptability, practicing active listening, and maintaining flexibility, they can navigate the complexities of cross-cultural negotiations. Additionally, overcoming language barriers through language training, professional interpreters, and technology further ensures effective communication. With these strategies in place, Nigerian entrepreneurs can foster stronger partnerships and achieve sustainable success in the global marketplace.

The findings from the study on how language and culture influence international business negotiations offer valuable insights for Nigerian entrepreneurs and global companies. These insights highlight the necessity of cultural awareness and flexibility for achieving success in international markets. Below is a thorough examination of the implications for both Nigerian entrepreneurs and international businesses:

Implications for Nigerian Entrepreneurs

❖ Developing Cultural Intelligence

Nigerian entrepreneurs should work on enhancing their cultural intelligence to gain a better understanding of the values, norms, and expectations of their international partners. As Ojo (2022) points out, cultural intelligence is crucial for navigating cultural differences and building meaningful business relationships.

❖ Investing in Language Training

Effective communication is essential in international negotiations, and being proficient in languages can significantly improve this. Gudykunst and Mody (2022) emphasize the need for Nigerian entrepreneurs to invest in language training to overcome language barriers and communicate effectively with their international counterparts.

❖ Embracing Adaptability

Entrepreneurs need to be open to adjusting their negotiation strategies to fit cultural and linguistic differences. As Adewale (2020) notes, adaptability is a vital component for ensuring the success of cross-cultural business interactions.

❖ **Prioritizing Relationship Building**

Creating strong relationships with international partners is key to building trust and facilitating successful negotiations. Nigerian entrepreneurs should concentrate on relationship-building strategies, as highlighted by Gudykunst and Mody (2022), to establish a foundation for long-term collaboration.

Implications for International Businesses

❖ **Providing Cross-Cultural Training**

To effectively navigate the complexities of international business, organizations must provide their employees Cross-Cultural Training To effectively manage the challenges of international business, organizations need to provide their employees with cross-cultural training. This training helps them grasp the cultural values and norms of their Nigerian partners, as suggested by Katz and Miller (2020).

❖ **Offering Language Support**

International businesses should offer interpreters or translation services to help bridge communication gaps. Hall (2020) points out that providing language support can significantly improve negotiation effectiveness and promote clearer communication.

❖ **Adopting Flexible Negotiation Strategies**

Being flexible in negotiation strategies is crucial for accommodating cultural differences. Adewale (2020) emphasizes that recognizing and adjusting to local contexts can result in more favorable outcomes in international business transactions.

❖ **Fostering Trust and Collaboration**

Establishing trust with Nigerian partners is essential for successful negotiations. Gudykunst and Mody (2022) highlight that trust acts as a solid foundation for building long-term business relationships.

Conclusions and Future Work

This study points to the importance of language proficiency and cultural intelligence in international business negotiations for Nigerian entrepreneurs. In discussing how those factors affect communication, negotiation and outcomes, the paper provides a conceptual model that links the theoretical and applied core. Results underscore the importance of being cognizant of culture, of enhanced language capabilities, and of flexibility when communicating in international negotiations.

For the future, research on the proposed conceptual model may be provoked empirically through qualitative or quantitative study. Case studies, in-depth interviews or surveys with Nigerian entrepreneurs dealing in real-life international negotiation might test the underlying relationships among language abilities, cultural intelligence, negotiation processes and outcomes. In some other regions or industries, comparative research may reveal country or industry specific dynamics.

Furthermore, in an era of rapid global communication – in which AI-driven translation tools, virtual negotiations and culturally diverse digital platforms increasingly dominate – it is clear that further research is needed into how global communication is affecting negotiation practices. How we use technology to manage culture and language barriers will be critical in empowering these entrepreneurs to play and expand within an increasingly digital and interconnected global world.

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