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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN ACADEMIC COLLABORATION: A BELF PRESPECTIVE ON INDONESIAN-DUTCH HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP DURING WINNER 2024

Komunikasi Lintas Budaya dalam Kemitraan Pendidikan Tinggi Indonesia–Belanda: Kajian BELF pada Konferensi WINNER 2024

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Abstract

This study examines cross-cultural communication strategies between Indonesian and Dutch partners during the WINNER 2024 conference, with a focus on the use of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF). The study aims to identify the pragmatic communication strategies used by Indonesian and Dutch participants, analyzing the interaction, cultural expectations challenge, and uncover the challenges faced during the collaboration. Using a qualitative case study method, this research analyze three selected sessions from WINNER 2024 that publicly available on youtube channel, applying BELF strategies, and combining cultural awareness framework between Hofstede's power distance theory, Hall's high/low context theory, and Ting-Toomey's face negotiation theory. The findings show that both Indonesian and Dutch participants adapted their use of English through simplification, repetition, and clarification to ensure mutual understanding. Cultural dynamics found in this interaction is: Indonesians preferred high-context and hierarchical expressions, while Dutch speakers preferred low-context and egalitarian communication. Face-saving strategies and power distance also shows conversational patterns. This study conclude that the combination of communication flexibility and cultural awareness make effective collaboration and minimize cultural communication gaps. This research contributes to applied linguistics studies by demonstrating how BELF used in real-time academic collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of globalization, English has becoming the primary medium of communication in international academic collaboration. Since the majority of English users today are non-native speakers, English has evolved into a medium of cross-cultural interaction, especially in academic settings such as conferences, research partnerships, and joint publications. In this context, the concept of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) has attracted academic attention because of its emphasis on clarity, efficiency, and mutual understanding rather than grammatical perfection (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2018). BELF users adapt their language to achieve cross-cultural communication goals, using strategies such as simplification, repetition, avoidance of idioms, and pragmatic accommodation (Kankaanranta et al., 2018).

BELF previous study have largely focused on the multinational corporate environment in Europe and North America. While this research has explored BELF communication strategies and their intersection with cultural strategies on theories such as Hofstede's power distance, Hall's high and low

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context communication, and Ting-Toomey's face negotiation, there is a empirical research gap on the Global South, especially on academic collaborations between Asian and European stakeholders. This suggests a significant research gap, especially given the increasing number of bilateral programs and knowledge exchange initiatives between countries such as Indonesia and the Netherlands. To examine this gap, this article analyzes how Indonesian and Dutch academics navigate cross-cultural communication during the WINNER 2024 conference (Indonesia-Netherlands Education and Research Week). This forum, held with English as a medium communication and attended by a wide range of institutional stakeholders, provides a relevant and under-explored context to observe how BELF functions in academic collaborations.

This study specifically investigates: (1) the communication strategies used by Indonesian and Dutch participants when using English as a lingua franca; (2) the impact of cultural norms such as power distance and communication context on their interactions; and (3) the challenges and adjustments that emerged in the process. Based on the hypotheses in this study, it is showing that effective communication in multicultural academic collaboration is not only influenced by English proficiency, but also by the speaker's ability to adapt and manage cross-cultural expectations. It is also expected that cultural orientations such as the high-context and hierarchical tendencies of Indonesian versus the low-context and egalitarian communication styles of the Dutch will significantly influence interaction patterns. This article provide a comprehensive analysis of BELF strategies and cultural dimensions in the context of Indonesian–Dutch academic collaboration. By integrating linguistic and intercultural frameworks, this study contributes to the applied linguistics literature and offers practical insights for improving intercultural communication in higher education collaboration. The findings are expected to support educators, policymakers, and event organizers in designing more inclusive and effective international academic collaboration.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative case study method to examine how cross-cultural communication occurs at an international academic event. The focus of this research is how participants from Indonesia and the Netherlands used Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) during the WINNER 2024 conference. A case study design was chosen to support an in-depth examination of cross-cultural communication practices in real-time from publicly available data. This method allowed the researcher to capture the interaction patterns that emerge when speakers from different cultural backgrounds engage in academic dialog using English as a shared medium.

The primary data for this study was selected from three recorded sessions of the WINNER 2024 conference, which are publicly available on the official YouTube page. The sessions were selected based on the following criteria: (1) they featured active participation from both Indonesian and Dutch speakers; (2) they reflected the theme of academic collaboration; and (3) they provided clear, transcribable English interactions. The selected sessions included the Opening Session, a thematic session entitled "Win WINNER! More Mutual Benefits from Green Knowledge Collaboration", and a Closing Session. To support data analysis, audio-visual materials were transcribed using Revoldiv.com, followed by manual adjustments to ensure accuracy and clarity. The transcripts provided the textual data used for qualitative analysis.

Instead of using questionnaires or interviews, this study relied on the naturally occurring patterns of word choice and interactions between the two parties as the main research instrument. These interactions examine the use of BELF strategies, such as simplification, repetition, or avoidance of idiomatic expressions. In addition, the data was analyzed through the lens of three intercultural communication frameworks combination, they are: Hofstede's power distance, Hall's high/low context communication theory, and Ting-Toomey's face negotiation theory. These frameworks were applied to identify how cultural norms shaped language use, politeness strategies, and communicative expectations during the sessions.

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For the analysis process, discourse analysis was used to interpret the data. This method was chosen because it allows for a more detailed observation of how language is used, especially in multilingual and multicultural contexts. The researcher used coding to identify patterns and categorized the findings into three main areas: (1) BELF pragmatic strategies, (2) cultural awareness related to power distance and communication context, and (3) coping strategies. This analytical framework allowed the researcher to draw analytical inferences between linguistic choices and cultural orientations, by highlighting how participants navigated meaning-making across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

To enhance credibility and validate the findings, triangulation was used by re-examining data from multiple sources: video transcripts, speaker profiles, and session topics. As this research relied solely on publicly accessible materials, no formal ethical approval procedures were required. However, the identities of the speakers were disguised to respect privacy and academic integrity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In total, this study analyzed 66 quotes taken from three WINNER 2024 conference sessions. Each quotes was categorized using three key lenses: BELF pragmatic strategies**,** cultural awareness based on power distance and context type, and cultural awareness based on face negotiation strategies**.** These categories helped analysing how participants navigated the different communication cultural and linguistic lines. The frequency and proportion of each category are shown in the table below.

A. Percentage of BELF Pragmatic Strategies

Table 1 Percentage of BELF Pragmatic Strategies

BELF Key Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Avoiding idioms and culturally specific expressions	3	30%
Simplifying language	7	60%
Pragmatic accommodation	1	10%
Total	**11**	**100%**

B. Cultural Awareness Based on Power Distance and Context Type

Table 2 Cultural Awareness Based on Power Distance and Context Type

Cultural Orientation	Frequency	Percentage
High Power Distance	6	13.6 %
Low Power Distance	7	15.9 %
High-Context Communication	13	31.8 %
Low-Context Communication	15	38.6 %
Total	**41**	**100%**

C. Cultural Awareness Based on Face Negotiation Strategies

Table 3 Cultural Awareness Based on Face Negotiation Strategies

Type of Face Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Positive Face (Other-oriented)	5	35.71 %
Negative Face (Self-oriented)	4	28.57 %
Humor-based Face Saving	2	14.29 %
Face Acknowledgement through Self-reference	3	21.42 %
Total	**14**	**100 %**

Discussion

The data finding show that the used of BELF strategies**,** the most frequently used approach was simplifying language, which appeared 60**%** of the relevant data. This shows that speakers often

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chose clear, straightforward phrasing to make their messages easier to understand. About 30% of the data showed efforts to avoid idioms or culturally specific expressions, likely to avoid confusion among listeners from different backgrounds. Pragmatic accommodation, such as rephrasing or checking for understanding, appeared less frequently (10%), but still reflected speakers awareness of their diverse audience.

Next, when we looked at cultural awareness patterns, both high-context and low-context communication styles were present contrastly from both parties. Dutch speakers tended to use more low-context, direct communication (38.6%), while Indonesian speakers leaned toward high-context, indirect communication (31.8%). This contrast reflects rooted cultural tendencies from both side, where the Netherlands prefer openness and clarity, and Indonesians value subtlety and relationship-building. In terms of power distance culture, low power distance interactions showed by the Netherlands (15.9%) were slightly more common than high power distance ones which showed by Indonesian speaker (13.6%), suggesting that while formal hierarchies were acknowledged, many exchanges still encouraged openness and equal participation.

Finally, when it comes to how speakers managed politeness and interpersonal comfort, positive face strategies were the most common (35.71%). These included showing appreciation or agreement to build harmony. Negative face strategies (28.57%) reflected a desire to maintain autonomy and avoid imposing on others. Speakers also used self-referential comments (21.42%) to soften their opinions and humor-based face saving (14.29%) to ease tension and keep the tone light.

Altogether, this data showing of speakers who were actively adapting to each other by choosing clarity over complexity, balancing cultural norms, and using thoughtful strategies to keep conversations respectful and collaborative. It highlights how BELF works not just as a language tool, but as a shared intercultural effort.

Through the analysis of the three selected sessions, including the Opening, Selected Thematic session, and Closing sessions, the following key findings were identified and discussed below.

1. BELF Strategies in Action: Prioritizing Clarity over Perfection

The first key finding hypothesis confirmed that participants did not strive to achieve native-like fluency, but focused on making their messages clear, articulate and comprehensible. Among the 66 segments of speech data analyzed, BELF strategies such as simplification, repetition, and explicit phrasing appeared frequently. For example, Indonesian and Dutch speakers often repeated or summarized their points, avoided idiomatic expressions, and used inclusive phrases such as “working together” or “learning from each other” to maintain clarity and cohesiveness.

In one example, a speaker from the Netherlands explained, “We try to learn from each other to make better research and better partnerships,” a simple but effective sentence that reflected BELF's emphasis on collaboration and clarity. Similarly, Indonesian speakers blended formal and informal language, such as “from time to time” or “so many collaborations”, to make their points understandable, even when grammar was not perfect. These patterns support the existing BELF literature (Kankaanranta et al., 2018) and confirm the practical function of English as a shared working language.

2. Cultural Orientations in Academic Communication

2.1 Power Distance

The concept of power distance is how cultures deal with inequalities in power and authority, which was evident in the interactions between the Indonesian and Dutch participants. Based on Hofstede's framework, these findings clearly reflect contrasting communication styles that align with their cultural roots, showing by: Indonesian speakers often show high power distance characteristics, while Dutch speakers lean more towards a low power distance approach.

In high power distance cultures like Indonesia, language use often reflects respect for hierarchy, institutional status, and centralized authority. For instance, in the opening session, an Indonesian speaker addressed several dignitaries using full titles: *“Excellencies, Minister of Education... Chairman of the Indonesian National Research and Innovation Agency...”* (Data 11). This

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careful formal address highlights the importance of status recognition and protocol, showing of high power distance interaction.

Another example is the statement, *"BRIN executes its roles under the principle of no money across borders"* (Data 12), which implies a rigid, top-down structure where policies are dictated by higher authorities without room for negotiation. The emphasis on following established norms indicates an institutional culture that values hierarchy and obedience.

Further, the speaker's suggestion that WINNER outcomes be formalized into "a more concrete scientific collaboration platform" (Data 13) shows how legitimacy is closely tied to formality and structured authority. In this case, informal dialogue alone is not perceived as sufficient until it is acknowledged through institutional procedures.

In contrast, a low-distance culture like Dutch frequently demonstrated egalitarian values in their discourse. For example, one speaker expressed: *"collaborate in such a way that we learn from each other, that we can share knowledge, that we can share experiences"* (Data 17). This reflects a flat hierarchy and mutual learning, rather than status-based communication.

Another striking moment occurred when a senior Dutch academic remarked, *"I try to be a good mentor for Mbak Fitri… and she is also mentoring me"* (Data 18). This mutual exchange, where a senior openly learns from a junior colleague, shows trust, humility, and a clear departure from rigid hierarchies.

Lastly, the invitation for *"partners from the Dutch end, but definitely also from the Indonesian end"* to join the reflection session (Data 19) illustrates participatory leadership and inclusiveness. It frames collaboration as a shared effort, emphasizing open dialogue and collective responsibility, which showing a typical traits of low power distance cultures.

2.2 Communication Style: High and Low Context

Hall's theory of high and low context communication further enriches the understanding of these cultural differences. While high-context cultures like Indonesia rely heavily on shared experiences, relational cues, and implicit messages, low-context cultures like the Netherlands prioritize clarity, explicitness, and direct meaning.

In addition to power distance relations, another important cultural aspect of the partnership is the differences in communication methods, especially between high-context and low-context cultures, as suggested by Hall (1976). This difference affect the way Dutch and Indonesian participants participate in academic collaboration by influencing how meaning is expressed and understood.

Indonesian participants often drew on relational values and emotional expression to convey meaning. For example, one speaker noted: *"The first benefit is we are able to build friendship beyond just collaboration"* (Data 26). Here, the term "friendship" signals the deeper value placed on trust and emotional connection as the foundation for academic partnerships.

Another speaker expressed gratitude with the phrase: *"I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all partners"* (Data 25). Instead of naming individuals, the speaker relied on the audience's understanding of context, that highlighting the indirect, polite nature of high-context communication.

Another example stated, *"So friendship as a basis for long-term collaboration, I think that's a very valuable contribution of WINNER"* (Data 27), reaffirming the idea that shared relationships are just as important than formal structures or goals.

Conversely, Low-context communication, according to Hall (1976), is defined by straightforward, explicit, and unambiguous language in which the meaning of a message is mostly contained in the words themselves rather than the context. Speakers in low-context cultures, like the Netherlands, place a higher value on communication that is efficient, transparent, and clear. Several quotes from Dutch participants in the WINNER cooperation illustrate this tendency which showing how clear communication, thorough explanations, and open discussion are used to enhanced the understanding of both side and decision-making.

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Dutch speakers communicated in a more direct and information-rich style. One participant clearly stated: *"So one health aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals, plants, and the environment more generally"* (Data 39). This level of specificity avoids ambiguity, allowing all participants, regardless of cultural background to understand the goals and context.

Another Dutch speaker explained the purpose of a meeting with precision: *"All our funded projects are invited to exchange information… to sharpen plans for working on impact"* (Data 40). The task-oriented, goal-driven explanation leaves little to interpretation, demonstrating low-context communication.

On another example, Dutch speaker asked: *"How can we make sure each student, each researcher..."* (Data 41), openly identifying the target group and initiating action without relying on implied meaning. This question-driven style is typical of low-context cultures, where transparency and verbal precision are expected.

Most interactions reflected how cultural values shaped the way participants deliver messages. The data showed contrasting preferences culture rooted from both Indonesian and the Netherlands in Hofstede's power distance and Hall's high and low context communication styles. Indonesian speakers tended to high-context, hierarchical communication, often using formal greetings, indirect suggestions, and emotion-relation terms. One speaker addressed funcitionary with honorifics and institutional titles, which not only reflected politeness but also showed the speaker's respect for status and formality consistent with Indonesia's high power distance culture.

In contrast, participants from the Netherlands demonstrated low-context, egalitarian communication, prioritizing directness, clarity, and shared decision-making. Some of Dutch statement indicate their preference for transparency and equal participation regardless of status. This tendency is in line with Hall and Hofstede's framework, which confirms the second research question: that cultural orientation influences how participants interpret and deliver meaning.

In conclusion, the researcher found that the most component of high-context communication in formal institutional relationship especially on Indonesian speaker are reflected by implicit messages based on trust, hierarchy, and the context of long-term relationships. This contrasts with low-context communication styles, which emphasize assertiveness, clarity, egalitarianism, and unambiguous information.

3. Face Negotiation: Managing Politeness and Autonomy

This section presents how speakers from Indonesian and Dutch cultural backgrounds manage face, both their own and others' during academic collaboration, as framed by Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory. Drawing from 14 quotes, this analysis reveals culturally grounded differences in how face-saving, face-restoring, and face-threatening acts are handled, reflecting broader communicative norms rooted in collectivist (Indonesia) and individualist (Netherlands) societies.

Facework Strategies of Indonesian Speakers side

Indonesian speakers largely shows positive face strategies, which aim to maintain group harmony, show appreciation, and protect the interpersonal image of others. For instance, in an opening session, an Indonesian moderator began by affirming a previous speaker's speech by *"Wonderful insight!"* before gently transitioning to the next part of the event with *"Now, due to time, we must move on"* (Data 53). This strategic blend of praise and indirect redirection reflects collectivist norms, where managing harmony is more important than rigid time control.

Similarly, phrases like *"Let's give a warm applause…"* and *"We can see if we need more than one signature…"* (Data 54) show how Indonesian speakers used inclusive, non-confrontational language to navigate potentially face-threatening moments. Instead of issuing direct directives, the speaker involved the audience through shared decision-making and softened requests by framing them as shared possibilities.

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This indirectness continued with statements like *"This is an open invitation…"* (Data 55), which framed tasks as opportunities, not assignments, thereby preserving autonomy and avoiding imposition. Likewise, comments such as *"we can learn step by step"* (Data 56) and *"I think it's also good if they have some choice" (*Data 57) reflected a preference for soft suggestion over command**,** in line with a mutual-face concern that avoids singling out individuals or applying pressure.

The expression of hopes for shared success *"Hopefully some of them will become lecturers or researchers"* (Data 58) also embodied collectivist positivity. It highlighted shared aspirations while diffusing any implication of failure or individual pressure, preserving both the speaker's and audience's face.

These examples affirm that Indonesian communication in this academic setting prioritizes relationship maintenance, politeness, and group harmony, that represent key features of other-face and mutual-face orientations**.**

Facework Strategies of Dutch Speakers side

In contrast, Dutch participants displayed self-face maintenance strategies rooted in individualistic and low-context cultural values. Directness, self-awareness, and task clarity were preferred, though sometimes softened with humor or self-reflection.

For instance, a Dutch speaker candidly admitted, *"We are sometimes a little blunt. And sometimes we are too critical…"* (Data 59), which exemplifies face acknowledgment through self-reference. By acknowledging their own cultural directness, the speaker reduces defensiveness in others while affirming their own authenticity. This was followed by an expression of growth *"These differences teach me to become a better researcher"* which emphasizing personal development and mutual respect.

Similarly, the phrase *"I try to help…"* (Data 60) communicated support without imposing authority, aligning with negative face strategies that preserve the collaborator's autonomy. Even blunt expressions were reframed to highlight their usefulness, as in *"Just a little bit of bluntness… can be helpful"* (Data 61), signaling a cultural comfort with constructive critique when aimed at improving outcomes.

Other examples, such as *"I want to briefly explain…"* (Data 62) and *"We might have to cut you off"* (Data 64), revealed direct communication paired with pragmatic tone. Though these statements risk face threat, they were delivered with clarity and softened by humor or casual phrasing *"I'll be sitting behind that thing over there so you can't miss me"* preserving professionalism while ensuring efficient event flow.

Statements like *"you realize that's not easy"* (Data 65) and *"Challenges? Bureaucracy. I leave the Indonesian bureaucracy to my Indonesian friends"* (Data 66) reflect a humor-based face-saving approach, used to address sensitive topics (such as institutional barriers) without masking the speaker's perspective. In Dutch communication, transparency is often favored over ambiguity, even if it challenges face norms. These strategies were not meant to offend but rather to maintain authenticity, accountability, and efficiency showing of Dutch communicative style.

Face negotiation theory also plays an important role in analyzing how speakers maintain harmony and resolve cultural gaps during collaboration. Indonesian participants often used positive face strategies, using phrases such as "hopefully", "we can try", or "maybe we can consider..." that indirectly make suggestions. This approach helps maintain social harmony and avoid conflict, especially in discussions involving hierarchy or criticism of institutions. Dutch speakers, although generally more straightforward, sometimes soften their criticism with humor or self-referential comments. For example, one speaker admitted, "We are sometimes too critical," as a way of acknowledging cultural differences while still maintaining mutual respect. This demonstrates an awareness of face-saving strategies, even in more individualistic cultures.

These findings validate the hypothesis that effective communication in a multilingual academic environment depends not only on English proficiency, but also on participants ability to adapt to

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differences in cultural expectations. Both groups show the adaptability pragmatically and culturally to ensure successful collaboration, with evidence of cultural sensitivity and flexibility towards each other.

4. Communication Challenges and Adaptive Strategies

Despite the overall effectiveness, several communication challenges were also observed. Misalignments occasionally arose due to differing interpretations of silence, politeness, or task urgency. For example, Dutch directness was at times perceived as too blunt, while Indonesian indirectness was sometimes mistaken for hesitation or lack of engagement.

To overcome these barriers, both groups engaged in adaptive strategies. Indonesian speakers clarified local terms by giving examples (e.g., WhatsApp groups, Zoom calls), while Dutch speakers made efforts to restate points or provide structured outlines. These adaptive behaviors reflect the participants' shared goal of achieving mutual understanding and maintaining collaborative momentum.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to look at how Indonesian and Dutch academics navigated cross-cultural communication during the WINNER 2024 conference using Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF). Using a combination of three main frameworks, namely: BELF strategies, cultural frameworks, and face negotiation, the results of this study show that successful collaboration is not only determined by English proficiency, but also by the speakers' ability to adjust their language use and manage the cultural expectations of both parties. In answering the research question, this study shows that Indonesian and Dutch participants strategically use simplification, repetition and clarification to bridge the language gap. At the same time, their communication styles are shaped by deeply rooted cultural orientations: Indonesian speakers often use high-context, hierarchical, and indirect expressions, while Dutch speakers tend to prefer low-context, egalitarian, and direct language. Despite these differences, both groups show efforts to keep the interaction harmonious and running by using humor, self-mentioning, and inclusive expressions to increase mutual understanding and maintain good relations.

The most meaningful discovery lies in how language and culture work together to shape academic collaboration. BELF is not just a communication tool, it is a shared practice that requires flexibility, openness, and intercultural sensitivity. The WINNER 2024 conference provided a live example of how BELF can function as a bridge in cross-border education and research partnerships when supported by cultural awareness. From the analysis that has been done, the researcher found how language and culture work together to form academic collaboration. BELF is not just a communication tool, but a shared practice that requires flexibility, openness, and intercultural sensitivity. The WINNER 2024 conference provides a clear example of how BELF bridges educational and research partnerships across borders when supported by cultural awareness. Of the twenty sessions available, the analysis in this study focused on three sessions, and only verbal communication was examined. Non-verbal cues-such as gestures, tone, and facial expressions-were not captured in the transcripts, yet they can significantly contribute to meaning-making in high-context cultures. In addition, this study only considered the Indonesian-Dutch context, which may not be fully representative of other BELF interactions in different regional or academic environments.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the scope of data by including more sessions, analyzing non-verbal cues, or conducting comparative studies involving participants from other cultural backgrounds. Further research could also explore how BELF operates in written academic exchanges, such as emails or collaborative reports, or examine the role of digital communication tools in shaping intercultural interactions. Finally, there is great potential to apply the results of this study into practical implications. Academic institutions, conference organizers, and international program coordinators are encouraged to provide cross-cultural training to participants that includes language strategies and intercultural sensitivity. When BELF is supported by such a framework, international academic cooperation can become more inclusive, equitable, and effective.

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