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## **Conflict and consensus in Spanish vs. Scandinavian negotiation interaction**

### **1.0. Introduction**

The question to be raised in this paper concerns conflict management in price negotiations. Since our focus is the dynamic, interactive aspect of the discourse process, let us by way of introduction underline that the negotiating parties have opposed interests since one party wants to sell dear and the other to buy cheap, but they also have mutual interests since they both want to make a bargain. How do the parties manage to move from a point of disagreement to a point of agreement? How do they manage to settle the price?

We will try to answer these questions in a cross-cultural perspective, comparing the interplay between dominating components of strategic behaviour in Spanish vs. Scandinavian (Swedish and Danish) price negotiations. Our approach is basically discourse analytical since it is presupposed that the strategic behaviour displayed in conflict management is constructed in and through conversation. We also assume that if analyses of a large amount of Spanish and Scandinavian negotiations, not only price negotiations, reveal that in conflict management it is the same cluster of strategic components that occur again and again, the reason must be that in their strategic choices the negotiators are greatly influenced by the cultural value systems which they supposedly have internalized. One strategic aspect that the negotiator necessarily must take into account is his willingness to cooperate, another his credibility. Our analysis seems to reveal the important, global difference that whereas the Spanish negotiators, to show their willingness to cooperate

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and credibility, prefer to build up affiliative strategies, the Swedes and Danes are much more concerned with the preserving of consensus.

### **1.1. The data**

The parties are 10 Spanish, 12 Swedish and 12 Danish negotiation teams. Altogether, the Spanish sample has a duration of 3 hours and 1 minute. The Swedish sample has a duration of 3 hours and 54 minutes and the Danish sample a duration of 2 hours and 33 minutes. The negotiators were young executives in Spain and Denmark, all with previous negotiation experience, who attended training courses to improve their negotiation skills. The courses were 5-day courses arranged in Spain, Denmark and Sweden by professional training centres. The training programmes were practically identical, including the simulation exercise that will be referred to in this paper.

The primary issue to be negotiated in this simulation exercise concerns the sale of a fishing boat. The selling party consists of a businessman and his wife, who owns a fishing restaurant. They have a son who just left college. The buyers are fishermen, who already own a small fishing boat. This means to say that secondary issues that may be made subject to negotiation concern e.g. the delivery of fish to the fishing restaurant, the possibility of employing the sellers' son on the fishingboat, and whether the small boat is to be included in the deal or not.

### **1.2. Conflict management**

Since conflictive elements play an important part in negotiations, we will here try to state explicitly what we mean by a conflict. In our view the constituent elements of a conflict are that

- a problem has arisen between two or more parties,
- the parties have some opposite interests,
- the parties have some mutual interests.

This means to say that if the parties had only opposite interests they would not make an attempt to solve the problem, since they would know beforehand that they could not possibly find a solution. If the parties have only mutual interests there would not be different opinions of the desirable outcome and consequently no conflict between them.

Following Pruitt, conflict arises when somebody *perceives* that his interests are opposed to that of another party though they might not actually be opposed (1987). We can adhere to his point of view that what turns a situation into a conflict is not the situation itself but the way in which the parties involved react to that situation. For the sake of clarity we may add, however, that if the persons involved perceive that a conflict has arisen they will also perceive the above-mentioned constituent elements. The important issue is, of course, how interactants act and react when they find themselves in conflictive situations. Conflict solving is both a problem-solving and a communicative process, which are highly interdependent. When we talk about communicative strategies we refer to both dimensions. Once a negotiator has decided what his next move is going to be in the process of coming to terms with the other party, he has to implement it. This implementation requires verbal interaction. Hence he also has to make communicative choices.

If the conflicting parties decide to meet, the next question to be raised concerns whether there are any pivots that the parties must necessarily take into account when preparing their communicative strategies. We see at least two such features. One is that their ability to reach an agreement depends on their willingness to cooperate. Cooperation is a necessary prerequisite for successful conflict management since the parties will not be able to make progress without exchange of information. Since the willingness to give information about one's own situation requires openness, another indispensable precondition is that a certain amount of trust between the parties is established. ('Trust' is here understood as 'mutual acknowledgement of credibility'.)

We will now switch from a 'universalistic' to a culture-specific perspective. If we can agree that 'cooperation' and 'trust'/'credibility' are core elements in strategic planning, we must explore how a negotiator signals that he is cooperative and credible in a way that will be understood by the other party. This encoding and decoding process is language-specific and depends on the cultural value systems that the interactants have internalized. Hence, what we will examine is whether it is possible to find recurrent patterns in the way in which communicative strategies are built up by the Spanish, Swedish and Danish negotiators. In the sections that follow, we intend to carry out a componential analysis of communicative strategies and to examine

how these strategical components interact between the Spanish, Swedish and Danish buyers and sellers, respectively. However, it may be convenient to discuss the concept of cultural values first.

### 1.3. Cultural values

By 'cultural values' we understand all those culture-specific factors that in certain specific situations may trigger off certain kinds of behavioural modes. Here, the concept of values is used in the widest sense of the word, without any distinction being made between notions such as attitude, norm, value or basic assumptions. We believe that different kinds of values may be described along a continuous scale going from a high degree of stability to a high degree of variability. Stable values are considered to be basic and will only change very little in the course of time, and they will be relatively situation-independent. Changeable values, on the other hand, are relatively situation-dependent and may vary a lot over time. As an example, we consider it to be relatively easy for a Spanish negotiator to change his time management patterns and for a Danish negotiator to change his dressing habits. At the other end of the scale, it may be almost impossible for a Danish negotiator to change his task-oriented way of solving problems, whereas the Spanish negotiator may find it extremely difficult to abandon emotional display. When we describe Spanish and Danish negotiation behaviour, we will focus on such aspects that we believe reflect relatively stable values.

In cross-cultural research, various attempts have been made to describe cultural values as belonging to different dimensions. Most scholars that are concerned with cultural studies are probably familiar with the dimension 'high/low power distance' and 'high/low masculinity' (Hofstede 1984), or 'universalist/particularist', 'specific/diffuse' (Trompenaars 1993), and 'task-orientedness/person-orientedness' (Casse 1981), which all originate from multi-cultural studies. We will not discuss the value of such world-wide studies, but only point to the fact that in the case of bi-cultural studies these dimensions may seem too broadly defined. If one compares typical behavioural modes in two different cultures, such as e.g. Spain and Denmark, one will find that for each of these dimensions some aspects seem to be more relevant than others. It will probably be observed that when people from one culture interact, they give a high priority to some 'components' encompassed

by a certain dimension, whereas others are paid only little attention to. When people from another culture interact, the observation of their behaviour will show that they follow another set of preferences. It may well be the case that some aspects are not touched upon, and that some of these do not fit at all into this multi-dimensional framework.

This is precisely what happens if one tries to describe Spanish, Swedish and Danish behaviour in conflictive situations, where in order to characterize what is typical, it seems necessary to emphasize the *consensus* and *affiliation* dimensions that each constitute a cluster of behavioural modes that cut across the above-mentioned dimensions.

## **2. Cultural differences between Spaniards and Scandinavians: hypotheses concerning interaction in general and negotiations in particular**

In earlier accounts, such as Fant (1989) and (1992), Grindsted (1989) and (1990), and Villemoes (in press), important differences between Spanish and Scandinavian negotiation interaction have been highlighted. In particular, emphasis has been placed on Scandinavian conflict-avoidance and Spanish assertiveness. In this more precise context, where conflict management is at issue, we would like to make explicit the set of hypotheses concerning divergent cultural values that we believe will account for important aspects of the behavioural differences observed.

*A. The credibility precondition.* We take it to be a universal feature applying both to Spanish and to Scandinavian interactants, that the establishment of credibility is a precondition for cooperative action to take place between two parties.

*B. The 'involvement first' principle.* From a Spanish interactant's perspective, we believe that a comparatively high degree of interpersonal involvement is required for credibility to be established between two parties and, consequently, for cooperative action to take place. From a Scandinavian interactant's viewpoint, however, even a low degree of interpersonal involvement can be accepted when cooperating with another party.

*C. The 'consensus first' principle.* For Scandinavian interactants, a high degree of consensus is required for credibility to be established, and,

consequently, for cooperative action to take place. For Spanish interactants, however, even a low degree of consensus can be accepted when cooperating with another party.

*D. Divergent preferences for emotional display.* From a Spanish interactant's perspective, displaying emotions is a means for expressing high interpersonal involvement. This, in turn, contributes to strengthen credibility. From a Scandinavian interactant's perspective, emotional display reveals lack of stability and thereby reduces the credibility of its producer.

*E. Divergent preferences for self-affirmative behaviour.* For a Spanish interactant, self-affirmative attitudes towards equals is a means for displaying credibility. The reason for this is that self-affirmation is understood as an invitation for an opposite party that is equal in hierarchy to affirm itself. Mutual self-affirmation produces mutual respect, and mutual respect, in turn, produces credibility. Moreover, self-affirmative behaviour is understood as a form of emotional display. As such, it strengthens the interpersonal involvement and thereby increases the credibility of the self-affirming party. For a Scandinavian interactant, on the other hand, self-affirmative attitudes diminish credibility. The reason for this is that self-affirmation, as far as values, beliefs and opinions are concerned, is considered a threat to consensus and thereby to credibility. Self-affirmative attitudes in general are also understood to be over-emotional and, thereby, to weaken the credibility of their displayer.

The above-mentioned principles and preferences are understood as general and valid for most activity types in the respective national/cultural groups. The question now arises: what are the consequences of these factors as far as the activity of negotiating is concerned?

Negotiation may be seen as a sort of 'preparatory' activity type where the cooperative action consists precisely in establishing a consensus. The ultimate aim of negotiating is, in fact, to ensure subsequent cooperation within some other activity. However complex or simple this other activity may be (it often boils down to a simple transaction of buying/selling), it is logically distinct from the negotiation itself. This fact, in combination with the cultural preferences attributed to each of the national/cultural groups that we want to compare, entails a specific dilemma for each group.

For a Scandinavian negotiator, the specific dilemma consists in being obliged to display consensus before a true consensus - i.e. the positive outcome of the negotiation - can be reached. If he displays consensus, he will be in a situation of double bind. If he does not display enough consensus, however, he will give the other party the opportunity of claiming that he cannot be trusted.

For the Spanish negotiator, the specific dilemma (in case the negotiation takes place between two parties that do not know each other yet) consists in having to display an already existing interpersonal involvement at a stage when he is actually trying to establish it. A weaker variety of the same dilemma, in the case of a negotiation between parties that are familiar with each other, is that the negotiator has to display that his interpersonal involvement with the opposite party is already high enough at a moment when he is actually making an effort to strengthen the bonds.

It should be recognized, however, that the 'Scandinavian dilemma' is a more serious obstacle to the negotiating activity than the 'Spanish dilemma'. Universally speaking, the activity of negotiating aims at establishing consensus, but not necessarily at creating bonds or affiliation. The 'Scandinavian dilemma' thus affects central aspects of the activity, whereas the 'Spanish dilemma' is rather to be considered a natural consequence of the fact that it is a 'preparatory' activity by its very nature.

If our hypotheses are correct, we should be able to make certain comparative predictions about the behaviour of Spanish and Scandinavian negotiators. We have chosen the following domains for our comparative study:

- the patterns of argumentation that characterize each national/cultural group (section 3)
- the strategic preferences of each national/cultural group when it comes to negotiating prices (section 4)
- the utterance in which the first price bid is made and its immediate surroundings (section 5)

### **3. Conflict and consensus in argumentation**

In order to test our hypotheses concerning the effects that different sets of cultural values would have on negotiation interaction, we decided to

take a closer look at certain features of the argumentative patterns produced by the respective national/cultural groups. Although argumentation cannot be considered an absolutely indispensable component in the negotiation activity - after all, a negotiation could technically be carried out by means of proposals, counterproposals, acceptances, and rejections, without any arguments being presented at all either for or against the underlying claims - anyone familiar with the way this type of activity is carried out in modern Western society would agree that argumentation plays an important part in negotiations. We therefore assume that observing and describing patterns of argumentation is essential to the study of cultural differences in negotiators' behaviour.

### 3.1. Parameters

In our analysis we have taken the following parameters into account:

A) The *type of claim* that the argument addresses. Our classification has been carried out along a scale of supposedly decreasing conflictiveness.

The central, and thus most conflictive, claims in the type of buying-and-selling negotiation that we have studied, are those that involve the *price* of the object negotiated. Claims concerning the price have been subdivided into two categories: those somewhat *more conflictive* claims that directly concern the price (e.g. the state of the object, the valuation made by experts, etc.), and those somewhat *less conflictive* claims that only indirectly affect the price (e.g. what supplementary investments will have to be undertaken, what the terms of payment are, etc.).

The following Spanish fragment contains two price-related arguments. The first of these addresses the terms of payment and therefore belongs to the 'indirect' subcategory, whereas the second is related to the state of the boat and therefore has a direct bearing on the price.

#### Example 1

Buyer: *sabemos lo que podemos pescar en un año y no es tan rápida la amortización eh?=-*

Seller: *bueno el tema parece en un marco,=*

Buyer: *nuestra estimación es de de los diez años que tiene de vida el barco si fuera nuevo éste: te queda en siete (0,5)*

Seller: *que no: no uy no*



Buyer: [1] *We know how much fish we can get in a year and the instalments are not that quickly paid off, are they?*

Seller: Well the issue seems to be in a framework...

Buyer: Our estimation is that that [2] *of the ten years of life that the boat has in case it was new, you have seven left.*

Seller: Oh no, ooh, not at all

Next in line on the conflictiveness scale we have placed the claims that involve so-called alternative currencies, a term by which we refer to services and other benefits which form part of the negotiation in their capacity of compensating for price differences, without being attributed any measurable value.

The following Swedish fragment provides an illustration of how an 'alternative currency' is proposed, viz. that the seller's son could work on the boat, a proposal which is immediately followed up by an argument in favour of it, viz. that the buyers would only have to pay him an apprentice's wages and thus would economize the cost of a third fisherman they would otherwise have had to employ.

#### Example 2

Seller: *anledningen till att jag ställer frågan, jag har nämligen en: grabb, som precis har slutat skolan, å som söker sig till fiskeindustrin, fiskenäringen, å som nu går runt å: söker, som lärling, vikarie på båtarna å jag tänkte att ifall vi kunde komma till nån form av uppgörelse, så skulle ju det vara ett ypperligt tillfälle, att han skulle kunna börja hjälpa till på den här båten, för lärlingslön då, vilket gör att dom här tvåhundrausen kronorna inte är aktuella för den tredje personen*

*..the reason why I ask the question, that is I have a boy who just finished school and who has an interest in the fishing industry, in fishery, and who is now looking for a job as an apprentice, a stand-in on the boats, and I thought that if we could come to some sort of agreement, this would be an excellent opportunity for him to start helping you on this boat, for an apprentice's wages, that is, which makes these two hundred thousand crowns unnecessary for that third person...*

It goes without saying that arguments supporting claims about alternative values may well, in the course of the negotiation, develop into arguments supporting indirectly price-related claims, and also that arguments supporting indirect price claims may be used later on as arguments supporting direct price claims. Therefore, in order to classify

correctly an argument that emerges in the conversation, the relevant contextual features must be taken into consideration.

Least conflictive are the arguments that address ‘*peripheral*’ claims, i.e. claims that do not involve the price nor any alternative currency in any obvious way. Admittedly, this is a ‘waste-basket’ category, which includes not only claims that have an indirect bearing on the issues which the negotiation is about (such as the ‘*buy boat*’ and ‘*sell boat*’ claims which will be commented upon below), but also claims that have an activity-regulating function (such as whether to interrupt or continue the negotiation), and claims that are more or less irrelevant to the issues in the process of being negotiated. We will try to demonstrate later on in this section that this category includes interesting subtypes, which distribute in significant ways across the respective national/cultural groups.

B) The nature of the argument itself in terms of a distinction we have chosen to label ‘*ad hominem (AH) vs. ad rem (AR)*’. We have defined *ad hominem* arguments as arguments which refer to the relationship or bonds existing between the interactants. The most important subcategories included are the following:

- All references to past or future profits made, or losses suffered, by the parties, as long as the profits or losses referred to involve a comparison between the parties. Thus, when an argument carries the message “you’ll make a big profit on this (so offer us a lower price)”, it has been coded as AH although if it says “doing this will increase your profit by 40 % (so do it)”, it has been classified as AR. The reason why the former type is considered an instance of AH is that it presupposes a message that says “since we’re involved with each other, there should be a balance between us, but since there is an imbalance you owe me X”.

- All references to favours (or non-favours) made by one party to the other, i.e. arguments that carry messages of the type “we are doing this as a favour to you (so offer us a lower price)”.

- All references to the good relationship existing or to be established between the parties, such as “we are such good neighbours (so give up your claim)”, or “we’re looking forward to fruitful cooperation with you (so accept my offer)”.

- All messages built on attributions of value-laden properties to oneself or the other party, such as “we have such good reputation (so

cooperate with us)” or “since good businessmen are supposed to behave this way you should acknowledge our claim”. However, arguments that are based on reference to actual categories to which one or the other party belong, without any directly value-laden connotation being understood, such as “you are fishermen and these things are easier for fishermen to do than for other people (so accept my proposal)”, have been categorized as AR arguments.

Example 3

Seller: bien yo creo que una buena: (0,5) estás planteando bien el tema, y lo que pasa que creo os quedé muy bajos, vamos es que *realmente no no cubro ni siquiera lo que he sacado prácticamente*.=

Buyer: con cinco y medio?=  
 Seller: no lo CUbro.=

Buyer: hombre:=  
 Seller: vosotros sabéis *que el barco está nuevo*, hombre luis yo te he preguntado hace un momento..

Seller: Well, I think that a good... you're putting the issue correctly, and what happened I think is that I gave you a very low offer. Look, in fact, I really don't, *I don't even cover, practically, what I spent*.

Buyer: With five and a half?  
 Seller: I don't cover it.

Buyer: Now come on!  
 Seller: You know *the boat is in a good state*, man, Luis, I just asked you a while ago..

C) The relative ‘distance’ - either physical or intellectual/psychological - that an argument keeps to its claim. Here, too, we have chosen to operate with a binary distinction, viz. ‘*immediate*’ vs. ‘*mediate*’. As ‘*immediate*’ we have categorized any argument that is explicitly related to a corresponding claim and presented in direct connection with this claim. If any of these conditions is not satisfied, the argument is classified as ‘*mediate*’. It should be noted that arguments that are only understandable by means of implicature, have always been classified as *mediate*.

In the Danish excerpt that follows, we can see examples of rapid switches between immediate and mediate arguments. Argument (1), that the boat is well kept, is an immediate argument in favour of the

seller's position. The buyer's response is argument (2), which is mediate in the sense that it contains an implicit message "these costs should be compensated for by your reducing the price". The seller's subsequent argument (3) is also mediate since it contains implicit pieces of information: that 180.000 is considered the maximum market price and that the seller's opening position of 135.000 should be considered low and hence favourable to the buyers. Finally, the buyer expresses an immediate argument (4), namely that he considers the seller's position to be very high.

Example 4

Seller 1: *den er velholdt.*=

Buyer: *jæ men der er jo det ved det at vi ska jo ofre nogle tusind før vi kan- vi kan bruge den*

Seller 2: *[nå men der er jo også en marginal fra 135.000 til 180.000 ik'?*

Buyer: *nåe ja men jeg synes da 135.000 i første omgang er højt [laughing].*

Seller 1: *[1] it is well kept*

Buyer: *Yes, but then again there's this little thing [2] that we shall have to spend some thousands before we can .. we can use it*

Seller 2: *Sure, but [3] there is also a margin from 135.000 to 180.000, right?*

Buyer: *Sure, yeah, but I must say I think [4] 135.000 in the first place is much money [laughing]*

D) A final parameter is whether the argument supports the home party's or the opposite party's claim. We have labelled this distinction '*push vs. yield*'. We have been restrictive in using the label 'yield', and in particular we have excluded the quite frequent strategy which consists of hiding a 'push' move behind an apparent 'yield' move by starting the utterance with "OK, but ..." or "Right, now ...". To qualify as 'yield', an argument should be both explicit and complete.

In the following excerpt, the Swedish buyers have argued that the additional investments that are needed for the boat will cost much money. The seller presents a series of counterarguments, among others that his son, who may possibly start working on the boat, may give them a hand. The buyers' recognizing the validity of this argument is a typical instance of a yield move.

### Example 5

Seller: om vi gör det själva då. du har ju den här erfarenheten från fiskerinäringen. grabben som har gått på tekniskt gymnasium å vad jag förstod så hade ju även du varit verksam på Ängelholm med- med fly:g

Buyer: ja:, ja, *det är klart, får vi din grabb till hjälp*

Seller: Then what if we do it ourselves? You who have this experience from fishery, the boy who has attended a secondary school of technology, and as I understood you had also been active at Ängelholm with aviation

Buyer: Well, yes, *of course, if we've got your boy to help us...*

E) A few more words should be added about the way we have proceeded in order to isolate arguments in the dialogue. Very often, in natural conversation as well as in written texts, compound arguments appear. At times these compounds consist of 'chains' in which one part backs up the other; at times they constitute repetitions of what appears to be more or less the same argument, at times they imply the coordinating of two or more arguments, and at times they consist of an argument followed by one or several clarifications or rectifications. We have counted these compounds as one and the same argument, provided (1) they occur in the same speaker turn (or extend into an other-initiated repair-move), and (2) their parts are not separated by any syntactic or prosodic boundary markers that signal that they should be interpreted as distinct information units.

## 3.2. Predictions

Provided our assumptions about cultural differences between Spanish and Scandinavian negotiators, as outlined in section 2, are correct, the following predictions can be made:

*Prediction 1:* As a result of the 'consensus first' principle, a Scandinavian negotiator can be expected to use less arguments, the more conflictive the issue turns out to be. In a corresponding fashion, a Spanish negotiator, due to preferences for self-affirmative behaviour, can be expected to prefer spending his/her energy on conflictive issues rather than on more neutral issues. The converging effect will be that Spanish negotiators will use more *arguments addressing the price* than

the Scandinavians, whereas the Scandinavians will use more *arguments directed towards peripheral claims*.

*Prediction 2:* As a result of the ‘involvement first’ principle and the concomitant preference for high emotional display, a Spanish negotiator will produce more *AH arguments* than a Scandinavian negotiator.

*Prediction 3:* As a conjoined effect of the Spanish preferences for self-affirmative behaviour and the Scandinavian ‘consensus first’ principle, a Scandinavian negotiator can be expected to produce a higher proportion of ‘*yield*’ *arguments* than a Spanish negotiator.

*Prediction 4:* As an effect of the ‘self-affirmation’ principle combined with preferences for high emotional display, a Spanish negotiator can be expected to use a higher proportion of *immediate arguments* than a Scandinavian negotiator.

### **3.3. Results and discussion**

The sample we have examined consists of two complete Spanish negotiations with an overall duration of 61,5 minutes, three complete Danish negotiations with a duration of 64 minutes, and two complete Swedish negotiations with a duration of 67 minutes. We have preferred to study complete negotiations rather than random excerpts, since the different types of argument distribute inequally across the various stages that negotiations run through, and our data are too limited for a random sampling to be effective.

In our sample, the following proportions were found between the different classes of arguments presented in section 3.1.

**Table 1. The distribution of different classes of arguments across national/cultural groups**

	SPAIN (61,5 min)		DENMARK (64 min)		SWEDEN (67 min)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
DPRICE	105	30,3	28	11,6	45	22,8
IPRICE	120	34,6	88	36,4	33	15,2
PRICE TOTAL	225	64,8	116	47,9	78	39,6
ALT. CURR.	54	15,6	51	21,1	57	28,9
PERIPH.	68	19,6	75	31,0	62	31,5
AH	183	52,7	66	27,3	38	19,3
AR	164	47,3	176	72,7	159	80,7
YIELD	15	4,3	36	14,9	28	14,2
PUSH	332	95,7	206	85,1	169	85,8
IMM	120	34,6	74	30,6	67	34,0
MED	227	65,4	168	69,4	130	66,0
IMM/PRICE	74	32,9	32	27,6	17	21,8
MED/PRICE	151	67,1	84	72,4	61	78,2
IMM/PERIPH	27	39,7	23	30,7	23	37,1
MED/PERIPH	41	60,3	52	69,3	39	62,9
TOT	347	100	242	100	197	100
TOT/HOUR	339		227		176	

PRICE: arguments connected with claims concerning the price

DPRICE: arguments connected with claims which directly concern the price

IPRICE: arguments connected with claims which indirectly concern the price

ALT.CURR.: arguments connected with claims concerning alternative currencies

PERIPH.: arguments connected with peripheral claims (claims that neither concern the price nor any alternative currency)

AH: ad hominem arguments

AR: ad rem arguments

IMM: immediate arguments

MED: mediate arguments

YIELD: arguments that support a claim made by the opposite party

PUSH: arguments that support a claim made by one's own party

### 3.3.1. Amount of arguments

The first result that may strike the reader is the much higher amount of arguments produced by the Spanish than by the Scandinavian negotiators. While the Spanish negotiators, as an average, present approximately six arguments per minute, the Danes present four and the Swedes only three. This result is perfectly compatible with our hypothesis concerning Spanish self-affirmation and the Scandinavian ‘consensus first’ principle.

### 3.3.2. Immediate/mediate arguments

The immediate/mediate distinction is the one that yields the smallest differences between Spaniards and Scandinavians. It is striking how similar the proportions between immediate and mediate arguments are across the national/cultural groups, at least as long as we stick to the overall figures. However, if we take a closer look at the arguments related to price, it can be seen that the Spanish negotiators use a somewhat higher proportion of immediate arguments than the Danes, and a considerably higher proportion than the Swedes. To a certain extent this supports our hypothesis concerning the Spanish preferences towards self-affirmative behaviour and high emotional display.

It is noteworthy that the immediate/mediate ratio among the Danes does not seem to change much according to which type of claim the arguments address, whereas for the Swedes the proportion of immediate arguments diminishes considerably on its way from the ‘peripheral’ (37,1%) to the price-related category (21,8%). Here, the Swedes seem to differ more from the Danes than the Scandinavians as a whole differ from the Spaniards.

There may be several explanations why the immediate/mediate distinction does not yield a clearer picture. One factor is the ambiguity connected with the notion ‘mediate’. A general impression is that the Spanish negotiators tend to indulge in longer argumentative chains than any of the Scandinavian groups. This would be reflected as a relatively higher proportion of mediate arguments. The Danes, on the other hand, show a stronger tendency to produce implicit arguments than the Spaniards and the Swedes. Since all implicit arguments are coded as ‘mediate’ in our account, this will also yield a higher proportion of mediate arguments. This is admittedly a weakness in the categorization.



### 3.3.3. 'Yield' arguments

The table clearly shows a much stronger tendency for Scandinavian negotiators than for Spaniards towards using 'yield' arguments. Both the Danish and the Swedish relative figures are more than three times as high as the Spanish ones (14,9 and 14,2 vs. 4,3%). This clearly supports our hypothesis concerning Spanish self-affirmation and the Scandinavian 'consensus first' principle.

### 3.3.4. 'Ad hominem' arguments

The differences between Scandinavian and Spanish negotiators regarding the use of 'ad hominem' arguments are also very clear. Among the Spaniards, more than half of the arguments presented are AH arguments, as compared to approximately one fourth among the Danes and one fifth among the Swedes. This gives firm support to our hypothesis regarding the Spanish 'involvement first' principle and preferences for high emotional display.

### 3.3.5. Price-related vs. peripheral arguments

Last but not least, our predictions concerning the ratio of price-related vs. peripheral arguments turn out to be confirmed by the figures of Table 1. Almost two thirds of the Spanish arguments address the price, as compared to less than half of the Danish and less than two fifths of the Swedish arguments. As for the arguments that address alternative currencies and 'peripheral' claims, the proportions are inverted. Less than 20% of the Spanish arguments are 'peripheral', as compared to over 30% among the Swedish and Danish negotiators. In a similar vein, only 15,6% of the Spaniards' argumentation is related to alternative currencies, as compared to 21,1% for the Danes and 28,9% for the Swedes. These results show that the Spanish negotiators, in contrast to the Scandinavians, show a preference for not avoiding conflictive issues. This is to say that our hypotheses regarding the Scandinavian 'consensus first' principle and Spanish preference for self-affirmative behaviour again are given empirical support.

Sometimes the Danes seem to occupy an intermediate position between the Spanish and the Swedish negotiators. This is true of the proportion of 'ad hominem' arguments (52,7% for the Spaniards, 27,3% for the Danes, and 19,3% for the Swedes), and also of the proportions

of price-related argumentation. Although it is not our purpose to compare the two Scandinavian groups, this aspect is interesting, and there are other divergences that may also require comments. One is the immediate/mediate ratio discussed above. Another aspect is the distribution between directly and indirectly price-related arguments. Here, we find that the Danish negotiators connect relatively few arguments (11,6%) directly with the price of the fishingboat, and about three times as many (36,4%) with claims concerning issues such as the cost of supplementary investments, etc. that are only indirectly related to the price. Although as a whole the Swedish negotiators produce considerably fewer price-related arguments than the Danes, a majority of these arguments are directly related to the price and only a small part is indirectly price-related (22,8% and 15,2%, respectively). On the other hand, we have seen that the proportion of arguments related to alternative currencies (benefits negotiated without being directly quantified) is higher for the Swedes than for the Danes. It seems that we are dealing with two alternative ways of avoiding the most conflictive issue, i.e. the price of the boat. This can be done either by talking of things that influence the price of the boat indirectly, as do the Danes, or by dealing with things that are not directly translatable into prices but still have a bearing on the negotiation as a whole, as do the Swedes. As yet we can suggest no explanation to account for these phenomena.

### 3.3.6. 'Buy boat' vs. 'sell boat' claim

Among the 'peripheral claims', there are two types which are particularly frequent in all the negotiations examined, and which we have labeled '*buy boat*' and '*sell boat*', respectively. The 'buy boat' claim is to be understood as "it is in the interest of the buyers to buy the boat". Normally, this claim is addressed as a sellers' claim, though at times it is the buyers that take the initiative of presenting this claim as their own. The second claim, 'sell boat', is understood as "the sellers have acceptable reasons for selling the boat".

Taken together, these types constitute 63% of the Spaniards' and 76% of both the Danes' and the Swedes' peripheral arguments. However, while the Swedes and the Danes both give twice as many 'buy boat' as 'sell boat' arguments, the Spaniards produce a higher proportion of the 'sell boat' category. The below table show the relevant figures:

**Table 2. Arguments addressing the ‘Buy Boat’ and the ‘Sell Boat’ claims**

	SPAIN		DENMARK		SWEDEN	
	tot.	AH	tot.	AH	tot.	AH
BB	18	10	37	12	33	5
% OF PERIPH	26,5	14,7	49,3	16,0	53,2	8,1
SB	25	20	20	9	14	5
% OF PERIPH	36,8	29,4	26,7	12,0	22,6	8,1
BB+SB	43	30	57	21	47	10
% OF PERIPH	63,2	44,1	76,0	28,0	75,8	16,1

BB: arguments addressing the ‘BUY BOAT’ claim

SB: arguments addressing the ‘SELL BOAT’ claim

AH: ad hominem arguments (cf. table 1)

PERIPH: arguments addressing ‘peripheral’ claims (cf. table 1)

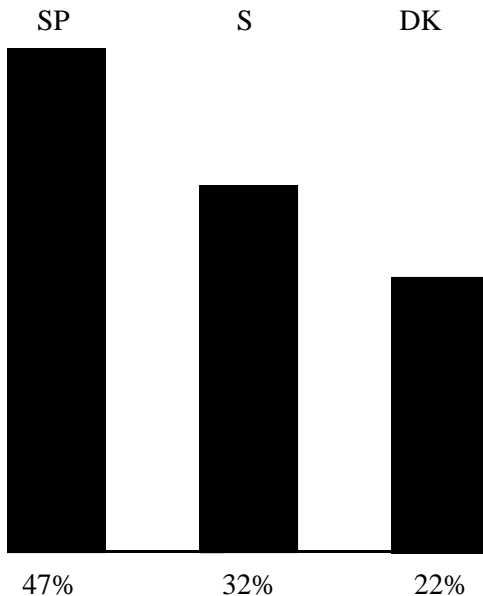
How can these data be interpreted? An analysis in terms of the potential face threat of the respective categories will tell us that the ‘buy boat’ claim is a far ‘safer’ one than the ‘sell boat’ claim. What the ‘buy boat’ claim does is simply drawing attention to a necessary basic assumption for the whole negotiation. Supporting it adds no new information at all, and arguing against it can be seen as a rather straightforward way of pleading for stopping the negotiation, without casting any particular shadow on any of the parties. The ‘sell boat’ claim, on the other hand, directly involves the face of the sellers, and could easily be given a still more threatening bias, viz. “do the sellers have legitimate reasons for selling the boat?”. This is precisely what the Spaniards tend to do. The arguments put forward by the Spanish buyers frequently express the message “you want to make undue profits on this business (so you have no legitimate reason for selling)”, and this is reflected in the proportion of AH arguments (20 out of 25 ‘sell boat’ arguments). These facts give additional support to our original hypotheses regarding Spanish self-affirmative behaviour as a strategy for maintaining the ‘involvement first’ principle, vs. Scandinavian conflict-avoidance, as entailed by the ‘consensus first’ principle.

#### 4. Strategic preferences of Spaniards and Scandinavians in negotiating price

Comparing sellers' and buyers' opening prices with closing prices<sup>1</sup> and prevailing market prices is another way in which we can obtain the information we need about the problem-solving process to be able to verify if there are important differences in the way in which Spanish and Scandinavian negotiators interact when approaching the issue of reaching an agreement on price. Such comparison has yielded the results that appear below.

In fig. 1 below the sellers' opening price is compared to the buyers' in the three countries. The gap between sellers' and buyers' opening positions is measured with the buyers' positions as the base line and with columns showing how many per cent higher the sellers' opening positions are:

**Fig. 1. Seller's opening price/buyer's opening price**



<sup>1</sup> The price for the sale of fish to the seller's wife is included in the closing price, if the parties consider it to be part of the payment for the big boat. Likewise, the small fishing boat is seen to form part of the deal if the price for handing it over to the seller is explicitly stated and confirmed by both parties.

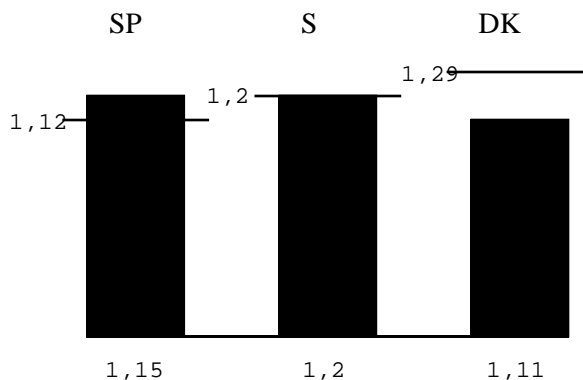
However, comparing the information sheets handed out to the parties to prepare themselves for the simulation exercise, the prevailing market conditions are slightly different in the three countries. In this way it must be taken into account that the span between maximum and minimum market prices for the big fishing boat varies somewhat in the three countries, as it appears from table 3 below.

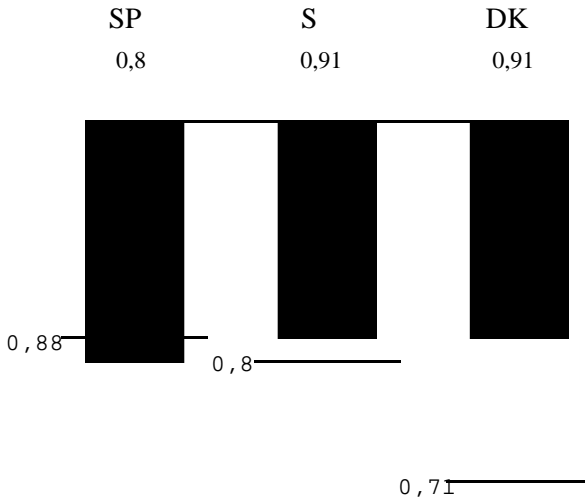
**Table 3. Market price span (average market price = 1,0)**

	SP	S	DK
Max.	1,12	1,2	1,29
Min.	0,88	0,8	0,71

In figs. 2 and 3 the sellers' and the buyers' opening prices are compared to the average market price in the three countries. In the figures we have incorporated the different maximum and minimum market price spans indicating them by means of a horizontal line.

**Fig. 2. Seller's opening price/average market price**



**Fig. 3. Buyer's opening price/average market price**

As it was expected, fig.1 shows us that the distance between sellers' and buyers' opening bids is greater in Spain than in Scandinavia. If we look at fig. 2, in which sellers' opening price is compared to the average market price, we see that the Spanish sellers go above the maximum market price position of 1,12 while making opening prices of 1,15 , whereas the Danish sellers keep their first prices much below their upper limit (1,11 compared to the maximum position of 1,23). If we go to the other end of the price interval, looking at the buyers' opening positions in proportion to the average market price in fig. 3, we observe the same trend once more. The Spanish buyers go below the minimum market price position of 0,88 while making opening prices of 0,80, whereas the Scandinavians stay well above<sup>1)</sup>. The Swedish buyers' average opening price is 0,91 with a minimum position of 0,8. The Danish buyers' opening price is also 0,91, though with a minimum position of 0,71. In spite of the fact that the prevailing market prices, as they appear from the general information sheets for the simulation exercise handed out to the negotiators, offer different market price spans, we find that the Spanish negotiators, who were supposed to operate within the most narrow limits, show the widest gap between sellers' and buyers' opening positions, whereas the Scandinavian nego-

tiators, who were introduced to wider spans, show much smaller gaps (see fig. 1).

If we compare the closing price with the average market price, we note, however, that in spite of the above-mentioned differences, in all three countries they are very close to the average (SP: 0,95, DK: 1,00, S: 0,99). Thus, we can see that in spite of the different strategies being followed in Spain and Scandinavia, the negotiators arrive at almost the same outcome.

In conclusion, the strategy followed by the Spaniards seems to be based on maximizing contrasts, whereas the Scandinavian negotiators do not allow themselves to carry matters to extremes. It seems as if the Spanish negotiator, by maximizing the distance between opposed positions, displays an emotional involvement which shows that he is interpersonally involved in the activity being performed. He also signals a high degree of self-affirmation, which shows that he wants to make himself respected. If one does not manage to make these contrasting positions, one is not a worthy opponent but must be taken to be an indifferent and emotionally uninvolved person. The Scandinavian negotiator, on the other hand, must follow the consensus-oriented strategy in order to be taken seriously. By minimizing the distance between opposed positions he signals that he is a reliable person displaying emotional control and stability.

If the principles underlying these price span processes are applied to conversational behaviour, it can be expected that in a conflictive situation it will be important for the Scandinavian negotiators to signal as small a distance as possible between opposed positions, due to the fact that such behaviour will minimize the tension and be interpreted as consensus-seeking. As for Spanish negotiators, however, it can be expected that they will signal greater distance between opposed positions, since such display will maximize the tension between the parties, with the positive emotional effects that this tension can be expected to entail.

It is, of course, true that the responsive qualities of every new move must meet certain conditions with regard to the previous move. Thus every new move must contain a certain contrastive element. If not, conversation will quickly be brought towards an end. In the Spanish negotiations that we have analyzed, it seems to be an important principle that this contrast should be maximized.

It is also true, on the other hand, that conversations must contain a certain element of consensus in order not to break down. A case in point is that interactants who cannot come to terms on what they are going to talk about, simply will stop conversation and go their separate ways. As far as the Scandinavian negotiators are concerned we find that they seem to give strong priority to consensus.

## 5. Sequencing patterns around first price bid

As has been stated earlier, the central issue of the negotiation concerns the sale of a fishingboat. In each simulation exercise we have analyzed the utterance in which the first price bid is made and its immediate surroundings, in particular the utterances next to it, in which we can observe how the opposite party act and react to this bid. When analyzing such sequencing patterns we have found no significant differences between the Spanish, Swedish and Danish negotiators as to when in the negotiation the first bid is made, by whom (seller or buyer) or whether the price bid was elicited by the other party or not. However, analyzing the relationship between the utterance in which the first price bid is made and the immediately following utterances, we do find significant differences that may be described in terms of a psychological gap that party B establishes with regard to the price offer of party A while responding to it. In order to account for these differences, we have tried to establish a hierarchy of types of responses with regard to their distance-creating property.

If the relationship between utterances is marked by *maximum distance* they are placed at the upper end of the hierarchy. This is the case if the utterance(s) next to the first price bid is a counterbid in bold, i.e. with no arguments to support it, or person-oriented metacomments attacking the other party, or proposals to break the negotiation.

At the middle of the scale the relationship between utterances is marked by *medium distance*. In this group we have placed cases in which the next utterance(s) is a negative evaluation of the first bid, or a counterbid accompanied by statements concerning the state of the boat to support it, and/or other metacomments than those mentioned above.

At the lower end of the scale the relationship between utterances is marked by *minimum distance*. In this group we have placed cases in which the next utterance(s) ask(s) for more information concerning the



state of the big boat and cases in which the small boat forms part of the buyer's offer. This is due to the fact that the information sheets for the simulation exercise tell us that the sellers are businessmen who are interested in getting a foothold in the fishing market.

In the following you will find examples of each position in the hierarchy:

Example 6

Seller: bueno pues nosotros habíamos pensado en: de acuerdo a la situación que tiene el barco, creemos que el barco está en perfectas condiciones para tener tres años está bastante bien, sabéis que un barco nuevo de las mismas características anda en torno a los doce trece millones de pesetas y bueno pues nosotros considerábamos que un precio: bastante: real bastante lógico, que lógicamente tampoco queremos que sea totalmente totalmente inflexible son pues en torno a los siete millones de pesetas

Buyer 1: *hombre: te quieres forrar con esta operación eh?*

Buyer 2: [laughing] *qué pasada se ha pegado el chaval, se ha quedado más descansado con los siete millones* [laughing]

Seller: Well, yes, we had thought that according to the condition of the boat, we think that the boat is in a perfect condition for a three year old boat, it is quite good. You know that that a new boat of the same type costs about twelve or thirteen million pesetas, and, well, we think that a rather realistic rather reasonable price, and of course we do not want to be totally totally inflexible, is, well, about seven million pesetas.

Buyer 1: *Good heavens, you want to make a packet out of this deal don't you.*

Buyer 2: [laughing] *Oh now the guy is really going too far . He would feel nice and comfortable with those seven millions, wouldn't he?* [laughing]

In example 6, both buyer 1 and buyer 2 establish maximum distance to the seller's price bid by making a person-oriented metacomment attacking him. The example is rich in *distance maximizing* devices, in particular modal markers that increase the assertive power of utterances, such as 'hombre', 'eh' and 'chaval', and also blunt irony, such as the comment "he would feel nice and comfortable with those seven millions".

In the following Swedish example, where the seller's response to the buyer's bid also establishes maximum distance by being a counterbid in bold, we find, however, several instances of *distance minimizers* ('of course', 'about', 'you know').

Example 7

- Buyer: ja det som vi har tänkt oss och kunna betala det är jo 450.000  
 Seller: mm ja  
 Buyer: mm  
 Seller: *det er klart* det är en bra bit ifrån värderingen, den går *ju runt* 600  
 Buyer: Well, what we have thought we would be able to pay is 450.000.  
 Seller: Mm, yes.  
 Buyer: Mm.  
 Seller: *Of course*, that is a far away from the valuation. It is *about* 600, *you know*.

Example 8 below also belongs to the bottom of the hierarchy in which a *minimum distance* is established with regard to the previous utterance. In this example the buyer asks for more information.

Example 8

- Seller: nej men øh den øh der vil der vil også synes jeg være en marginal til jer til at investere yderligere på den båd. altså for at være helt ærlig og komme til sagen så har vi tænkt os at vi vil tilbyde jer den til 135.000 for hvad jeg har læst  
 Buyer: er det så med ombygningen?  
 Seller: No but er, it er, there will there will also I think be a margin for you to make further investments in that boat. Well, to be quite honest and get down to business, then we have thought that we will offer it to you for 135.000, according to what I have read.  
 Buyer: Does it include the refitting then?

In examples 9 and 10 the sellers make the first bid, and in both examples the buyers establish a *medium distance* to these bids.

In example 9 the buyer's response is a negative evaluation of the seller's first bid.

Example 9

- Buyer: ja hva hva hva koster den der båd?
- Seller: det er sådan at viø: havde forestillet os sådanø: en pris på omkring 150.000 USD
- Buyer: aha det er *sgu mange penge*
- Buyer: Well, how, how, how, much does that boat cost?
- Seller: The thing is that we, er, had imagined something like, er, a price of about 150.000 USD.
- Buyer: Aha. That is a hell of a lot of money.

In example 10 the buyer makes a counterbid which is accompanied by a statement concerning the state of the boat.

Example 10

- Seller: men: om man ser det rent krasst i pengar så: äh så, vår båt tillhör ju då den har ju bästa klass helt enkelt, för att vara en sån här havsfiskebåt. den har helt enkelt inte utnyttjats för havsfiske så att den är rätt lite väldigt lite sliten, och: öh båtar i motsvarande klass dom rör sig om ja det ligger på minst sexhundredratusen för en sån båt. i:
- Buyer: ja. äh ja för att bemöta den biten litegrann så så den är ju utrustad for kustfiske som [Seller: mm] som jag sa inledningsvis, och: dom informationer vi har så så är MINST sexhundredratusen nog MAX sexhundredratusen
- Seller: But if you look at it strictly in terms of money, then, er, then our boat belongs, as you know, it is simply a first class boat for being a boat for off-shore fishing. It simply has not been used for off-shore fishing, so it is very little worn, and, er, boats in the same class cost, well, it is probably situated around at least six hundred thousand.
- Buyer: Well, er, well in order to meet that bit a little then, then it is equipped for in- shore fishing you know, as as I said at the beginning, and according to the information we have then, then AT LEAST six hundred thousand is more probably a MAXIMUM of six hundred thousand.

Classifying our data along this scale yields the following. Three of our Spanish examples are found in the upper part and two at the middle, but none at the bottom. Five of the Swedish examples are found in the middle, one in the upper part and none in the lower part, whereas four of the Danish examples have been placed in the lower part, two in the middle of the scale, and none at the top.

There is, however, another interesting aspect that should be mentioned. In each step of the scale we included some special cases of responses. Two of these call for special attention. One is *person-oriented metacomments*. These only occur in the Spanish examples. None was found in the Swedish nor in the Danish data. The Spanish negotiators' use of person-oriented metacomments is, in our opinion, a perfect example of self-affirmative behaviour and emotional display that should be considered important strategic components of affiliation-seeking behaviour. This is seen to be essential in the Spanish cultural values system as compared to Scandinavia. To a Dane or Swede, such person-oriented comments would mean that you carry the negotiation to extremes which would be considered inappropriate behaviour. If a Scandinavian negotiator makes person-oriented comments that even may be taken as personal attacks, his Scandinavian counterpart will consider him to be too much emotionally involved. This would signal loss of self-control and would consequently be interpreted as a sign of insufficient credibility.

The other special case is when the small boat is presented as part of the deal. Three Danish examples go into this category, but no Spanish nor Swedish examples. How come that Danish buyers in three cases include it in their first bid? Following this train of thought, it ought to be mentioned as well that in all our Swedish and Danish data, the small boat is part of the outcome, but in none of our Spanish data. The typical Scandinavian businessman would probably think that the small boat represents a value that naturally could be turned into an object of bartering in the negotiation. Since this position tends to minimize the conflict, as it moves the attention away from the most conflictive issue of the negotiation, we think it reflects another aspect of the consensus-oriented behaviour typical of Scandinavian as compared to Spanish negotiators. It would not come naturally to the typical Spanish businessman to include the small boat in the deal. The Spanish negotiator concentrates on the price of the big fishing boat, since it is the most conflictive issue of the exercise. It is in this field the fight must be fought.

## **6. Conclusion**

In the present article, in which special emphasis has been placed on the conflictive dimension of the negotiation activity, it has been analysed

how Spanish and Scandinavian negotiators construct their communicative strategies. The idea was to find out if it is the same cluster of strategical components that occur at various levels of the negotiation.

It has been argued that a prerequisite for successful conflict management is credibility, and that the concept of credibility is understood differently in Spain and Scandinavia. It was assumed that in Spanish negotiations credibility and respect is established through affiliation-seeking behaviour, in which important components are self-affirmation and emotional display. The Scandinavian negotiator, on the other hand, is concerned with establishing consensus, which is understood as a sign of stability and self-control. Such behaviour produces respect and credibility.

In our discourse-analytical approach we have chosen three different fields of study, the results of which all seemed to point in the direction of confirming our assumptions.

The Spanish affiliation-through-contrast behaviour was found to be reflected in the negotiators' argumentative patterns, where 'push' arguments, 'ad hominem' arguments and price-related arguments were strongly represented. The Spaniards also produced a larger overall number of arguments than the Scandinavians. This behaviour is also reflected in their price offers, which aim at maximizing contrasts.

The divergencies are finally reflected in the psychological distance between the utterance in which the first price bid was made and the immediately following response(s). For the Spaniards this distance was found to be relatively large.

The Scandinavians' argumentative patterns are characterized by their more frequent use of 'yield' arguments, 'ad rem' arguments and peripheral arguments. The distance between sellers' and buyers' opening price positions are smaller. This is also true of the distance between the utterance in which the opening price bid is made and the response to this bid. These features are all taken to be typical of Scandinavian consensus-oriented communicative behaviour.

### **Transcription conventions**

Emphatic stress: Capital letters

Inaudible speech: (...)

Intonation:

Continuative: ,  
 Falling: .  
 Rising: ?  
 Non-verbal signals: [...]  
 No pause between turns: =  
 Overlapping speech: [  
 Sound stretch in the preceding sound:

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