

## **Translating Cultures in International Mediation Networking Development**

In today's challenging times, 'conflict' has become a prominent issue in politics and in business. More often than not, parties involved in a conflict are from very different cultures. To achieve an agreeable resolution, **translating cultures** in conflict resolution is vital. The proposed activities are intended to provide an invaluable opportunity to bring together academics specialising in language, translation and intercultural studies, and professionals with profound experience and interest in cross-cultural and intercultural mediations. Professionals in The Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR), the leading independent mediation organisation, will discuss and debate with academics how research into languages, intercultural studies and translation studies can contribute effectively to the process of mediation in achieving desired outcomes. This project can enhance the understanding of 1) how language is used and phrased sensitively to manage interpersonal interactions in mediations, 2) the pivotal role of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity in cross-cultural and intercultural mediations and how such cultural awareness and sensitivity are represented or reflected in the use of language, for example, through a particular language pattern, and the ensuing impact on the mediation process, 3) when interpretation is used to facilitate intercultural mediations, whether such cultural awareness and sensitivity are represented in interpretation, for example, how face is managed in intercultural mediation and how it is represented through interpretation.

In the research on international dispute resolution, focus has concentrated on the political and legal differences across the countries (Arikan 2011, Keohane 2002, Goldstein 2001), dispute resolution as a decision-making process across cultures (Bercovitch and Jackson 2009, Murray 1999, Lind and Tyler 1988), or varied dispute resolution strategies in a framework of

interests, rights and power (Mckinney and Harmon 2004, Tinsley 2004, Ury et al.1988). Little work has been carried out to examine explicitly the use of language and interpretation in dispute resolution (Moeketsi 2002), and none has investigated the cultural, linguistic, and translational issues in, for example, Chinese-English contexts. In view of the above, the proposed project intends to fill this gap and will study how verbal and body language is used to manage interactions in international mediations, how cultural variables influence people's interactional behaviour towards achieving desired outcomes, and how the differences are addressed and represented in interpretation. Through a two-day event, academics with research specialities in language, translation and intercultural studies will collaborate with senior international mediators from CEDR who have proven professional experience in the field. This project endeavours to offer an ideal venue for promoting illuminating exchanges and debates among the research and the practising experts in identifying specific areas of research innovation.

### **Aims and objectives**

1 To investigate how languages (linguistic and non-linguistic) are exploited and used/phrased sensitively in relationship management by mediators to handle potentially difficult conflictive situations in cross-cultural/intercultural dispute resolutions. For example, are there any recurrent language patterns that mediators resort to in order to smooth interactions with parties in conflict, mitigating threats of communication breakdowns , and creating rapport for negotiation to proceed further. If the answer is positive, then what are those recurrent language patterns in, for example, Chinese and English, in what contexts are they applied , and how do they help to mitigate threats and build rapport? By the same token, issues can also be examined as to whether there are recurrent language patterns from conflicting parties

that deteriorate the process of mediations, and what the linguistic and non-linguistic triggers that provoke such use of destructive language patterns are.

2 To investigate cultural variables that influence people's use of language to achieve certain interactional goals and their impact on the process and the outcome of international mediations. For example, questions can be asked in terms of what the Chinese-British cultural variables influencing people's linguistic and non-linguistic relationship management strategies are, how the cultural differences are represented in interactions, and the impact of mediators' cultural sensitivity on the process of mediation. It is also important to examine the impact of conflicting parties' cultural awareness or cultural ignorance on the mediating process.

3 To investigate the representation in interpretation of cultural differences and differences in the use of language in relationship management when an interpreter is involved in the mediation. For example, it is necessary to look into whether various linguistic relationship management strategies in, for example, Chinese and British cultures are represented in the interpretation and the impact on the interactions between mediators and conflicting parties via the interpretation, between conflicting parties via the interpretation, and between the interpreter and the rest of the group.

### **Timetable of activities**

**There are two key stages** in this project (February 29<sup>th</sup> 2012 – August 29<sup>th</sup> 2012):

Stage 1 Research specialists in language, translation, sociolinguistics, intercultural studies, communication studies, forensic linguistics and behavioural science in psychology will meet in Nottingham to participate in a one day seminar to discuss and exchange ideas on relevant

researches that have been undertaken in the areas of cross-cultural and intercultural communication, language use in dispute resolution, and interpreting in legal contexts.

Stage 2 The project will culminate in its development in a two day event in August during which academics and professionals are brought together in Nottingham to exchange knowledge, experience and ideas on the issues specified with an aim to identify and develop collaborative and innovative interdisciplinary research work. Discussions will also be carried out on pursuing effective pathways to impact so as to identify the optimal channels for communicating findings to beneficiaries.

This event will take place at the University of Nottingham (University Park Campus) in the UK. The specific venue will be finalised and given from the 20th July 2012 onwards. Please watch this space.