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## “Ha! Relationships? I only shout at them!” Strategic management of discordant rapport in an African small business context

**Abstract:** This study demonstrates how and why interactants at a tyre fitment centre in Grahamstown, South Africa, manage discordant interpersonal relationships in strategic ways. Individuals in a post-apartheid small business respond to their social and economic context and exercise agency to their advantage in doing so. This study draws on linguistic ethnography (Rampton 2007) and the Rapport Management Framework (RMF, Spencer-Oatey 2000b, 2011), itself a development of politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1987). An initial RMF analysis ran into difficulties around interactions that at first glance appeared to be oriented toward Rapport Challenge and Neglect. Upon closer examination, it appeared that discordant rapport was being actively maintained in this business. This led us to address underdeveloped areas of RMF that were not responsive enough to describe naturally occurring small business interactions, and propose an Enhanced Rapport Management Framework to overcome its inadequacies. We conclude that people may deliberately maintain discordant relationships when it is in their best interests to do so. Thus, contrary to a common-sense belief that harmonious social relations are an intrinsic good, we found that promoting discordant social relations can be understood as a rational response to individuals’ social and economic contexts, particularly in conditions such as those in many postcolonial African societies.

**Keywords:** Linguistic ethnography, discordant, rapport management, agency, structure, small business discourse

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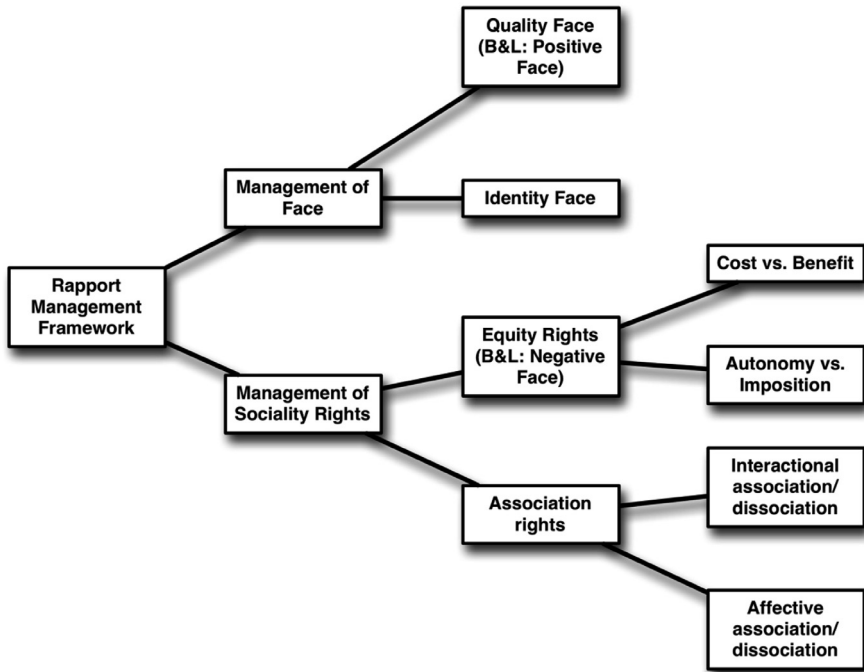
## 1 Structure, agency and politeness in the South African workplace

Post-apartheid South Africa is a complex society in which people from diverse economic, cultural and racial groups must interact and work together on a daily basis. In many ways, the relations between individuals from these groups are still affected by the legacy of apartheid racial domination. Critical postcolonial studies have tended to focus on the social structures, which have resisted transformation in African societies like South Africa. However, Rampton (2011) observes a shift in the study of multilingualism and language use away from a focus on social structures towards an emphasis on the agency of speakers to reshape their own identities within these structures. This post-structuralist approach does not view individual language use as a mere product of its social context, but instead emphasizes the agency that speakers express by manipulating the linguistic resources available to them (Dyer 2013). To recontextualize this in an African context entails studying the agency of individual Africans of all races and cultures to challenge and renegotiate existing structures of hegemony. In this article we investigate the ways in which individuals in a South African small business exercise agency by drawing on multilingual repertoires and intercultural politeness strategies for their benefit against the background of the business' hierarchical structure.

## 2 Changing perspectives on managing linguistic resources in business discourse

Spencer-Oatey (2000a) introduces the term *rappport management* to refer to any language use that is used to promote, maintain or threaten harmonious relationships. She therefore takes an important step away from Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1978, 1987), which focuses on polite behaviour, by including defensive and challenging behaviour as aspects of relational talk. However, we argue later in this article that Spencer-Oatey may not have gone far enough: her definition of *rappport management* should be refined to better reflect the discordant side of linguistic interaction.

The Rapport Management Framework (RMF, Spencer-Oatey 2000b) consists of, on the one hand, rapport orientations reflecting the intended function of an utterance and, on the other hand, two interrelated components: the management of face and the management of sociality rights. Both include a personal



**Figure 1:** Graphic representation of Spencer-Oatey's (2000b: 14–15) Rapport Management Framework.

or individual component as well as a social or interdependent component as displayed in Figure 1.

## 2.1 Management of face in RMF

Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) conceptualization of face, particularly negative face, places a great emphasis on the individual. Spencer-Oatey (2000b) develops this by drawing attention to the interpersonal or social side of face. She argues that there are two interrelated aspects of face: 1) quality face and 2) social identity face.<sup>1</sup> Quality face is associated with personal self-esteem and

<sup>1</sup> We are aware that Spencer-Oatey (2008) omitted this distinction between quality face and social identity face in the second edition of *Culturally speaking*. However, we find it an interesting and useful distinction to make and therefore use her more elaborated description of the framework.

relates to people's fundamental desire for "people to evaluate us positively in terms of our personal qualities" (Spencer-Oatey 2000b: 14). This aspect of face is similar to Brown and Levinson's conceptualization of positive face. On the other hand, social identity face is associated with the fundamental desire for "people to acknowledge and uphold our social identities or roles, e.g., as valued customer, close friend etc." (Spencer-Oatey 2000b: 14).

Spencer-Oatey (2000b) agrees with other scholars like Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987) that face is a universal phenomenon. However, while fundamental face concerns are universal, Spencer-Oatey argues that sensitivity to different aspects of face and preferred strategies to manage face concerns are subject to individual and contextual differences. Schnurr and Chan (2011) argue that some aspects of the framework are more readily applicable in certain socio-cultural contexts than others.<sup>2</sup> Their study of workplace interactions in Hong Kong and New Zealand shows that the distinction between quality and social identity face is more salient in Hong Kong than in New Zealand. They argue that these differences may occur as a result of cultural differences. In Hong Kong there is a strong emphasis on the maintenance of hierarchical relationships and on adhering to role expectations, whereas in New Zealand power differentials are minimized and role expectations less predetermined. Similarly, the differences in rapport management style we observed in South Africa appear to be best accounted for by considering the result of organizational structure and wider sociocultural contexts.

## 2.2 Management of sociality rights in RMF

Sociality rights entail "the personal and social entitlements that individuals claim as part of their professional role or status in interactions with others" (Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2007: 41–42). Sociality rights involve two interrelated aspects: 1) equity rights and 2) association rights (Campbell et al. 2003). Equity rights relate to our "fundamental belief that we are entitled to personal consideration from others, so that we are treated fairly: that we are not unduly imposed upon, that we are not unfairly ordered about, and we are not taken advantage of or exploited" (Spencer-Oatey 2000b: 14). Equity rights, in turn, consist of two components. First, the notion of cost-benefit concerns the extent

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<sup>2</sup> Schnurr and Chan's are part of the Victoria University of Wellington's Language in the Workplace Project ([www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/lwp](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/lwp)). This project developed a database of spoken interaction in New Zealand workplaces and researches topics, such as power, humour, gender, and small talk.

to which an individual is disadvantaged or exploited and suggests that the disadvantage brought about by an utterance should be balanced with the benefits it will achieve. Second, autonomy-imposition concerns the extent to which an individual is imposed upon.

Social entitlements also entail association rights, which concern the “fundamental belief that we are entitled to an association with others that is in keeping with the type of relationship that we have with them” (Spencer-Oatey 2000b: 14–15). The notion of association rights also has two components. First, people expect an appropriate amount of conversational interaction with others, which is what Spencer-Oatey calls interactional association-dissociation. What is considered an appropriate amount depends on the sociocultural context, the existing relationships and personal preference. Second, affective association-dissociation refers to the extent to which people share feelings, interest and concerns. When sociality rights are threatened, an individual’s sense of personal or social entitlement is infringed upon. For example, an individual’s equity rights are threatened when (s)he is forced to do something that (s)he cannot be expected to do (Spencer-Oatey 2000b). Similarly, affective disassociation rights are threatened when a colleague is asking questions that are too personal for one’s liking.

## 2.3 Rapport orientations and strategies

Spencer-Oatey (2000b) distinguishes four rapport orientations that speakers can hold and which can change during the course of an interaction. An individual can hold a rapport-enhancement orientation (i.e., a desire to strengthen harmonious relationships between the interlocutors) or a rapport-maintenance orientation (i.e., a desire to maintain harmonious relations). In addition, an individual can also hold a rapport-neglect orientation (i.e., a lack of interest in maintaining relations) or a rapport-challenge orientation (i.e., a desire to challenge existing harmonious relations).

With the exception of García (2009) and Esbensen (2009), scholars tend not to use the rapport orientations in their analysis of rapport management. Instead, there is a tendency to focus on the types of strategies they observe and especially strategies that centre on the harmonious communication necessary to achieve business goals. Some of the strategies discussed in rapport management literature are: the claiming of common ground or emphasizing similarities in values and views (Hernández López 2008; Placencia 2004), the use of expletives as solidarity markers (Esbensen 2009; Daly et al. 2004), honorifics and forms of address (Collier 2010; Paramasivam 2011), humour (Schnurr

and Chan 2011). These strategies are predominantly intended to either enhance or maintain harmonious rapport and this signals a relative lack of attention to rapport strategies that actively promote discordant relationships. This article seeks to fill that gap.<sup>3</sup>

### 3 Linguistic ethnography as methodology

Businesses are a complex and multi-layered context for situated linguistic practices and the field of business discourse is characterized by multi-method approaches that allow for a rich and comprehensive understanding (Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2007). In addition to RMF, we draw on the methods of linguistic ethnography in order to fully grasp the complexities of the management of interpersonal relationships and the strategic uses of linguistic repertoires in multilingual small businesses.

#### 3.1 Linguistic ethnography

Linguistic ethnography attempts to combine ethnographically explored contexts with fine-grained linguistic analysis of spoken data (Rampton 2007). Methodologically, linguistic ethnography is characterized by traditional ethnographic tools, such as participant observation and interviews. Theoretically, it positions itself alongside anthropological traditions of language studies, primarily linguistic anthropology and Hymes' work on the ethnography of communication (Creese 2008).

Rapport management and linguistic ethnography form a useful combination as they both assert a focus on language use in context. The RMF explores the linguistic choices speakers make. These choices are informed by the context in which they are embedded, which can be ethnographically explored. This ethnographic understanding can in turn be informed by the fine-grained linguistic analysis of the situated linguistic practices and so both approaches inform each other.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that the active promotion of discordant relationships is qualitatively distinct from neglect as a rapport management orientation: the former are active while the latter is passive; the former attempts to promote a discordant relationship while the latter is indifferent to the quality of relationship.

## 3.2 Data collection

The data for this article was obtained during four weeks of ethnographic fieldwork at Frontier Motors by Sanne Lauriks (see participant profile on the next page). Data were recorded using written field notes, a reflective journal, audio recordings, and interviews. Field notes served as a material memory (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 35) that documented detailed observations of events, behaviours and physical settings. Audio recordings of naturally occurring workplace talk provided an accurate record of events and behaviours in the workplace (LeCompte and Schensul 1999; Marra 2008). Photographs and collected documents helped create a thick description of the workplace environment and structure. Finally, semi-structured interviews and informal and unplanned conversations supplemented the data obtained through participant observation. Eliciting ‘insiders’ points of view is an integral part of linguistic ethnography (Maybin and Tusting 2011) and essential for the interpretive process (Codó 2008).

### **Participant profile: Sanne (fieldworker)**

Sanne is a female, Dutch, 26-year-old, white, linguistics graduate. Her first language is Dutch. She is also fluent in English, which she learned at school from a young age and later acquired through friends and living abroad. She has a good understanding of Afrikaans, and speaks a few words of isiXhosa, German and Spanish.<sup>4</sup>

The names of the business and participants have all been replaced with pseudonyms (except for the name of the fieldworker) and their information was treated with the utmost confidentiality. We obtained informed consent from all employees at the beginning of the fieldwork. We also put up a notice at the counter stating that recordings were being made for a research project and added our contact details so that customers could address any further queries to us if they so desired.

## 3.3 Context of study: Grahamstown

The data for this study was collected from two small businesses, embedded in two different sociocultural contexts on two different continents, although we

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of her role as legitimate peripheral participant and how she gained access into a predominantly male-dominated workplace, see Lauriks (2014).

focus exclusively on only one of these in this article: Frontier Motors, a car tyre and exhaust service centre in Grahamstown, South Africa.

Three languages are predominantly spoken in Grahamstown, a city in South Africa's Eastern Cape province: English, Afrikaans and Xhosa. They are involved in a stable form of diglossia or triglossia (Ferguson 1959, Fishman 1971), reflecting the wider linguistic ecology of the Eastern Cape. Grahamstown and the surrounding rural areas make up the Makana Municipality, which has a population of 80 390 residents (Statistics South Africa 2011). Xhosa (71,5 %) is the largest first language spoken in the Makana Municipality, followed by Afrikaans (14,85 %) and English (10,47 %) (Statistics South Africa 2011, cited in Frith 2011). Education is Grahamstown's largest industry and it is also home to the provincial High Court.

Although Xhosa is the largest first language, it is mainly used in informal and blue-collar domains and has covert prestige as a sign of in-group solidarity. English, on the other hand, is used in a wide range of functions in formal domains (e.g., business and education) and carries more overt prestige. Afrikaans is commonly spoken among blue-collar workers and also used in formal domains (e.g., there are a few Afrikaans schools in Grahamstown), but to a lesser extent than English. This contemporary linguistic hierarchy of languages and the domains in which they are used date back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when the town was founded (Marshall 2008; Irvine 2012). Grahamstown is affected by mobility and globalization, thanks to the presence of immigrants from other African countries, and international students and academics attracted to the city's many schools and university. Despite this, like many South African towns, Grahamstown is still a city divided by class and race.

### 3.4 Frontier Motors

Frontier Motors is a family business run by a father (manager) and son (owner), established in 1971. There is no official language policy, but the owner informed us that the business language is English. Jenny, the owner's sister, works in the office and assured us that Frontier Motors would be a disappointing research site since English is the only language ever spoken. Yet, outside her office an employee was heard greeting a customer in Xhosa and from the outside area came a loud discussion between two employees in Afrikaans (Field notes 26/07/2012). Jenny's misconception was an early indicator of the anglo-centric focus of Frontier Motors' top management, which became more apparent during the analysis. Of the sixteen employees at Frontier Motors, eight are first language Xhosa speakers, five speak English as a first language (including



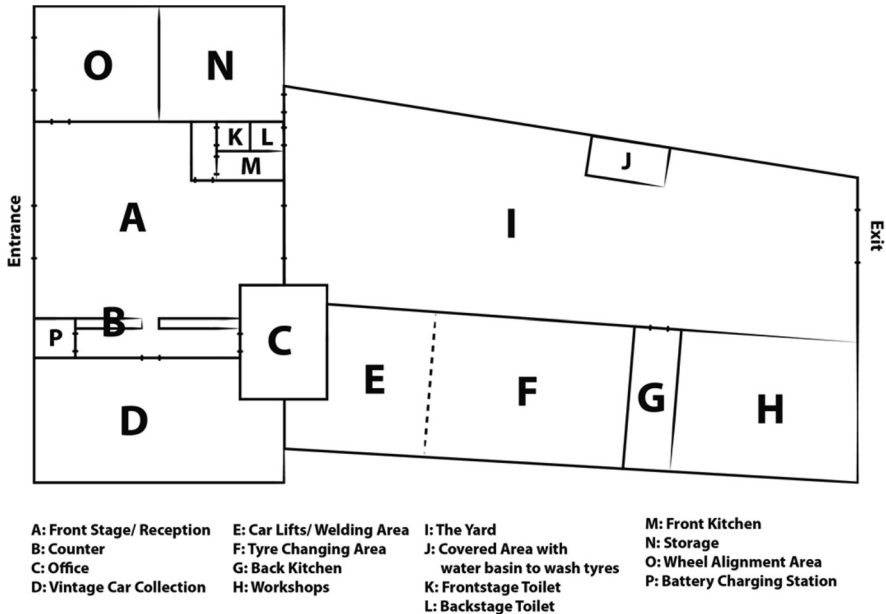


Figure 2: Layout of Frontier Motors.

the owner and manager), two are first-language Afrikaans speakers and one speaks Afrikaans and Tswana as his first languages.

The business can be divided into a frontstage and a backstage (Goffman 1959). The frontstage is the main area in which customer-employee interactions take place and the backstage refers to the areas characterized by colleague-to-colleague interactions. Figure 2 shows the physical layout of Frontier Motors. Customers enter the shop either on foot or by car in area (A), where they are welcomed by employees at the counter, indicated in Figure 2 as (B).

This is the core of the Frontier Motors frontstage. Area (I) is the outside yard (see Figure 3), which can function as both a front- and a backstage. There is a one-way flow of cars arriving in area (A) and exiting through the outside area (I). When customers enter area (I) and interact with employees they transform this space into a frontstage. The division between the frontstage and backstage at Frontier Motors is clearly defined by physical boundaries: a high counter; walls and compartments as well as differences in colour and style of paving. There are significant differences in languages used between these different areas of the front- and backstage.

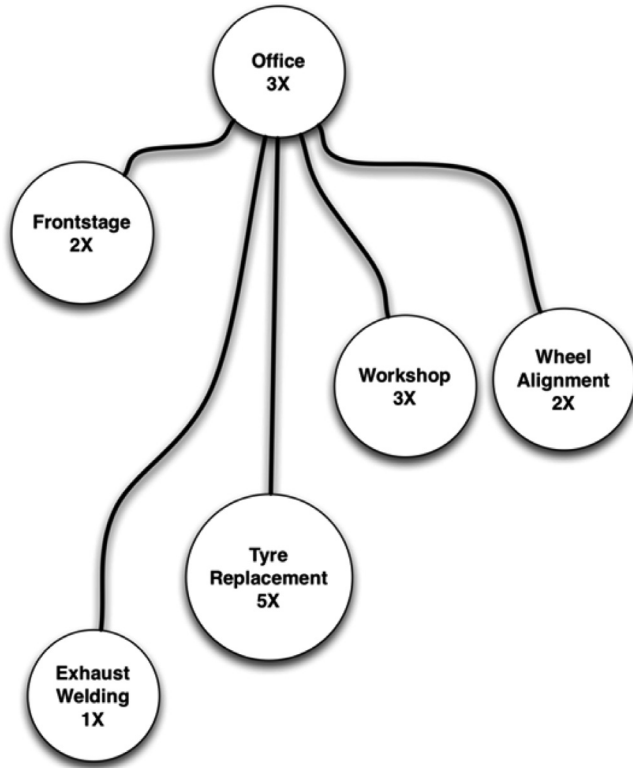


Figure 3: The yard as seen from the frontstage/reception area.

### 3.5 The workplace as a community of practice

Frontier Motors constitutes a distinct community of practice, i.e., it fulfils the three criteria set out by Wenger (1998): there is regular mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and distinct ways of speaking have developed that form a shared repertoire. It is characterized by a rigid, hierarchical power structure with centralized power that resides with the owner, Gareth, who fulfils the role of a strong, paternalistic leader. Gareth's eighteen employees all have fixed role-expectations and their role-relationships are to a large extent predetermined. They work in separate units, as shown in Figure 4, each with one employee as the head of the unit.

Within the general community of practice consisting of all Frontier Motors employees, we identified five auxiliary communities of practice that developed in particular areas centering on particular activities. For instance, one community of practice is formed by the members of the tyre-changing unit, whose activities surround the tyre-changing machine (F on Figure 2). They have developed their own norms and ways of speaking. Their core members are the five members of the tyre-changing unit, with the head of this unit as their centre of



**Figure 4:** Frontier Motors' organizational structure according to activities.

authority. They also have three peripheral members who are first-language Xhosa speakers and have lunch in the same place but are involved in different types of work. Two of them are also peripheral members of other communities of practice. The wheel alignment crew (at O on Figure 2) consists of two members, one Afrikaans and one Xhosa speaker, who have developed a routine that is based on shared knowledge and therefore requires a minimal amount of interaction.

Another community of practice has formed in the workshop (H), with one Xhosa-speaking and one Afrikaans-speaking mechanic and the English-speaking head of the unit. A fourth community has developed between the two frontstage employees in area B, who deal with customers and share many experiences and inside jokes which each other. One of them is a white man whose first language is English and the other is a coloured man who speaks Afrikaans and

Tswana as his first languages.<sup>5</sup> These auxiliary communities of practice all adhere to the norms that emanate from the office. The owner, his sister and their father, who are all first-language English speakers, form a secluded community of practice in the office.

Frontier Motors' customers are predominantly English, Afrikaans or Xhosa first-language speakers. Most of them are regular customers from all over Grahamstown (e.g., students, academics, municipality workers) or from nearby farms. The few new customers that come to Frontier Motors are often non-locals, for example people driving through Grahamstown or parents dropping their children off at one of the many boarding schools or the university.

## 4 Rapport management in a hierarchical workplace

Rapport strategies are a means for speakers to accomplish their personal and interactional goals and these goals are reflected in the speakers' rapport orientation. They are a means by which individuals can exercise agency and negotiate, challenge or subvert the social structures in which they find themselves. However, a large subset of our data appeared to resist interpretation purely in terms of rapport orientations. In this section we argue that Spencer-Oatey's (2000b) RMF is not responsive enough to accommodate some of the more complex rapport management practices in small business discourse and propose changes that are warranted by the data. In particular, the framework does not accommodate the possibility that in certain social structures, it may be profitable for individuals to maintain discordant relations with each other.

This section, therefore, first exemplifies a context where the RMF succeeds in shedding light on communicative choices. The second part of this section explores four contexts where the data warrant new theoretical orientations; it identifies underdeveloped areas in the RMF (Spencer-Oatey 2000b; 2008) and proposes an Enhanced Rapport Management Framework (ERMF) that is better equipped to describe interaction in small businesses, like Frontier Motors.

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<sup>5</sup> The term *coloured* is a problematic South African apartheid-era term that denotes people of mixed descent (usually European, African, Malay and Khoisan). It is still recognized and used in the public domain and South African legislation and, to the extent that people self-identify as coloured or *kleurling*, it is a locus of community and identity formation. We use the term here, and other 'racial' labels, such as black and white, where necessary because staff is often divided among racial lines.

## 4.1 Where RMF succeeds

Most of the interactions that could be described adequately using RMF involved rapport enhancement orientations. An example of a salient strategy in Frontier Motors is accommodation to the interlocutor's L1, a solidarity strategy that enhances the hearer's social identity face (i.e., relating to one's identity as a group member). One frontstage employee, Denzel, always tried to switch to the customer's language of choice, "so they feel more comfortable around you" (interview 30/11/2012). Other observed strategies served a rapport maintenance orientation, which included the use of appropriate terms of address and politeness markers. For example, Denzel would address an older, English-speaking woman as *ma'am*. Not adhering to the normative use of politeness markers and honorifics would be considered rude and potentially threatens the interlocutor's equity rights (i.e., their entitlement to considerate treatment). However, most interesting for the purpose of this article are interactions in which discordant relationships are managed, and so this section explores a particular instance where a rapport challenge orientation was clearly identifiable in terms of the RMF.

### **Participant profile 1: Denzel**

Denzel is a 38-year-old coloured man who works six days a week in the frontstage and is an energetic and hard-working employee. He speaks fluent Afrikaans (L1), Tswana (L1), Xhosa and English. His multilingual repertoire was the main reason he was hired for service encounters in the frontstage of the shop. Jenny, the owner's sister, wrongly assumes that customers only ever speak English in the shop and that Denzel's multilingual competence is therefore no real asset to the business.

A person holding a rapport challenge orientation aims to threaten or "impair the harmony of the relationship" (Spencer-Oatey 2000b: 30). Many strategies that can be used to enhance rapport can also be employed to challenge rapport. For example, humour has the ability to create solidarity and in-groups, but the same features can be used to negotiate out-groups and increase distance from the interlocutor (Rogerson-Revell 2007). Similarly, small talk can enhance rapport by attending to a person's association rights, but it can also serve a rapport challenge orientation. For instance, a subordinate initiating small talk with his/her superior can signal a challenge, since initiating small talk is often seen to be the role of a superior in a superior-subordinate relationship (Coupland 2000; Holmes and Stubbe 2003).

The following extract exemplifies how small talk can be used to challenge an existing power structure. The interaction involves two main participants. Gareth is the owner of the business and Velile is head of the tyre-changing unit. There are also two bystanders: Sandile and the fieldworker. As head of the tyre-changing unit, Velile fulfils a more powerful position than Sandile. However, the distance between Sandile and Velile is significantly smaller than the distance between Velile and Gareth.

### Participant profile 2: Gareth

Gareth is the white, English (L1) speaking, middle-aged owner of Frontier Motors. He speaks some Afrikaans, which he learned at school, and some Xhosa, which he acquired at work and from his father. Gareth is a busy man who often speaks in a forceful and direct manner.

### Participant profile 3: Velile

Velile is 59 years old and the head of the tyre-changing unit. He is what Gareth calls ‘a second-generation employee’. His father used to work in the same shop and Velile started when he was very young, long before the current owners bought the business in 2004. Velile’s first language is Xhosa and he is fluent in English and Afrikaans. He is an open and sociable man, but can also be very serious and at times quite cynical.

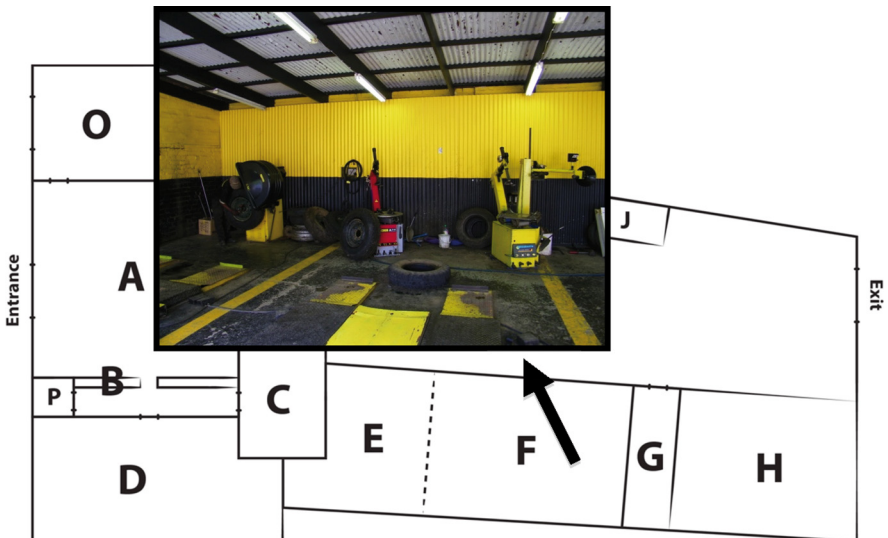


Figure 5: Tyre-changing area in Frontier Motors backstage.

#### Participant profile 4: Sandile

Sandile works in the tyre-changing unit. He is 58 years old and speaks Xhosa (L1), English and a little Afrikaans. He smiles a lot, is quiet and works hard. He has been working in the shop for 30 years, long before the current owners bought the business.

In (1), Velile displays a challenge orientation towards a superior, which is not common at Frontier Motors. The interaction takes place in the backstage (see Figure 5). It is a Saturday morning and Gareth is supposed to have the day off, but he and his father drive by several times a day to check up on their staff. Velile, Sandile and the fieldworker are standing near the wheel-balancing machine when Gareth drives by on his way to the exit without saying goodbye to anyone.

(1) (Field notes 24 November 2012)

1. Velile: *BYE*
2. Gareth: *BYE KWEDINI* (little boy)
3. Velile: *Bye kwedini my gat* (little boy my arse) ((Only audible to fieldworker and Sandile))

The exchange shows an interesting interactional pattern in which each utterance includes the previous with the addition of new information in a new language, as displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Interactional pattern in (1).

	English	Xhosa	Afrikaans
1	Bye		
2	Bye	kwedini	
3	Bye	kwedini	my gat

In the powerful position of owner, it seems acceptable for Gareth to drive away without greeting. It in fact adheres to the power distance between him and his employees. Yet, intentionally or not, Gareth has threatened Velile's interactional association rights, i.e., his sense of entitlement to an appropriate amount of interaction. This becomes apparent in Velile's response in line 1 where he chooses to initiate a small talk sequence. Since small talk is generally initiated by the more powerful speaker (Coupland 2000) this signals a rapport challenge orientation towards his boss. With his *bye*, Velile shows what he perceives to

be normative interactional behaviour. This potentially threatens Gareth's social identity face since it challenges Gareth's position as a superior, who should be at liberty to drive away without saying goodbye.

In line 2, Gareth replies in English, followed by an interesting choice of the listener's first language. The word *kwedini* is used in Xhosa to address young boys. Xhosa culture has an elaborate and highly valued initiation ritual in which boys are introduced to manhood, and this demonstrates the extremely high value placed on manhood in this society. Thus, to call a Xhosa man a boy is a serious insult. However, it is possible that Gareth is unaware of this and means *kwedini* as a term of endearment. Both the choice of Xhosa and the term of endearment could be used as quality face-enhancing strategies. A more likely reading of this interaction (and the one adopted by Velile) is that Gareth does not accept the challenge posed by Velile's *bye* and is using the denigrating *kwedini* to impose the existing power structure on their relationship. It is an interesting use of Velile's first language to put him back into place. In terms of rapport management, this threatens Velile's honour and sense of self-esteem (i.e., quality face). Moreover, the insult is made in front of Sandile (Velile's subordinate) and the fieldworker and therefore also threatens Velile's social identity or role as group leader (i.e., social identity face).

In line 3, Velile's rejection of Gareth's insult draws on three different languages. He uses his third language, Afrikaans, to reject the positioning in line 2. *My gat* (my arse) is a well-known expression and the code-switch is likely used for emphasis. The rejection is not loud enough for Gareth to hear, which signals that Velile chooses to reject the insult in line (2) but at the same time accepts that his challenge is constrained by the power relations between the two. Voicing his rejection is thus aimed at saving his own face in front of the bystanders.

Velile's challenge is small but significant within the context of a business characterized by a rigid hierarchical power structure. It exemplifies how individual agency is used to challenge structural power relationships. There are two influential factors that seem to have licensed this particular challenge. Firstly, this interaction took place three weeks into the fieldwork and during this time Velile spoke multiple times about his dissatisfaction with the working conditions at Frontier Motors. This possibly led to his decision to express some of his frustrations and take a stance, even though it is a minor challenge conveyed within relatively safe boundaries. Apart from the presence of the fieldworker, the choice to challenge a superior and the linguistic choices made by both participants also seem influenced by the geographical space in which the interaction took place. The tyre-changing area is Velile's territory where he as head of the unit is an established figure of authority. The participant's position



combined with the specific setting creates a relatively safe space for him to challenge his superior. It is unlikely that Sandile would ever display a challenge orientation towards Gareth or that Velile would challenge Gareth in the frontstage of the business. In addition, Gareth also adheres to the space by choosing Xhosa to reposition his subordinate. Generally, a participant may switch to English, as the language of upper management, to upscale his or her message to a more authoritative level, but it seems that Gareth recognizes that Xhosa is the local authoritative code as well as Velile's own language and uses this to give his insult extra force. This is also evidence that Gareth's behaviour is not simply crude and forceful, but that he shows a (tacit) understanding of the subtleties involved in his linguistic choices, which suggests that he is actually a strategic manager of rapport.

Challenging strategies were a salient characteristic of the rapport management in Frontier Motors, but they also posed the greatest challenge to analyze within the RMF. Situations of conflict provide interesting communicative events and show the complexities of rapport management. Here, aspects of the RMF fall short in explaining the nuances involved in more complex small business discourse, as the following sections demonstrate.

## 4.2 Where RMF fails: Problems with the orientations

We applied Spencer-Oatey's theory to naturally occurring small business interactions and encountered some friction. Some of the interactions were difficult to identify as belonging to one of the four rapport orientations. Other interactions seemed to be limited in their interpretation by categorization into the orientations. An analysis of the problematic data resulted in the identification of four underdeveloped areas of RMF, which we aim to address and strengthen in order to provide an adequate analysis of the small business discourse data in this study.<sup>6</sup> The first underdeveloped aspect is Spencer-Oatey's (2000b) definition of rapport. The second problem is epistemological in nature, namely that a researcher cannot determine speakers' intentions with any certainty. The third difficulty is the assumption that orientations are managed in a consecutive order and the last is that the model focuses on dyads and thus is ill-equipped

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<sup>6</sup> We note that some of these problems have been referred to by Spencer-Oatey (2000b; 2002; 2005) in passing in her discussion of other aspects of rapport management. Yet, they are not properly theorized in her description of the rapport orientations. Spencer-Oatey's (2000b: 29; 2008: 31) description of the orientations is not very extensive (some 700 words) and herein lies most of the difficulties with the concept.

to handle multi-party conversations. Our aim in this section is not to criticize Rapport Management Theory as a whole, but to address underdeveloped or non-explicit areas of the RMF, which, in light of our data, warrant development. In 4.3 we propose an Enhanced Rapport Management Framework that is adequately equipped to describe complex, small business interactions.

#### 4.2.1 Defining rapport harmoniously

Brown and Levinson's (1978; 1987) definition of politeness emphasizes the harmonious aspect of social relations. Spencer-Oatey (2000a: 3) criticizes this and argues that speakers "sometimes attack rather than support their interlocutors". She includes this aspect in her definition of rapport management: "the use of language to promote, maintain or threaten *harmonious* [our italics] social relations" (Spencer-Oatey 2000a: 3). This definition takes a necessary step away from traditional politeness theory by including challenging behaviour, but it still suggests that only harmonious relationships can be promoted, maintained or threatened. Yet, the data suggest that one can promote, maintain or threaten both harmonious and *discordant* relationships. This section aims to show that it is problematic to see rapport as the equivalent of a harmonious relationship and that rapport should rather be seen as the quality of a relationship (i.e., either harmonious or discordant). The following extract shows how Gareth actively manages a discordant relationship.

(2) (Field notes 20 November 2012)

Melityala and Sisonke are driving a car towards wheel alignment when the alarm goes off. They are trying to turn the alarm off when Gareth comes out of his office, shaking his head and shouting that there "is only a button right in the middle that you guys will never find" and that it is only the same in every car of that make. They find the button and drive away.

#### **Participant profile 5: Melityala**

Melityala is in his 60s and works in the wheel alignment area for six days a week. He has a rich repertoire including nine languages (all of which he learned growing up on a farm in the northern part of South Africa): Xhosa (L1), English, Sotho, Tswana, Pedi, Tsonga, Zulu and Fanakalo. Melityala is an outgoing and very sociable man. Ruth, the mother of the owner, claims that some customers find him too forward.

Regardless of Gareth's rapport orientation, his utterance poses a threat to the employees' quality face (i.e., the desire to be positively evaluated in terms of one's competence and abilities). The audience of customers further intensifies this potential damage to their quality face. If we define rapport as a harmonious relationship, Gareth's behaviour can either be interpreted as challenging or neglect. It would be hard to distinguish whether he simply does not care about the relationship with his employees (indicating a rapport neglect orientation) or whether he deliberately chooses to harm a harmonious relationship (a rapport challenge orientation). Ethnographic data can help to infer the speaker's intentions, and in this case it reveals that this event does not stand on its own, as illustrated by the following two extracts. From the data emerges a pattern of a forceful and discordant interaction style by Gareth towards some of his employees.

- (3) (Field notes 20 November 2012)

Them bani is standing in the frontstage and has just brought down four tyres. Gareth asks Them bani in a sarcastic tone how he expects to fit four tyres on five rims.

#### **Participant profile 6: Them bani**

Them bani is 63 years old and works in the tyre-changing unit. He speaks Xhosa (L1), English and Afrikaans. He started working here before the current owners took over in 2004. He is a quiet man who both mutters and laughs a lot.

- (4) (Interview 19 November 2012)

An employee from the backstage said that the former owners were very approachable. If you had a problem with your house or anything they would help you out in any way they could. Now, if you need to get something fixed in your house Gareth will tell you that he's not a bank.

What these examples show is that Gareth's relationship with some of his employees, including Melityala, Sisonke and Them bani, is *typically* discordant. Thus, in (1–4), Gareth is not neglecting or challenging a *harmonious* relationship, because there was no harmonious relationship to start with. Instead, his style can be seen as a deliberate strategy to uphold and reinforce a discordant relationship with some of his employees. He even identified this strategy himself when the fieldworker first met him. After she had briefly explained that she wanted to look at relationships within the business, he started laughing and said: "Ha! Relationships? I only shout at them!" (Field notes 26/07/2012).

Thus, our data suggest that speakers can also actively promote, maintain or threaten *discordant* relationships. When co-workers are in a discordant relationship, they may choose to uphold this discordant relation, thus holding a rapport maintenance orientation. Accordingly, rapport should not be understood as a harmonious relationship but rather as the quality of a relationship. Therefore, we suggest the following redefinition of rapport:

**Rapport** is the quality of a relationship and ranges on a continuum from harmonious to discordant.

Traditionally, rapport is seen as a positive term, but our data suggests that it actually involves a range of behaviours, ranging from positive to negative, each leading to different ways of managing rapport. Understanding rapport as the quality of a relationship, rather than a harmonious relationship entails a reconceptualization of both rapport and rapport management. For example, a speaker can enhance a harmonious relationship and improve it, but a speaker can also enhance a discordant relationship, thereby making it more discordant. Similarly, a speaker can either maintain a harmonious or a discordant relationship, ensuring that the quality of the relationship does not change. When a speaker challenges a harmonious relationship it results in a more discordant relationship and, vice versa, when a discordant relationship is challenged the relationship becomes more harmonious. Lastly, neglecting a harmonious relationship will initially make it less harmonious; neglecting a discordant relationship can make it less discordant, but if a speaker neglects a relationship long enough it will converge to null. An important consequence of this reconceptualization of rapport is that any analysis of a rapport management act should begin by establishing the existing relationship between the participants. Ethnographically obtained information plays a valuable role in this regard.

In addition to redefining rapport as the quality of a relationship, we want to draw attention to the strong connection between the management of rapport and the management of power role-relationships. Power plays a role in most rapport management research, but it is not often foregrounded (e.g., Campbell and Davis 2006; García 2009; Paramasivam 2011), with the exception of Campbell et al. (2003) and Schnurr and Chan (2011), who specifically examined rapport management in asymmetrical relationships. Yet, from our specific data set, a strong connection emerges between the management of rapport and power negotiations and positioning. The following examples illustrate how power emerges as a central feature of rapport management in both workplaces.

A first example is the use of Xhosa in the tyre changing area in the Frontier Motors backstage. Xhosa is the first language of the members of the tyre-chang-

ing unit. In the fieldworker's presence, the employees only switched to English when they addressed her directly. The rest of the time they spoke in Xhosa, which effectively positioned her as an outsider. Interestingly, when the owner, Gareth, or the manager, Neil, entered this space, he would start speaking in English to the employees and then switch to Xhosa to repeat his instructions (Field notes 01/11/2012). Typically, the use of the interlocutor's first language signals an accommodation strategy, which has the potential to reduce power distance and enhance a harmonious relationship. However, this does not explain why the owner or manager would start off in English. Instead, Gareth and Neil's choice of English in this area establishes a sense of authority and by repeating their instructions in Xhosa they seem to imply that the hearer might not have understood them in English. The switch is thus patronizing and the use of Xhosa in this situation can be seen as not only a display of their multilingual repertoire but also as a sign of control. It functions as a sign of linguistic power or linguistic superiority, a reminder that the employees cannot even subvert the power relations of the business by speaking among themselves in their own language, because Gareth and Neil understand that language.

Conversely, frontstage employee Denzel begins speaking in Xhosa and switches to English in the same area. The following extract shows Denzel giving instructions to Them bani in Xhosa and then switching to English to confirm that the instructions are understood.

(5) (Field notes 05 November 2012)

Denzel is giving Them bani instructions in Xhosa about a customer's car. He finishes off in English: "understand?" Denzel checks if the information is received and understood in English, while Gareth and Neil often give instructions in English and then seek confirmation in Xhosa.

By giving his colleague instructions, Denzel is already positioning himself in a higher power position than Them bani. Doing so in Xhosa accommodates to the dominant language of the work station and is thus solidarity building. This is offset by the use of English. English is the language of the frontstage of the business and the language spoken by those in power (i.e., the owner and top management). Denzel's switch to English can thus be seen as an upscaling of his message to a higher, more authoritative scale. This is, similar to the code-switching by Gareth, an example of how language choice is used to negotiate power relationships and to reinforce the hierarchy in the tyre-changing area.

A second example of how rapport management entails power negotiations at Frontier Motors is found in (1), discussed above. This short interaction is a

prime example of the (constrained) individual agency to negotiate power relationships in an otherwise rigid hierarchical structure. Velile challenges the existing power relations between him and his superior. Gareth rejects this challenge and reinforces the power hierarchy of the business by positioning Velile as a *kwedini*. Velile in turn refuses this positioning, but his refusal is merely an attempt to save his own face in front of the bystanders. By not voicing his rejection loudly enough for Gareth to hear, Velile does seem to accept that his challenge is constrained by the power relationship between him and his superior.

To conclude, we have redefined *rapport* to mean the quality of a relationship rather than Spencer-Oatey's (2000b) definition of a harmonious relationship. In addition, we found that *rapport* management appeared to be an instrument by which power positions and role-relationships were managed in our data set. This does not necessarily entail that the same is true for other small business, but it does imply that the influence of power and distance should not be underestimated in a theory of *rapport* management.

#### 4.2.2 Epistemological concerns about speaker intentionality

A second problem we encountered when applying the notion of *rapport* orientations, is the notion's reliance on speaker intentions. The only distinction between a *rapport* challenging and a *rapport* neglect orientation is the intention of the speaker. Both orientations negatively affect harmonious *rapport*, but a challenging orientation entails the desire to alter the quality of *rapport*, while neglect is a mere lack of interest in *rapport*. The problem here is that such intentions cannot be determined with any certainty, which is a generally recognized issue in politeness theory and pragmatics in general (Haugh and Jaszczolt 2012). Spencer-Oatey alludes to this issue in her introduction to the orientations:

Needless to say, people's *rapport* orientations are not available for open inspection. Unless people talk about them explicitly, they can only be inferred from their choice of *rapport*-management strategies. Even so, it may still be difficult to distinguish clearly one orientation from another. Nevertheless, the notion of interpersonal intent is an important issue in real-life interaction, and for that reason, I believe it needs to be included in any description of relational management. (Spencer-Oatey 2000b: 31)

To illustrate, the following extract describes an interaction between a customer and Richard, whose direct and short interactional behaviour could signal various *rapport* orientations.

(6) (Field notes 20 November 2012)

A customer (young black man) drives in. Richard is busy on the computer and he takes his time before asking the customer how he can help him. The customer points out a strange noise coming from his car. Richard, still standing behind the counter, tells him in a short, direct manner to drive his car to the back. The customer does so, but Richard does not follow him and so the customer gets out of his car, walks back in and asks Richard where he should go. All Richard says is “first one on the right” and then continues to stare at his computer.

### **Participant profile 7: Richard**

Richard works in the frontstage of the shop for five to six days a week. He is a 39-year-old white, English-speaking man. Besides English he speaks a little Afrikaans and a few words of Xhosa. He worked for the previous owners and, since 2004, for the current owners. He sees himself as middle management, but in practice his influence does not reach beyond the frontstage of the business (fieldnotes 15/11/2012).

Regardless of his intentions, Richard’s actions pose a considerable threat to the customer’s quality face (by not acknowledging him) and equity rights (by making him wait and thus imposing on the customer’s time). Richard’s utterance *first one on the right* conveys a minimal amount of information, is very informal due to its shortness and the omission of a subject or verb and is consequently a flout of the Gricean maxim of Quantity.

If the customer was a regular and all the information that he required was conveyed in that short utterance, then the level of indirectness and informality might have signalled a solidarity strategy, as Richard would have relied on some shared knowledge with the customer. However, the customer does not appear to be a regular and seems uncertain about what is expected of him, so it is hard to interpret this as an attempt to enhance harmonious rapport levels. It is more difficult to determine whether Richard holds a rapport challenging or a rapport neglect orientation towards the customer. One possible interpretation is that Richard purposefully refrains from any mitigating strategies and opts for a bald-on-record strategy to challenge his rapport with the customer. Another possibility is that Richard has little time to help the customer because he is busy with something and that he chooses to focus on the task rather than the relationship without having the intention to damage the rapport.

The bottom line is that there is no certain way of knowing. Yet, the concept of speaker’s intention is crucial in understanding human behaviour (Haugh and Jaszczolt 2012) and rapport orientations are an essential factor of rapport

management. However, explicitly asking participants about his or her intentions may not provide an accurate account. Despite this, we can attempt to infer intentions by obtaining and analyzing ethnographic data.

Since rapport orientations presume knowledge of the intentions of the speaker, this is problematic when applying the concept of rapport orientations as an analytical tool. We need to find appropriate ways of inferring intentions. One way of doing this is by considering this in line with Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, which postulates that speakers' contributions are always conversationally cooperative. Grice's Cooperative Principle is a useful stipulation of speaker intentionality, which thus helps to explain indirect speech acts. Indirect speech acts may seem uncooperative, but they become meaningful if one assumes that the speaker intends to be cooperative and if one turns to the context of the act to look for an explanation for the seemingly discordant behaviour. On similar lines, we propose the following principle.

**Rapport Management Principle:** a speaker always has the intention to manage rapport in some way in every interaction

This means that even when linguistic behaviour seems insensitive to rapport, this insensitivity is meaningful. And although we do not have direct access to speakers' intentions, this principle asserts speakers' intentions a priori and thus allows for a greater focus on the particular context and perlocutionary force of rapport management acts.

#### 4.2.3 Simultaneous versus sequential orientations

Our data suggest that participants are able to manage multiple orientations at once. Spencer-Oatey (2000a, 2000b) does not elaborate on how speakers hold rapport orientations or how these orientations might change during the course of an interaction, although she does allude to the dynamic nature of rapport orientations in a later paper: "People's motives for these various orientations can be various, and of course, their orientations can change dynamically during the course of an interaction or series of interactions" (2005: 96).

This description leads to the assumption that the orientations can change in sequential order. For instance, a speaker may begin a conversation holding a rapport enhancement orientation and switch to a challenge orientation after being insulted by the interlocutor. What Spencer-Oatey does not explicitly mention or take into account in her model is that orientations can be held simultaneously. This section aims to show that viewing orientations as being organized



in a sequential manner will limit our understanding of the strategic and dynamic nature of rapport management. In support of this claim we provide examples of participants who skillfully manage multiple orientations on various levels at once, thus warranting a more explicit integration of the dynamic nature of rapport management into the framework.

The following extract shows how Frontier Motors owner, Gareth, uses humour at the cost of a third party to achieve two things: he is reprimanding a subordinate (a courier who delivers tyres weekly), whilst trying to enhance rapport with three white, male customers. The interaction takes place in the frontstage of the shop. It starts with a short interaction between Gareth and the driver that is inaudible to the bystanders, but then Gareth raises his voice:

(7) (Field notes, 20 November 2012)

Gareth addresses the young, black man first in English: “No wonder you’re a driver; you have no brains!” and then an utterance in Xhosa. Now Gareth turns to the customers and says: “Even in his own language he doesn’t know what I’m talking about”. He starts laughing and so do the customers.

Gareth’s first statement (*No wonder you’re a driver; you have no brains*) is a flout of the Gricean maxim of quality, generating a conversational implicature (Grice 1975) that can be derived as an insult, which poses a threat to the courier’s quality face as it infringes his personal self-esteem. The perlocutionary force of the insult is increased by the presence of the bystanders. Gareth then switches to the driver’s first language, Xhosa, which is a display of his linguistic competence and also shows his control over the situation. With his third utterance, Gareth involves the bystanders. By making fun of the courier and attending to the customers’ association rights, Gareth is trying to establish an in-group consisting of him and the customers. It can be argued that he is challenging harmonious rapport (or maintaining discordant rapport) with the driver and reinforcing the power hierarchy between a boss and his subordinate, but it is likely that Gareth is more concerned about the customers and that this overrides any concern for the face and rights of the driver. The customers hold a more powerful position than the courier in this participant structure and Gareth adheres to this hierarchy by involving them in his public humiliation of the driver. Thus Gareth is strategically managing two orientations at the same time. He uses humour and insults as devices to exert control and hierarchical power, whilst trying to enhance rapport with his customers through solidarity.

Thus, although Spencer-Oatey (2000b) alludes to the sequentially dynamic nature of rapport management orientations, our data show that speakers man-

age various rapport orientations simultaneously. This signals a fourth problem: a tendency to focus on dyadic interactions.

#### 4.2.4 Dyadic versus group focus

The previous section has shown that speakers dynamically manage multiple orientations and that these orientations are not necessarily directed at the speaker's direct interlocutors. Spencer-Oatey (2002) discusses how face and rights concerns can be personally orientated (regarding interlocutors as individuals), group-orientated (regarding interlocutors as group representatives), or a mixture of both. In their study of rapport management amongst British and Chinese business people, Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2000) found that corporate identity played a major role and this also emerged from our study. This shows that rapport management efforts are not restricted to the direct interlocutors (the employee and customer), but can involve larger group concerns. This is an interesting and valuable discussion that is never discussed by Spencer-Oatey (2000b) in direct relation to the rapport management orientations. So, although she mentions the group aspect of rapport management in other contexts, she does not conceptually build a group orientation into the RMF. In this section we argue that a dyadic focus restrains the interpretation of more complex situations of rapport management in small business discourse. Instead, speakers should be regarded as possible group representatives since this can reveal a potential covert function of the speakers' discordant behaviour.

The observed patterns at Frontier Motors warrant an emphasis on the tension between interpersonal and intergroup orientations. Group concerns often overrule individual rights and concerns. The direction at which this group focus is aimed may differ from business to business. At Frontier Motors, group cohesion efforts are primarily directed externally, creating an in-group between management and customers as opposed to directing them internally to create an in-group of employees versus an out-group of customers. Consequently, Frontier Motors' emphasis on customer rapport is sometimes at the expense of employee relationships. This was exemplified in (7), where Gareth opts for a public shaming of his subordinate in order to create an in-group between him and the customers. By involving them in the event Gareth attends to the customers' affective interactional rights (i.e., sharing of humour, experiences and concerns).

Viewing rapport orientations as directed to groups, as well as individuals, helps to make sense of strategies that otherwise seem random and inappropri-

ate. Another notion that aids in this sense-making is the idea that rapport orientations are mandated by context, as shown in the following sub-section.

#### 4.2.5 Rapport orientations are contextually mandated

Different rapport strategies correspond with different types of contextual business model. Lancaster (2012: 67) examined entrepreneurship and family businesses in Grahamstown and found that “all of the businesses, to some degree, attribute their survival to the loyal customers within the local economy of Grahamstown.” That is certainly true for Frontier Motors. Employee Denzel estimates he knows eight out of ten people that walk into the business in a day (interview 30/11/2012). Since most small businesses rely heavily on their loyal customers it is important to maintain and build a strong relationship with them, especially in a small community like Grahamstown.

Of course, Frontier Motors’ employees also manage harmonious rapport internally. For instance, Richard and Denzel often joke with each other behind the counter. Another example emerged when four participants, from the front-stage and the workshop, on a quiet afternoon started to share concerns and frustrations about the working conditions and top management (such as unpaid sick leave) (Field notes 16/11/2012). By sharing their frustrations they created a sense of solidarity, which enhanced their affective association rights. Nonetheless, rapport management efforts retain a distinctly external orientation at Frontier Motors.

We think that these relationships can be plotted graphically. Figure 6 gives a representation of the primary relational focus at Frontier Motors. The horizontal axis represents the continuum of customer relationships, which can either be harmonious (+) or discordant (–), and on the vertical axis are employee relationships. Frontier Motors is on one end of the spectrum (Quadrant D), promoting harmonious customer-management relationships at the expense of discordant inter-employee relationships.

A business that promotes inter-employee collegiality could do so at the expense of customer relations (Quadrant A). We found that this characterized our other fieldwork location (not discussed in this paper) where a small business had a large and diverse customer base characterized by ‘once-off’ sales and where, in consequence, there was no need to promote a customer-centred business culture (see details in Lauriks 2014).

A business that promotes both harmonious inter-employee relations and harmonious business-customer relations would fall into Quadrant B. It is important to realize that we are not claiming that this type of business communi-

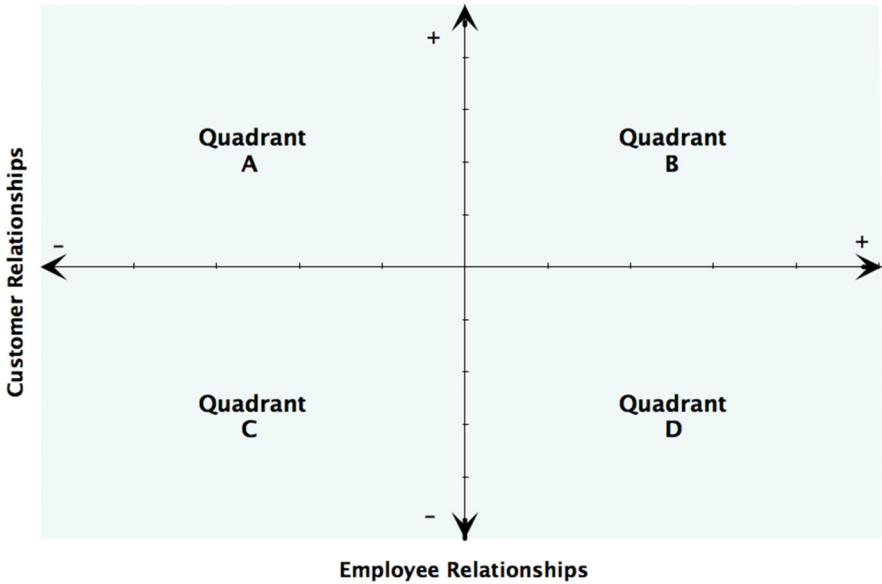


Figure 6: Possible relational configurations in small businesses.

cation model is necessarily better or worse than any other. However, such businesses, if they were to validate its institutional identity without alienating either its customers or its employees, may have to do so at the expense of a third party. We postulate that this may underlie competitive inter-business behaviour and may, possibly, only be available in contexts where such competition is possible.

Finally, a business that actively promotes both discordant inter-employee relations and discordant business-customer relations would fall into Quadrant C. Businesses of this type may very well be dysfunctional in some sense and we are not sure whether it is a stable configuration or not, as identity validation seems to lack a locus. However, certain large state or parastatal monopolistic entities may fall into this category. Future research could ascertain whether this is the case.

### 4.3 Toward an Enhanced Rapport Management Framework (ERMF)

We have identified some underdeveloped theoretical aspects of RMF, and argue that these aspects need to be systematically addressed and integrated into Rap-

port Management Theory. The four main problems that emerged during the analysis and our responses to them are tabulated below.

**Table 2:** Comparison between RMF and the proposed ERMF.

RMF (Spencer-Oatey 2000b, 2008)	ERMF
<p><b>Rapport is a harmonious relation:</b> Spencer-Oatey (2000b, 2005) defines rapport as a harmonious relationship</p>	<p><b>Rapport is the quality of a relation</b> and can be either harmonious or discordant</p>
<p><b>No access to intentions:</b> A researcher cannot know the intentions of a speaker with any certainty. This weakens the analytical use of the notion of a rapport neglect orientation</p>	<p><b>Rapport Management Principle:</b> rapport is always being managed</p>
<p><b>Sequential management of orientations:</b> The suggestion that speakers can only hold one orientation at any given time, leaves the potential for simultaneous management implicit</p>	<p><b>Simultaneous management of orientations:</b> The data shows that speakers are effective and economical rapport managers who can hold multiple orientations simultaneously</p>
<p><b>Dyadic focus on speaker/hearer:</b> Overemphasize on two parties in an interaction obscures rapport orientations toward groups, and leaves potential group dynamics implicit</p>	<p><b>Multidirectional focus on speaker/hearer/audience</b> (and the groups they represent)</p>

## 5 Conclusion: when discordant strategies become meaningful

We explored situated language practices in small business discourse to examine how multilingual repertoires are used to negotiate power relationships in small business interactions. Our focus has been on how individual agents use rapport management strategies to their own advantage, rather than on the post-colonial social structures that impose particular relations of hegemony on those individuals. We have shown that individuals do indeed use their linguistic resources to save face and reclaim power in the face of hierarchical organizational structures in postcolonial societies.

While such individual agency exists and has the potential to effect small, incremental changes to social structures, we have not been able to ignore the

role that context plays in licensing and constraining individuals' rapport management strategies. Velile's retort, "Bye *kwedini, my gat!*" [Bye little boy, my arse!] was licensed by his spatial position in the tyre changing area, a backstage area over which he had been delegated authority. At a broader level of context, we noted how the setting of Frontier Motors in a small town in post-apartheid South Africa mandated the business's general orientation towards harmonious customer relationships and discordant employee relationships. Structural factors such as these interact with the agency of individual participants in complex ways.

The analysis shows that speakers strategically manipulate the linguistic resources available to them to manage rapport in an effective and economical way. This entails that rapport management is a dynamic and complex practice in which multiple orientations aimed at multiple parties (i.e., individuals or groups) can be managed simultaneously. We therefore postulated the Rapport Management Principle, which states that speakers always have the intention to manage rapport. This principle, together with an understanding of the dynamic and complex nature of rapport management, and the wider context of the business, can explain the seemingly rude and uncooperative behaviour displayed by some speakers. If the Rapport Management Principle holds and every rapport management act serves a purpose, then the arrangement of linguistic codes and rapport management strategies is not random but in fact suit its particular context. Thus, rapport management strategies that include the cultivation of discordant relationships can be meaningful when they are compatible with the types of customer, the structural organization of the business and broader society.

**Note:** This paper is based on the Master's thesis of Sanne Lauriks (2014). The project was conceptualized and written by Sanne Lauriks with the close assistance and support of her supervisors, Mr Ian Siebörger and Dr Mark de Vos. Although the fieldwork and data annotation was undertaken solely by Sanne Lauriks, the analysis and final text owes much to collaborative work between the three authors. Each author played an important role in the production of the final text of this article.

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