



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



## Negotiation of Meanings in Job Interviews amongst Fresh Graduates in Malaysia

Isai Amutan Krishnan, Leena Ismail, Riithraiyeini V.Veerappan, Randeep Singh Sidhu, Grace Gayathri Ramakarsinin, Elangkovan Narayanan

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i5/13328>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i5/13328

**Received:** 22 March 2022, **Revised:** 24 April 2022, **Accepted:** 04 May 2022

**Published Online:** 17 May 2022

**In-Text Citation:** (Krishnan et al., 2022)

**To Cite this Article:** Krishnan, I. A., Ismail, L., V.Veerappan, R., Sidhu, R. S., Ramakarsinin, G. G., & Narayanan, E. (2022). Negotiation of Meanings in Job Interviews amongst Fresh Graduates in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(5), 1094 – 1111.

**Copyright:** © 2022 The Author(s)

Published by Human Resource Management Academic Research Society ([www.hrmars.com](http://www.hrmars.com))

This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this license may be seen at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

Vol. 12, No. 5, 2022, Pg. 1094 – 1111

<http://hrmars.com/index.php/pages/detail/IJARBSS>

JOURNAL HOMEPAGE

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at  
<http://hrmars.com/index.php/pages/detail/publication-ethics>



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



[www.hrmar.com](http://www.hrmar.com)

ISSN: 2222-6990

## Negotiation of Meanings in Job Interviews amongst Fresh Graduates in Malaysia

Isai Amutan Krishnan, Leena Ismail, Riithraiyeini  
V.Veerappan<sup>3</sup>, Randeep Singh Sidhu<sup>4</sup>

Perdana University, School of Liberal Arts and Science and Technology  
Email: isai.amutan@perdanauniversity.edu.my, amuthan.isai@gmail.com,  
leena.ismail@perdanauniversity.edu.my, riithraiyeini@perdanauniversity.edu.my,  
randeep@perdanauniversity.edu.my, randeeproy89@yahoo.com

Grace Gayathri Ramakarsinin<sup>5</sup>

Temiang National School, Seremban, Negeri Sembilan  
Email: graceleah68@gmail.com, g-22133307@moe-dl.edu.my<sup>2</sup>

Elangkovan Narayanan<sup>6</sup>

Perdana University, School of Business  
Email: Elangkovan.narayanan@perdanauniversity.edu.my<sup>1</sup>, elangkovank@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate how fresh graduates use negotiation of meanings in job interviews. There were 45 took part in the research. The data were collected from a real setting in one of the organizations in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. The job interview data were recorded and analyzed qualitatively by using Long's (1980) negotiation of meanings. The successful interviewees attempted two strategies. They attempted to modify and requested to repeat which were more proactive. The reserved interviewees attempted two strategies namely attempts to rephrase and elaborate their speeches when they were failed to attempt in answering the question in an acceptable manner. The unsuccessful interviewees failed to communicate clearly, to understand the interviewer, and consistently failed to provide correct responses. The present study suggests that in the course module or training module, negotiation of meanings (Long 1980) could be integrated as there is need to attain a certain threshold of proficiency.

**Keywords:** Negotiation of Meaning, Job Interviews, Fresh Graduates, Malaysia

### Introduction

Interactions between two speakers or dialogue, is frequently defined as a model in sociology, language, and interaction analyses, and described as a social interaction (David and David, 1994). This form of interaction is described as the shared impact of a person's absolute bodily manifestation with his/her nonverbal interaction (Janet, 2012). Face-to-face interaction is one of the fundamental features of the societal structure, creating a major portion of singular

communality and knowledge derived during a person's lifespan. Similarly, it is pivotal to the progress of different groups and bodies comprising of those persons (Adam et al., 1975).

Hymes (1986) suggested that from the linguistics standpoint, word selection, expressions, terminology or term used in face-to-face interaction can be more significant and simpler to grasp with the benefit of body language and para language. Allwood (1976) also stated that interaction between people would be more stimulating and collaborative if the dialogue occurred by way of face-to-face interaction. In order to carry out an effective conversation, there are vital interaction skills required by speakers as that would enable interaction with one another, respond instantly on what another speaker says, clarify, request to repeat or challenge another speaker's statement (Ellis, 1997).

As the world moves from conventional modes of communication to more cyber-savvy modes, communication has also become more widespread, particularly through globalization. Consequently, as people across the world communicate with each other, they also tend to rely on one common language that can be understood by all and this is the English language. This implies that the English language has become important in today's world for anyone who intends to participate in the global market or under and global actions and news, needs to acquire language proficiency. As English has become an international language there is a need for fresh graduates as well as current undergraduates in all the 24 public universities of Malaysia to be proficient in the language. Singh and Singh (2008) have mention that the interviewer should be skilled in asking precise and focused interview questions to assess interviewee's language skills during job interviews which leads to a mutually beneficial engagement between them. Holmes (2009); Truman (2011); Reed (2014) noted that proficiency of interviewees should be carefully scrutinised during job interviews to ensure they are sufficiently proficient to reduce the chances of miscommunications in work places. Based on Morreale, Hugenberg and Worley (2006); Foss and Littlejohn (2008); Truman (2011) and Sravanis (2015) views' can be concluded that proficiency plays a significant role in job interviews in the selection of suitable interviewees for the job market.

As local graduates have become the focus of unemployment, poor proficiency is a major concern among stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, public universities, banks, parents and the students, are extremely worried and concerned about their future (JobStreet, 2013, 2014; Ahmad, 2016; 2018). Thus, it is imperative that this issue of local fresh graduates being unemployed due to their poor command of proficiency is addressed and if possible, resolved quickly as 10,000 graduates are churned out every year by the universities in this country (Hussaini, 2016; Krishnan et al., 2017). It seems hard to believe that Malaysian students can fare well in academic pursuits with high CGPAs yet they are unable to communicate well in English. As Taliff and Noor (2009) and Rachel, Fauziah and Teoh (2017) have said, there is a need to understand what is expected at work places so that the English programmes being offered at the tertiary level can meet these needs and be able to produce relevant graduates. If oral skills are required during interviews, then this is one aspect of the training that graduates should focus on. They need to be able to conduct a decent conversation in the professional context with correct pronunciation, correct grammar, sentence structures, and relevant vocabulary and interact well to portray their proficiency. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate how fresh graduates use negotiation of meanings in job interviews.

## Literature Review

Studies carried out on face-to-face interactions by Adam, Richard and Mary (1975), David and David (1994); Janet (2012) were termed as a method of evaluating the response displayed by persons during interactions concerning subjects like arguments, instructions, and approach. The notion of face-to-face interaction has interested researchers from the early 20th century (Adam et al., 1975). The findings were further improved by other scholars, like Charles Cooley and George Herbert Mead, who developed terms like symbolic interactionism (Pierre 2011). Towards the middle of the 20th century, a good number of academic papers were available related to face-to-face interaction. In dealing with face-to-face interaction, negotiation of meaning takes place to portray language proficiency.

### 2.1 Negotiation of Meaning

The works on SLA (Second Language Acquisition) by (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Boulima, 1999; Varonis & Gass, 1985a, 1985b; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) on the compromised negotiation of meaning interactions and expressions availed. Besides Long (1980) researched on interactive studies of both native and non-native speakers respectively (NS & NNS). This study found a significant difference between adapted information and interaction. Moreover, Long (1980; 1981) observed how NS and NNS evaded and amended statements while engaging in interactions as adjustments of interactions. However, Long (1980) defined interaction as follows:

Negotiation of meaning is the procedure by which, competent speakers and learners while putting in some effort for interaction, interpret as well as make available provision of their personal signals and the perceived comprehension of their speakers' thereby leading to the content of the message, structure of the interaction, linguistic form in portraying proficiency, or combination of the three being adjusted provocatively, until there is an achievement of an accepted understanding level in any types of interactions. (Long 1980,p. 418)

In line with Long's definition on negotiation of meaning that stressed on interactive nature, Ellis (1997, p. 141) defined negotiation of meaning as "the part of interaction that happens when there is a cooperation of at least two interactants for the purpose of reaching a common comprehension of their expressions". Negotiation of meanings consisted of clarification, modification, request to repeat, rephrasing, elaboration and miscommunication of interaction. In line with Ellis (1997); Bejarano et al (1997) added the various strategies would be able to enhance speaking skills in any language when they encounter disagreement and agreement in conversations. Therefore, both speakers would be able to enhance their language proficiency with the help of these strategies. Based on the definitions that were given by Long (1980); Ellis (1997) negotiation of meaning helps to ensure a smooth interaction without any interruption between two speakers which portray language proficiency.

According to Pica (1994), negotiation of meaning refers to interactional work done by interlocutors to achieve mutual understanding when an interaction problem occurs. Furthermore, a precise interactive negotiation of meaning was explored by Pica (1994) and had been employed in interactive reorganisation and modification which happened when there were difficulties in understanding between learners and their speakers. Ellis (2005) identified negotiation sequences as recasts, clarification requests, confirmation checks, etc. These negotiation sequences have been regarded by Long (1985) as interactional

modification types. Regardless of the type of labels employed, the negotiation characteristics depict a method as to how a listener demands the confirmation as well as clarification of a message (Jeong, 2011).

Furthermore, Long (1985), informed that, in an encounter between a native and non-native speakers, comprehension and expression would be experienced by both parties which would eventually lead to the modification of the interaction. Usually the native speaker would alter the interaction to a level suitable for the non-native speaker. There are two results derived from the modification: 1) the interaction keeps going to achieve the intended results; 2) comprehensible input is being provided. It is normal the trials of learners to engage in interaction might go wrong occasionally and could even lead to misunderstandings based on the language.

Therefore, negotiation of meaning can take place between speakers of less proficiency and those with higher proficiency. Both categories of speakers are assumed to be beneficiaries of negotiation of meaning. On a general note, negotiation of meaning that involves interaction, acquisition may occur in the interaction process. Long (1980, 1983b, 1989) explained how the negotiation of meaning contributed to one-to-one interaction and helped in portraying proficiency and the definitions are provided below.

**Table 1.** Definition of six strategies of Negotiation of Meaning.

| <b>Negotiation of Meanings</b> | <b>DEFINITIONS</b>  |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Clarification                  | Refers to understandable or give clear statement to avoid confusions.   |
| Modification                   | Refers to changes made to terms, expressions views and method of speech normally to develop it further to make it more pleasing.  |
| Request to repeat              | Refers to say something one has already said to reconfirm.  |
| Rephrase                       | Restating the information to listeners by using different words or phrases  |
| Elaboration                    | Giving extra information on particular matters  |
| Miscommunication               | Refers to the difficulty in interacting effectively or absence of coherent speech. Examples of message failing when the speaker is unable to evoke the perceived impact, misinterpretation when the listener is unable to construe the intended message of the speaker. |

Source: *Negotiation of Meaning (Long, 1980)*

Table 1 defines the meanings of the six strategies of negotiation of meanings which have been identified by Long (1980) as being crucial in a face-to-face interaction which leads to proficiency. Long defines that clarification is to give a clear statement to avoid confusion between two speakers. Modification is applied to improve the interaction by changing terms, expressions and opinions to have a greater impact on the listener. As for request, it is to repeat to ensure what one has said to avoid trouble in the interaction. Rephrasing, is the position taken by a speaker to accentuate achievements in a perceived poor interaction. The

speaker tries to re-articulate the interaction to conceal poor proficiency. Elaboration is needed in any interaction and can be achieved by adding more information or explanation. Finally, miscommunication is focused on speakers having difficulties to communicate effectively those results in poor delivery of message and the inability of the listener to grasp the message. All these six strategies are needed in interaction to conduct the interaction smoothly to enable proficiency. Past studies on negotiation of meaning will be discussed in the following section.

## 2.2 Past Studies on Negotiation of Meanings

For many years, researchers have proposed several frameworks with the aim of investigating the processes involved in negotiation of meaning. Negotiations of meaning or the model of non-understanding and the framework of trouble in an interaction (Long, 1985) which was suggested by (Varonis and Gass, 1986). It has been extensively used and applied in studies of face-to-face interactions as well as in the CMC (computer-mediated communication) which enabled to examine the categories and the breakdowns interactions (Pica, 1994).

Ever since the commencement of CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication), studies face-to-face interactions have been abandoned, giving more focus to research in the CMC domain (Turdine, 2007), informs this is due to the fact that opportunity is provided to CMC communicative practise for both the active and passive learners. For instance, in a research by Bower and Kawaguchi (2011) on negotiation of meaning among Australian and Japanese learners, the results revealed that the opportunity to resolve the challenging aspect of the interaction exchange was employed by the learners. It is important to state that this benefits SLA as learners. Moreover, the corrective feedback discovered, the learners were able to recognise the form, thereby specifying learning in progress (Bower & Kawaguchi, 2011).

Another study was conducted by Tam et al (2010) with focus on "low proficiency learners in two environments" (i.e. face-to-face interactions and SCA (Synchronous Computer-Assisted)). This study revealed that more incidences of negotiations in face-to-face environment existed despite the linguistic ability of the learners. The SCA environment, showed learners the chance for semantic and syntactic alterations. This is advantageous for low proficiency learners as it enables them to notice the form and have a comprehensible negotiation. Consequently, SCA environment can be a supplementary learning platform for the communicative language practise of the language learners. In 2014, Gildaro conducted a study on students with high proficiency in an EFL setting. The work was a repetition on Foster's work in 1998 to examine the interactive modification on negotiations of meaning by employing the several categories of activities. Four diverse activities were also employed by Paloma to generate data; two of the activities were on dual-way exchange of information while the two other activities were one-way information exchange. Furthermore, these activities were shared and given to students (i.e. pair-work (dyad) and group-work). Also, in Paloma's work, it was discovered that a high rate of interaction existed which requested the subjects to participate in taking of turns, signalling for non-comprehensibility, and production of altered output. Paloma's results further revealed highest frequency was generated based on the two-way information interchange exclusively in group dialogue. The results also disclosed that the highly proficient learners exhibited syntactic consciousness.

Jyon (2015) also examined negotiation of meaning, from a different angle. By investigating the interaction and comprehension attempts, it was discovered that learners were capable of noticing form, meaning and use. The results disclosed that learners emphasised on the

non-linguistic and linguistic elements and pragmatic features, which could be the cause of the breakdown in interaction. Hence, she recommended that negotiation of meaning should provide learners with sufficient chances to interact in a natural manner. In simpler terms, the opportunity was employed by learners to use language as a tool of interaction rather than just focusing only on the content. Hence, it is obvious that negotiation of meaning offers learners the chance to alter output, notice as well as input on a form (Ellis, 1997) thereby, enabling the learners to acquire the language. Previous studies on negotiation of meaning especially in the face-to-face contexts are available, but the number of studies is insufficient.

Jyon (2015) showed specific references to utterances of meaning, and discussed the possibility that certain inputs could be determined through negotiation of meanings. The study further pointed out that this kind of negotiation may offer the learner a chance to recognise what we speak through the language. The qualitative study suggested that like other people, learners regularly have anticipations about language use. Therefore, if these anticipations are not met, it could lead them to re-negotiate the meaning in a way that meets their anticipations. Most often, some learners have trouble in understanding specific implications even without a complete breakdown in interaction. Nordin, Mukundan, Samad and Samani (2015) study found that 10 kinds of roles in the negotiation of meaning, which were: vocabulary check, confirmation, request for clarity, reply clarification or definition, check of confirmation, correction or self-correction, reply elaboration, elaboration, reply confirmation, and elaboration request. The most regularly used functions from the findings of this study were: elaboration request, confirmation, and elaboration, while the least regularly used functions were: reply confirmation, vocabulary check, and reply confirmation. Results of this study gave researchers, teachers and learners an understanding of negotiated meaning in SLA.

Azlin and Hee (2016) conducted a study utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse the language output in a face-to-face interaction made by ESL (English Second Language) learners of high-proficiency. The study was focused on mixed gender participants of Generation Y born between and 1996 and those who had just completed secondary school. The purpose of the study was to analyse how they interacted in face-to-face using negotiation of meaning and whether gender plays a role in the interaction. A decision-making role play was given based on negotiation of meaning. It was found that males conducted the interaction by using modifications whereas females utilized the interaction more for comprehensible input. The study concluded that face-to-face interaction amongst non-native ESL learners of high proficiency focused on interaction in a school setting and not in a professional setting.

Chenxi et al (2017) in their study tried to ascertain negotiation of meaning patterns in synchronous audio and video Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) environs established from the CMC' text chat" model as suggested by (Smith, 2003). Their research was conducted at Beijing Foreign Studies University's Online Education Institute. Four dyads respectively accomplished four information gap tasks via the synchronous audio/video CMC environs. The lexical items targeted were specifically 'embedded' to bring about interactions that were negotiated amidst the dyads. Furthermore, the virtual lessons were captured as multi-mode data for investigation. The subjects also took a one-to-one video interview to reinstate their opinions in the course of the negotiated interactions as well as to present their approaches concerning synchronous audio/video CMC environments with regards to Task-

Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Negotiated interactions were transliterated and analysed based on the model by Smith in 2003, to get new patterns that were discovered further.

Generally, the use of negotiation of meanings in classroom setting has attracted many researchers. For the last three decades researchers have been interested in negotiation of meaning as an interactional process which enhances language acquisition. In addition, a number of studies have set out to determine the tasks that best promote negotiations of meaning (Rudi & Diemroh, 2017). However, research has mostly tended to investigate negotiation of meaning under experimental conditions, leaving significantly unknown negotiated interactions that might take place in real EFL classrooms. As an answer to this, the current study is set out to examine the nature and incidence of negotiation of meaning in three uncontrolled EFL classrooms. This is done by examining several teachers as well as learner-led speaking tasks at advanced, intermediate and basic levels. The results indicated that negotiation of meaning was lower than those reported in previous studies. Moreover, a qualitative analysis of the interactional data suggested that the negotiation of meaning across proficiency levels was limited in nature, and thus did not provide learners with all the learning benefits essential for negotiation for meaning. These outcomes raised questions as to the opportunities that learners and teachers had to negotiate meaning during EFL classroom interactions, and ways through which they could promote negotiated interactions in their EFL classrooms.

Qi and David (2018) conducted a study with peer feedback procedures especially on negotiation of meaning and clarification. Peer feedback has benefits to students, however the process of how they learn is left under-researched. Building on the feedback ideas as discourse, their study focused on revealing the insights of both the receiver and producer of peer feedback in correlation to the challenges of dialogue in academic writing. Collection of data for their study was through interviews, journals, and classroom observations at a Southern China university. Two crucial inter-related themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of verbal interaction insights of the students with regards to written peer feedback. Feedback by the provider of written comments was obtained based on their feedback and there was an opportunity for the receiver to negotiate meaning or clarify with the feedback provider. Students wanted more supervision on peer feedback and were desirous for more input from the teacher was some of the contextual challenges. Moreover, the study added to the body of knowledge about the impact of peer discourse in mutual negotiation and clarification while emphasising the teacher's guidance between the recipient and the provider.

The study by Azlin and Hee (2016) has provided examples of negotiation of meaning which are: the occurrences of miscommunication, attempts to rephrase, modification and elaborate by the learners in a task-based interaction. The examples provided by Azlin and Hee (2016) were taken from the high proficiency ESL students who were engaged in a task-based activity and the findings may not be similar to the current study because there was no activity involved and the interaction was set in a professional environment. Therefore, the examples taken from the current study would be of importance for future job applicants. Hence, the six strategies of negotiation of meaning: clarification, modification, request to repeat, rephrase, elaboration and miscommunication may pose an underpinning for the present study to analyse how the interactions are portrayed by both the interviewer and interviewees in a job interview.

It is certain the studies reviewed so far have tried to make some impact in discovering the implications of negotiation of meaning as discussed by the different approaches by



different researchers, nevertheless, there are still gaps which this current study hopes to fill. One of these gaps is that most of the studies reviewed here have focused on a school setting and not a professional setting, the current research tends to come up with different findings with regards to negotiation of meaning practice in a professional setting. \\It can and usually occurs when interaction problems arise and it helps both speakers to comprehend intended message. Nevertheless, far from its centrality to SLA, we would ascertain that it represents only one of the several means by which language development is enhanced through interaction which helps both speakers portray their proficiency.

To reiterate what Long (1980) said, "I would like to suggest that negotiation for meaning, and especially in face-to-face interaction, needs adjustment by the both speakers and one could be more competent speaker and it connects input, internal other speaker's capacities, particularly selective attention in uttering the words which portraying the proficiency in productive ways (Long, 1980, p.451-2)". There have been several investigations carried out on negotiation of meaning by Long (1980); Pica (1994); Ellis (2008) that have utilized negotiation of meaning in their studies. Nevertheless, they have not found any usefulness in negotiation of meaning in different settings which can be done in the future rather than focusing on SLA.

Therefore, a disparity can be observed in the six strategies of negotiation of meaning: clarification, modification, request to repeat, rephrase, elaboration and miscommunication was only applied within the socio-cultural teaching context, CMC, teacher-student context, classroom perspectives and scenarios, instructor-learners, cooperative, EFL (English Foreign Language) interaction among students, patterns of negotiation of meaning in ESL, face-to-face interaction, pair work, and peer feedback. These six aspects were hardly covered; thus, less attention was given in casual and professional settings to face-to-face interaction. The present study will be looking at professional settings which is the job interview, by using Long's (1980) negotiation of meaning to analyse how the interactions are portrayed by interviewer and interviewees in job interviews using clarification, modification, request to repeat, rephrase, elaboration and miscommunication.

## **Methodology**

This was a case study, and the data was collected from one of the small certification organizations in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. The consent letters were obtained from the organization as well as the participants. They were 45 interviewees who participated in the study and their ages ranged between 23 and 25 years and were of mixed races. They were all fresh graduates from public universities in various disciplines. They were shortlisted based on their English placement which was provided by the organisation. The data was recorded, transcribed and coded and analysed qualitatively using the theory of Long (1980). The were NVIVO and three experts to determine the reliability and validity in the present study.

## **Results and Discussion**

Negotiation of meaning analysis will be presented based on successful i , reserved and unsuccessful interviews. Legend : IE –interviewee and IR interviewer.

### **4.1 Successful Interviewees**

It was discovered that, some successful interviewees responded by signifying when the questions asked were not fully understood. Two strategies were attempted by the successful interviewees; (i) attempt to modify (ii) request to repeat. The two strategies attempted were

found to assist the interviewee to continue with their interactions by providing a proper and adequate answer in the interview. Excerpt 1 shows attempt to modify.

#### Excerpt 1: Attempt to Modify

- IR laugh)...ok (.) what major challenges and problems did you face?  
 IE14 ...you mean how I handled them?...I involed in practical training...its ok nevermind.
- IR Oops...hmmm...well...that sounds bad to me then (laugh)...it is ok=it is ok...what is your greatest strength?

In excerpt 1, it appears that, IE14 might not have fully understood the question that was posed by the interviewer. For example, the interviewer's question was; how did you have problems in workplace but IE was not intended to answer bu stating 'its ok never mind'.

Thus, prior to the response, IE14 might have several assumptions thus; what kinds of answers were expected by the interviewer. As this could be seen where IE14 did not provide a response, but instead, s/he made an attempt to modify the interviewer's original question. Instead of rephrasing the subject of the question ('challenges' or 'problems'), IE14's modification sought to ascertain what information the interviewer sought for these problems. The interviewer wanted to know how IE14 handled such challenges or problems '(You mean how I handled them)' was uttered as a modified version of the question 'what were major challenges and problems you faced with'. By modifying the question and focusing on the techniques to handle the problems, the answer provided by IE14 was found to be useful for the interviewer. It showed that IE14 was able to foresee the question and where it ultimately led to. In other words, the answer that was expected by the interviewer was more on how the interviewee would handle or solve such issues. The modified response, gave the interviewer the impression that IE14 would like to recheck the question, in order to answer it correctly. The modified response also helped the interviewer to get the actual response for the answer and allowed the interviewer to continue with the flow of the interaction. The modified response by the IE14 was acceptable for the job interview. The interaction not only assisted in the flow because of proficiency, but also showed the interviewee's capability of foreseeing where the interview question was leading to. The next observation was the request that was made by the interviewee to repeat the questions shown in excerpt 2.

#### Excerpt 2: Request to Repeat

- IR would you mind sharing about a difficult decision you have made recently?  
 IE26 I'm sorry...**can you please repeat?**  
 IR Would you mind sharing about a difficult decision you have made recently?  
 IE26 Oh yes...recently (.) I have been facing a decision to pick in between my family needs and my own need...due to my responsibility for my family...I have chosen my parental needs even though I have to abandon my own decision which makes me sad...however (.) it turned out well...after all...who knows better than us...if not our parents.

Excerpt 2 begins with the interviewer eliciting information from IE16 with an open-ended question, beginning with the indirect question phrase; 'Would you mind sharing...' This mode

of questioning is quite common in professional and formal discourse (Grice, 1975). However, instead of providing the appropriate response, that would be able to describe a difficult decision, IE26 responds with an apology (I'm sorry), which is followed by a request to repeat the question. From this response it could be inferred that, IE26 either did not hear or did not understand the interviewer's question. In the case of comprehension difficulties, the indirect question form was used by the interviewer, which was phrased as a yes/no question. This was actually seeking a descriptive response as the question might have posed difficulties for the interviewee.

Following IE26's request, the interviewer repeated IE23's question. Although, the interviewer used exactly the same words as the original question this time IE26 appeared to comprehend the question and then described a difficult decision IE26 had recently faced. The next analysis is on reserved interviewees.

#### 4.2 Reserved Interviewees

As for the reserved interviewees, some attempts were made when there was interaction trouble. The interaction trouble in this case was, when the utterance made by the interviewer or interviewee was not fully understood. There were two attempts made; (i) to rephrase (ii) to elaborate. The first attempt to rephrase is shown in excerpt 3.

##### Excerpt 3: Attempts to Rephrase

- IR would you mind sharing about a difficult decision you have made recently?  
 IE9 I'm sorry...can you please repeat?  
 IR Would you mind sharing about a difficult decision you have made recently?  
 IE9 Oh yes...recently (.) I have been facing a decision to pick in between my family needs and my own need...due to my responsibility for my family...I have chosen my parental needs even though I have to abandon my own decision which makes me sad...however (.) it turned out well...after all...who knows better than us...if not our parents.

IE9's interactions demonstrated that s/he was not able to comprehend the meaning of the question. Therefore, IE9 uttered 'can you please repeat'. Then, IR, rendered his assistance by rephrasing. That was very helpful for IE9 to answer IR's question. In addition to rephrasing, attempts were also made to negotiate the meaning in the interviews, with the reserved interviewees which is seen in excerpt 4.

##### Excerpt 4: Attempt to Elaborate

- IE4 Hmm I need to deal with colleagues...  
 IR deal with colleagues...you mean...what did you do ?  
 IE4 well...take care of their work and handle man work to take of it  
 IR Alright...planning you mean ( laugh)  
 IE4 yes...yes  
 IR Can say further....  
 IE4 to check their work in a good manner  
 IR I see  
 IE4 ...there is a time they cannot so we make an arrangement ..  
 IR I see

The whole conversation was about the work as the interviewer wanted to elaborate but it was not achieved. A poorly structured sentence and inappropriate choice of words were responsible for the incomprehensibility. The hesitation marker 'hmm' was later uttered by the interviewer to show IE4's was expecting more relevant input from IE4. Upon hearing the hesitation marker, IE4 tried to accommodate the interviewer and tried to elaborate the answer without much success. The interviewer intervened and rephrased IE4's answer with a clarification. However, IE4 answered in a single word, 'yes' without elaborating further. The short answer provided by IE4 reflected IE's poor proficiency and this was evident when the interviewer made another attempt by asking 'what is the meaning? That means...'. The answer provided by IE4 was full of grammatical errors and was not complete. This made the interviewer to utter another hesitation marker 'hmm' requesting for more input. Finally, IE4 managed to elaborate IE4's answers from the initial answers that were found that led the interviewer to say 'okay'. This was to acknowledge that, IE4 was partially satisfied with the answers given. The attempts to elaborate by IE4 had proven to assist in the interaction. However, three attempts were made to elaborate from the initial answer, which could be done by one single attempt. The attempts that were made were also due to the effort that was earlier made by the interviewer by asking continuous questions were signs of incomprehensibility. This was another form of providing an opportunity to IE4 to elaborate the answer. Despite all these, the elaborations provided by IE4 were poorly structured, and less specific, which could also be responsible for being grouped into the reserved category. In negotiation of meaning, the attempts to elaborate especially in responding to questions seemed to aid in the interaction as in excerpt 4, especially when the interviewer modified the questions. This was to assist IE4, in responding to the questions with elaboration. However, lack of proficiency and insufficient elaboration was not helpful to guarantee a successful interview. The analysis on unsuccessful interviewees is presented in the next section.

### Unsuccessful Interviewees

The finding also showed that, the unsuccessful interviewees failed to comprehend the interviewer's questions. Their lack of proficiency was clearly noticed when the interviewees were found to digress from answering the question, and this caused the interviewer to be misunderstood. With these type of problems in job interviews, it is obvious that, the interviewee's application is deemed to be unsuccessful. An example is shown in excerpt 5.

#### Excerpt 5: Miscommunication 1

IR        you work as a..  
IE20     listen to clients  
IR        say about it  
IE20     ok  
IR        what ok what do you do  
IE20     I found from the computer

The entire interaction was miscomprehended. The interviewer did not anticipate any response and presumed the IE20 was unable to answer. This led the interviewer to express 'really' in a surprise manner. Since 'hmm' was uttered, it had also made the interviewer to modify the initial question into 2 questions to elicit more information. In the end, IE20 chose to ignore the first question on the previous task and was only able to respond to the second question, which was how IE20 found out the vacancy. Despite all the efforts that were put

forward by the interviewer e.g. modifying the question, IE20 decided to utter less information without many details. This could also be responsible for the lack of proficiency that was visible in Excerpt 5, as the interviewer was putting in more efforts to draw information from the interviewee. The interviewee uttered poorly constructed sentence with less details and tried to avoid answering the question. The avoidance to answer displayed of miscommunication. For example, when the interviewer waits for a response, and it is delayed or a single utterance is provided, the interviewer assumes that, the interviewee is incapable of answering.

The same assumption could have occurred which led to the miscommunication between the interviewer and the interviewee. In the framework of negotiation of meanings, the occurrence of miscommunication could assist the interviewer to rephrase, modify and elaborate their speeches to resolve the meaning of the message (Pica, 1994) which was found in the data of the successful and reserved interviewees. However, these attempts were not found in the unsuccessful interviewees. In this excerpt, the findings showed that, the interviewer was putting more effort in the speech and not much effort was seen in IE20. Nevertheless, the modified questions that were provided by the interviewer had helped the IE20 to respond, although, the response was inadequate for the interviewer another example of miscommunication was found in excerpt. As Long (1980, p.20) mentioned "negotiation of meaning occurred when one listens to another speaker and the listener was unable to comprehend the message, is an indication that, the listener linguistically resolved this impasse". Scholars or researchers have conducted studies within the framework of face-to-face interaction to enhance language proficiency in any language even in English (Gass & Mackey, 2007; Mackey, 2007a, 2007b). As it was discussed, previously negotiation of meaning (Long 1980) is a framework that could be used for multidisciplinary functions, that involves face-to-face interaction as in job interview.

The present study was conducted with six strategies of negotiation of meaning (Long, 1980); clarification, modification, request to repeat, rephrase, elaboration and miscommunication. However, clarification were not attempted in the interaction between interviewer and interviews.

Among the six negotiations of meanings the successful interviewees used clarification, modification, but did not use request to repeat, rephrase, elaboration and miscommunication. The reserved interviewees attempted to rephrase and elaboration. Based on the analysis, the unsuccessful interviewees attempted to use miscommunication,

The interaction between interviewer and the successful interviewees showed that, generally, they understood the questions that was asked by the interviewer and gave the appropriate answers. There was a very little repetition of questions or prompting by the interviewer. The minimal negotiations of meaning among the successful interviewees, suggested their proficiency. The finding of the present study was similar to Samira's (2014, p.16) study, which discovered that, "the proficiency of the partakers affects the amount of negotiation of meaning that occur". The reserved interviewees on the other hand had attempted to rephrase, which led to incomplete answers, lacked clarity or was incomprehensible to the interviewer. Attempts to rephrase and elaborate the answers were still inadequate and unsatisfactory for the interviewer. The primary reason these interviewees were put in the reserved list was their poor proficiency, which made it difficult for them to speak effectively, especially on matters related to work experience. The interviewer attempted to rephrase and elaborate to explain the questions to help the reserved interviewees' to comprehend the questions. The unsuccessful interviewees had trouble in comprehending the interviewer's questions, which led to miscommunication and the use of

hesitation markers. The interviewer tried to get answers by attempting to rephrase the questions as shown in Excerpt 5. At the end, the interviewer only managed to elicit partial answers or no response as in Excerpt 6, forcing the interviewer to switch to a new topic. It was apparent from analysing excerpts 5 and 6 that, the poor performance of the unsuccessful interviewees was due to poor proficiency.

The findings further reveal that the answers of the reserved and unsuccessful interviewees were similar to Bitchener (2004, p. 92-93) who found that, "low proficiency from non-native speaker's negotiation of meaning occurred frequently, when they discovered difficulties in interactions". The results of the present study showed that, even those with good proficiency still negotiated their meanings, with the interviewer during their interactions. Poor proficiency among reserved and unsuccessful interviewees contrasted sharply with the successful interviewees, who exhibited good proficiency.

The reserved interviewees were found to have difficulty to converse effectively and were found to attempt to rephrase the answers. They also used modifications and elaborations to seek for clarification, which led to increased intervention by the interviewer to repeat the questions. The unsuccessful interviewees found it difficult to respond to questions from the interviewer. There was also miscommunication, where the interviewees were unable to grasp the meaning of the question. For example, in Excerpt 84, the unsuccessful interviewee did not make any attempt to negotiate meaning e.g. to modify, to rephrase or to elaborate, and instead chose to refrain from answering the question. Miscommunication among the unsuccessful interviewees was a problem for the interviewer that s/he switched to a new topic in the hope to obtain better results. There is apparently a correlation between proficiency and success in the interview. As this study shows, only interviewees who spoke well were successful. Based on the excerpts 84 and 85, it was evident that, there was considerable miscommunication in the interactions which reflected unfavourably among the interviewees. Based on the previous studies, the hesitation marker 'hmm' (Clark & Fox-tree, 2002) and the utterances of 'what?', 'what do you mean?', 'means what?', 'meaning?' (Long, 1981; Azlin & Hee, 2016) are indications of the messages being partially understood or not at all. The reserved and unsuccessful interviewees had difficulty in comprehending words like 'handle' and 'remuneration' that resulted in poor interaction with the interviewer. This failure was underpinned primarily by poor proficiency, as there were numerous instances of miscommunication between the interviewees and the interviewer. It is also worth mentioning that, the poor interaction of reserved and unsuccessful interviewees might not be a reflection of their capabilities or experience, but, their poor proficiency. This becomes an impediment, that prevents them from expressing themselves effectively to the interviewer.

Negotiation of meaning can greatly benefit speakers to enhance proficiency (Long, 1980). As rationalised by Gass and Mackey (2007) based on the work of Long (1980), the present negotiations of meaning is face-to-face interaction to enhance language proficiency. The negotiation of meaning evolves to become a pattern, a connotation that it explains the procedures connected when the same input is encountered by both speakers. Ellis (1997, p.141) pointed that negotiation means "the part of interaction that happens when there is a cooperation of at least two interactants for the purpose of reaching a common comprehension of their expressions". The win-win outcomes can be achieved where both sides feel their viewpoints have been taken into consideration. Speakers should always manage to compromise instead of holding to their own positions during the negotiation interaction because this may show that speakers are sincere to achieve a win-win situation. Moreover, good elaboration skills are essential for negotiation interaction. Fresh graduates

should improve and develop their elaboration skills because it will help to minimize misunderstanding in negotiation. In conclusion, as the present study focuses on fresh graduates, they should enhance all these abilities with good proficiency to enhance their employability skills.

### **Implication of the Study and Further Studies**

The utilization of Long's (1980) negotiation of meaning framework in the present study had undoubtedly brought about the realization that attempts were made even when the message was incomprehensible. This theory was used broadly in ESL context but not in job interviews. The finding showed the successful candidates were used predominantly. The significant findings on job interviews, and negotiations of meaning is paramount in linguistics which should be evaluated using the criteria of the spoken form and for a particular genre which is professional interaction. Negotiation of meaning strategies can be added in course teaching so that undergraduates will learn how to use these strategies in job interviews. A further studies can be done investigating communicative strategies (Dornyei & Scott, 1997) where the analysis is on the use of power words between interviewers and interviewees in order to get an in-depth finding in relation to coining new words and asking for clarification to overcome communication problems. The present can be further looked into the use of communicative strategies in developing skills and via this study training modules or course materials can be revamped.

### **Conclusion**

Negotiation of meaning can be of great benefit for speakers in enhancing proficiency (Long 1980). As rationalized by Gass and Mackey (2007) based on the work of Long (1980), the present negotiation of meaning is face-to-face interaction in enhancing language proficiency. Ellis (1997, p. 141) pointed that negotiation means "the part of interaction that happens when there is a cooperation of at least two interactants for the purpose of reaching a common comprehension of their expressions". It is characterised by a few strategies such as miscommunication, attempts to rephrase, elaboration, modification, clarification, and restructuring of interactions both individuals involve in the real setting of interactions. And, it is necessary to carry out a decision to meet an agreement between both sides. If the process of negotiation breaks down and an agreement cannot be reached, speakers should modify their desired outcomes to achieve a win-win situation. The win-win outcomes can be achieved where both sides feel their viewpoints have been taken into consideration. Speakers should always manage to compromise instead of holding to their own positions during the negotiation interaction because this may show that speakers are sincere to achieve a win-win situation. Moreover, good elaboration skills are essential for negotiation interaction, especially for fresh graduates.

The major findings of the study included the attempts to modifying and request to repeat which was covered by successful interviewees. Long (1980) and Ellis (1985) noted that interaction contribute to enhance proficiency in one's language as it is the resource by which the speaker is able to understand the context in the particular context. This takes place when the speaker can conclude what is said even though the message contains linguistic items that are not yet part of his/her competence. The listener can use the discourse to help him/her modify, elaborate, repeat, rephrase, clarify or increase the language knowledge s/he has already used in interaction. Boulima (1990) also noted that negotiation of meaning strategies could achieve in the development of NNS proficiency. In this case, fresh graduates should

acquire good proficiency in order to market themselves in the relevant employment field, especially in the current trend among corporations, companies and agencies in Malaysia.

## References

- Ahmad. (2016). JobStreet: Unrealistic salary demands reason why fresh grads are unemployed. *The Malaymail*. Retrieved March 4, 2022 from <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/jobstreet-unrealistic-salary-demands-reason-why-fresh-grads-are-unemployed>.
- Ahmad. (2018). English is crucial for success. *The Star*. Retrieved March 4, 2022 From <https://www.pressreader.com/malaysia/the-star-malaysia-star2/20180717/282029033004435>
- Adam, K., Richard, M. H., Mary, R. K. (1975). *Organisation of behaviour in face-to-face interaction*. Walter de Gruyter. p. 357.
- Allwood, J. (1976). *Linguistic communication as action and cooperation*. Gothenburg Monographs in Linguistics 2. University of Goteborg, Department of Linguistics, pp. 1-257.
- Azlin, Z., & Hee, S. C. (2016). Negotiation of meaning in face-to-face interaction among high proficiency ESL learners: Generation Y Gender Interaction. *Asian EFL Journal Professional Teaching Articles*,8(9),1-12.
- Bejarano, Y., Levine, T., Olshtain, E., & Steiner, J. (1997). The skilled use of interaction strategies creating a framework for improved small-group communication interaction in the language classroom. *System*, 2(25), 203-214.
- Bitchener, J. (2004). The relationship between the negotiation of meaning and language learning: A longitudinal study. *Language Awareness*,13(2), 81-95.
- Bower, J., & Kawaguchi, S. (2011). Negotiation of meaning and corrective feedback in Japanese/English eTandem. *Language Learning and Technology*, 15 (2), 41-71.
- Boulima, J. (1999). *Negotiated interaction in target language classroom discourse*, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Chenxi, L., Ligao, W., Chen, L. & Jinlan, T. (2017). Exploring meaning negotiation patterns in synchronous audio and video conferencing English classes in China, *Research Publishing Net*, 1(2), 194-100.
- Clark, H. H., & Fox Tree. (2002). Using uh and um in spontaneous speaking. *Journal of Cognition*, 73-11. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from [http://www.columbia.edu/~rmk7/HC/HC\\_Readings/Clark\\_Fox.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~rmk7/HC/HC_Readings/Clark_Fox.pdf)
- David, J. C., & David, M. (1994). *Communication Theory Today*. Stanford University Press. p. 35.
- Dorney, Z., & Scott, M. (1997). Communication strategies in a second language: definitions and taxonomies. *Language Learning*, 47(1), 173-210.
- Ellis, R. (1984). *Teacher-pupil interaction in second language development*. In S. Gass, & C. Madden (Eds.), *Input in second language acquisition* (pp. 69-85). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Ellis, R. (1997). *Second language acquisition research and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Referred to by Foth & Dewaele, 2002, 178.
- Ellis, R. (2005). *Analysing learner language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Foss, K., & Littlejohn, S. (2008). *Theories of human communication (9th ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Academic.



- Gass, S. M., and Mackey, A. (2007). *Input, interaction, and output in second language acquisition*. In B. VanPatten and J. Williams (Eds.), *Theories in second language acquisition: An introduction* (pp. 175-199). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Gass, S. M., & Varonis, E. M. (1986). *Sex Differences in NNS/NNS Interactions*. In R. R. Day (Ed.), *Talking to Learn: Conversation in Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 327 - 351). Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.
- Gildaro, P. (2014). A class room view of negotiation of meaning with EFI Mexican Adult Pupils. *Sage Open*, 1-14.
- Hee, S. C. (2016). *Gender interaction in negotiation of meaning among high proficiency ESL Learners*. (Masters dissertation, University of Malaya).  
<http://studentsrepo.um.edu.my/6678/>
- Holmes, J. M. M., & Riddiford, N. (2009). *New Zealand's language in the workplace project: Workplace communication for skilled migrants* (1st ed.) New Zealand, Victoria: Academic.
- Abdul Karim, H. (2016). Unemployed because they can't speak English. *New Straits Times*. Retrieved April 3, 2022, from  
<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/02/125529/unemployed-because-they-cant-speak-english>
- Hymes, D. H. (1986). Discourse: scope without depth. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 57(1), 49-89.
- Janet, S. (2012). *Misbehaviour in cyber places: The regulation of online conduct in virtual communities on the internet*. Rowman & Littlefield. p. 50. ISBN 978-0-7618-6011-2.
- Jeong, N. (2011). *Selected proceedings of the 2009 second language research forum*. Luke Plonsky and Maren Schierloh (pp. 51-69).
- JobStreet. (2013). Communication, English skills more important for employers: *JobStreet survey*, Retrieved March 26, 2022, from <http://www.digitalnewsasia.com/digital-economy/comms-english-skills-more-important-for-employers-jobstreet-survey>
- JobStreet. (2014). Tops five reasons fresh graduated don't get hired: *JobStreet Survey*, Retrieved March 30, 2022, from <http://www.digitalnewsasia.com/digital-tops-five-reasons-fresh-graduated-dont-get-hired>.
- Jyon, C. (2015). Negotiation of meaning and feedback among language learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 6(2), 250-257.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. New York : Pergamom.
- Krishnan, I. A., Hee, S. S., Ramalingam, S., & Maruthai, E. (2017). The selection practices and recruitments of fresh graduates in local organization's job interview. (2017). *Journal of Language and Communication*, 4(2), 153-167.
- Long, M. H. (1980). *Input, interaction, and second language acquisition*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. University of California at Los Angeles.
- Long, M. H. (1985). *Input and second language acquisition theory*. In S. Gass, & C. Madden (Eds), *Input in second language acquisition* (pp. 377-393). Rowly. MA: Newbury House.
- Morreale, S., Hugenberg, L., & Worley, D. (2006). The basic communication course at US colleges and universities in the 21st century: Study VII. *Communication Education*, 55(4), 415-437.
- Nordin, N., Mukundan, J., Samad, A., & Samani, E. (2015). Patterns of Negotiation of Meaning in English as Second Language Learners' Interactions, *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6 (1), 16.24.

- Pica, T. (1994). *Research on negotiation: what does it reveal about second language learning conditions, processes, and outcomes?* *Language Learning*, 44, 493-527.
- Qiyun, Z., & David, C. (2018). Dialogue within peer feedback processes: Clarification and negotiation of meaning, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37(4), 883-897.
- Rachel, S. K. T., Fauziah, T., & Teoh, M. L. (2017). When blinkers come off: Undergraduate students' performance at simulated job interviews. (n.d.). *International Journal Sociology Language*, 2(44), 39-64.
- Reed, K. (2011). The importance of communication in your job and life. *Journal of Human Resource*, 8(9), 5-11.
- Rudi, H., & Diemroh, I. (2017). An Analysis of Meaning Negotiation Strategies Used in Conversation by Undergraduate EFL Students. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research (ASSEHR)*, 8(2), 260-263.
- Schmidt, R. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 129-158.
- Singh, G. K. G., & Singh, S. K. G. (2008). Malaysian graduates' employability Skills. *Unitar E-Journal*, 4(1), 15-45.
- Sravani. (2015). *Why is grammar important in communication: Top 14 reasons*. Retrieved March 07, 2022, from <http://content.wisestep.com/why-is-grammar-important-in-communication-top-reasons/>
- Swain, M. (1985). *Communicative competence: some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development*. In S. Gass & C. Madden (Eds.), *Input in Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 235 - 255): Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Talif, R., & Noor, R. (2009). Connecting language needs in the workplace to the
- Tam, S. S., Kan, N., & Ng, L. L. (2010). Low proficiency learners in synchronous computer-assisted and face-to-face interactions. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 9 (3), 61-75.
- Truman, H. S. (2011). Management study of communication skills. *Journal of Human Resource*, 1(3), 11-32.
- Tudini, V. (2007). Negotiation and intercultural learning in Italian native speaker chat rooms, *The Modern Language Journal*, 11(11), 1540-4781.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1992). The semantics of interjection. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 18(2-3), 159-192.