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‘Appreciation of Linguistic Accommodation on the Outcome
of Salary Negotiations: A Comparative Study Between Direct
and Indirect Cultures’

A bachelor’s thesis presented

by

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to

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Abstract

This empirical research provided an insight into the appreciation of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), specifically in directness, and the interactions of its effects between contrasting cultures. Due to the growing rise in multicultural business negotiations, a better understanding of CAT assists in increasing for example organizational success, and negotiation outcomes. Drawing on Hall's High and Low-context culture framework, this study investigated the difference in appreciation of directness accommodation between a high (France) and low-context (the Netherlands) culture in a business negotiation setting with an unequal power distribution. We hypothesized that low-context cultures showed greater appreciation for convergence towards directness. Additionally, we did not expect the maintenance of the speaker's communicative style to be significantly different between the two cultures. Results indicated that convergence towards directness was not significantly appreciated more by the low-context culture, it was however significantly less appreciated by the high-context culture, indicating a strong preference for maintenance by the high-context culture. Lastly, results indicated that maintenance was not appreciated equally, rather appreciated more by the high-context culture than the low-context culture, indicating that even if there is no manipulation of accommodation taking place cultures still value certain characteristics of communication differently. These conclusions contributed to existing knowledge of communication tactics in business negotiations and are used in multicultural environments as a guide to preferences regarding CAT.

Theoretical Framework

In the ever-globalizing world, cultural identities regularly meet and occasionally attempt to merge in order to function as a multicultural society. However, cultural engagement, in the form of willingly communicating, working, and living with other cultures, is a significant challenge which is often underestimated. Hesse (2000) argues that engagement in a multicultural context may be strained due to change, tensions, and lack of tolerance. However, the concept of cultural engagement is described by Nye (2007) as a central part of the establishment of functional multiculturalism within a society. The article argues for three steps in realizing the multiculturalism of a society (country, corporation, community etc.): Recognition, Observing of differences, and Toleration. The latter, however, is a complicated step. Nye posits that tolerance is not the end product of cultural engagement, rather the fundamental step towards it. Multiculturalism requires observing (learning), tolerating of differences, and engaging across those differences. Nonetheless, these requirements are

difficult to meet (Shome, 2012) due to change in people's living situation (religion, communities, holidays etc.) that is often met with resistance.

Such resistance resonates in intercultural business, where there are increased difficulties in understanding and communicating with colleagues, peers, and superiors. As the number of multicultural teams, classes, and interactions in business and academia is growing (Braslauskas, 2021), so too increase the challenges (Yuges, 2020). Examples of issues with communication in a multicultural environment are language barriers, attitudes towards conflict resolution, different decision-making styles, and different ways of building trust and relationships (Hussain, 2018). The study of Pratiwi et al. (2023) equally underlines the necessity of research on cultural differences in a business environment due to the growing amount of intercultural communication in business. Therefore, this current study aims to further investigate the effect of culture in corporate communications with the focus of reducing the challenges of effective intercultural business communication.

The necessity of research on intercultural corporate communication is highlighted by Adanlawo et al. (2021), who argue that language is seen as one of the most austere operational problems in many intercultural businesses. Drawing on Shannon and Weaver's (1949) theoretical model of communication to minimize disturbances, the authors explored the various ways in which language impedes effective intercultural business communication. The model put forth by Shannon and Weaver highlights noise as a dysfunctional factor within communicative processes (Al-Fedaghi, 2012). Noise is defined as 'any interference with the message which may lead to the signal received being different from that sent'. As a result of noise, a communicative effort may be differently interpreted due to the culture barrier, creating a language barrier as a consequence of the culture barrier. The study by Adanlawo et al. (2021) therefore argues that within intercultural business, cultural disparities function as noise in the effectiveness of a communicative effort. Additionally, the study recommends training and further research on the bridging of these cultural gaps to better our understanding of interculturality in business communication.

A commonly used way to decrease any form of noise in business communication is communicative accommodation. In 1973, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was first introduced by American social psychologist Howard Giles. Giles proposed a framework designed to explain and predict how and why individuals adjust their communication styles to their conversational partner(s) during social interactions (1973). Changes in communication could be in accents, directness, tone, volume, speech rate, language, and slang usage among many others. There are three types of accommodation styles

that can be adopted: convergence, maintenance, and divergence (Giles et al., 1991). With convergence, the speaker tries to adapt their interactions to be more similar to those of the listener. With maintenance, the speaker does not change their linguistic style towards the listener. Lastly, with divergence the speaker tries to diverge their communication to that of the listener. CAT, specifically convergence, is associated as a key element with efficient and correct communication as identified by Lockwood and Song (2020). This article investigated the use of accommodation strategies between native and nonnative English speakers in virtual business meetings. By providing a detailed literary review with their experiment, the authors conclude that within an environment where there is more communicative accommodation (thus reducing noise), there is an increased productivity and output of business processes.

The increased performance in business by accommodating, and therefore reducing noise, is a strategy based on Similarity Theory (ST). ST, developed around the same time as CAT, posits that being or becoming similar to another yields increased results and performance, whether it be socially, or in a business context. A study by Pornpitakpan (2003) concludes that positive business outcomes increase with higher levels of perceived cultural similarity and attraction between Thai and American professionals. Similarly, a significantly higher employability rate is found in speakers which are culturally and communicatively similar to them (Roebken, 2010; Rakic et al., 2011). Accommodation to one's communication style has even been proven to have an effect in human-computer interactions, where computers with a similar communication style to the human participant were evaluated more positively and received a higher degree of satisfaction (Nass et al., 1995). Specific characteristics of speech can be accommodated to, leading to a positive effect of ST in the evaluation of the speaker (Buller & Aune, 1988). This effect is supported by Geregory Jr. et al.'s (1997) article which tests the presence of accommodation, the evaluation of the conversational partners, and the quality of the conversation. It was found that if there was a noted presence of converging accommodation, there was a significantly more positive evaluation of the speakers and the conversation. It is therefore argued that increasing similarity towards others increases the positive effects of CAT and effectively reduces noise between intercultural speakers.

To summarize, this current study aimed to further investigate the role of the positive effect of CAT in a multicultural business context. By deepening the understanding of communicative convergence towards conversational partners, increased positive outcomes can be achieved in a global business environment that is challenged by the growing amount of intercultural correspondence within or between corporations. Communicative convergence is

a form of reducing noise that is based on ST to increase mutual understanding, trust, and efficiency between speakers. This form of reducing noise has not become a standard practice in professional environments, where its effect has been proven to be highly salient.

However, as Braslauskas (2020) suggests, there are still factors which are overlooked on overcoming the obstacles of cross-cultural business communication. A recent study by Nguyen and Hamid (2019) reveals that power distribution is an influential factor in communicative accommodation. In this study, student minorities are shown to converge towards students speaking the majority language, revealing that unequal power distributions can cause a one-way convergence effect. Consequently, this indicates that power dynamics can impact the presence and the effect of accommodation. A study by Muir et al. (2016) confirms that a low-power position induces a greater likelihood of communication accommodation in participants. Nevertheless, unequal power distributions have shown contrasting results regarding performance of the speakers (Schaerer et al., 2020). For example, a study by Sari et al. (2019) showed that foreign students often chose to diverge from their conversational partners in their politeness strategy, as they maintained their foreign identity. This study concluded that in the case of a foreign/native power distribution, accommodation was the unfavourable option. Therefore, unequal power distributions report differences in the perceived appreciation of accommodation.

Contrasting results like the aforementioned studies between accommodation and convergence call into question the correct form of accommodation to increase performance in unequal power distributions in intercultural business communication. The scarcity of existing research combining power distribution and intercultural business proves this question currently unanswered. While the positive effects of communicative accommodation have been noted in many different settings, for example: politics (Batool & Shakur, 2023; Popal, 2022; Hall-Lew et al., 2017), crisis negotiation (Hill et al., 2023; Ladegaard, 2011), and business (Rogerson-Revell, 2010; Ayoko et al., 2002), the interplay of unequal power distributions is not assumed as factor within the literature on these topics. In recent research, suggestions point towards the influence of power dynamics on CAT as a contrast (e.g. maintenance-convergence) instead of one specific accommodation type (Hoffman & Zhang, 2023).

Such influence of power dynamics on CAT as a contrast regarding business communication is found in negotiations. Negotiations have an unequal power distribution due to their nature of demand/supply. It is known that successful negotiations are associated with higher levels of communicative accommodation (Taylor & Thomas, 2008). This study assessed the degree to which negotiators coordinate their word use and the negotiation

outcome in a hostage situation, finding that higher coordination led to significantly better results. A hostage situation is a context with an unequal power distribution in the field of crisis mediation, showing valuable conclusions in the literature on unequal power distributions in communication accommodation. However, this theory has not currently been tested in a business environment. Due to crisis mediation's urgent and high-pressure environment, effects of power dynamics can behave differently than in a business context.

Another factor that is overlooked in existing research on overcoming the obstacles of intercultural business communication and the appreciation of accommodation is that of culture. Many studies on this topic are based on the English language, assuming generalizability to cultures outside the Anglosphere (Gaete, 2022; Lee, 2021; Drljaca Margić, 2017; Jenkins, 2000), resulting in a lack of research on the effects of communication accommodation in other cultures. Hofstede (2001), suggests that variations in power distance, collectivism versus individualism, and communication styles across cultures indicate that accommodation strategies might not have uniform effects. Consequently, a converging accommodation style of a speaker, while attempting to improve understanding and evaluation of this speaker, may be perceived as negative by other cultures, as this accommodation style may not be the appropriate style in their own or the foreign culture. For example, a study by Scholtens and Dam (2007) concludes that there are significant differences among ethical policies (and their interpretations) of companies headquartered in different countries, thereby highlighting the importance of research on cultural differences in business communications for improved organizational success.

Cultural differences are defined using Hall's (1959) cultural dimensions. In Hall's work, the author describes key cultural elements (Context, Time, and Space) that function to substantiate differences between cultures. In the case of communication, context is the cultural element that is focused on, as this element is present in a culture's form of communication. The height of the usage of context in a culture is defined as a continuum of how explicit messages that are exchanged within one culture are and the importance of context within the communicative act. For example, someone from a high-context culture will be able to convey a message through less direct words by using contextual cues of the conversation and environment as additional information. The context of a culture forms an empirical manner of exploring differences in cultures that may influence effects of communicative accommodation in intercultural business. An example of a high-context and low-context contrast in Europe is France and the Netherlands. French culture is identified to be high-context while the Dutch

culture is low-context. This pair serves as an exemplary contrast for this current study, due to their geographic proximity to each other and the accessibility for sampling.

Lastly, a final factor that is overlooked in existing research on overcoming the obstacles of intercultural business communication and the appreciation of accommodation is what part of the communicative act is exactly accommodating to the conversational partner. There are many aspects of language that differ per culture, think of speech rate between Spanish (260 words per minute) and English (140 words per minute), formality, or the aforementioned usage of context. Hall's (1959) theory of high and low-context cultures aligns with a previous empirical attempt by Kim et al. (1998) to measure directness differences between cultures, due to the either explicit (direct) or implicit (indirect) nature of a culture. This study tested high and low-context comparisons in politeness, where context in cultures was also used to substantiate differences in directness. Directness and politeness in intercultural business is connected in meaning based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory which uses indirectness as a form of politeness. Yang (2012) reiterates the challenges of achieving any sort of personal relationships in business negotiations, further confirming the equality of the concepts of directness and politeness in business negotiations.

Based on the currently growing multiculturalism in business, the lack of knowledge on the practical uses of communication accommodation, the lack of research on business negotiations with an unequal power distribution, and the differing results of the effects of the studies on CAT the following research question is proposed: *What difference do high and low-context cultures have in the appreciation of linguistic accommodation on directness?*

There is no expectation for maintenance to be appreciated differently between a direct or indirect culture. On the contrary, convergence has a positive impact on the perception of the speaker. However, convergence in directness in the form of becoming more direct may not positively impact the appreciation of the accommodation by an indirect culture. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Convergence on directness towards direct is appreciated more by low-context cultures than high-context cultures.

H2: Maintenance of directness is appreciated equally by the high-context and low-context culture.

Methodology

Materials

Two scripts were produced by the researchers (see Appendix). These scripts contained a negotiation of salary between a superior and an employee and were based on either maintenance or convergence of directness of the employee towards the superior. Fragments of preexisting transcriptions of business negotiations were used to inspire the script (Ladegaard, 2011; Yang, 2012). Additionally, guidelines on the construction of a negotiation and variables like turn-taking, pause length, and response time were considered (Di Stasi et al., 2023; Neu, 1988). To ensure no variation found in the results could be attributed to differences in the scripts, the scripts were produced in English. Additionally, control questions regarding the coherence of the scripts were added, this guaranteed the validity of the answers.

Initially, it was necessary to establish that the scripts seemed like a realistic salary negotiation. The realism of the conversation was measured with a 7-point Likert scale (Please indicate to which extent you agree with the following statements. - This negotiation could happen in real life [1= Strongly disagree, 7= Strongly agree]) to secure that there were no biases in the answers from the subjects, therefore making it a control variable. Additionally, it ensured that the conversations were representative of a real business setting in France or the Netherlands. A one-way ANOVA showed no significant difference between the realism of the scripts and the conditions and cultures ($F(3,55) = .10, p = .999$). It can therefore be concluded that the realism of the scripts ($M = 4.97, SD = 1.67$) was considered satisfactory by the participants and any results from the analyses have been caused by the researched effect.

In addition, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted to test for a significant manipulation of directness between the two scripts, which was measured with a numerical scale (Did you find the employee to be? [0 = Indirect; 100 = Direct]). The independent samples *t*-test on manipulation of the scripts, with directness as a between-subjects factor, showed a significant manipulation between the two scripts ($t(52,15) = 2.463, p = .017$). The convergence script ($M = 82.59, SD = 12.89$) proved to have a higher level of directness than the maintenance script ($M = 71.94, SD = 19.73$). It could therefore be concluded that the manipulation of directness in the scripts of maintenance and convergence was successful, and results have been attributed to this effect.

The independent variable of **Accommodation** had two levels: *Convergence* and *Maintenance*. The test stimuli were recordings of the script which contained a negotiation on salary (see Appendix) in which the employee was converging or maintaining in directness

towards the superior. The outcome of the conversation, proposed salary, and reasons remained the same in order to be able to exclude any other external variables or biases.

The independent variable of **Culture** of the evaluator had two levels: *High-context* (France) and *Low-context* (Dutch). This means that the sample was divided into two groups, one from a high-context culture and from a low-context culture. The script of the audio recording was kept in English but recorded with accents from native Dutch/French speakers. The speakers in the audio recording were required to have a neutral (normal tone, not raspy or nasal) voice, as this could be an external variable influencing the accommodation and its appreciation. These recordings were made by one of the researchers as the superior (neutral accent) and the employee is one native speaker of Dutch and one of French for their corresponding cultures.

Subjects

There were 104 Dutch or French native participants in this study, of which 59 data entries were complete enough to be used for analysis. Out of these 59 participants (age: $M = 36.98$, $SD = 18.61$) there were 29 males and 30 females (see Table 1. for the full descriptives). The participants were gathered via network and snowball sampling. A Chi-square test showed no significant relation in the gender distributions of participants ($\chi^2(3, N = 59) = 3.756, p = .289$).

Table 1.

Gender distributions of participants per condition.

		What is your gender?		Total
		Male	Female	
Accommodation	Maintenance	8	10	18
	_Dutch			
Convergence	_Dutch	10	4	14
	Maintenance	5	8	13
_French	Convergence	6	8	14
	_French			
Total		29	30	59

As French and Dutch were used in this study, the participant must be a native to their respective culture and their respective language. That is to say, people who have not grown up within the culture of their respective language group were not relevant for this study. For

example, France is considered a high-context culture whereas Canada is considered a low-context culture. This means that Canadian French people could not be used for the experiment as it would impact the validity of the experiment. Besides their cultural background it was important that the subject learned either Dutch or French (respective of which group they are in) as their native language, if there were any influences of other languages from a young age, and thus by extension other cultures, there could not be assurance that only Dutch and French cultures are tested.

Another variable that could influence the answers of the participants is whether the participants had work experience. Therefore, a chi-square test was conducted. The chi square test showed no significant interaction for work experience (yes/no) and the conditions ($\chi^2(3, N = 58) = 4.386, p = .223$) It can therefore be concluded that, even with a few participants without work experience (see Table 2. for full descriptives), the results of the analyses have been attributed to the researched effect.

Table 2.

Work experience per condition.

		Do you have any work experience?		Total
		No	Yes	
Accommodation	Maintenance	0	18	18
	_Dutch			
	Convergence	3	11	14
	_Dutch			
	Maintenance	1	12	13
	_French			
	Convergence	2	11	13
	_French			
Total		6	52	58

Design

For this study, a 2x2 between-subjects design was used to determine the appreciation of directness accommodation between different cultures. Each participant was only exposed to one experimental condition and was automatically divided into the French or Dutch group depending on their cultural background. The subjects were entered into the converging or maintenance group through random allocation to guarantee that there could be no biases due to the sampling methods. The maintenance groups heard a recording in which there is no

converging accommodation in directness. In the convergence recordings converging accommodation in directness did take place.

Instruments

A questionnaire was created for the subjects, starting with questions regarding their personal information to collect basic demographic data: an open-ended question about age, a multiple choice question about gender [male, female, non-binary, other, prefer not to say], a multiple choice question about country of origin [The Netherlands, France, Other], a multiple choice question about current or highest completed education [Dutch: VWO, MBO, HBO/WO; French: Collège, Lycée, Licence/Master], and continued by measuring their appreciation of accommodation. Lastly the questionnaire ended with control questions: an open-ended question on whether the participant would give the employee a raise, a scale from 0-100 to measure directness [0 = indirect, 100 = direct], a yes/no question about whether the participant had previous work experience (with added voluntary open-ended question asking about what position if the participant answered yes), and a yes/no question on whether the participant had ever negotiated their salary. This questionnaire was built by the researchers. Figure 1. displays the analytical model of this study.

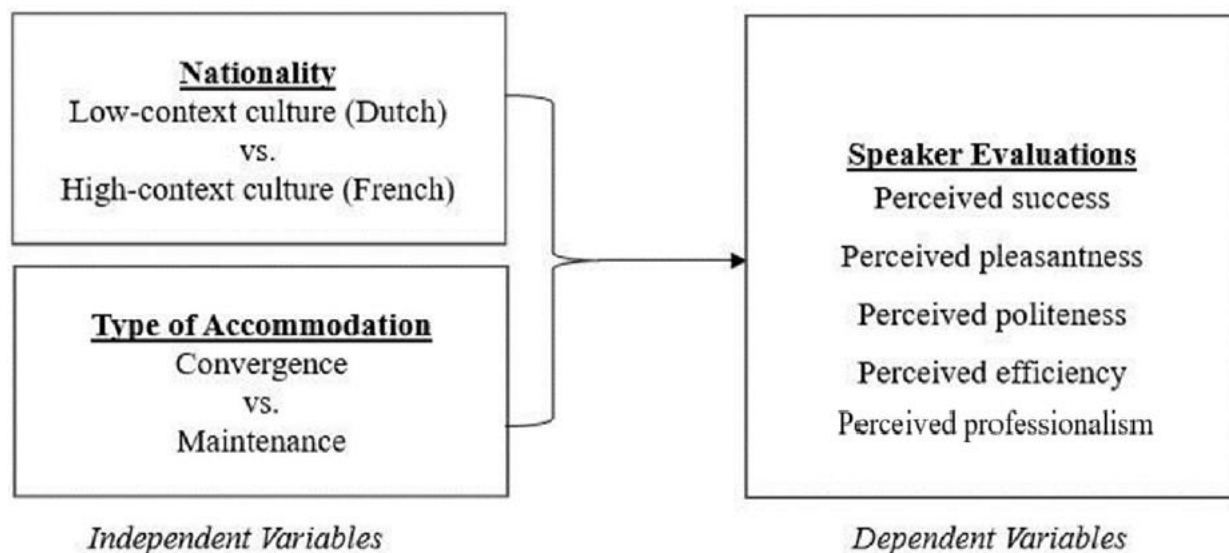


Figure 1. the analytical model of this study.

The **Appreciation towards accommodation** was divided into five dependent variables, respectively: *success*, *pleasantness*, *politeness*, *efficiency*, and *professionalism*.

The success of the conversation was based on if the subjects were under the impression that the employee was a successful negotiator, in other words, the employee was sufficiently capable of getting a raise from their superior. The variable of success was measured with a 7-point Likert scale (Please indicate to which extent you agree with the following statements. - The employee was a successful negotiator. [1= Strongly disagree, 7= Strongly agree]) to acquire an interpretation of the differences in the subject's perception of the success of the employee.

The pleasantness of the employee was to measure the appreciation of the employee by the different cultures. The pleasantness was measured by giving the subjects two 7-point Likert scales, the first with two items, based on Belleza et al. (1986) (Please indicate to which extent you agree with the following statements. - The employee was friendly. - The employee would be enjoyable to work with. [1= Strongly disagree, 7= Strongly agree] - I find the employee: [1= Very unpleasant, 7=Very pleasant]). The reliability of 'perceived pleasantness' comprising of three items was good: $\alpha = .80$, meaning all three items were used to calculate the compound variable 'perceived pleasantness', which was used in the further analyses.

The politeness of the employee was tested to get information regarding the appreciation of the directness accommodation. The scales that were used in these questions regarding politeness is a 7-point Likert scale with three items, based on Burke and Kraut (2008) (Please indicate to which extent you agree with the following statements. - The employee was polite. - The employee was well-mannered. - The employee was respectful. [1= Strongly disagree, 7= Strongly agree]). The reliability of 'perceived politeness' comprising of three items was excellent: $\alpha = .91$, meaning all three items were used to calculate the compound variable 'perceived politeness', which was used in the further analyses.

Efficiency measured the amount of perceived efficiency of the negotiator. This level is closely related to the success level. Whether the negotiation was successful or not however, it could still have been perceived as an undemanding or rather strenuous conversation. Perception of time and effort it took to come to an agreement took part in this. Efficiency was measured with a 7-point Likert scale (Please indicate to which extent you agree with the following statements. - The employee was an efficient negotiator. [1= Strongly disagree, 7= Strongly agree]).

Professionalism measured the amount of perceived professionalism of the negotiator. The professionalism variable was tested to be able to conclude if converging or maintaining

was seen as unprofessional, therewith decreasing the appreciation of the accommodation. Professionalism was measured with a 7-point Likert scale (Please indicate to which extent you agree with the following statements. - The employee was professional. [1= Strongly disagree, 7= Strongly agree]).

Procedure

The experiment was conducted via an online questionnaire in the program Qualtrics. The participants were presented with information regarding their privacy and the usage of the data of this study. The privacy statement was added to the materials so that the participants were aware of exactly what happened to their data after it was collected, analyzed, and reported. This privacy statement conformed to the norms set by Radboud University and the legal requirements of the Dutch government. All information regarding privacy and data usage must be presented to the participant before the start of the experiment, giving the participant the option to leave the study without filling in any data.

Next the participants were asked to fill in personal information and they were sorted into either the maintenance or the convergence group of their respective language. The subjects listened to the recording made for their experimental condition. After listening to the entire recording, they were asked to fill in the survey. After the survey the participants were made aware of the purpose of the study. The participants were asked to participate personally by one of the researchers or other participants (network/snowball sampling). On average, the participants took 10.54 minutes ($N = 58$, $SD = 6.60$) to complete the survey, with one outlier excluded due to their completion time being 2472.53 minutes (nearly 2 days).

Statistical Treatment

For the hypotheses to be answered, the dependent variables (success, pleasantness, politeness, efficiency, professionalism) were tested with two-way ANOVAs, with the independent variables as factors (accommodation type, culture). Significant tests were further investigated with the use of one-way ANOVAs on the data, split by either culture or accommodation type.

Results

Perceived Success

A two-way ANOVA was conducted with accommodation type and culture as factors on perceived success as dependent variable. The two-way ANOVA showed a significant interaction ($F(1,55) = 12.31, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$) and a main effect of accommodation type ($F(1,55) = 5.14, p = .027, \eta^2 = .09$). There was no main effect found of culture ($F(1,55) = .38, p = .543, \eta^2 = .01$).

Per culture

Two one-way ANOVAs were conducted with accommodation type as factor on perceived success as dependent variable, split by culture. The one-way ANOVA for the Dutch culture showed no significant effect ($M = 4.69, SD = 1.42$) of accommodation type. The one-way ANOVA for the French culture showed a significant effect ($F(1,25) = 19.80, p < .001$) of accommodation type. This shows that the French culture perceived the success significantly higher for maintenance ($M = 5.92, SD = .76$) than for convergence ($M = 3.93, SD = 1.44$).

Per accommodation type

Two one-way ANOVAs were conducted with culture as factor on perceived success as dependent variable, split by accommodation type. The one-way ANOVA for the accommodation type maintenance showed a significant effect ($F(1,29) = 12.52, p = .001$) of culture. This shows that the French culture perceived the success significantly higher for maintenance ($M = 5.92, SD = .76$) than the Dutch culture ($M = 4.50, SD = 1.30$). The one-way ANOVA for the accommodation type convergence showed no significant effect ($M = 4.43, SD = 1.57$) of culture.

Perceived pleasantness

A two-way ANOVA was conducted with accommodation type and culture as factors on perceived pleasantness as dependent variable. The two-way ANOVA showed no significant interaction ($F(1,55) = 1.88, p = .176, \eta^2 = .03$) and no main effect of accommodation type ($F(1,55) = 1.66, p = .202, \eta^2 = .03$) and culture ($F(1,55) = .16, p = .693, \eta^2 < .01$).

Perceived politeness

A two-way ANOVA was conducted with accommodation type and culture as factors on perceived politeness as dependent variable. The two-way ANOVA showed a significant

interaction ($F(1,54) = 5.87, p = .019, \eta^2 = .10$) and no main effect of accommodation type ($F(1,54) = 2.35, p = .131, \eta^2 = .04$) and culture ($F(1,54) = .19, p = .668, \eta^2 < .01$).

Per culture

Two one-way ANOVAs were conducted with accommodation type as factor on perceived politeness as dependent variable, split by culture. The one-way ANOVA for the Dutch culture showed no significant effect ($M = 5.54, SD = .97$) of accommodation type. The one-way ANOVA for the French culture showed a significant effect ($F(1,25) = 5.70, p = .025$) of accommodation type. This shows that the French culture perceived the politeness significantly higher for maintenance ($M = 6.28, SD = .65$) than for convergence ($M = 5.10, SD = 1.68$).

Per accommodation type

Two one-way ANOVAs were conducted with culture as factor on perceived politeness as dependent variable, split by accommodation type. The one-way ANOVA for the accommodation type maintenance showed a significant effect ($F(1,29) = 9.18, p = .005$) of culture. This shows that the French culture perceived the politeness significantly higher for maintenance ($M = 6.28, SD = .65$) than the Dutch ($M = 5.43, SD = .85$). The one-way ANOVA for the accommodation type convergence showed no significant effect ($M = 5.38, SD = 1.44$) of culture.

Perceived efficiency

A two-way ANOVA was conducted with accommodation type and culture as factors on perceived efficiency as dependent variable. The two-way ANOVA showed a significant interaction ($F(1,55) = 5.01, p = .028, \eta^2 = .09$) and no main effect of accommodation type ($F(1,55) = 2.57, p = .115, \eta^2 = .05$) and culture ($F(1,55) = 2.90, p = .094, \eta^2 = .05$).

Per culture

Two one-way ANOVAs were conducted with accommodation type as factor on perceived efficiency as dependent variable, split by culture. The one-way ANOVA for the Dutch culture showed no significant effect ($M = 4.50, SD = 1.59$) of accommodation type. The one-way ANOVA for the French culture showed a significant effect ($F(1,25) = 8.89, p = .006$) of accommodation type. This shows that the French culture perceived the efficiency significantly higher for maintenance ($M = 5.92, SD = .76$) than for convergence ($M = 4.43, SD = 1.65$).

Per accommodation type

Two one-way ANOVAs were conducted with culture as factor on perceived efficiency as dependent variable, split by accommodation type. The one-way ANOVA for the accommodation type maintenance showed a significant effect ($F(1,29) = 10.47, p = .003$) of culture. This shows that the French culture perceived the efficiency significantly higher for maintenance ($M = 5.92, SD = .76$) than the Dutch ($M = 4.39, SD = 1.58$). The one-way ANOVA for the accommodation type convergence showed no significant effect ($M = 4.54, SD = 1.62$) of culture.

Perceived professionalism

A two-way ANOVA was conducted with accommodation type and culture as factors on perceived professionalism as dependent variable. The two-way ANOVA showed a significant interaction ($F(1,55) = 5.81, p = .019, \eta^2 = .10$) and no main effect of accommodation type ($F(1,55) = .004, p = .948, \eta^2 = .000$) and culture ($F(1,55) = 1.32, p = .255, \eta^2 = .02$).

Per culture

Two one-way ANOVAs were conducted with accommodation type as factor on perceived professionalism as dependent variable, split by culture. The one-way ANOVA for the Dutch culture showed no significant effect ($M = 5.31, SD = 1.47$) of accommodation type. The one-way ANOVA for the French culture showed no significant effect ($M = 5.74, SD = 1.16$) of accommodation type.

Per accommodation type

Two one-way ANOVAs were conducted with culture as factor on perceived professionalism as dependent variable, split by accommodation type. The one-way ANOVA for the accommodation type maintenance showed a significant effect ($F(1,29) = 6.08, p = .020$) of culture. This shows that the French culture perceived the professionalism significantly higher for maintenance ($M = 6.15, SD = .80$) than the Dutch ($M = 4.94, SD = 1.63$). The one-way ANOVA for the accommodation type convergence showed no significant effect ($M = 5.57, SD = 1.23$) of culture.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of communication accommodation on directness, specifically maintenance and convergence, in conjunction with high and low-context cultures' influence perceptions of success, efficiency, pleasantness, politeness, and professionalism among native Dutch and French listeners.

H1 states that convergence on directness is appreciated more by low-context cultures than high-context cultures. The findings of all variables do not provide sufficient evidence that the Dutch appreciated convergence more than the French. The Dutch seemed to be indifferent to convergence/maintenance, showing no significant differences between their ratings of the perceived appreciation. This provides an argument against H1. Therefore, H1 is rejected. It should, however, be noted that the French did appear to appreciate maintenance significantly more than convergence. This would provide an argument for an opposite hypothesis of H1 (maintenance on directness is appreciated more by high-context cultures).

H2 states that maintenance of directness is appreciated equally by the high-context and low-context culture. The results of perceived efficiency, perceived success, perceived politeness, and perceived professionalism disprove this hypothesis by indicating a significant difference in the mean results of the Maintenance groups. The findings conclude that the French Maintenance group perceived the aforementioned variables significantly higher than the Dutch Maintenance group. Therefore, H2 is rejected.

Discussion

The present study aimed to contribute new insights into the study of Communication Accommodation Theory by investigating whether there are differences in appreciation between a high and low-context culture on communicative accommodation in a business setting with an unequal power distribution. We investigated to what extent native Dutch and native French speakers differ in their attitudes to converging accommodation of directness.

Our findings that the use of converging accommodation does not prove to be positively evaluated in a high-context culture, and that the effect is not significant in a low-context culture, do not align with existing research on perceptions of accommodation. As previously mentioned, convergence is seen as a key element in increasing the similarity of one's communication style to the other (Giles, 2016). Inconsistent with the aforementioned studies of Gregory et al. (1997), Pornpitakpan (2003), and Roebken (2010), converging accommodation did not provoke a similarity effect, instead only providing more communicative noise. While this is a surprising conclusion compared to existing literature, the newly added in variable of high vs low-context cultures could explain this difference. Whereas the aforementioned studies rely on the results within a single culture, the present study compares two contrasting cultures. One of the key characteristics of this contrast (high vs low context) is directness, as explained in the introduction. When such a difference between these two contrasting cultures was challenged, the results show that cultural differences appear to be stronger than the positive effects of CAT. This leads towards the hypothesis that cultural differences may influence the effect of communication accommodation. However, depending on its salience to communication, other cultural characteristics may not replicate this finding. It is therefore suggested that in future research CAT is tested on other scales of cultural characteristics, such as personal space preference, and time culture. For example, a follow-up study can be conducted where two contrasting cultures in personal space preference (e.g. Argentina: 0.76m average distance to a stranger, Romania: 1.4m; (Sorokowska et al., 2017)) are tested on their appreciation of accommodation to the personal space preference of their counterparts. As the element of personal space does not directly interfere with verbal communication, it can be hypothesized that the effect of CAT is stronger in that case than the effect of this cultural difference.

Nevertheless, our findings that converging accommodation was considered less favourable by the high-context culture, whereas it was neutral for the low-context culture, confirm that cultural disparities function as noise within a business environment. Noise, as first described by Shannon and Weaver (1949), is defined as any interference with the

message which may lead to the signal received being different from that sent. In line with Adanlawo et al. (2021), our findings suggest that the cultural differences between a high and low-context culture serve as a form of noise in their reception and evaluation of converging directness accommodation. As previously underlined by Hussain (2018), such noise may consist of language barriers, different attitudes towards conflict resolution, different decision-making styles, and different ways of building trust and relationship. The aforementioned issues are expected to have played a pivotal role in the divergent findings.

Our findings that maintenance is not evaluated equally by low and high-context cultures further align with research on the differences in communication styles and appreciation of certain factors like directness. In line with Adair and Brett (2005), our findings hint towards dyadic movements between high and low-context cultures in their evaluation of directness, indicating a more intricate interplay of the variables between these two types of cultures than previously hypothesized. For example, whereas perceived pleasantness did not show a significant effect of accommodation, other variables did. This result shows that some specific attitudes react more to a manipulation of communicative accommodation than others. In future research the variable pleasantness could be further investigated, taking into account its biological nature in the brain (Kühn & Gallinat, 2012). Pleasantness can be expanded into multiple variables such as desirability, goodness, and likeability (Belleza et al., 1986). By expanding the concept of pleasantness, further research can explore the reason why this variable did not yield significant results in this study. A further study could, for example, hypothesize that affective characteristics like desirability are not affected by accommodation in communication.

It should be acknowledged that this study has hard limitations which impact the applicability of the conclusions. Primarily, the insufficient sample size calls into question the robustness of our significant findings, and the missed possibilities of our insignificant findings. Due to the small sample size, it cannot be concluded that there is a normal distribution, and therefore it is not generalizable to the general population. This calls into question the validity of our results, even though the results were significant. For further research, it is suggested to test converging accommodation in an unequal power distribution business environment with a larger sample size to be able to draw robust conclusions. It can be hypothesized that a steadfast effect of converging accommodation may be stronger than the effect of cultural differences on power distributions in a business environment. Additionally, because of the uncertainty regarding the generalizability, it may be that existing effects were missed, insignificant, and/or inconclusive, even though in practice the effects are present.

In terms of practical implications for communication departments of intercultural corporations, the current study showed that the use of accommodation of a key communicative characteristic made no positive change to the evaluations of individuals from cultures that are inherently opposite of the behaviour (directness) that is being accommodated to. As convergence was not appreciated more positively on any variable by the low-context culture nor maintenance equally by both low-context and high-context culture, these findings can be taken to imply that cultural identity can overpower the effects of communicative accommodation. Therefore, in the case of companies containing employees from a high-context culture, it is suggested to maintain culture-specific tactics to bridge the gap of cultural differences rather than using generalized strategies to increase similarity. Additionally, employees on the lower end of the power distribution are advised to accommodate to a higher-power employee in moderation and in a culture-specific manner, as accommodation on characteristics like directness is not perceived positively in each culture.

In conclusion, convergence on directness is not appreciated more by low-context cultures than high-context cultures. Nonetheless, maintenance was shown to be more appreciated by high-context cultures than low-context cultures. This contradictory result is explained by the contrast between cultures, as their characteristics appeared to overpower the noted positive effects of CAT. Additionally, maintenance on directness was not appreciated equally by both low-context and high-context cultures, based on the results of the perceived success, perceived politeness, and perceived efficiency variables. This finding can be explained due to the presence of noise in intercultural communication. Cultural disparities cause a difference in interpretations of communicative acts which functions as noise.

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Appendix

Transcript

[SCRIPT BEGINNING = SAME IN BOTH CONDITIONS = aim is to show the employee is originally indirect]

Manager: *Please take a seat. Alright, let's get started. I would like to discuss your future within the company. Is there any particular matter you would like to discuss first?*

S: *Honestly, I don't really have a preference.*

M: *In this case, we will first discuss your potential future salary. Have you thought of an appropriate amount considering your position?*

S: *I did some research about what's the average salary for my position and I discovered that an HR coordinator, in this country can earn between forty eight and seventy two thousand euro per year The amount depends of course on the skills and responsibilities of the employee...*

M: *In my opinion, around fifty four thousand would be applicable considering your brief working experience with us. Do you agree?*

S: *It is surely a reasonable offer... Personally, I believe my position requires a lot of responsibility for the effective functioning of this department and more in general of the company... In addition, I believe that, despite being new in the Human Resources (HR) field, I have been successful in performing my duties and responsibilities within past... Allow me, therefore, to ask you if the raise could be a little bit higher..*

M: *How much would you consider appropriate then?*

[END OF SCRIPT 1 = MAINTENANCE = the employee stays indirect]

S: *Considering the elements I previously mentioned, as well as the caliber of the position and the enterprise, I would say around sixty six thousand per year is a fair request...*

M: *I'm taking into account what you did just mention... Can we agree on sixty thousand per year? With the inclusion of holidays and overtime.*

S: *I would not want to sound ungrateful but I am not sure I agree. I would have expected a higher amount considering the skills I have presented as well as my vast past experience.*

[END OF SCRIPT 2 = Convergence = the employee becomes direct]

S: *I would say sixty-six thousand per year is a fair request.*

M: *I'm taking into account what you did just mention... Can we agree on sixty-thousand per year? With the inclusion of holidays and overtime.*

S: *I disagree. My expectations are for a higher amount considering the skills I have presented as well as my vast past experience.*