Convergence in job interviews: The effects on attitudinal evaluations across high- and low-context cultures

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Abstract

Globalization has led to more interactions between people from different cultures such as job interviews. Previous research has found that candidates are prone to converge their accent to the interviewer. However, few studies have investigated whether convergence in directness in communication also happens during job interviews and if this influences the outcome and thus successfulness of the interview for the candidate. Furthermore, to date, no studies have elaborated on whether convergence in directness is evaluated differently by high- and low-context cultures. It could be that cultures which prefer indirect communication are not sensitive to convergence on directness and even react negatively to it. Therefore, the present study examined whether convergence of the candidate on the basis of directness in a job interview influences the success of the interview and if there is a difference in candidate evaluations between English (high-context) and Dutch (low-context) mother tongue speakers. An experiment was conducted in which 47 Dutch and 35 English participants evaluated an audio sample from a job interview setting in which the candidate either converged to the interviewer in directness or remained indirect throughout the conversation. Findings revealed that in the convergence condition, low-context participants found the candidate more likeable than high-context participants. Furthermore, in the convergence condition the candidate was evaluated as more competent and hireable than in the maintenance condition. The latter implies that by converging in directness, a candidate could increase hiring chances regardless of cultural differences.

Keywords: convergence, high- and low-context culture, job interviews

Research proposal

Due to globalization, the workplace is becoming increasingly internationalized. As a result, interactions between people from different cultures occur more frequently (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010). One of such interactions is the job interview. This hiring setting is one of the most important ways in which the labor market is stratified (Rivera, 2012). During job interviews the recruiter needs to decide whether the candidate would be suited for the position as well as whether he or she will be an asset to the organization. Oftentimes, this decision is already made within five minutes (Wiley, 1977). It might therefore be useful to investigate what makes a job interview successful with regard to evaluations of the candidate and taking into account cultural differences. One of the ways in which candidates can be perceived as more likeable is through the language they use. Language is an important aspect in interpersonal evaluations (Callan et al.,1983; Gallois et al., 1984). It is a tool interlocutors can use to either increase or decrease the linguistic distance between them. The latter can be achieved through 'convergent accommodation' (Giles, 1973; Giles & Coupland, 1991).

Convergent accommodation is the phenomenon whereby people tend to adjust their way of speaking to sound more similar to the other. It occurs in all kinds of spoken interactions, ranging from colleagues meeting each other during a coffee break, to negotiations in business (Giles, 1973; Giles & Coupland, 1991). An explanation for convergent accommodation has been proposed by Giles and Powesland (1997) known as Communication Accommodation Theory. This theory argues that accommodation could exist due to the desire of people to reduce the social distance between the speaker and the interlocutor. The motivation that drives this desire is described as the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971). Willemyns et al. (1997, p. 2) define this paradigm as "the more similar people are perceived to be on various characteristics, the more likely they will be attracted to each other". So, by accommodating to the interlocutor people can increase the chances the interlocutor will be attracted to them.

According to Gallois et al. (1988), linguistic accommodation can be linked to how much people feel connected to and identify themselves with their in-group. A speaker who strongly identifies with their in-group shows more patterns of converging their speech during interaction to another in-group member, as well as more patterns of diverging when speaking with someone who does not belong to that in-group, than a speaker who does not identify with an in-group (Gallois et al., 1988). One of such in-groups can be defined by culture. Culture is "the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another" (Hofstede, 1980a, p. 24). According to Hofstede (1980a) these cultural groups can be highly diverse in size, ranging from societies (i.e., nations), to organizations, to families.

Research proposal

The concept of culture on a national level has been studied quite extensively (e.g., Hofstede, 1983; Kim et al., 1998, Hofstede, 2001). Perhaps the most frequently used framework to classify cultures based on nationality was published by Hofstede in his book *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (Hofstede, 1980b). Here he studied a multinational organization that had the same formal structure in each of the 39 countries it was active in. Due to this similarity in structure, the differences found in terms of attitudes and work ethic could be attributed to differences in culture between countries (Hofstede, 1980b). In his framework, Hofstede (1980b) initially included four dimensions to classify cultures: power distance (acceptance of social hierarchy), uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity (task or person oriented). Later on, he found two more dimensions which he added: time orientation (long-term vs short-term), and indulgence-restraint (Hofstede et al., 2010).

In addition to Hofstede's framework, Hall (1966; 1976) argued that cultures could also be classified according to the dimension of high-context vs low-context. This dimension of contextualization is based on whether information is communicated more implicitly or explicitly. In a high-context culture, emphasis is laid on the context provided through messages that have a deep meaning. People understand each other because they have formed close relationships and are therefore involved in each other's lives. As a result, communicating indirectly and relying highly on context is the norm in such a culture. Examples of high-context countries are China, the UK, and France (Hall, 1976). On the other end of the continuum, a low-context culture is a culture where communication is performed in a more explicit manner. What is meant is said directly through words. The people in low-context cultures show little involvement and are more focused on themselves. Therefore, communicating explicitly is the norm. Examples of low-context countries are Germany, the Netherlands, and the US (Hall, 1976).

The dimension of high-context vs low-context focuses, among others, on the way people communicate. A distinction can be made between direct and indirect communication. People who use direct communication "tend to say what they think" and "their message is conveyed primarily by the words they use, and they depend on the literal interpretation of these words" (Joyce, 2012, p. 1). The goal of this type of communication is simply to transfer information. On the other hand, Joyce (2012, p. 1) and Ting-Toomey (1999, p. 100) define indirect communication as a form of communication where "the meaning is conveyed not just by the words used but by nonverbal behaviors (pauses, silence, tone of voice), implication, understatement, and a widely shared understanding of the context of the communication". The

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goal of indirect communication is to provide context and to save face. Saving face means to steer clear of arguments, tensions, and conflicts (Joyce, 2012).

By comparing these two forms of communication, Joyce (2012) found differences in multiple situations. For example, where direct communicators would simply say 'No', indirect communicators would avoid this word at all costs and rather talk around it. Furthermore, when it comes to meetings in business situations, where direct communicators would want to immediately "get to the point" (Joyce, 2012, p. 2), indirect communicators prefer small talk first. In these situations, direct communication needs less words than indirect communication. If we then return to the setting of a job interview, we could argue that the questions and answers will be shorter when direct communication is used, whereas when indirect communication is used, they will be longer. Furthermore, because the goal of direct communication is simply to transfer information, during a job interview the candidate will give specific answers only related to the questions asked. For indirect communication the goal is to provide context, so questions will be answered more extensively to provide context and will be less related to the questions asked (Bašnáková et al., 2015). An example that illustrates the difference between a direct answer and an indirect answer in a job interview was provided by Bašnáková et al. (2015, p. 81):

(1a)　Q: "Are you fluent in any foreign languages?"

　　　　R: "I am planning to take a language course this summer" (indirect reply)

(1b)　Q: "What are your plans after graduation?"

　　　　R: "I am planning to take a language course this summer" (direct reply)

Examples that illustrate the difference between direct and indirect communication in terms of number of words used are also provided by Bašnáková et al. (2015, p. 90). A direct question-answer pair would be:

Q: How are you going to improve your language skills?

R: I am planning to follow an English course this summer.

An indirect question-answer pair would be:

Q: I can see that your previous job lasted less than three months. Did you resign voluntarily?

> R: I came there in the middle of a restructuring process and the newcomers had to leave as the first ones.

From the previously mentioned definitions of high- and low-context cultures and its link with direct and indirect communication, we could argue that people in low-context cultures would prefer direct communication whereas people in high-context cultures have a preference for indirect communication. This argument was examined by Tanova and Nadiri (2010). In their study, the researchers compared nine countries varying from high-context to low-context and how much direct communication was used in organizations. They hypothesized that managers in high-context countries would use less communication in its direct form towards employees, whereas managers in low-context countries would use more direct communication. In line with this hypothesis, they found that in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece (high-context) the score of direct communication was significantly lower than the score of Estonia, Finland, and Sweden (low-context). An implication, however, was that the study relied on data collected from a managerial perspective. The directness of the communication could have been perceived significantly different from the perspective of the employee (Tanova & Nadiri, 2010).

Returning to the context of a job interview, one could argue that culture can influence the outcome of the interview. This was studied by Rivera (2012). She wanted to investigate whether similarities in culture between the interviewer and candidate influenced the perceived hireability of the candidate. Participants working for large organizations who had hiring experience were interviewed on what they would search for in a candidate. The results indicated that cultural similarity in terms of "leisure pursuits, experiences, and self-presentation styles" (Rivera, 2012, p. 999) was oftentimes more important for a candidate's perceived hireability than job competency (Rivera, 2012).

Even though quite some research has been done on (in)direct communication in business settings (e.g., Joyce, 2012; Tanova & Nadiri, 2010; Einhorn, 1981), to date, little is known on convergent accommodation with regard to directness and if it influences the success of a job interview. Willemyns et al. (1997) did study convergent accommodation regarding accent, but they did not report on whether it had an influence on the outcome of a job interview. Furthermore, where previous research has used Hall's (1976) theory on high-context and low-context cultures and linked this theory to directness in communication (Tanova & Nadiri, 2010), to date, no studies have elaborated on convergent accommodation regarding directness and whether it influences the success of a job interview as evaluated by high- and low-context cultures. Lastly, most research on job interview evaluations has taken the point of view of

someone who is involved in the interview himself (e.g., Einhorn, 1981; Rivera, 2012). However, to date, little is known on whether evaluations will be different if someone is not directly involved but acts as a third person overhearing the conversation. Only Bašnáková et al. (2015) have looked at whether evaluations on a candidate in terms of directness would be different when the evaluator acted as either the interviewer or a third person. They found no significant differences between the two conditions. Despite these results, little is known on if there is a difference in evaluations between people who are being directly converged on and people not being converged on acting as a third person.

What makes the present study relevant is that it could give us an improved insight on what makes a job interview successful. As such, that was the purpose of this study. Furthermore, knowledge could be gained on whether convergent accommodation in terms of directness is evaluated differently by a high-context culture, the UK, and a low-context culture, the Netherlands. Not only could the results of the present study bridge the previously mentioned research gap, the results are also relevant to investigate whether Hall's (1976) classification of cultures on the dimension of contextualization is still valid today. It could be that due to globalization and immigration cultures have become more similar to each other, and thus would prefer the same way of communicating, direct or indirect.

The present study will examine whether convergence on the basis of directness in a job interview influences the success of the interview and if there is a difference in candidate evaluations between a high-context and a low-context culture. Therefore, the following research question was proposed: Are high- and low-context cultures similarly sensitive to convergence on directness during job interviews? Based on the research by Hall (1976) who argued that in high-context cultures relying on the context and communicating indirectly is the norm, whereas in low-context cultures people tend to communicate more in a direct manner, and based on Tanova and Nadiri (2010) who found that organizations in high-context countries use less direct communication than organizations in low-context countries, two hypotheses were formulated. The first one is that we expect the high-context country (UK) to give more positive candidate evaluations when the candidate maintains an indirect way of communicating than the low-context country (the Netherlands). The second hypothesis is that we expect the low-context country (the Netherlands) to give more positive candidate evaluations than the high-context country (UK) when the candidate converges to the interviewer in speaking more direct.

In order to answer our research question, we need to measure success in a job interview. A study that has examined this was conducted by Einhorn (1981). She wanted to examine what kind of communicative behavior would result in a successful job interview. Einhorn (1981)

measured the evaluations of interviewers on candidates in terms of motivational level and personality characteristics before and after the interview was executed. By comparing the evaluations, she could determine whether these were influenced by communicative behavior of the candidates during the interview. Motivational level, according to Waugh (2002), consists of three criteria: knowledgeability, goal-orientedness, and motivation. Personality characteristics, as described by Costa and McCrae (1992), could be defined by five characteristics: "Extraversion (to be sociable, active), Agreeableness (to be soft-hearted, trusting), Conscientiousness (to be organized, reliable), Emotional Stability (to be calm, relaxed), and Openness (to be curious, creative)" (Nunes et al., 2018, p. 1). The results of Einhorn (1981) indicated that candidates were more successful (i.e., they scored higher on motivational level and personality characteristics) when they delivered their messages swiftly and in a forceful manner, so, by using direct communication. Important to mention is that this research has been done in the US, a country which was classified as low-context by Hall (1976). Therefore, the results of Einhorn (1981) are in line with Tanova and Nadiri (2010) who also found that in low-context countries more direct communication is used.

Another variable that measures the success of a job interview, which is probably the most important one, is hireability. Hireability as an evaluation in job interviews was used in a study by Roessel et al. (2019). Participants had to evaluate candidates with different degrees of accentedness on their hireability. It was found that candidates who had a weak foreign accent were perceived to be more hireable than candidates with a strong foreign accent (Roessel et al., 2019). Previous research has also looked at likeability and competence as candidate evaluations in job interviews (e.g., Fuertes et al., 2012; Hendriks et al., 2021). In line with what Roessel et al. (2019) found, the results of Hendriks et al. (2021) revealed that candidates with a moderate accent were evaluated less positive, so less likeable and competent, than candidates with a slight or native accent. This difference in perceived hireability, likeability, and competence could possibly be explained by the similarity-attraction paradigm stating that people evaluate others that are similar to them more positively than others that are less similar to them (Byrne, 1971). Candidates with a weak accent spoke in a more similar way as the interviewer and could therefore be evaluated as more positive than candidates with a strong accent. Besides this matching in accent, Willemyns et al. (1997) found that in job interviews candidates also show convergent accommodation with regard to accent. They found that candidates were prone to adapt their accent to the interviewer. Whether hireability, likeability, and competence evaluations also differ when convergent accommodation is used regarding accent or directness in communication has not been researched so far.

Research proposal

The present study will investigate whether the abovementioned variables (i.e., hireability, likeability, competence, personality characteristics, and motivational level) are influenced by convergent accommodation and whether these evaluations differ for a high-context and a low-context country.

Method

Materials

The independent variables in this study were Accommodation (Converging or Maintenance) and Mother tongue of the participants (English or Dutch). Participants with English as their mother tongue belonged to a high-context culture, whereas participants with Dutch as their mother tongue belonged to a low-context culture. Participants had to listen to an audio fragment from a job interview. Before the audio fragment, the participants were given some background information that they were asked to be part of a hiring panel for an international organization that is looking for a Chief Financial Officer (CFO). The participants listened to an audio fragment of a job interview in English in which the candidate either converged to the interviewer in directness or maintained an indirect communication style. In the Converging interview, the interviewer used direct communication and the candidate began with indirect communication and changed to direct communication. In the Maintenance interview, the interviewer used direct communication and the candidate used indirect communication. The difference between direct communication and indirect communication was based on Joyce (2012, p. 2). When direct communication was used, the answers were straight to the point, honest, and criticism to authorities was accepted. Also, the candidate said what she meant instead of implying things. The indirect communication of the candidate consisted of answers that avoided disagreement, softened the truth by means of implying, and answers in which criticism was avoided (Joyce, 2012). An example from the questionnaire that shows the difference between a direct and indirect reply is the following:

Q: Why did you quit? Was it because of your boss or colleagues?
R: Well, it could have played a small role but I would not directly say so. (indirect)
R: Yes, that played a role in my decision. (direct)

For both scripts of the audio fragments, the same questions were incorporated. After the questions were formulated, the Maintenance interview was made by formulating indirect replies to the questions. Thereafter, the Converging interview was created by formulating direct replies to the questions from the middle of the interview until the end. So, where the Convergence interview incorporated indirect replies to questions at the beginning of the interview and direct replies to questions at the rest of the interview, the Maintenance interview incorporated only

the indirect replies. The full transcripts of the audio fragments can be found in Appendix 1 and 2.

The recordings of the audio fragments were made by letting the speakers read their part of the transcript face-to-face in a quiet environment and recording this conversation with a phone. Both interviews had the same speakers. To create a realistic setting, the interviewer was male and the candidate was female. According to Bogaers (1998) job interviews are held most frequently by men. We chose a female candidate because it would make it easier for participants to differentiate between the interviewer and the candidate when listening to the audio fragments. Furthermore, choosing a female candidate for the position of a Chief Financial Officer is in line with theory stating that women nowadays take on higher positions in organizations more often than they used to (Ricketts Gaskill, 1991). Both speakers were not native speakers of English but did have a similar way of speaking to reduce the possible influence accent could have on evaluations. The audio fragments as well as the questionnaire were both in English to avoid the risk of errors in translation.

The independent variable Mother tongue was operationalized after obtaining the results from the questionnaire by splitting participants into groups based on their nationality and mother tongue and corresponding culture (English/High-context or Dutch/Low-context). Each of the two audio fragments was evaluated by a High-context culture group and a Low-context culture group.

Subjects

Overall, 82 participants finished the questionnaire and were included in our experiment of which 54.9% was female, 42.7% was male, and 2.4% was non-binary/third gender. A Chi-square test did not show a significant relation between the condition the participant was exposed to (Convergence or Maintenance) and the gender of the participants ($\chi^2 (2) = 0.51$, $p = .975$). Another Chi-square test did not show a significant relation between the mother tongue the participant had (Dutch or English) and the gender of the participant ($\chi^2 (2) = 4.12$, $p = .128$).

The most frequent level of education of the participants was university level (58.5%) followed by degree/non-degree education (24.4%). A Chi-square test did not show a significant relation between the condition the participant was exposed to (Convergence or Maintenance) and the level of education of the participant ($\chi^2 (4) = 6.29$, $p = .178$). Another Chi-square test showed a significant relation between the mother tongue of the participants (Dutch or English) and the level of education of participants ($\chi^2 (4) = 11.34$, $p = .0.23$). Participants with English

as their mother tongue had secondary education as their current or highest level of education relatively less often (3.0%) than participants with Dutch as their mother tongue (4.0%).

Furthermore, the study included 35 participants with English as their mother tongue (42.7%) and 47 participants with Dutch as their mother tongue (57.3%). The mean age of the participants was 32.76 years ($SD = 16.62$) and ranged from 18 to 79 years. There were two participants who filled in an age below 18 years old and where therefore excluded from the study. An independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between participants exposed to the Convergence condition and the Maintenance condition with regard to age (t (78.00) = 2.00, $p = .049$). Participants exposed to the Maintenance condition had a significantly higher age ($M = 36.37, SD = 17.57$) than participants exposed to the Converging condition ($M = 29.15, SD = 14.95$). Another independent samples t-test did not show a significant difference between Mother tongue of the participant (Dutch or English) with regard to age (t (68.35) = 0.19, $p = .985$).

Lastly, Self-assessed English proficiency was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = 'terrible', 5 = 'excellent'), and had a mean of 4.21 ($SD = 0.77$). The most frequent rating was 'good' (41.5%), followed by 'excellent' (40.2%), followed by 'average' (17.1%).

Design

A 2 x 2 between-subjects design was used: each participant was exposed to one of the four conditions. There was a group of participants from the High-context country (UK) and a group of participants from the Low-context country (Netherlands) who evaluated the Converging interview, and there was a different group of participants from the High-context country (UK) and a different group of participants from the Low-context country (Netherlands) who evaluated the Maintenance interview. So, in total there were four different groups.

The independent variables: accommodation (Converging or Maintenance) and mother tongue (Dutch or English), were measured on a nominal level. The dependent variables: likeability, competence, motivational level, personality characteristics, and hireability evaluations of the candidate, were measured on an interval level.

Instruments

The dependent variables were likeability, competence, motivational level, personality characteristics, and hireability. The dependent variables were operationalized by means of an online questionnaire. Participants first answered some general questions on their nationality, mother tongue, age, level of education, gender, and self-assessed English proficiency. Self-

assessed English proficiency was measured on a 5-point scale (1 = 'terrible', 5 = 'excellent'). They then listened to the audio fragment and filled in the questionnaire evaluating the candidate.

Likeability was measured in the present study using the scales developed by Fuertes et al. (2012) and Hendriks et al. (2021). This means that 7-point Likert scales ('Completely disagree' – 'Completely agree') were used for the items: 'credible', 'sympathetic', 'warm', 'impolite', 'humorous', 'tactful', 'irritating', and 'unfriendly'. The reliability of 'likeability evaluation' comprising eight items was acceptable after recoding the items 'impolite', 'irritating', and 'unfriendly': α = .81.

Competence was measured based on the scales used by Hendriks et al. (2021). The items 'unreliable', 'intelligent', 'incompetent', 'hardworking', and 'educated' were measured using 7-point Likert scales ('Completely disagree' – 'Completely agree'). The reliability of 'competence evaluation' comprising five items was acceptable after recoding the items 'unreliable' and 'incompetent': α = .82.

The dependent variable motivational level comprised of three items: 'knowledgeable', 'goal-oriented', and 'unmotivated' and was measured on 7-point Likert scales ('Completely disagree' – 'Completely agree') based on the scales used by Waugh (2002). The reliability of 'motivational level evaluation' comprising three items was acceptable after recoding the item 'unmotivated': α = .82.

Personality characteristics was measured in the present study using the scales developed by Costa & McCrae (1992). This means that 7-point Likert scales ('Completely disagree' – 'Completely agree') were used for the items: 'introvert', 'agreeable', 'conscious', 'emotionally stable', and 'closed off'. The reliability of 'personality characteristics' comprising five items was acceptable after recoding the items 'introvert' and 'closed off': α = .73.

Hireability was measured with five statements based on Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010): *'I would recommend employing this candidate', 'I would feel satisfied if this candidate would be hired', 'I feel favorably towards this candidate', 'This candidate would be an asset to the company',* and *'There is a high likelihood of this candidate being hired'.* The statements were again measured on 7-point Likert scales ('Completely disagree' – 'Completely agree'). The reliability of 'hireability evaluation' comprising five items was good: α = .95.

Lastly, to check whether the manipulation worked, three more statements were included in the questionnaire. To test whether participants noticed if the candidate was converging to the interviewer the statements *'In my opinion, the candidate became more and more direct during the conversation'* and *'In my opinion, the candidate was more straight to the point at the beginning of the conversation than at the end of it'* were measured on 7-point Likert scales

('Completely disagree' – 'Completely agree'). The reliability of these two items was poor: $\alpha =$ .28. Therefore, the statement that most reflected what we were investigating was analyzed separately which was: *'In my opinion, the candidate became more and more direct during the conversation'*, the second statement was left out of the analysis. To test whether participants noticed if the candidate maintained indirect from beginning to end the statement: *'In my opinion, the candidate was indirect in her replies throughout the whole conversation'* was measured on 7-point Likert scales ('Completely disagree' – 'Completely agree') as well. The analysis of the two statements will be discussed in the results section. The complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3 as well as an ethics checklist in Appendix 4.

Procedure

The experiment was conducted using an online questionnaire in Qualtrics. Participants were recruited by means of snowball sampling asking friends and their friends. Before filling in the questionnaire, participants had to answer some screening questions on their nationality, mother tongue, age, education level, gender, and self-assessed English proficiency. The prerequisites were participants with an English nationality and mother tongue or a Dutch nationality and mother tongue, with an age of 18 years or older. The experiment in total took around 10 minutes on average. Participants were not financially rewarded after taking part in the experiment.

Statistical treatment

Independent samples *t*-tests were used for the manipulation checks. The dependent variables listed in *Instruments* were tested using two-way and one-way ANOVAs with Accommodation and Mother tongue as factors.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine whether convergence on the basis of directness in a job interview influences the success of the interview and if there is a difference in candidate evaluations between a high-context (English) and a low-context culture (Dutch). The hypotheses proposed were the following:

H1: The high-context country (UK) will give more positive candidate evaluations when the candidate maintains an indirect way of communicating than the low-context country (the Netherlands).

H2: The low-context country (the Netherlands) will give more positive candidate evaluations than the high-context country (UK) when the candidate converges to the interviewer in speaking more direct.

Manipulation checks

To test whether participants noticed if the candidate was converging to the interviewer independent samples *t*-tests were executed for the statement: *'In my opinion, the candidate became more and more direct during the conversation'*. No significant difference was found between the Convergence and Maintenance conditions for whether the candidate was evaluated as becoming more direct during the conversation (t (78.29) = 0.87, p = .385). Therefore, this manipulation was not consciously experienced by the participants.

To test whether participants noticed if the candidate remained indirect throughout the whole interview independent samples *t*-test were executed for the statement: *'In my opinion, the candidate was indirect in her replies throughout the whole conversation'*. An independent samples *t*-test showed a significant difference between the Convergence and Maintenance conditions (t (78.00) = 3.14, p = .002). Participants in the Maintenance condition evaluated the candidate as indirect throughout the whole interview more (M = 4.12, SD = 1.68) than participants in the Convergence condition (M = 3.03, SD = 1.46). Therefore, participants in the Maintenance condition were aware of the maintenance style of communication.

Candidate evaluations

The dependent variables likeability, competence, motivational level, personality characteristics, and hireability were analyzed with Accommodation (Converging or Maintenance) and Mother tongue (English or Dutch) as fixed factors for the two-way ANOVAs.

Likeability

A two-way ANOVA did not show significant main effects of mother tongue on likeability (F (1, 78) < 1, p = .588) nor accommodation on likeability (F (1, 78) = 1.37, p = .246). The interaction effect between mother tongue and accommodation was significant (F (1, 78) = 5.04, p = .028).

To interpret the interaction effect, separate one-way ANOVAs were executed. After the data was splitted on accommodation, a one-way ANOVA with mother tongue as factor showed that there was a significant difference between participants with Dutch as their mother tongue and participants with English as their mother tongue for evaluated likeability in the Convergence condition (F (1, 39) = 5.84, p = .020). Participants with Dutch as their mother tongue evaluated the candidate higher on likeability (M = 5.32, SD = 0.72) than participants with English as their mother tongue (M = 4.78, SD = 0.71). For the Maintenance condition no significant difference was found (F (1, 39) = 1.06, p = .309).

These results imply that when the candidate converged to the interviewer in communication style, this led to more positive evaluations in terms of likeability, but only for participants with Dutch as their mother tongue and not for participants with English as their mother tongue. Therefore, for likeability H2 was confirmed. In the maintenance condition, no differences were found between the Dutch and the English group, meaning that H1 was rejected.

Competence

A two-way ANOVA did not show a significant main effect of mother tongue on competence (F (1, 78) = 1.13, p = .291). A significant main effect was found of accommodation on competence (F (1, 78) = 10.66, p = .002). Participants exposed to the Convergence condition found the candidate significantly more competent (M = 5.51, SD = 0.84) than participants exposed to the Maintenance condition (M = 4.84, SD = 0.97). The interaction effect between mother tongue and accommodation was not significant (F (1, 78) < 1, p = .411).

These results indicate that convergence in communication style can lead to a more positive evaluation in terms of competence of the candidate. However, no differences were found between participants with Dutch or English as their mother tongue with regard to how they evaluated the candidate on competence. Therefore, for competence both H1 and H2 were rejected.

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Motivational level

A two-way ANOVA did not show significant main effects of mother tongue on motivational level (F (1, 78) < 1, p =.646) and accommodation on motivational level (F (1, 78) = 3.65, p = .060). The interaction effect between mother tongue and accommodation was also not significant (F (1, 78) < 1, p = .521).

These results imply that convergent communication does not influence candidate evaluations in terms of motivational level, and also that evaluations did not significantly differ when comparing the Dutch group with the English group. Therefore, for motivational level both H1 and H2 were rejected.

Personality characteristics

A two-way ANOVA did not show significant main effects of mother tongue on personality characteristics (F (1, 78) = 1.19, p = .279) and accommodation on personality characteristics (F (1, 78) < 1, p = .380). The interaction effect between mother tongue and accommodation was also not significant (F (1, 78) < 1, p = .714).

These results imply that convergent communication does not influence candidate evaluations in terms of personality characteristics, and also that evaluations did not significantly differ when comparing the Dutch group with the English group. Therefore, for personality characteristics both H1 and H2 were rejected.

Hireability

A two-way ANOVA did not show a significant main effect of mother tongue on hireability (F (1, 77) < 1, p = .419). A significant main effect was found for accommodation on hireability (F (1, 77) = 4.78, p = .032). Participants exposed to the Convergence condition found the candidate significantly more hireable (M = 4.74, SD = 1.20) than participants exposed to the Maintenance condition (M = 4.02, SD = 1.53). The interaction effect between mother tongue and accommodation was not significant (F (1, 77) = 1.86, p = .177).

These results imply that convergent communication could lead to more positive evaluations in terms of the candidate's hireability. However, the results also indicate that participants with Dutch or English as their mother tongue did not evaluate the candidate differently in terms of hireability. As such, H1 and H2 were rejected.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether convergence in communication in job interviews influences the success of the interviews. To be more specific, this study investigated the effect of convergence in terms of directness in job interviews and whether there was a difference between a high-context culture (English) and a low-context culture (Dutch) with regard to candidate evaluations. English and Dutch mother tongue speakers evaluated an English-speaking candidate that either converged to the interviewer in directness or remained indirect throughout the whole interview while the interviewer remained direct in his speech. The candidate was evaluated on likeability, competence, motivational level, personality characteristics, and hireability.

  The present study found that when the candidate converged to the interviewer, Dutch participants evaluated the candidate as more likeable than English participants did. This finding possibly implies that a low-context culture prefers a converging way of speaking more than a high-context culture. To date, the present study is the first to address convergent accommodation regarding directness and whether it influences the success of a job interview as evaluated by high- and low-context cultures. However, previous research has compared these two types of culture with regard to the use of directness in communication. In line with what was found in the present study, i.e., converging in directness made the candidate more likeable according to the low-context culture, Tanova and Nadiri (2010) found that in organizations in low-context countries direct communication was used more than in high-context countries. It might have been possible that the candidate was evaluated as more likeable by the low-context country not because convergent accommodation was used but because the candidate converged to direct communication, which was the form of communication preferred by a low-context country according to Tanova and Nadiri (2010) and Hall (1976).

  If the latter is true, we would expect candidate evaluations on the other variables (competence, motivational level, personality characteristics, and hireability) to also be more positive for a low-context than a high-context culture in the convergence condition. However, no cultural differences were found for the other variables. With regard to competence evaluations, our results are not in line with what Hendriks et al. (2021) found when examining accents in job interviews. According to the researchers (2021), candidates with a weak accent were evaluated as more competent than candidates with a strong accent. Candidates with a weak accent spoke in a more similar way as the interviewer and could therefore have been evaluated as more competent than candidates with a strong foreign accent. In the present study we would

have expected that competence evaluations would be more positive in the maintenance condition for the English participants than for the Dutch participants, because a high-context culture used more indirect communication than a low-context culture according to previous research (Tanova & Nadiri, 2010; Hall, 1976). This, however, was not the case. Competence evaluations were only influenced by accommodation. The candidate was evaluated as more competent when she converged to the interviewer in communication style than when she remained indirect throughout the interview. This finding is in line with results of Street Jr. (1984) who found that speech convergence in terms of speech and response rate in fact-finding interviews led to positive competence evaluations. Thus, when the speaker converged to the interlocutor in terms of speech and response rate, he was evaluated to be more competent than when he did not converge to the interlocutor. The present study found this as well for convergent accommodation with regard to directness.

Evaluations on motivational level and personality characteristics were not influenced by accommodation nor culture. Our results are thus not in line with findings by Einhorn (1981). She found that evaluations on motivational level and personality characteristics were higher when direct communication was used in interviews compared to indirect communication. A possible explanation for why the present study did not find any influence of accommodation or mother tongue on motivational level and personality characteristics could be because in the convergence condition the candidate spoke indirectly in the beginning. There was no condition where the candidate maintained direct throughout the interview, only indirect. However, we would then also have expected evaluations to be significantly lower for the maintenance condition than for the convergence condition, which was not the case.

For hireability, it was found that when the candidate converged to the interviewer, evaluations were higher for both the English participants as well as the Dutch participants compared to when the candidate remained indirect throughout the interview. This finding is in line with what Roessel et al. (2019) found when examining accents. The researchers found that when the candidate had a similar accent to the interviewer, he was evaluated as more hireable than when accents did not match. In the present study, when the candidate converged to the interviewer, they communicated more similarly which could be evaluated as more attractive and therefore more hireable according to the similarity-attraction paradigm as explained earlier (Byrne, 1971). Hireability was not influenced by culture, however.

Since the present study did not find any influence of candidate evaluations on culture except for likeability, one could argue whether Hall's (1976) distinction between high- and low-context cultures is still valid today. It could be that for example due to globalization cultures

have become more alike. This was studied by Kim et al. (1998). Their findings, nevertheless, revealed that Hall's classification of high- vs low-context cultures could still be confirmed at that time. The lack of influence of culture on candidate evaluations could also be explained by the possibility that the Dutch culture and the English culture are not that far away from each other on the high- vs low-context spectrum. According to Hall and Hall (1990) the Dutch culture could be classified as low-context, but the English culture was more ranked in the middle between high- and low-context. Countries like Japan, Greece, Spain, Italy, and Arab countries were ranked as more high-context than England (Hall & Hall, 1990). Perhaps the Dutch and English participants in the present study were too similar in terms of culture to obtain significant differences in candidate evaluations.

The present study had a number of limitations. One limitation could be that there were 47 Dutch participants compared to only 35 English participants. Furthermore, participants in the maintenance condition were significantly older than participants in the convergence condition. It could be the case that age has had an influence on candidate evaluations. Also, participants with English as their mother tongue had secondary education as their current or highest level of education relatively less often than participants with Dutch as their mother tongue. Level of education could also have influenced the results with regard to candidate evaluations, because both the audio fragment as well as the questionnaire were in English. It might be possible that the English participants were better able to understand the job interview and the questionnaire than the Dutch participants and that this had an influence on the ratings of the Dutch participants.

Another limitation is that the manipulation checks might not have been consciously picked up by the participants. No differences were found between the convergence and maintenance conditions in whether participants noticed if the candidate was becoming more direct during the interview. This means that participants in the convergence condition may not have noticed that the candidate was converging to the interviewer in directness. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions on whether convergent accommodation had an influence on the results or whether these results were obtained because of preferences of the use of direct or indirect communication.

Since not much research has been done on evaluations regarding convergence in interviews, conclusions should be drawn with a degree of caution. To date, little is known on convergent communication with regard to directness and if it influences the success of a job interview. Previous research by Willemyns et al. (1997) has studied convergent accommodation regarding accent, but the present study is the first to elaborate on convergence with regard to

directness. To obtain results that are more likely caused by convergent accommodation future studies could repeat the present study but adjust the audio fragments so participants notice a change in communication style in the convergence condition. Furthermore, as was discussed above, it could have been the case that the Dutch and the English culture were too much alike to find significant differences in candidate evaluations. Future studies could compare the Dutch culture with a different culture that is more on the high-context side of the spectrum than the English culture according to Hall and Hall (1990) such as Japan. Lastly, the results of the present study could have been influenced by the fact that the audio fragments and the questionnaire were in English. English participants might have understood the experiment better than the Dutch participants. To investigate whether the results will be the same, further research could repeat the present study but translate the audio fragments and the questionnaire in Dutch for the Dutch participants.

The research question investigated in this study was whether high- and low-context cultures are similarly sensitive to convergence on directness during job interviews. Based on our results we could possibly conclude that, except for likeability, high- and low-context cultures evaluate candidates who converge on directness during job interviews in a similar way. Besides this, we could say that convergent communication in job interviews leads to more positive candidate evaluations in terms of competence and hireability. Therefore, our results imply that in a job interview setting, converging one's speech to the interlocutor could contribute to the chances of being hired regardless of cultural differences. To be more specific, both British and Dutch candidates could use convergent accommodation to be perceived as more competent and hireable, therewith increasing the chances of a successful outcome of the job interview. As such, the present study has contributed to Communication Accommodation Theory as proposed by Giles and Powesland (1997) and the similarity-attraction paradigm by Byrne (1971), because in line with these theories our results also indicate that by accommodating to the interlocutor, the speaker could be evaluated in a more positive way.

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Appendix 1: Maintenance interview

Interviewer:	Good morning, how are you?
Candidate:	Hi, good morning. Well, it's been a while since I had a job interview. How are you?
Interviewer:	I'm good, thank you. Excuse me for being late, I was still in a meeting.
Candidate:	That is completely fine, I understand that you're a very busy person. No problem at all.
Interviewer:	It's nice to meet you. My name is Jack Miller, I'm the CEO of this organization. Today I'm going to be asking you a couple of questions about who you are and why you'd like to work here. Alright?
Candidate:	Of course, that sounds good. I think I have prepared myself well enough.
Interviewer:	Perfect. So, on your resume I see you have worked at an international office in Amsterdam before. Tell me a little bit about your experiences and what you did there.
Candidate:	Well, yeah I used to live in Amsterdam. The organization was quite big and there was quite a lot of hierarchy there. The office was only 10 minutes away from my home so that was convenient.
Interviewer:	Why did you quit? Was it because of your boss or colleagues?
Candidate:	Well, it could have played a small role but I would not directly say so. My boss has always been nice to me and he offered me the job at the beginning. My colleagues used to be helpful and we had some good times.
Interviewer:	Okay I see. Was it the job itself you did not like anymore?
Candidate:	I think I became a bit too used to the environment. If you work somewhere for a long time, at a certain point it becomes somewhat harder to keep on challenging yourself if you know what I mean.
Interviewer:	Yes, okay. And is there something specifically that you would want to learn if you would become part of our company?
Candidate:	I think I can improve on time management a bit. At least that was what I noticed during my previous job. I also think that a company like yours possesses a lot of knowledge on different kinds of areas so that is very useful.

Appendix 2: Converging interview

Interviewer:	Good morning, how are you?
Candidate:	Hi, good morning. Well, it's been a while since I had a job interview. How are you?
Interviewer:	I'm good, thank you. Excuse me for being late, I was still in a meeting.
Candidate:	That is completely fine, I understand that you're a very busy person. No problem at all.
Interviewer:	It's nice to meet you. My name is Jack Miller, I'm the CEO of this organization. Today I'm going to be asking you a couple of questions about who you are and why you'd like to work here. Alright?
Candidate:	Of course, that sounds good. I think I have prepared myself well enough.
Interviewer:	Perfect. So, on your resume I see you have worked at an international office in Amsterdam before. Tell me a little bit about your experiences and what you did there.
Candidate:	I worked as an accountant for about five years there. I learned about the responsibilities of tracking cash flow, the financial planning and I made sure to propose strategic directions.
Interviewer:	Why did you quit? Was it because of your boss or colleagues?
Candidate:	Yes, that played a role in my decision. Even though my boss and colleagues were very nice, there were some communication problems going on at certain times.
Interviewer:	Okay I see. And was it also the job itself you did not like anymore?
Candidate:	No, the job was not the problem. The job I had there was still very challenging and diverse which I really liked.
Interviewer:	Yes, okay. And is there something specifically that you would want to learn if you would become part of our company?
Candidate:	Yes, I want to learn how to manage my time better.

Appendix 3: Questionnaire

Dear participant,

Thank you for wanting to participate in this study. This study is carried out by five students at Radboud University and is incorporated in our Bachelor's theses. We ask you to carefully read the following instructions. If you have any questions, please contact us via merel.boekhorst@ru.nl.

In this study you will be asked to listen to an audio sample from a job hiring setting. It is therefore important that you are in a quiet environment and have working volume on your device. We also suggest wearing headphones if possible. After you have listened to the audio sample, you are asked to answer some questions. The questionnaire will take about 10 minutes.

The people in the audio samples have been recorded with consent, and are aware of the fact that the samples will be used in our study.

Please know that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time, and your answers will remain anonymous and confidential. Your answers will be used for this study only.

If you click on the 'I agree to participate in this study' button below, you agree:
-   To have read the information above
-   To voluntarily agree to participate

If you want to withdraw from participating in this study, please decline participation by clicking on the 'I do not want to participate in this study' button.
o   I agree to participate in this study
o   I do not want to participate in this study

General questions
1.   What is your nationality?
o   English
o   Dutch
o   Other

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2. What is your mother tongue?
o English
o Dutch
o Other

3. What is your age?

   _____

4. What is your current or highest level of education?
o Further education / MBO
o Degree/Non-Degree education / HBO
o University / WO
o Secondary education
o Other

5. What is your gender?
o Male
o Female
o Non-binary / third gender
o Prefer not to say

6. How would you rate your English proficiency? (1 = 'terrible', 5 = 'excellent')

Explanation and instructions

You have been asked to be part of the hiring panel of an international organization who is looking for a new Chief Financial Officer (CFO). You will listen to an audio fragment of a male interviewer and a female candidate. After listening to the fragment, you will answer some questions to evaluate the **female candidate**.

Fragment

Please now listen to the following audio fragment of a male interviewer and a female candidate in a job hiring setting. The female employee is applying for a job as a Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Note that you cannot return to the audio fragment while filling in the questionnaire.

Research proposal

AUDIOFRAGMENT

<u>Questions</u>

Please now answer the following questions. Mark the bullet that best reflects your opinion on your evaluation of the **female candidate**. We are interested in your first impression so there are no wrong answers.

In my opinion, the candidate sounds…

7. Credible   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

8. Sympathetic   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

9. Warm   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

10. Impolite   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

11. Humorous   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

12. Tactful   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

13. Irritating   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

14. Unfriendly   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

In my opinion, the candidate sounds…

15. Unreliable   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

16. Intelligent   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

17. Incompetent   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

18. Hardworking   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

19. Educated   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

In my opinion, this candidate is …

20. Knowledgeable   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

21. Goal-oriented   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

22. Unmotivated   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

In my opinion, this candidate is …

23. Introvert   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

24. Agreeable   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

25. Conscious   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

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26. Emotionally stable   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))
27. Closed off   (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements:
28. I would recommend employing this candidate (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))
29. I would feel satisfied if this candidate would be hired (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))
30. I feel favorably towards this candidate (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))
31. This candidate would be an asset to the company (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))
32. There is a high likelihood of this candidate being hired (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements:
33. In my opinion, the candidate became more and more direct during the conversation (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))
34. In my opinion, the candidate was indirect in her replies throughout the whole conversation (Completely disagree (1) – Completely agree (7))

Thank you for your participation.

Please know that it is still possible to withdraw your participation in this study. If you wish to do so, please send an e-mail to merel.boekhorst@ru.nl.

Appendix 4: Ethics checklist

1. Is a health care institution involved in the research?

Explanation: A health care institution is involved if one of the following (A/B/C) is the case:

A. One or more employees of a health care institution is/are involved in the research as principle or in the carrying out or execution of the research.
B. The research takes place within the walls of the health care institution and should, following the nature of the research, generally not be carried out outside the institution.
C. Patients / clients of the health care institution participate in the research (in the form of treatment).

☒ No → continue with questionnaire

☐ Yes → Did a Dutch Medical Institutional Review Board (MIRB) decide that the Wet Medisch Onderzoek (Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act) is not applicable?

☐ Yes → continue with questionnaire

☐ No → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen → end of checklist

2. Do grant providers wish the protocol to be assessed by a recognised MIRB?

☒ No → continue with questionnaire

☐ Yes → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen → end of checklist

3. Does the research include medical-scientific research that might carry risks for the participant?

☒ No → continue with questionnaire

☐ Yes → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen → end of checklist

Standard research method

4. Does this research fall under one of the stated standard research methods of the Faculty of Arts or the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies?

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> ☒ Yes → Standard questionnaire research, 12 → continue with questionnaire
>
> ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist

Participants

5. Is the participant population a healthy one?

> ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire
>
> ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

6. Will the research be conducted amongst minors (<16 years of age) or amongst (legally) incapable persons?

> ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
>
> ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

Method

7. Is a method used that makes it possible to produce a coincidental finding that the participant should be informed of?

> ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
>
> ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

8. Will participants undergo treatment or are they asked to perform certain behaviours that can lead to discomfort?

> ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
>
> ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

9. Are the estimated risks connected to the research minimal?

> ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
>
> ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

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10. Are the participants offered a different compensation than the usual one?

☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

☒ No → continue with questionnaire

11. Should [deception](#) take place, does the procedure meet the standard requirements?

☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

12. Are the standard regulations regarding [anonymity and privacy](#) met?

☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

Conducting the research

13. Will the research be carried out at an external location (such as a school, hospital)?

☒ No → continue with questionnaire

☐ Yes→ Do you have/will you receive written permission from this institution?

☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

☐ Yes → continue with questionnaire

14. Is there a contact person to whom participants can turn to with questions regarding the research and are they informed of this?

☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

15. Is it clear for participants where they can file complaints with regard to participating in the research and how these complaints will be dealt with?

☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

16. Are the participants free to participate in the research, and to stop at any given point, whenever and for whatever reason they should wish to do so?

    ☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

17. Before participating, are participants informed by means of an information document about the aim, nature and risks and objections of the study? (zie explanation on informed consent and sample documents).

    ☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

18. Do participants and/or their representatives sign a consent form? (zie explanation on informed consent and sample documents.

    ☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → checklist finished