Onto the corner office: using accommodation theory to get hired

To what extent are high- and low-context cultures similarly sensitive to convergence on directness during a job interview?

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Abstract

How come there are still more men in hierarchical high job positions than women? This research has attempted to provide an extra stepping stone for women to increase their chances of getting hired for a high position. It has done so by looking at the communication accommodation process in relation to the (in)direct communication style within a hiring context. Audio recordings of a job interview were created on which participants evaluated the job applicant on likeability, competence, personality characteristics, motivational level, and hireability. Moreover, The Netherlands and England were compared to investigate a potential difference in high- and low-context culture. An experiment executed through a survey showed that a female job interviewee was evaluated more positively when converging her communication style to the interviewer as opposed to maintaining her style. As for a difference in culture, Dutch participants evaluated the job applicant as more likeable when they converged their communication style to that of the interviewer than when they did not. Our study has contributed to research in the area of speech accommodation theory in relation to job interviews and directness and offers an extra strategy for women to increase their success rates at job interviews.

Introduction

In 2022 women still occupy more hierarchically low job positions than men. Could this depend on their skillset? Are there not enough women? Or are they just not passing that one key job interview? If the latter is the case, many tools could be used to increase their chances of getting hired like proper preparation, dress-code, or steering the topic of conversation. Making use of the right communication style could also be a tool to positively influence a conversation. To investigate to what extent this is true, this research will try to give an insight on how communication style can affect a job interview and how women may be able to profit from this. To do so, several concepts must first be analyzed.

Background

Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) was first introduced by Giles (1973), in which he presented the phenomenon of interpersonal accent *convergence*. Convergence is conceptualized as a manner of communicating in which one speaker modifies their communication style to their interlocutor during a conversation in order to reach larger similarities between speakers. Later, *non-accommodation* (or also *maintenance*) and *divergence* were added to the theory. The

first entails not adapting one's communicative style and maintaining their own, whereas the latter can be defined as purposely deviating from one's interlocutor's communication style in order to emphasize and accentuate differences between speakers (Zhang & Giles, 2018). SAT has thereafter been expanded and reviewed by many researchers and developed into the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). Many clear reviews of these developments over the past 45 years can be found in existing literature (Gallois et al., 2005; Giles, 2016; Giles et al., 1987; Zhang & Imamura, 2017). The Communication Accommodation Theory can be defined as follows (Soliz & Giles, 2014, p. 109):

> "[…] a theory that attends to both interpersonal and intergroup dynamics of interactions by examining the association between accommodative behaviors and various relational and identity outcomes. The theory predicts that people may modify communication based on personal, idiosyncratic characteristics of a conversational partner."

Accommodative communication is reached when communicative adjustments in a conversation are viewed as appropriate by both parties, which is usually experienced as successful and positive (Giles & Gasiorek, 2013). For example, Giles et al. (1973) concluded in their empirical research that in a bilingual context, people were evaluated more positively when they appeared to devote more effort in accommodating their message to their interlocutor's communication style. Reasons speakers may adjust their communication style to their interactant's communicative behavior are a desire to convey to the other person they want to or already belong to that person's ingroup and to establish and maintain a positive social and personal identity (Gallois et al., 2005). Another explanation for the need to accommodate our language is that we favor other people that agree with us, because these people support the logic and consistency of our world. This support creates a positive feeling which consequently leads to more attraction towards the other person (Montoya & Horton, 2013). This paradigm has been confirmed by, among others, a large meta-analysis study in which similarity was found to create a positive, moderately sized effect on attraction (Montoya et al., 2008). So, by accommodating your language, your interlocutor is more likely to be attracted to you which subsequently leads to more positive relations and successful conversations.

Situations in which communication styles of speakers differ, can often be found in an intercultural setting. Communication styles between cultures can deviate from each other due to differences in, for example, power distance, individualism, or uncertainty avoidance

(Hofstede, 1984). Hall's (1977) model of high versus low-context cultures also applies to this. In this model he describes two frames through which people communicate with one another; one frame concerning a high-context communication style and one a low-context communication style. These frames are dispersed over the different cultures throughout the world. The high-context cultures use physical context and/or internalized information to convey a message, discarding most of the actual coded, explicit, and transmitted part of a message. An example of a high-context culture are Chinese or Arabic cultures. Conversely, the low-context cultures do utilize the explicit message and avoid using an abundance of context to clarify their message; whatever is said is what is meant. Low-context cultures can typically be attributed to The Netherlands and The United States of America. Though this model provides a great foundation, this dimension was proposed by Hall 45 years ago, so its validity should be reevaluated in this day and age.

A clear distinction between high- and low-context culture can be observed through the use of direct and indirect communication. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988, p. 100) have originally defined directness as the "extent [to which] speakers reveal their intentions through explicit communication". The direct style makes use of explicitly stating one's feelings, wants, and needs and thus directly communicates what a person means. In the indirect style, on the other hand, one expresses their feelings, wants, and needs in a subtle and more hidden way, concealing their true intentions (Nelson et al., 2002). As one may expect, the direct style pertains to the low-context culture and the indirect style to high-context cultures. Directness has however been defined alternatively by Levinson (1983), who views indirectness mainly as politeness, as he argues that the distinction between directness and indirectness is very difficult to make, if not non-existent. For example, the question "Do you have a pen?" would generally be considered as a direct communication style. However, when asking this question, the person is usually not interested in the possession of the pen, but whether they could borrow it or not. The interrogator is thus not literally saying what they want, but has wrapped their message in a more polite and conventional way. This is where Levinson argues that the line between direct and indirect communication is very fine, if even present. More recently, Kádár and Bargiela-Chiappini (2011) provide us with a broad view on directness by an extensive discussion of existing literature. They present us with definitions of indirectness such as "a mismatch between expressed meaning and implied meaning" (Thomas, 1995, p. 119), a way of leaving meaning 'off record' by inferring or implying it (Tannen, 2010), or as implied and non-literal meaning (Bowe et al., 2014). This is also how we will interpret directness throughout this study.

4

Directness is a speech style that can influence the evaluation of a conversation greatly. Those using a direct communication style can often be considered as rude by indirect speakers, which in its turn influences the opinions and attitude about the direct conversation partner. So, in which settings could this influence have a negative impact? One situation in which success is only achieved by leaving a good impression, is a job interview. This is a context in which you absolutely do not want your speech style to negatively impact the outcome of the conversation. What makes a job interview successful or not, however, must first be determined. Flexibility and adaptability have been found to be the most important characteristics in a job applicant for an employer (Vendolská & Kačerová, 2016). After these qualities, willingness to learn, loyalty, and self-reliance were considered as essential. Other research (Hollandsworth Jr et al., 1979) concluded that appropriateness of content, fluency of speech, and composure were the heaviest weighing factors in achieving a positive employment decision. Ramsay et al. (1997) have, based on an experimental survey, examined sixty personnel specialists and investigated reasons for breaking social rules and found that this could mainly be explained by situation and chance. More importantly, applicants that were considered as competent communicators, were rated more positively in rule-following competence and on hireability. From this finding, we can conclude that (appearance of) competent communication and general interpersonal skills are important factors in completing a successful employment interview. Especially competent communication is a relevant element to our prospective of potential larger success due to communication accommodation.

Considering accommodation is generally perceived as positive and competent communication in a job interview creates success as well, it can be expected that converging one's communication will also be perceived as positive within a hiring setting. Since direct communication can negatively influence a conversation, we must consider whether it would be helpful to then converge from the direct to the indirect style to achieve greater success. In order to research this possible effect, it would be most logical to turn to an intercultural setting, as this is the most likely context in which a difference in direct communication style can be found between speakers. Taking this into account, we have come to following research question:

To what extent are high- and low-context cultures similarly sensitive to convergence on directness during a job interview?

We expected there to be little to no difference in sensitivity to convergence on directness between the high- and low-context cultures, since the research that has been executed does not

agree on the extent to which height of context culture differs between certain countries (this will be discussed more below). On the other hand, we propose the following hypothesis.

> H1: We expected convergence on directness to be evaluated more positively than maintenance in a hiring context.

We predicted this, because literature has shown that speech accommodation usually has successful results. We will now consider the research that shows this.

Literature review

Research into the differences between high-context cultures and low-context cultures has most regularly been done through experiments analyzing conversations (Beebe et al., 1990; Nelson et al., 2002; Wang, 2008) and comparisons of existing literature (Bello et al., 2006). The former seemed to be the best way for the current study, as an experiment allows for manipulation, which is something we wanted to make use of. Often, research observes countries that are on opposite sides of a scale (Mensa & Morales, 2011), but it is also interesting to compare those that are supposedly not too far apart. In Hall and Hall's later work (1990), we see that on a scale of high- vs low-context cultures, The Netherlands is categorized as very low-context. An extreme outer value we could say. England, on the other hand, is found right in between the two extremes, making it an interesting country to compare with the Netherlands. Moreover, as these two countries lie close to each other geographically and interact with each other in business, an investigation into communication accommodation between these two nations would be useful.

As for research between England or the UK and the Netherlands in relation to directness, very little can be found. Though Mellaard (2008) concluded that there are no major differences between Dutch and British with regards to directness, she also underlines that it is extremely difficult to compare the two as they are more similar than one would expect. This difficulty may explain the limited amount of research into this topic. Another study by Rottier et al. (2011) confirm Mellaard's statement on similarity. They established that communication between the British and Dutch is not always as clear as might be expected due to the differences in directness. Whereas the British may, for example, say "I hear what you say" they will actually mean "I disagree completely". Dutch will however interpret this message exactly as they hear it and think the British speaker accepts their point of view. Their study, as opposed to Mellaard, concluded the British to be distinctly less direct than the Dutch. This perspective aligns with Hall and Hall's (1990) distinction between England and the Netherlands on the high- vs low-context scale. In the present study we thus do assume there to be a significant difference in

directness and height of context between these two countries and have built our research question upon it.

Analyzing and measuring directness has not been done extensively yet, but existing literature can help us construct the best manner for investigating the current research. Nelson et al. (2002) analyzed directness in a refusal context and did so by coding refusal responses for directness or indirectness. They created a classification of direct and indirect refusal strategies, based on Beebe et al. (1990). The direct strategy had subcategories 'performative' and 'non-performative'. The indirect strategy contained thirteen subcategories, like 'statement of regret', 'reason', 'statement of alternative', and 'promise of future acceptance'. Kádár and Bargiela-Chiappini (2011) on the other hand reviewed the previous literature on 'rating directness'. Not all scholars agree that indirectness can be rated on a scale, but Leech (1983) does argue that directness is a matter of degree that can be expressed in 'optionality' and 'force'. Sperber and Wilson (1986) also propose that directness can be measured by the amount of 'work' a hearer has to do to reach the meaning. We agree with these approaches and consider directness to be a dimension that can be measured on a scale.

No research could be found of communication accommodation theory in relation to directness. However, especially in high- versus low-context cultures, communication style plays an important role and both detection and appreciation of speech style convergence may be evaluated differently per culture. Therefore, we decided to contribute to this gap. On the other hand, Communication Acommodation Theory in itself has been researched extensively throughout multiple disciplines. The most common ways of analyzing CAT are by self-assessment of participants' accommodative behaviors and by evaluation of actual or hypothetical conversations from the perspective of an external party (Soliz & Giles, 2014). As we worked with an experiment, the latter form was more fit to conduct our research. We thus made use of hypothetical conversations, since these were the easiest to implement our manipulation into. These speech utterances were then to be analyzed by the participants.

These hypothetical conversations had to include the act of communication accommodation. Therefore, we must also discuss the scarce previous scientific observations in this area in relation to the job interview. A study by Gallois et al. (1992) uncovered that managers viewed job candidates as more favorably to hire when they had a similar communication style to their own than when they did not have a similar communication style. However, accommodating has not always been found to have a positive effect. Another investigation (Ball et al., 1984) showed that when converging your accent in a job interview to

a less prestigious one in order to converge to the interlocutor, one's overall appearance was rated by observers as negative. The investigators concluded that 'downward convergence', accommodating from a more prestigious accent to a lesser one, was rated as negative because it violates normative beliefs about the job interview. The context of a job interview is namely quite formal and rule-governed, one in which each participant has clearly defined roles. By downwardly converging, Ball et al. (1984) posed that the general social rules surrounding the job interview were breached and therefore the convergence was not considered as positive. Using CAT in a job interview can thus be positive, as long as one does not converge their communication style in a so-called downward manner. Research by Einhorn (1981) supports the importance of competent communication in job interviews. By setting up a real job interview for which college seniors could apply, she analyzed the conversations and opinions of the interviewers. She established that communicative choices of job applicants influenced interviewers' final evaluations of them. The outcome of this judgement consequently influenced the tendency to hire the candidates or not. Her main findings that differentiated unsuccessful from successful applicants were, however, the following:

- o Successful candidates were well able to identify with the employer
- o Successful candidates supported their claims with evidence-based arguments in various types of support
- o Successful candidates made fully use of the time they had
- o Successful candidates used active and concrete language
- o Successful candidates delivered their messages rapidly and forcefully
- o Successful candidates presented a positive image of themselves

All these factors can thus be considered as important elements that create a successful employment interview. The first finding can even support that convergence could be a useful tool. The fourth and fifth element could, however, potentially play a confounding role in possible outcomes of the current study. As we investigate convergence in relation to directness and indirectness, the indirect conversation may in itself be evaluated negatively because it usually does not have concrete language nor rapid delivery of messages. In this case not the convergence would differentiate the evaluations, but the rating would merely be defined by the lack of certain successful elements due to the indirectness. On the other hand, our research does provide the opportunity to evaluate whether Einhorn's findings still hold in speech utterances distinguished in direct and indirect communication style.

We chose to carry out this study through a quantitative experiment executed by a survey. With an experiment we were well able to manage the amount and manner of accommodation in the conversation. This allowed for more control of the variable directness and therefore more precision and external validity of the outcome of the experiment. Directness served as the independent variable, consisting of two sublevels: converging and maintaining, as we wanted to investigate whether or not adapting one's speech to the interlocutor has a successful effect on the outcome of the conversation. The second independent variable was the variable culture, specifically high-context (England) versus low-context (The Netherlands). We wanted to measure how a job applicant was rated overall when converging their communication style or not. By looking at how some other studies (Einhorn, 1981; Fuertes et al., 2012; Hendriks et al., 2021) operationalized evaluations of people and specifically job applicants, we came to the following dependent variables; likeability, competence, personality characteristics, motivational level, and hireability.

There were two more factors we also wanted include: gender and the hiring context. Gender can be an important factor in getting hired or not and has been shown to play a differentiating role in speech accommodation. For example, research by Jones et al. (1994) has shown differences between men and women in the outcome of speech accommodation. They found that women were evaluated better when they made use of a more prestigious speech style on the work floor where an unequal status was at hand. And although the number of women occupying high positions at companies is slowly increasing, this unequal status can still be found regularly as these positions are still largely dominated by men (Jongen et al., 2019). Therefore, it made most sense to replicate this reality in our experiment as well and have the interviewee in our experiment be female and the interviewer male. The main societal purpose of our study was thus to offer women an extra stepping stone and provide more insight on how to be successful in a conversation within a hiring context. Specifically this hiring context was chosen, not only because of our societal goal, but also because previous research has found that the job interview provides a proper structure and has a relatively fixed or rule-bound context (Herriot, 1981). This means that the job interview has clear rules that participants adhere to, like the topics that are to be discussed or the assumption that there is an interrogation from the interviewer. Moreover, since conductance of future research within this rule-bound construct has been encouraged (Willemyns et al., 1997), we found this to be a good setting to examine the accommodation process in.

Method

Design

The independent variables directness and culture with respectively the two sublevels of converging or maintaining and high-context or low-context culture were operationalized in a 2x2 design. The variable directness was distributed across the subjects through a between-subjects design. After filling out the demographics, participants were randomly assigned to audio 1 or audio 2. Apart from this separation, participants received the exact same questions.

Materials

In order to research our independent variables, two different English audio fragments were created. An audio was used instead of a video to avoid creating any confounds that could emerge with image, like gestures and biases towards appearance. The recordings presented two job interviews, both of which had one female job applicant and one male interviewer. The transcription for the fragments had been written in advance and, as an example recording, subsequently acted out by two of the researchers to assure tone and pauses were interpreted correctly. The conversations were then recorded through an online Zoom meeting by one of the female researchers and a volunteer male student. The two audios were similar in that they used the same voices, had the same opening sentences and the male part was exactly the same in both conversations. Both recordings lasted a maximum of two minutes in order to maintain the participants' attention and to constrain the duration of the survey.

We decided to let the job applicant apply for a position as Chief Financial Officer (CFO), which is a hierarchically high position within a company. Using this position allowed our results to be applied to the specific context we were interested in, this being women applying for high job positions. In interview 1, the interviewer adopted a direct communication style, whereas the interviewee initially adopted an indirect communication style. She converged towards a direct communication style during the conversation. In interview 2, the starting communication styles were the same as in interview 1. However, in the second interview the female candidate maintained her indirect communication style throughout the entire interview. The difference of converging versus maintaining was made at the fourth reply of the candidate and thereafter. This is the point where the candidate either converged to the direct communication style or maintained her indirect style. She converged to the interviewer's direct style by answering his questions to the point and not adding extra information that was not asked for, whereas she did do this at the introduction of the conversation. In the second audio,

the maintenance of her indirect style was shown by continuing to reply extensively, add context, and not explicitly answer the question that was posed. Transcripts of the audios can be found in appendix 1.

The start of the survey accounted for a division between our population and the groups outside that did not belong to this. In this demographical section we asked for age, nationality (Dutch, English, or Other) and mother tongue (Dutch, English, or Other). We also asked for highest achieved education level, which was categorized in both the English as the Dutch manner: secondary education; further education, or as used in Dutch, MBO; degree/non-degree education or HBO; and university or WO. Lastly, we asked for gender (male, female, non-binary, no response), and self-evaluated English proficiency (ranging on a 5-point scale). Participants indicating to be below 18 were excluded from the results. People reporting to be below the age of 16 were not able to fill out the survey. Exact formulation of these questions can be found in appendix 2.

Participants

Sampling was done by distributing our survey through online social media like WhatsApp, Facebook and LinkedIn. It was not possible to offer a reward or other incentive for filling out our survey. Despite tremendous efforts, it was difficult to collect sufficient participants to complete our survey. 127 people filled out the survey, of which 97 finished it completely. Of these, 49 were Dutch and 35 English and 13 filled in 'Other'. Distribution across mother tongue was mostly the same, except for two cases that chose both Dutch or English and Other. All responses including 'Other' were excluded from the statistical treatment. By doing so, nationality and mother tongue coincided and for purposes of ease and clarity, these two variables shall hereon forth merely be referred to as 'nationality'. The mean age for all participants was 32 with a standard deviation of 16.97 and a range of 18 to 79.

A one-way analysis of variance showed that there was no significant effect of age on the audio conditions for the Dutch participants (F (1, 45) = 3.13, p = .083). The same was the case for the English participants (F (1, 33) = 1.09, p = .305). However, for the complete sample, a slight significant effect of age on audio condition was found (F (1, 80) = 4.01, p = .049). The mean age for the converging audio was lower (M = 29, SD = 14.95) than the mean age for the maintaining audio (M = 36, SD = 17.57).

The most frequent level of education was by far University with 49 people indicating to have obtained or be working on a university degree. 5 people indicated further education (MBO), 20 degree/non-degree education (HBO), and 7 people with only secondary education.

Despite these large differences, a chi-square test showed no significant relation between nationality and level of education (χ^2 (4) = 9.51, p = .050). Another Chi-square test also showed no significant relation between audio condition and educational level for the English participants (χ^2 (4) = 5.31, p = .257). It did, however, show a significant relation between audio condition and educational level for the Dutch participants (χ^2 (3) = 8.83, p = .032). Participants who had a (Non-)Degree/HBO diploma were relatively less often distributed to the converging audio (14.3%) than the maintaining audio (46.2%). The opposite was the case for those with a University/WO degree, where there were more participants that evaluated the converging audio (81.0%) than the maintaining audio (46.2%). There was no significant difference for the other two education levels. Details of this distribution can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of education level in count and percentage of occurrences among audio condition for Dutch participants through a chi-square analysis. Here a and b display a significant difference between the converging and maintaining audio conditions.

| | | Current or highest level of education | | | |
		MBO	HBO	University	Secondary
Convergence	Count	0a	3a	17a	1a
	% within current or highest education level	0%	14%	81%	5%
Maintenance	Count	2a	12b	12b	0a
	% within current or highest education level	8%	46%	46%	0%

The distribution of gender was very similar among the English, 17 male versus 16 female and SD = .61, whereas the Dutch differed more with 18 males and 29 females and a standard deviation of .62. However, no significant relation was found in a chi-square analysis between audio condition and gender for the English participants (χ^2 (2) = 1.63, p = .443) nor for the Dutch participants (χ^2 (1) = 1.40, p = .237). The distribution of gender was thus homogeneous.

Self-reported English proficiency was rated by 55% of the Dutch as 'good' (4), ranging from 1 'terrible' to 5 'excellent'. As may be expected, these numbers were higher for the English, where 77% considered their proficiency as 'excellent' and the lowest was rated as 'average', indicated by one participant. A final chi-square analysis also showed no significant relation between audio condition and self-reported English proficiency for the Dutch (χ^2 (3) = 5.00, p = .172) nor for the English participants (χ^2 (2) = 2.29, p = .318). The distribution of English proficiency among audio conditions was thus similar.

Instruments

As for the dependent variables, we observed likeability, competence, motivational level, personality characteristics, and hireability. To operationalize these variables, a questionnaire was created. The dependent variables, or the attitudes, towards the candidate were measured with 9 statements on a 7-point Likert scale preceded by "In my opinion, the candidate sounds…" or "In my opinion, this interviewee is…" anchored by "completely disagree" and "completely agree", scales based on previous research (Bayard et al., 2001; Hendriks et al., 2016; Tsalikis et al., 1991).

For likeability, participants were asked to indicate their opinion on eight different items: 'credible', 'sympathetic', 'warm', 'humorous', 'tactful', 'polite', 'irritating', and 'unfriendly'. These items were also based upon existing literature (Fuertes et al., 2012; Hendriks et al., 2021). The reliability of 'likeability of the interviewee' comprising these eight items was good: α = .806. Consequently, the mean of all eight items was used to calculate the compound variable 'likeability of the candidate', which has been used in the further analyses.

Competence was measured by the labels 'reliable', 'intelligent', 'competent', 'hardworking', and 'educated' (as also done in Hendriks et al. (2021)). The reliability of competence of the interviewee comprising five items was also good: α = .824. Consequently, the mean of all five items was used to calculate the compound variable 'competence of the candidate', which was used in the further analyses.

Motivational level was measured with the characteristics 'knowledgeable', 'goal-oriented', and 'motivated' (based on Waugh, 2002). The reliability of this variable comprising three items was also good: α = .816. The mean of all three items was thus used to calculate the compound variable 'motivational level of the candidate', which was used in the further analyses.

The measurement of personality characteristics was based on Costa Jr and McCrae (1992) and measured by 'extravert', 'agreeable', 'conscious', 'emotionally stable', and 'open'. Its reliability, including five items, was acceptable: α = .729. The mean of all five items was used to create the compound variable 'personality characteristics of the candidate', which was used in the further analyses.

Lastly, hireability was evaluated by indicating to what extent the participant agreed with the given 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", "There is a high likelihood of this candidate being hired". The reliability of hireability of the interviewee comprising five items was very good: α = .950. Consequently, the mean of all these items was used to calculate the compound variable 'hireability of the candidate', which was used in the further analyses. An overview of the complete survey can be found in appendix 2.

A manipulation check was added at the end of the survey to verify whether participants were sensitive to the difference in communication styles. This manipulation was executed by utilizing three statements that had to be rated on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by "strongly disagree" and oppositely "strongly agree". These statements were: "In my opinion, the candidate became more and more direct during the conversation", "In my opinion, the candidate was more straight to the point at the beginning of the conversation than at the end of it", and "In my opinion, the candidate was indirect throughout the whole interview". The reliability of the first two manipulation checks was unfortunately insufficient: α = -.387. Due to this low value, we decided to exclude the second manipulation check question, as the first one reflected the act of convergence better. In order to test whether the participants were aware that the candidate was constant or not throughout the entire interview, a t-test was carried out on the third manipulation check question.

Procedure

An online survey with the tool Qualtrics was created, based on the audio recordings. It opened with a short explanation of the situational context and what was expected of the participant. It was required to consent filling out the questionnaire. People who indicated they did not want to, were redirected to the end of the survey. This was followed by the demographic questions, after which the assigned audio fragment was given with the appurtenant questions. The last section included three questions that functioned as a manipulation check. The end of

the survey was indicated by a small text and thank you note. Specific texts can again be found in appendix 2.

People were to be persuaded to fill out our survey by the following text that went along with the link to the survey: "Hi there! If you have 5 mins to spare while you're on the train, waiting at the dentist or enjoying the sunshine could you maybe fill out our thesis survey? Thank you so much in advance!" This text did not address the topic of the study to avoid any possible suspicions of the goal of the experiment. In total the questionnaire took more or less 10 minutes. Surveys were to be filled out individually and remote, we thus had no control or knowledge on where and when they were answered. This may have influenced the answers, as each person was in a different setting and in different place. Subjects were not informed of the aim of the study afterwards, but were provided with contact details of one of the researchers.

Statistical Treatment

In order to assure homogeneity between the distribution of groups, multiple chi-square tests were run in SPSS. To compare culture and audio condition per dependent variable, multiple two-way univariate analyses of variance were carried out.

Results

To assure our convergence manipulation was effective, an independent samples t-test was carried out for the third manipulation question: "In my opinion, the candidate was indirect throughout the whole interview". This test showed a significant difference between the converging and maintaining groups (t (78.00) = 3.14, p = .002). The candidate in the maintenance audio (M = 4.12, SD = 1.68) was rated as more indirect throughout the whole interview than the one in the convergence audio (M = 3.03, SD = 1,46). This means participants did notice a difference in indirectness throughout the conversation and did so according to our manipulation. This finding reinforces the results that come from the following statistical treatment.

A two-way analysis of variance with audio condition (converging or maintaining) and nationality (Dutch or English) as factors showed no significant main effect of audio type on likeability of the candidate (F (1, 78) = 1.37, p = .246). Nationality was also not found to have a significant main effect on likeability (F (1, 78) < 1). However, the interaction effect between

audio condition and nationality was statistically significant (F (1, 78) = 5.035, p = .028). The difference between the two nationalities was only found among Dutch subjects (F (1, 45) = 6.34, p = .015): the converging audio (M = 5.32, SD = 0.72) was rated better than the maintaining audio (M = 4.65, SD = 1.01). There was no difference between the two types of audio fragments for the English subjects (F (1, 33) < 1). This finding tells us that the Dutch observed the candidate as more likeable when she converged her communication style to that of the interviewer.

Another two-way ANOVA with the same factors showed a significant main effect of audio type on competence of the candidate (F (1, 78) = 10.67, p = .002). Competence was rated higher for the converging audio (M = 5.51, SD = .84) than for the maintaining audio (M = 4.84, SD = .965). Nationality was not found to have a significant main effect on competence (F (1, 78) = 1.13, p = .291). The interaction effect between audio condition and nationality was also not statistically significant (F (1, 78) < 1). In other words, participants of both nationalities rated the candidate's competence more positively when she converged her speech to the interviewer.

No significant main effect of audio type on perceived motivational level of the candidate (F (1, 78) = 3.65, p = .060) was found through a two-way analysis of variance. Nationality was also not found to have a significant main effect on motivational level (F (1, 78) < 1). There was also no statistically significant interaction effect (F (1, 78) < 1). Moreover, no significant main effect of audio type on personality characteristics of the candidate (F (1, 78) < 1) was found. Nationality was not found to have a significant main effect either (F (1, 78) = 1.19, p = .279). The interaction effect was also not statistically significant (F (1, 78) < 1).

A final two-way ANOVA did show a significant main effect of audio condition on hireability of the interviewee (F (1, 77) = 4.78, p = .032). The candidate in the converging audio was rated by participants as more likely to be hired (M = 4.74, SD = 1.20) than the one in the maintaining audio (M = 4.02, SD = 1.53). Nationality was not found to have a significant main effect on motivational level (F (1, 77) < 1). Here, the interaction effect between audio condition and nationality was not statistically significant (F (1, 77) = 1.86, p = .177). As we also observed in the previous results, converging one's speech style was thus evaluated better on hireability than maintaining it, independent of nationality. For a clear overview of the means of all dependent variables per condition and nationality, see Table 2.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the evaluation of the job interviewee in function of high- and low-context culture (Dutch versus English) and converging versus maintaining audio fragment (1 = very negative, 7 = very positive).

	Dutch		English	
	converging	maintaining	converging	maintaining
	$n = 21$	$n = 26$	$n = 20$	$n = 15$
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Likeability	5.32 (.72)	4.65 (1.01)	4.78 (.71)	4.98 (.93)
Competence	5.70 (.91)	4.86 (.96)	5.31 (.73)	4.81 (1.01)
Motivation	5.46 (1.07)	4.82 (1.25)	5.18 (.89)	4.87 (1.19)
Personality characteristics	4.70 (.69)	4.45 (.98)	4.85 (.87)	4.75 (1.01)
Hireability	5.07 (1.19)	3.96 (1.52)	4.39 (1.13)	4.13 (1.61)

To conclude, we have thus found three significant effects relevant to answering our research question.

1. Dutch participants viewed a job interviewee as more likeable when they converged their communication style to that of the interviewer.
2. The mean rating of all subjects on the candidate's competence was better when the job applicant converged her speech to her interviewer.
3. Attitudes towards hireability were valued higher by both nationalities in a converging communication style, than a maintaining one.

Discussion

The findings that have come from the statistical treatment shall now be discussed with regards to its implications and shortcomings. All significant effects support our expectation that convergence would have a more positive effect than maintenance in a hiring context. These results are also in line with Gallois et al.'s (1992) finding in which similar communication style between interviewer and interviewee was favorable. Our results also support Einhorn's (1981) conclusions that identifying with the employer creates greater success. However, the positive evaluation of the job candidate in this study, can also merely be due to Einhorn's definition of successful applicants, who had rapid and forceful delivery of messages and active and concrete language use. This was the case in the converging audio as opposed to the maintaining one,

since the converging audio started indirect and relatively quickly transferred to a more direct style. This does allow us to conclude that Einhorn's findings still hold in a speech accommodative context.

The first significant difference applied to nationality and likeability; the converging job applicant was found more likeable by the Dutch. Comparing this to Hall and Hall's model (1990), it makes sense that the Dutch, in this model low-context culture, preferred the conversation in which mostly a direct style or low-context style was handled. The difference in context-style or directness between The Netherlands and England that we have found here, had similarly been established by Rottier et al. (2011). On the other hand, the current result may also be attributed to the fact that Dutch prefer direct communication over indirect communication in general and not specifically appreciate the act of converging. Then again, this counterargument would stand stronger if the English, of whom we know prefer indirect communication, were then also found to like the maintaining candidate better, since she only used indirect communication. Altogether, general preference for a communication style is a factor that should be taken into account when interpreting these findings. Additionally, there was only one significant difference with regards to culture. This may confirm Mellaard's (2008) conclusion that there are no major differences in directness, as culture was strongly linked with directness in this investigation. The small dissimilarity between cultures also aligns with our own expectations: there was little (to no) difference in sensitivity to convergence on directness between the high- and low-context cultures. This may be attributed to a too narrow difference between the Netherlands and England in terms of high- and low- context culture. Conducting the same research but with stronger opposites in context culture may unfold whether this was the case. Research into merely height of context culture of the two countries could also contribute to finding an explanation.

Effect number two, higher competence when converging, and number three, higher hireability when converging, are also in line with discussed literature (Ramsay et al., 1997) and our own expectations of convergence to have a positive influence on a job interview. However, the mean difference of both competence and hireability between the converging and maintaining audio was not too large. Bearing in mind the small sample size, the same research with a larger participant group could also present different and possibly even insignificant results for these variables. Nevertheless, here it does show to be significant, meaning converging could convince the interviewer you are competent enough to get hired.

Though our results are very promising, it is not certain whether convergence caused these significant effects or if any confounding variables did so. Moreover, we must also not

forget that education level was not distributed evenly across conditions, which may have had an effect on how the audio fragments were perceived per condition. Specifically, it may be possible that the participants with the converging audio and thus higher education, were (more) aware of the goal of the study. Additionally, those with higher education may value certain qualities and characteristics in a job applicant differently than those with lower education. In its turn, this could have affected the candidate evaluation. Lastly, our second manipulation check question did not hold and sample size was smaller than preferred. This makes our results less generalizable. To verify what exactly caused the effect in our results and to clear the potential confound of recruiters simply preferring direct candidates, more extensive research should be done. This should include audio types that converge from a direct to an indirect style as well and take into account the possible Dutch preference for direct communication. Investigations with larger datasets would also allow for results with higher validity.

Finally, our last finding concerning hireability could be considered to be the most important outcome, as it indicates whether the candidate would have actually been hired or not, which is the ultimate goal of the job interview. So, as this variable weighs more than others, this finding can, along with the previous two, confirm our hypothesis. We can thus conclude that in a job interview, it has a positive effect to converge your communication style to your interlocutor with regards to directness. What does this mean for future employees and organizations? We recommend job applicants to make use of the communication accommodation strategy and converge their communication style to the interviewer to attain success. We especially hope our research contributes to women that try to climb the ladder of hierarchy. On the other hand, we also recommend businesses to take this strategy into account and bear in mind this might affect their objective judgement of a candidate.

Conclusion

Our research has contributed to research in high- and low-context cultures, speech accommodation theory in relation to directness, and the comparison of the Netherlands and England. We have concluded that there was a distinction in candidate evaluation in communication accommodation style between low-context and high-context cultures. More importantly, we found that it is useful to converge your communication style to your interlocutor as opposed to maintaining it, with regards to directness in a job interview. This could be applied to job interviews with both Dutch and English assessors.

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Appendix 1

Transcript job interview 1: Converging from indirect to direct

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.

Transcript job interview 2: Maintaining indirect

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

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 Dutch
    - o English
    - o Other

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

I would rate my English proficiency as…

        (1) Terrible   (2) Poor   (3) Average   (4) Good   (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.

AUDIOFRAGMENT 1 OR 2

<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.

Likeability

In my opinion, the candidate sounds…

6.	Credible	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
7.	Sympathetic	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
8.	Warm	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
9.	**Impolite**	**(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))**
10.	Humorous	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
11.	Tactful	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
12.	**Irritating**	**(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))**
13.	**Unfriendly**	**(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))**

Competence

In my opinion, the candidate sounds…

14.	**Unreliable**	**(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))**
15.	Intelligent	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
16.	**Incompetent**	**(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))**
17.	Hardworking	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
18.	Educated	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))

Motivational level

In my opinion, this candidate is …

19.	Knowledgeable	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
20.	Goal-oriented	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
21.	**Unmotivated**	**(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))**

Personal characteristics

In my opinion, this candidate is …

22.	**Introvert**	**(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))**
23.	Agreeable	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
24.	Conscious	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
25.	Emotionally stable	(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
26.	**Closed off**	**(Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))**

Hireability

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements

27.   I would recommend employing this candidate (Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
28.   I would feel satisfied if this candidate would be hired (Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
29.   I feel favorably towards this candidate (Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
30.   This candidate would be an asset to the company (Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
31.   There is a high likelihood of this candidate being hired (Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))

Manipulation checks

32.   In my opinion, the candidate became more and more direct during the conversation (Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))
33.   In my opinion, the candidate was more straight to the point at the beginning of the conversation than at the end of it (Strongly disagree (1) - Strongly agree (7))

You have now reached the end of this survey. 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.

Thank you very much for your participation!

Your answers have been saved. You may now close this window.

Appendix 3

Sign this *Statement of own work* form and add it as the last appendix in the final version of the Bachelor's thesis that is submitted as to the first supervisor.

Student name: **Maxime de Raad**

Student number: **s1027639**

PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

DECLARATION:

a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the faculty manual (https://www.ru.nl/facultyofarts/stip/rules-guidelines/rules/fraud-plagiarism/) and with Article 16 "Fraud and plagiarism" in the Education and Examination Regulations for the Bachelor's programme of Communication and Information Studies.

b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words

c. I certify that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.

Signature:

Place and date: **'s-Hertogenbosch, June 10th 2022**