BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC QUẢN LÝ VÀ CÔNG NGHỆ HẢI PHÒNG

KHÓA LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP

NGÀNH: NGOẠI NGỮ

Sinh viên   : Đỗ Thị Ánh
Giảng viên hướng dẫn : Ths. Bùi Thị Mai Anh

HẢI PHÒNG – 2021

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LOW AND HIGH CONTEXT CULTURE - A CROSS - CULTURAL COMPARISON OF AMERICANS AND VIETNAMESE.

KHÓA LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP ĐẠI HỌC HỆ CHÍNH QUY
NGÀNH: NGOẠI NGỮ

Sinh viên   **: Đỗ Thị Ánh**
Giảng viên hướng dẫn : Ths. Bùi Thị Mai Anh

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2. Các số liệu cần thiết để thiết kế, tính toán.

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3. Địa điểm thực tập tốt nghiệp.

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CÁN BỘ HƯỚNG DẪN ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP

<u>Người hướng dẫn:</u>

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Đề tài tốt nghiệp được giao ngày 24 tháng 04 năm 2021

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       TS. Trần Thị Ngọc Liên

PHIẾU NHẬN XÉT CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN HƯỚNG DẪN TỐT NGHIỆP

Họ và tên giảng viên: Ths. Bùi Thị Mai Anh

Đơn vị công tác: Đại học Quản lý và Công nghệ Hải Phòng

Họ và tên sinh viên: Đỗ Thị Ánh   Chuyên ngành: Ngôn ngữ Anh

Đề tài tốt nghiệp: Low and High Context Culture - A cross-cultural comparison of Americans and Vietnamese.

Nội dung hướng dẫn: Văn hóa bối cảnh thấp và cao – Sự so sánh giao thoa văn hóa của người Mỹ và Việt Nam.

1. Tinh thần thái độ của sinh viên trong quá trình làm đề tài tốt nghiệp

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2. Đánh giá chất lượng của đồ án/khóa luận (so với nội dung yêu cầu đã đề ra trong nhiệm vụ Đ.T. T.N trên các mặt lý luận, thực tiễn, tính toán số liệu…)

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3. Ý kiến của giảng viên hướng dẫn tốt nghiệp

Được bảo vệ ☐   Không được bảo vệ ☐   Điểm hướng dẫn ☐

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PHIẾU NHẬN XÉT CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN CHẤM PHẢN BIỆN

Họ và tên giảng viên: ....

Đơn vị công tác: ....

Họ và tên sinh viên: .... Chuyên ngành: ....

Đề tài tốt nghiệp: ....

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1. Phần nhận xét của giáo viên chấm phản biện

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2. Những mặt còn hạn chế

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3. Ý kiến của giảng viên chấm phản biện

Được bảo vệ ☐   Không được bảo vệ ☐   Điểm phản biện ☐

Hải Phòng, ngày … tháng … năm 2021
Giảng viên chấm phản biện
(Ký và ghi rõ họ tên)

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

In our daily life, communication plays an important part, as such, present at all times. However, its presence often implies simplicity and mutual understanding. Such forgone conclusions have put people around the world into numerous delicate situations. Many of these situations have provided the basis for, more of less helpful, books on cultural etiquette. It is generally acknowledged that people from different countries tend to communicate in slightly different ways. These differences are more related to different communication cultures than other differences. Being aware of these differences usually leads to better comprehension, fewer misunderstanding and to mutual respect. Basing on Edward T. Hall's concept (1959, 1966, 1976, 1983) of high-context and low-context communication, the paper illustrates the communication styles and cultural features of Vietnamese and Americans. In order to create a common understanding, the first part of the paper will provide information on the role of culture in communication. At this point, culturally affected areas of communication will be identified. Furthermore, the differences in communication styles, as well as some cultural issues will be described.

2. Aim of the study

The purpose of this paper is to clarify similarities and differences in cross low and high context culture of the Vietnamese and American people. The Western culture is at the variance with the Eastern culture, therefore, we find interesting differences in the communication of each culture.

Through this study, I hope that I myself and the English learner can get better understanding of the low and high context culture of other countries. Therefore, the study contributes to raising awareness of cross-cultural differences in communication.

3. Research questions

These followings are two research questions of this study:
- What is high/low-context?
- What are the differences between low/high-context in Vietnamese and Americans?

4. *Scope of the study*

A cross culture study is a very large scale. However, due to the limitation of my knowledge as well as experience and time, I only research on the low-context and high-context culrures between Americans and Vietnamese . But hopefully these will partly help people have general knowledge and understanding about the differences of the two countries' cultures to get easier to communicate .

5. *Design of the study*

The study contains three parts :

- **Part I : Introduction** presents the rationales, the aims, the research questions and the design of the study.

- **Part II : Development** consist of three chapters :

  + **Chapter 1 :** Theoretical background provides readers the overview of culture and cross culture communication, low and high context culture.

  + **Chapter 2 :** The study about characteristics, communication styles, differences and values of the high-context and low-context cultures.

  + **Chapter 3 :** This chapter is case analysis and discussion. In this chapter, I compare and analyze the findings obtained and evaluations.

  + **Chapter 4:** This final chapter is low-context and high-context cultures between Americans and Vietnamese.

- **Part III : Conclusion** presents an overview of the major findings of study, and recommendation for further study.

PART II: DEVELOPMENT
CHAPTER 1 : Theoretical background

1. History of differing context cultures

These concepts were first introduced by the anthropologist Edward T. Hall in his 1959 book *The Silent Language*. Cultures and communication in which the context of the message is of great importance to structuring actions are referred to as high context. High-context defines cultures that are usually relational and collectivist, and which most highlight interpersonal relationships. Hall identifies high-context cultures as those in which harmony and the well-being of the group is preferred over individual achievement. In low context, communication members communication must be more explicit, direct, and elaborate because individuals are not expected to have knowledge of each others histories or background, and communication is not necessarily shaped by long-standing relationships between speakers. Because low-context communication concerns more direct messages, the meaning of these messages is more dependent on the words being spoken rather than on the interpretation of more subtle or unspoken cues. A 2008 meta analysis concluded that the model was "unsubstantiated and underdeveloped".

2.Culture and Cross- Cultural Communication.

2.1. Culture

Culture, as stated by Fay *"is a complex set of shared beliefs, values, and concepts which enables a group to make sense of its life and which provides it with directions for how to live"* (Holliday, A et al. (2004:60)).

In relation to language, **Culture** is emphasized as *"the total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behaviors, social habits,… of the member of a particular society"* (in Richards et al. (1985:94)).

According to Cambridge English Dictionary Online, **culture** is, *"the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time."*

In Nguyen Quang's opinion (1998:3), **culture** is *"a share background (for example, national, ethnic, religious) resulting from a common language and communication style, custom, beliefs, attitudes, and values. Culture in this text does not refer to art, music, literature, food, clothing styles, and so on. It refers*

to the informal and often hidden patterns of human interactions, expressions, and viewpoints that people in one culture share. The hidden nature of culture has been compared to an iceberg, most of which is hidden underwater! Like the iceberg most of the influence of culture on an individual cannot be seen. The part of culture that is exposed is not always that which creates cross-cultural difficulties; the hidden aspects of culture have significant effects on behavior and on interactions with others."

Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn (1952:47) also pointed out that *"**Culture** consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and 6 selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action."*

UNESCO firmly held on to a definition of culture, originally set out in the 1982 Mexico Declaration on Cultural Policies: *"In its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs"* (UNESCO, 2001:148).

2.2. Cross Cultural Communication

Cross-cultural communication is a process of creating and sharing meaning among people from different cultural backgrounds using a variety of means. The term cross-cultural communication is used interchangeably with intercultural communication at times. However, cross-cultural communication and intercultural communication are differentiated based on the focus of the research: whereas intercultural communication focuses on the interaction with different cultures, cross-cultural communication focuses more on the comparisons of different cultures. After providing a more thorough definition of cross-cultural communication, this entry offers a review of the inception of cross-cultural communication and a description of different approaches toward research. Major cross-cultural communication theories are then discussed, and considerations for those conducting cross-cultural research are provided.

Conventionally, culture, in the narrow sense, implies different ethnicities and races…

- ***Hall breaks up culture into two main groups:***

High and Low context cultures.

Depending on how a culture relies on the three points (Non- verbal, oral, written) to communicate their meaning, will place them in either high or low context cultures.

- High context refers to societies or groups where people have close connections over a long period of time. They rely more on context than the content.

- Low context refers to societies where people tend to have many connections but of shorter duration or for some specific reason. They rely more on content than the context.

3. *About Halls high-context and low-context*

Context is important in all communication, but it is relatively more important in some situations than in others. There are also significant differences across cultures in the ways and the extent to which people communicate through context. One of the main distinctions between cultures has been the notion of high and low context cultures, proposed by the American anthropologies Edward. T. Hall in his 1976 classic, Beyond Culture (Hall, 2000).

3.1. *What is high/low-context?*

Edward T. Hall has described cultural differences in the use of language and context in communication. He calls communication that occurs mostly through language low context and communication that occurs in ways other than though languages as high context. A high-context communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context communication is just the opposite; i.e., the, mass of information is vested in the explicit code. Any transaction can be characterized as high, low or middle context. High context transactions feature preprogrammed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. Low-context transactions are the reverse. Most of the information must be in the transmitted message in order

to make up for what is missing in the context. Although no culture exists exclusively at one end of the scale, some are high while others are low. American culture, while not on the bottom, is toward the lower end of the scale. And Vietnamese culture, while not on the top, is toward the higher start point of the scale.

3.2. *Distinctive characteristics between high-context and low context*

Hall observed that *"meaning and context are inextricably bound up with each other"* (Hall, 2000, p. 36), and suggested that to understand communication one should look at meaning and context together with the code (i.e., the words themselves). By context, we refer to the situation, background, or environment connected to an event, a situation, or an individual. When communication is high-context, it is not only the non-verbal and paraverbal communication that comes into play. High-context communication draws on physical aspects as well as the time and situation in which the communication takes place, not to mention the relationship between the interlocutors. The closer the relationship, the more high-context the communication tends to be, drawing on the shared knowledge of the communicating parties. By using scales meant to conceptualize the difference between high and low-context communications, Gudykunst et al. (1996) identified high-context communication to be indirect, ambiguous, maintaining of harmony, reserved and understated. In contrast, low-context communication was identified as direct, precise, dramatic, open, and based on feelings or true intentions.

Thus basic distinctive characteristics within the two contexts can be generalized into the way by which people express the meaning and think as well as the media through which people communicate i.e. directness or indirectness; verbal or nonverbal.

Detailed analysis about these two distinctive characteristics will be given in the following part, using the actual cases in daily communication between Vietnam and America, to illustrate the importance of recognizing the differences of context in cross-cultural communication.

CHAPTER 2: THE STUDY

1.Characteristics of high-context and low-context cultures.

1.1. Denotation and connotation

High-context cultures are related to connotation. People within high-context cultures tend to be more aware and observant of facial expressions, body language, changes in tone, and other aspects of communication that are not directly spoken.Denotation tends to be attributed to low-context culture. People in low-context cultures communicate in a more direct way, with explicitly speaking what they want to communicate.

1.2. Confrontation

Man, like other animals, is sometimes aggressive, but, unlike other species, he handles and channels aggression in many different ways, depending upon his culture and how it structures and integrates aggression (Hall, 1976). In high-context culture, people tend to personalize their disagreement with others. To show one's disagreement and anger in public is tantamount to admitting loss of control and face, because what is being said is taken personally which may have an influence on interpersonal relationships. Therefore, they will keep their emotions inside or just remain silence to avoid trouble. In this way, they can maintain social harmony and intimate bonds with each other. In the eyes of people from low-context culture, this kind of repression is totally unreasonable. Everyone has their own rights to express opinions, and this explicit criticism has nothing to do with theirinterpersonal relationships. It is reported (Chua & Gudykunst, 1987) that in low-context culture solution orientation is more often used to resolve conflicts, whereas in high-context culture non-confrontation is more often used.

1.3. Interpersonal relationships

Individualism and collectivism are related to low-context and high-context cultures, respectively. Within high-context cultures, people rely on their networks of friends and family, viewing their relationships as part of one large community. In low-context cultures, relationships are not viewed as important figures to identity. People within low-context cultures see their relationships much looser and the lines between networks of people are more flexibly drawn.

2. *Overlap and contrast between context cultures*

The categories of context cultures are not totally separate. Both often take many aspects of the others cultural communication abilities and strengths into account. The terms high-context and low-context cultures are not classified with strict individual characteristics or boundaries. Instead, many cultures tend to have a mixture or at least some concepts that are shared between them, overlapping the two context cultures.

Ramos suggests that "in low context culture, communication members communication must be more explicit. As such, what is said is what is meant, and further analysis of the message is usually unnecessary." This implies that communication is quite direct and detailed because members of the culture are not expected to have knowledge of each others histories, past experience or background. Because low-context communication concerns more direct messages, the meaning of these messages is more dependent on the words being spoken rather than on the interpretation of more subtle or unspoken cues.

The Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice states that, "high context defines cultures that are relational and collectivist, and which most highlight interpersonal relationships. Cultures and communication in which context is of great importance to structuring actions is referred to as high context." In such cultures, people are highly perceptive of actions. Furthermore, cultural aspects such as tradition, ceremony, and history are also highly valued. Because of this, many features of cultural behavior in high-context cultures, such as individual roles and expectations, do not need much detailed or thought-out explanation.

According to Watson, "the influence of cultural variables interplays with other key factors – for example, social identities, those of age, gender, social class and ethnicity; this may include a stronger or weaker influence." A similarity that the two communication styles share is its influence on social characteristics such as age, gender, social class and ethnicity. For example, for someone who is older and more experienced within a society, the need for social cues may be higher or lower depending on the communication style. The same applies for the other characteristics in varied countries.

On the other hand, certain intercultural communication skills are unique for each culture and it is significant to note that these overlaps in communication techniques are represented subgroups within social interactions or family

settings. Many singular cultures that are large have subcultures inside of them, making communication and defining them more complicated than the low-context and high-context culture scale. The diversity within a main culture shows how the high and low scale differs depending on social settings such as school, work, home, and in other countries; variation is what allows the scale to fluctuate even if a large culture is categorized as primarily one or the other.

3. Communication styles in a high – low context

3.1. Definitions of high - low context communication

First used by Hall, the expression "high- context" and "low-context" are labels denoting inherent cultural differences between societies. "High-context" and deep "low-context" communication refers to how much speakers rely on things other than words to convey meaning. Hall states that in communication, individuals face many more sensory cues than they are able to fully process. In each culture, members have been supplied with specific "filters" that allow them to focus only on what society has deemed important. In general, cultures that favor low-context communication will pay more attention to the literal meanings of words than to the context surrounding them. It is important to remember that every individual uses both high-context and low- context communication. It is not simply a matter of choosing one over the other. Often, the types of relationships we have with others and our circumstances will dictate the extent to which we rely more on literal or implied meanings (Nishimura at al, 2008).

High context refers to societies or groups where people have close connections over long period of time. Many aspects of cultural behavior are not made explicit because most members know what to do and what to think from heat around the bush until their interlocutor years of interaction with each other. They decodes the message correctly. The reason for this is that their primary goal is to saving face and ensuring harmony. Hall characterize high-context communication styles as being faster and more efficient preserve and strengthen relationships by as they rely on intuitive understanding. However, they are slow to change and need time to create a common understanding between sender and receiver. It is posited that a high context culture would have strong respect for social hierarchy, bonds between people would be strong, people may be more self-contained with feelings and messages may be simple but with deep meaning (Kim et al, 1998).

3.2. Commons between high – low context communication

- Because context includes both the vocal and non-vocal aspects of communication that surround a word or passage and clarify its meaning - the situational and cultural factors affecting communications, high-context or low-context refers to the amount of information that is in a given communication. The verbal aspects include:
- The rate at which one talks
- The pitch or tone of the voice
- The quality of the voice .
- The fluency
- The intensity or loudness of the voice.
- The flexibility or adaptability of the voice to the situation
- The variations of rate, pitch and intensity
- Expressional patterns or nuances of delivery.

The non-verbal aspects include: Eye contact, pupil contraction and dilation. gestures, body movement, proximity, and use of space.

4. Differences between high and low context culture
4.1. Overview

- The "contex" is the information that surrounds an event and is strongly connected with the event.
- The elements that combine together to give meaning to an event are different depending on the culture.
- It is possible to order the cultures of the world on a scale from low to high context.

4.2. High context
4.2.1. Main types of knowledge

- Hall: "Most of the information is either in the physical context or initialized in the person."
- Knowledge is situational, relational.
- Less is verbally explicit or written or formally expressed.
- More internalized understandings of what is communicated (eg: in-jokes)
- Often used in long term, well-established relationships.

- Decisions and activities focus around personal face to face communication, often around a central, authoritative figure.
- Strong awareness of who is accepted/ belong vs. "outside".

4.2.2. Association
- Relationships depend on trust, build up slowly, are stable. One distinguishes between people inside and people outside ones circle.
- How things get done depends on relationships with people and attention to group process.
- Ones identity is rooted in groups (family, culture, work).
- Social structure and authority are centralized; responsibility is at the top. Person at top works for the good of the group.

4.2.3. Interaction
- High use of nonverbal elements; voice tone, facial expression, gestures, and eye movement carry significant parts of conversation.
- Verbal message is implicit; context (situation, people, nonverbal elements) is more important than words.
- Verbal message is indirect; one talks around the point and embellishes it.
- Communication is seen as an art form a way of engaging someone.
- Disagreement is personalized. One is sensitive to conflict expressed in anothers nonverbal communication. Conflict either must be solved before work can progress or must be avoided because it is personally threatening.

4.2.4. Territoriality
- Space is communal; people stand close to each other, share the same space.

4.2.5. Temporality
- Everything has its own time. Time is not easily scheduled; needs of people may interfere with keeping to a set time. What is important is that activity gets done.
- Change is slow. Things are rooted in the past, slow to change, and stable.

- Time is a process; it belongs to others and to nature.

4.2.6. Learning

- Knowledge is embedded in the situation; things are connected, synthesized, and global. Multiple sources of information are used. Thinking is deductive, proceeds from general to specific.
- Learning occurs by first observing others as they model or demonstrate and then practicing.
- Groups are preferred for learning and problem solving.
- Accuracy is valued. How well something is learned is important.

4.2.7. Cultural issues

- Stable, unified, cohesive, and slow to change.
- People tend to rely on their history, their status, their relationships, and a plethora of other information, including religion, to assign meaning to an event.
- Often seem too personal and even offensive.

4.3. Low context

4.3.1. Main types of knowledge

- Hall: "The mass of information is vested in the explicit code [message]."
- Rule oriented
- More knowledge is public, external, and accessible.
- Shorter duration of communications
- Knowledge is transferable
- Task-centered.
- Decisions and activities focus around what needs to be done and the division of responsibilities.

4.3.2. Association

- Relationships begin and end quickly. Many people can be inside ones circle; circles boundary is not clear.
- Things get done by following procedures and paying attention to the goal.
- Ones identity is rooted in oneself and ones accomplishments.
- Social structure is decentralized; responsibility goes further down (is not concentrated at the top).

4.3.3. Interaction

- Low use of nonverbal elements. Message is carried more by words than by nonverbal means.
- Verbal message is explicit. Context is less important than words.
- Verbal message is direct; one spells things out exactly.
- Communication is seen as a way of exchanging information, ideas, and opinions.
- Disagreement is depersonalized. One withdraws from conflict with another and gets on with the task. Focus is on rational solutions, not personal ones. One can be explicit about anothers bothersome behavior.

4.3.4. Territoriality
- Space is compartmentalized and privately owned; privacy is important, so people are farther apart.

4.3.5. Temporality
- Things are scheduled to be done at particular times, one thing at a time. What is important is that activity is done efficiently.
- Change is fast. One can make change and see immediate results.
- Time is a commodity to be spent or saved. Ones time is ones own.

4.3.6. Learning
- Reality is fragmented and compartmentalized. One source of information is used to develop knowledge. Thinking is inductive, proceeds from specific to general. Focus is on detail.
- Learning occurs by following explicit directions and explanations of others.
- An individual orientation is preferred for learning and problem solving.
- Speed is valued. How efficiently something is learned is important.

4.3.7. Cultural issues
- Value individualism over collectivism and group harmony. Individualism is characterized by members prioritizing individual needs and goals over the needs of the group.
- It is thought to be polite to ask questions.

5. High context culture requires reading between the lines

In a high context culture –
- Communication is indirect, implicit, subtle, layered and nuanced

- Non verbal cues like tone of voice, eye movements, gestures and facial expressions carry a great deal of meaning
- True intent of the message is not communicated verbally and is often left to the interpretation of the individual which requires contextual understanding and reading between the lines. In other words, verbal message is indirect often talking around the point and requires shared cultural context to carry meaning
- Focus on long term relationships to derive meaning which makes explicitness unnecessary
- During meetings, do not summaries the key takeaways or follow it up with written communication with the implicit assumption that everyone got their part right
- Individuals who value high context communication find low context style of communication as extremely detailed, distrustful and a waste of time due to repetition of message. "If you are from a high context culture, you might perceive a low-context communicator as inappropriately stating the obvious.You didnt have to say it! We all understood! or even as condescending and patronizing – You talk to us like we are children", says Erin Meyer in The Culture Map
- High-context cultures often exhibit less-direct verbal and nonverbal communication, utilizing small communication gestures and reading more meaning into these less-direct messages. High context defines cultures that are usually relational and collectivist, and which most highlight interpersonal relationships, those in which harmony and the well-being of the group is preferred over individual achievement.

6. *Low context culture requires stating as you mean it*

In a low context culture –

- Communication is concise, straight forward, explicit, simple and clear
- Requires attention to the literal meanings of words than to the context surrounding them
- With emphasis on sending and receiving accurate messages, nothing is left to interpretation and actual intent is conveyed in words. Repetition is often used to provide the necessary clarity

- The purpose and outcome of the communication takes precedence over interpersonal relationships. Focus on following standards and procedures leads to short term relationships. This requires that more value be placed on logic, facts and directness of the message
- Summarizing the key takeaways from the meeting and nailing things down in writing are expected to avoid confusion and set clear expectations
- Individuals who value low context communication find high context communicator as lazy, undisciplined, secretive, lacking transparency, unable to communicate effectively or those who waste a lot of time in trying to build relationships as opposed to getting the work done
- Low-context cultures do the opposite; direct verbal communication is needed to properly understand a message being communicated and relies heavily on explicit verbal skills. In low context, communication members communication must be more explicit, direct, and elaborate because individuals are not expected to have knowledge of each others histories or background, and communication is not necessarily shaped by long-standing relationships between speakers. Because low-context communication concerns more direct messages, the meaning of these messages is more dependent on the words being spoken rather than on the interpretation of more subtle or unspoken cues.

7. *Values in High-Context Culture and Low-Context Culture*

There are several studies that focus on the link between cultural differences and differences in values. A cross-cultural study on values in four different nations by Milton Reach (1973) shows that the value systems of culture differ. In this research cross-cultural comparisons are presented for American, Canadian, Australian and Israeli college men. The findings show that values differentiate significantly among cultural variables. According to J. Ruesch (1951), the experience of contact with different cultures makes one aware of the fact that valuesdiffer from group to group. Eckhart and White (1967) formulated a "mirror-image" hypothesis which states that opposing nations will see themselves and their opponents as representing exactly the opposite values.

Triandis (1972, p.188) compares value systems in the United States and Japan in this way:

- American: Individual progress, self-confidence, status, good adjustment, satisfaction.
- Japanese: Aesthetic satisfaction, societal well-being, glory, responsibility, peace, good adjustment.

There are several studies on values in Japanese society (Wilson and Iwawaki, 1980; Varrian, 1966; Reischauer, 1978; and Mitarai, 1981). Reischauer, contrasting Japanese with Americans, wrote: Cooperativeness, reasonableness, and understanding of others are the virtues most admired, not personal drive, forcefullness and individual self-assertion. (p. 135)

The key Japanese value is harmony, which is sought by a subtle process of mutual understanding (Ozaki, 1980). By contrast, Vander Zanden (1956) argues that there are seven principal values operating in the culture of the United States. He lists: materialism, success, work and activity, progress, rationality, democracy and humanitarianism.

Gudykunst and Kim (1984) explain these differences in values by the concept of "relational orientations." There are three potential ways in which humans can define their relationship to other humans: individualism, lineality, and collaterality.

Individualism is the predominant orientation in the United States. In this orientation individual goals and objectives take priority over group goals and objectives. . . Collaterality focuses on the laterally extended group. . . The crucial issue in the lineality orientation is the continuity of their group through time. (p. 45)

In all societies people belong to significant groups, such as the family, the school class and civic or social clubs. These groups give support and security. At the same time, people have a "tendency to behave with established norms and a desire to cooperate to achieve group goals" (Gudykunst and Kim, 1984, p. 125). It has also been observed by Segall (1977, p. 140) that "some degree of tension between the competing values of conformity and autonomy must therefore exist in every society." Okabe explains (1983, pp. 25-26):

The value of independence is predominant in the horizonatal, doing culture of the United States [low-context culture].

The independent "I" and "You" clash in argument and try to persuade each other. . . In contrast, it is the value assumption of interdependence that dominates the stratified, vertical, and being culture of Japan [high-context culture].

Here pronouns such as "I" and "You are truly "relative" in that their correct forms can only be determined in relation of the others in the interaction. What the other thinks and says is of greater importance than what the individual does.

Although most, if not all, individuals belong to groups, the extent to which an individual is dependent on the group, and the balance between dependency and autonomy of individual members, varies considerably across cultures. The culture of the United States is represented by the attitude that the individual is more important than the group, which exemplifies a characteristic of low-context culture.

Hsu (1981) writes that individualism is a master key to the North American character and the rest of the Western world and distinguishes the Western world from the non-Western.

8. *Low-context cultures and High-context cultures in Day-to-Day Practice*

8.1. *Business Agreement*

Low-context cultures and high-context cultures play a key role in cross-cultural business relationships. While written contracts and signed agreements are considered essential in low-context cultures, less legal paperwork is conducted in traditional high-context cultures because people are expected to honor verbal agreements. Requesting a written contract with a signature could even be perceived as a sign of dis-respect in high-context cultures and, therefore, may damage the relationship.

8.2. *Yes and No*

One of the most challenging and confusing experiences for individuals from low-context cultures cultures when working with high-context cultures counterparts is understanding the meaning of yes and the various ways of saying "no" . For example, when a person's Japanese counterpart keeps nodding and saying "Yes" in response to a statement, it may not be a sign of agreement but a sign of acknowledgment. In this context, yes means "Yes, I

am listening," not "Yes, I agree." An even greater challenge is in understanding the subtle ways of saying no . While it is okay to say no in low-context cultures, direct confrontation is avoided in high-context cultures. Loss of face in high-context cultures means disrupting group harmony and bringing shame. It is a serious infraction. Therefore, an indirect refusal is used, such as saying "We will think about it," "It might be a little difficult," or "We will do our best," or simply responding with silence.

8.3. Use of Silence

Whereas silence is an important communication device in many high-context cultures, people from low-context cultures often feel uncomfortable with silence. In high-context cultures, knowing when not to talk in a particular cultural situation can be even more important than knowing when to talk. Silence is sometimes used as a way of indicating no , sometimes as a signal of listening attentively and showing respect, and sometimes as a way of expressing agreement. In a recent joint venture, the United States (U.S). American meeting coordinator was frustrated because he did not hear back from any of his Korean team members confirming their attendance for a conference call. He thought they weren't available to attend and informed his U.S. team that the meeting would be rescheduled. The next day, all the Korean team members attended and were surprised that none of the U.S. team was present. When the U.S. coordinator asked them what had happened, they replied, "We would have responded if we couldn't attend. We didn't say anything because we, of course, were planning to attend the meeting." This kind of email silence often causes misunderstandings between people accustomed to low-context cultures and those used to high-context cultures.

8.4. Writing-Style Differences Between Low-context cultures and High-context cultures

Even written communication can be different between individuals using LCC and those using HCC. When students from high(er)-context cul-tures study abroad in low(er)-context cultures, they are often perplexed by the feedback they receive about their writing. For example, they are often told, "You need to move the last sentence of the paragraph to the beginning." This makes little sense to students from high-context cultures, who think, "How could I

dare to put the topic sentence first and state my point without providing detailed background beforehand?" In high-context cultures, good writing starts with an extensive background on the subject matter, often using storytelling or metaphor. It is the reader's job to connect all the circular and subtle signals from this background to the topic sentence, which often comes at the end of the last paragraph. In low-context cultures, however, the topic sentence generally comes first in the paragraph, followed by supporting arguments in linear order. This logic also applies to the structure of presentations and the way people write e-mail messages. When people rely on their own internalized cul-tural scripts and fail to take contextual differences into account, miscommunication is inevitable. Understanding the differences between low-context cultures and high-context cultures and being able to flexibly shift between them are fundamental building blocks in the development of intercultural competence.

CHAPTER 3: CASE AND ANALYSIS

1.Cross-cultural communication from a low and high culture context

Distinction of characteristics between high-context cultures and low-context cultures is discussed by many authors, including Ting-Toomey (1988), Samovar and Porter (2001), Gibson (2001), Thomson (2003), and Ting-Toomey & Chung (2005). Thomson (2003: 29-30), for example, remarks that in high-context cultures, as often found in the east, contextual factors are relied on to provide meaning to the communication, whereas in the low-context cultures more closely associated with the west, explicit verbal content of the communication is emphasized. Thus, the author mentions the distinction between the east and the west, but it seems to be too general because no typical examples of eastern or western countries are given. Ting-Toomey & Chung (2005) make this distinction more explicit by giving some typical examples of High Context Culture and Low Context Culture in Table 1.
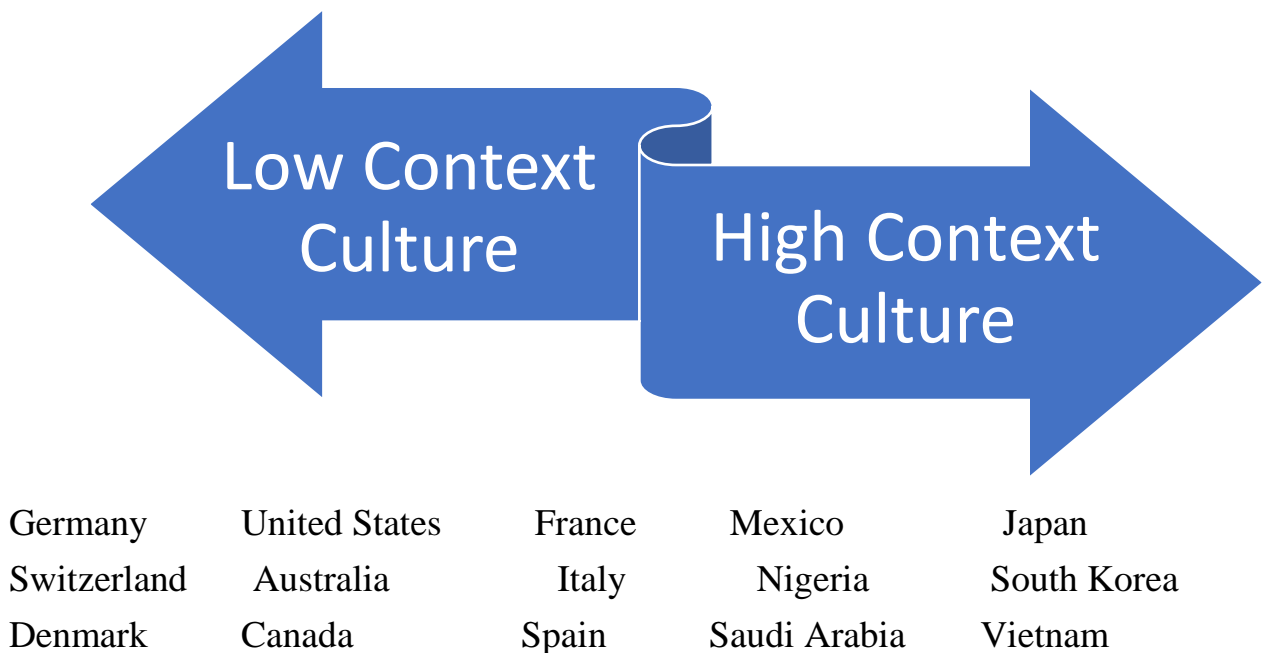
Low Context Culture			High Context Culture	
Germany	United States	France	Mexico	Japan
Switzerland	Australia	Italy	Nigeria	South Korea
Denmark	Canada	Spain	Saudi Arabia	Vietnam

Table 1: Country examples of low-context and high-context communication

Low- Context: Good communication is precis, simple, and clear. Messages is expressed and understood at face value. Repetition is appreciated if it helps clarify the communication.

High- Context: Good communication is sophisticated, nuanced, and layered. Messages are both spoken and read between the lines. Messages are often implied but not plainly expressed.

As can be seen from Table 1, Vietnam and other Asian countries like South Korea and Japan are high-context cultures, while typical English speaking countries like Germany, Australia, and the United States are low-context cultures. Distinguishing the two groups of cultures with each other, from the perspective of communication styles, Ting-Toomey (1988: 225) remarks that the low-context cultures system values individual value orientation, line logic, direct verbal interaction, and individualistic nonverbal style with clearly displayed intentions. In contrast, the high-context cultures system values group value orientation, spiral logic, indirect verbal interaction, and contextual nonverbal style in which intentions and meanings are situated within the larger shared knowledge of the cultural context.

Thus this distinction of culture patterns shows its reliance on peaking contexts. The level of context dependence in understanding the meaning of an utterance in social interactions helps to decide whether a country should be put in the group of high or low- context cultures. Along with this line of argument, but with a focus on further explaining what context refers to, Samorvar and Eporter (2001:81) explain that in high-context cultures, information is provided through gestures, the use of space, and even silence. Communicators in high- context cultures tend to be more aware of their surroundings and their environment and can communicate those feelings without words … Supporting this line of reasoning but from the perspective of business intercultural communication, Gipson (2001) gives some interesting examples to clarify his explanation. According to him, in high-context cultures, meaning does not always have to be put into words. It is non-verbal clues that are important, as in the context in

which the situation takes place. The meaning of words can even depend on the context. For instance, "yes" can mean anything from "I agree", to "I am listening", to "No".

2.Examples of higher-context and lower-context cultures

Cultural contexts are not absolutely "high" or "low". Instead, a comparison between cultures may find communication differences to a greater or lesser degree. Typically a high-context culture will be relational, collectivist, intuitive, and contemplative. They place a high value on interpersonal relationships and group members are a very close-knit community. Typically a low-context culture will be less close-knit, and so individuals communicating will have fewer relational cues when interpreting messages. Therefore, it is necessary for more explicit information to be included in the message so it is not misinterpreted. Not all individuals in a culture can be defined by cultural stereotypes, and there will be variations within a national culture in different settings. For example, Hall describes how Japanese culture has both low- and high-context situations. However, understanding the broad tendencies of predominant cultures can help inform and educate individuals on how to better facilitate communication between individuals of differing cultural backgrounds.

Although the concept of high-context and low-context cultures is usually applied in the field of analyzing national cultures, it can also be used to describe scientific or corporate cultures, or specific settings such as airports or law courts. A simplified example mentioned by Hall is that scientists working in "hard science" fields (like chemistry and physics) tend to have lower-context cultures: because their knowledge and models have fewer variables, they will typically include less context for each event they describe. In contrast, scientists working with living systems need to include more context because there can be significant variables which impact the research outcomes.

Crouchers study examines the assertion that culture influences communication style (high/low-context) preference. Data was gathered in India, Ireland, Thailand, and the United States where the results confirm that "high-context nations (India and Thailand) prefer the avoiding and obliging conflict styles more than low-context nations (Ireland and the United States), whereas low-context nations prefer the uncompromising and dominating communication style more than high-context nations."

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In addition, Hall identified countries such as Japan, Arabic countries and some Latin American Countries to practice high-context culture; "High-context communication carries most of its information within physical acts and features such as avoiding eye contact or even the shrug of a shoulder." On the other hand, he identified countries such as Germany, the United States and Scandinavia as low-context cultures. These countries are quite explicit and elaborate without having prior knowledge to each members history or background.

Cultures and languages are defined as higher or lower context on a spectrum. For example, it could be argued that the Canadian French language is higher context than Canadian English, but lower context than Spanish or French French. An individual from Texas (a higher-context culture) may communicate with a few words or use of a prolonged silence characteristic of Texan English, where a New Yorker would be very explicit (as typical of New York City English), although both speak the same language (American English) and are part of a nation (the United States of America) which is lower-context relative to other nations. Hall notes a similar difference between Navajo-speakers and English-speakers in a United States school.

Hall and Hall proposed a "spectrum" of national cultures from "high-context cultures" to "low-context cultures". This has been expanded to further countries by Sheposh & Shaista.

Some recognized examples include: Higher-context cultures: China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam other Asian countries, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Mauritania, Oman, and Yemen, Africa, India, Latin America, the Pacific islands, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Russia. In the United States, Native Americans and Hawaiian islanders are also considered high-context. Lower-context culture: United States, Germany, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, Finland, Canada and other European nations.

Cultural context can also shift and evolve. For instance, a study has argued that both Japan and Finland (high-context cultures) are becoming lower-context with the increased influence of Western European and United States culture.

3. Cases analysis based on Halls views

A. Directness vs. Indirectness

Hall adds that those who use low-context communication style are "expected to communicate in ways that are consistent with their feelings," whereas a person from a High context culture will set the context and the setting and let the message evolve without referring to the problem directly. In the event of a conflict arising, High context cultures tend to use indirect, non-confrontational, and vague language, relying on the listeners or readers ability to grasp the meaning from the context. Low-context cultures tend to use a more direct, confrontational, and explicit approach to ensure that the listener receives the message exactly as it was sent. The following dialog is a typical communicating failure happing between people from the two contexts.

Case 1

Mr. Jones: It looks like were going to have to keep the production line running on Saturday.

Mr. Lam: I see.

Mr. Jones: Can you come in on Saturday?

Mr. Lam: Yes. I think so. (with a hesitative tone)

Mr. Jones: Thatll be a great help.

Mr. Lam: Yes. Saturdays a special day, did you know?

Mr. Jones: How do you mean?

Mr. Lam: Its my sons birthday.

Mr. Jones: How nice! I hope you all enjoy it very much.

Mr. Lam: Thank you. I appreciate your understanding.

Analysis and Discussion:

One of the problems in this case study is that Mr. Jones is being direct in his question while Mr. Lam is being indirect in his refusal. Firstly, a Vietnam people will choose to ask indirectly as a kind of suppose: "you dont have any arrangement in Saturday?" instead of asking: "Can you come in on Saturday?" since Saturday is not a work day and ask someone directly makes it as a kind of force. Mr. Lam on the other hand wants to refuse the requirement at the very beginning, and supposes his boss just offers a kind of euphemistic requirement. And to a Vietnam, he will never refuse a bosss requirement directly. So when the boss asks whether he can come on Saturday, Mr. Lam havent answered no

directly. Considering the "face" of the boss, Mr. Lam tells him Saturday is the birthday of his son as a hint of refusing.

However, as one comes from a low-context culture who expresses meaning in a direct way doesnt catch Mr. Lams indication. Thats reason why the communication fails eventually.

B. Liner vs. Circular

Thought pattern is another distinctive characteristic within the two contexts. Low-context cultures tend to emphasize logic and rationality, based on the belief that there is always an objective truth that can be reached through linear processes of discovery. High-context cultures, on the other hand, believe that truth will manifest itself through non-linear discovery processes and without having to employ rationality. In conversations, people in low-context cultures will shift from information already stated to information about to be given, while high-context communication will jump back and forth and leave out detail,

assuming this to be implicit between the two interlocutors. Also case analysis will be given in the following part to exemplify the two thought patterns. The following case would be a good example to illustrate how the two contexts distinguish each other on the aspect of thought patterns.

Case 2

George Hall was attending a trade fair and looking for an opportunity to do business in Vietnam. He had been very successful in U.S and prided himself on his ability "to get things moving". Finally he approached Mr. Lams company which he thought would be most responsive to his products. Since he had read that Vietnamese find getting down to business immediately too abrupt and rude, he began a casual conversation, eventually leading up to the topic of his products and suggesting how Mr. Lams company might benefit from using them. George then suggested that he could arrange to get together with Mr. Lam and provide more specifics and documentation on his products.

Mr. Lam responded in fairly good English, "That would be interesting."

Knowing that he had only a few days left in HCM City, George wanted to nail down a time. "When can we meet?"

"Ah. This week is very busy," replied Mr. Lam.

"It sure is," said George, "How about 10 oclock? Meet you here."

"Tomorrow at 10 oclock?" asked Mr. Lam thoughtfully.

"Right," said George, "I'll see you then?"

"Hmm, yes; why dont you come by tomorrow," was the reply.

"OK," responded George, "It was nice meeting you."

The next day at 10 oclock he approached Mr. Lams companys exhibit only to find that Mr. Lam had some important business and was not able to meet with George. He called back later in the day and was told that Mr. Lam was not available.

Analysis and Discussion:

In this case, besides the difference of directness and indirectness, the failure also results from peoples pattern of thought from the two different contexts. George Hall, coming from a culture of low-context has set his purpose at the very beginning of their communication. Thus all the words he used to convey his meaning goes to the object directly, and in his context, the purpose of communication or what the two talking about is involved in the situation that they may have a cooperation in the future. So when hearing: "That would be interesting." "Why dont you come by tomorrow." He takes it as an indication of allowance. However, for Mr. Lam, who comes from a low-context, he didnt take their talking seriously. For him one time communication doesnt mean they will have a future cooperation. And he supposes George will not take his words directly when he uses a indirect refusing way.

C. Verbal vs. Nonverbal

High-context communication was identified by Hall as involving "more of the information in the physical context or internalized in the person" (Hall, 1976, p. 79); greater confidence is placed in the non-verbal aspects of communication than the verbal aspects. Communication in low-context cultures was identified by Hall as "just the opposite [of high-context communication]; i.e. the mass of information is vested in the explicit code" (Hall, 1976, p.79). Face-to-face communication in high-context cultures is thus characterized by an extensive use of non-verbal strategies for conveying meanings. These strategies usually take the shape of behavioral language, such as gestures, body language, silence, proximity and symbolic behavior, while conversation in low-context cultures tends to be less physically animated, with the meaning depending on content and the spoken word.

Case 3

Thao Linh is a Vietnamese student who studies in America. Before she went to America, she had never lived apart with her parents. Although Thao Linh and her mates went well in study and daily life, there is still a thing that made her mates uncomfortable, that is, Thao Linh seldom did cleaning of the room and never made up her own desk. Her roommates gave Thao Linh some lighthearted reminders such as joking about how they hated cleaning, but this didnt produce any positive results. So the American roommates decided to discuss the problem directly.

One evening in the room, one of her roommate asked: "we dont know whether it is the same situation in Vietnam that one needs to take the responsibility of cleaning the room on turn, but in America we do. It is really a problem troubling us, so can we have a talk?"

Thao Linh was silent and stared at the table.

Her roommate tried again: "we hope you would spend time in cleaning the room, if you are business the day and have no time to do it, it will be ok, but just do it when you are not involved in some immediate situation."

Thao Linh didnt say anything. She didnt look at her roommates and just stared at the table, with face turning into pale.

Her roommates tried again. "Were not angry, just confused, tell us what youre thinking. We want to understand your point of view."

More silence.

Finally the roommates couldnt tolerate Thao Linhs silence any longer. They became angry and one of them said: "you know, in this culture its very rude to stay silent when someone is trying very hard to resolve a misunderstanding."

Analysis and Discussion:

In this case, those American roommates finally annoy of Thao Linh's silence, since Americans rely on talk to make an agreement and resolve a conflict, while Vietnamese use indirect and silence to pass their feelings. Actually, Thao Linh is also angry when her mates continuously ask her questions about the same subject which embarrasses her most. But Vietnamese people tend to keep silent, using nonverbal codes to impart their feelings. And American goes the opposite. Forthem meaning is conveyed through language not by guessing from others performance or the circumstance they are in.

4.Low and high context Languages

- In a low-context language, such as English, German, and the Nordic languages, the best way to figure out what someone means is to listen to the words they say. Verbal communication in high-context languages, such as Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Saudi to a lesser extent Italian and Spanish tends to be indirect and ambiguous, and conversations often seem circular. To understand what someone means in a high-context language you have to be much more aware of facial expressions, of who speaks first and who doesnt speak at all, of whats said in public versus whats said in private. Theres more feeling, more nuance, more subtlety.

- In high-context cultures, language may be used to assist and maintain relationship-building and to focus on process. India and Japan are typically high-context, highly collectivistic cultures, where business is done by building relationships and maintaining respectful communication.

6. Tips for communication between high-context and low-context

As cross-cultural communicators, having the awareness of high-context and low context with different cultures especially the differences within the two, can help to lessen and even prevent conflicts, and make the communication smoother and easier.

Generally, low-context communicators interacting with high-context communicators should be mindful that

- Nonverbal messages and gestures may be as important as what is said;
- Status and identity may be communicated nonverbally and require appropriate acknowledgement;
- Face-saving and tact may be important, and need to be balanced with the desire to communicate fully and frankly;
- Building a good relationship can contribute to effectiveness over time; and
- Indirect routes and creative thinking are important alternatives to problem-solving when blocks are encountered.

High-context communicators interacting with low-context communicators should be mindful that

- Things can be taken at face value rather than as representative of layers of meaning;
- Roles and functions may be decoupled from status and identity;
- Efficiency and effectiveness may be served by a sustained focus on tasks;
- Direct questions and observations are not necessarily meant to offend, but to clarify and advance shared goals; and
- Indirect cues may not be enough to get the others attention.

7. *Recommendation*

High-context communicators interacting with Low-context communicators should be mindful that:
- Things can be taken at face value rather than as representative of layer of meanings.
- Roles and functions maybe decoupled from status and identity efficiency and effectiveness may be served by a sustained focus on tasks.
- Direct questions and observations are not necessarily meant to offend, but to clarify and advance shared goals.
- Indirect cues may not be enough to get the others attention.

Low-context communicators interacting with high-context communicators should be mindful that:
- Nonverbal messages and gestures may be as important as what is said.
- Status and identity may be communicated nonverbally and require appropriate acknowledgement.
- Face-saving and tact may be important, and need to be balance with the desire to communicate fully and frankly.
- Building a good relationship can contribute to effectiveness overtime.
- Indirect routes and creative thinking are important alternatives to problem-solving when blocks are encountered.

CHAPTER 4: LOW AND HIGH CONTEXT CULTURE BETWEEN AMERICANS AND VIETNAMESE

I.Vietnamese high-context culture

1. Cultural categories of communication

The famous anthropologist Edward T. Hall has divided intercultural communication into two types: "low context cultures" and "high context cultures" in his book The My Silent Language.

This division helps to explain why Vietnamese people (high culture context) prefer to work face-to-face, rather than through technological means, which are preferred in countries such as the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and Germany (low-context cultures).

Or more simply, Vietnamese people (considered a high-context cultures) when communicating, will begin with a long and detailed introduction, then mention the issue to be conveyed, while Americans will tend to speak directly to the problem and suggest solutions.
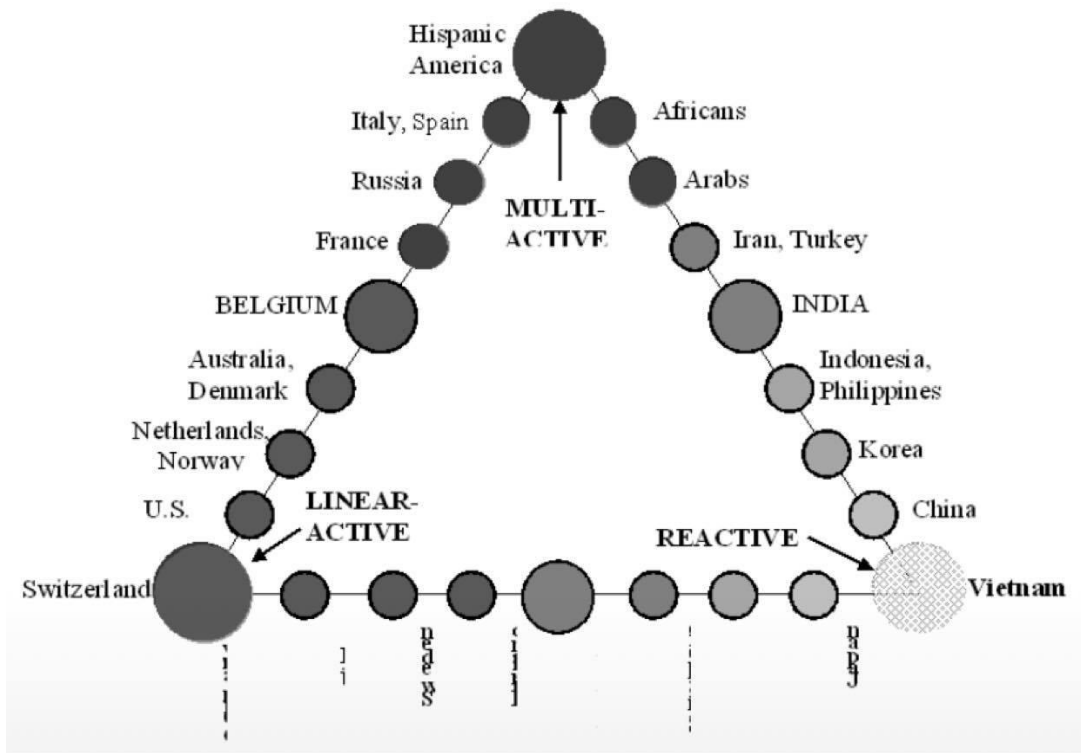

Figure 1: Cultural categories of communication (Lewis, 2005:89)

In 2005, Vietnam is mentioned in Lewis's (2005:89) division of cultural categories of communication as one of the high- context cultures. Lewis divides countries into linear-active, reactive and multi- active cultures.

According to Lewis (2005, p. 70, p. 89), linear-active cultures are calm, factual and decisive planners. They are task-oriented, highly organised and prefer doing one thing at a time. They stick to facts and figures that they have obtained lacis from reliable sources. They prefer straightforward, direct discussion, and they talk and listen in equal proportions.

Reactives are courteous, outwardly amiable, accommodating, compromising, and good listeners. Their cultures are called listening cultures. Reactives prefer to listen first, in order to establish both their own position and the others. They often seem slow to react after a presentation or speech, and when they speak up, it is without clear signs of confrontation. (Lewis, 2005, pp. 70–71.)

 Multi-actives are warm, emotional, loquacious and impulsive. They like to do many things at a time. They often talk in a roundabout, animated way. It is typical of them to speak and listen at the same time, leading to repeated interruptions. They are uncomfortable with silence and seldom experience it between other multi-actives. (Lewis, 2005, p. 70, p. 89.)

2.Communication styles of Vietnam

Vietnamese communication style is deeply rooted in the Vietnamese language. It can be considered as an agglutinating language, one that contains many separable elements particles, auxiliary verbs, and auxiliary adjectives attached to the words. Particles express not merely grammatical relations but also personal feelings. And, of course, the Vietnamese language is known for its system of respectful and humble forms as well as its variety of strategies for marking politeness. Thus, one may argue that Vietnamese-language communication tends to be high-context.

Vietnamese conversation often cannot be understood without knowing the context because of the homonyms. For example, "Con ngựa đá con ngựa đá" means "a horse kicks a stone horse". The first "đá" means "to kick", the second means "stone". The homonyms cannot be distinguished in oral communications without knowing the context.

Indeed, Vietnamese communication style has all the characteristics of high-context cultures, such as indirect and digressive communication, use of few

words, reliance on contextual cues, avoidance of the use of personal names, respect for long silences, and waiting politely until the other person has stopped speaking before taking turns. Often, they are unable to speak frankly about some matter due to the desire to save face.

When conversing in Vietnamese, people have to listen carefully to their interlocutors to find the context and elicit the meaning beyond the words. Even the use of personal names only when they cannot be avoided has roots in this feature of the Vietnamese language. Vietnamese has a lot of second person singular pronouns, such as "cô", "dì", "chú", "bác", "ông", "anh"... These pronouns are used according to the situational requirements. For example, "cô" is used when the listener is a woman, and she is younger than the speakers parents. Moreover, Vietnamese people are typically polite and even submissive in social encounters, but when a dispute persists, they may suddenly become very hostile without providing warning signals. This happens because of the unconscious cultural conflict between low- context and high- context cultures. They used to their high-context communication and, thus, constantly "tuned" to the moods of the other conversants during interaction; expect the others to be similarly sensitive. In conversations, Vietnamese unconsciously favor verbal hesitancy and ambiguity to avoid giving offense, and they refrain from making spontaneous or critical remarks. Their body language is characterized by repeated head- nodding and lack of eye contact. They are notoriously unwilling to use the word "no" even when they actually disagree with others. When they try to translate their norm of sending indirect messages during a discussion into English, a language they have difficulty mastering, their efforts are often misunderstood or ignored.

 3. Cultural features of Vietnam

As it can be seen from Lewis's (2005, p. 89) linear active reactive scale, Vietnamese culture is closest to the reactive end of the scale, together with China, Korea and Japan. Vietnam has developed as very unique culture when compared to other countries. There are three principal factors influencing its uniqueness: its long history of isolationism, its geography, and the Vietnamese language itself.

Vietnams culture can be described with many distinct pursuits, vastly disparate convictions, widely divergent customs, and a veritable feast of viewpoints. It's

society and culture are ambiguous in many senses. Vietnamese people pursue material well-being, appreciate success in business, and admire creativity, especially in technology. They are introvert, dislike big talkers, emotional, and unpunctual, and they mix professional and family affairs.

Vietnamese people are very family- oriented and loyal to their group and to their employer. Vietnamese society is a hierarchical system in which all obligations and duties arise from being a member of the family, a member of a work group, an employee, or an employer. They are highly individualistic in their local group, but collectivist when dealing with outsiders.

The people of Vietnam think human nature can only be revealed in communication. First of all, looking at the communication attitude of the Vietnamese people, it can be seen that Vietnamese love communicating but are very shy at the same time. In Vietnam, communicative competence is considered to be the standard for evaluating people. For foreigners living in Vietnam it is, to some extent, necessary to be aware of some basic protocols in Vietnamese communication culture, and a number of basic communication situations. Because they pay great importance to communication, Vietnamese love communicating. This is expressed mainly in two perspectives: From the perspective of the communication subject, Vietnamese Vietnam a love visiting each other. In Vietnam, even when people are very close to each other and meet each other on a daily basis, they still visit each other whenever they can. Here, visiting is not associated with work (like in the west), but rather is an expression of love, gratitude, and a glue to strengthen relationships. Therefore, for foreigners living in Vietnam, in order to create intimacy with their Vietnamese partners (colleagues, friends, etc), it is advisable to pay occasional visits or eat out together. Regarding the communication object, Vietnamese people show great hospitality. Whenever a guest, either close or not so close, comes to a Vietnamese home, the host will try his best to welcome and treat the guest with the best facilities and food. An old saying goes "Treat guests with either chicken or salad, because no one is supposed to be hungry in one meal", The level of hospitality increases especially in the remote countryside or mountainous moumam areas. Here, it should be noted that in Vietnamese culture, communication is closely attached to eating. Vietnamese people often great each other with a question such as "Uncle, have you had your meal?". Eating is so

important that even the Almighty has to hesitate to intervene, like the saying "Even God avoids striking at meal times". Eating is highly valued and has become permanent in the mind of Vietnamese people. statistics from Dictionary of Vietnamese show that there are up to 551 entries related to the word "eat". Western philosophy views eating as a means of survival. As their saying zoes, "People eat to live, not live to eat". Unlike this western view, the Vietnamese view eating as a culture. Thus, foreigners in Vietnam should learn about this culture in order to avoid misunderstandings, and to behave appropriately. Alongside their love for communication, Vietnamese people also have a characteristic which is almost the opposite being very timid. This has been observed and mentioned by many foreigners. The simultaneous existence of the two conflicting personalities is derived from the two basic characteristics of the Vietnamese village, which are community and autonomy. Vietnamese love to communicate, but only when they find themselves in a familiar range of community. On the other hand, when a Vietnamese person is outside his community and in front of strangers, he appears to be very timid. The two seemingly contradictory characteristics are, in fact, not in conflict with each other a all because they are expressed in different environments, reflecting two sides hich the same nature, which is flexibility in Vietnamese communication. Talking about relationships in communication, their agricultural background culture has led the Vietnamese people to take emotion, i love and/or haterd, as a rule of conduct. There are many sayings about emotion used as rules of conduct. In everyday life, Vietnamese rely mostly on their emotions consider between rationality and emotion, emotion often triumphs.

In their communication, Vietnamese people have a habit of learning, observing and evaluating their communication objects.learning. Issues such as age, hometown, education, social status and family status (parents, spouse, and children) are the most common topics in Vietnamese communication. This habit is greatly contradictory to which makes foreigners comment that western beliefs, Vietnamese people are curious. Actually, thats only how a Vietnamese person expresses his/her concern for others. This is one of the cultural aspects which strongly reflect the Vietnamese national identity. Foreigners often misunderstand and criticise this aspect unless a proper explanation of the meaning is provided. They would find it more acceptable once they have

understood the cause and cultural meaning of this aspect. If they are not talking about age, which is a common question for a conversation starter in Vietnam, many Vietnamese often annoy foreigners with personal questions. For example, a taxi driver may ask a foreigner sitting in the car: "How long have you been in Vietnam? When are you planning to home?". What is the purpose of such a question? Foreigners are usually surprised by these questions and they may wonder "Why do I have to report on my travel plans or discuss my travel itinerary with someone I have just met for the first time, and most likely the only time?". When being asked by friends and colleagues, foreigners may find it normal, However. when being asked by a taxi driver or a shop assistant, they find it very strange, especially when being "attacked" with the same question 6 or 7 times per day. Due to the communal characteristics of Vietnamese people, they find themselves responsible for paying attention to others, and learning about others interests and circumstances. On the other hand, because of the strong differentiation in social status, there are many ways to address each other in a conversation. Therefore, its necessary to first identify the appropriate way to the opening element betel, has been address each other in a conversation.

Regarding communication style, Vietnamese people prefer delicacy, consideration and harmony. The delicate way of communicating shapes the Vietnamese habit of beating about the bush, never talking directly or speaking their mind. According to Vietnamese tradition, a communication should be started with a question asking about the home, work, and so on. It is also necessary to create an atmosphere that a former Vietnamese tradition states "betel is the beginning of a conversation". Nowadays, the has been replaced by a cup of tea, a cigarette, or a glass of beer. In order to know about the parents of the communication objects, Vietnamese people often ask "How are the elderly?". In order to know whether home this late?".

II.Americans low-context culture

In 1976, Edward T. Hall, an American anthropologist and cross-cultural researcher published Beyond Culture, introducing the idea of high versus low context cultures and how their corresponding characteristics affect the way a

group communicates. There are countless cultures present in America, however, the standard view is that Americas culture is low context. As Americans are task-centred, the primary purpose of communication is to exchange information, facts and opinions. In the United States, conflict is dealt with directly and openly and for this reason, Americans will not hesitate to say 'no' or criticise others in public. This direct style of speech is often interpreted as rude by foreign visitors and may cause embarrassment to business people who are unaccustomed to such explicit communication. However, it is important to remember that in a business context it bears no relation to personal feelings and should not be taken as such.

This doesnt mean that relationships arent important, even in business anyone doing business understands the value of networking but Americans tend to believe that an established relationship is not necessary for communicating and doing business together. We believe that there is no problem getting across the necessary knowledge and that our interaction can just center around those activities that we are undertaking together.

One of the characteristics of American business speaking style is directness. You have to get to the point quickly you dont need a big wind-up. You do need to provide facts, research, and background information, but its important to wait to do this until after youve stated your conclusions, not before.

The relative directness of American speech is connected to anthropologist Edward Halls idea of "high-context" and "low-context" cultures. Low-context cultures, among other characteristics, tend to be more straightforward and direct with their communication. High-context cultures, on the other hand, tend to value more circularity and have much greater patience for details and background.

The United States (U.S) is generally a low-context cultures, while countries like Vietnam and Japan have high-context cultures. In American business speaking, a good rule of thumb is to get straight to the facts.

1. Visual language

You may think that that directness leaves little room for visual flourishes, but youd be wrong. The American style of speech is often quite vivid. American political speeches, especially, tend to be filled with visual imagery and colorful language. Other cultures tend to be more straightforward and cerebral.

When U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke in front of the U.N. General Assembly last year, I analyzed their delivery styles. They both began their speeches with similar content, but they were vastly different in approach.

Putin said, "In 1945, the countries that defeated Nazism joined their efforts to lay solid foundations for the postwar world order." Obama, on the other hand, put it this way: "Out of the ashes of the Second World War, having witnessed the unthinkable power of the atomic age, the United States has worked with many nations in this Assembly to prevent a third world war."

Obamas use of dramatic visual language is one of the hallmarks of American political speech. But that approach is permeating the business world, too. As video conferencing, social media, and remote teams become more prevalent, visual language has become necessary to keep people engaged and inspired.

2.Simple vocabulary

Another one of the characteristics of American business speaking style is the use of simple vocabulary. This aversion to overly formal language originally stemmed from colonists desire to separate themselves from the aristocracy. In his book Democratic Eloquence, historian Kenneth Cmiel traces the history of American speaking style from 1775 to 1900. He explains how Abraham Lincoln continued the pre-Revolutionary tradition of using simple language to communicate in the civic sphere.

The American speaking style stretches out vowels horizontally.

In fact, the first draft of Lincolns first inaugural address included this line: "We are not, we must not be, aliens or enemies, but fellow countrymen and brethren." But he ended up revising it this way: "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies."

Simple diction and syntax was, and still is, seen by many Americans as more democratic. And in todays business world, where inclusivity is becoming more widely valued, simple language is a requirement, not a choice.

3.A flat pitch

Finally, the American style tends to have a flat sound pattern. While countries like the U.K., India, and China frequently change pitch vertically (from low to high or high to low), the American speaking style stretches out vowels

horizontally. In American business speaking, changing pitch vertically is perceived as "sing-song"–distracting, artificial, and not projecting confidence.

While the U.S. is certainly a diverse country, these business speaking conventions have remained surprisingly constant over time. And as the world grows more interconnected, theyre becoming the prevailing global style, not just American.

Whats more, simply by getting more attuned to this type of speaking, youll become more sensitive to the complexities of how people in other cultures communicate. Its not just about speaking the language; its much more about becoming sensitive to cultural style differences in verbal communication.

III.   Core Elements

How would an individual approach a friend to get the friend's help in moving house? The two conversations below demonstrate how people from low-context and high-context cultures communicate differently.

Low-Context Example:

Klaus: Hey, I'm finally moving to my new apartment. I need to start packing.

Bob: Wonderful! When are you moving?

Klaus: This Sunday. I have so many things to move. Could you come and help?

Bob: Sure! My church service ends around noon, so I would be happy to help afterward.

Klaus: Thanks!

High-Context Example:

Linh: Well, I am finally moving to my new apartment. You will be invited to the housewarming party!

Minh: How wonderful! When are you moving?

Linh: This Sunday. I need to start packing. [I hope Minh can help me.]

Minh: Do you need help? I would be happy to help! [I know Linh needs help , but she will not ask me unless I offer.

Linh: Really? I hate to trouble you. . . . You have church on Sunday. . . . [I am so glad Minh is offering to help.]

Minh: No worries. It ends at noon, so I can come afterward.

Linh: Oh . . . are you sure? If you insist. . . . Thanks so much!

Minh: My pleasure!

If Klaus and Bob's direct and get-to-the point communication style is preferred, one would most likely feel more comfortable with low-context cultures. In contrast, people who normally practice high-context cultures feel more comfortable with Linh and Minh's indirect communication style. In high-context cultures, people communicate meaning in a more circular manner so as not to sound overly demanding and expect the listener to understand the message that is being communicated so they don't have to be specific. If Linh (from the second example above) were communicating with Bob (from the first example), Bob might not necessarily catch the hidden request from Linh. Instead, Bob would expect a straightforward request from her if she needed help. In high-context cultures, Linh's preferred communication style, the request or refusal is implied through context. If Bob did not recognize Linh's intention and therefore did not offer help, Linh would likely ask someone else rather than overtly state her request. Her intention would be to preserve a harmonious interaction and to save Bob's face in case he is not available to help. Patterns of direct verbal assertiveness, linear logic, straightforwardness, and transparent mes-sages are characteristic of low-context cultures. Often generated from individualistic cultures, in which shared assumptions are not taken for granted, low-context cultures values saying what you mean and meaning what you say. High-context cultures, more common in collectivistic cultures, relies on communication patterns of indirect non-verbal cues, spiral logic, a self-humbling tone, and silence. High-context cultures emphasizes the cultural norm "Don't say anything that may result in losing face or hurting the other's feelings." The speaker's intentions, wants, and needs are expressed in a diplomatic and softer tone to maintain harmony in the relationship. Very little is explicit in the transmitted part of the message; instead, the receiver is expected to read between the lines and infer meaning from the nonverbal subtleties accompanying the verbal message.

IV.   Key Characteristics

Table 2 illustrates the key characteristics of low-context culturres and high-context cultures.

When discussing high-context and low-context cultures, it is important not to oversimplify and to keep the relative nature of cultural context in mind. There are considerable variations within lowercontext and higher- context cultures.

One could use a direct, low-context cultures style when discussing one matter (e.g., business) but prefer an indirect, high-context cultures style when discussing other matters (e.g., social relationships). Furthermore, individual differences and contextual situations should be considered. For example, while Northern European cultures are usually considered lower context than Arab or Latin American cultures, it does not mean that every person in that culture adheres to that norm. For instance, one cannot assume that a Swedish person will necessarily use a lower context communication style than a Mexican person.

Low-Context Communication	High-Context Communication
Most of the information is in the verbal message (spoken words, written notes, memos, legal documents, etc.) and less in the context.	Less information is in the verbal message and more in the context; nonverbal communication (eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, color of the envelope, etc.) matters more

Direct message:
  "Get to the point"
  "I mean what I say, and I say what I mean"
  "Don't beat around the bush"
  "Cut to the chase"
  "Give me the bottom line"
	Important to read between the lines and consider the rank, age, gender, and class of the communicator
	"Hear one and understand ten"
	"Silence is golden"

What (content) is said is more important; *how* is secondary.	*How* the message is delivered is more important; *what* (content) is secondary.
"Yes" means "*yes*; "no" means "*no*".	"Yes" could mean "*yes*", maybe, or "*no*"; words can mean different things depending on the context.

It is okay to say "No".	Saying "No" is often avoided to preserve harmony and save face; instead, apologetic expressions or an indirect signal are given: "It will be difficult" (meaning "no") "We will get back to you" "Let me think about it" Silence.
Linear writing style; topic sentence and key message often come at the beginning of the paragraph.	Circular writing style; topic sentence and key message often come at the end of the paragraph.
Task oriented.	Building relationships is primary.
Conflicts can be resolved relatively quickly.	Conflict avoidance; frequent use of third parties to resolve problems; therefore, conflict resolution takes more time.

Table 2: Low-Context/High-Context Communication

PART III : CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this seminar paper was to show how a person's cultural background affects communication. What was found was that the process of communication involves the perception, interpretation and evaluation of a person's behavior. All three are dependent on a person's cultural background, which determines the meanings attached to a specific behavoir. In addition, the seminar paper intended to investigate the differences in perception of information across cultures. Firstly, the differences of how people across cultures perceive information were described. In low-context cultures people tend to rely heavily on the spoken word whereas in high-context cultures people focus strongly on context. America and Vietnam were mentioned as model example for low-context and high-context cultures. With regard to what people perceive, it was shown that perceptual patterns are selective, learned, consistent, inaccurate and, most importantly, culturally determined. The information on communication styles across cultures lead to the conclusion that two people from different cultures will not only communicate in different ways but also experience a situation differently. When low-context cultures interact with high-context cultures, there could be a number of problems in many aspects including language, attitudes toward time and personal space, and interpersonal relationships. These problems may not only cause misunderstanding and disappointment of both sides, but also may lead to failure of business, so effective solutions are necessarily needed. The essential way is to understand and respect different cultures. Language use needs to be paid much attention. Despite the cultural differences, people should follow local cultures or make a compromise if they cannot accept another culture. Multinational education cannot be neglected for its major role in companies and organizations. Since the globalization has been an inevitable trend in many fields today, intercultural communications will be increasingly frequent and common. It would be of great importance for people to master skills of intercultural communication. Many people have realized this importance, but they have not found effective ways to overcome the difficulties in communications. Therefore, for creating good cross-cultural communications, there is still a long way to go.

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APPENDIX

I. Read the description and then decide if its an example of low- or high-context.

4. "Claudia will always let you know exactly what she means, regardless of where she is or who she is speaking to."

a. Low-context

b. High-context

5. "Amit speaks very casually with his friends, but when around his superiors, he tends to change his tone and seems to speak more seriously."

a. Low-context

b. High-context

6. "Jim seems to have trouble directly saying no. He seems to talk around the subject when asked to do something he cant with a desire to keep people happy."

a. Low-context

b. High-context

7. "Bahati needs to be more respectful of her superiors. Shes pretty casual with not just her friends, but with everyone."

a. Low-context

b. High-context

II. Now that youve seen low- and high-context communication in action and have some practice identifying the differences between those styles, lets take it a step further.

Here are some scenarios where youll have to think about how you would respond. Keep in mind there are no right answers, but some responses might go better than others.

5. You are riding downtown on a bus from your neighborhood to meet some friends. You are talking with a friend on your phone. As you are talking, someone on the bus notices you are speaking English and begins to pay attention

to your conversation. When you hang up the phone, he states that he is learning English and is eager to practice. At this point he engages you in conversation and asks about your countrys election. During this encounter, he is standing very close to you and holding your arm, making you feel uncomfortable.

How do you respond? There are pros and cons to each option.

A. You patiently hold your ground and pleasantly answer his questions.

B. You silently stand up and deliberately move to another area on the bus so he cannot touch you.

C. You say, "Im sorry, Im in a bit of a hurry" and get off the bus at the next stop.

D. You turn to him and say, "Excuse me, that was a private conversation and I am not comfortable discussing politics."

6. As you have recently arrived in a new culture, you are keenly observing how people interact with each other. One of the more puzzling behaviors is how people greet each other. You try to determine what the protocols are for how women greet women, how men greet men, and how women and men greet each other.

Your spouses organization is hosting a gathering for the families, and you watch how people interact. Some only nod their heads in the direction of the other person and some shake right hands. Some shake right hands but then draw close for a hug as well. Some will kiss each other, just touching cheeks and not kissing on the lips, but some touch right cheeks and some touch left cheeks. This is all so confusing! You want to be friendly and appropriate, but you also dont want to offend anyone.

How do you attempt to greet people? There are pros and cons to each option.

A. Just offer your right hand, as this seems the safest for greeting both men and women.

B. Find a "cultural informant," a local person who can explain the local customs to you.

C. Wait and see how people greet you, and then reciprocate in the same way.

D. Use your observations at the party to start a conversation with someone, and ask for their explanation.