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## THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN COMMUNICATION:

### HOW KNOWLEDGE OF DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CULTURES MAY BE THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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#### INTRODUCTION

This paper deals about only one of the many aspects that affect communication: culture. I will try to show that people from different cultures differ considerably in their view of the forms and means of communication that are appropriate in a certain context and situation. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that if people involved in intercultural communication reckon with those differences in communication, their intercultural encounters will be more successful and miscommunication will occur less.

The organization of this paper is as follows. I will first deal with culture (1) and show that culture plays an important part in communication. Subsequently I will demonstrate on the basis of one of the most recent communication models that the differences in communication between cultures concern precisely those aspects for which it is essential that senders and receivers of a message are in agreement in order to communicate successfully (2). In the last part of my paper (3) I will briefly examine a number of theories about how to deal with cultural differences in communication.

#### 1. CULTURE

##### 1.1 What is culture?

In most Western languages the word *culture* is usually used in the sense of "civilization" or "refinement of the mind" and in particular the results of such refinement, like education, art and literature. For example, Breyten Breytenbach represents South African culture, Shakespeare British culture and Voltaire and Sartre French culture. The word *culture*, however, also has a broader meaning. In the anthropological sense of the word it refers to both the activities that are supposed to refine the mind as well as ordinary and menial things in life such as how to greet people, how to show emotions, which physical distance to keep from others, what to eat when with whom. There are more than 300 definitions of the word *culture* in the anthropological sense of the word (Victor 1992:6).

#### The role of culture in communication:

One of the most often used ones is: Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another (Hofstede 1991:5). When we speak about differences in communication between cultures we use the word culture in this sense. With culture we refer to all activities that a group of human beings have in common and that they have learned from previous generations, their parents and grand parents. One believes that culture is taught and not inherited, so nurture and not nature. Nowadays there is much research about which aspects of a human being are nature and which nurture. It is possible that this research will reveal that a part of that what we consider to be nurture, including cultural aspects, will appear to be nature.

Cultural differences manifest themselves in several ways. Hofstede (1991) depicts the different manifestations of culture in the so-called onion diagram (cf. Figure 1).

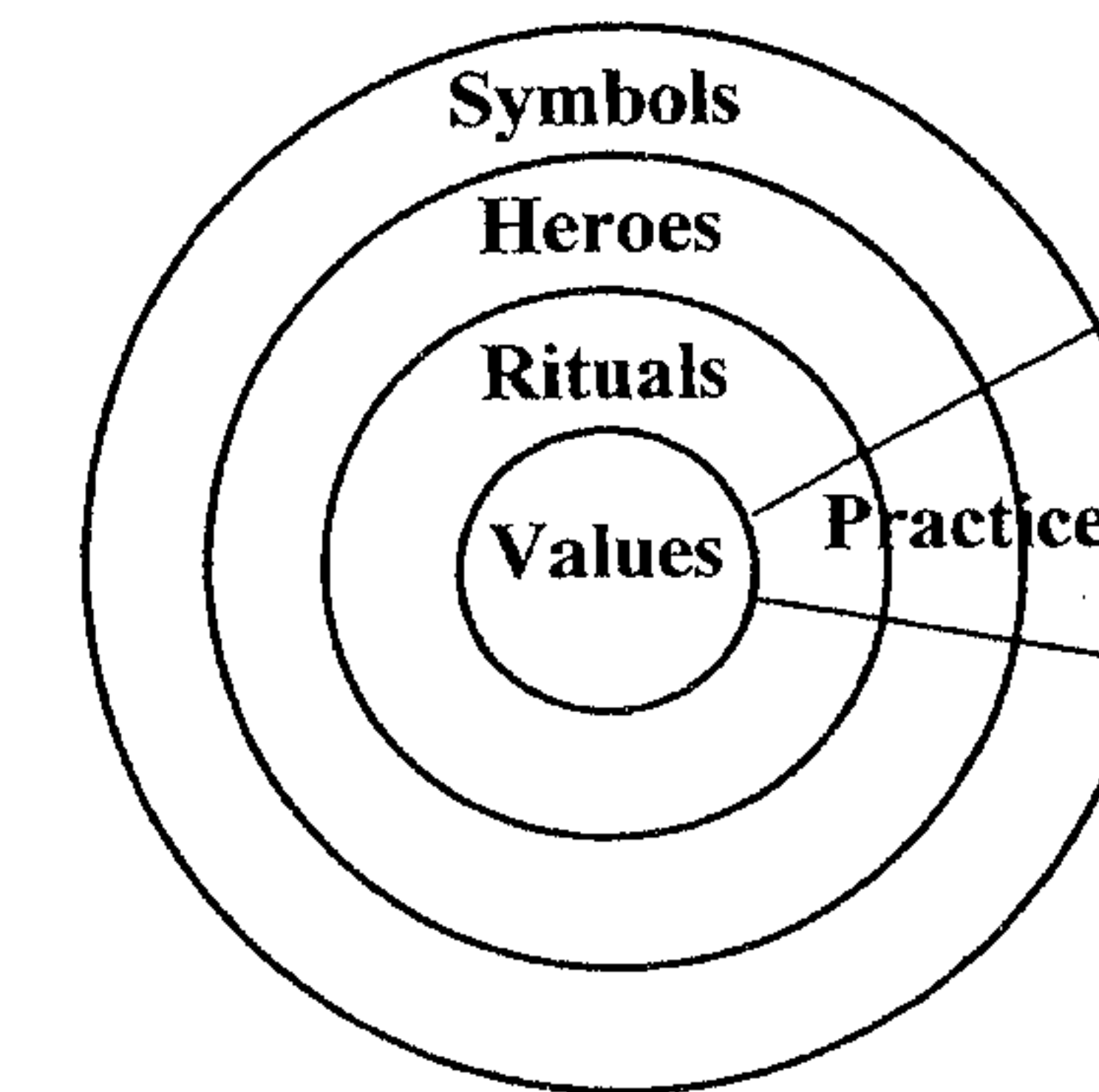


Figure 1: The 'onion diagram': manifestation of culture at different levels of depth (from Hofstede 1991:9)

In this figure manifestations of culture are described by means of four concepts: symbols, heroes, rituals and values. They are represented as the skin of an onion, indicating that symbols represent the most superficial manifestations of culture and values the deepest, with heroes and rituals in between.

The *symbols* of a culture are of course things like a flag, a coat of arms, a logo-type, a slogan, but also clothes, language use (such as which words you use to greet people, which rate and loudness of speaking you consider normal, whether or not you interrupt people) and non-verbal communication (which distance between people you consider normal [proxemics], whether or not you look at people when you speak to them [oculesics], whether or not you like long silences in a conversation).

In the second layer the *heroes* are represented. Hofstede (1991:8) describes them as persons — alive or dead, real or imaginary — who possess charac-

teristics which are highly prized in a culture. Important political persons like Jan van Riebeek, Mandela and Botha, but also strip or literary figures like Mr. Bean.

The *rituals* of a culture are the activities that are, technically speaking, superfluous in reaching desired ends, but which, within a culture, are considered as socially essential: they are therefore carried out for their own sake. Ways of greeting and paying respect to others, social and religious ceremonies (birthdays, Holy Communions). Even business and political meetings organized for seemingly rational reasons often mainly serve ritual purposes (Hofstede 1991: 8).

A good observer can detect the differences in symbols, heroes and rituals between his or her own culture and another culture, because those aspects are reflected in practices (cf. figure 1), the things people do. Miscommunication resulting from such differences between cultures can be avoided rather easily because the differences can be observed. This does, however, not so easily hold for differences in values between cultures. Values are considered to be the core of culture (cf. figure 1). Values are broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others, for example what is good in a culture and what is bad, what is ugly and what is beautiful, what is dirty and what is clean, what is irrational and what is rational. Those values are learned, implicitly. By the age of ten most children have learned the values of their culture. Since values are not always reflected in practices, various paper and pencil questionnaires were developed in order to find them, for example forced choices or Likert scales (5 or 7 point scales).

An example of how research into differences in values is performed is given in (1). This is an example of the more than 25 questions that Fons Trompenaars (1993:17-18) submitted to 15,000 managers from a number of countries. Figure 2 gives the results.

(1)

- A. One way is to see a company as a system designed to perform functions and tasks in an efficient way. People are hired to perform these functions with the help of machines and other equipment. They are paid for the tasks they perform.
- B. A second way is to see a company as a group of people working together. They have social relations with other people and with the organisation. The functioning is dependent on these relations.

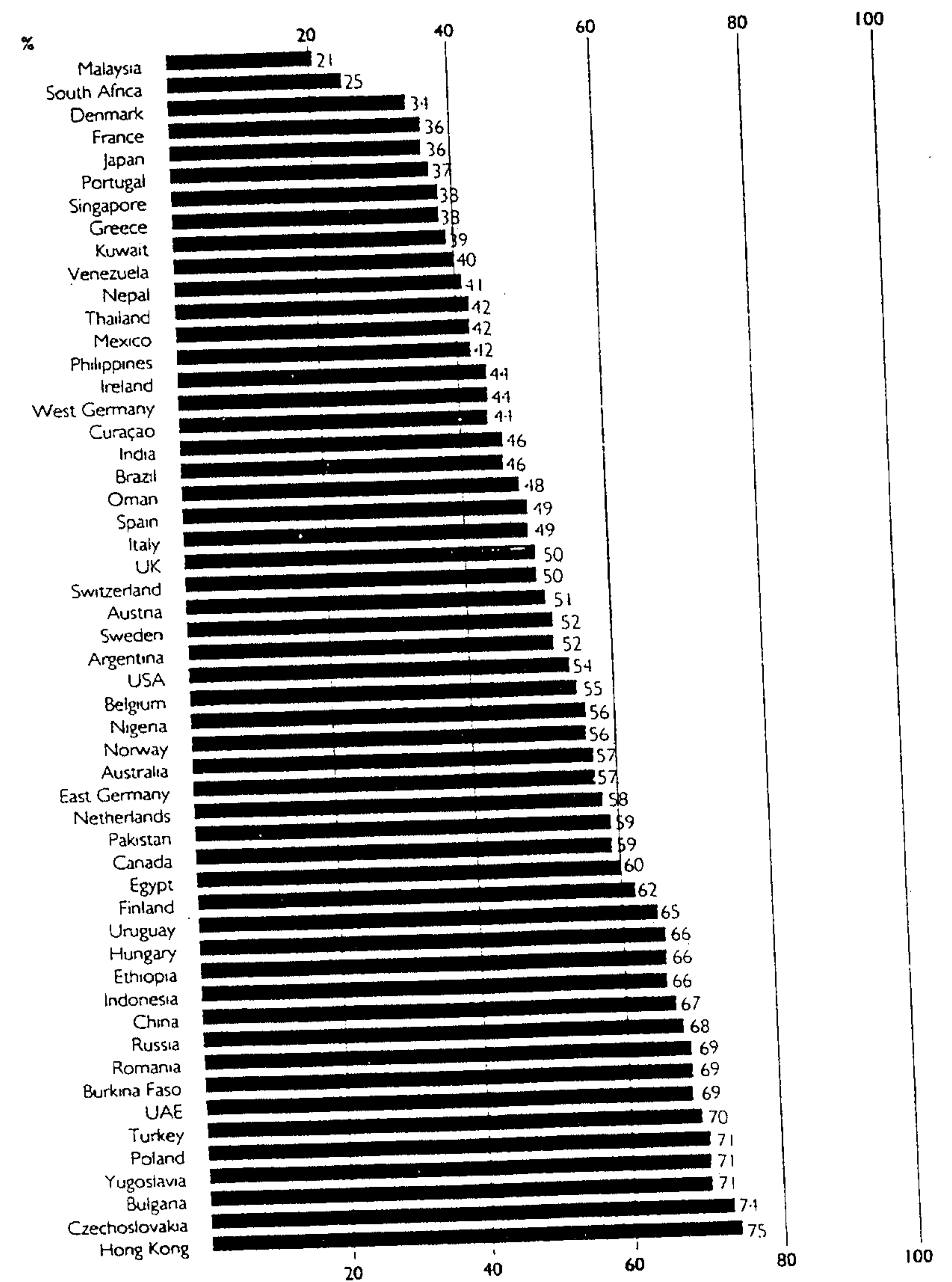


Fig. 2: Which kind of company is normal? Percentage of respondents opting for a system rather than a social group (From Trompenaars 1993:18)

Figure 2 shows that there are considerable differences between countries. We see, for example, that according to his research the majority of the South Africans opt for a group, whereas many other countries opt for a system. We have to realize, though, that it is not clear which groups exactly were interviewed in South Africa. It is very plausible that the results presented in figure 2 do not hold for the whole South African population. It would be interesting to repeat his survey with a number of different cultures in South Africa (also see the other questions in Trompenaars 1993).

I hope that this example gives you an idea about what we mean with values and that differences in values may be reflected in differences in communication. Those who consider a company a system in which people are hired to perform a certain task have quite another way of communicating with colleagues than those who consider a company a group of people that have social relations with each other.

Miscommunication in intercultural communication is often a consequence of differences in values between cultures. Just because values are not reflected in practices (cf. figure 1). This can be illustrated by another way of depicting culture: the floating iceberg.

The iceberg symbolizes culture. A small part of it, in fact only the peak, is above water. This part of culture corresponds with the symbols, heroes and rituals in the onion (cf. figure 1) and it can be easily recognized in intercultural encounters. The major part of the iceberg is under water. It cannot be seen and it corresponds with the values in the onion. Intercultural miscommunication is mostly due to differences between cultures in the part of the iceberg that is under water: in the values. Therefore we will deal in greater detail with differences in values between cultures.

## 1.2 Values: Geert Hofstede and Edward T. Hall

Researchers from different disciplines have investigated differences in values between cultures and they also have tried to reduce all the different values to an as small as possible number of basic values. I will deal here with the results of two of those researchers: Geert Hofstede and Edward T. Hall. I have two reasons two focus on them: they connect differences in values explicitly with differences in communication and they are the most famous specialists on differences in cultures.

### 1.2.1 Geert Hofstede

Geert Hofstede is a Dutch social psychologist who worked as a psychologist for IBM in the sixties. He was given the opportunity to study a large body of survey data on the values of people in over 50 countries. These data were collected by IBM in order to gain a better insight into the values of its personnel all over the world in order to know which working environment would be most productive in which country.

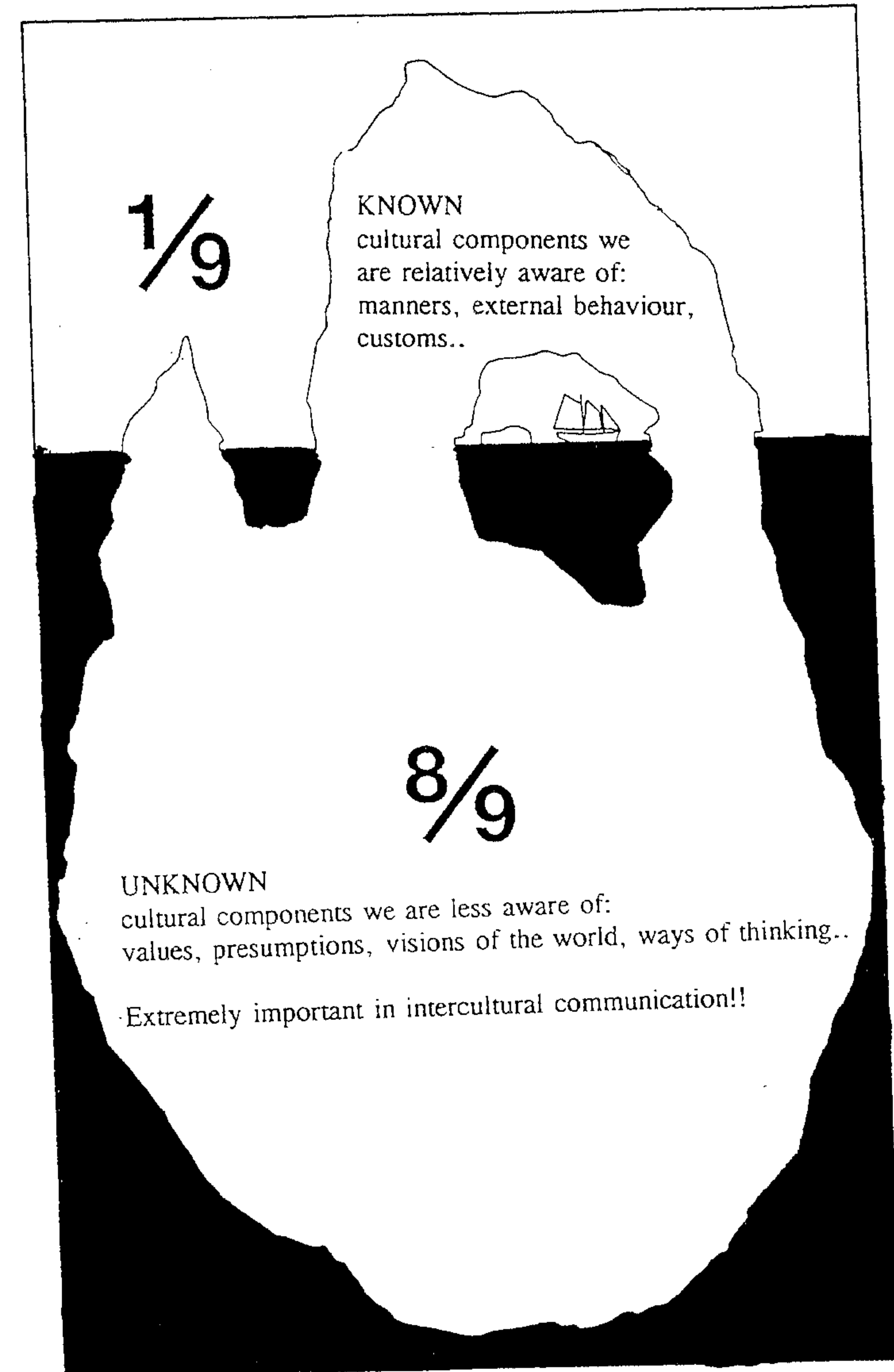


Fig. 3: The floating iceberg

On the basis of statistical analyses on these survey data Hofstede (1980, 1991) found that differences in values between cultures could be reduced to five basic values. He calls them dimensions: *Power Distance* (PDI), *Individualism* (IDV), *Masculinity* (Mas), *Uncertainty Avoidance* (UAI), *Long Term Orientation*, also called *Confucian Dynamism* (CDI). These are in fact common basic problems worldwide. Cultures differ in the way in how they deal with them. Hofstede indicates on a scale from 0 to 100 which position a country has with respect to a certain dimension. The figures are the result of statistical analyses of the questions posed in the IBM-survey. Appendix 1 gives the figures for a number of countries including South Africa. Those mentioned in A are based on research, those mentioned under B are estimates on the basis of correlated phenomena. The figures of the five dimensions for a certain country offer an idea of the meaning people in that country attach to various aspects of life and which become crystallised in the institutions of a society.

We have to give some comments on these figures. In the first place, we should realize that there is an individual variation within a country. Different cultures may be distinguished according to, for example, gender, generation, religion, social class, ethnic group. Nation should therefore not be equated to culture.

Furthermore, we have to keep in mind that Hofstede's figures are based on questions answered by the native employees who worked for IBM. It could be that the figures are somewhat different for other groups. Similar surveys among other populations of a country, however, mostly show indexes similar to the ones mentioned by Hofstede. According to Hofstede (1980:22), cultures are relatively stable and do not change easily. Changes would only come from outside influences such as forces of nature (change of climate, silting-up of harbors) or forces of man (trade, conquest, colonization, liberation, scientific discovery).

In view of the important political changes that have taken place in South Africa after Hofstede's research, his figures for South Africa should not be taken too seriously. This holds the more since he only investigated the white population in South Africa. New research should be carried out in order to obtain an insight into the indexes for the five dimensions for the other cultural groups that are present in South Africa and in order to check whether the indexes for the white population have changed since the seventies. Hofstede 1994 deals with the methodology of such research and includes a questionnaire.

I will now briefly discuss the five dimensions and give some communicative aspects that are related with a high or a low index.

***Power distance. This is the extent to which the less powerful members of society accept that power is distributed unequally***

Members of cultures with a high power index such as Malaysia, Guatemala, Arabic Countries, India, Western Africa show respect for those who have power (for example parents, the boss, teachers) and the elderly. One shows this re-

spect, for example, through the use of honorifics, a refined system of 2nd pronominal pronouns, greetings and non-verbal aspects of greeting. The physical distance between people in face-to-face interaction is relatively large in such cultures. Privileges and status symbols for the powerful are both expected and popular. In cultures with a high power index the less powerful expect the powerful to tell them what to do and the former will hardly argue with the latter. If they do so they will do it in a very indirect way and in a subdued voice. In such a culture a person without power will never say "no, you are not right" to a person with power. The good listener can deduce from other communicative aspects (intonation, non-verbal aspects) that the answer "yes" has to be interpreted as "no". Appendix 1 shows the indexes for power distance under PDI.

***Individualism: People only look after themselves and their immediate family.***

***Collectivism: People belong to in-groups (families, clans or organisations) who look after them in exchange for loyalty***

In cultures with a high collectivism such as Guatemala, Equador, Indonesia, Pakistan and Colombia, the maintenance of harmony in the group is highly important. Family, clan members or school mates are supported emotionally and materially in all situations, even the work situation. In those cultures there are seldom arguments with people from the in-group and it is avoided that a member of the group will lose his or her face. Communication is very implicit and indirect, because all members of the group know each other well and they do not need many words to convey a message (see also 1.2.2). Opinions of a member of the group are highly predetermined by the group and group decisions are considered to be better than individual decisions. Therefore, individuals speak on behalf of the group and not on behalf of themselves. One of the worst things that you can do with a person from a high collectivist culture is to ask him an opinion about something that he did not discuss with the members of his group. One should give him an opportunity to do so. Appendix 1 shows the indexes for a number of countries under IDV.

***Masculinity: The dominant values in society are achievement and success***

***Femininity: The dominant values in society are caring for others and quality of life***

In masculine societies the division of roles between women and men is rather strict, but not in feminine societies. A high degree of working women is, however, not always an indication for a feminine society, because economic factors also play a part. If salaries are relatively low in a country, there is a need for women to work. In masculine societies women will have other professions and functions than men, but in feminine society there will not be a strict division of sex roles. Masculine cultures (for example Japan, Italy, Great-Britain, USA, Greece, South Africa) are assertive, boasting is normal and so is praising persons in public. In those cultures one is proud to be the best manager of the month, the best A-level candidate of the school, but in feminine societies one

tries to be average. In masculine cultures one openly crosses swords in conflicts, meetings are used to show how good you are and the opinion of the best will win, whereas in feminine societies (for example Denmark, the Netherlands) nobody wins, but one tries to find a consensus. A feminine society is a society in which one likes compromises. In masculine societies one has sympathy for the hero and disdain for the unfortunate, but in feminine societies one has sympathy for the poor soul. Feminine societies are more people oriented (one works in order to live!), masculine societies are more money and things oriented (one lives in order to work!). Appendix 1 shows the figures for a number of countries under MAS.

**Uncertainty avoidance. The extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid these situations.**

Cultures with a high uncertainty avoidance index such as Greece, Portugal, Belgium, France, Spain, Argentina, Chile, Yugoslavia, are afraid of people and things that they don't know well (other persons, other groups, innovations). They want to be on the safe side and want to have many laws and rules in order to get a grip on life. For example, those cultures mostly have an elaborated legal system and a religion that offers certainty about aspects we do not have a grip on, like what will happen after death. They have organizational structures that clearly show who is responsible for what, employers receive very precise instructions what and how to act, managers have answer all questions that employers may raise about their work. Contracts are worked out well and nothing is left to chance. Whereas accuracy is a great virtue in cultures with a high uncertainty avoidance, creativity is a great virtue in cultures with a low uncertainty avoidance (for example Denmark, Sweden, Great-Britain). Appendix 1 shows the figures for a number of countries under UAI.

**Long-Term Orientation or Confucian Dynamism:** The extent to which a society exhibits a pragmatic future-oriented perspective rather than a conventional historic or short-term point of view

This dimension has recently been discovered by someone who repeated Hofstede's research: Michael Bond. He found that Hofstede's questionnaire had been drawn up too strictly from a European perspective and that therefore the answers did not offer an insight into an aspect that was important for Asian cultures: Long-Term Orientation versus Short-Term Orientation (Hofstede & Bond 1988). Since the values of the Long-Term Orientation aspect of this dimension seem to be taken straight from the teachings of Confucius, the dimension is also called Confucian Dynamism. In cultures with a high Confucian Dynamism (for example China, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea) people are willing to subordinate themselves for a purpose far in the future, there is a perseverance towards slow results, people show respect for social and status obligations but within limits, and will not keep up when it means overspending. Furthermore, there is an adaptation of traditions to a modern

context. In Japan Shinto-priests, for example, say a prayer to inaugurate a new type of plane. Appendix 1 gives the indexes for some countries. Unfortunately, we do not have the index yet for a great number of countries, including South Africa.

**1.2.2 Edward T. Hall**

The second culture specialist I would like to discuss is the anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1976). Compared to Hofstede his model is very simple. He only has one basic value: *the role of context in interpretation of communication*. He argues that every human being is faced with so many perceptual stimuli — sights, sounds, smells, tastes and bodily sensations — that it is impossible to pay attention to all of them. Cultures differ in the selection of stimuli that they make. According to Hall, cultures differ on a continuum that ranges from a high to a low context. In high-context cultures the meaning of a message is not merely deduced from the words that are uttered but from the context and situation. A person may say that he or she agrees with a statement, however the members of the culture deduce from non-verbal stimuli that the person does not really agree and that "yes" in fact means "no". In high-context cultures the world of the sender and the receiver of a message are so similar that misinterpretations may hardly occur. High-context cultures are also called implicit cultures. They do not have many written rules and laws. There are hardly any contracts. What to do and what not is known by all members of the culture. In low-context cultures the meaning of an utterance is almost only deduced from the words that are uttered. Those cultures are explicit cultures. The sender of a message leaves nothing to chance and explicitly states what he or she means.

Other stimuli than verbal stimuli are hardly used for the interpretation in low-context cultures. An example of a message in a low-context culture is: "I suggest a price of 100 rand per package with 12 cookies, packed in cases of 12 and delivered within 40 working days after having received the order". Low-context cultures have many laws and rules, especially when they have a high uncertainty avoidance, such as the German and the Belgian culture. Table 1 gives a summary of the differences in communication between high and low context cultures.

Table 2 shows the ranking of some cultures on a continuum from high to low context. The diagram is not based on quantitative empirical research such as the majority of Hofstede's figures (see appendix 1), but on the observations of Hall. Unfortunately, South Africa is not reflected in this figure. I suppose that the white population of South Africa will be in the same position as Great-Britain — as was also often the case with Hofstede's values.

**Table 1:** Differences in communication between high- and low-context cultures (after Victor 1992, chapter 5)

	High-context cultures	Low-context cultures
Reliance on words to communicate	Low	High
Reliance on non-verbal communication	High	Low
Emphasis on written word	Low	High
Adherence to law	Flexible	Rigid
Agreements based on written words (contracts)	Not binding	Binding
Agreements based on personal promises	Binding	Not binding
View of silence	Respected communicative	Producing anxiety; non-communicative
Focus on detail	Low	High
Focus on intention	High	Low
Communication style	Indirect	Direct

**Table 2:** The ranking of some cultures on a continuum from high to low context.

High context cultures	Information implicitly conveyed
Japan	
China	
Middle East	
South America	
Italy	
Great Britain	
France	
North America	
Scandinavia	
Germany	
Switzerland	
Low context cultures	Information explicitly conveyed

According to Hall, two values are linked with high- and low-context cultures: collectivism and poly/monochrony. High-context cultures are very collectivistic (cf. 1.2.1). Just because the members of such a culture live in the group and know each other very well they can communicate implicitly. High-context cultures are polychronic. Time is not highly organized in sequences, but it is open. People do several things at the same time and they do not mind being interrupted. Low-context cultures are monochronic. They have a diary which divides time in half hours with space to note down what to do when and they have secretaries who take care that they are not interrupted.

I hope that this summary about theories of differences in culture has offered you some insight about what is going on in this type of research and what the results are. It is of course no more than a very brief summary. Hopefully it has had the function of an appetizer. If you have become interested I highly recommend to read the literature to which I have referred.

## 2. CULTURE IN COMMUNICATION MODELS

In the first part of my paper I have tried to show that there are major differences between cultures in values and that those differences result in differences in communication. In this part I will try to indicate that differences in communication between cultures may lead to miscommunication. I will do this on the basis of the so-called layer-based pragmatic communication model of Targowski and Bowman (1988).

Since the nineteen forties of this century communication specialists have tried to represent in a communication model under which conditions the communication between a sender and a receiver proceeds most successfully. Compared to the first model, that of Shannon and Weaver from 1949, the models have become increasingly complex in the course of time. Model builders realized that many aspects were involved in communication and they tried to take account of those aspects in the models.

One of the most elaborate models is that of Targowski and Bowman (1988). Their model consists of two parts: one part depicts the relationship between sender, receiver and external environment in communication. I will not deal in detail with this part of the model. I will only mention two so-called paths of communication in this model which may lead to miscommunication if the culture of the sender of the message is different from the culture of the receiver.

### 2.1 Non-verbal communication

This holds for both conscious and unconscious nonverbal communication. Conscious non-verbal communication is, for example, how to beckon people. In some parts of the world you do it with the palm of your hand upwards (for example Western and Northern Europe), in others with the palm of the hand downwards (Southern Europe). In some cultures (Ethiopia) you use the first

way of beckoning for animals and the second for human beings. This may lead to a great miscommunication when people with different manners of beckoning communicate with each other. Whereas one person means to beckon a human being, the other believes that he or she is treated as an animal.

There are also many cultural differences in unconscious non-verbal communication. For example, the distance in normal face-to-face communication. In the United States and Europe this is about 60 centimetres, in Asia about one meter and in South America about 45 centimetres. Whether or not you look at a person to whom you speak is also culturally determined. In most Northern European cultures it is very impolite to not look at people. When you do so people believe that you have to conceal something. In China and India on the other hand it is impolite to look at people, because then you do not show respect

### 2.2 The interpretation of the external environment

When cultures largely differ in their basic values, for example the dimensions of Geert Hofstede, they will differ in their interpretation of words. The meaning of the sentence "Go to the boss" is different in a culture with a high index for power distance than in one with a low index. The statement "You are the best at your school" is a real compliment of which one is proud in a masculine, individualistic society, but a shame in a feminine and collectivistic society. The statement: "You look much older than you are" is a compliment in a culture such as China with a high power distance where elderly people automatically have respect, but it is not in cultures with a low power distance.

I will discuss in greater detail the second part of the model of Targowski and Bowman. It indicates that the sender of the message and the receiver have to be in agreement regarding at least ten aspects. In nine of those aspects differences in culture may lead to miscommunication.

#### L1 Physical link

Sender and receiver have to share a physical link in order to communicate: telephone, paper, electronic mail, face to face interaction. The only cultural problem that we may expect with regard to this link is that cultures may differ in the means of communication available to them.

#### L2 Systems link

Cultures may differ from each other in their ideas about whether or not a certain physical link is suitable for conveying a message. Cultures diverge, for example, in how to invite somebody for a party. An important intercultural event in the Netherlands was a fiasco because the organizations representing the different cultures (Surinam, Ghana, the Dutch Antilles, Morocco, Turkey) did not

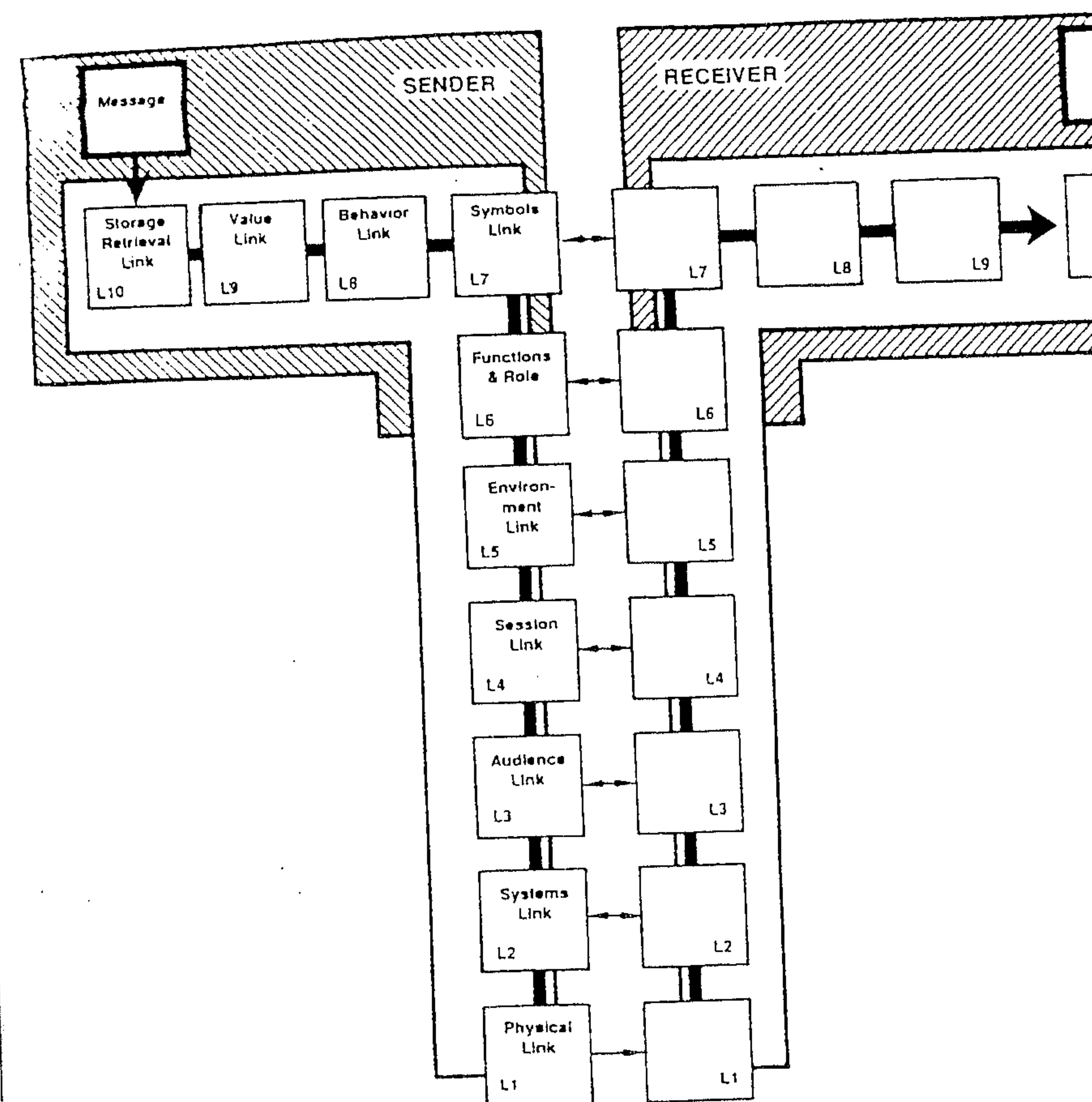


Fig. 4: The second part of the so-called layer-based pragmatic communication model of Targowski and Bowman (1988).



come, although they were officially invited. The official letter, undersigned by the mayor of Amsterdam, was in their view, however, not a real invitation. If you really want that people attend your event, you invite them in another way in these cultures: personally in face-to-face- interaction or by telephone.

Due to the fast developments in means of communication, we may expect that cultures will show a rapid change in their opinions with regard to which means are suitable for certain messages.

### L3 Audience link

In order to communicate successfully the sender and receiver should have the same conceptions of themselves and of each other. Since cultures differ considerably in which qualities they use for assigning the status of a person, partners in intercultural communication do not easily agree about the audience link. In Asian cultures the status of people increases as they grow older. Old people almost automatically receive a lot of respect. In European culture you receive respect for that what you do and not because of your age. This difference according to the basis on which aspects respect is assigned often leads to miscommunication. The capable but young representative of a European company is not taken seriously by Asians. For them the age of the representative is a sign that the European company does not take them seriously. The European in his turn believes that Asians do not take his company seriously, because the negotiations are done by such an old person.

### L4 Session link

For successful communication the time of communication should be convenient for both the sender and the receiver. The fact is that time not the same everywhere on our globe. An e-mail or fax that has been sent from the States around 11.00 o'clock will arrive in South Africa just before closing time and will probably not be answered immediately. That could make the Americans think that the South Africans are not very interested in the content of the fax, the overseas contact or that they are nonchalant. Furthermore, it should be realized that the same time is not the right time for all cultures to convey a message. For example, inviting a Moslem for lunch during Ramadan is not very respectful.

### L5 Environmental Link

Sender and receiver should have the same ideas about the appropriateness of the environment in which a message is conveyed. In this respect cultures may also vary considerably. People are allowed to speak with each other before the service has started in a synagogue, but not in a Christian church. Doing business during a lunch is normal in southern Europe, but less in northern Europe. When the Dutch minister of Foreign Affairs, Hans van Mierlo, was the chairman of the European Union in Brussels he even forbade the members of the Union to take lunch for longer than one hour and to do business during lunch. According to him European politics were too important to be discussed between starter and

coffee. He proposed a quick lunch no longer than one hour in which politics were not discussed. His proposal was criticised vehemently by the members from southern parts of Europe. Immediately after his departure the long business lunch meetings were reintroduced again.

### L6 Function and status

Sender and receiver of the message should have the same ideas about their function and status. When cultures differ in what determines the function and status of a person, miscommunication may arise. A German professor, for example, does not only have the status of professor at the university, but also in other sectors of private and public life. The grocer, the hairdresser and his doctor all call him Herr Professor and even his wife has the epitheton ornans Frau Professor. In the USA this is completely different. A professor is a professor at university, but nowhere else. A German professor in the States will be surprised that people only treat him as a professor at the university. However, an American professor in Germany in his turn will smile when everybody calls him as well as his wife professor.

### L7 Symbols

In order to communicate successfully the sender and receiver should assign the same meaning to the symbols used in communication. From many studies it is well known that cultures differ considerably in this. The meaning assigned to a certain word differs and this leads to miscommunication. In (2) we have summarized the results of an investigation into the meaning that members from four different cultures assign to the word *marriage* in their native language (Claes 1993, and Claes and Gerritsen forthcoming). The meanings are presented in the order of importance.

(2)

USA	equality to be together partner love
Japan	family children obligations end
France	sexuality passion
The Netherlands	fidelity love to be together obligations

It goes without saying that the message that a French sender wants to convey with the phrase "I want to marry you" is somewhat different than the American, Japanese or Dutch receiver decodes.

Claes (1993) investigated whether Dutch and French speaking Belgians attached the same meaning to a number of words. It appeared that there were few overlappings. The similarity is 1 when both groups attach the same meaning to a word, but that was not the case for any of the words investigated. The highest similarity was with the word "transport" (0,45) and the lowest with the words "problem" and "society" (0,19).

Apart from the factor culture, geographical factors also play a part in assigning the meaning of words. Few Europeans realize for example that a room facing south is a relatively cool room in South Africa!

**L8 Behaviour**

In order to communicate successfully the sender and the receiver should evaluate behaviour in the same way. Since there are so many cultural differences in how to behave, this is again a source of miscommunication in intercultural communication. We already discussed the differences in conscious and non-conscious non-verbal communication such as beckoning, bowing, waving, oculesics and proxemics that may lead to miscommunication. There are, however, many other differences in behaviour of cultures that may lead to miscommunication. For example, ways of argumentation. Western culture mostly have an inductive style of argumentation "I do A, because X, Y and Z", whereas Asian cultures have a deductive style of argumentation "Because X, Y and Z we do A". People from western cultures consider the deductive style of argumentation to be long winding, not to the point, whereas the Asians consider the inductive style as imposing (Scollon & Scollon 1995:74). Cultures also differ in their styles of face-to-face interaction (cf. figure 5). Japanese do not speak before the partner has finished and even wait some seconds before starting to speak. In the Anglo-Saxon world overlappings occur, one starts when the partner has not finished yet. In countries with Roman languages it is normal to interrupt the speaker.

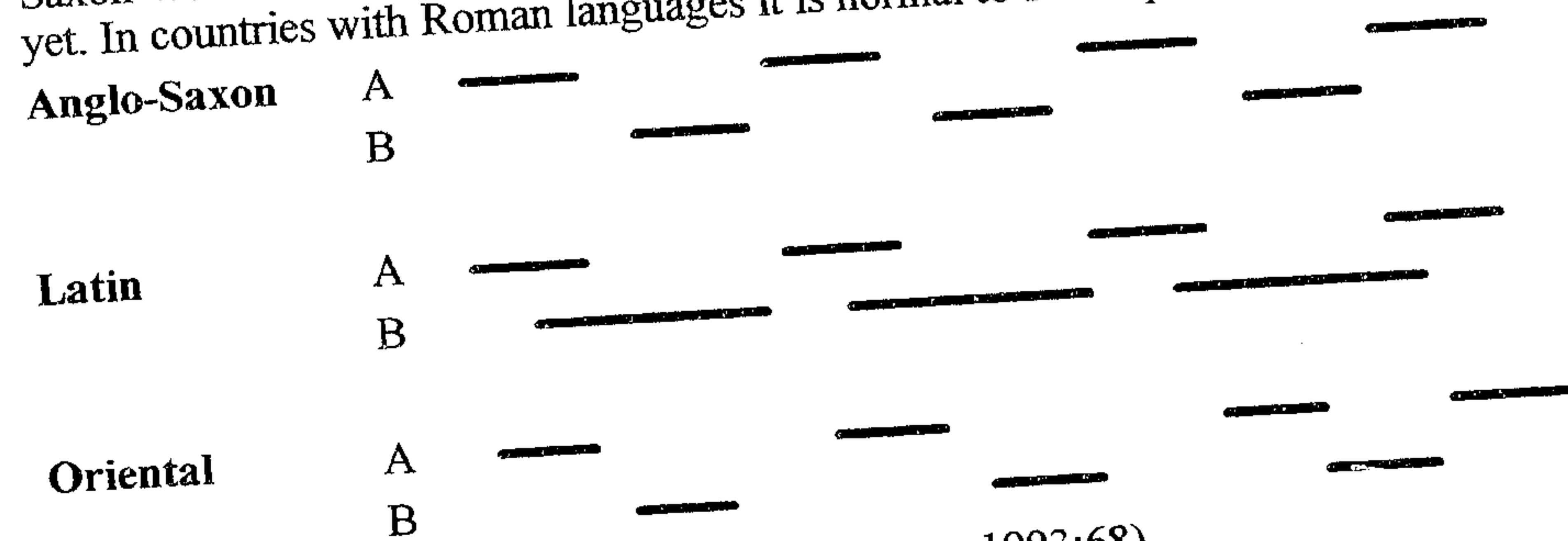


Figure 5: Interaction styles (From Trompenaars, 1993:68)

**L9 Values**

When the sender and receiver have different values the risk of miscommunication is very great. I have shown in 1.2 that cultures differ considerably in their values.

**L10 Storage/retrieval links**

Experiences in the past have an influence on the interpretation of utterances. When the experiences of the sender and receiver differ, the communication will be less successful. It is a matter of fact that many aspects affect experiences in the past, but culture is definitely a very important one. Differences in values between cultures lead to differences in how you experience power, success, the group to which you belong, uncertainty. In short, differences in life. Those differences lead to miscommunication. There is respect for the powerful in cultures with a high index for power distance, but not for cultures with a low index. The need to have a watertight contract is much higher for people from cultures with a high uncertainty avoidance than for people from cultures with a low uncertainty avoidance.

I hope to have shown that many aspects for which it is essential that senders and receivers are in agreement in order to communicate successfully are often not in agreement when senders and receivers are from different cultures. It concerns both differences in values (the layers 3, 6, 9 and 10) and in more superficial manifestations of culture such as symbols, heroes and rituals (cf. figure 1). Miscommunication due to differences in the latter could be more easily avoided than miscommunication due to differences in values, because symbols, heroes and rituals are reflected in practices (cf. section 1). People involved in intercultural encounters should be made aware of the differences in values, symbols, heroes and rituals that may lead to miscommunication. In the last section of this paper I will briefly examine a number of theories about how to deal with differences in communication between cultures.

**3. HOW TO COPE WITH CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

Most of the theories about how to teach people to cope with cultural differences distinguish three stages.

1. **Awareness of cultural diversity.** In order to reach this goal people have to carry out cultural awareness tests and exercises. Furthermore, theories such as those of Hofstede and Hall are taught and discussed.
2. **Knowledge of the own culture.** In the second stage people are faced with the cultural impact of all their comings and doings. This is done again with the help of cultural awareness tests, exercises and descriptions of the own culture in terms of general theories such as the ones described in section 1 of this paper. Apart from this, important historical, political and social aspects of the own culture are viewed in the context of these theories.

3. **Knowledge of the other culture.** The last stage consists of teaching people the symbols, heroes, rituals and values of the other culture and other aspects that are important in order to understand another culture: history, geography, economics, politics, art, literature, language. The idea is that the more knowledge people have about these aspects of another culture, the greater the chance is that the communication with members of that culture will be successful.

According to many theories (for example Hofstede 1997:230-233; Brislin and Yoshida 1994) these three steps provide participants in intercultural communication with enough knowledge to communicate successfully. In some theories, however, a fourth stage is added in which it is discussed to which extent one has to adapt oneself to the other culture (Pinto 1990). Theoretically speaking there are three possibilities:

- a. **No adaptation at all.** In that case one believes that awareness and knowledge of cultural differences is sufficient enough in order to avoid miscommunication.
- b. **Complete adaptation.** We find this, for example, in the guidelines given by Guétin (1989) to French business people in the United States: know the environment, be mobile, be a doer, report, be a pro, seek excellence, do not be modest, be open, be a team-player, be a nice guy.
- c. **Draw the line.** Pinto (1990:184) states that understanding another culture does not imply yet that one has to adapt to that culture. One should draw the line and make this clear to people of the other culture. If you try to adapt completely, you run the risk to get irritated. Such irritations are difficult to conceal and may therefore obstruct successful intercultural communication. It is a matter of fact that it depends on many factors where the line is drawn. Individual factors always play a part. With some people, independent of their culture, you can get along better than with others. It also depends on the issue involved. The fact that a person does not eat pork is probably less irritating than that somebody always arrives two hours later than agreed. The context and situation also play an important part in where you draw the line. If you want to book an order, you are more inclined to adapt to another culture than in other situations.

It is difficult to advise how to deal with cultural diversity in a country like South Africa, where so many cultures have already lived together for so many years. One thing is very clear: an awareness of cultural diversity and knowledge of the other cultures may avoid miscommunication. Whether the members of the different cultures should adapt to each other's cultures, the extent to which this should be done depends on so many factors that no advice can be given.

Maybe I have given the impression that we do already know quite a lot about differences in communication between cultures and how to cope with them. This is true, but compared to the number of cultural differences in communi-

cation that probably exist, it is only a small part. Much research still has to be carried out. South Africa is a gold mine for research on cultural differences in communication and how to deal with them. The laboratory is everywhere around you. I hope that this paper will stimulate people to carry out such research.

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## APPENDIX 1

This appendix is based on the 5-D pocket guide of ITIM International, Celebesstraat 96, 2585 TP The Hague, The Netherlands. phone 31-70-3505054, fax 31-70-3552003. The figures under A are based on Hofstede's research, the figures under B are merely estimates. PDI=Power Distance, IDV = individualism, MAS=Masculinity, UAI=Uncertainty avoidance, CDI = Confucian Dynamism.

## A FIGURES BASED ON RESEARCH

Country	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	CDI
Arab world	80	38	52	68	--
Argentina	49	46	56	86	--
Australia	36	90	61	51	31
Austria	11	55	79	70	--
Belgium	65	75	54	94	--
Brazil	69	38	49	76	65
Canada	39	80	52	48	23
Chile	63	23	28	86	--
Colombia	67	13	64	80	--
Costa Rica	35	15	21	86	--
Denmark	18	74	16	23	--
East Africa	64	27	41	52	25
Ecuador	78	8	63	67	--
El Salvador	66	19	40	9	--
Finland	33	63	26	59	--
France	68	71	43	86	--
Germany	35	67	66	65	31
Great Britain	35	89	66	35	25
Greece	60	35	57	112	--
Guatemala	95	6	37	101	--
Hong Kong	68	25	57	29	96
India	77	48	56	40	61
Indonesia	78	14	46	48	--
Iran	58	41	43	59	--
Ireland	28	70	68	35	--
Israel	13	76	54	47	81
Italy	50	39	70	75	--
Jamaica	45	68	68	13	--

## The role of culture in communication:

Japan	54	46	95	92	80
South Korea	60	18	39	85	75
Malaysia	104	26	50	36	--
Mexico	81	30	69	82	--
Netherlands	38	80	14	53	44
New Zealand	22	79	58	49	30
Norway	31	69	8	50	--
Pakistan	55	14	50	70	0
Panama	95	11	44	86	--
Peru	64	16	42	87	--
Philippines	94	32	64	44	19
Portugal	63	27	31	104	--
Singapore	74	20	48	8	48
South Africa	49	65	63	49	--
Spain	57	51	42	86	--
Sweden	31	71	5	29	33
Switzerland	34	68	70	58	--
Taiwan	58	17	45	69	87
Thailand	64	20	34	64	56
Turkey	66	37	45	85	--
United States	40	91	62	46	29
Uruguay	61	36	36	100	--
Venezuela	81	12	73	76	--
West Africa	77	20	46	54	16

## B ESTIMATES

COUNTRY	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	CDI
Albania	90	20	80	70	--
Baltic Republics	40	60	30	50	--
Bulgaria	70	50	50	80	--
Bhutan	94	52	32	28	20
Burkina Faso	70	15	50	55	--
Caucasus	70	20	50	60	114
China	80	15	55	40	--
Croatia	72	33	40	80	--
Czech Republic	35	60	45	60	--
Dominican Rep.	65	30	65	45	--

Egypt	70	25	45	80	--
Ethiopia	70	20	65	55	--
Fiji	78	14	46	48	--
Ghana	80	15	40	65	--
Hungary	19	55	79	83	--
Iraq	95	30	70	85	30
Jordan	70	30	45	65	35
Kenya	70	25	60	50	--
Lebanon	75	40	65	55	--
Luxemburg	55	70	60	70	--
Malawi	70	30	40	50	--
Namibia	65	30	40	45	35
Nepal	65	30	40	40	--
Nigeria	80	30	60	55	--
Poland	50	60	70	55	--
Romania	90	20	40	95	--
Russia	95	47	40	75	--
Saudi Arabia	95	25	60	80	--
Serbia	86	25	43	92	--
Sierra Leone	70	20	40	50	--
Slovenia	71	27	19	88	--
Sri Lanka	80	35	10	45	45
Surinam	80	48	35	80	--
Syria	80	35	52	60	30
Tanzania	70	25	40	50	--
Zambia	60	35	40	50	--

## 'N BEKENDSTELLING VAN DIE PROJEK:

### TAALGEBONDE VERSKUIWINGS TUSSEN AFRIKAANS EN ENGELS<sup>1</sup>

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"... the activity of comparing languages certainly ought to concern translation."  
De Beaugrande (1991:20)

*This article is meant as an introduction to a project in translation concerning obligatory shifts between Afrikaans and English. When translation takes place between Afrikaans and English the process can occur almost congruently both structurally and functionally. But there are cases where the translator should deviate from the source language in order to have grammatically and idiomatically sound target language structures. The term for this essential deviation is obligatory shift. Obligatory shifts should, however, be distinguished from interference, where the latter indicates the identical transfer of source language structures to the target language, while there should be a deviation (obligatory shift) from the source language to result in idiomatic target structures.*

*The broad field of research will cover both microstructural and macrostructural aspects of the source and target languages. The microstructure covers the linguistic level such as the grammatical and lexical dimensions of the translating process including the transfer of dominant syntactic patterns, morphological and phonological transfer, the choice of lexical items, and the transfer of metaphors and idioms. The macrostructure comprises the pragmatic dimension: texts are discussed more comprehensively. These metalinguistic components cover for instance transfer of texts, type of discourse, culture, context, coherence and cohesion, style, titles, focus of the original author, time and location of activities, characterisation in literary works. Within this project the first investigations will be done microstructurally: in other words a comparative study with the focus mainly on the grammatical and lexical levels respectively.*

*Hierdie artikel is 'n bekendstelling van 'n projek wat handel oor taalgebonde verskuiwings wat plaasvind tussen Afrikaans en Engels tydens vertaling. Wanneer daar tussen Afrikaans en Engels vertaal word, kan die proses tot 'n baie groot mate vormlik sowel as funksioneel naasteby kongruent geskied. Maar daar ontstaan egter ook gevalle waar daar noodwendig van die brontaal afgewyk moet word voordat die doeltaalstrukture grammatikaal en idiomaties aanvaarbaar is. Die term vir hier-*