

HOW TO PERSUADE BELGIAN, FRENCH AND DUTCH AUDIENCES  
TO LISTEN TO YOUR PRESENTATION:  
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE APPRECIATION OF  
INTRODUCTIONS OF PRODUCT PRESENTATIONS.



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INTRODUCTION

The introduction of a presentation is of great importance to get the attention of the audience: the first flow is half the battle. When a speaker loses this, the audience will drop off soon. That is the reason why so much attention is paid to introductions of presentations in communication trainings and communication handbooks. Current advice on how to begin a presentation does not differ much from advice given in classical rhetorical theory. All advice closely resembles the triad developed by the Sophists and adopted by Cicero: *attentum*, *benevolentem* and *docilem facere* (Andeweg, de Jong, Hoeken 1998).

- *Attentum*: gaining the attention and willingness of the audience with regard to the subject
- *Benevolentem*: establishing the speaker's credibility
- *Docilem*: increasing the ability to listen (that is, by giving information and previewing)

All cultures seem to agree that a good introduction has to meet these three criteria of classical rhetorical theory. However, there are indications that an introduction that fulfils these three conditions in one culture does not necessarily fulfil them in another culture. A comparison of recommendations in advice books from different cultures regarding introductions of presentations shows, for example, that Dutch advice books (Van der Spek 1995:33; Smulings et al.:1993:41; Korstwagen 1988:104) recommend to use the Overview, an introduction that summarises the outline of the presentation, whereas French advice books strongly recommend not to use the Overview (Charles & Williams 1988:106; Ferréol & Flageul 1996:10). Furthermore, on the basis of the theories on cultural differences as developed by Geert Hofstede and Edward T. Hall, one may expect that cultures will differ with regard to the introduction they appreciate most (Claes 1998). It is remarkable that handbooks about international business communication and intercultural communication hardly say a word about such cultural differences. Exceptions are Lustig and Koester (1996), who draw them carefully, Ober (1998), who offers some tips for presenting abroad, and Bennett et al. (1998), who devote a whole chapter to presentation skills in an intercultural setting and who, in another chapter, give practical hints on giving presentations in various European business contexts. Those pieces of advice are usually not based on experimental research, but on what one may expect on the basis of theories, observations of presentations presented by people from different cultures, and the reactions to those presentations in an international context. This paper is a first step towards experimental research into cultural differences in appreciation of presentations. Presented here are the results of an investigation into the differences between the Netherlands, Dutch-speaking Belgium, French-speaking Belgium and France in the appreciation of four different introductions: Ethical Appeal (a short description of the qualities of the speaker and his or her company), Overview, Metaphor and Anecdote. The study reported on here is part of a project on cultural differences in the appreciation of presentations. Wannet and Gerritsen (2000) is the first publication within the context of this project. We will first go into the theories on cultural differences (1) that led us to expect that cultures will differ in their appreciation of different introductions (2). Subsequently, we will discuss expectations (3), the design of the study (4), and the results (5). The discussion and conclusion follow in section 6.

THEORIES ON CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND THEIR POSSIBLE RELATION WITH THE APPRECIATION OF PRESENTATIONS

Claes (1998) has shown that, on the basis of theories on cultural differences as proposed by Edward T. Hall and Geert Hofstede, one may expect that cultures differ in what they consider to be a good presentation. She points at three aspects that may result in a presentation being more appreciated in one culture and less in another: complexity of communication, polychrony/monochrony and formality. Differences regarding the first two aspects are related to Edward T. Hall's theory (1976) on high and low context societies (power distance) and the differences regarding formality with one of the five dimensions according to which cultures differ from each other in Hofstede's theory (1991).

Below we will discuss these three aspects and what they mean for the cultural differences in the appreciation of different types of presentations as formulated by Claes. In addition, we will state what they might mean for differences in the appreciation of introductions. It is a fact that it is not always easy to relate theories on cultural differences to differences in the appreciation of presentations and introductions of presentations. That is the reason why we present our ideas as expectations.

**Complexity of communication**

Hall (1976) 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 them all. Culture determines which stimuli a person



does not perceive, which he does perceive and how he interprets these stimuli. According to Hall (1976), the cultures of the world differ in the extent to which they use context and situation for the interpretation of a message. There is a continuum that ranges from high to low context. High context cultures, for example Asian cultures, are cultures in which most of the meaning of a message cannot be deduced from the words which are uttered, but have to be deduced from the context and situation. In low context cultures, for example Germany, most of the meaning of a message can be deduced from the words that are said; here context and situation play only a minor role.

Claes indicates that high and low context cultures differ in what they consider to be a good presentation. In high context cultures, the complexity of the communication is high; the audience is searching for underlying signals. Here eloquence, rhetoric, metaphoric language use and non-verbal signals are highly valued. In low context cultures, the complexity of the communication is low: people expect unambiguous, direct and explicit language use; non-verbal communication is restricted to some conscious and controlled movements.

Regarding the introduction of a presentation we expect that an introduction with a citation, a historical event, an Anecdote or a Metaphor will be highly appreciated in cultures with a high complexity of communication, whereas an explicit formulation of what is going to be said, the Overview, will probably be appreciated most in cultures with a low complexity of communication.

### **Polychrony versus monochony**

According to Hall (1976), high/low context is related to differences in time management. High context cultures are polychronic and low context cultures are monochronic. Time is not very structured in polychronic cultures, people can do different things at the same time and priority is given to individuals rather than to a well-fixed programme. In monochronic cultures, time is ordered in strict units and people prefer to perform only one task per unit.

According to Claes, a monochronic audience expects a presentation to be very well structured and this structure to be followed rigorously. Polychronic audiences, on the contrary, do not like structured presentations, they prefer unexpected turns, metaphors and eloquent digressions.

Regarding the introduction of a presentation we expect that people from monochronic cultures will highly value the Overview whereas people from polychronic cultures will probably value an introduction that may not seem not to the point: an Anecdote, Metaphor or historical event.

### **Formality**

Hofstede (1991) believes that the differences in values between cultures can be reduced to differences on 5 dimensions: power distance, collectivism/individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and confucian dynamism. It is a fact that all these five dimensions may have influence on the form and content of presentations and on which type of presentations are appreciated most, but Claes deals with 'power distance' only. She calls this formality. Power distance is the extent to which members of institutions and organisations that do not have power, expect and accept that power is not equally divided (Hofstede 1991:39). The more people accept that power is not equally divided, the higher the power distance is. Hofstede indicates power distance on a scale from 0 to 100. Low power distance is for example found in Denmark (18), Great Britain (35) and the Netherlands (38), high power distance is found in France (68), Mexico (81) and Panama (95).

In cultures with a high power distance, the distance between the powerful and the rest of the population is literally and metaphorically large. The powerful have power, wealth and status. The subordinates – employees, pupils, children – expect that the powerful will tell them what they should do and not do and the powerful expect that subordinates will do nothing without asking the superior prior permission. In such cultures formality is high. People abide by the rules of behaviour, dress codes, use of titles and forms of address which express the differences between the powerful and the powerless. In cultures with a low power distance, the difference between people with and without power is less pronounced. The powerful have less status and privileges. Subordinates have a say in matters and the superiors listen to them. These cultures are rather informal.

According to Claes, people from formal cultures will appreciate presentations in which the presenter shows that he or she has power and knowledge, whereas people from informal cultures will prefer presentations in which the distance between presenter and audience is as small as possible.

In our view Ethical Appeal will be more valued in formal cultures than in informal cultures since the presenter sketches in this introduction the quality of himself and the organisation.

### **EXPECTATIONS**

Our research was conducted in three countries: the Netherlands, Belgium and France. These countries are situated in a continuous area in Europe in which two languages are spoken: Dutch in the Netherlands and Belgium and French in France and again Belgium. The variety of Dutch that is spoken in Belgium is also known as Flemish. Dutch is the first language of the part of Belgium north to the Roman-German language border and French is the first language in the area south of the Roman-German border. This border runs south of Brussels from the west to the east of Belgium.

This area is interesting for research on cultural differences because according to Geert Hofstede the cultural differences in this area do coincide neither with national borders nor with language use. Both Dutch- and French-speaking Belgium are very similar to France, whereas the Netherlands strongly differs from Belgium and France.



Hofstede (1980:335) states: "In fact no two countries in the HERMES data with a common border and common language are so far culturally apart according to my HERMES indices as Belgium and the Netherlands". Table 1 shows the indices for power distance for the four cultures (Hofstede 1980). A high figure indicates a high power distance and a low figure a low power distance .

Edward T. Hall explicitly mentions France in his theories on high and low context cultures, but does not mention the Netherlands and Belgium. On the basis of what we know about these cultures, we believe that the Netherlands can be put on a par with the low context monochronic Scandinavian cultures, and Dutch- and French-speaking Belgium with a middle context and rather polychronic culture such as France.

Table 1 shows the differences and similarities between the Netherlands, Dutch-speaking Belgium, French-speaking Belgium and France in cultural aspects that according to Claes (1998) could be related to presentations. We see a dichotomy between the Netherlands, a monochronic culture with a low power distance, on the one hand, and Belgium (both the Dutch- and French-speaking part) and France, which are rather polychronic and have a rather high power distance, on the other. As a consequence, we expect that other introductions are appreciated in the Netherlands than in Dutch- and French-speaking Belgium and France. Table 1 shows which introductions should be most appreciated in which culture according to the theories.

We also expect that there is a relationship between the appreciation of an introduction and the extent to which it makes the audience attentum, benevolem and docilem. The more an audience appreciates an introduction, the more it will be attentum, benevolem and docilem.

Table 1 Cultural differences in the appreciation of introductions of presentations to be expected on the basis of Edward T. Hall's and Geert Hofstede's theories.

Culture Theory	The Netherlands	Dutch-speaking Belgium	French-speaking Belgium	France
Context	Low Overview	Middle Anecdote Metaphor	Middle Anecdote Metaphor	Middle Anecdote Metaphor
Monochronic/ Polychronic	Monochronic Overview	Rather Polychronic Anecdote Metaphor	Rather Polychronic Anecdote Metaphor	Rather Polychronic Anecdote Metaphor
Power Distance	38	61 Ethical Appeal	67 Ethical Appeal	68 Ethical Appeal

**DESIGN**

In each of the four cultures a group of 100 respondents (50% women and 50% men) took part in the experiments. All 400 respondents were aged between 19 and 23 and were studying Business Communication or Langues Etrangères Appliquées. Dutch students were studying at the University of Nijmegen, the Dutch-speaking Belgian students at the Handelshogeschool in Antwerp, the French-speaking Belgian students at the Université Catholique de Louvain in Louvain-la-Neuve, and the French students at the Université François Rabelais in Tours.

We have chosen to use a product presentation for our survey since this type of presentation is an important marketing instrument in international business communication. The topic of the presentation was the introduction of a new mobile telephone. We had various reasons for investigating cultural differences in the appreciation of introductions. The introduction is an extremely important part of the presentation: the first flow is half the battle (cf. 0). On the basis of the theories on cultural differences, we expected that the cultures studied here would differ in their appreciation of different introductions (cf. Table 1). It is easier to conduct experiments with an introduction of a presentation than with other parts. Another reason was that we could base our research partly on a study that was performed in the Netherlands by Andeweg, de Jong and Hoeken (1998).

We investigated the appreciation of four different introductions (see Appendix I): Ethical Appeal (a short description of the qualities of the speaker and her or his company), Overview (a summary of what is going to be said), Metaphor (an implicit comparison with the product) and Anecdote (a short story that introduces the product in an indirect way). We choose these introductions because they receive a lot of attention in publications on effective presenting (Morse 1983; Korswagen et al. 1988; Boogaard et al. 1989; Bulck 1994; Houtet al. 1993; Peype 1994; Bloch 1995; de Jong 1996; Mulder 1997; Andeweg et al. 1998) and because theories led us to expect that the cultures investigated here would differ in the appreciation of those introductions (cf. Table 1).

In order to gain insight into the appreciation and the effect of the different introductions, two experiments were administered in face-to-face-communication between researcher and respondent. In the first experiment, respondents first had to read all four introductions and then indicate and motivate which one they thought was the most suitable and which one the least. The extent to which each of the introductions made the respondent attentum, benevolem and docilem (cf. 0) was measured in the second experiment by means of statements that the respondent had to rate on a five-point Likert scale running from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (agree completely) (see Appendix II). For each introduction the respondents had to rate 15 statements equally divided between the 3 functions: 5 measured attentum facere , 5 benevolem facere and 5 docilem facere. In order to avoid that respondents would be directed to one side of the scale, some statements were formulated positively (for example 3, 4, and 6) and some

negatively (for example 2, 5 and 7). The scores on the negatively formulated statements were recoded: 5 points for a positive evaluation and 1 points for a negative evaluation. By means of reliability analyses, we checked whether the answers relating to a certain function of an introduction were similar enough to computed. Table 2 presents the alphas.

**Table 2** Reliability of the answers of 400 respondents to the questions that measured attentum (N=5), benevolem (N=5) and docilem facere (N=5).

	Ethical Appeal	Overview	Metaphor	Anecdote
Attentum	.87	.83	.86	.83
Benevolem	.85	.84	.86	.85
Docilem	.79	.82	.74	.71

Table 2 shows that the alphas are very high, the lowest is 71. This implies that the answers to the five questions that measured the extent to which a certain introduction made the public attentum, benevolem or docilem can be computed. We will deal with those computed data below. The extent to which, for example, the Anecdote attracts the attention of the Dutch-speaking audience in Belgium is expressed by a figure between 1 (very negative) and 5 (very positive).

The data were processed in SPSS 9. As level of significance we took  $p < .05$  for Kruskal Wallis tests and regression analyses. For Mann Whitney tests, we chose as level of significance  $p < .05$ , since we performed many of such tests.

## RESULTS

### Appreciation of the introductions

In order to gain insight into the differences between the four cultures in the appreciation of the four introductions as beginnings of a product presentation for mobile telephones, we asked the respondents which introduction they thought was the most suitable and which one the least. The most suitable introduction got score 2, the least suitable score 0, and the others got score 1. Table 3 shows the means for each introduction and for each culture. The higher the figure, the more the introduction was appreciated.

**Table 3** Means of suitability (2 = most suitable, 1 = neither suitable nor unsuitable, 0 = not suitable)

Culture	The Netherlands	Dutch-speaking Belgium	French-speaking Belgium	France
Introduction	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Ethical Appeal	1.02 (.59)	1.15 (.67)	1.02 (.64)	1.23 (.63)
Overview	1.48 (.64)	1.33 (.69)	1.46 (.63)	1.22 (.61)
Metaphor	0.66 (.73)	0.69 (.62)	0.65 (.67)	0.45 (.67)
Anecdote	0.83 (.60)	0.80 (.69)	0.86 (.64)	1.10 (.61)

There are similarities between the cultures - the Metaphor is appreciated least and the Overview most (except in France) - as well as differences. Kruskal Wallis tests were performed in order to check whether those differences in the appreciation of the four introductions were statistically significant. There appeared to be significant culture differences for all four introductions Ethical Appeal ( $X^2=8.29$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.04$ ), Overview ( $X^2=12.34$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.006$ ), Metaphor ( $X^2=10.34$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.016$ ) and Anecdote ( $X^2=13.94$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.003$ ). In order to find which differences between cultures were significant Mann Whitney tests were performed. Table 7 presents a summary of the significant differences (chosen level of significance  $p < .01$ , cf. 3). It is striking that the Netherlands and both Dutch- and French-speaking Belgium do not differ significantly in their appreciation of introductions. Most of the significant differences occurred between France and the other three cultures. Ethical Appeal was appreciated significantly more in France than in the Netherlands ( $z=2.46$ ,  $p=.01$ ). Overview was appreciated less in France than in the Netherlands ( $z=3.11$ ,  $p=.002$ ) and French-speaking Belgium ( $z=2.90$ ,  $p=.004$ ). Metaphor was appreciated less in France than in Dutch-speaking Belgium ( $z=3.21$ ,  $p=.002$ ) and the Anecdote was appreciated more in France than in the other three cultures (Netherlands:  $z=3.07$ ,  $p=.002$ ; Dutch-speaking Belgium:  $z=3.25$ ,  $p=.001$ ; French-speaking Belgium:  $z=2.68$ ,  $p=.007$ ).

These data show a dichotomy between France, on the one side, and Dutch- and French-speaking Belgium and the Netherlands, on the other. This is contrary to what we expected on the basis of the theories (cf. 3). We will come back to this in section 6.



**Scores for attentum, benevolem and docilem facere**

Tables 4, 5 and 6 show the mean of the scores on attentum, benevolem and docilem facere for each culture and introduction. The higher the figure, the more the introduction fulfills the opening function.

Table 4 Means of attentum facere (1 = negative, 5 is positive).

Culture	Netherlands	Dutch-speaking Belgium	French-speaking Belgium	France
Introduction	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Ethical Appeal	2.70 (1.08)	3.13 (1.07)	2.89 (0.98)	3.30 (1.20)
Overview	3.19 (0.97)	3.23 (1.04)	3.42 (1.02)	3.45 (1.15)
Metaphor	3.20 (1.20)	2.85 (1.10)	2.97 (1.14)	2.87 (1.23)
Anecdote	3.12 (1.01)	2.87 (0.91)	2.88 (1.05)	3.24 (1.16)

Kruskall Wallis tests showed that the cultures differed significantly from each other in the extent to which a certain introduction made attentum. There were significant differences for Ethical Appeal ( $p=.001$ ) and Anecdote ( $p=.047$ ). Mann Whitney tests revealed that the cultures only differed significantly on Ethical Appeal (cf. Table 7). Ethical Appeal attires the attention for the French than for the Dutch- ( $z=3.71$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and the French-speaking Belgians ( $z=3.06$ ,  $p=.002$ ) and also more for the Dutch-speaking Belgians than for the Dutch ( $z=2.83$ ,  $p=.005$ ).

Table 5 Means of benevolem facere (1 = negative, 5 is positive).

Culture	Netherlands	Dutch-speaking Belgium	French-speaking Belgium	France
Introduction	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Ethos	3.69 (0.92)	4.14 (0.80)	3.84 (0.88)	4.06 (0.89)
Nutshell	4.20 (0.74)	3.94 (0.81)	3.80 (0.89)	3.72 (1.02)
Metaphor	2.32 (0.92)	2.33 (0.97)	2.17 (0.86)	2.21 (1.13)
Anecdote	2.33 (0.89)	2.11 (1.13)	2.29 (0.89)	2.73 (1.13)

In all cultures the ratings for benevolem are much higher on Ethical Appeal and Overview than on Metaphor and Anecdote. The use of the latter two do apparently contribute less to the credibility of the speaker than the use of the former two. Kruskal Wallis tests showed that the four cultures differed in the extent to which Ethical Appeal ( $p=.001$ ), Overview ( $p=.002$ ) and Anecdote ( $p=.001$ ) made the audience benevolem. Mann Whitney tests (cf. Table 7) showed that Ethical Appeal makes the Dutch significantly less benevolem than the Dutch-speaking Belgians ( $z=3.56$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and the French ( $z=3.02$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Furthermore, Ethical Appeal makes the Dutch-speaking Belgians more benevolem than the French-speaking Belgians ( $z=2.67$ ,  $p=.007$ ). Overview makes the speaker significantly more credible for the Dutch audience than for the audiences from Dutch-speaking Belgium ( $z=2.43$ ,  $p=.015$ ), from French-speaking Belgium ( $z=3.34$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and France ( $z=3.30$ ,  $p=.001$ ). The Anecdote makes the French more benevolem than the respondents from French-speaking Belgium ( $z=2.65$ ,  $p=.008$ ) and Dutch-speaking Belgium ( $z=3.04$ ,  $p=.002$ ).

Table 6 Means of docilem facere (1 = negative, 5 is positive).

Culture	Netherlands	Dutch-speaking Belgium	French-speaking Belgium	France
Introduction	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Ethos	3.94 (0.90)	4.13 (0.77)	3.41 (0.97)	3.98 (0.99)
Nutshell	4.70 (0.55)	4.41 (0.78)	4.27 (0.88)	4.16 (1.01)
Metaphor	3.03 (0.99)	3.18 (0.93)	2.97 (0.88)	2.73 (1.04)
Anecdote	3.41 (0.93)	3.40 (1.09)	3.41 (0.82)	3.40 (0.97)

Table 6 shows the same pattern for all cultures for docilem facere. The Overview has the highest ratings and the metaphor the lowest. By means of a Kruskal Wallis test we tested whether the differences between cultures were significant. The test revealed significant differences for Ethical Appeal ( $X^2=33.09$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ), Overview ( $X^2=25.03$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and Metaphor ( $X^2=9.94$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.02$ ). Mann Whitney tests (cf. Table 7) showed that Ethical Appeal increased the ability to listen more in Dutch-speaking Belgium than in French-speaking Belgium ( $z=5.32$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and more in France than in French-speaking Belgium ( $z=4.36$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Furthermore, Ethical Appeal makes the Dutch audience more docilem than the French-speaking Belgian audience ( $z=3.99$ ,  $p=.001$ ). The Overview makes the Dutch more docilem than the Dutch and French-speaking Belgians ( $z=3.27$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and

( $z=4.04$ ,  $p=.001$ ) respectively) and than the French ( $z=4.53$ ,  $p=.001$ ). The Metaphor makes the respondents from Dutch-speaking Belgium more docile than those from France ( $z=3.04$ ,  $p=.002$ ).

**The relationship between the appreciation of the introductions and the scores for attentum, benevolem and docilem facere.**

Table 7 presents a summary of the significant cultural differences in the appreciation of an introduction (5.1) and in the scores on the functions of an opening: attentum, benevolem and docilem facere (5.2). We have also indicated which significant difference we found. F>N in the appreciation column and the Ethical Appeal row means, for example, that the French appreciate this introduction significantly more than the Dutch.

**Table 7** Significant cultural differences in the appreciation of an introduction and in the scores on attentum, benevolem and docilem facere (see for raw data the Tables 3,4,5 and 6)

	Netherlands-Dutch Belgians			Netherlands-French Belgians				Netherlands-France				
		Attent.	Benev.	Docil.	Apprec	Attent.	Benev.	Docil.	Apprec	Attent.	Benev.	Docil.
Ethical appeal	-	DB>N	DB>N	-	-	-	-	N>FB	F>N	F>N	F>N	-
Overview	-	-	N>DB	N>DB	-	-	N>FB	N>FB	N>F		N>F	N>F
Metaphor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	
Anecdote	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	F>N	-		-
	Dutch Belgians-French Belgians				Dutch Belgians-France				French Belgians-France			
Introductions	Apprec	Attent	Benev.	Docil.	Apprec.	Attent	Benev.	Docil.	Appr.	Attent.	Benev	Docil.
Ethical appeal	-	-	DB>FB	DB>FB	-	-	-	-	-	F>FB		F>FB
Overview	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	FB>F	-	-	-
Metaphor	-	-	-	-	DB>F	-	-	DB>F		-	-	-
Anecdote	-	-	-	-	F>DB		F>DB	-	F>FB		F>FB	-

N=Netherlands, DB=Dutch-speaking Belgium, FB=French-speaking Belgium, F=France

Table 7 shows first of all that the statistically significant differences are in line with each other. When an introduction is significantly more appreciated in one culture and less in another, and when there are also significant differences in attentum, benevolem and/or docilem facere for that introduction and for those two cultures, those differences point in the same direction. We see, for example, that the French appreciate Ethical Appeal significantly more than the Dutch, and that the French scores on attentum and benevolem facere are also significantly higher than the Dutch scores. Significant differences between cultures in the appreciation of an introduction do, however, not always go hand in hand with significant differences on the openings functions. To get insight into the relationships, a stepwise regression analysis was performed for each culture with the independent variables attentum, benevolem and docilem facere and the dependent variable 'appreciation of the opening'.

The scores on the functions of the opening appear to predict fairly well the appreciation of an opening. The explained variance ( $R^2$ ) varies from 26% for the Anecdote in the Netherlands to 55% for the Metaphor in France. The third column of Table 8 shows which openings functions contribute to the explained variance and in which order. The exact contribution to the explained variance of a function of an opening is indicated in columns 4, 5 and 6 for attentum, benevolem and docilem respectively. These data show that the scores on attentum facere are the best predictors for the appreciation of an opening in all the cultures. The role of benevolem facere is far less important and the role of docilem facere is almost zero. In all the cultures investigated here the best introduction of a product presentation seems to be a beginning that draws the attention of the audience. The problem in intercultural communication is that cultures differ in their views on which introduction performs this function best.



**Table 8** Results of a stepwise regression analysis with the independent variables *attentum*, *benevolem* and *docilem facere* and the dependent variable appreciation of an introduction.

The Netherlands	R2	Order	B Attentum	B Benevolem	B Docilem
Ethical Appeal	44	AD	27	-	15
Overview	52	AD	41	25	-
Metaphor	38	ABe	27	20	-
Anecdote	26	Be	-	34	-
Dutch-speaking Belgium					
Ethical Appeal	36	A	38	-	-
Overview	53	AD	40	-	17
Metaphor	47	AD	28	-	17
Anecdote	51	ABe	38	20	-
French-speaking Belgium					
Ethical Appeal	52	ABe	33	19	-
Overview	48	A	43	-	-
Metaphor	49	BeD	-	34	26
Anecdote	39	BeA	19	23	-
France					
Ethical Appeal	32	A	30	-	-
Overview	43	AD	22	-	18
Metaphor	55	BeD	-	31	17
Anecdote	32	A	30	-	-

R2= explained variance, A=Attentum, Be=Benevolem, D=Docilem

#### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

When we compare the results of our study with the theory-based expectations summarised in Table 1, we see that our data are partly in line with the expectations and partly not. Our data largely corroborate the differences that we expected between the Dutch and French cultures. We expected that the Overview would be appreciated more in the Netherlands, and that Ethical Appeal, Anecdote and Metaphor would be appreciated more in France. Our data (cf. Table 7) show statistical significant differences between the Netherlands and France in the direction that we expected for all introductions except the Metaphor.

We expected a dichotomy between the Netherlands on the one side - being monochronic and having a low context and a low power distance - and Belgium (both the Dutch- and French-speaking parts), and France, being rather polychronic and having a middle context and a rather high power distance, on the other side. We found a dichotomy indeed, but it is different from the split that we expected. There are no significant differences in the appreciation of introductions between the Netherlands and Dutch- and French-speaking Belgium (cf. Table 7). There are only some significant differences in the scores on the functions of an opening, but those differences do not go hand in hand with the differences in the appreciation of an opening, and the important function of *attentum facere* is involved only one. Regarding the appreciation of introductions, the Netherlands and both parts of Belgium are clearly on the one side and France on the other. Apart from the significant differences between the Netherlands and France mentioned above the Anecdote is appreciated significantly more in France than in Dutch- and French-speaking Belgium, the Overview is appreciated more in French-speaking Belgium than in France and the Metaphor less in France, than in Dutch-speaking Belgium.

The theories seem to predict the situation in France and the Netherlands fairly well, but not in Belgium. This could mean that the classification of both Dutch- and French-speaking Belgium as a rather polychronic middle context society and high power distance society is not correct. On the basis of what we know about those cultures and the results of the replication study of Hofstede (1980) (Claes & Gerritsen forthcoming), we can hardly believe that this is the case. It could be that the appreciation of an introduction not only depends on cultural factors such as context and power distance, but also on other factors. In this case, it could be that education plays an important part. In Belgium and the Netherlands, presentation skills are hardly taught at school, whereas, in France, it is an important part of the curriculum (Bennett et al 1998:126-127, 133). It could be that the fact that Ethical Appeal and Anecdote are appreciated more in France is due to rhetoric tradition. They can be seen as a part of the Cartesian mind-set in which rhetoric is taught in French schools: presentations have to be structured logically, but one does not need to stress the obvious such as links between parts of the presentations and outlines (Bennett et al 1998:130-133). The next question that emerges is of course: why has France adopted this idea and not the other cultures? Does this have to do with the French culture? Unfortunately, we do not have an answer to this question.

One of the most important results of this study is that, in all cultures, the extent to which a product presentation draws attention is an important predictor for the appreciation of the introduction. In our survey, the Overview is the favourite opening in the Netherlands and Dutch- and French-speaking Belgium; the Ethical Appeal is the favourite

opening in France. But the Overview is appreciated nearly as much as the Ethical Appeal (cf. Table 3). When an audience consists of Belgian, French and Dutch people, the best opening for a product presentation seems to be an Overview. There are, however, no hard and fast rules how to persuade an audience. Culture plays a part, but many other things too.

Both presenters and listeners should realise that what is considered to be a good introduction in one culture is not necessarily also a good introduction in another culture. We have seen that in this respect there are even differences between neighbouring cultures in which the same language is spoken, such as France and French-speaking Belgium. We may expect that the differences between other countries will be much greater. Further research on the cultural differences in the appreciation of presentations is therefore recommended.

#### Notes

The data relating to the Netherlands and France as presented here were collected by Evelyn Wannet (Wannet 1999) and the data relating to Dutch- and French-speaking Belgium were collected by Marian van Bakel and Marieke Jansen (Van Bakel and Jansen 2000). Part of the design of this study is based on Wannet (1999).

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## Appendix I      **The Introductions**

### Ethical Appeal

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Dr. Harry Maas. Six years ago, I joined Ericsson's R&D Department. For the last two years I have held the position of head of the Mobile Telephony Department. Ericsson is the world's largest supplier of mobile phones, operating in more than 140 countries. In 1998, our net turnover amounted to approximately 30 billion guilders. We specifically and systematically try to improve our products and services by means of our own Quality Model. This model enables us to increase customer satisfaction in a structural way. In 1998, we received the International Quality Award from the Institute for Total Quality Management for this approach. It was particularly because of the I88 World that we won this award. This mobile phone can be used anywhere in the world. In tests performed by independent research institutes, the I88 World proved to be the best. It is therefore with great pride that I introduce this unique product to you this afternoon.

### Overview

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the next thirty minutes I will try to tell you all there is to know about Ericsson and our new mobile phone, the I88 World. In this presentation I will provide answers the following questions (speaker puts a sheet on the overhead projector):

- What kind of company is Ericsson?
- Why was the I88 World developed? In my answer to this question I will also go into the problems with previously developed models and how we solved them.
- What features does the I88 World have?
- Why would the I88 World be a good product for your organisation?
- And, finally, what position does the I88 World hold vis-à-vis competitive products?

If you have any questions, or if something is not quite clear to you, please feel free to interrupt my presentation.

### Metaphor

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the days of Julius Caesar, Pompey and Crassus, about a thousand years before the birth of Christ, messengers were used to send information from one place to another in the Roman Empire. For example, from Rome in Italy to Thapsus in Africa, or from Munda in Spain to Pharsalus in Greece. It was not so that just about anyone could become a messenger. Each candidate had to meet the strict selection criteria drawn up by the Roman Messengers' Committee with regard to speed, quality of transmission, stamina and equipment. One day in May in the year 58 B.C., a brawny fellow called Scipion appeared before the selection committee. No one had ever seen such a man: Scipion could run with the speed of sound. He transmitted all messages without any distortion. His speech was exceptionally clear and his 'storage capacity' enabled him to convey messages of up to 360 minutes without any problem. It was not long before everyone in the Roman Empire had heard of Scipion and soon every nobleman wished to acquire his services.

### Anecdote

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the first week of February, Paul, a colleague of mine, and a friend of his travelled to Landeck in Austria for a winter sports holiday. While they were on a trip through the wooded hills of the ski resort, it all of sudden became pitch-dark. Then they heard a loud bang... Paul turned around and saw a huge white wall of snow rushing towards him and Eric. There seemed to be no escape. Luckily, at the very last minute, they found refuge in a small cave nearby. They were immediately closed in by a thick layer of snow and suddenly found themselves cut off from the outside world. Fortunately enough my colleague had his mobile phone with him, which happened to be our latest model. Without any problem he contacted Major Wartoc of the Austrian army. It did not take Paul more than a minute to explain to the rescuer what had happened and where the cave was situated.

Eventually, at about half past five, Paul and Eric were brought to safety by a helicopter rescue team. That single telephone call had helped to save the lives of my colleague and his friend. This story once again proves how useful a mobile phone can be.

## Appendix II      **The questionnaire used to measure the appreciation of each of the introductions in terms of attentum (A), benevolum (B) and docilem facere (D)**

- 1 – disagree
- 2 – disagree to some extent
- 3 – neither agree nor disagree
- 4 – agree to some extent



5 – agree

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1. The introduction was intelligible (D)   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. The introduction was boring (A)   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. The introduction gave good impression of the company's expertise (B)              | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. The introduction made me curious about what would follow (A)                      | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. The introduction lacked structure (D)   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. The introduction was made in a professional way (B)                               | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. This introduction is not suitable for business presentations (D)                  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. The introduction convinced me that this company is a serious business partner (B) | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. The introduction was interesting (A)  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. The introduction was convincing (B)  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. The introduction was difficult to follow (D)                                     | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. I am curious about the rest of the presentation (A)                              | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. The content of the introduction was superficial (A)                              | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. The introduction was credible (B)  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. The introduction was insulting (D)   | 1 2 3 4 5 |

☞