

# TYPICAL RESPONSES IN GIVING EVALUATION: AN ANALYSIS OF HIGH AND LOW CONTEXT CULTURE COMMUNICATION

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## Abstract

This paper aims at discussing high and low context in responses given by the students to evaluate their friend's impromptu speech performance. The study focuses on the characteristics of high and low context represented specifically on (1) direct-indirect (2) simple-complex response, and (3) relationship orientation. The study is based on the analysis of ten responses given by ten students with different sexes. Classroom observation followed by transcription analysis is used. The data were collected naturally at undergraduate campus. The result shows that using indirect and complex responses can maintain harmonious relationship with others. The basic assumption is that the students tend to communicate in high level context.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membahas konteks tinggi dan rendah dalam mengevaluasi performansi pidato tanpa persiapan temannya. Penelitian ini memusatkan perhatian pada ciri konteks tinggi dan rendah yang direpresentasikan oleh (1) tanggapan langsung-tak langsung (2) sederhana-kompleks, dan (3) orientasi hubungan. Penelitian ini didasarkan pada sepuluh tanggapan yang diberikan oleh sepuluh mahasiswa pria dan wanita. Pengamatan kelas yang diikuti dengan analisis transkripsi digunakan untuk pengumpulan data. Data dikumpulkan di kampus diploma. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa siswa cenderung menggunakan tanggapan kompleks dan tak langsung agar dapat menjaga keharmonisan hubungan dengan temannya. Oleh karena itu asumsi dasarnya adalah bahwa siswa cenderung berkomunikasi dalam konteks level tinggi.

**Keywords** : high and low level of context, impromptu speech, evaluation, responses, indirect responses

## **INTRODUCTION**

The function of language is for communication. Furthermore, he argues that to communicate, a person has to convert meaning into behaviour. In other words, the message the sender has is to transfer his information, his ideas or his feelings into word, facial expressions or gestures. Hence, the message receiver will understand the message. After meaning has been encoded into behaviour, the message receiver has to decode the behaviour back into meaning. Why communication is always dependent on the perception, interpretation, and evaluation of a person's behaviour will be clarified in this paper. In the same view, Gamsriegler (2005) argues that the process of communication is highly complex, multilayered and dynamic. Gamsriegler (2005) asserts that this is due to the fact that communication is always dependent on the perception, interpretation, and evaluation of a person's behaviour which includes verbal versus non-verbal as well as consciously versus unconsciously sent messages

In communication there is one phenomena in the types of response in giving evaluation to others. There are many kinds of response that would appear from the audience toward the speech. The responses from the hearer might be such an evaluation or the response in the form of comments or evaluation. The activity happens when one of the students should give an impromptu speech in the class. In this activity, the audience should give attention to the speaker then evaluate it by giving one or two lone comments towards their friend's speech. The evaluation might consist of criticism or compliments or both of them. Everybody in the class would have their own way in evaluating their friend's speech. It depends on their perception, knowledge, culture, values, and so on. The way people express their evaluation might be different from one student to another. The difference might be on the focus of evaluation or the strategy in uttering evaluation. In giving evaluation and responding to people is influenced by the culture value employed. Regarding to the use of language, communication is so closely and uniquely tied to the culture. High and low culture context theories discuss the way people communicate to others based on their cultural context. For example, in giving response to one's speech, it would invite any kinds of caharacteristics of responses from the person in that context. There will be a direct and indirect response; simple-complex response; and relationship orientation between the speakers.

Regarding to culture, it is inherent in human life since it can affect all aspects, especially language and education. Culture and learning are intervowen and inseparable (McLoughlin, 1999, as cited in Sherri Sieffert, 2006). According to Hall (1976), communication in culture is based on a continuum from high to low context. In a high context culture, people tend not only to have the same knowledge of the world but also to share the same attitudes and values. "High-context people are apt to become impatient and irritated when low context people insist on giving them information the information they don't need. Conversely, low context people are at a loss when high-context people do not provide enough information" (Hall and Hall, 1987 as cited in Carpenter, 2003).

In intercultural situation the difference would be significantly revealed and obvious, because there is a wide gap between one culture to another. Here in

Indonesia, the context of the study is in the EFL classroom, whereas, although the students come from different places with different cultural background ( family, environment, personal characteristic, etc), they are still from one nation and employ the same national language. In other words, between the persons in that context there are still the similarities in some aspects, so the differences of the culture relatively would not be so wide and large. Hence, it would give a different typical kinds of response given by those people in that context.

This study has the significance for both the researchers and the teachers. From this analysis, hopefully, we would understand that there would be a tendency and typical characteristics appearing in one context. It obviously depends on the culture which are employed by the students in the class. The culture value would influence more or less to the way of them in giving evaluation, whether it is uttered directly or indirectly, simple or complex and utter the evaluation based on relationship orientation.

This study investigated the students' response based on the categorization of cultures (high context and low context). It is necessary because by understanding the typical context of culture, it will help to create a good communication among the people. For the teachers and the learners, by knowing the typical response in a cultural context, it is intended that they would be able to choose and select the words appropriately according to the context and in order to avoid the conflict, furthermore, it can create and promote relationship and harmony among the member of the group.

Reviewing another study of identifying the strategies used in high and low context cultures, Wurtz (2005) has concerned on how the strategies used by high context cultures in utilizing the internet- a largely low context cultures for communicating and marketing purposes. The study taken by Wurtz (2005) triggered by assumption that visual communication is a high priority in the design of high context websites. The objective of Wurtz's study (2005) is to find the answer on how the visual methods used on websites vary according to the communication styles in different cultures by using Hall's high and low context dimension as main parameters. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the typical characteristics of comments given by the participants to the speaker.

Intercultural communication study is an area of research about different cultures, its differences, and similarities. The study comprises practical application such as learning how to negotiate with people from different cultures, living with people from different cultures, living in a different culture, and the prospects of peace between different cultures.

The concepts of high and low level context refer to the degree to which speakers rely on factors other than explicit speech to convey their messages. This theory is proposed by Edward T. Hall (1976) who suggests that the categorization of cultures into high context and low context was made to understand their basic differences in communication style and cultural issues. Furthermore, he explains that communication varies according to its degree of field dependence, the degree to which things outside the communication itself affect the meaning, and it can be classified into two general categories- high context and low context.

Hall (1976) says that every human being is confronted by far more sensory stimuli than can possibly be attended to, and that all of us engage in both high

context and low context in our culture. Cultures help by screening messages, shaping perceptions and interpretations according to a series of selective filters. In high level context the screens are designed to let in implied meaning arising from physical setting, relational cues, or shared understanding while in low level context the screen direct attention more to literal meaning of words and less to the context surrounding the words.

### **High level context**

High level context implies that a lot of unspoken information is implicitly transferred during communication; in other words, internal meaning is usually deeply embedded in the information and not explicitly stated in writing or speaking. In society of high culture, the listener is expected to be able to read “between the lines” to understand the unsaid and get the meaning based on their background knowledge.

Furthermore Hall (1976) emphasizes that 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, or transmitted part of the message. In other words, in high level context people tend to rely on their history, their status, their relationship, and sources from other information, including religion, to assign meaning to an event.

From the explanation above, it can be summed up that the characteristics of high level context, among others, indirect and implicit messages, high use of non-verbal communication, use intuition and feeling to make decisions, and long-term relationship.

### **Low level context**

Low level context implies that a lot of information is exchanged explicitly through the message itself and rarely is anything implicit or hidden. In this culture, meanings are explicitly stated through language. Hall (1976) explains that in low level context most information is expected to be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context. Low level context is characterized by direct and linear communication and by the constant and sometimes never ending use of words, where the communication is direct, precise, dramatic, open, and based on true intentions (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

In connection to characteristics of low level context, Triandis et al. explain that low level context typically value individualism over collectivism and group harmony. The term individualism in this theory characterised by members prioritising individual needs and goals over the needs of the group.

From the explanation above it can be concluded that there are some characteristics of low level context, direct, simple, and clear messages, low use of non-verbal communication, based on evidence, and short-term relationship.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted at Singaperbangsa Karawang University. Ten students of English Education Study Program were involved. The data were collected by researchers when the students were taking impromptu speech in Speaking class. The comments used by the participants to the speaker were analyzed based on high and low context culture theory.

The purposes of the study are to investigate the typical characteristics of comments given by the participants to the speaker, and to conduct classroom observation in impromptu speech performance in which the researcher acts as ‘teacher as researcher’.

Cowie (2009) in Heigham (2009) defines classroom observation as conscious noticing and detailed examination of participants’ behaviour in a naturalistic setting. Furthermore, Cowie elaborates that there are main reasons why observation was chosen. Firstly, it can help to uncover familiar routines, activities, and fixed aspects of education and help to demistify what is actually going on. Secondly, observations can be used with other data collection to triangulate and provide additional evidence for the study.

Audio tape was used to record class interaction. Fraenkel (1996) proposes some advantages of using audio tape or recording: it could be replayed several times for the study and analysis, it could be listened to the experts or others who are interested in the topic so they can offer their insights, and the recording obtained could be used as a comparison with later or different samples.

The recorded data were transcribed, categorized, and interpreted to answer the purposes of the study mentioned above. In analysing the data from class interaction, transcribing the recording was the first step of data analysis. After transcribing the recording, the data were categorized into similar responses, and then the researchers interpreted them. The interpretation of the recording was done to analyze the category of typical responses in giving evaluation in impromptu speech performance in the research site.

The comments are categorized according to the following category:

1. **High context.** High context communication has several characteristics: indirect, complex, long term relationship.
2. **Low context.** Low context communication has several characteristics: direct, simple and clear, short term relationship.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Category Analyzed	High Level Context						Low Level Context					
	Indirect		Complex		Long term relationship		Direct		Simple		Short term relationship	
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
<b>1. Comment F1 :</b> Speechnya dari Nurhalimah udah bagus ya, berani, biasanya pemalu. Cuman sayang banget kalo materinya dikembangkan lagi pasti lebih bagus. Sorry ya?												
<b>Analysis F1</b>	Indirect (-)		Complex (-)		Long term		Direct		Simple (+)		-	
<b>2. Comment F2 :</b> Menurut saya, nurhalimah bagus ya speechnya, tapi karena malu-malu jadi kurang dikeluarkan kemampuannya												

<b>Analysis F2</b>	Indirect (-)	Complex (-)	Long Term	-	Simple (+)	-
<b>3. Comment F3 :</b> Menurut aku, untuk penjelasannya secara keseluruhan bagus , Cuma banyak yang dilewat jadi intinya kurang bisa ditangkap.						
<b>Analysis F3</b>	Indirect (-)	Complex (-)	Long Term	Direct (+)	Simple (+)	-
<b>4. Comment F4:</b> Menurut saya, pidatonya bagus, Cuma menerangkannya kurang menjelaskan tentang point utamanya.						
<b>Analysis F4</b>	Indirect (-)	-	-	Direct (+)	Simple (+)	-
<b>5. Comment F5 :</b> Buat Nurhalimah, speechnya udah baik ya, tapi kembali lagi ke vocab, jangan cari yang susah-susah biar lebih lancar.						
<b>Analysis F5</b>	Indirect (-)	Complex (-)	-	Direct (+)	Simple (+)	-
<b>6. Comment M1 :</b> Menurut saya, untuk 'impromptu speech' itu dah bagus, tapi sepertinya belum bisa menyampaikan inti materinya.						
<b>Analysis M1</b>	Indirect (-)	Complex (-)	-	Direct (+)	Simple (+)	-
<b>7. Comment M2 :</b> Apresiasi buat Nurhalimah sudah bagus ya pidatonya. Cuma perlu lebih berani lagi ya!						
<b>Analysis M2</b>	-	-	-	Direct (+)	Simple (+)	-
<b>8. Comment M3 :</b> Kalo menurut saya, buat Nurhalimah, khususnya temanya udah bagus, cuman vocabnya perlu dikembangkan lagi ya, banyak kok kalo mau cari vocabulary-nya dikamus.						
<b>Analysis M3</b>	Indirect (-)	Complex (-)	-	Direct (+)	Simple (+)	-
<b>9. Comment M4 :</b> Kalo menurut saya, penjelasannya secara keseluruhan bagus, cuman suaranya kurang jelas, jadi suaranya tolong diperkeras lagi agar yang belakang bisa mendengar.						
<b>Analysis M4</b>	Indirect (-)	Complex (-)	-	Direct (-)	Simple(-)	-
<b>10. Comment M5 :</b> Kalo menurut saya bagus, Cuma cara penyampaiannya kurang diperjelas ke intinya.						
<b>Analysis M5</b>	Indirect (-)	Complex (-)	-	Direct (+)	Simple(-)	-

### Direct vs. indirect

According to Hall (1976), high and low context culture can be distinguished from directness and indirectness. High context culture typically uses indirect comments, while low context culture accustomed to using direct comments.

Table 1. Direct and indirect comments in giving negative comments

No	Category	F	%
1	Direct	1	10%
2	Indirect	9	90%

Table 1. Direct and indirect comments in giving positive comments

No	Category	F	%
1	Direct	10	100%
2	Indirect	0	0%

From the table above, it is clearly shown that the number of respondents who gave indirect coments is much bigger than in direct ones. In other words, the difference



is significant. The following response represents the example of the negative evaluation by using indirect way.

- (1) M3: *Menurut saya, pidatonya bagus, Cuma menerangkannya kurang menjelaskan tentang point utamanya, jadi kitanya kurang ngerti, tapi bagus kok.*

According to the comment in (1), the respondents in providing his negative evaluation used long sentences to convey the direct point that the performer gave unclear topic. Indirect style was chosen by the respondents to give the negative evaluation. He tended to camouflage his actual intentions and carried out it in a softer tone of voice.

On the other hand, the second table shows that all the respondents in giving praise or positive evaluation used a direct style. Here's an example for the positive evaluation given.

- (2) R8: *Kalo menurut saya, tema-nya udah bagus, cuman vocabnya perlu dikembangkan lagi ya, banyak kok kalo mau cari vocabulary-nya dikamus.*

Based on the positive evaluation above the respondent revealed the short and direct comment..She gave the direct point of her evaluation that the theme is good.

So from the data of this study it can be concluded that the respondents tend to choose the indirect style when they will convey a negative evaluation, whereas when they give a positive evaluation, they will choose the direct way.

### Simple response vs. complex response

Simple responses consist of one illocution, while complex responses consist of two illocutions.

No	Category	F	%
1	Simple	0	0%
2	Complex	10	100%

All of the respondents chose to give complex responses which had two illocutions in the same time. The respondents tried to compliment and complain at the same time. Here is the example of the complex response given by one of the respondents.

- (3) R3: *Kalo menurut saya bagus, Cuma cara penyampaiannya kurang diperjelas ke intinya.*

According to that response, the respondents gave compliment by uttering “*Kalo menurut saya bagus*”, and directly gave complaint that the speaker did not deliver the speech clearly by stating “*Cuma cara penyampaiannya kurang diperjelas ke intinya*”

### Long term relationship orientation

At the end of the session, the researcher held informal interview with the respondents. The interview focused on finding the respondents’ intention in using their indirect and complex style when they delivered the evaluation on their friend’s impromptu speech. The following response represents their answers.

- (4) R3: *biar temen ngga sakit ati Ms. Hehe* (laughing)

(5) R1: *biar Nurhalimah lebih semangat lagi, jadi ngga down gitu, miss.*

The answers in (4) and (5) show that the respondents emphasized the interpersonal relationships between them and the speaker. They are concerned about how their responses would affect their friend's feeling and avoided conflict. According to Hall, these responses are collectivist behavior which prefers group harmony and consensus to individual achievement (Hall, 1976). They are part of the culture that is more-group orientation rather than individual focused. Moreover, the collectivists are less governed by reason than by feelings. An important goal of their responses' style is to maintain harmony.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, an effort has been made to investigate the typical responses in giving evaluation from high-low cultural context perspectives. From the data analysis above, it can be concluded that most of the students prefer to use indirect and complex responses in giving evaluation to the speakers' impromptu speech performance because they want to maintain good relationship and avoid conflict. To sum up, students' response in giving evaluation in the research site represents high context culture.

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