2. Hall’s Classification of Cultures

By Professor James Ellis

I. Pre-listening
1. Discussion
   a. How would you define culture?

   b. What are some unique features of Japanese culture?

   c. Is there any other culture that you know about deeply? Tell your group members about it? Refer to the Wikipedia entry on “Culture” to help you find points of comparison <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture>.

2. Reading
Prepare the reading and vocabulary sections for homework. You’ll be quizzed on this material next week.


Cultures are extraordinarily complex, much more so than TV sets, automobiles, or possibly even human physiology. So how does one go about learning the underlying structure of culture? Any of the basic cultural systems and subsystems can serve as a focus for observation. These include matters such as material culture, business institutions, marriage and the family, social organization, language, even the military (all armies bear the stamp of their culture), sex (I once knew a man who became fascinated with differences in blue movies), and the law. These activities and many more besides reflect and are reflected in culture…

In Japan, the over-all approach to life, institutions, governments and the law is a high-context one in which one has to know considerably more about what is going on at the covert level than in the West. It is very seldom in Japan that someone will correct you or explain things to you. You are supposed to know and they get quite upset when you don’t. Also, Japanese loyalties are rather concrete and circumscribed. You join a business firm and, in a larger sense, you belong to the Emperor. You owe each a debt that can never be repaid. Once a relationship is formed, loyalty is never questioned. What is more, you have no real identity unless you do belong. This does not mean that
there aren’t differences at all levels between people, ranging from the interpersonal to the national. It is just that differences are expressed and worked out differently. As in all high-context systems, the forms that are used are important. To misuse them is a communication in itself.

Context, in one sense, is just one of many ways of looking at things. Failure to take contexting differences into account, however, can cause problems for Americans living in Japan, and even at times inconvenience the sheltered tourist. High-context cultures, such as Japan, make greater distinctions between insiders and outsiders than low-context ones do. People raised in high-context systems expect more of others than do the participants in low-context systems, such as America. When talking about something that they have on their minds, a high-context individual will expect his interlocutor to know what’s bothering him, so that he doesn’t have to be specific. The result is that he will talk around and around the point, in effect putting all the pieces in place except the crucial one. Placing it properly -- this keystone -- is the role of his interlocutor. To do this for him is an insult and a violation of his individuality.

Also in high-context systems, people in places of authority are personally and truly -- not just in theory -- responsible for the actions of subordinates down to the lowest man. In low-context systems, responsibility is diffused throughout the system and difficult to pin down. Paradoxically, when something happens to a low-context system, everyone runs for cover and “the system” is supposed to protect its members. If a scapegoat is needed, the most plausible low-ranking scapegoat is chosen.

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Successful students use multi-color highlighting pens to underline key words and ideas in readings. Using a minimum of five colors, indicate the main definitions, distinctions, and items of evidence in the passage. Hopefully, you will be able to fill in the missing information below by referring to your underlined words and phrases.

**Key Definition**

Cultural systems that can be observed include:

* * *
* * *
* * *

**Key Distinction**

High-context culture: _____________________________
Low-context culture: _____________________________

Japan is a ___-context culture, whereas the U.S. is a ___-context culture.

**Evidence that Japan is a ___-context culture.**

* * * Evidence that the U.S. is a ___-context culture.
* * * * *
* * * * *
* * * * *
* * * * *
### 3. Vocabulary

Write definitions of these words, found in the pre-reading, and use each of them in a sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High-context</th>
<th>Low-context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scapegoat</td>
<td>Interlocutor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subordinate</td>
<td>Plausible</td>
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II. Note-taking
1. Cloze passage: Listen to the first section of the lecture. Fill in the missing words.

Usually, when we deal with __________ people, we deal with them as if we were all __________ of the same culture. However, it’s possible that people from different cultures have different, ____________, ingrained assumptions about the world regarding such important and basic ideas as ______________ relationships, time and personal __________. And basically this is the ________ of Edward Hall. Edward Hall is an anthropologist who spent a large part of his life studying American __________; their culture, their language. But he was different from a lot of other ____________ who just study one culture. He was interested rather in the _______ between cultures, how cultures __________. And basically he believes that cultures can be placed, or ________ rather, on a continuum ranging from what he called ________-context to low-context. I’ll define those terms later on. This talk is going to deal with the two __________ on the ____________: the high-context culture and the low-context culture. So I’m going to look at both of these in today’s __________.
2. a. First, cross out all *words* that do not contain the main idea of each sentence (for example, “the” and “a”)
   b. Next, cross out any words or phrases that are repeated.
   c. Then, cross out *sentences* that do not contain main ideas.
   d. Finally, reduce this paragraph to two sentences.

OK, to start with, a high-context culture is a culture in which the context of the message, and all…and you all understand context, context meaning surroundings, the context of the message or the action or an event, carries a large part of its meaning and significance. So what this means is that in a high-context culture, more attention is paid to what’s happening in and around the message or event than to the message itself. So more attention is paid to what’s going on around the words or the event than to the actual event or message. And you’ll get a better of…you’ll get a better idea of what this all means when I give you examples…OK?

3. Now, listen for the 3 subtopics the speaker intends to speak about in his lecture.

   ➔

   ➔

   ➔
4. Listen to the next section and look at the note-taking model below. It contains only a summary of the main ideas of the paragraph. As you listen, fill in the missing information.

Interpersonal relationships in high-context cultures
- Strong dependence on shared or built-in, preprogrammed information concerning a message or event.
  
  For example: In legal paperwork, people would trust ________________ rather than care about ________________.
  
  For example: When you ___________ money in a high-context culture, they might only say ____________________________.

- Also you might find there’s a strong dependence on ________________ rather than ________________.
  
  In other words, ________________ restrains people more than just ________________.
  
  For example: In a high-context culture, a person wouldn’t break the law because ____________________________________________.

- Another thing about interpersonal relationships is that there’s a ________________.
  
  They care more about ________________, and not so much about ________________.
  
  It could be demonstrated in _______________________.

Hall’s Classification of Cultures
5. Take notes on the following section.
   **Key words:** personal space (bubble), respect for privacy, body language

6. Summarize the next section in one sentence.

7. What is the attitude toward time in high-context cultures? Explain this with an example.
   **Key words:** polychronic, clock time
8. The speaker will sum up everything he has covered so far in his lecture. As he does so, fill in the blanks. [You may refer to the notes you’ve taken in previous sections, if necessary.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGH-CONTEXT CULTURES</th>
<th>LOW-CONTEXT CULTURES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Definition:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal relationships</td>
<td>Interpersonal relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td>Example:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal space</td>
<td>Personal space</td>
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<td>Example:</td>
<td>Example:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td>Example:</td>
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9. a. Listen to the ninth paragraph WITHOUT looking at the video screen and write down the twelve nationalities you hear.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. 
10. 
11. 
12. 

b. Please place the twelve nationalities on this continuum.

Extreme low-context cultures

Extreme high-context cultures

c. Now, watch this section again and check your answers.
10. Cloze: Listen to the final section of this lecture. Fill in the missing information.
So, basically, what all this is about is that Hall ________ that people need to be aware of their different assumptions about __________. And Hall also believes that this has all kinds of relevance no matter what you’re doing. If you’re in business ____________, if you’re in _________, interpersonal relations, if you’re just dealing with people from different cultures in any way, its going to _________ every part of your life because these assumptions that we make are so __________ that we don’t think about them. We __________ assume that everyone thinks the same way about time, place, personal relationships in the same way. But Hall says these things are so ________, they are actually very different, that we unconsciously learn these things. These things are based on culture. And Hall basically says that we think of…as mind…what we think of as mind, is really __________ culture. He’s of the belief that ________ is basically your culture, your culture’s _____________. OK, and he stresses the fact that in any multicultural situation these assumptions need to be taken into account for successful _____________.

III. True or False: If false, correct the sentence.
1. T / F Different cultures have similar ideas regarding interpersonal relationships, time, and personal space.
   ______________________________________________________________

2. T / F Edward Hall was interested in differences between cultures.
   ______________________________________________________________

3. T / F A high-context culture is a culture in which the message is given more attention than its context.
   ______________________________________________________________
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. T / F</strong></td>
<td>In a high-context culture, more attention is paid to what’s happening in and around the message.</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>5. T / F</strong></td>
<td>In a high-context culture, people prefer to have details written down rather than trust someone’s word.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6. T / F</strong></td>
<td>In a high-context culture, focus is placed on one’s personal networks.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7. T / F</strong></td>
<td>A high-context culture places emphasis on individuality.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8. T / F</strong></td>
<td>A high-context culture has less respect for the personal space bubble.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>9. T / F</strong></td>
<td>High-context cultures pay little attention to clock time.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10. T / F</strong></td>
<td>In a low-context culture the context of the message carries a large part of its meaning.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>11. T / F</strong></td>
<td>A low-context culture places more emphasis on group identification.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>12. T / F</strong></td>
<td>In a low-context culture, the concept of privacy is very important.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>13. T / F</strong></td>
<td>A monochronic sense of time means that there’s one standard of time for everything.</td>
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<td><strong>14. T / F</strong></td>
<td>The Japanese culture is a high-context culture.</td>
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IV. Multiple Choice

1. Edward Hall is
   a. an engineer
   b. a biologist
   c. an anthropologist
   d. a sociologist

2. In a high-context culture there is a strong dependence on
   a. legal restriction
   b. bureaucratic restrictions
   c. academic restrictions
   d. social restrictions

3. Who takes responsibility in a high-context culture company if something goes wrong?
   a. the head of the organization
   b. the individual who caused the problem
   c. the department
   d. the entire society

4. If someone from a low-context culture is jostled in a crowd or touched inadvertently, they would
   a. not worry about it
   b. feel their personal space had been violated
   c. hit the violator(s)
   d. behave rudely in return

5. A polychronic attitude towards time means
   a. there is no set standard of time
   b. that people, things, and events have their own time
   c. punctuality isn’t emphasized
   d. all of the above

6. In a low-context culture
   a. people stand close to each other when talking
   b. there’s a respect and a desire for privacy
   c. people pay close attention to body language
   d. time is considered relative
V. Vocabulary

1. Vocabulary Context
1. The work ethic was deeply ingrained in him.
2. The result of the experiment shook the basic assumptions of his theory.
3. He was quite unconscious of having offended them.
4. The results of the experiments showed striking differences between the experimental group and the control group.
5. All cultures fall somewhere along a continuum between those two extremes.
6. He shouldered the blame for everyone.
7. There was a network of people who worked together.
8. In some societies, what the group thinks restrains people.
9. People feel violated when they get too physically close to one another.
10. People are calling for reforms in our prison system.
11. Class structure is very rigid in some countries.
12. Two countries are linked by bonds of friendship.
13. In low-context cultures, the message, event, or action is seen as a separate entity.
14. The treaty was the result of long negotiations.
15. In some cultures, time is considered a commodity.
16. No one would take responsibility for the error. They all just passed the buck.

2. Match the vocabulary from the video with the appropriate answer on the left. Guess if you are not sure of an answer.

1. _____ ingrained  a. discussion leading to compromise
2. _____ assumption  b. line with extremes at each end
3. _____ unconscious  c. internalized
4. _____ striking  d. restrict/ hold back
5. _____ continuum  e. web
6. _____ to shoulder the blame  f. changes/ improvements
7. _____ network  g. item
8. _____ restrain  h. unaware
9. _____ to feel violated  i. feel attacked
10. _____ reforms  j. avoid taking responsibility
11. _____ rigid  k. noticeable/ remarkable
12. _____ bonds  l. firm/ strict/ unyielding
13. _____ entity  m. accept responsibility
14. _____ negotiation  n. connections
15. _____ commodity  o. goods
16. _____ to pass the buck  p. something taken for granted w/o proof
3. Write down any words you didn’t know. Use each word in a new sentence.

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VI. Outlining the lecture [Can be done for homework as a review exercise.]
Read the following sentences and underline key words. Then, listen to the lecture again and order the sentences as they occur in the lecture. Check your answers with a partner.

_____ In a high-context culture there is a “polychronic” attitude towards time, which means people, things, and events have their own time.

_____ In a low-context culture there is a “monochronic” sense of time, which means one standard time.

_____ Hall stressed that people need to be aware of the different unconscious assumptions about reality that are based on culture.

_____ A high-context culture is a culture where the context of the message carries a large part of its meaning.

_____ According to Hall’s classification of cultures, Swiss-Germans come at the low end of the continuum. The Greeks, Arabs and the Japanese are classified as high-context cultures.

_____ In a low-context culture people pay more attention to the event than the context which surrounds the event.

_____ Edward Hall is an anthropologist, who studies American Indians. He believes that cultures can be placed on a continuum ranging from low-context cultures to high-context cultures.

_____ In a high-context culture there is a greater dependency on group thinking and less respect for privacy and personal space.

_____ There is more emphasis on individuality and the concept of privacy is very important in low-context cultures.

_____ There is a strong dependence on shared information in a high-context culture as well as strong feelings of responsibility for the group.
VII. Post-listening

1. Write a summary of the talk you have just heard. Include facts about…
   * high- and low-context cultures
   * interpersonal relationships
   * personal space
   * time

2. When lecturers move from one topic to another, verbal and non-verbal cues may be used (for example, they might say “Moving to the next...” or they may make a relatively long pause). List ones that appear in this lecture.

3. Discussion
   a. Can you think of any serious international or racial problems caused by differences between cultures? What do you think we can do to prevent them?

   b. Look at the speaker’s examples of interpersonal relationships, personal space and time. Which of them do you think apply to Japanese culture and which of them don’t? Please justify your answers using your personal examples.
Hall’s Classification of Cultures