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Cultural specificity of English-language corporate discourse (based on job interviews)

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Abstract

This thesis explores how social norms are linguistically expressed and interpreted in job interviews conducted in American English, with a particular focus on verbal and pragmatic strategies that influence the perception of professionalism, politeness, and appropriateness. The research investigates both fictional representations and professional discourse to identify the language features that contribute to effective communication in high-stakes interview settings.

The theoretical framework is grounded in Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson), Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (limited to the U.S. context), and Speech Act Theory. These approaches inform the linguistic analysis of selected interview scenes from three U.S. films and television series—*The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), *The Intern* (2015), and *Suits* (2011–2019). Through qualitative content and discourse analysis, the study examines how job applicants in these media texts use specific vocabulary choices, grammatical structures (such as modals and conditionals), and speech acts (such as requests, self-promotion, and refusals) to navigate power relations and social expectations.

In addition, the thesis draws on professional hiring guidelines and HR communication practices from U.S. sources to illustrate how linguistic strategies are expected to function in real-world interviews. Rather than conducting a direct comparison, the study uses these materials to contextualize and support the analysis of media examples.

The findings highlight effective language strategies in U.S. interviews, offering insights for job seekers and HR professionals while emphasizing pragmatics and cultural awareness in applied linguistics.

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Introduction

In an increasingly global job market, the ability to communicate effectively in professional contexts is a crucial skill, particularly during job interviews, which are often high-pressure situations where language, cultural expectations, and social norms intersect. For many international job seekers, success in English-language interviews depends not only on linguistic competence but also on understanding the implicit norms that shape how professionalism, politeness, and competence are communicated. This study investigates how such social norms are realized through language in U.S.-based job interviews, drawing on both fictional portrayals and real-world data to identify key communicative strategies that contribute to interview success.

The **subject** of this research is the expression of social norms through language in job interviews conducted in American English.

The **object** of the research is the system of linguistic strategies—verbal, grammatical, and pragmatic—used in U.S.-based job interviews to convey politeness, professionalism, and social appropriateness.

The **research methods** include discourse and qualitative content analysis, grounded in key frameworks like Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson), Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions (American context), Speech Act Theory, and Pragmatics, focusing on how language reflects social norms in interviews. A comparative analysis of media portrayals and HR guidelines is also conducted to highlight the alignment or divergence with real-world practices.

The research material consists of selected job interview scenes from three U.S.-produced films and television series—*The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), *The Intern* (2015), and *Suits* (2011–2019)—as well as real-world resources such as HR

guidelines from SHRM (2020), Glassdoor (2021), and academic literature on professional communication.

The **scientific novelty** of this research lies in its integration of linguistic theory with media and professional discourse to reveal how social norms function in U.S. job interview communication. While much research addresses cross-cultural interviews in general, this thesis uniquely focuses on the representation and realization of these norms in American English contexts using multimodal and applied sources.

The **scientific significance** of the research is its contribution to applied linguistics and professional communication by identifying specific linguistic strategies that international job seekers can use to enhance their interview performance in American settings. The findings may help HR professionals in multicultural environments understand how language reflects candidate competence and cultural alignment.

The **structure** of the thesis is as follows:

- **Chapter 1** lays the theoretical groundwork, defining social norms and explaining the key linguistic theories used in the analysis.
- **Chapter 2** examines how social norms are represented in U.S.-based job interviews as depicted in selected media sources, focusing on vocabulary, grammar, speech acts, and pragmatic cues.
- **Chapter 3** applies these findings to real-life interview contexts, analyzing HR guidelines and hiring practices, and provides practical implications for job seekers. The study concludes with a synthesis of the findings and recommendations for effective communication strategies in American job interviews.

Chapter1: Social norms and theories in cross-cultural communication

1.1 Defining Social Norms in Communication

Social norms are the unwritten rules that guide behavior, especially in communication. These norms dictate how individuals interact, shaping both verbal and non-verbal communication (Hofstede, 2001). They are crucial for determining what behaviors are acceptable or not within specific contexts (Hall, 1976). When individuals from different cultures interact, these norms play a critical role in shaping the expectations and understanding of what constitutes appropriate communication (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

Social norms are often unconscious and deeply embedded in the cultural fabric (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). As Geber and Hefner (2019) argue, norms are communicative phenomena—they are learned, maintained, and sometimes altered through communication processes. The unspoken rules govern not just language but also the social rituals and behaviors surrounding it (Chung & Rimal, 2016). In this context, norms influence the formality of language, how to express agreement or disagreement, and even the topics considered appropriate for conversation.

In many cultures, direct communication is valued, such as in individualistic societies (Hofstede, 2001), while in more collectivist cultures, indirectness is preferred to preserve harmony (Scollon et al., 2012). Norms also regulate the content of communication—what is appropriate to discuss and how it should be addressed, often influenced by gender roles or hierarchical expectations (Tannen, 2001). For example, in Western workplaces, casual language and first-name usage are norms once familiarity is established, whereas in Asian cultures, the use of honorifics and last names reflects respect for authority (Hall, 1976).

These norms ensure smooth interactions, especially in formal settings like job interviews, where adherence to cultural norms can determine perceptions of professionalism (Kádár & Haugh, 2013). Violating these norms can lead to misunderstandings or negative evaluations, such as being perceived as culturally unaware or disrespectful (Geber & Hefner, 2019).

The Role of Social Norms in Communication

Social norms play an essential role in guiding communication by providing a framework for understanding what is expected in conversations (Scollon et al., 2012). These norms, often implicit, are not questioned until disrupted, either within or across cultures. Hofstede (2001) argues that social norms are deeply linked with cultural values, varying significantly across countries. In individualistic cultures like the U.S., communication is more direct and personal, reflecting values of autonomy. In contrast, collectivist cultures emphasize harmony, hierarchy, and indirectness in communication (Hofstede, 2001).

These norms function not only as tools for maintaining social order but also as mechanisms for managing interpersonal relationships, especially in professional settings where adherence to specific norms is crucial (Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to Lapinski and Rimal (2005), norms also regulate behavior by setting expectations for politeness, respect, and appropriate conduct.

Verbal Norms in Communication

Verbal norms are crucial in communication, as they guide how language is used across different cultures. In Western cultures, for instance, directness and clarity are highly valued (Hofstede, 2001). In more formal settings, like job interviews, the expectation is to articulate thoughts clearly and confidently. Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of "face" explains how individuals navigate the social value placed

on their public self-image. Politeness strategies, such as hedging or indirect speech, are used to maintain face, especially in cultures where direct confrontation is avoided (Kádár & Haugh, 2013).

In Asian cultures, indirect communication and politeness are key norms, often reflected in the use of honorifics and formal titles (Hall, 1976). In these settings, being overly direct may be seen as impolite or confrontational. Geber and Hefner (2019) argue that language itself becomes a vehicle for navigating social hierarchies and expectations of respect.

Non-Verbal Norms in Communication

Non-verbal communication, encompassing gestures, facial expressions, posture, and eye contact, plays a critical role in conveying messages. These forms of communication are governed by cultural norms, with differences across societies in their interpretation and significance (Scollon et al., 2012). For instance, eye contact is seen as a sign of confidence in Western cultures, while in some Asian societies, too much eye contact can be interpreted as disrespectful (Hofstede, 2001). Similarly, gestures like handshakes or bows convey respect and hierarchy differently across cultures (Hall, 1976).

Tannen (2001) highlights that non-verbal cues are often gendered; women may use more supportive body language to signal empathy, while men may adopt more dominant postures. These differences in body language reflect broader societal norms and expectations about gender roles. Kádár and Haugh (2013) emphasize that non-verbal communication is as critical as verbal communication, particularly in high-stakes environments such as job interviews, where body language can significantly impact perceptions of competence.

Intersections Between Verbal and Non-Verbal Norms

Verbal and non-verbal norms are interconnected and must align for effective communication. When they mismatch, the message can become unclear or misinterpreted (Scollon et al., 2012). As Geber and Hefner (2019) note, communicators must be attuned to both verbal and non-verbal cues, especially in intercultural contexts, where different cultures prioritize one form of communication over the other. In high-context cultures, such as Japan, non-verbal cues like silence or body language carry more weight than the spoken word, while in low-context cultures, such as the U.S., verbal clarity is emphasized (Hall, 1976).

Lapinski and Rimal (2005) discuss the role of social norms in influencing individuals' behaviors and attitudes in communication. Understanding the cultural context of both verbal and non-verbal norms is essential for successful intercultural communication, as misinterpretations can lead to conflict or misunderstanding (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The digital age further complicates this, as non-verbal cues are often minimized in digital communication, with people using new forms of expression like emojis or punctuation to compensate (Derks et al., 2008).

Moreover, awareness of how these norms are expressed in specific contexts—such as interviews, negotiations, or presentations—can help individuals adapt their communicative style. Training in both verbal precision and non-verbal awareness is increasingly recognized as a key component of professional development, particularly in globalized workplaces.

So, effective intercultural communication depends on understanding the complex intersection of verbal and non-verbal norms. Sensitivity to these cultural nuances fosters mutual respect and promotes smooth interactions, whether in professional settings, everyday communication, or intercultural exchanges (Gudykunst, 2012).

1.2 Theoretical Approaches to Social Norms and Communication

Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson) – Positive/Negative Face and Politeness Strategies

In intercultural communication, understanding the nuances of politeness is essential, particularly regarding how individuals manage "face" — the social value one claims in interactions. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing face management and the strategies employed to mitigate face threats during communication. Central to their theory are the concepts of **positive face** and **negative face**.

Recent scholarship has extended the scope of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory by addressing its applicability to globalized, multicultural, and digital communication contexts. Fathi (2024), for instance, revisits the theory and argues that the traditional binary of positive and negative face must be viewed more fluidly in diverse intercultural environments. This is particularly relevant in modern job interviews where the negotiation of identity and power is shaped by both cultural expectations and digital modes of interaction.

Positive face refers to the desire for approval, acceptance, and respect from others. For instance, a candidate in a job interview might express admiration for a company's values to foster rapport and align with the interviewer's expectations. **Negative face**, on the other hand, is the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. A candidate feeling pressured by an intrusive question may experience a threat to their negative face. The theory suggests that politeness strategies, such as **bald on-record**, **positive politeness**, **negative politeness**, and **off-record** strategies, help manage these face threats in various contexts.

- **Bald on-record:** Direct and unambiguous communication, used in close relationships (Tannen, 2001).
- **Positive politeness:** Strategies to enhance the listener's positive face by fostering solidarity and shared interests (Scollon, Scollon, & Jones, 2012).
- **Negative politeness:** Strategies that show respect for the listener's autonomy, such as hedging or apologizing (Brown & Levinson, 1987).
- **Off-record:** Indirect communication that allows for multiple interpretations, avoiding direct confrontation (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The application of these strategies depends on cultural norms and social dynamics. For example, collectivist cultures (e.g., Japan) prioritize positive face, while individualistic cultures (e.g., the U.S.) focus more on preserving negative face (Hofstede, 2001).

Cross-Cultural Considerations in Politeness

Cultural values significantly influence how politeness strategies are used and interpreted. Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, including **power distance** and **individualism vs. collectivism**, provide valuable insight into these differences. In high power distance cultures, like many Asian countries, greater deference to authority is expected, often necessitating the use of negative politeness. Conversely, in low power distance cultures, like the U.S., direct communication (bald on-record) may be more acceptable.

Similarly, the distinction between individualism and collectivism also shapes communication strategies. Individualistic cultures value personal autonomy, and self-promotion is often encouraged in job interviews (Hofstede, 2001). In contrast, collectivist cultures emphasize group harmony and may discourage overt self-

promotion in favor of showing how one contributes to collective success (Scollon et al., 2012).

Cultural differences in politeness strategies can also be linked to underlying value hierarchies. Schwartz and Bardi (2001) propose that while cultures share common values, the priority placed on them differs across societies. For instance, societies that emphasize conformity, benevolence, or tradition are more likely to favor indirectness and deference, aligning with negative politeness norms. This framework complements Hofstede's dimensions by offering a motivational basis for why certain communication styles dominate in specific cultures.

Gender and Politeness in Workplace Communication

Gender also influences politeness strategies, particularly in professional settings. Tannen (2001) observes that women tend to use positive politeness more frequently to build connections and rapport, while men may rely on negative politeness or even bald on-record strategies to assert autonomy. In intercultural job interviews, gendered communication styles can add complexity, especially when interviewers and candidates come from different cultural and gendered backgrounds (Tannen, 2001).

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions – Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory remains pivotal for understanding intercultural communication, particularly in workplace settings such as job interviews. The **power distance** dimension, which measures the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept unequal power distribution, plays a critical role in shaping communication dynamics (Hofstede, 2001).

In cultures with high power distance, like Japan and China, there is an expectation of formal communication and deference to authority in job interviews. In contrast, cultures with low power distance, such as the U.S. and Scandinavian countries, encourage more egalitarian and direct communication, where candidates assert their qualifications and engage in self-promotion (Tannen, 2001).

The **individualism vs. collectivism** dimension further impacts job interview communication. In individualistic cultures, candidates often focus on self-promotion, highlighting personal achievements (Hofstede, 2001). In collectivist cultures, candidates may downplay individual success and instead focus on how their skills benefit the group (Scollon et al., 2012).

While Hofstede's (2001) work has laid the foundation for understanding cultural dimensions, Schimmack, Oishi, and Diener (2005) emphasize that individualism is a valid and meaningful cultural construct. This perspective supports the notion that self-promotion and assertiveness in job interviews—hallmarks of individualistic communication—are closely tied to cultural values of independence and self-expression.

Implications for Intercultural Communication in Job Interviews

The interplay of power distance and individualism vs. collectivism creates challenges in intercultural communication during job interviews. Misalignments between these cultural dimensions can lead to misinterpretations. For example, an interviewee from a high power distance culture may hesitate to assert themselves, which could be perceived by an interviewer from a low power distance culture as a lack of confidence (Kádár & Haugh, 2013). Similarly, an individualistic interviewee might emphasize personal achievements, which may be seen as inappropriate by a collectivist interviewer who values group-oriented contributions.

Understanding Hofstede's dimensions helps mitigate such misunderstandings by allowing candidates and interviewers to adjust their communication strategies based on cultural expectations, thus fostering more effective intercultural communication (Kádár & Haugh, 2013).

Speech Act Theory & Pragmatic Norms in Interviews

Speech Act Theory, developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), focuses on how language performs actions rather than merely conveying information. In job interviews, candidates perform a variety of speech acts, such as making requests, issuing commands, or offering apologies, all of which are influenced by cultural norms and politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Performative language in job interviews often shapes the dynamics of self-presentation. A candidate's statement, such as "I am the best candidate for this position," is not just a factual assertion but an act of self-promotion that conveys confidence and competence. Similarly, indirect speech acts, such as "I hope my qualifications meet your needs," may be employed to maintain politeness and deference, especially in cultures with high power distance (Scollon et al., 2012).

The concept of **illocutionary acts**, which refers to the intended actions behind utterances, is particularly relevant in job interviews. These acts can range from assertives (stating qualifications) to commissives (promising contributions) (Searle, 1969). Understanding the cultural context of these acts is essential for both interviewees and interviewers, as it shapes how statements are interpreted.

Politeness strategies in job interviews help manage face threats (positive or negative), ensuring that candidates present themselves effectively without violating social norms. Depending on the culture, candidates may employ direct strategies,

such as bald on-record statements, or indirect strategies, such as hedging, to navigate the interview (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Pragmatic Norms in Job Interviews

Pragmatics, which examines language in context, is vital in understanding how candidates navigate job interviews. Cultural norms shape how candidates use language to align with interview expectations. For instance, in cultures with high power distance, candidates may use indirect language to show deference, while those from low power distance cultures might be more direct in expressing their qualifications (Kádár & Haugh, 2013).

Incorporating Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory can significantly enhance the analysis of interview speech acts, as it explains how politeness is used to manage "face"—the positive social value a person claims in a given interaction. Their framework suggests that interviewees employ politeness strategies to mitigate potential threats to both positive face (the desire to be liked and respected) and negative face (the desire for autonomy). The use of these strategies varies by culture, highlighting the importance of context. For example, in cultures with low power distance, candidates may opt for direct strategies, such as assertively stating their competence, while in high power distance cultures, more indirect and humble approaches are preferred to demonstrate respect for authority.

Additionally, understanding the pragmatic norms that underpin these strategies is crucial in job interviews. Pragmatics concerns how language is used in context, and these norms shape how candidates perform their roles and pursue their goals—securing the job. For instance, an interviewee's ability to request clarification, offer rebuttals, or acknowledge weaknesses can significantly impact how their competence and likeability are perceived.

The tension between directness and indirectness in interview discourse is another important aspect to consider. In many Western cultures, directness is associated with confidence and clarity. Interviewees who give clear, assertive answers, such as confidently claiming their project management skills, are seen as self-assured and competent. In contrast, in collectivist or high power distance cultures, such directness may be viewed as disrespectful or overly self-promotional. Instead, these interviewees might prefer to use more indirect speech acts, where their responses are softened to avoid appearing arrogant or overly confident. This indirectness functions as a face-saving strategy, maintaining harmony and showing respect for authority.

Scollon et al. (2012) discuss how the balance between directness and indirectness is influenced by cultural expectations and norms. In some cultures, indirectness is necessary to avoid conflict and maintain politeness, while in others, it may be seen as evasive. Therefore, understanding the cultural context of an interview is vital to avoid misunderstandings. In high power distance cultures, indirectness might be misinterpreted as a lack of confidence in low power distance settings, where directness is expected.

Finally, integrating Speech Act Theory into the analysis of job interviews provides a valuable framework for understanding the role of language in social roles and relationships. Hall (1976) emphasizes how deeply embedded cultural values influence communication styles, with collectivist cultures often favoring more formal and indirect language. Conversely, individualistic cultures may value directness and efficiency. This cultural variation underscores the importance of recognizing and adapting to different pragmatic norms to avoid misinterpretations in cross-cultural interactions. Kádár and Haugh (2013) argue that speech acts are not merely linguistic tools but are deeply connected to social relationships and cultural

norms, which are essential for successful intercultural communication in professional settings.

1.3 Communication in Specific Social Contexts: Formal vs. Informal Workplace Communication

Effective communication is essential for the success of any organization, and its form varies significantly depending on the social context. A key distinction in workplace communication is the difference between formal and informal communication, both of which adhere to different cultural and organizational norms, influencing linguistic strategies and interpersonal dynamics.

Formal Communication: Characteristics and Contexts

Formal communication in the workplace is structured and follows established protocols, particularly in hierarchical settings. It often involves interactions with superiors, clients, and other formal relationships, where the language used is typically less personal and more focused on clarity, professionalism, and respect. Examples of formal communication include meetings, official correspondence, job interviews, and interactions with superiors (Hofstede, 2001).

In high-context cultures, such as East Asia, formal communication is essential for maintaining social hierarchy. For instance, the use of honorifics and formal speech patterns in Japan, China, and Korea helps reinforce status and maintain social harmony (Scollon, Scollon, & Jones, 2012). Hofstede's concept of power distance also applies here, as cultures with a high power distance often use formal language to uphold authority. In these contexts, employees are expected to use formal language when addressing superiors, signaling respect for hierarchical structures (Hofstede, 2001).

Organizational policies, industry norms, and legal frameworks also regulate formal communication. For instance, in formal email exchanges, employees are expected to use polite language such as “Dear Sir/Madam” and avoid colloquial expressions. This ensures professionalism and adherence to social expectations in the workplace.

Informal Communication: Characteristics and Contexts

Conversely, informal workplace communication is more relaxed and personal. This type of communication is typically found among peers or colleagues of equal status, allowing for greater flexibility, humor, and personal expression. Informal communication often occurs in casual settings like break rooms, lunch breaks, or team meetings (Tannen, 2001). It fosters camaraderie and group cohesion, enabling employees to express themselves more freely and contribute ideas without the constraints of status or power dynamics.

However, informal communication is not without its own set of social norms and expectations. In high-power distance cultures, informal communication may be limited or even discouraged in professional settings, as maintaining formality is expected, even in peer-to-peer interactions (Hofstede, 2001). On the other hand, in low-power distance cultures, informal communication is more common, often encouraged to promote collaboration and open dialogue.

In cultures that emphasize individualism, informal communication is typically seen as an opportunity to build personal relationships. In collectivist cultures, however, where respect for authority and group harmony are more important, informal communication may be more reserved or limited to certain contexts (Scollon et al., 2012). This means that humor, colloquial expressions, and casual interactions must be understood within their cultural context to avoid misinterpretations (Tannen, 2001).

The Balance Between Formal and Informal Communication

In many workplaces, formal and informal communication coexist, and the lines between the two are often blurred. Employees may switch between formal and informal styles depending on the context, people involved, and purpose of the interaction. This flexibility is particularly evident in multinational organizations, where employees from diverse cultural backgrounds must navigate different communication norms.

Effective communication in professional settings is shaped by the norms and expectations of the workplace, which can vary significantly across cultures. Johnson, Donohue, Atkin, and Johnson (1994) explore the distinction between formal and informal communication channels, noting that informal communication often plays a key role in building relationships and fostering collaboration. In many workplaces, informal channels provide employees with a sense of community and a space to share ideas and feedback that might not be addressed in formal settings (Whittaker, Frohlich, & Daly-Jones, 1994). These informal exchanges are essential in understanding group dynamics, as they can influence decision-making processes and organizational culture.

According to Kádár and Haugh (2013), successful communication in such multicultural contexts requires intercultural sensitivity and awareness. Employees must understand when and how to switch between formal and informal communication styles and be aware of the consequences that might arise from using one over the other. Misinterpretations can occur if informal communication is used in inappropriate contexts, such as when addressing superiors or clients from cultures that value formality.

Understanding when to use formal versus informal communication is crucial for maintaining professional relationships and ensuring effective collaboration. This becomes especially important in intercultural communication, where misreadings of formality and informality can lead to breakdowns in communication.

Norms of Behavior and Language Use in Different Cultures

Cultural expectations strongly influence communication during job interviews, from attire and formality to conversational structure. In some cultures, job interviews are highly formal, requiring candidates to dress conservatively, use formal language, and maintain a reserved demeanor. In contrast, other cultures may value personal expression and informal dialogue, where candidates are encouraged to be more relaxed in their approach.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory offers insights into how language is used in interviews. They argue that people employ politeness strategies to protect both their own and others' "face" (self-esteem). These strategies include directness, hedging, and indirect speech. Cultures with high-context communication, like those in East Asia, often use indirect speech to maintain respect and avoid appearing overly assertive, while low-context cultures such as the United States value directness and self-promotion (Scollon et al., 2012).

Directness and Self-Promotion in Interviews

In individualistic cultures like the United States and Australia, self-promotion and directness are viewed as essential traits in job interviews. Candidates are expected to assert their achievements and clearly demonstrate why they are the best fit for the role. Confidence in one's abilities is seen as a strength in these cultures, where directness is often celebrated (Tannen, 2001).

On the other hand, in collectivist cultures like those in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, modesty and indirectness are preferred. Candidates in these cultures may avoid self-promotion and instead focus on their ability to work well within a team. This behavior reflects the cultural emphasis on humility and group cohesion (Scollon, Scollon, & Jones, 2012).

Power Distance and Hierarchical Structures

Power distance, a concept introduced by Hofstede (2001), refers to the degree to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect an unequal distribution of power. In high power distance cultures, like Japan and many Arab nations, candidates in job interviews typically adopt a formal and deferential approach, showing respect for the authority of the interviewer. In contrast, low power distance cultures, such as those in the United States and Scandinavian countries, tend to promote equality and informality in interviews, encouraging candidates to engage in open, conversational exchanges.

These cultural differences in power distance can lead to misunderstandings. For example, a candidate from a high power distance culture may appear overly deferential or reserved, which could be misinterpreted by an interviewer from a low power distance culture as a lack of initiative or confidence (Hofstede, 2001).

Communication Styles: Verbal and Non-Verbal Behaviors

Cultural variation also influences both verbal and non-verbal communication in job interviews. In individualistic cultures, candidates are expected to speak directly and confidently about their achievements. In contrast, in collectivist cultures, non-verbal cues such as body language and tone of voice often convey respect and cooperation (Scollon et al., 2012).

This divergence in communication styles can lead to confusion. For example, a candidate from a high-context culture might rely on silence or indirect responses to show respect, while an interviewer from a low-context culture might interpret this as discomfort or lack of engagement. These differences highlight the importance of cultural awareness in interview settings, as both verbal and non-verbal cues play a significant role in communication.

Cross-Cultural Challenges in the Hiring Process

Misunderstandings can arise when interviewers are unaware of the cultural differences influencing communication behaviors. For instance, a candidate from a collectivist culture may appear evasive in a job interview, while an interviewer from an individualistic culture may question the candidate's qualifications. Similarly, an interviewee from a high power distance culture may appear overly deferential, which could be misread as a lack of self-confidence (Lim, Winter, & Chan, 2006).

Cross-cultural differences further complicate workplace communication, especially in job interviews. Manroop, Boekhorst, and Harrison (2013) highlight how different cultural contexts shape interview expectations and outcomes. For example, in high-context cultures, non-verbal cues and subtle references are often valued more than direct statements, which can lead to misunderstandings when the interviewer comes from a low-context culture, where explicit communication is prioritized. This is particularly evident in interviews, where candidates from different cultures may communicate their qualifications and competencies in culturally specific ways.

Such challenges emphasize the need for cultural competence in the hiring process. Interviewers who are trained in intercultural communication can better navigate these differences, ensuring more informed and accurate hiring decisions (Manroop, Boekhorst, & Harrison, 2013).

In examining linguistic norms, Schrott (2020) emphasizes that norms of politeness, formality, and directness in language use are deeply influenced by cultural traditions. Understanding these norms is crucial not only for effective communication but also for fostering inclusive environments that respect diverse linguistic practices in the workplace.

How Norms Are Realized Through Language

Language plays a crucial role in enacting, reinforcing, and negotiating cultural norms. In the workplace, language reflects deeply ingrained social values and expectations. Cultural scripts—shared patterns of thinking, speaking, and interacting—guide how language is used in different contexts (Hall, 1976). These scripts shape the expectations of what constitutes appropriate language in various situations, including job interviews.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory suggests that the use of linguistic strategies—such as indirectness, hedging, and politeness markers—varies according to cultural norms. For example, in high power distance cultures, employees may use deference and honorifics when addressing superiors, while in low power distance cultures, informal communication is more common, even in hierarchical settings.

Cultural Scripts and Language Use

Cultural scripts—specific ways of thinking, speaking, and interacting—shape language use. Hall (1976) distinguished high-context cultures (e.g., Japan, China), where communication relies on implicit messages and shared knowledge, from low-context cultures (e.g., Germany, the U.S.), where direct, explicit speech is valued. These differences influence workplace communication, as job applicants from high-context cultures may avoid overt self-promotion, using tone and deference to communicate competence, while low-context candidates are likely to assert their

achievements directly. Such linguistic patterns reflect deeper social values like individualism versus collectivism or equality versus hierarchy (Scollon et al., 2012).

Politeness Strategies and Social Expectations

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory explains how speakers manage "face"—their public self-image—using strategies like directness, hedging, honorifics, and indirect requests. These strategies vary by culture. In high-power-distance cultures (Hofstede, 2001), hierarchical relationships are marked by formal address and indirect speech, while in low-power-distance cultures, more direct and egalitarian communication prevails. Kádár and Haugh (2013) argue that politeness is culturally constructed; for example, silence in East Asia may signal respect, but in North America, it can imply discomfort.

Gendered Language and Norm Performance

Tannen (2001) explored how gender shapes communication in professional settings. Women tend to use language that fosters collaboration, while men often adopt more assertive speech. These patterns, learned through socialization, affect how language is perceived in the workplace. In some cultures, women who use assertive language may be seen as aggressive, while men who employ collaborative speech might be seen as weak. Thus, language norms are intertwined with identity factors like gender and age.

Dynamic Realization of Norms in Global Contexts

In today's globalized workplace, linguistic norms are continuously negotiated across cultural boundaries. Even within multinational organizations, employees bring their unique cultural expectations into communication practices, leading to potential misunderstandings. For example, a manager might expect brief, bullet-point

responses, while an employee from a high-context culture may prefer to provide a more detailed, narrative explanation (Scollon et al., 2012).

These differences highlight the importance of communicative competence in multicultural settings. Understanding and adapting to cultural norms is key to effective communication. Professionals who are aware of their own cultural values and sensitive to those of others can better navigate the complexities of cross-cultural interactions (Hofstede, 2001).

Conclusion to chapter 1

This chapter has explored the intricate ways in which cultural norms and communication styles influence job interview discourse, particularly through the lenses of directness and indirectness, speech act theory, power distance, and the dynamics of formal and informal communication. By examining these factors, it is clear that effective communication in interviews is not only a matter of linguistic proficiency but also a matter of cultural understanding. Job interviews, often viewed as straightforward processes, are deeply shaped by cultural expectations and norms that influence both the content and the form of the interaction.

The tension between directness and indirectness in job interviews is a critical area of focus. In individualistic cultures, directness is often valued as a sign of confidence and clarity, with candidates expected to assert their qualifications and achievements openly. In contrast, collectivist cultures prioritize indirectness and humility, where self-promotion is often seen as impolite or boastful. This cultural divide underscores the importance of understanding how different cultures negotiate self-presentation and politeness strategies. Interviewees from high power distance cultures may adopt formal speech patterns and more reserved body language to show respect for authority, while candidates from low power distance cultures might favor a more casual, egalitarian approach.

Furthermore, cultural scripts play a significant role in shaping the way interviewees respond to questions and structure their answers. High-context cultures, which rely heavily on shared background knowledge and implicit communication, may lead candidates to offer more nuanced, deferential responses. In contrast, low-context cultures value explicitness and directness, expecting candidates to confidently highlight their skills and qualifications. This difference in communication style can

lead to misunderstandings if interviewers are not attuned to these cultural distinctions.

Power distance also influences how candidates approach job interviews. In high power distance cultures, where hierarchical relationships are highly respected, candidates often adopt a deferential stance, emphasizing respect and conformity. Meanwhile, in low power distance cultures, interviewers may value egalitarianism and expect candidates to demonstrate initiative and assertiveness. Understanding the concept of power distance is crucial for interviewers, as misinterpretations of deference or assertiveness can skew perceptions of a candidate's suitability.

Lastly, the discussion of formality in both verbal and non-verbal communication highlights the varying expectations across cultures regarding dress, body language, and tone. High power distance cultures may require more formal attire and communication styles to reflect respect for authority, while individualistic and low power distance cultures may tolerate more casual or flexible approaches. Recognizing these variations ensures that interviews are conducted with sensitivity to the cultural context, preventing potential missteps in the hiring process.

Chapter2: Social Norms in Job Interviews – American films

2.1 Linguistic Representation of Social Norms in Job Interviews

This section analyzes job interview scenarios in Western media, focusing on films and TV series that authentically portray the interview process and reflect social norms. The selected works—*The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), *Suits* (2011–2019), and *The Intern* (2015)—depict American workplace culture, interview expectations, and identity negotiation in professional settings, highlighting the broader societal norms that influence workplace communication.

In job interviews, linguistic choices such as **formal/informal vocabulary**, **grammar**, and **turn-taking structures** help to reflect the social dynamics and expectations in these professional contexts. These aspects not only convey politeness and professionalism but also shape the power relationships between interviewers and candidates.

One example from *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006) illustrates the **use of formal language** to create an impression of professionalism and respect. Chris Gardner, during his interview, says: “I’m not looking for a job, I’m looking for a career.” Here, the vocabulary is more formal and deliberate. The use of the word “career” instead of “job” signals a higher level of commitment and ambition. This linguistic choice aligns with the social norm of presenting oneself as a dedicated and goal-oriented individual, which is highly valued in professional settings (Goleman, 1995). It also reflects the notion of **self-promotion** through language, a common feature in job interviews where candidates aim to display their suitability for the role.

Furthermore, Chris’s statement utilizes **hedging** to soften the potential imposition of his request. Instead of directly demanding a job, he positions himself as a candidate with a more **strategic** vision. The phrase “I’m not looking for a job” acts as a form

of **modality**, indicating a softer approach to asserting his ambitions. This linguistic strategy aligns with **Politeness Theory** (Brown & Levinson, 1987), where politeness is achieved by mitigating directness and thus reducing the risk of imposing on the interviewer's face.

In *Suits* (2011-2019), Harvey Specter's communication style contrasts sharply with Chris Gardner's. In one scene, Harvey asserts: "I don't answer questions. I ask the questions." The **imperative form** of "I ask" is a direct command, which reflects Harvey's high-status position and his desire to maintain control over the interaction. This is a prime example of how **imperatives** and **direct speech acts** reflect power dynamics in hierarchical organizations. According to **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions** (2001), this type of communication is typical in cultures with high **power distance**, where individuals in higher positions often exhibit directness and authority in their speech.

This sentence also lacks any form of **hedging**, which would soften the impact of such a statement. Harvey's choice to forgo hedging and instead use a firm, direct statement is an indication of confidence and authority, emphasizing the **assertiveness** valued in corporate culture. In such professional settings, the lack of hedging and the use of imperatives like this can be seen as a linguistic strategy to establish dominance and control.

Similarly, in *The Intern* (2015), the language used by Jules Ostin in her interactions with Ben Whittaker reflects a more **egalitarian** tone. When she says, "I'm not here to be your boss, I'm here to be your colleague," the choice of **informal language** reflects a more relaxed and collaborative approach to communication. The use of "I'm here to be your colleague" rather than "I am your boss" signals a **low power distance** culture, as emphasized by **Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions**. It also

reveals Jules's effort to create an environment of mutual respect, where the role of hierarchy is downplayed in favor of fostering collaboration.

Moreover, Jules's use of **conditional structures** in the sentence "I'm not here to be your boss" introduces a **softening element**, providing a non-imposing tone that fosters rapport and trust. This is a key aspect of effective workplace communication, as seen in **Pragmatic Norms**, where the manner in which an individual communicates can affect the interpersonal relationship (Varner & Beamer, 2010).

Grammar also plays a significant role in reflecting the dynamics of power in these job interview scenes. For instance, the use of **modals** in *The Pursuit of Happyness* helps express Chris's desire to maintain politeness while negotiating his identity. When he says, "I would be happy to do anything you need," the modal "would" introduces an element of **tentativeness**, which reduces the imposition and makes the offer sound less demanding. This use of modality aligns with the **face-saving** strategies outlined in **Politeness Theory** (Brown & Levinson, 1987), where speakers employ indirectness and tentativeness to avoid threatening the interviewer's face.

In contrast, Harvey Specter's use of **direct statements** such as "I don't answer questions" and "I ask the questions" reflects his **high status** and **dominant role** in the conversation. This lack of hedging and use of strong grammatical structures showcases the power dynamics at play. Harvey's language, by being assertive and straightforward, leaves little room for negotiation or deference, thus establishing his **authority** within the interaction. The absence of **modal verbs** such as "would" or "could" in his speech further emphasizes his **dominance** and **certainty**.

Lastly, **turn-taking structures** are also pivotal in understanding how power and politeness are negotiated during job interviews. In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris Gardner's respectful turn-taking (e.g., waiting for the interviewer's response after

making a point) contrasts with Harvey Specter's more **interrupted** and **assertive** style in *Suits*. In the latter, Harvey often **interrupts** the interviewer or takes control of the conversation, signaling his **dominance** and **authority** in the interaction. These interruptions, while potentially seen as rudeness in other cultural contexts, are permissible and even expected in high-power distance environments, highlighting the role of **pragmatic norms** in shaping social expectations (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015).

In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, the protagonist Chris Gardner makes a statement that reflects self-deprecation and humility. He admits he's not the smartest person, but he makes sure to emphasize that he knows what he wants. This reflects a classic case of **negative politeness**—he minimizes any threat to the other person's face by reducing his self-importance (Brown & Levinson, 1987). By using the phrase "I'm not a smart man," Chris strategically lowers his status in a way that prevents the interviewer from feeling threatened by his self-promotion. However, when he declares that he knows what he wants, he subtly shifts to a more **positive politeness strategy**. This demonstrates his confidence without threatening the interviewer's face, showing an awareness of balance in professional discourse.

This approach is reflected in the **modality** of his speech. The modal "know" in "I know what I want" reveals **certainty**—he's sure of his goals, which positions him as a determined candidate despite the earlier self-deprecation (Palmer, 2001). Grammar-wise, the use of the **simple present tense** ("I am not" / "I know") gives the statements a sense of permanence and universality. It implies that his desire for success and drive are constant, not just relevant to the current situation (Yule, 1996).

In *Suits*, Harvey Specter delivers a statement that is both authoritative and imperious. His speech is **direct**, and he avoids hedging or modulating his statements with more tentative language. This choice is typical in **high-power distance cultures**, where

individuals in positions of authority take charge of interactions (Hofstede, 2001). By saying he doesn't answer questions, Harvey asserts his control over the situation. He doesn't use phrases like "perhaps" or "maybe," which would soften his directive. The **imperative tone** he uses further reinforces his authority, placing the onus on the interviewer to align with his expectations.

The **lack of hedging** here is also worth noting. In professional settings where **power dynamics** are pronounced, directness can signal **confidence**, and it is often seen as a marker of **strength in leadership** (Holmes, 2006). Grammar also plays a key role in this interaction—his use of the **simple present tense** and the **declarative nature** of his statement indicate that this is not a negotiable position. Harvey's words carry the force of authority that doesn't invite dispute.

In terms of **pragmatics**, his refusal to answer questions and his command to ask questions instead are clear examples of **speech acts** that reinforce **power structures** (Searle, 1969; Thomas, 1995). The strategic use of **silence**—when he doesn't answer a direct question—further underlines his control over the conversation. Harvey's approach to **turn-taking** shows that interruptions are calculated, meant to ensure that his agenda is the one that shapes the discussion.

In *The Intern*, Jules Ostin's approach to a potentially awkward situation with her intern—who is much older than expected—demonstrates a delicate balance of **facework**. When she remarks on his age, she could be risking a **face-threatening act**. However, she quickly follows it up with a reassuring statement, "I'm okay with that," which serves to mitigate the threat (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This highlights **positive politeness**: she seeks to preserve both her own face and the intern's by showing that the age difference doesn't affect her judgment. Her swift transition to reassurance shows that she is aware of **social cues** and works to maintain a

harmonious relationship, which is crucial in a collaborative workplace environment (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

The use of **hedging** in her response—“I’m okay with that”—acts as a **softener**. By expressing that she is “okay” with the situation, she distances herself from any potential judgment or discomfort, keeping the tone of the conversation **light and amicable**. Grammar in this context is important, as the **simple present** “I’m okay with that” also serves to communicate **ongoing comfort** with the situation. The fact that she doesn’t escalate the conversation further and doesn’t inquire deeper into his age reflects her desire to **avoid confrontation**, a common trait in **low-power distance cultures** that value **equality** and **mutual respect** (Hofstede, 2001; Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

Another scene from *The Pursuit of Happyness* shows Chris Gardner’s commitment to showing the interviewer that he values their time. His statement, which emphasizes that he’s not there to waste anyone’s time and just wants to work, functions as an act of **self-promotion**. The strategic choice of words here demonstrates **respect** for the other party’s time and positions Chris as a **considerate and reliable candidate**. This is another instance of **negative politeness**: he downplays his own desires to avoid imposing on the interviewer (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The use of **modality** here is notable—by saying, “I just want to work for you,” Chris is **indirectly asking** for the opportunity while showing **certainty** about his intention (Palmer, 2001). The **directness** of this statement, combined with the **lack of hedging**, positions him as **assertive and professional**. His use of the **present tense** reinforces the **immediacy** of his desire to start work and signals his **dedication** to the role (Yule, 1996).

Lastly, a scene from *Suits* involves Mike Ross, who delivers a line asserting his superiority despite not being a lawyer. This bold statement reflects a strong element of **self-promotion**, where Mike claims that he is better than all the lawyers despite not having formal credentials. This type of statement is a **face-threatening act** because it could offend others, particularly those with more experience and formal qualifications (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, in **high-power distance** settings, such confident declarations can be seen as a sign of **ambition and competence** (Hofstede, 2001).

Here, Mike's speech involves a **direct assertion** of his abilities, with **no hedging**. He's fully confident in his skills, and the use of "better than all of them" is a strong **comparative** that emphasizes his belief in his own worth. Grammar-wise, the use of the **simple present tense** in "I'm better" suggests a **permanent state of confidence**, as opposed to a temporary situation. The **lack of uncertainty** in his phrasing suggests a **high degree of self-assurance and assertiveness**, characteristics often associated with **leaders or those in positions of power** (Holmes, 2006; Thomas, 1995).

Linguistic Analysis of Ben Whittaker's Interview Response in *The Intern* (2015)

In the scene from *The Intern* (2015), Ben Whittaker's response to the question about why he wants to come out of retirement is linguistically rich and demonstrates various politeness strategies and pragmatic features. His answer is:

"Well, I've been a company man all my life. I'm retired now, and I'm looking to get back in the game. I want to be involved, to be challenged, to be needed. The tech stuff might take a bit to learn, but I've got time, and I'm a quick study. Also, I bring a lot to the table. I'm dependable, organized, and I'm loyal." (*The Intern*, 2015).

Politeness Theory and Linguistic Strategies

Ben's statement can be analyzed through **Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory**, which involves positive and negative politeness strategies aimed at mitigating threats to the interlocutor's face (their social identity or self-esteem).

1. **Positive Politeness:**

- **Positive politeness** strategies aim to reinforce the speaker's desire to be liked and respected. In Ben's response, he employs positive politeness by expressing his desire to be involved and challenged, using phrases like "I want to be involved" and "I want to be challenged." These expressions align with **Brown and Levinson's** concept of *fellowship*—the desire to establish common ground and maintain a friendly rapport. By framing his answer this way, Ben not only conveys his qualifications but also his eagerness to contribute in a meaningful way to the company, which could create a sense of solidarity with the interviewer.

2. **Negative Politeness:**

- **Negative politeness** strategies, on the other hand, minimize imposition and respect the interviewer's autonomy. This is especially evident in his mention of the "tech stuff" he needs to learn. He acknowledges his potential shortcomings ("The tech stuff might take a bit to learn") but carefully frames it as something he can overcome. The hedging phrase "might take a bit to learn" is a classic **negative politeness** feature, reducing the potential threat to the interviewer's expectations by downplaying any perceived weakness or deficiency. It serves to soften the impact of his admission, ensuring that the interviewer's face is not threatened by the acknowledgment of his limitations.

- Moreover, his use of “I’ve got time, and I’m a quick study” further mitigates the threat to his social identity. The emphasis on his ability to adapt and learn quickly helps maintain a sense of professionalism while still acknowledging his need for growth in the tech area. This balances humility and self-assurance, reinforcing the notion that he is a valuable asset despite needing some time to get up to speed with new technology.

Modality and Assertiveness

The **modality** of Ben’s language is crucial in understanding his stance. Modality refers to the way in which speakers express certainty, probability, and necessity in their speech. Ben’s use of **modal verbs** such as “might” and “want” plays a key role in the interaction.

- The **modal verb “might”** (in “the tech stuff might take a bit to learn”) introduces an element of uncertainty, which aligns with **negative politeness** by softening the potential threat of his inexperience with technology. The hedging here is significant because it avoids giving the impression that he is certain of his limitations, thus preventing any potential negative judgment.
- The **modality of “want”** in “I want to be involved, to be challenged, to be needed” is more assertive and positive. It signals his strong desire to contribute, showing that he is actively pursuing the opportunity rather than passively accepting it. This use of **“want”** creates a sense of agency and determination, underscoring his commitment to being an active participant in the work environment.

Use of Simple Present Tense and Permanence

The **simple present tense** in phrases like “I bring a lot to the table” and “I’m dependable, organized, and I’m loyal” is significant in that it conveys a sense of

permanency and reliability. The present tense signals that these qualities are not fleeting or contingent on the job situation but rather are stable attributes of Ben's character. This linguistic feature strengthens his self-presentation as dependable and trustworthy, which are crucial qualities in a professional context.

By stating his values in the present tense, Ben not only asserts his ongoing capabilities but also aligns himself with the **idea of reliability**—a trait that transcends the immediate context of the interview. It is particularly important in high-stakes professional settings, where candidates are expected to demonstrate consistent, dependable qualities.

Pragmatics and Speech Act Theory

From a **pragmatic** perspective, Ben's response can be analyzed through the lens of **Speech Act Theory** (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), which examines how utterances function not just to convey information but to perform actions in communication. In this context, Ben is not merely answering a question; he is also **performing an act of self-promotion** and **creating a narrative** that positions him as a valuable addition to the company.

- The act of **self-promotion** is crucial here—through phrases like “I bring a lot to the table” and “I’m dependable, organized, and I’m loyal,” Ben is asserting his qualifications and worth. This is a strategic move in the interview process to ensure that the interviewer sees him as a competent and desirable candidate, while also maintaining a humble tone.
- The **directness** of his language (e.g., “I’m dependable”) coupled with the hedging around his technological skills (e.g., “the tech stuff might take a bit to learn”) shows how Ben strategically balances **assertiveness** and **modesty** to avoid overstepping social boundaries. This balancing act, which is

particularly relevant in interviews, demonstrates his pragmatic competence in understanding the social dynamics at play.

Non-Verbal Communication and Face Theory

In addition to linguistic elements, **non-verbal communication** plays a significant role in conveying politeness and sincerity. Ben's tone, pacing, and eye contact, although not directly observable through written text, contribute to the perception of his sincerity and humility. **Gumperz's (1982) work on non-verbal cues** suggests that elements like tone and pace contribute significantly to interpersonal communication and help establish rapport in face-to-face interactions.

Ben's calm and measured speech pattern is not only a reflection of his personality but also a strategic move to avoid threatening the interviewer's face. By not overexaggerating his qualifications or emotions, Ben's non-verbal cues align with his verbal communication, reinforcing his respectful and humble demeanor.

In examining the linguistic representations of social norms in job interviews within *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *Suits*, and *The Intern*, it is clear that language plays a pivotal role in shaping power dynamics, self-presentation, and interpersonal relationships. The films and TV shows selected for this analysis reflect various strategies employed by interviewees and interviewers to navigate social norms and negotiate their identities in professional settings.

2.2 Analysis of Social Norms and Communication Strategies in Job Interviews

A Pragmatic Approach

Job interviews, as a high-stakes communicative event, are heavily shaped by social norms, linguistic strategies, and pragmatic concerns. This section analyzes social norms and communication strategies, focusing on pragmatic strategies such as greetings, requests, refusals, self-promotion, and how these are used strategically in

interviews, particularly in the context of Western films like *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *The Intern*, and *Suits*. Drawing on relevant theories such as Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (2001), and Speech Act Theory, this analysis explores how pragmatic elements like modality, turn-taking, hedging, and face-threatening acts are carefully managed in these settings. Additionally, it emphasizes the role of interruptions, silence, and the management of power dynamics in shaping social relationships in interviews.

Pragmatic Strategies in Job Interviews

Self-Promotion and Hedging

In job interviews, the way candidates self-promote can heavily influence how they are perceived. The use of hedging, such as modal verbs and conditionals, plays an important role in modulating self-promotion while aligning with cultural expectations for modesty and politeness. For instance, in *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), Chris Gardner uses hedging phrases such as “I think I can do this” when describing his qualifications. This cautious approach, typical in Western interviews, serves to soften potentially face-threatening acts, as noted by Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), speakers engage in “positive politeness” strategies, which attempt to minimize the imposition on the hearer, thus allowing the speaker to navigate the delicate balance of asserting competence without appearing overly assertive. The phrase “I think” introduces uncertainty and avoids direct assertiveness, which mitigates the risk of threatening the interviewer’s face by over-claiming.

Similarly, in *Suits* (2011–2019), Mike Ross employs hedging when discussing his qualifications, using phrases such as, “I could be wrong, but I believe...” This hedging demonstrates how modality functions as a polite strategy to present one’s

qualifications while still acknowledging the possibility of error. Such statements reflect the cultural emphasis on humility in Western settings, as well as the social expectation that one should not claim more confidence or ability than is reasonable. Brown and Levinson's work suggests that hedging can be seen as a form of "negative politeness," aiming to avoid imposing on the listener by presenting claims in a less direct manner.

However, while hedging is prominent in these Western examples, cultural differences influence how hedging is perceived and utilized. According to Hall (1976), cultures with a high-context communication style, such as those in Japan, emphasize indirectness and humility more strongly. In these contexts, hedging may be more pervasive, and the pragmatic function of mitigating face-threatening acts becomes even more pronounced. In contrast to the more straightforward hedging in Western settings, Japanese speakers might use rhetorical questions or disclaimers, such as "I may not be the most qualified, but I am eager to learn," to soften their responses and emphasize modesty (Pan, 2008).

Turn-Taking and Interruptions

Turn-taking is a key feature in the analysis of any interaction, but it is particularly critical in interviews, where the smooth exchange of turns reflects not only the participants' communication competence but also the underlying power dynamics. In Western job interviews, turn-taking is often structured and orderly, with the interviewer guiding the conversation through strategic questioning. For instance, in *Suits*, rapid and controlled turn-taking reflects the fast-paced nature of the corporate environment. Harvey Specter, a senior partner, uses brief, direct questions such as, "Why should I hire you?" The speed and decisiveness of his questioning not only reflect the high expectations of the workplace but also indicate the hierarchical

nature of the setting. In these instances, the interviewer's dominance in the exchange is reinforced by their control over the flow of conversation.

On the other hand, in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, turn-taking is marked by frequent pauses and hesitations, as Chris Gardner carefully considers his responses. This slower, more deliberate rhythm highlights his nervousness but also signals a more interpersonal, empathetic approach. The pauses in Gardner's dialogue invite empathy from the interviewer, reinforcing the notion of a connection based on mutual understanding rather than the imposition of authority (Holmes, 2013). In *The Intern*, the turn-taking structure is more relaxed, with occasional interruptions by the CEO, Jules Ostin, as she interjects into conversations with Ben Whitaker. This more fluid interaction style mirrors the modern, less hierarchical nature of startups and the increasing importance of emotional intelligence and collaboration in the workplace (Goleman, 1995).

In all three films, silence serves as an important cue in the management of power dynamics. In *Suits*, silence is often used strategically by interviewees to reflect contemplation or to subtly assert authority over the conversation. In *The Pursuit of Happyness* and *The Intern*, silence or pauses are used to show respect and humility, allowing the interviewer space to guide the interaction.

Cultural Context and Power Distance

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (2001) provide a valuable framework for understanding the underlying power dynamics that govern interviews in different cultural contexts. Power distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept unequal power distribution. In *Suits*, a high power distance is evident through the interactions between Harvey Specter and the candidates. Harvey's assertive questioning and directness underscore the

hierarchical nature of the corporate world, where decisions are made swiftly and with a clear top-down structure. The use of formal language and clear-cut questioning signals his authority and reinforces the power distance in the workplace (Bourdage et al., 2021).

Conversely, in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, the lower power distance between the interviewer and Gardner allows for a more personal, egalitarian exchange. The informality of the language used by Gardner (“I’m just trying to make something happen for myself”) highlights his humility and emphasizes the cultural preference for connection rather than strict hierarchy. This reflects a more individualistic approach, where the emphasis is on personal agency and the potential for self-improvement.

Goleman (1995) also highlights the role of emotional intelligence in navigating these power dynamics. Emotional intelligence is crucial in interviews, especially when managing stress, building rapport, and maintaining self-regulation in response to difficult or challenging situations. In *The Intern*, Ben Whitaker’s experience and emotional intelligence allow him to navigate his interview with confidence and humility, demonstrating that understanding others' emotions and adjusting one’s communication style accordingly is key in lower power distance environments.

Analysis of Pragmatic Strategies in Job Interviews: Speech Acts and Turn-Taking

In job interviews, candidates engage in a variety of communicative strategies, such as speech acts, turn-taking, and strategic pauses, to navigate power dynamics and social relationships. These pragmatic strategies are essential not only for managing rapport but also for effectively aligning with cultural expectations. This section explores key strategies in job interviews, including speech acts such as greetings,

requests, offers, refusals, persuasion, and self-promotion, alongside pragmatic cues like turn-taking, interruptions, and silence. Additionally, we will explore insights from YouTube resources and scholarly sources to illustrate how these strategies are employed cross-culturally in job interviews.

Speech Acts: Greetings, Offers, Requests, Refusals, and Self-Promotion

Speech acts in job interviews are fundamental to establishing rapport and conveying intentions. Greeting forms, for instance, are the first act of social interaction, setting the tone for the entire interview. In Western job interviews, a simple but warm "Good morning" or "Hello" is typically used to initiate a positive interaction. These greetings, though brief, are laden with social expectations of politeness and professionalism (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). In the YouTube video by *EnglishClass101* (2016), the importance of initial greetings is emphasized, with interviewees advised to make eye contact and speak clearly to express confidence without overstepping social boundaries. The video illustrates how greetings can signal a candidate's confidence and politeness, qualities highly valued in Western interviews.

Similarly, the act of self-promotion is a crucial aspect of job interviews, where candidates must balance humility with assertiveness. *The Pursuit of Happiness* and *Suits* showcase candidates' use of self-promotion strategies. For instance, Chris Gardner's line "I think I can do this" from *The Pursuit of Happiness* uses hedging to soften self-promotion, signaling humility (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This approach aligns with Western norms of modest self-assertion. In contrast, *Suits* demonstrates a more direct form of self-promotion, as characters like Harvey Specter use strong, declarative statements such as "You will do this," showcasing a more hierarchical approach to communication (Holmes, 2013). This difference highlights

cultural variations in the expectations of assertiveness during self-promotion in interviews.

Refusals and offers, as speech acts, are another important aspect of managing social expectations in interviews. The refusal, often a face-threatening act, requires careful mitigation to avoid appearing uncooperative. In the interview scene from *The Intern* (2015), Ben Whitaker uses a polite, indirect refusal when he says, “I could help out, but I'm not sure if I am the best person for that task.” The use of modal verbs like “could” and hedging signals deference and a willingness to collaborate while avoiding the imposition of a direct “no” (Goleman, 1995). Such refusal strategies exemplify a modern, more collaborative workplace culture that values consensus-building.

The act of making offers is another key speech act in job interviews. In *Suits*, Harvey Specter frequently uses offers like “I’ll make it happen,” signaling confidence and authority in a hierarchical work environment. This approach reflects high power distance, where the speaker assumes control over the situation (Pan, 2008). Contrastingly, in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, offers are more tentative and reflect an individualistic, aspirational culture. For instance, when Chris Gardner says, “I think I can do this,” it signals not only his willingness but also his awareness of the potential risks involved.

Turn-Taking, Interruptions, and Silence as Pragmatic Cues

Turn-taking is a vital component of job interviews, facilitating a smooth flow of communication. In interviews depicted in *Suits*, turn-taking is structured and efficient, reflecting the high-pressure environment of corporate America. As noted by Holmes and Stubbe (2015), turn-taking in these settings tends to be more controlled, with speakers taking turns quickly and with minimal hesitation. This

rapid exchange reflects the competitive nature of corporate environments, where time is valuable and efficiency is paramount. In contrast, *The Pursuit of Happyness* and *The Intern* feature less rigid turn-taking, which supports the more personal and emotionally intelligent nature of the interviews. For example, Chris Gardner's pauses during responses create space for both reflection and connection, inviting empathy from the interviewer (Goleman, 1995).

In terms of interruptions, the YouTube video *EnglishClass101* (2016) explains that interruptions in job interviews often serve as a strategy for testing a candidate's composure under pressure. In *Suits*, Harvey Specter frequently interrupts his interviewees to assert dominance and assess their ability to respond under stress. This reflects the hierarchical structure of corporate America, where interrupting the flow of conversation is a way to test a candidate's agility and confidence. On the other hand, in *The Intern*, interruptions are more collaborative. The CEO, Jules Ostin, is depicted as interjecting in a manner that feels more like engaging with the candidate rather than overpowering them, highlighting the modern preference for more relaxed, emotionally intelligent interactions (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015).

Silence, though often overlooked, plays a significant role in interviews. According to *Everyday Speech* (n.d.), silence can be a powerful pragmatic cue, conveying uncertainty or encouraging deeper reflection. For instance, in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris Gardner's occasional silences in response to questions emphasize his thoughtfulness and hesitation, which serve to humanize him and create space for empathy. The brief pauses are not signs of incompetence but reflections of Gardner's introspective nature. In the context of cross-cultural communication, silence can also indicate respect and deference, particularly in high-context cultures where more is communicated through what is not said (Skillroads, n.d.).

Cross-Cultural Considerations in Job Interview Strategies

Cultural norms greatly influence the pragmatic strategies used in job interviews. The video *University of California, Berkeley* (2019) focuses on cross-cultural communication differences, particularly within the U.S. It emphasizes how American culture values directness and assertiveness in interviews. In U.S. job interviews, candidates are expected to showcase their skills confidently, often engaging in self-promotion to demonstrate their suitability for the role. This is in contrast to cultures with high power distance, where indirectness and deference are prioritized (Wikipedia contributors, 2016). In the U.S., as illustrated in *The Pursuit of Happyness* and *Suits*, self-promotion and assertiveness are key strategies for establishing credibility and building rapport with interviewers.

Moreover, *Skillroads* (n.d.) underscores that in cross-cultural interviewing, understanding these differences is crucial to overcoming communication barriers. For example, while American interviewees may be expected to be direct in their responses, candidates from high-context cultures may use more indirect forms of self-promotion, relying on the cultural norm of humility and group harmony.

Linguistic Strategies for Job Interviews: Persuasion, Self-Promotion, and Pragmatic Communication

In the context of job interviews, language is not only a tool for communication but a strategic instrument employed by candidates to influence their prospects, convey their suitability for a role, and navigate the cultural expectations of their respective environments. This analysis focuses on three core linguistic strategies commonly employed in American job interviews: **self-promotion**, **persuasion**, and **turn-taking**. These strategies are examined through examples from the films *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), *Suits* (2011–2019), and *The Intern* (2015), as well as insights from relevant cross-cultural communication theories and linguistic models such as

Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions** (2001).

These films offer a diverse representation of how candidates employ linguistic tactics to make a favorable impression on interviewers, highlighting variations in communication styles that align with broader cultural norms within Western workplaces.

Self-Promotion in Job Interviews

Self-promotion is perhaps the most direct linguistic strategy in job interviews. It involves highlighting one's achievements, skills, and personal qualities to demonstrate why a candidate is the best fit for the role. The strategy of self-promotion, while pervasive in Western corporate cultures, can take various forms, ranging from modest assertions of potential to confident declarations of success.

Self-Promotion in *The Pursuit of Happyness*

In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris Gardner's self-promotion is framed with humility and the subtle assertion of his potential. Gardner, played by Will Smith, emphasizes a growth mindset over tangible past achievements, a stance that reflects the importance of continual self-improvement in American workplace culture. A pivotal moment occurs during Gardner's interview when he states:

"I may not have experience, but I am eager to contribute." (*The Pursuit of Happyness*, 2006)

This statement exemplifies a form of self-promotion that focuses on potential rather than direct accomplishments. The phrase "I may not have experience" acknowledges a perceived shortcoming while immediately pivoting to his eagerness to contribute, which emphasizes his willingness to learn and his commitment to the role. This

linguistic strategy—acknowledging one’s limitations while stressing enthusiasm and readiness—aligns with **Politeness Theory** (Brown & Levinson, 1987), where such hedging softens the self-promotion, making it more palatable and less self-centered. By focusing on eagerness to contribute rather than personal achievements, Gardner’s approach resonates with the Western value of growth and personal development.

This style of self-promotion is rooted in an underlying cultural belief in the value of humility and the potential for personal growth. As **Hofstede** (2001) notes, in cultures with moderate power distance, such as the United States, an individual’s worth is often evaluated not just by their achievements but by their potential for development.

Self-Promotion in *Suits*

In contrast, *Suits* portrays a much more aggressive and assertive form of self-promotion through the character of Harvey Specter, a high-powered lawyer known for his boldness. Harvey’s approach to self-promotion is direct and unapologetic, emphasizing his success and ability to outshine others. In one of his interviews, Harvey confidently asserts:

"I closed the biggest deal of the year." (Suits, 2011)

This declaration is an example of self-promotion grounded in competitive achievement. The phrase “the biggest deal of the year” serves not only as a statement of past success but also as a demonstration of Harvey’s dominance within his field. His use of the superlative “biggest” emphasizes his outstanding performance, positioning him as someone who stands out in a highly competitive environment. This approach contrasts sharply with Gardner’s more humble strategy and aligns with the **Western corporate ideal** that values assertiveness and the showcasing of individual achievement (Varner & Beamer, 2010).

Harvey's language—marked by certainty and confidence—reflects the cultural norms of the **United States'** high-power distance environments, where personal success is often equated with individual achievement and where a direct, unapologetic style of self-promotion is valued (Hofstede, 2001).

Self-Promotion in *The Intern*

Ben Whitaker, the protagonist of *The Intern*, employs a more understated form of self-promotion that draws on his experience and wisdom rather than overt success. Ben's approach is grounded in emotional intelligence and relational expertise. For instance, when Ben discusses his qualifications, he says:

"I've been in the business long enough to know that people need to feel good about their work." (The Intern, 2015)

Unlike Harvey's direct self-promotion, Ben's statement emphasizes the value of empathy, experience, and the understanding of interpersonal dynamics. This softer, more relational approach to self-promotion aligns with the growing recognition in modern workplaces of the importance of emotional intelligence, collaboration, and mentoring. Ben's humility in positioning his experience as a resource for others reflects the shift in workplace values where self-promotion is not always about showcasing individual accomplishments but highlighting one's ability to contribute to the well-being and success of a team.

Persuasion Strategies in Job Interviews

Persuasion, as a communicative strategy, is central to job interviews. Candidates must convince the interviewer of their suitability for the role through logical reasoning, emotional appeals, and interpersonal skills. While direct persuasion based on reason and achievement is common, other more subtle forms of persuasion, grounded in emotional narratives and shared values, are also effective.

Persuasion in *Suits*

Harvey Specter's persuasion strategies in *Suits* typically employ logical reasoning and a focus on competence. When persuading others, Harvey uses strong logical connectors and self-assurance:

"This is the best course of action because..." (Suits, 2011)

This statement exemplifies the kind of logical persuasion that is common in high-powered legal and corporate environments. The phrase "the best course of action" frames the argument as not just a personal preference but as the optimal solution, positioning Harvey as a rational, decision-making authority. His persuasive language reflects **American corporate norms** that value clear, logical argumentation and the ability to take decisive action (Gumperz, 1982). Harvey's approach mirrors the **direct communication style** emphasized in American corporate culture, where rationality and clear reasoning are integral to persuasive speech (Hofstede, 2001).

Persuasion in *The Pursuit of Happyness*

In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris Gardner's persuasive language focuses on authenticity and emotional appeal. His narrative of personal struggle and determination serves as a form of persuasion that highlights his dedication and resilience. For instance, Gardner persuades an interviewer by saying:

"I don't have the qualifications, but I am driven to succeed." (The Pursuit of Happyness, 2006)

This statement is an example of **emotion-based persuasion**, where Gardner uses his personal story to evoke empathy and demonstrate his commitment. Instead of relying solely on logical qualifications, Gardner appeals to the interviewer's emotions by showcasing his perseverance. This approach highlights a more **relational form of**

persuasion, where emotional honesty and determination are persuasive in their own right. As **Brown and Levinson (1987)** assert, the use of emotional language helps maintain rapport and mitigate the imposition of self-promotion, making it more acceptable in a professional setting.

Persuasion in *The Intern*

In *The Intern*, Ben Whitaker employs persuasion through his experience and collaborative approach. A key example comes when he emphasizes the importance of mentorship and teamwork, stating:

"I'm here to make your life easier." (The Intern, 2015)

Ben's persuasive language focuses on collaboration and support, appealing to the interviewer's need for assistance and guidance. Unlike Harvey, who persuades through individual competence and achievement, Ben uses relational persuasion to position himself as a facilitator of others' success. This form of persuasion reflects the contemporary corporate trend that values emotional intelligence and the ability to work in teams. Ben's language is empathetic, highlighting the importance of making others feel supported, which is particularly valuable in today's more collaborative and less hierarchical workplace environments.

The job interviews in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *Suits*, and *The Intern* highlight how cultural norms shape communication. Self-promotion ranges from confident assertions in *Suits* to humble expressions in *The Pursuit of Happyness*. Persuasion varies from logical in *Suits* to emotional in *The Pursuit of Happyness*. Turn-taking differs, with *The Intern* emphasizing collaborative listening, while the others blend assertiveness with emotional intelligence. These strategies reflect different approaches to power dynamics and cultural expectations in professional settings.

Conclusion to chapter 2

This chapter explored the intricate relationship between cultural norms and linguistic strategies in job interviews, highlighting how cross-cultural communication influences the way candidates present themselves, persuade interviewers, and navigate turn-taking. By examining the linguistic tactics used in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *Suits*, and *The Intern*, it became evident that the cultural context significantly shapes interview dynamics, particularly in Western corporate environments.

In American job interviews, self-promotion plays a central role, yet the manner in which candidates engage in this practice varies greatly depending on individual approaches and cultural expectations. In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris Gardner's humble, growth-oriented form of self-promotion contrasts with Harvey Specter's direct and assertive tactics in *Suits*. Both approaches are valid within the broader cultural framework of the United States, where the value of self-promotion intersects with personal achievement, assertiveness, and the desire for continual self-improvement. Ben Whitaker's more relational and empathetic form of self-promotion in *The Intern* further complicates this narrative, emphasizing the rising importance of emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills in modern workplaces. These examples demonstrate that self-promotion in interviews is not monolithic but rather shaped by cultural values such as humility, competitiveness, and collaboration.

Moreover, persuasion strategies in job interviews reveal different ways of convincing an interviewer of a candidate's suitability. While Harvey Specter relies on logical reasoning and success-driven arguments in *Suits*, Chris Gardner in *The Pursuit of Happyness* uses emotional appeals and personal narratives to persuade the interviewer of his resilience and commitment. The contrasting forms of

persuasion—rational versus emotional—align with broader cultural values, with U.S. corporate culture often prioritizing logical arguments while simultaneously appreciating personal narratives that reflect determination and authenticity. Ben Whitaker's persuasion in *The Intern* highlights the shift towards collaborative and team-oriented values, where persuasion is not about individual achievement but rather fostering support and contributing to collective success.

Finally, turn-taking practices revealed how power dynamics and respect for social hierarchies manifest in job interviews. In *Suits*, Harvey Specter's interruptive style reflects his dominant personality and the competitive nature of high-power environments. Conversely, Chris Gardner in *The Pursuit of Happyness* uses silence and pauses strategically, reflecting a more introspective and thoughtful approach to communication. Ben Whitaker's emphasis on active listening in *The Intern* aligns with modern workplace trends that value empathy and patience in communication. These turn-taking dynamics not only highlight differences in interview strategies but also reflect broader social norms within Western corporate culture.

Overall, the analysis of linguistic strategies in job interviews, framed by the cultural norms depicted in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *Suits*, and *The Intern*, underscores the profound impact that culture has on communication practices. Whether through self-promotion, persuasion, or turn-taking, the ways in which candidates present themselves in interviews are deeply influenced by cultural expectations and values. Understanding these strategies can help candidates navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication and succeed in diverse professional environments.

Chapter3: Practical Application – Job Interviews in Real-Life Intercultural Contexts

3.1 Case Studies and Observational Data

In today's globalized job market, effective communication during job interviews plays a crucial role in candidates' success, particularly in intercultural contexts. Human Resource (HR) guidelines from reputable sources such as the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and Glassdoor provide essential insights into expected communication norms within U.S.-based hiring processes. These sources not only offer structured advice but also highlight cultural expectations, interaction protocols, and behavioral cues that shape interview outcomes in American professional environments.

According to SHRM (2020), U.S. employers prioritize clear, confident, and respectful communication in interviews. Key expectations include maintaining eye contact, answering questions directly and succinctly, and demonstrating self-awareness. HR professionals value responses that showcase a candidate's ability to collaborate, adapt to workplace culture, and communicate ideas effectively. This emphasis on interpersonal competence reflects broader cultural norms favoring individualism, assertiveness, and low-context communication—concepts commonly associated with U.S. workplace culture.

Glassdoor (2021) offers guidance that reflects common expectations among U.S.-based recruiters, emphasizing candidates' professionalism, cultural fit, and strong verbal articulation. It recommends structuring responses using the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result), a widely used approach that helps convey experiences with clarity and coherence. Additionally, HR guidelines suggest maintaining an appropriate level of formality while balancing confidence with humility when discussing past achievements.

Furthermore, Ulrich (2012) argues that HR competencies include the ability to manage global talent through awareness of cultural and communicative diversity. His framework suggests that organizations assess candidates not only for technical qualifications but also for their ability to engage in context-sensitive communication. This is especially important in intercultural job interviews, where mismatches in expectations about tone, turn-taking, and response style can lead to misinterpretation.

HR guidelines also stress the importance of aligning one's communication style with the company's values and mission. Guffey and Loewy (2018) emphasize the need for effective business communication that is concise, courteous, and audience-centered. In the interview context, this translates into an expectation that applicants will tailor their language, examples, and tone to reflect the role and company culture. These expectations are particularly relevant in intercultural scenarios, where misunderstanding of norms can disadvantage otherwise qualified candidates.

Another key trend identified by Glassdoor (2021) involves the increasing use of behavioral and situational questions designed to elicit evidence of soft skills such as teamwork, conflict resolution, and ethical judgment. Responding effectively requires not only fluency in English but also familiarity with U.S. interactional conventions—such as elaborating with specific examples, providing measurable results, and using proactive language.

In addition, SHRM (2020) outlines the role of digital communication in modern recruitment. With virtual interviews becoming more common, candidates are expected to demonstrate comfort with digital platforms, maintain professional demeanor on camera, and observe online communication etiquette. These evolving norms extend traditional expectations and add new layers to intercultural

competence, requiring candidates to interpret and adapt to both verbal and non-verbal cues in digital spaces.

HR guidelines from SHRM and Glassdoor offer a rich basis for understanding the communicative norms governing U.S.-based job interviews. They underscore the importance of direct, respectful, and goal-oriented interaction, highlight cultural values such as individual achievement and professionalism, and provide actionable advice for candidates navigating intercultural interview contexts.

Comparison with Media Portrayals: Evaluating the Accuracy of Cultural Representations in Films/TV Shows

This section offers a linguistic analysis of job interview scenes depicted in three American media texts: *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), *The Intern* (2015), and *Suits* (2011–2019). By focusing on vocabulary, grammar, speech acts, and pragmatic cues, this analysis evaluates the extent to which media representations align with HR expectations as outlined in authoritative sources such as SHRM (2020), Glassdoor (2021), Ulrich (2012), and Guffey & Loewy (2018).

Vocabulary Use: Hedging, Formality, and Jargon

In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, the protagonist, Chris Gardner, often employs a blend of formal and informal vocabulary. For instance, when addressing the interview panel, he uses phrases like "I figured out," which signal informality and self-initiative but may not align with the expected formal register in professional contexts (Glassdoor, 2021). In contrast, HR guidelines emphasize the use of role-specific terminology and structured responses (SHRM, 2020). Gardner's limited use of corporate jargon may be viewed as a barrier in real-world HR contexts, where industry knowledge is evaluated through precise vocabulary (Guffey & Loewy, 2018).

The Intern showcases Ben Whittaker’s mastery of formal and respectful vocabulary. He uses phrases such as “May I offer a suggestion?” and “I’d be happy to assist,” demonstrating a high level of deference and politeness. These forms closely reflect the expectations of HR professionals who value formality and role awareness (Ulrich, 2012). His vocabulary choices align with Brown and Levinson’s (1987) concept of negative politeness strategies, intended to avoid imposition.

In *Suits*, characters like Mike Ross tend to use assertive and confident vocabulary, often bordering on arrogance. While such vocabulary might suggest competence, HR guidelines caution against overconfidence, favoring clarity, humility, and specificity in responses (SHRM, 2020). Mike's overuse of legal jargon, while demonstrating subject knowledge, occasionally undermines interpersonal clarity, especially when used without contextual explanation—potentially violating pragmatic norms (Guffey & Loewy, 2018).

Grammar: Modals, Conditionals, and Questions

Grammar in media portrayals often highlights character traits more than realistic HR expectations. In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris uses simple modals like “can” and “will,” reflecting determination. However, the limited use of conditionals such as “I would” or “I could” may present a lack of linguistic nuance typically expected in professional interviews. According to Guffey & Loewy (2018), successful candidates tend to use second conditional structures (e.g., “If I were in this role, I would...”) to demonstrate hypothetical thinking and strategic insight.

In *The Intern*, Ben frequently employs modal verbs such as “would,” “could,” and “might,” aligning with pragmatic expectations for politeness and flexibility. His responses often include embedded questions and conditionals, demonstrating both linguistic competence and social awareness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This reflects

a low power distance approach (Hofstede, 2001), showing his awareness of hierarchical structure while maintaining respectful interaction.

Conversely, *Suits* often bypasses such linguistic subtleties. Mike Ross's language features declaratives and rhetorical questions, revealing self-assurance but sometimes lacking in deference. He rarely uses hedging or conditionals, which, from a real-world HR perspective, could indicate a lack of adaptability or poor interpersonal sensitivity (SHRM, 2020).

Speech Acts: Requests, Offers, Refusals, and Self-Promotion

Speech acts in interview settings carry weight in terms of both impression and interpretation. In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris demonstrates speech acts of self-promotion through personal narratives and modest claims, such as "I'm the type of person who..." which align with positive politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, his reluctance to perform refusals or offers (e.g., when asked about wearing inappropriate clothes) indicates a lack of strategic communicative planning.

Ben in *The Intern* exemplifies effective use of indirect speech acts. For example, he uses "Would it be helpful if I..." as an offer, reflecting politeness and emotional intelligence. This aligns with both HR norms and speech act theory, emphasizing performativity, social appropriateness, and mitigation strategies (Guffey & Loewy, 2018; SHRM, 2020).

In contrast, *Suits* presents speech acts that often conflict with HR best practices. Mike tends to deliver direct refusals or criticisms without softening mechanisms, such as "That's not how I'd do it." While it showcases confidence, it lacks the politeness strategies that HR professionals expect in high-stakes settings (Ulrich, 2012). His self-promotion tends to be excessive, violating Grice's maxim of modesty and potentially harming interpersonal rapport.

Pragmatic Cues: Turn-Taking, Silence, and Interruptions

Non-verbal and pragmatic aspects play a subtle yet critical role in interview interactions. In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris often allows longer pauses before responding, which can be interpreted as thoughtful hesitation or lack of confidence, depending on cultural expectations. According to Hofstede's (2001) individualism-collectivism framework, American interview contexts expect active verbal engagement, where prolonged silence might signal unpreparedness.

Ben in *The Intern* displays mastery over pragmatic cues. He waits for appropriate turn-taking moments and responds with measured pauses. His respect for conversational flow, combined with reflective listening, matches SHRM's (2020) emphasis on emotional intelligence and active listening in HR interactions.

Suits, however, disrupts these norms. Mike frequently interrupts, overlaps with interlocutors, and asserts dominance through aggressive turn-taking. While dramatized for television, such behavior is discouraged in real-world settings, where HR professionals favor collaborative conversational style (Glassdoor, 2021).

Evaluation of Media Accuracy vs. HR Guidelines

Overall, *The Intern* most closely mirrors HR guidelines, particularly in its portrayal of respectful, structured communication. Ben's linguistic strategies—use of modals, indirect speech acts, and formal vocabulary—reflect real-world expectations outlined by SHRM (2020) and Glassdoor (2021). *The Pursuit of Happyness* presents a more emotionally driven and less linguistically polished portrayal, aligning partially with HR norms. *Suits*, while compelling, exaggerates assertiveness and linguistic dominance, often misrepresenting the cooperative and respectful tone preferred by HR professionals.

Thus, while media offer dramatized representations, only select portrayals align closely with actual HR communication norms. These findings reinforce the need for linguistic awareness in job interview preparation, particularly in intercultural contexts where norms may be culturally constructed and context-dependent (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hofstede, 2001).

Impact on Interview Outcomes: Linguistic Features and HR Guidelines

In the context of job interviews, certain linguistic features, including politeness strategies, speech acts, and pragmatic cues, are crucial in determining interview outcomes. These features influence whether an interviewee's performance aligns with the expectations set forth by HR guidelines. Drawing upon HR resources such as those from SHRM (2020), Glassdoor (2021), and linguistic theories like Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson), Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, and Speech Act Theory, we can examine how these elements play out in three American films: *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *The Intern*, and *Suits*. This analysis will synthesize insights from both HR guidelines and the media portrayals to identify which linguistic features contribute to interview success or failure.

1. The Pursuit of Happyness: Strategic Self-Promotion and Demonstrating Initiative

In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris Gardner's (played by Will Smith) interview strategy provides a prime example of linguistic features that align with HR expectations in U.S.-based hiring processes. According to HR guidelines, particularly those in SHRM's reports on global hiring practices (2020), demonstrating resilience, initiative, and self-promotion are valued traits in job candidates. Gardner does not ask for clarification on the job role but instead uses his

personal story to emphasize his problem-solving abilities and determination in the face of adversity.

This strategic self-promotion is a significant aspect of his interview success. According to Guffey and Loewy (2018), effective self-promotion in job interviews involves providing specific examples that illustrate personal competence and determination. In Gardner's case, his language choices showcase these qualities. For instance, his narrative about overcoming personal struggles not only aligns with the cultural expectation of individualism (Hofstede, 1980) but also highlights his proactive problem-solving skills, which are valued in U.S. job interviews (Glassdoor, 2021).

From a linguistic standpoint, Gardner's use of self-promotion reflects a positive politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), aiming to enhance his "positive face" by demonstrating competence and aligning himself with socially valued traits. By showcasing his resilience and tenacity, Gardner taps into the U.S. job market's emphasis on individual achievement and problem-solving, as outlined in HR guidelines (Glassdoor, 2021).

2. The Intern: Balancing Formality and Informality

In *The Intern*, the interview dynamics are shaped by a contrast between the formality of the job role (an internship at a high-tech startup) and the informality of the interviewer-employee relationship. The character of Ben Whittaker (Robert De Niro), a senior intern, uses a mix of formal and informal language, striking a balance that reflects the evolving expectations of workplace communication. This is in line with HR guidelines that stress the importance of being adaptable in communication style (Ulrich, 2012).

In this context, the interview success hinges on Whittaker's ability to engage in a conversational, rather than overly formal, manner. His speech acts (requests, offers, and refusals) are performed with respect, but his language does not strictly adhere to traditional formalities. For example, when he makes an offer to work at no charge initially to prove his worth, his language reflects a blend of politeness and directness. According to Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), Whittaker's directness in offering his services aligns with a positive politeness strategy. He is presenting himself as willing and capable without appearing too imposing, thus preserving his own "negative face" while enhancing his "positive face" through his initiative.

Additionally, Whittaker's use of questions during the interview (e.g., "What's the team like?") aligns with the conversational norms of informal U.S. workplaces (Guffey & Loewy, 2018). His questions, while not directly aimed at seeking clarification, serve to demonstrate his interest and adaptability. According to HR guidelines on effective interviewing, showing curiosity and engaging in reciprocal communication is valued in building rapport and fostering a collaborative environment (Glassdoor, 2021).

3. Suits: The Power of Formality and Hierarchical Communication

In the TV show *Suits*, the job interview scenes often feature candidates navigating complex hierarchical dynamics within a law firm. The formal tone and precise language used by both interviewers and candidates reflect a different set of expectations compared to *The Pursuit of Happyness* or *The Intern*. Here, the emphasis is placed on professional vocabulary, formal address, and clear speech acts, such as requests, offers, and self-promotion. These characteristics align with Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (1980), particularly the high power distance and emphasis on formality in professional settings.

The linguistic choices in *Suits* underscore the importance of maintaining professional distance while simultaneously engaging in strategic self-promotion. Candidates must demonstrate respect for authority (using formal titles like "Mr." and "Ms."), which aligns with the high power distance described by Hofstede (1980). This aligns with HR guidelines, which often stress the importance of showing deference and respect in more formal job interviews, especially in industries like law (Ulrich, 2012).

In one notable scene, Harvey Specter (Gabriel Macht) evaluates a candidate's ability to balance confidence with humility. The candidate's use of formal vocabulary and speech acts, like requesting clarification on the job role and offering examples of past achievements, plays into the professional expectations for communication in high-power-distance cultures (Glassdoor, 2021). Here, the candidate's self-promotion strategy reflects a "negative face" politeness strategy, where the candidate seeks to minimize threats to the interviewer's face by showing deference while presenting their qualifications.

Synthesis of Linguistic Features and Interview Outcomes

When we synthesize the examples from HR guidelines and the film analysis, we can see a clear relationship between linguistic features and interview success or failure. In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris Gardner's initiative and self-promotion, guided by positive politeness strategies, align with HR expectations for candidates who demonstrate resilience and problem-solving abilities (Glassdoor, 2021). In *The Intern*, Ben Whittaker's balance of formality and informality in his language, along with his respectful but direct speech acts, aligns with the more informal workplace norms of modern U.S. startups (Guffey & Loewy, 2018). Finally, in *Suits*, the emphasis on formal language and hierarchical communication reflects the high

power distance in professional settings and adheres to the HR expectations for respectful communication in more formal industries like law (Ulrich, 2012).

These examples show how the success or failure of interviews can hinge on the candidate's linguistic choices and their ability to align with the cultural expectations embedded in HR guidelines. Politeness strategies, speech acts, and pragmatic cues such as turn-taking, hedging, and vocabulary use all play a critical role in shaping interview outcomes. Ultimately, whether in the more casual context of *The Intern* or the highly formalized world of *Suits*, the linguistic features that influence interview outcomes are deeply connected to both the individual's ability to adapt to cultural norms and the interviewer's expectations as outlined in HR resources.

3.2 Implications for Cross-Cultural Communication

Effective Interview Strategies for Intercultural Communication

Navigating a job interview across cultures is not only about having the right qualifications—it's about knowing how to use language effectively, respectfully, and appropriately within a specific cultural and professional context. Based on insights from HR sources such as SHRM (2020) and Glassdoor (2021), as well as linguistic theories explored in earlier chapters, this section outlines strategies that support successful communication in intercultural job interviews. These strategies are not presented as rigid rules, but rather as flexible approaches that can help candidates adapt to unfamiliar communication norms.

Politeness and Respectful Framing

In intercultural interviews, demonstrating politeness often involves balancing confidence with humility. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, where maintaining the interviewer's "positive face" (i.e., desire for approval) and "negative face" (i.e., desire for autonomy) is essential. Hedging

phrases such as “*I believe that...*” or “*I would suggest...*” show respect for the listener’s perspective while still expressing one’s views. In American contexts—especially in companies that value direct communication—candidates are expected to assert themselves, but without appearing overly aggressive (SHRM, 2020). A gentle assertiveness, shaped by culturally appropriate politeness, can support this balance.

Moreover, politeness doesn’t just come through vocabulary—it’s also present in the way speech acts are carried out. When making requests or offering solutions, candidates should consider framing their contributions in a way that invites discussion rather than imposing a view. For example, in *The Intern*, Ben (Robert De Niro) uses polite but confident phrasing when suggesting improvements, maintaining warmth while signaling initiative. His statement, “*I’d be happy to take on whatever you need. I’m here to learn,*” captures this balance. It’s a classic example of a positive politeness strategy—signaling cooperation, openness, and deference to authority—while still asserting his readiness to contribute (Meyers, 2015).

This kind of politeness is deeply valued in HR practices. According to SHRM (2020), U.S. hiring managers seek candidates who are proactive but also collaborative—people who bring solutions without appearing dismissive of team structures. That subtle balance of language use becomes especially critical in intercultural interviews, where a mismatch in tone or assertiveness might create unintended impressions.

Grammar as a Cultural Tool

Grammar may seem like a technical matter, but in intercultural settings it plays a deeper role. The use of modals such as “*could,*” “*might,*” or “*would*” can soften

suggestions or responses, which is especially helpful in high power distance settings (Hofstede, 2010). However, in low power distance cultures like the U.S., where interviews often aim to assess independence and decision-making skills, being overly indirect may come across as uncertain. A candidate who uses clear conditionals—such as “*If I were in that situation, I would...*”—can demonstrate thoughtfulness while remaining action-oriented.

Grammar also shapes turn-taking. In *Suits*, we often see fast-paced questioning that demands quick, structured responses. Candidates who can use concise answers—especially employing past tenses for experience or future modals for planning—match the rhythm of U.S. interviews more effectively. As reported by Glassdoor (2021), recruiters often interpret clear grammar as a sign of clarity in thinking and communication.

Speech Acts: Strategic Self-Presentation

Speech Act Theory emphasizes how language performs actions, not just shares information (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). In interviews, speech acts such as **offering**, **refusing**, **justifying**, and **praising** are central to success. But how these acts are performed varies culturally. For instance, U.S. interviews expect a degree of self-promotion—seen as confidence, not arrogance. A candidate’s ability to highlight achievements without seeming boastful can make a strong impression (Ulrich, 2012).

Chris Gardner in *The Pursuit of Happyness* exemplifies this well: his storytelling approach, combined with emotional awareness and persistence, acts as a subtle form of persuasive speech. As Gardner himself says during the interview, “*I’m the type of person who, if you ask me a question and I don’t know the answer... I’m gonna find the answer.*” This line performs confidence and resourcefulness while remaining

respectful—an ideal alignment with HR expectations in the U.S. (SHRM, 2020). It also reflects a successful performance of a “commissive” speech act, where a candidate commits to future action with integrity and drive (Muccino, 2006).

Refusals and disagreements are also crucial areas. Candidates need to express disagreement without creating discomfort. Phrases like “*I see it slightly differently, because...*” or “*Another approach I’ve used is...*” offer a way to signal expertise while preserving harmony. Such strategies help maintain rapport—something valued across cultures, but expressed differently.

Pragmatic Cues: Listening, Timing, and Tone

Beyond vocabulary and grammar, pragmatic awareness—how language works in real-time communication—can shape outcomes. In multilingual or intercultural contexts, silence, pauses, and interruptions are interpreted differently. In the U.S., brief pauses might show thoughtfulness, but long silences may be seen as uncertainty. Likewise, interruptions are often tolerated in fast-paced industries (e.g., tech or law), as seen in *Suits*, but can appear rude in others.

Pragmatic competence involves being alert to these cues. HR managers often look for how well candidates read the conversational flow (Glassdoor, 2021). Using supportive feedback—like “*That’s a great point,*” or “*Yes, absolutely*”—can help maintain engagement, especially in panel interviews. These subtle signals of alignment reinforce a candidate’s sociolinguistic sensitivity.

Tone of voice, too, plays a powerful role. Friendly yet professional tone creates a sense of trust and openness. As Guffey and Loewy (2018) note, in business settings, candidates who vary their tone to reflect enthusiasm, respect, or concern tend to be perceived as more emotionally intelligent—another factor influencing hiring decisions.

Applying the Findings: What Candidates Can Do

Ultimately, successful candidates in intercultural interviews show adaptability—not by abandoning their identity, but by expanding their communicative toolkit. Understanding HR expectations (SHRM, 2020; Glassdoor, 2021) and combining them with linguistic awareness allows job seekers to prepare in a more holistic way.

They can reflect on questions such as:

- Am I using respectful yet confident language?
- Do my grammar choices match the cultural norms of the workplace?
- How am I performing key speech acts like suggesting, refusing, or apologizing?
- Am I aware of pragmatic elements like timing, tone, and turn-taking?

Such awareness is especially important in global hiring contexts where misunderstandings can occur easily—not due to lack of skill, but due to misalignment in communication styles. By practicing strategic linguistic choices and reflecting on culturally shaped norms, candidates increase not just their chances of getting hired—but of building meaningful cross-cultural relationships in the workplace.

Certainly! Here's the revised version without the numbered structure, maintaining the flow and clarity of your analysis while removing the numbering.

Communication Tips for International Job Seekers and HR Professionals in U.S. Interviews

In today's globalized job market, understanding how to communicate effectively in U.S.-based interviews is crucial for international job seekers. U.S. hiring processes

place a strong emphasis on communication skills, especially in intercultural contexts, where language nuances can have a significant impact on the success of an interview. This section offers practical communication tips based on linguistic theories and cultural insights, supported by analysis of key scenes from *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), *The Intern* (2015), and *Suits* (2011). The goal is to provide actionable strategies for non-native speakers preparing for interviews in the U.S., considering both the cultural and linguistic elements that can enhance their interview performance.

One of the key strategies for achieving balance in U.S. interviews is the use of **hedging** and **modality**—tools that help express ideas politely while avoiding the appearance of overconfidence or arrogance. Hedging involves softening statements to create more space for dialogue and collaboration, while modals (such as *could*, *would*, *might*) convey possibility or polite suggestion. In *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), Chris Gardner’s approach to self-presentation in the interview demonstrates the use of assertiveness paired with respectful hedging. Gardner’s famous line, “*I’m the type of person who, if you ask me a question and I don’t know the answer... I’m gonna find the answer*” (Muccino, 2006), showcases his commitment without being overly boastful. He communicates his resourcefulness and problem-solving skills confidently, but his hedging (“if you ask me...”) implies openness to collaboration and further learning. This strategy aligns with **Politeness Theory** (Brown & Levinson, 1987), where showing deference to the interviewer’s autonomy (i.e., acknowledging that you might not have all the answers) is a key tactic in successful communication.

For international job seekers, using modals like *would*, *could*, or *might* when discussing hypothetical situations or past experiences can signal thoughtfulness and a willingness to engage in collaborative problem-solving, which is highly valued in

U.S. business culture (SHRM, 2020). For instance, instead of saying, “*I can do this,*” a more culturally aware version would be, “*I believe I could handle this task, given the opportunity.*” This reflects a respectful balance of confidence and humility.

In cross-cultural communication, particularly in U.S. interviews, demonstrating politeness is crucial. However, politeness doesn’t always mean being overly deferential. It’s about finding the right balance between asserting yourself and respecting others’ viewpoints. In **Politeness Theory**, Brown and Levinson (1987) emphasize that speakers must navigate between two kinds of face: positive face (the desire to be liked and accepted) and negative face (the desire to maintain autonomy). Effective communicators in U.S. interviews know how to balance these competing needs.

Ben from *The Intern* (2015) provides a great example of this balance. In the film, Ben says, “*I’d be happy to take on whatever you need. I’m here to learn*” (Meyers, 2015). This statement reflects a **positive politeness strategy**, where Ben signals cooperation and openness while maintaining respect for his superiors. It also expresses humility and a willingness to contribute without overstepping boundaries. This is particularly important in U.S. corporate culture, which values teamwork and collaboration, and this statement exemplifies how international candidates can approach an interview with a respectful yet confident tone.

For non-native speakers, showing respect through polite phrasing can significantly impact the interviewer’s perception. For example, candidates can use phrases like “*I would be glad to discuss this further*” or “*I’m happy to contribute in any way I can*” to convey willingness and openness without sounding passive.

Another key component of successful interview communication is understanding how **speech acts** (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) function in the interview context. In

U.S. interviews, candidates are expected to perform a range of speech acts that demonstrate their qualifications, such as **asserting**, **offering**, and **justifying**. These speech acts are culturally specific; in the U.S., there is an expectation for candidates to self-promote and highlight their skills without appearing arrogant or overly boastful.

In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris Gardner's ability to present himself confidently without appearing overly self-important is a key part of his success. Gardner exemplifies this through his use of a **commissive speech act**, where he commits to future action, asserting his reliability and problem-solving abilities. His quote, "*I'm the type of person who, if you ask me a question and I don't know the answer... I'm gonna find the answer*" (Muccino, 2006), performs both an assertion (of his capabilities) and a promise (to find answers). This is a classic example of self-promotion in a way that aligns with U.S. hiring expectations, where candidates are encouraged to demonstrate both confidence and a willingness to take action.

For international candidates, understanding how to perform these speech acts in a culturally appropriate way is crucial. A key tip for non-native speakers is to practice **self-promotion** while maintaining humility. For example, instead of saying "*I am the best person for this role,*" candidates might say, "*I believe my skills and experience align well with the needs of this role, and I'm excited to contribute.*" This allows the candidate to promote themselves while still respecting the interviewer's perspective.

Beyond vocabulary and grammar, **pragmatic competence**—how language works in real-time communication—plays a crucial role in U.S. interviews. Interviewers value candidates who can respond appropriately to the flow of conversation, including the timing of their answers and their ability to read conversational cues.

In *Suits* (2011), we often see fast-paced interviews where quick, direct responses are expected. Candidates who can navigate this environment successfully know when to speak, how to maintain the conversation's rhythm, and how to express enthusiasm without interrupting. For example, using supportive feedback such as "*That's an interesting point,*" or "*I completely agree*" can help keep the conversation engaging and signal active listening. These subtle cues demonstrate a candidate's emotional intelligence and awareness of interview dynamics, both of which are valued in U.S. hiring processes (Guffey & Loewy, 2018).

For international job seekers, it's important to be mindful of these pragmatic cues. One tip is to practice **active listening**, which includes nodding, maintaining eye contact, and using verbal feedback to show attentiveness. Timing also matters; while brief pauses can signal thoughtfulness, long silences may be misinterpreted as uncertainty. Candidates should also be aware of the tone of their voice. A friendly, professional tone creates rapport and helps build trust, which is essential in U.S. business culture (Glassdoor, 2021).

successful communication in U.S.-based interviews requires a nuanced understanding of linguistic strategies such as hedging, modality, and speech acts, as well as cultural awareness of American business practices. By carefully balancing confidence and humility, practicing active listening, and mastering pragmatic competence, international job seekers can significantly improve their chances of success. By applying these communication tips, non-native speakers can present themselves more effectively and align with the expectations of U.S. employers, ultimately fostering better outcomes in their job search.

Conclusion to chapter 3

This chapter has explored the critical role of linguistic strategies and cultural understanding in navigating U.S. job interviews, offering a comprehensive guide for international job seekers preparing for these high-stakes interactions. Drawing upon theories of Politeness, Speech Act, and Pragmatics, as well as insights from films like *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *The Intern*, and *Suits*, we have highlighted how candidates can adjust their communication styles to align with U.S. cultural expectations and enhance their chances of success.

One of the key findings is the importance of balancing assertiveness with respect, achieved through the use of hedging and modals, which signal thoughtfulness and humility. As seen in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris Gardner's ability to confidently yet modestly present his skills and commitment exemplifies how international candidates can strategically navigate the fine line between self-promotion and overconfidence. The thoughtful use of speech acts—such as offering, justifying, and committing—also emerged as crucial for presenting oneself effectively in interviews, where cultural norms in the U.S. encourage candidates to demonstrate both competence and a willingness to take initiative.

Moreover, understanding pragmatic cues such as timing, tone, and turn-taking is indispensable in intercultural settings. In U.S. interviews, quick responses and the ability to maintain the conversation's flow are highly valued, as is the demonstration of emotional intelligence through the appropriate use of feedback and tone. These subtle aspects of communication often determine whether candidates are perceived as adaptable and sociolinguistically aware, essential traits for success in a competitive job market.

Ultimately, the chapter underscores that success in U.S. interviews is not merely about technical competence but about strategic communication that reflects cultural

sensitivity. Candidates who can master the nuanced dynamics of language—by using the right grammatical structures, performing culturally appropriate speech acts, and responding to pragmatic cues—are more likely to make a positive and lasting impression. This communication competence, when coupled with a genuine understanding of the cultural landscape, enables international job seekers not only to secure employment but also to foster meaningful, cross-cultural relationships in the workplace.

In conclusion, by integrating linguistic theories with practical strategies tailored to the U.S. interview context, this chapter provides a roadmap for international candidates seeking to thrive in the increasingly globalized job market. The insights shared here will serve as valuable tools for candidates to confidently approach interviews, refine their communication practices, and navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication with greater ease and effectiveness.

Conclusion

This thesis examined the relationship between cultural norms, linguistic strategies, and communication styles in U.S. job interviews, highlighting how cultural expectations influence communication dynamics. Interviews, often seen as straightforward, are deeply shaped by cultural factors like directness, power distance, and formality. In individualistic cultures, self-promotion and directness are valued, while collectivist cultures prioritize humility and indirectness. These differences can lead to miscommunication, emphasizing the importance of cultural awareness for both candidates and interviewers.

The analysis showed that self-promotion in U.S. job interviews varies, with some candidates using assertive approaches, while others, like Chris Gardner in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, employ humility and a growth-oriented mindset. Persuasion strategies also differ, reflecting the broader cultural values of U.S. corporate culture, which balances individual achievement with emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills.

The final chapter focused on practical strategies for international candidates, offering insights from linguistic theories such as Politeness Theory and Pragmatics. Success in U.S. interviews relies on balancing assertiveness with humility, understanding pragmatic cues, and mastering timing, tone, and turn-taking. HR professionals play a crucial role in fostering cultural sensitivity and ensuring interview techniques align with organizational values.

Ultimately, success in U.S. job interviews is shaped not only by technical competence but by the ability to navigate cultural and linguistic complexities. By mastering these strategies, international candidates can adapt to U.S. interview norms, build rapport, and thrive in cross-cultural professional environments.

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Summary

This thesis investigates how cultural norms and linguistic strategies influence communication in U.S. job interviews, with a particular focus on candidates from diverse cultural backgrounds. It examines how factors such as directness, power distance, and the use of formal or informal communication styles impact the dynamics of job interviews. The study highlights the contrast between individualistic cultures, where self-promotion and directness are emphasized, and collectivist cultures, where humility and indirectness are more valued.

The analysis of linguistic strategies in U.S. job interviews reveals the importance of self-promotion, persuasion, and turn-taking in the hiring process. Cultural values, such as assertiveness in American corporate settings and emotional intelligence in modern workplaces, shape the communication strategies employed by candidates. The thesis also explores how candidates from different cultural backgrounds adapt to these expectations, using varying linguistic tactics to effectively present themselves.

In the final chapter, the thesis provides practical strategies for international candidates preparing for U.S. job interviews. It incorporates insights from Politeness Theory, Speech Act Theory, and Pragmatics to guide candidates in navigating these interactions. It also emphasizes the role of HR professionals in ensuring that interview techniques align with cultural sensitivities, fostering inclusive and effective hiring practices.

Overall, the thesis underscores the importance of cultural awareness and effective communication in U.S. job interviews, offering valuable insights for international job seekers to succeed in a competitive, globalized job market.