

codes and nonverbal cues (see chap. 6). Researchers have contended that learning the organizational rules of a second language is almost simple compared to the complexity of trying to understand the complete scope of pragmatic behavior (e.g., Boxer, 1993; Brown, 2000; Ellis, 1994; Kasper & Kellerman, 1997).

In American English, it is common to end a conversation with “See you later” or “We’ll have to get together some time.” Such phrases are intended not as actual commitments to meeting the other speaker but, rather, as a way of showing camaraderie and solidarity with that speaker. To actually arrange a meeting, speakers must engage in a series of steps, which allow either speaker to withdraw at any point from making an actual commitment (Wolfson, D’Amico-Reisner, & Huber, 1983). Nonnative speakers unfamiliar with the underlying meaning of such utterances and/or the negotiation processes involved are likely to take such utterances at face value (see chap. 6). Then, when native speakers do not show commitment to what the nonnative speakers have interpreted as actual engagements, the nonnative speakers become offended, hurt, and/or insulted, which often leads them to negatively label Americans as insincere. **(See Activity F—Critical Incidents)**

Chinese speakers often greet each other with “Have you eaten?” Native speakers of English, accustomed to “How are you?” are taken aback and unsure of how to respond to this question. For Chinese speakers, the phrase “Have you eaten?” provides a way of showing concern and consideration toward their listeners. It has a pragmatic or social meaning that cannot be taken literally; however, when they use this phrase in English, the cultural and social contexts underlying the pragmatic meaning no longer apply, and the listeners will misinterpret both the intent and the meaning of the utterance. Because so much of communication is part of the cultural and social context of the speakers, the opportunities for cross-cultural misunderstandings and misinterpretations are great. The rules of speaking vary greatly across cultures, across ethnic groups, and across speech communities. **(See Activity G—Simulation: The Milapalanders)**

High/low context

The anthropologist Hall (1976) has distinguished between two broad types of cultural communication styles, high context and low context. While these are broad generalizations, research indicates that cultures

tend to fall along a continuum of high context versus low context (e.g., Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Okabe, 1983; Yoshikawa, 1988).

High-context communication occurs in cultures that emphasize communication through the context of the social interaction (e.g., speakers' social roles, gender, age, status, and other variables deemed important by the culture) and the physical environment in which the interaction is taking place. High-context communication makes extensive use of subtle nonverbal behaviors—including pauses, silences, the use of space, and avoidance of eye contact—to convey a message. Much of the actual message is left unsaid or implied, and it is up to the speakers to understand the implicit information being imparted. The message itself is dependent on the context within which it is being delivered, and it can only be understood or interpreted within that context. Hall notes that high-context communication styles tend to be found in homogeneous cultures, such as China or Japan, with a long shared history. In such cultures, there is enough shared knowledge, values, and background to allow for speakers' tacit sharing and exchange of information.

Low-context communication takes place in cultures that stress communication via explicit verbal messages. Communication is regarded as an independent act performed between speakers and their listeners. Speakers and listeners are seen as autonomous individuals whose relationship to one another is primarily derived from and defined through verbal messages. Although social context and physical environment influence communication in low-context cultures, the primary responsibility for ensuring that listeners correctly receive and interpret verbal messages rests on speakers. Direct verbal modes of communication are preferred, and elaborated messages are the norm. It is up to speakers to ensure effective communication by conveying their messages as clearly, as thoroughly, as logically, and as persuasively as possible. Low-context communication styles are generally found in more individualistic cultures, such as Italy or North America, as these tend to focus more on the individual and to have less of a common history.

Nonverbal Behavior

When communicating, speakers use more than spoken words to convey meaning. A great deal of information is expressed nonverbally. Indeed, some researchers have suggested that what speakers communicate non-