

## **Face Threatening/Supporting Strategies in Korean and American TV Presidential Debates: A Cultural Comparative Study**

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The purpose of this study is to investigate cultural differences in face-threatening and face-supporting strategies employed in presidential debates in South Korea and the United States. We conducted a quantitative content analysis of exchanges in the 1997 and 2002 Korean presidential debates and in the 1992, 2000, and 2004 U.S. presidential debates. The results of content analysis indicated that the U.S. presidential candidates employed direct, aggressive communication strategies for attacking or supporting opponents significantly more frequently than did Korean candidates, who preferred indirect, moderate strategies. In addition, the U.S. candidates' attacks were framed in terms of independent, personal attacks rather than interdependent, collective attacks, whereas the Korean candidates' attacks were more interdependent and collective in nature. Two culturally distinctive dimensions—individualism/collectivism and high-context/low-context culture—provide theoretical explanations for these results.

The practice of televised debates, once limited to Western democracies, has spread rapidly around the world with the development of democracy, especially in Eastern cultures. In many countries, televised campaign debates are now regarded as major political campaign events, and television has been shown to have major effects on election outcomes (Plasser & Plasser, 2002). In the research areas of political and intercultural communication, however, there has been very little effort to compare debating discourses in Eastern and Western cultures.

The ways by which participants conduct debates and the communication strategies or patterns that debate participants use are not necessarily similar across cultures. Instead, new patterns of political communication, mainly inspired exogenously by the U.S., are modified according to the endogenous contexts of each culture (Coleman, 2000; Gomard & Krogstad, 2001; Lee & Benoit, 2005; Pfetsch & Esser, 2004; Schrott, 1984; Song, 2000). Every culture provides its members with guidelines for communicative behaviors that are closely related to shared expectations of how others will behave (Hall, 1976). The perceptions and interpretations held by participants in communicative events are informed by their own cultural values, beliefs, patterns of thinking, norms, and behaviors (Beom, Carlin, & Silver, 2005). Although a comprehensive review of theoretical perspectives in intercultural communication is beyond the scope of this paper, numerous reviews (Casmir & Asuncion-Lande, 1989; Gudykunst, 2005; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1989; Kim, 1988; Pennington, 1985; Sarbaugh & Asuncion-Lande, 1983) have paid a significant amount of attention to developing an understanding of the significance, as well as the complexity, of cultural influences in human communication.

Previous comparative studies of the communication styles in Eastern and Western presidential debates, especially in South Korea and the U.S., have shown that the perceived

performance of debate participants differs because of the influences of cultural norms, values, and beliefs (Khang, 2008; Kim, Khang & Lee, 2008; Lee & Benoit, 2005; Song, 2000). Surprisingly, however, very little research has been carried out in this direction.

### Handling Public Faces in Presidential TV Debates

Face is defined as the self image or impression that each person displays to other people in a particular interaction (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Face threats arise when a person's desired image or identity is challenged before the public. Since debates inherently involve conflict among participants, it is inevitable that contenders in televised campaign debates will be exposed to face-threatening situations, possibly in front of millions of viewers. Arguments between debate participants who share the same goals—winning elections—are directly informed by the candidates' common desire to save face. Competitive situations between two opposing parties involve more potential face threats than normal human interactions (Ting-Toomey, 2005). The more effective candidate in a debate usually achieves his/her goals at the expense of the opposing candidate. In other words, the success or failure of each candidate in a political debate during election periods might be determined by how well each persuades the public to perceive his/her face in the most positive light (Beck, 1996; Hinck & Hinck, 2002).

Face-work has been studied extensively by communication scholars over the past three decades since Goffman (1955) proposed the concept of face, which was later recast as politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1978). Despite the pervasiveness of this concept, research has so far been restricted mainly to the field of interpersonal communication. Harris (2002) argued that previous studies of face-work have focused primarily on ordinary interpersonal conversations based on the concerns of maintaining or enhancing relationships with others. However, the importance of face is not limited to casual interpersonal interactions. The importance of candidates' face-work in televised debate situations is often noted, but there are surprisingly few studies on this topic in the vast literature on presidential debates. Hinck and Hinck (2002) is the only study so far that has directly applied the concept of face-work to the analysis of communication patterns in presidential debates by assuming that politeness is an important component of the character of a political leader. Their analysis of the 1992 vice presidential and presidential debates within the framework of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory revealed that although politeness theory provides a new perspective for analyzing the discourse of televised debates, it is still from a non cross-cultural perspective.

Hinck and Hinck defined face as self-image necessary to preserve self-esteem amid human interactions. This concept of face reflects an individualized, Western viewpoint, and prioritizes direct, assertive, frank communication manners over indirect and vague styles. From the Eastern perspective, there is great concern not only about individual face, but also group (or interdependent) face. Therefore, it is necessary to explore cultural differences in the concept of face.

## Cultural Variation in Communication Styles

Many comparative studies have revealed that the meaning of face, and concepts of how face operates in society, such as face protecting, maintaining, losing, saving, threatening, and giving, differ across cultures (Augsburger, 1992; Cocroft & Ting-Toomey, 1994; Earley, 1997; Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey, 1994, 2005; Ting-Toomey, Gao, Trubisky, Yang, Kim, Lin, & Nishida, 1991; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Various disciplines have explained cultural variability along the axes of individualism and collectivism to illustrate how cultural differences influence the ways that people emphasize and regard particular aspects of face and how they employ face-working strategies in interactions (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 1988). For example, in collectivist societies, such as Japan and Korea, individual face is not independent, as it is in Western society; instead it is interdependent, and strongly associated with the groups to which individuals belong, such as their family, workplace, school, region, and nation, among others (Mastsumoto, 1988; Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994).

Another cultural variable that affects face-work strategies is Hall's (1976) distinction between high-context and low-context communication styles (Ting-Toomey, 2005). A low-context communication style puts emphasis on the importance of direct, explicit verbal messages to transmit the communicator's opinions, thoughts, and feelings. A high-context communication style, by contrast, frames encounters through implicit, contextualized, and multiplex messages. In conflict situations, low-context cultures tend to use assertive and direct face-work styles focused on content goals, while high-context cultures tend to utilize vague and indirect face-work styles that focus on the conflict relationship (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

### The Meaning of Face in Korean and Western Cultures

Collectivism does not include all the public in a general sense. Instead, collectivism is concerned with ongoing relationships or in-group interactions. The emphasis on in-group interactions sometimes appears to be exclusive. Collectivists are more aggressive than individualists toward out-group members when they compete with out-group members for limited resources. Collectivists emphasize social relationships and identify themselves as closely related to others and to the groups to which they belong. Individuals are willing to sacrifice their personal needs in order to maintain group harmony. Therefore, it can be said that collectivistic cultures are characterized by individuals who have interdependent self-construals, or who recognize that "one's behavior is determined, contingent on, and, to a large extent, organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227). Collectivism involves the desire to have a "feeling of oneness with fellow members of one's group" (Lebra, 1976, p. 25), such that all members share feelings of dignity, pride, shame, or embarrassment. In collectivistic cultures, if one of the group members is doing something wrong, other group members feel shame because the wrongdoing will have negative effects on the social faces of both the wrongdoer and other group members. This collectivistic self-construal may occur

because it is difficult to differentiate clearly between the concepts of personal face and group face in such cultures (Kim, 2002).

In Korea, face is an important concept at every level of human communication. The Korean concept of social face, *che-myon*, is group-oriented and collectivistic. If one member loses face, it involves all group members. For example, Korean parents feel shame and tend to avoid contacts with other people if their children fail their college entrance exams (Park, 1979). For Korean workers, the “social reputation and image of the organization” for which they work is the most important factor influencing job satisfaction or organizational commitment, while the quality of communication inside the work unit is the most important predictor of workers’ job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the U.S. (Downs, Beom, & Lim, 2005). Consequently, in Western cultures, face-work primarily affects intrapersonal (private) and interpersonal communication. When two people are involved in an interaction, it affects the faces of only those two participants. Korean social faces, however, are socially fixed in association with one’s social status and position. In other words, “while the Western face performance is ‘person-wise’ social, the Korean *che-myon* activity is ‘context-wise’ social” (Choi & Choi, 1990, p. 18, as cited in Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994, p. 58). Therefore, the meaning of face in Korean culture is very different from those in Western culture, especially American culture.

In individualistic societies, such as that of the U.S., individual interests are considered more important than group interests. This individualism is based on cultural beliefs that emphasize individual rights and success, which are achieved mostly through competition against others. Individualism refers to “the broad value tendencies of a system in emphasizing the importance of individual identity over group identity, individual rights over group rights, and individual needs over group needs” (Ting-Toomey, 1994, p. 314). Individualism reflects a loosely-knit social network and is motivated by the individuals’ own interests and the interests of their immediate family members (Hofstede, 1980, 2001). In an individualist culture, members tend to identify themselves as separate and unique and to make their most important commitments to themselves (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Lu, Rose, & Blodgett, 1999).

Individualistic societies are characterized by individuals who have independent self-construals that require seeing oneself “as an individual whose behavior is organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to one’s own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and actions, rather than by reference to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 226). This individualistic self-construal is associated with a socio-cultural emphasis on individual-oriented (or independent) face.

Euro-American concepts of face stem from Goffman (1955). Influenced by the Chinese concept of face, Goffman defined face as the identity or image of self that has positive social value, as claimed by each person in interactions with others, which can be lost, saved, or given. Face-work seeks to counteract face-threatening situations in which a person fails to present his or her most positive image. Goffman suggested two foci of face: self-face and other-face. During interactions with others, one needs to not only protect one’s own face, but also to save others’ faces. In Goffman’s conception, which has a Western bias, face and face-work are presented through communication content and actions that require a person to alternate between the role of performer and observer (Choi & Choi, 1990, as cited in Morisaki

& Gudykunst, 1994). Face is negotiated between parties in communication, but is not associated with the other person's face. Therefore, Morisaki and Gudykunst (1994) argued that Goffman treats face as an "independent" phenomenon.

Following Goffman's (1955) definition of face, Levinson and Brown (1978) introduced politeness theory, which focuses on linguistic face redressing strategies in interpersonal communication. They proposed two contrasting concepts of face: positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to "the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactions" (p. 66). In contrast, negative face is "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction—i.e., to freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (p. 66). Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed a politeness continuum including five super-strategies that people choose from in order to minimize or alleviate face-threatening acts (FTA). First, bold on-record strategies communicate without any redressive action. Second, positive politeness communicates while enhancing positive face. Third, negative politeness communicates by attempting to soften the encroachment on the addressee's freedom of action or freedom from imposition. Fourth, off-record strategies communicate FTA in an indirect or ambiguous manner. The final strategy is avoidance of FTA.

Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness theory has been regarded as groundbreaking and has been widely applied in diverse disciplines. However, many scholars have challenged this theory. One of the most frequently criticized aspects is the claim that the notion of face, especially negative face, is universal (Mao, 1994; Matsumoto, 1988; O'Driscoll, 1996). First, Brown and Levinson's conceptualization of face can be interpreted as an example of ethnocentrism. Mao (1994) argued that the concept of "self-oriented" face, which may be applicable in the West, is problematic in Eastern cultures. The Eastern notion of face represents not only a self image, but also a public image. Second, in Eastern cultures, the concept of negative face can be applied to only a very limited kind of human interaction (Mao, 1994; Matsumoto, 1988). The most important goal in Eastern cultures is to gain the acceptance and respect of in-group members; the desire for freedom, which is related to the concept of negative face, is less important.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

We can assume that collectivists are more concerned with group (interdependent) face or public image than are individualists, and that individualists are more concerned about personal (independent) face than collectivists. We can also assume that in a competitive situation, such as in presidential debates, individualists, who prefer low-context communication styles, tend to attack in direct ways while collectivists, who prefer high-context communication styles, tend to attack in indirect, vague ways. Following these cultural assumptions, this study posits the following research question and hypotheses:

- RQ1: Are there differences and/or similarities in face-threatening (FT) and face-supporting (FS) strategies performed by U.S. and Korean candidates?

- H1: Korean candidates in presidential debates use more indirect FT and FS strategies than do U.S. presidential candidates, while U.S. candidates use more direct strategies than do Korean candidates.
- H2: Korean presidential candidates use more group (interdependent) FT and FS strategies than do U.S. presidential candidates, while U.S. candidates use more personal (independent) FT and FS strategies than do Korean presidential candidates.

### Method

In this study, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of exchanges in the 1997 and 2002 Korean and the 1992, 2000, and 2004 U.S. presidential debates. A total of 12 televised debates were analyzed for verbal content. Data from town-hall format debates in the U.S. were excluded from data analysis, because this format has never been employed in the two Korean election cycles that we examined, and involves significantly fewer relevant (attack-oriented) statements between debaters than the one-moderator format (Benoit & Wells, 1996; Carlin, Morris, & Smith, 2001; Morris, 2004) or the cross-examination format (Song, 2000).

We analyzed verbal content using six transcripts of Korean televised presidential debates printed by the Korean Broadcasters' Association (1998, 2003) and six transcripts of U.S. presidential debates obtained from the official web site of the U.S. Commission on Presidential Debates (2004).

The data were quantified ("unitized") via two steps. First, the unit of content analysis was a candidate's response. All statements representing answers to questions asked by a moderator, interruptions, audience member interjections, opposing candidates, rebuttals and re-rebuttals, and/or opening and closing statements were regarded as dividing points for units of analysis. However, one candidate sometimes interrupted the other while he/she was speaking. Each interruption was regarded as a unit if it included statements related to the issues, character, or policies of the candidate who was speaking before the interruption. The response units were further classified into thought units. A thought unit was defined as a "minimum meaningful utterance having a beginning and end, typically operationalized as a simple sentence" (Hatfield & Wieder-Hatfield, 1978, p. 46). Unitizing candidates' utterances into thought rather than time units was appropriate for the present study, because debate viewers are interested in how candidates construct their arguments (Hinck & Hinck, 2002).

Each data coder counted thought units containing face-work strategies within each candidate response unit. Thus, each candidate response unit could potentially include several thought units, because a single response can contain many different face-work strategies. These thought units were classified into five different categories of candidate face-work strategies (see below). The total number of candidate responses (units) was 459 for the U.S. debates and 560 for the Korean debates. The total number of thought units that were coded into the five categories of face-work strategies—direct FT, indirect FT, balanced between FT and FS, indirect FS, and direct FS—was 617 for the U.S. debates and 690 for the Korean debates.

The thought units were classified into two face-threatening strategies: personal (independent) and group (interdependent) face-threatening strategies. The total number of thought units that were coded into the two face-threatening categories was 269 for the U.S. debates and 303 for the Korean debates. A more detailed discussion of the categorization of the five FT and FS strategies and the two face attacking strategies is provided later.

### *Coding Process*

Because there were two different languages involved, Korean and English, coders needed to be fluent in both languages. Thus, the three coders we recruited were Korean-American undergraduate students and were familiar with both languages and both cultures. The three coders were trained by listening to an explanation of the general purpose of the study, receiving a code sheet and code book, and then discussing the units of analysis, categories, and procedures. For training, the coders were given the transcripts of the 2002 Korean minor candidates' presidential debate and the 2004 Cheney-Edwards U.S. vice-presidential debates. Throughout the practice coding exercises, confusion and disagreements were discussed to identify and clarify the categorization system and research process. Coders repeatedly practiced, discussed, and refined the coding method until the reliability from the practice transcripts reached 0.90.

One week after the training session, the coders independently coded five pages, about 25% of the text, of each presidential debate transcript for the purpose of reliability measurement. Inter-coder reliability was calculated by using Holsti's (1968) formula. Among seven categories, the reliability coefficient for all categories was above 0.80 except for two categories, the direct-FT strategy and the indirect FT strategy, which scored 0.68 and 0.60, respectively. The coders were retrained to clarify the exclusive meanings of all categories. After the retraining process, the score of the inter-coder reliability coefficient rose to 0.86 and 0.83, respectively, and the overall score reached 0.87. This level of reliability was regarded as a highly satisfactory guide for discussion. The remaining texts were equally distributed among the coders, who spent two weeks completing the coding (Holsti, 1968).

*Categories of FT and FS strategies.* To analyze the FT and FS strategies used by candidates in presidential debates, this study employed Kline's (1984) social face coding system. This system was chosen because it is suitable for analyzing positive face-work, which describes the communication strategies employed in debates to achieve the desire for acceptance and for respect of one's competence (Lim & Bowers, 1991). In addition, Kline's social face coding system has been successfully used in previous content analyses of face-work not only in studies of interpersonal interactions (Fairhurst, Green, & Snavely, 1984; Kline, 1984; Leichty & Applegate, 1991), but also in the context of televised political debates (Hinck & Hinck, 2002).

Kline's coding schema for social face-work is classified into one of three major levels: (1) strategies that threaten opponents' positive images or faces (lowest concern for other faces); (2) strategies that strike a balance between threatening and supportive evaluative implications to the opponents' images or faces; and (3) strategies that support the opponents' positive images or faces (highest concerns for other faces). Among the three major levels of

face-work strategies, level one and level three are divided further into two levels apiece by differentiating between the directness and indirectness of the FT and FS strategies for cross-cultural comparisons. In this study, Hinck and Hinck's (2002) modified version of facework coding framework for presidential debates was used for the analysis. Description of the five facework strategies and their examples were as follows.

#### I. Strategies that threaten the opponent's positive face

##### 1. Direct Face-Threatening Strategies (DFT):

The speaker directly criticizes or condemns the opponent's self image. At this level are included blatant expressions of criticism, reprimands, accusations, contempt, ridicule, and/or insults to indicate dislike or disapproval of the opponent. The speaker explicitly indicates that s/he does not like or approve of the opponent's characteristics, beliefs, attitudes, goods, or actions. Additionally, the speaker states or clearly assumes that the opponent has performed undesirable actions or possesses undesirable dispositional or motivational characteristics or the speaker asserts explicitly that the opponent is responsible for the problem. Examples include:

Kerry: And he rushed the war in Iraq without a plan to win the peace. Now, that is not the judgment that a president of the United States ought to make. You don't take America to war unless you have the plan to win the peace. You don't send troops to war without the body armor that they need. (U.S. presidential debate, September 30, 2004)

Bush: He's just not credible when he talks about being fiscally conservative. Just not credible. You look at his record in the Senate, he voted to break the caps—the spending caps—over 200 times. (U.S. presidential debate, October 8, 2004)

Gore: Under Governor Bush's tax cut proposal, he would spend more money on tax cuts for the wealthiest 1% than all of the new spending that he proposes for education, health care, prescription drug, and national defense all combined. Now, I think those are the wrong priorities. (U.S. vice presidential debate, October 3, 2000)

##### 2. Indirect Face-Threatening Strategies (IDF):

The speaker threatens the opponent's self-image by alluding to inappropriate characteristics or actions or by challenging aspects of the opponent's self-image. This can be done in the following manner. The speaker asserts that the opponent's beliefs or actions are unfair or unreasonable, but assumes that the opponent is unaware of the problematic behavior or is somehow misguided. The speaker asserts that the opponent's beliefs or actions are unfair or unreasonable, but contextualizes the opponent's negative characteristics or behaviors rather than assuming them to be intrinsic to the opponent. The speaker makes indirect reference to the opponent's need to change his/her beliefs, attitudes or actions. Examples include:



Bush: I think the economy has meant more for the Gore and Clinton folks than the Gore and Clinton folks have meant for the economy. I think most of the economic growth that has taken place is a result of ingenuity and hard work and entrepreneurship and that's the role of government to encourage that. (U.S. presidential debate, October 3, 2000)

Kim, Dae-Jung: I think that if the groups that have made this country worse regain their power, there would be no possibilities to reform. It is because the people with vested interests will oppose the reform...I think if the group that has made economy worse regains its power, we would not have any hope in the future. (Korean presidential debate, December 1, 1997).

## II. Strategies that are balanced between threatening and supporting the opponent's positive face

### 3. Balanced Face-work (BF):

The speaker balances both negative and positive implications for the opponent's positive self-image. At this level are included strategies that have both threatening and supportive implications for the opponent's self-image, but in which neither threatening nor supportive image implications predominate. This can be accomplished in the following ways. The speaker asserts that the opponent possesses both positive and negative motivational or dispositional characteristics or that the opponent is not behaving in ways that display his/her positive motivational or dispositional characteristics. The speaker implies or states that the opponent's beliefs, attitudes, or actions are or might be preventing a positive outcome. The speaker provides excuses, sympathy, concern or understanding for his/her opponent, but points out the present or potential negative consequences for the opponent's beliefs, attitudes, or actions. Examples include:

Lee, Hoi-Chang: Your utterance about currency adjustment once all right, but I don't think that your mentions—the more currency the higher prices—are not correct. (Korean presidential debate, December 1, 1997)

Kerry: I couldn't agree more that the Iraqis want to be free and that they could be free. But I think the president, again, still hasn't shown how he's going to go about it the right way. He has more of the same. (U.S. presidential debate, September 30, 2004)

## III. Strategies that support the opponent's positive face

### 4. Indirect Face-Supporting Strategies (IFS):

The speaker supports the opponent's positive self-image by claiming legitimacy for the self-image of the opponent. This can be accomplished in the following ways. The speaker claims or presupposes common feelings, beliefs, attitudes, intentions, or actions with the opponent. The speaker claims common ground with the opponent by using group identity markers. The speaker provides excuses or offers an alternative interpretation of the situation. The speaker provides sympathy for, concern with, or understanding of the opponent's needs and desires or disavows malice toward the opponent. Examples include:

Kerry: Well, I guess the president and you and I are three examples of lucky people who married up (October 13, 2004, p. 33).

Noh, Moo-Hyun: The candidate Kwon said, "Our party is a corrupted party newly opened." I am sorry that the works have gotten worse for past five years since my party was formed. Now we will work better as a clean party without any corruption. I will do it with responsibility. (Korean presidential debate, December 03, 2002, p.12)

Lee, Hoi-Chang: We can review the part that the candidate Kwon proposed, in order to get rid of corruption perfectly and prepare for the basis of a new start. (Korean presidential Debate, December 3, 2002, p. 21)

#### 5. Direct Face-Supporting Strategies (DFS):

The speaker directly approves of the positive self-image of the opponent. At this level are included explicit expressions of approval, optimism, praise, or liking for the opponent. The opponent explicitly indicates that s/he likes the opponent's personal characteristics, beliefs, attitudes, intentions, goods, or actions. This can be accomplished in the following ways. The speaker explicitly states that the opponent possesses desirable motivational or dispositional characteristics. The speaker praises the past efforts of the opponent. The speaker claims to like the opponent or approve of his/her relationship with the opponent. Examples include:

Gore: We agree on a couple of things on education. I strongly support new accountability, so does Governor Bush. I strongly support local control, so does Governor Bush. (U.S. vice presidential debate, October 3, 2000, p. 15)

Kim, Dae-Jung: I admire party chief Mr. Lee for acting according to his own firm conviction when he retired from the Prime Minister office four months after he was appointed. (Korean presidential debate, December 7, 1997, p. 5)

Kerry: Well, I respect everything that the president has said and certainly respect his faith. I think it's important and I share it. I think that he just said that freedom is a gift from the Almighty. (U.S. presidential debate, October 13, 2004, p. 31)

*Categories of attacks on personal or group faces.* Personal face threats are an attack on an opponent's personal (independent) face or image by criticizing the opponent's past deeds, past records, or future plans: directly threatening the individual image or face by attacking the opponents' personal responsibilities for wrongdoing, mistakes, failures, or shortcomings in the past. The concept of independent face is associated with individual self-esteem and self-identification. We analyzed only attacks on opponents' past statements, deeds or records, and excluded criticisms of an opponent's future plans or attacks on the opponents' statements that were made during debates.

Group face threats are an attack on the opponent's interdependent (group) face or image by criticizing the opponent's group's past deeds, records, or future plans: threatening the opponent's image or face by attacking past wrongdoings, mistakes, failures, or shortcomings of the group as a whole, such as political party and the current or former administration, that the opponent (used to) belongs to. It can also be performed by attacking affiliated groups, such as family members, running mates, or staff members. The concept of interdependent face is associated with collective self-esteem and group-oriented self-identification. If a candidate attacks an opponent by stating something not about the opponent's personal wrongdoing, but about the collective shortcomings of the policy of the opponent's party, then it can be said that the attack is made toward the opponent's interdependent face.

## Results

Research Question 1 was posited to examine differences and/or similarities in the FT and FS strategies between U.S. and Korean candidates. The results of a t-test show that American candidates ( $M = 1.11$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) had a slightly higher average score per response for using FT strategies than did Korean candidates ( $M = 0.99$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ), but the difference was not statistically significant,  $t(1, 1017) = 1.78$ , ns. Moreover, the frequencies of both FS strategies were similar between the candidates in both the U.S. and Korean debates. Hence, if we simply, without drawing distinctions between indirect and direct strategies, examined the three levels of face-work—(1) FT (face-threatening) strategies, (2) balanced between FT and FS (face-supporting) strategies, and (3) FS strategies—we could not find any significant differences between debaters in the U.S. and Korea.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that when Korean candidates attack or support opponents' face in the debates, they would use indirect communication strategies more often than American candidates, while American candidates would employ direct communication strategies more than Korean candidates. This hypothesis was confirmed by chi-square tests, revealing significant differences between the two nations in the face-work strategies employed by candidates in debates, when we analyzed cross-cultural distinctions in terms of the directness and indirectness of communication styles. First, in the category of direct FT, which was the most frequently used strategy among the five face-work strategies for both American and Korean debate participants, the U.S. candidates (78.0%) employed direct FT significantly more often than did Korean candidates (52.5%):  $\chi^2(1, N = 1,019) = 71.15$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . As for indirect

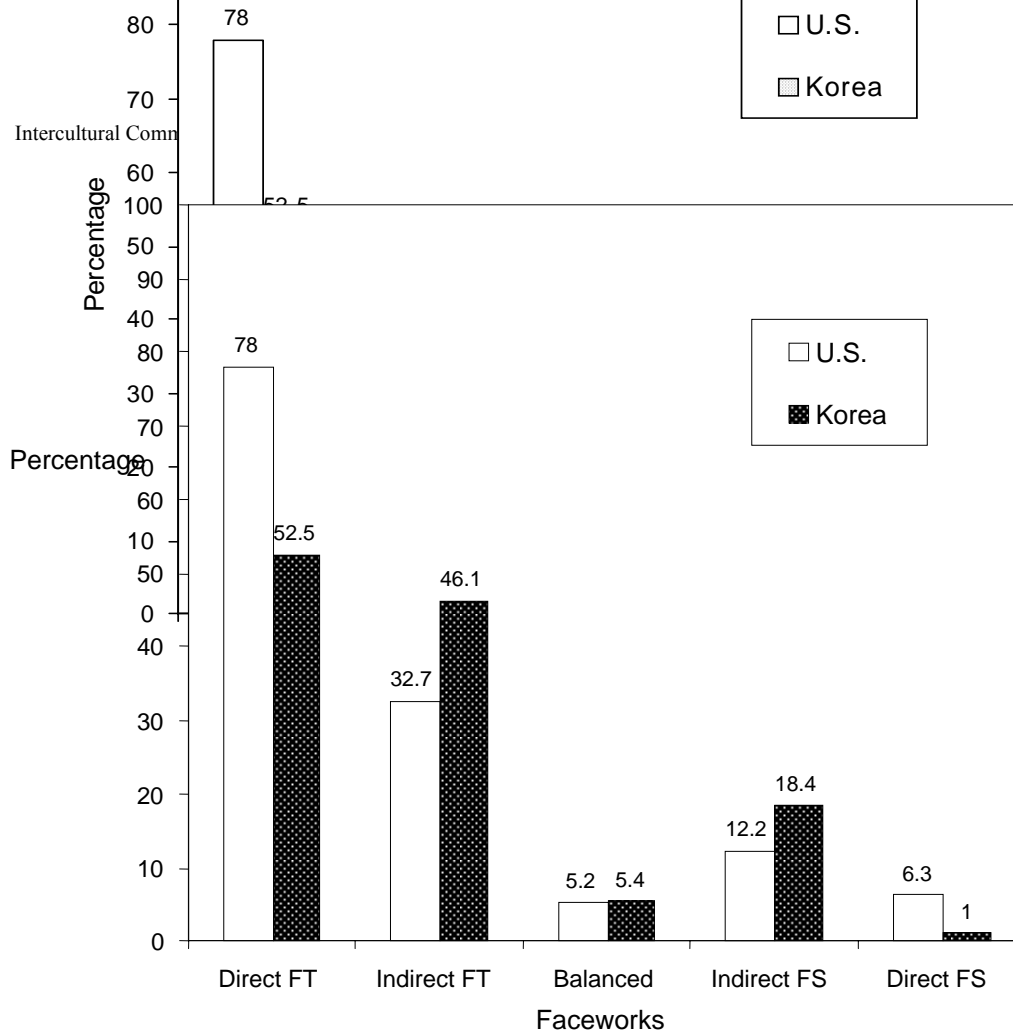


Figure 1. FT and FS in American and Korean presidential debates

FT, by contrast, Korean candidates (46.1%) were more likely to use indirect FT than were U.S. candidates (32.7%):  $\chi^2(1, N = 1,019) = 18.84, p < 0.0001$ .

Even though we found that both American and Korean candidates used direct FT more often than indirect FT, American candidates used direct FT (70.5%) more than twice as often as indirect FT (29.5%), while Korean face-threatening strategies were divided almost evenly between direct and indirect FT (53.3% and 46.7%):  $\chi^2(1, N = 1,060) = 33.10, p < 0.0001$ . This result confirms that American candidates used direct FT to indirect FT significantly more often than did Korean candidates.

As expected, since televised political campaign debates intrinsically highlight conflict rather than agreement between candidates, face-supporting (FS) strategies were very rarely employed. Despite the relatively lower frequencies of both indirect FS and direct FS

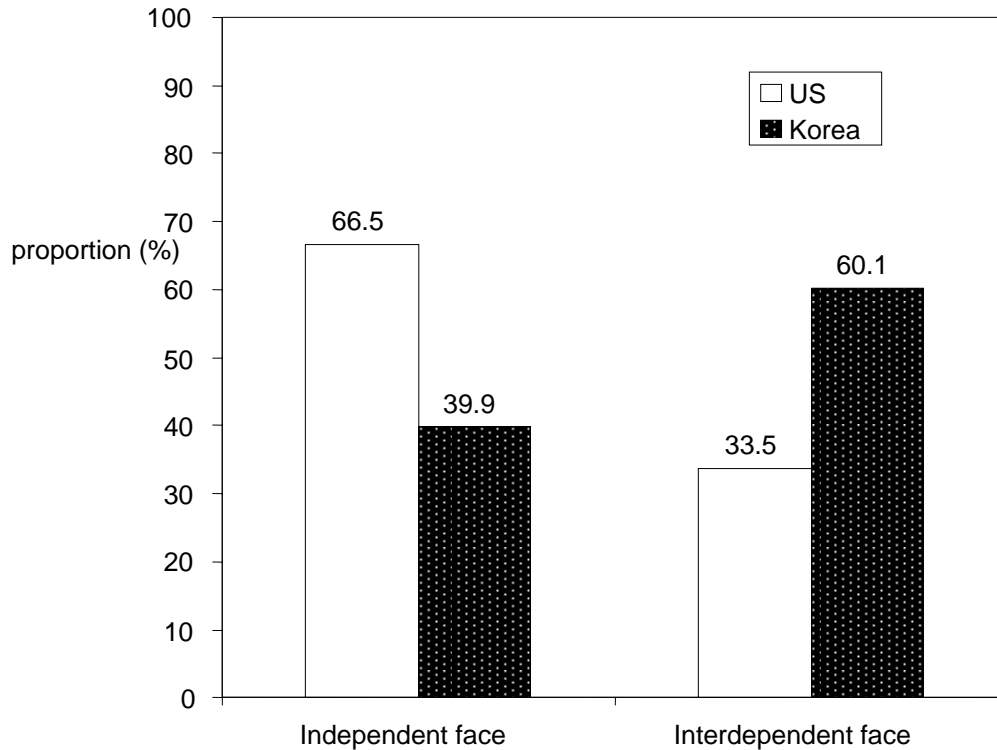


Figure 2. Frequencies of attacks on independent (personal) and interdependent (group) face in American and Korean debates

strategies, they followed similar patterns. Indirect FS was preferred by the Korean candidates (18.4%) significantly more than by American candidates (12.2%):  $\chi^2 (1, N = 1,019) = 7.35, p < 0.01$ . In contrast, American candidates (6.3%) used direct FS significantly more often than did Korean candidates (1.0%), as shown in Figure 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that Korean presidential candidates would use group-oriented (interdependent) face-work strategies more than would U.S. presidential candidates, while the American candidates would use individual-oriented (independent) face-work strategies more than would Korean presidential candidates. As shown in Figure 2, there are substantial differences between American candidates and Korean candidates in communication strategies for attacking an opponent's individual or group face. When attacking an opponent's past deeds or records, American candidates preferred attacking the opponent's personal face (39.0%) rather than his or her group face (19.6%):  $\chi^2 (1, N = 459) = 41.65, p < 0.01$ , while Korean candidates preferred attacking an opponent's group face (32.5%) rather than his or her personal face (21.6%):  $\chi^2 (1, N = 560) = 16.84, p < 0.01$ .

In addition, two nations produced significant differences with regard to personal-face attacks between American and Korean candidates. Chi-square tests revealed that American candidates (39.0%) attacked their opponents' personal faces much more often than did Korean candidates (21.6%):  $\chi^2(1, N = 1,019) = 36.73, p < 0.01$ . However, Korean candidates (32.5%) attacked opponents' group faces more often than did U.S. candidates (19.6%):  $\chi^2(N = 1,019) = 21.43, p < 0.01$ . These significant proportional differences,  $\chi^2(1, N = 572) = 40.45, p < 0.0001$ , in the use of attacks against opponent candidates' personal and group faces are illustrated in Figure 2.

### Discussion

The first research question asked whether American and Korean presidential candidates employed FT and FS strategies differently in television debates. After addressing this question, these face-work strategies were further investigated after dividing them into two distinct categories—directness and indirectness.

First of all, when we simply assessed the frequencies of FT and FS statements, no substantial or culturally-grounded differences between the two nations were observed. This finding is inconsistent with two previous cross-cultural comparative studies of presidential debates between American and Korean candidates (Lee & Benoit, 2005; McKinney & Song, 2002). These studies showed that attacks were more common in Korean debates than in American debates. However, each study analyzed the presidential debates for only one election cycle for each country. In addition, the two previous studies included debates that followed the town hall format, which contain significantly fewer clashes than other debate formats. It is impossible that the generalization problem is wholly resolved by this study, because there have been only two presidential election cycles in Korea with televised debates. However, this study analyzed more comprehensive data from all televised Korean presidential debates and all televised American debates that were not conducted in town hall format. The American debates that we analyzed represented three election cycles. By excluding town hall format debates from the analysis, we removed the possible effects of format differences. We found that there is no difference in the level of face-threatening or attacking and supporting or saving strategies between the two nations, which may indicate that the frequencies of face-attacking or face-saving strategies in televised debates are probably not affected significantly by cultural factors.

However, after dividing the FT and FS strategies into two contrasting categories, directness and indirectness, we discovered significant differences between the two nations. American presidential candidates directly and openly criticized their opponents' characteristics, policies, records, or actions more frequently than did Korean candidates. In contrast, Korean presidential candidates more often criticized or attacked their opponents in indirect ways by alluding vaguely to and/or contextualizing inappropriate characteristics or actions more often than did their American counterparts. The ultimate goal of this indirectness may be to protect and enhance their own social faces and to gain a political advantage over their opponents through the use of calculated communication strategies.

Even when candidates supported or saved the opponents' positive faces or public images, American candidates did so in a direct and straightforward manner more often than did their Korean counterparts. However, Korean presidential candidates tended to be more indirect and oblique in supporting their opponents' faces than were American candidates. In short, American presidential candidates employed direct, explicit communication styles for both attacking and supporting their opponents' faces in TV debates significantly more often than did Korean candidates. Korean candidates, by contrast, preferred more indirect, implicit manners in their verbal tactics than did American candidates.

These findings demonstrate that the debate tactics used by candidates in televised presidential debates reflect culture. The clear distinctions between communication norms in the U.S. and Korean presidential debates that we detected are consistent with Hall's (1976) distinctive notions of high-context culture and low-context culture. The communication styles of high-context cultures are dependent on contextual keys (historical context, social norms, roles, and situational and relational contexts). In confrontational situations, people from high-context cultures manage the situation with indirect or implicit communication styles to lessen the degree of threatening face (Ting-Toomey, 2005) that they create. For example, in Japan or Korea, people tend not to directly criticize other people's faults or misconduct, especially in public (Ting-Toomey, 2005). In contrast, the communication patterns of low-context Western cultures rely heavily on low-context messages in which most of the information is encoded in explicit verbal forms. In conflict situations, people from low-context cultures are likely to be explicit, assertive, and even aggressive in attempting to pursue their own interests (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Our results clearly illustrate differences in communication patterns of high-context cultures and low-context cultures.

In a cross-cultural comparative perspective between individualism and collectivism, face or public image can be described from two distinct perspectives—*independent* (individual-oriented) and *interdependent* (group-oriented) face (Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994). This distinction is closely tied to the different definitions of the social identity of a person from culture to culture (Kim, 2002). People from different cultures are likely to identify themselves or others as separated (independent) from or connected (interdependent) to the groups to which they belong (Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, & Yee-Jung, 2001). Western individualistic speakers tend to stress an independent or individual-oriented self or face. On the contrary, Eastern collectivistic speakers are likely to identify themselves or others as interdependent or group-oriented (Kim, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In short, individualistic cultures have a tendency to place a higher priority on individual needs, goals, and desires rather than group values, whereas collectivistic cultures are expected to concentrate on group values more than on individual interests.

The present study provides empirical evidence of cultural differences between communication styles by addressing whether presidential candidates' attacks in televised debates focused on opponents' independent (individual) faces or interdependent (group) faces. In particular, this study examined the cultural differences in communication tactics used in presidential debates between the United States, which has an individual-oriented culture, and Korea, which has a group-oriented culture. The results of this study clearly support these cultural assumptions and communicative norms. American presidential

debaters' attacks were more focused on "independent, personal" images or faces, while Korean presidential candidates' attacks showed the opposite trend. This finding is consistent with that of Song's study (2000), which shows the culturally embedded distinctive linguistic styles used in the two nations by considering the "I" and "we" linguistic modes. According to Song (2000), Korean candidates adopted the more inclusive "we" tone more often than did American candidates. Song (2000) argued that a Western individualistic communication style is based on a more speaker-oriented linguistic style in which the absolute "I" tone is employed frequently to construct a more assertive subjective-predicate connection. In an Eastern or Confucian cultural model, communication is much more relationship-oriented, and therefore Korean speakers often seek to avoid assertive verbal communication, but rather employ such terms as *uye-ri* or "we" to develop a more relational form of understanding. The discourse styles of candidates in presidential debates are significantly affected by traditional values, beliefs, and attitudes.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, this study was underpinned by the fundamental idea that communication practices in presidential debates are influenced by the cultural norms and values in the particular culture in which the presidential debates occur. The content of televised presidential debates consists of the messages of the candidates, who shape their messages accordingly to their particular culture. In addition, the audiences interpreting the messages presented by the candidates in presidential debates are embedded with specific cultural norms and values, which they share with other group members. In order to win more votes, candidates in presidential debates must meet the audiences' expectations of the proper way to communicate. The audiences' expectations and perceptions of candidates' communication skills might be affected by cultural norms and values. Therefore, we can assume that a candidate employs certain communication strategies for face-work (direct/indirect face-supporting or threatening and personal or group face attacks), which must be compatible with cultural norms.

We adopted two culturally distinctive dimensions between individualism and collectivism and between high- and low-context culture in this study to explain how cultural differences influence the way that candidates in American and Korean presidential debates emphasize and regard particular aspects of face and employ face-working strategies accordingly. Overall, American and Korean candidates follow the cultural values, norms, and rules embedded in their own societies. American candidates' face-work strategies were direct, clear, assertive, and even aggressive, which may stem from the low-context communication styles and individualistic cultural ethos predominant in the United States, substantially more so than in Korea. American candidates' attacks on their opponents' past deeds or records were based more often on an individual-oriented concept of face or image than those of their Korean counterparts. In contrast, Korean candidates' face-work conforms to collectivist and high-contextual communication patterns. Korean debaters were indirect, moderate, ambiguous, and group-oriented in their use of face-work strategies.



For all these reasons, the findings of this study provide empirical evidence of the stable influence of cultural norms, values, and rules on communication patterns used by candidates in presidential debates.

Along with the theoretical and empirical implications, the findings of the present study may also have some practical benefits, especially for Korean presidential debates, which are still in an early stage of development. Up to now, not many in-depth analyses of debating discourse have been carried out in Korea. In addition, there are only few debate coaches or experts in Korea who can provide strategic guidelines to participants. As discussed above, by conducting a cultural comparative analysis on face-work strategies as they are used in two starkly different cultures, this study found some general patterns in the communication styles of each nation. The clear distinctions in the face-work between the two cultures seem to imply that candidates should always carefully consider the most culturally appropriate face-work strategy to use so that the public receives their message well.

#### Limitations and Suggestions

Just as with any other study, there are some limitations in this study to be resolved by future research. First, in order to avoid the over-generalization of the effects of cultural factors, this study attempted to explain the combined effects of both cultural factors (individualism/collectivism and high-/low-context culture) on communication strategies. However, this study did not include a close microanalysis, which would entail a detailed description of each candidate's communication behavior in each debate, which must be significantly influenced by certain situations, subject to dynamic fluctuations on the campaign trail (Carlin, 1992). To overcome this shortcoming, it would be worthwhile to combine quantitative and qualitative research methods. With quantitative analysis, the general trend of cultural and situational differences can be addressed, and with a qualitative analysis, the specific utterances of debaters that contain instances of face-attacking or face-saving strategies can be illustrated in more detail. Future research is needed to substantiate the results of this study by linking them with a more detailed description of qualitative analysis.

Second, this study did not include other factors that influence a debater's face-work tactics, such as debate formats, the number of debate participants, third-party candidates, camera reaction shots, television studios, or auditoriums for debates with or without audiences, issues, or topics, and post-debate media coverage. In addition, the roles of the debate commissions, media, and candidates in each nation can, in the process of debate negotiations, affect the candidates' strategic debate communication patterns. For instance, American debates are hosted by a "candidate-controlled" commission, while Korean debates are hosted by three major "commission-controlled" television stations. In America, candidates have power over the Presidential Debate Commission to make major decisions in designing debates. The debate formats, times, locations, moderators, composition of debate participants, and issues to be covered in debates are decided mostly through extensive pre-debate negotiations between the two major campaign camps (Kraus, 2000; Self, 2004). Thus, it can be said that the candidates more closely control debates in the United States. By contrast, in Korea, although each candidate has the right to accept or reject an invitation, most major

points of issue in presidential debates are decided and managed by the National Election Broadcasting Debate Commission (Presidential Election Broadcasting Debate Commission, 2003). Hence, other possible factors described above should be incorporated into the research design of future research.

Third, it may be unreasonable to generalize the results of this study to all situations, because this research was conducted under particular conditions. Therefore, replicating this study for different kinds of debate with a larger number of debates is recommended.

Finally, the present study focused on how candidates deal with their opponents' face in presidential debates. However, there is another aspect of face that candidates must address in debates, namely, how they protect or enhance their own faces. In applying the cultural variability dimension of individualism-collectivism, Ting-Toomey (2005) argued that individualists or independents tend to be more concerned with protecting or preserving "self-face images" during a confrontation, while collectivists and inter-dependents tend to be more concerned with accommodating "other-face images" or saving "mutual-face images." We did not observe self-face defensive strategies or mutual-face concerns. Future research should examine how candidates defend their own or mutual faces from threatening tactics.

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presidential debate hold between the president of the United States, Barack Obama, and the former. governor Mitt Romney. It is believed that, being such a formal instance, and the tenor, of a high formal.Â Documents Similar To BROWN AND LEVINSON'S OFF-RECORD FACE THREATENING ACTS AS A POLITE STRATEGY TO DISCREDIT THE OPONENT'S FACE AT A PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE. Carousel Previous Carousel Next.