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About Polish Politeness

1. Politeness theories

Since the late 1970s ample research has been devoted to the study of politeness in different languages and cultures. However, the theoretical frameworks on which these studies are based have been developed by researchers with an Anglo-Saxon cultural background. And these frameworks build on concepts developed by other Anglo-Saxon scholars, such as language philosophers like Austin, Searle, Grice and sociologists like Goffman.

Politeness frameworks based on pragmatic theory tend to conceptualise politeness as “strategic conflict avoidance” (Leech 1980: 19), used “to reduce friction in personal interaction” (Lakoff 1975 [2004: 64]) or minimize face-threat (Brown/Levinson 1987).

For some Non-Anglo-Saxon researchers, this conceptualization of politeness seems to portray interpersonal communication as “a fundamentally dangerous and antagonistic endeavour” (Kasper 1990: 194) and to suggest that people are “always on the verge of a war which they try to avoid by being polite” (Sifianou 1992: 82).

More recent approaches to the study of politeness, notably those developed by British researchers like Mills (2003) and Watts (2003, 2005) – and referred to as discursive politeness theories – provide an even more critical picture of politeness. Mills argues against viewing it as “necessarily ‘a good thing’” (2003: 59) and draws attention to manipulative uses of politeness, while Watts asserts that politeness “may easily be non-altruistic and clearly egocentric” (2005: 69).

It seems that theoretical work on politeness has moved from equating politeness with strategic face-threat mitigation to viewing it as a tool for manipulating others.

While discursive politeness theories have so far been mostly applied to English data, Brown and Levinson's framework, and especially their distinction between negative and positive politeness, have proved extremely valuable for cross-cultural research. However, numerous studies have shown that the hierarchy of these strategies and the cultural values attached to them cannot be regarded as universal.

The emphasis on negative politeness and focus on the speaker's individual needs characterising Brown and Levinson's theory has met with ample criticism. Asian researchers, especially, have demonstrated that it is incompatible with collectivist cultures whose members define themselves in relation to the social group they belong to (e. g. Gu 1990, Mao 1994, Yu 2001), and where politeness is mainly associated with one's duty towards the group (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003: 1466). However, one does not need to go as far as Asia to meet with conceptualisations of politeness different from those shaped by the major politeness theories. Various European cultures, including Polish culture, have been shown to focus less on individual wants and to prefer positive to negative politeness.

The growing number of studies analysing politeness in languages other than English seems to confirm Wierzbicka's suggestion that theoretical work on pragmatics and politeness has mistaken "Anglo-Saxon conversational conventions for 'human behaviour' in general" (1985: 146) and that "it is English which seems to differ from most other European languages" (1985: 149) and not vice versa.

2. Research on Polish politeness

Wierzbicka's writings (e. g. 1985, 1991) are the best known and most influential source of insights into the concept of Polish politeness in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics. She demonstrates how Polish cultural values affect the performance of a selection of speech acts and identifies fundamental differences between English and Polish realisations of questions, suggestions and requests. Whereas Anglo-Saxon speakers show a marked preference for hedges and tags, thus

placing “special emphasis of the rights and autonomy of every individual” (1985: 150), Polish speakers favour direct forms. Similar discrepancies are identified in expressing opinions: While in Anglo-Saxon cultures opinions are explicitly marked as such, Polish speakers present their opinions rather forcefully, making it difficult to distinguish them from statements of fact (1985: 160).

Although Wierzbicka’s observations are very accurate, they are based on her experiences of a Pole living in an Anglo-Saxon culture and are seldom backed up by empirical data. Linguists in Poland, on the other hand, do not show much interest in the study of politeness. The field of pragmatics was established rather late in Poland. Translations of the major works in pragmatics did not appear until the 1980s, and the first Polish version of Austin’s *How to do Things with Words* was published in 1993. First introductions to pragmatics in Polish were offered by Awdiejew (1987) and Kalisz (1993). The only well established field devoted to an aspect of Polish politeness is the study of forms of address (e.g. Huszcza 1996, Lubecka 1993). The Polish tradition of describing speech acts, in contrast, goes back to etiquette books (e.g. Zgółka/Zgółka 1992).

Linguists such as Pisarek (1995) and Marcjanik (1997) have conducted detailed analyses of a number of Polish speech acts, but both authors limit their discussions to the description of the most prototypical speech act realisations and rely on introspection and excerpts from literature and press. Whereas Marcjanik describes a selection of Polish speech acts, Pisarek also contrasts them with their Russian counterparts. Ożóg’s investigation of Polish speech acts (1990), in contrast, is based on empirical data, but it is also largely limited to their formulaic realisations.

Nearly all cross-cultural speech act studies comparing Polish with other languages have been undertaken by Polish researchers specialising in English linguistics, who adopt the framework developed in the CCSARP. Jakubowska (1999) contrasts a variety of politeness formulae in Polish and English, Lubecka (2000) compares requests, invitations, apologies and compliments in English and Polish, and Suszczyńska’s paper (1999) offers a cross-cultural perspective on apologising in English, Polish and Hungarian.

The present chapter provides an overview of my own research on various aspects of Polish politeness: two cross-cultural speech act studies comparing Polish apologies and requests with their realisations in other languages on the basis of experimental data, and a study based on interviews tapping into the perception of politeness in Polish culture. The great advantage of contrastive studies is that culture-specific patterns of behaviour “function below the level of conscious awareness and are not generally available for analysis” (Hall 1989: 43), but they do become apparent when compared with patterns from other cultures. Interviews, on the other hand, provide metapragmatic information on the concept of politeness in a given culture; the so-called first-order politeness (Watts 2003). The picture emerging from my research largely contradicts the conceptualisation of politeness underlying the main politeness theories sketched above.

3. Polish speech acts

3.1 Cross-cultural speech act studies

Most studies in cross-cultural pragmatics compare linguistic realisations of a speech act in two or more languages. They tend to take a quantitative approach which makes it possible to generalise the findings and derive culture-specific patterns from them. The use of experimental data collection techniques prevalent in this research area, such as Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs), has the advantage of providing fully comparable and replicable data.

Despite the criticism DCT data have received for not adequately reflecting natural speech, there seems to be a consensus that DCT responses “accurately reflect [...] the values of the native culture” (Beebe/Cummings 1996: 75) and “indicate what strategic and linguistic options are consonant with pragmatic norms” (Kasper 2000: 329).

The growing body of studies looking at speech acts across cultures shows that the main strategies used to perform the studied speech acts are used in all the languages under investigation, suggesting that

they may be universal. The differences reported in cross-cultural pragmatic studies are, therefore, mainly quantitative (see Ogiermann/Saßenroth, this volume). This chapter offers both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the data, one of its objectives being to emphasise the importance of the latter for the study of culture-specific concepts of politeness.

3.2 Apologies

Apologies are, along with requests, the most extensively studied speech act in cross-cultural research (see Ogiermann 2009a: 61-79). One of the reasons for their popularity may be that they are “essential to the smooth working of society” (Norricks 1978: 284). They function as compensatory actions which enable us to restore social harmony whenever something goes wrong.

What is particularly interesting about apologies is that in order to restore the hearer’s face damaged by the offence, the speaker performs a speech act which is costly to his or her own face. The definitions provided in cross-cultural research, however, focus solely on the hearer’s face and its restoration (= politeness). The fact that apologies can be highly humiliating (Norricks 1978: 284) as they require the speaker to find a way to restore the hearer’s damaged face and, at the same time, allow damage to his or her own face in doing so, has not received much attention in previous research. Similarly, since (successful) apologies are beneficial to the hearer, and therefore necessarily direct, the central issue of indirectness is seldom discussed in cross-cultural apology studies.

Most studies conducted in cross-cultural pragmatics focus on identifying and quantifying the speech act strategies making up the speech act set of apologising and comparing frequencies across languages. This was also one of the concerns of the research I have conducted on apologies (Ogiermann 2009a). My study compares Polish, Russian and British realisations of this speech act. It is based on 800 experimentally elicited responses to contextually varied offensive situations per language (2,400 in total).

A quantitative analysis of the data shows a great degree of consensus across the three languages. Not surprisingly, speakers of all three languages used the full range of strategies identified in the data, namely: formulaic apology expressions, also called Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs), accounts, offers of repair, promises of forbearance, and expressions of concern.

N=800	IFIDs	Accounts	Offers of Repair	Promises of Forbearance	Concern for Hearer
English	645	899	365	47	55
Polish	607	1,027	343	52	35
Russian	586	789	381	53	20
Total	1,838	2,715	1,089	152	110

Table 1. Total numbers of strategies in English, Polish and Russian apologies.

While only some of the differences across languages reach statistical significance (see Ogiermann 2009a: 205), post hoc tests show that this is mainly the case between English and Russian. With the exception of accounts and offers of repair, the frequencies produced by the Polish respondents lie between those established for these two languages.

The following sections focus on two of the strategies used to apologise, namely IFIDs, which comprise a range of culture-specific routine formulae, and accounts, which reflect various degrees of responsibility acceptance and culture-specific ways of dealing with face threat and face restoration.

3.2.1 IFID realisations

As Table 1 shows, the Polish data include fewer IFIDs than the English and more than the Russian data. While these quantitative differences merely indicate various preferences for using formulaic apologies in the three languages, a closer look at their different linguistic realisations shows that each language exhibits a strong focus on one of the formulae. A qualitative analysis of the data shows that although all three languages use the same range of formulaic expressions (Ogier-

mann 2009a: 103), they are not pragmatically equivalent across languages.

Therefore, an analysis going beyond comparing frequencies of IFIDs across languages can provide interesting insights into culture-specific concepts of apologising. One of the results of my research is that the semantic and pragmatic properties of the preferred formulaic apology expression in a given language – i.e. the performative in Polish, the expression of regret in English and the request for forgiveness in Russian – shape the perception of what constitutes an apology in that language (see Ogiermann 2010).

The most common Polish IFID – the performative *przepraszam* [I apologise] – was used 495 times by my respondents, thus constituting 82% of IFIDs in the Polish data. Polish linguists emphasise the ritual character and broad applicability of this apology formula (e.g. Marcjanik 1997, Ożóg 1990, Pisarek 1995), which is partly related to the fact that, since Polish does not have an expression equivalent to the English *excuse me*, *przepraszam* also fulfils some of its functions (Lubecka 2000: 150).

The data further include 32 instances of the expression of regret *przykro mi* [I'm sorry]. While the expression of regret is the most common apology formula in English, there is a lack of consensus among Polish linguists as to whether this expression fulfils the function of an apology in Polish: Marcjanik (1997) and Lubecka (2000) define it as an explicit apology strategy, whereas Ożóg (1990) regards it as an indirect apology realisation.

An IFID that was used nearly as often as *przykro mi* by the Polish respondents is the English word *sorry* (*sory*, *sorki*), which amounts to 30 instances. Requests for forgiveness, in contrast, which constitute the most frequent Russian apology expression, occur only 14 times in the Polish data. While the imperative form *wybacz* represents the T-form, the V-form is more complex and takes two main forms, namely *niech mi pan(i) wybaczy* and the impersonal *proszę mi wybaczyć* (all forms translating as 'forgive me').

Another IFID category identified in the Polish data is comprised of expressions ascertaining that the hearer is not offended. Such conciliatory expressions are recognised to constitute direct apologies in Polish (Ożóg 1990: 52, Zgółka/Zgółka 1992: 92) and they

occur nine times in my data. Their most common linguistic realisation is the formula *nie gniewaj się* and its deferential variants *proszę się nie gniewać* and *niech się pan(i) nie gniewa* (all translating as *don't be angry*).

Disarming softeners have not been previously mentioned in discussions of Polish apologies. However, my data contain literal equivalents of the English IFIDs *I'm afraid* and *unfortunately*. *Niestety* [unfortunately] was, with 22 tokens, the preferred expression, whereas *obawiam się* [I'm afraid] occurs only three times in the data.

3.2.2 IFIDs and linguistic context

In order to understand the exact functions of routine apology formulae and the differences in their illocutionary forces, they need to be viewed in context. While the *situational* context is provided by the scenarios used to elicit the data – with responses to offensive situations containing IFIDs generally functioning as apologies – an examination of their *linguistic* context suggests that not all of the responses including an IFID actually result in an apology.

Since responsibility acceptance is an essential element of remedial apologies, an important indicator of whether the IFID used in a particular response can be interpreted as apologetic is the degree of responsibility acceptance reflected in the strategies with which this IFID is combined. Accounts, in particular, provide valuable information about the illocutionary force of IFIDs with which they co-occur (see 3.2.3).

N=800	Total numbers of IFIDs	Responses accepting responsibility
English	645	588
Polish	607	575
Russian	586	656

Table 2. IFID use vs. responsibility acceptance in English, Polish and Russian.

One way of looking at the co-occurrence of IFIDs and responsibility is by comparing the frequencies of IFIDs with the numbers of re-

sponses accepting responsibility. As Table 2 shows, the Polish respondents used a total of 607 IFIDs, and only 575 of their responses accepted responsibility.

These results can be interpreted further by considering the IFID category that appears most frequently in responses denying responsibility; namely the expression of regret. It appears that since regret can be expressed independently of the speaker's role in bringing about the regrettable state of affairs, the expressions *I'm sorry* and *przykro mi* do not necessarily entail responsibility acceptance – even if used in response to an offense.

Expressions of regret are the preferred English IFID, and the discrepancy between responses accepting responsibility and the number of IFIDs is greatest in the English data. The Russian data, in contrast, contain more responses accepting responsibility than IFIDs. Russians apologies consist mainly of requests of forgiveness, and responsibility is so intrinsic to the Russian concept of apologising that the expression of regret does not function as an apology strategy in this language.

Of the 32 expressions of regret in the Polish data, ten appear in responses denying responsibility, six were combined with other IFIDs and four with formulaic expressions of guilt. The fact that Polish expressions of regret tend to appear in responses denying responsibility or to be combined with more explicit apology strategies seems to confirm that this IFID type indeed does not serve as a direct apology strategy in Polish.

Moreover, 13 Polish expressions of regret were followed by the conjunction *ale* [but]. Since the word *but* triggers a conventional implicature signalling “that what follows will run counter to expectations” (Thomas 1995: 57), the clause it introduces can be expected to provide information intended to make the speaker's behaviour appear less offensive.

Interestingly, Polish shows an extraordinarily strong preference for combining IFIDs with *but*-sentences. The Polish data contain 143 such combinations, which means that roughly one in four apologetic formulae was followed by *but*. The English respondents, in contrast, produced 53, and the Russians only 40 such combinations.

While IFIDs can be embedded into various syntactic frames by means of a range of conjunctions and prepositions, the conjunction *but* is the only element that introduces additional information about the offence, which partly explains the high amount of accounts in the Polish data.

Furthermore, not all IFID types combine with *but*-sentences equally well: from a semantic point of view, there are no objections to performing the act of apologising and simultaneously providing reasons despite which the apology takes place. Expressing regret and naming circumstances due to which this regret should not be felt, or begging forgiveness while supplying reasons that are likely to make the hearer less inclined to forgive, in contrast, are semantically odd combinations.

3.2.3 *Accounts and responsibility*

As Table 1 shows, the frequency with which accounts were used by the Polish respondents constitutes an interesting deviation from the general pattern found in the data, whereby the frequencies of Polish strategies tend to occupy a middle position between the other two languages. The relatively high figure of 1,027 accounts (as opposed to 899 in the English and 789 in the Russian data) indicates a strong preference for providing explanations supporting the apology.

What is interesting about the accounts identified in the data, though, is that they entail various degrees of responsibility acceptance. Unlike most previous studies, which assign accounts to the two strategies Explanation and Taking on Responsibility, I have, therefore, developed a taxonomy distinguishing between upgrading and downgrading accounts and placing them on a continuum of increasing responsibility acceptance (see 2009a: 138-146). At the same time, I have taken into account that the extent to which an offender is willing to admit responsibility reflects his or her concern for both parties' face needs. Weighing up between them, as well as between positive and negative face, is central to the formulation of a successful and culturally appropriate apology.

While the frequencies of accounts established in all three languages suggest the greatest discrepancy between Russian and Polish,

a closer look at the data shows that while Poles show a strong preference for upgrading accounts, in particular justifications, the English respondents have used the highest number of downgrading accounts, especially ‘acting innocently’ and ‘admission of facts’. The differences that are most likely to cause cross-cultural clashes, though, appear in the ways in which speakers of these two languages refer to the offence and their responsibility for it – whether they accept or deny responsibility.

One of the scenarios used in the study proved particularly insightful in investigating this phenomenon. It has not only elicited the highest number of accounts in the data, but – more importantly – it describes a situation which offers the possibility of concealing one’s responsibility for the offence, namely:

When going on holiday your friend gave you his flat keys and asked you to feed his fish. You have not always had the time and some of the fish have died. When you return the keys your friend asks what happened.

Table 3 shows that speakers of four languages, including German, took advantage of the possibility that the fish died without the speaker’s contribution.

N=100	English	German	Polish	Russian
IFIDs	72	54	73	68
Intensifiers	46	20	16	20
Upgrading accounts	62	48	78	80
Downgrading accounts	124	68	102	60
Offers of repair	22	25	26	34
Responses accepting responsibility	38	53	44	61

Table 3. Strategy use and responsibility acceptance in the scenario ‘Dead Fish’ in English, German, Polish and Russian.

English and Polish exhibit the closest parallels with regard to the frequencies with which the various strategies were used as well as the numbers of responses accepting responsibility: both the British and the Polish respondents used relatively many IFIDs and relatively

many downgrading accounts. This suggests that in both languages a large proportion of the IFIDs used in this scenario did not serve as genuine apology strategies. The much higher number of intensifiers in the English data, in contrast, seems to suggest that, rather than intensifying the apology, they were used to indicate that the speakers found the situation *very* regrettable.

The most interesting differences between English and Polish, however, become apparent through a qualitative analysis of the exact formulations used and the focus on either negative or positive face they reflect. Consider the following two responses to the ‘Dead Fish’ scenario:

- (1) *I think I might not have fed them properly.*
- (2) *Sorry, zaniedbałam Twoje rybki. Wiem, że teraz i tak nie da się już nic zrobić. Mam nadzieję, że jakoś to przeżyjesz i nie znienawidzisz mnie.*
 Sorry, I have neglected your fish. I know that nothing can be done now. I hope you’ll get over it somehow and will not start hating me.

Although both responses entail responsibility acceptance, they differ fundamentally in how this responsibility is conveyed. The English response is formulated very carefully. The responsibility, though accepted, is downgraded not only by the use of a modal verb (*I might*) but also by presenting the matter in the form of a mere opinion (*I think*). This stands in sharp contrast to the Polish response where responsibility is accepted by a straightforward confession including the perfective form of the self-critical verb *neglect*. The apology is also very emotional – it recognises the irreparable nature of the damage and focuses on the hearer’s feelings and the negative way in which the offence could affect his relationship with the speaker.

The following responses avoiding responsibility, in contrast, illustrate the difference brought about by the preference for distancing strategies, such as statements of fact or acting innocently in the English data, and the use of strategies providing new information and making the speaker’s offensive behaviour more comprehensible, such as excuses, in the Polish data:

- (3) *I’m not sure, they must have died last night! They were fine yesterday.*

- (4) *Sorry, ale wydaje mi się, że niektóre rybki zachorowały. Były jakieś otepiałe, a następnego dnia zdechły. Nie wiedziałam, co mam robić! Mam nadzieję, że nie jesteś na mnie zły.*

Sorry, but it seems to me that some of the fish fell ill. They were a bit dull and the next day they died. I didn't know what to do! I hope you are not angry at me.

The British informant restricts her response to a carefully formulated statement (*must have*) of the obvious, while distancing herself from the offence by pretending that she is not aware of the circumstances leading up to it (*I'm not sure*) and by claiming that she has just discovered the damage herself (*they were fine yesterday*). The Polish respondent, in contrast, attempts to present a valid reason for the offence. The explanation provided is based on close observation of the fish and accompanied by an expression of helplessness implying good will. The entire response aims at showing that the fish died *despite* the attention they received and, thus, at avoiding loss of positive face and limiting damage to the relationship.

On the whole, the accounts found in the English data show a tendency to provide little personal information and to refer to the offence in a vague way, thus protecting both parties' negative face. The Poles, in contrast, provided effusive explanations and sometimes very inventive reasons for their offensive behaviour. An important element of Polish apologies, therefore, consists in ascertaining that the speaker is still perceived as worth having a relationship with.

Arguments making one's behaviour more understandable are clearly involvement strategies, though, when used in response to an offence, they focus on the redress of the *speaker's* positive face and may not necessarily classify as politeness strategies.

Furthermore, one should bear in mind that the orientation towards positive or negative and towards the speaker's or the hearer's face that accounts can display also depends on the speech act which they support. While Brown and Levinson classify the strategy "give (or ask for) reasons" (1987: 102) as an instance of positive politeness, research on requests suggests that accounts are negative politeness strategies. When used to support a request, they do not reflect the speaker's willingness to accept responsibility for an action, but provide the hearer with information justifying the request and thus reducing the imposition inherent in it.

3.3 Requests

The speech act of requesting is by far the most popular speech act in cross-cultural pragmatics research (see Ogiermann 2009b: 190-191). What makes requests particularly interesting is that they can be formulated at various levels of directness and that, while politeness theories draw a parallel between indirectness and politeness, empirical studies show that in-directness is perceived differently across cultures.

Both theoretical work on politeness and empirical work on requests distinguish between three main levels of directness. According to Brown/Levinson (1987), off-record (= non-conventionally indirect) strategies explicitly flout Grice's conversational maxims and focus on face-redress, while on-record strategies combined with redressive action have the advantage of being clear and polite at the same time (1987: 72). The latter are also referred to as conventionally indirect and generally associated with negative politeness. Bald on-record (= direct) strategies, in contrast, focus on clarity and efficiency, conform to Grice's maxims, and pay no attention to face (1987: 95).

All three levels of directness have been identified in all the languages studied so far and described as universal. Not all researchers agree, however, that politeness is necessarily tied to indirectness and that pragmatic clarity and directness reflect lack of concern for the hearer's face. The existing research shows that there is a strong preference for conventionally indirect requests in a variety of languages and cultures. The most frequent realization at this level of directness is the ability question, i.e. an interrogative construction containing the modal verb *can*.

Literature available on Polish requests assigns a more central role to direct requests, in particular imperatives. The little that is known about Polish requests in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics mainly goes back to Wierzbicka's writings (1985, 1991). Since her main aim is to illustrate an Anglo-Saxon bias in politeness research, she emphasizes the role of the imperative in Polish requests, while pointing out the softening effect of the diminutive on its illocutionary force (1991: 51). According to Wierzbicka, interrogative directives "sound formal and elaborately polite" (1985: 153) and the use of "interrogative forms outside the domain of questions is very limited" (1985: 152).

While the Polish linguist Marcjanik agrees with Wierzbicka that imperatives *can* serve as polite requests (1997: 159), she discusses twelve different types of interrogative constructions (1997: 161-170) and argues that conventionally indirect strategies constitute the most frequent request type in Polish (1997: 175).

The main objective of my research on requests was, therefore, to investigate the extent to which direct forms, especially imperatives, are the preferred form when formulating a request in Polish. The study I have conducted compares requests in English, German, Polish and Russian (2009b), that is in two languages which have been shown to prefer conventionally indirect and two languages which have been claimed to prefer direct request forms.

The data were elicited from 100 speakers of each language by means of a scenario which has been used particularly often in research on requests (see Ogiermann 2009b: 196):

You got ill and cannot attend an important lecture. You ring up a fellow student to ask if you can copy his notes.

Previous research shows an extraordinarily high degree of agreement across languages on using conventional indirectness in similar situations. And also in my data, interrogative constructions turn out to be the preferred strategy in all four languages – despite the informal character of the situation and the low social distance and equal power characterising the relationship between the interlocutors.

My results do show, however, that while imperatives are marginal in the English and German data, they make up 20% of the Polish and 35% of the Russian requests. Moreover, the proportion of imperative constructions in the Polish data exceeds that established for languages which have been characterised as having a high level of directness. The Hebrew responses to the ‘Notes’ scenario, for instance, contained 16% of direct requests and those in Argentinean Spanish only 10% (Blum-Kulka 1987, Blum-Kulka/House 1989).

N=100	English	German	Polish	Russian
Imperative	4	5	20	35
Interrogative	97	88	75	65
Declarative		8	6	
Total	101	101	101	100

Table 4. The use of conventionally direct and indirect requests in English, German, Polish and Russian.

Considering the generally strong preference for conventional indirectness in the situation used in the study, the fact that one in five Polish respondents chose an imperative construction seems to indicate that the request was not regarded as constituting a great imposition on the hearer's face.

Another phenomenon which reflects the perception of the hearer's role in performing a request is the request perspective. Imperative constructions necessarily portray the request as an activity to be accomplished by the hearer. Interrogative constructions with a modal verb denoting ability, on the other hand, can be formulated either in the first or in the second person, thus representing either the speaker's or the hearer's perspective. The choice of perspective has been shown to affect the illocutionary force of the request. Leech, for instance, argues that a request can be softened "by omission of reference to the cost to *h*" and suggests that a request formulated in the first person (*Can I?*) is more polite than a formulation in the second person (*Can you?*) (1983: 134).

Table 5 (overleaf) shows the preferences for request perspective across the four languages. The two Slavic languages exhibit a clear preference for the hearer's perspective, as opposed to a preference for the speaker's perspective in German and, especially English.

A possible explanation of these preferences is that in negative politeness cultures, placing particular emphasis on independence, phrasing the request in the first person is seen as reducing the imposition on the hearer. In positive politeness cultures, however, which value directness and honesty, portraying the speaker as responsible for the successful outcome of the request could be interpreted as manipulative.

N=100	English	German	Polish	Russian
Speaker-oriented	76	63	14	4
Hearer-oriented	18	35	85	96
Inclusive/impersonal	7	3	2	
Total	101	101	101	100

Table 5. Request perspective in English, German, Polish and Russian.

Unfortunately, the cultural implications of the request perspective have not been previously discussed by Polish linguists, but for Russian, it has been argued that speech acts formulated in the second person are generally more polite than those in the first person as they acknowledge the role of the addressee (Rathmayr 1996: 22).

The results of my study seem to suggest that request perspective is interpreted similarly in Polish. On the whole, the findings of this study show that, even though there is a stronger preference for direct forms in the Polish data than there is in English and German, more significant discrepancies appear in the choice of request perspective.

Both phenomena indicate that the concepts of imposition and entitlement to impede another person's freedom of action are viewed differently in different cultures. Polish people seem to be more available to one another than are members of negative politeness cultures, so that requests do not necessarily constitute a threat and, therefore, do not require a great degree of indirectness. More importantly, a crucial element in getting somebody to do something for oneself is to let that person know that their help is appreciated by explicitly referring to them as the person on whom the accomplishment of the requested activity depends.

This interpretation can be further backed up by the distribution of supportive moves in the data, with the Polish respondents showing an extraordinary preference for two types of supportive moves, namely formulae introducing the request and expressions of indebtedness (Ogiermann 2009b: 206). There are 22 instances of request introductions in the entire data and 16 of them were produced by the Polish respondents. More importantly, rather than downgrading the imposition of the request by referring to the favour as little, as in

‘Would you do me a *little* favour’, the Polish participants tended to describe the favour as huge, thereby not only acknowledging but even exaggerating the hearer’s contribution:

- (7) *Mam do Ciebie ogromną prośbę.*
I have a huge favour to ask you.

Formulaic expressions of gratitude were distributed more evenly across the four languages, but still, twelve of the 25 expressions of gratitude occur in the Polish data. Again, a closer look at the exact formulations shows that the quantitative differences do not provide the full picture, the most striking difference being the effusiveness of the Polish formulations, for instance:

- (8) *Będę Ci bardzo, bardzo wdzięczny! Z góry dzięki.*
I’ll be very, very grateful to you! Thanks in advance.

Accounts, in the context of requests referred to as ‘grounders’, constitute yet another type of supportive move and their distribution is interesting in that it shows a pattern different from that emerging from the use of accounts in apologies.

In contrast to apologies, where accounts provide information on the speaker’s offensive behaviour and can help restore both the speaker’s and the hearer’s face, accounts used in requests supply a reason for making the request. Explaining why it is necessary to impose on the hearer makes the request more plausible and may thus increase his or her willingness to comply with it. Preferences for grounders can, therefore, be viewed as indicative of the estimated necessity of justifying the intrusion upon the hearer’s face in a given culture. In my study, grounders occur 81 times in English, 63 in German, 59 times in Polish, and 43 times in the Russian data. Accordingly, while the Polish respondents used a variety of strategies acknowledging the hearer’s role, they put relatively little effort into redressing the hearer’s negative face.

3.3 Insights from speech act studies

My research on apologies shows that a detailed analysis of the routine formulae making up the category of IFIDs in a given language can provide valuable insights into their context-specific functions and culture-specific meanings. While the Polish expression of regret does not necessarily fulfil the function of an apology, the performative, which is most conventionalised Polish IFID, makes the Polish apology very explicit and unambiguous. At the same time, saying *przepraszam* does not go beyond the mere performance of the act of apologising.

An examination of the linguistic context in which this IFID is used shows a strong preference for combing it with the conventional implicature *but*, which indicates that what follows stands in opposition to the preceding element, i. e. the apology. What follows is mostly an account, and a detailed analysis of the accounts found in my data shows that accounts not only exhibit varying degrees of responsibility acceptance but also culture-specific ways of referring to the offence. In contrast to the English accounts, which tended to be rather vague and distancing, the Polish accounts were very effusive and personal.

On the whole, the Polish apologies are characterised by a strong focus on positive face. When the situation allowed for concealing the true nature of the offence, circumstances were invented to limit damage to the speaker's positive face. When responsibility for the offence was accepted, the accounts tended to be very effusive, emotional, and self-critical, reflecting the need to be understood and to appear trustworthy – thus focusing on both parties' positive face.

My research on requests shows that directness and other devices revealing the perceived entitlement to make the request are viewed differently in different cultures. While the Polish requests did include a relatively high proportion of imperative constructions, the main culture-specific element of Polish requests turned out to be the role assigned to the hearer. Rather than reducing the imposition by omitting the reference to the hearer or minimising the requested favour, the Polish respondents acknowledged the hearer's input by using the hearer's perspective, introductions to the request exaggerating the favour, and effusive expressions of gratitude.

On the whole, the concept of politeness emerging from the Polish data points not so much towards directness, as has been suggested in previous research, but towards effusiveness and emotionality. The focus of both apologies and requests seems to be mainly on positive face, emphasising the value of the relationship between speaker and hearer.

4. Defining Polish politeness

As the above discussion has shown, while different linguistic structures and routine formulae may translate literally across languages, their illocutionary forces are likely to be culture-specific. Another way of uncovering culture-specific understandings of politeness is through the concept of politeness itself. Even though the word *politeness* exists in most languages, the ways in which it is conceptualised in different cultures may vary greatly.

One of the researchers pursuing this idea is Watts. He refers to Brown and Levinson's theory as a theoretical construct investigating 'second-order' politeness (Watts 2003), and asserts that the analysis of 'first-order' politeness, defined as the 'commonsense notion' or 'folk interpretation' of politeness, is "the only valid means of developing a social theory of politeness" (Watts 2003: 9).

Watts investigates first-order politeness by looking at the etymology of the English word *politeness*. He identifies its etymological roots – which go back to the Latin *politus* (polished) (2003: 36) – in the "notions of cleanliness, a smooth surface and polished brightness" (2003: 33).

The etymology of the two most common Polish adjectives denoting politeness, namely *uprzejmy* and *grzeczny* (and the corresponding nouns *uprzejmość* and *grzeczność*) suggests a very different conceptualisation of politeness. The etymological roots of *uprzejmy* go back to the Old Church Slavonic **prēm-*, meaning *szczery* ('honest') and *otwarty* ('open') (Brückner 1970: 594). The adjective *grzeczny*, in contrast, was derived from *k rzeczy* (Brückner 1970: 162), which translates as 'to the matter' / 'to the point'.

Watts further argues that the concept of first-order politeness is reflected in the various terms a language offers to refer to polite behaviour, and he names “considerate”, “thoughtful”, and “well-mannered” (2003: 35) as synonyms of the English ‘polite’ and ‘courteous’.

In a study investigating first-order politeness in Polish and Hungarian cultures, Suszczyńska and I (2011) interviewed ten Polish and nine Hungarian participants in order to gain an insight into their perceptions of politeness. Interviews have proved “particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals’ attitudes and values” (Byrne 2004: 182), and we chose the episodic interview, which consists of a “combination of narratives oriented to situational or episodic contexts and argumentation that peel off such contexts in favour of conceptual and rule-oriented knowledge” (Flick 2009: 186).

In our interview, we inquired about the interactional styles of Polish and Hungarian people before and after the fall of the Iron Curtain. As the Polish informants were describing interpersonal encounters in various settings that they experienced before and after the fall of the Iron Curtain, they used a number of adjectives other than *uprzejmy* and *grzeczny*. The most frequent among them was the word *miły* (nice, pleasant), which was often used synonymously with *uprzejmy*, suggesting that the word *uprzejmy* depicts pleasantness.

The remaining adjectives referring to politeness that were used by the Polish informants, namely *otwarty* (‘open’), *emocjonalny* (‘emotional’), *serdeczny* (‘cordial’), *wylewny* (‘effusive’), *życzliwy* (‘kind’), *uczynny* and *pomocny* (‘helpful’) seem to reflect the concept of positive politeness. The nouns *szacunek* (‘esteem’) and *respekt* (‘respect’), on the other hand, depict negative politeness, and were used exclusively in relation to teachers, priests, women, the elderly and people in higher positions.

Towards the end of the interview we asked the interviewees to define politeness. Interestingly, the definitions provided by the Polish participants hardly made any reference to verbal politeness. Only one respondent indicated that he takes it as a form of politeness if somebody says ‘thank you’ and smiles at him – provided that the smile is *nie wymuszony* (‘not forced’).

Furthermore, although the two most common terms *uprzejmy* and *grzeczny* were used interchangeably, some of the interviewees

made interesting distinctions between them. One respondent, for instance regarded *uprzejmość* as necessarily reciprocal, while suggesting that *grzeczność* was more likely to take the form of an unconditional favour showing that one is a good human being. Another interviewee suggested that a person who is *uprzejmy* merely tries to be nice and helpful, while somebody who is *grzeczny* is nice and helpful by nature. Another treated *grzeczność* like a character trait, while describing *uprzejmość* as something that needs to be learnt. Finally, several respondents described *uprzejmość* as more formal than *grzeczność*, on the whole suggesting that *uprzejmość* has more features of negative politeness than *grzeczność*.

Uprzejmość was also the term used to refer to politeness in the context of service encounters. This form of politeness, which has mainly emerged after the fall of the Iron Curtain and with the introduction of Market Economy, was viewed critically by most interviewees, who described it as: *neutralna* ('neutral'), *pozorna* ('apparent'), *sztuczna* ('artificial'), *nieszczera* ('insincere'), *udawana* ('faked'), *wymagana* ('required'), and *szkolona* ('trained'). Several informants commented that it is only *uprzejmość* and there is nothing behind it.

While the concept of negative politeness has become more salient since 1989 in Poland, the definitions provided by the Polish respondents still show a clear preference for positive politeness. They associated being polite with helping others and attending to their needs rather than with using particular linguistic formulae. Many informants stressed the importance of authenticity, while asserting that *real* politeness 'comes from the heart'.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to provide some insights into the Polish concept of politeness. Although my research on apologies and requests takes a quantitative approach, I have argued that an interpretation of the findings needs to go beyond comparing frequencies of

speech act strategies across languages as it cannot be assumed that these strategies are pragmatically equivalent. Treating them as equivalent and relying exclusively on existing politeness frameworks would bias the findings towards the cultural values of those who developed those frameworks. Nonetheless, Brown and Levinson's concepts of negative and positive politeness – provided one is not regarded as more polite than the other – have proved very useful for the present analysis.

The Poles did not primarily express politeness through indirectness, use of conventionalised formulae or strategies reducing imposition. Rather, the results of the two speech act studies confirm the classification of Polish culture as a positive politeness culture. Polish apologies were clearly oriented towards both parties' positive face and their future relationship while requests emphasised the role of the hearer.

The preference for positive politeness was further confirmed by the metapragmatic information on first-order politeness elicited through interviews with lay members. The interviews have also shown that Polish people are aware that there are different types of politeness. And while positive politeness was clearly given preference, negative politeness was discussed as appropriate in contexts characterised by high social distance and power – and associated with instrumental and insincere uses.

On the whole, the various types of data suggest that, rather than perceiving interpersonal communication as a threat or imposition, Polish people are available to one another, feel entitled to involve others in their lives and obliged to help when they are needed. They like to feel appreciated as well as understood. And they are willing to put a lot of effort into maintaining relationships and restoring them if something goes wrong.

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