DIRECTNESS AND INDIRECTNESS IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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1. Introduction

People deal with communication daily, and in a 21st-century world characterized by globalisation, communication among people from diverse cultural backgrounds has become an inevitable part of everyday life. Kramsch (1998: 3), exploring the intertwined relationship between language and culture, states how language is "the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives" and thus explains how, with a specific language, cultural norms, values, and identity are expressed. Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 4) assert that "sharing a language implies sharing a culture, and without knowing one's language, people can easily misunderstand some sayings or phrases". Finally, as Wierzbicka (2003: 2) claims, modes of interaction vary from culture to culture, and if you want to learn a particular language, you need to know everything about a language's culture and society.

The main focus of this thesis is a pragmatic approach to cross-cultural communication. The aim is to demonstrate the differences in directness and indirectness among cultures and their languages. Understanding these differences can help individuals navigate cross-cultural communication more effectively and avoid misunderstandings. This thesis will provide examples of directness and indirectness in communication and discuss how they vary between languages and cultures, especially compared to native English speakers. By exploring the concepts of directness and indirectness through various examples, the thesis will provide an understanding of directness and indirectness in shaping cross-cultural communication and offer recommendations for successful communication.

1.1. Culture

The concept of culture is seen to have a wide variety of meanings. Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 4) define culture as a set of "norms of behaviour, beliefs, aesthetic standards, patterns of thinking, and styles of communication which a particular group of people have developed over time to help them survive". Therefore, as Trompenaars (2000: 3) notes, culture is socially constructed, people influence it, and its values and traditions are passed through new generations. Thus, people develop their personalities through culture, mostly when they are children, because it enables them to have a mixed context of values, beliefs, and traditions that influence their behaviour and way of thinking (Hurn and Tomalin 2013: 5). Additionally, culture can be seen as a moving reality, as people constantly change it and improve it (Trompenaars 2000: 3). Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 5) provide an interesting method of distinction of culture into *implicit* and *explicit* culture. *Implicit* culture refers to all of the culture's norms and traditions, which are reflected in the music, architecture, fashion, way of behaviour, and most importantly, language, all considered *explicit* culture. This thesis aims to show how a certain language is expressed in a certain culture and, in turn, how this language influences and is influenced by cultural norms and values, particularly in the context of directness and indirectness in communication.

1.1.1. Language and culture

Kramsch (1998: 3) explains that language is tightly linked to culture when used in a communicative environment. The spoken, written, or visual mediums are used by individuals to convey meanings understood by the group they are a part of, and, as Kramsch (1998: 3) notes, they include a speaker's tone of voice, accent, gestures, and facial expressions. Furthermore, Kramsch (1998: 3) claims that language represents cultural reality in all its verbal and nonverbal aspects. By expressing themselves, people create certain experiences. Additionally, Kramsch (1998: 3) asserts that language symbolizes cultural reality because it is

a system of signs that is seen to have cultural worth. Speakers use language to identify themselves and others; they see language as a sign of social identity. Then, inside that social group (family, neighbourhood, workplace, school), people acquire common ways of viewing the world through interactions with other members of the same group. Kramsch (1998: 3) expounds that beliefs, attitudes, and values are reflected in the way members of the group use language – what they choose to say or not to say and how they say it. Lastly, Kramsch (1998: 6-7) states that people who use the same linguistic code are part of the same speech community, whereas members of the discourse community are part of the bigger social group who use language to meet their social needs. This signifies that people from different discourse communities differ in how they convey information and how they interact (Kramsch 1998: 7).

For instance, Kramsch (1998: 7) gives an example of accepting a compliment between an American and a French. Americans have been taught to respond "Thank you" to any given compliment, as if they were receiving a gift: "I like your sweater!" – "Oh, thank you!" On the other hand, Kramsch (1998: 7) explains how the French tend to perceive compliments as an intrusion into their privacy, and they would rather minimize the value of the compliment: "Oh really? It's quite old!". Kramsch (1998: 7) shows how both reactions of these groups are based on different values given to compliments in both cultures and on the differing degrees of embarrassment caused by personal comments. Every culture differs, and not every social group has the same way of expressing language, as we can see from the previous example. Hence, people need to be careful with expressing themselves to other people from different cultures, even when it comes to giving or receiving compliments (Kramsch 1998: 3-7).

1.2. Cross-cultural communication

Cross-cultural communication is a complex term with elements from numerous disciplines, including linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy. Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 2) describe it as the way in which individuals from diverse cultures communicate, whether

remotely or in person. Communication presumes spoken or written language, body language, or the language of etiquette and protocol, according to Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 2). A more detailed definition would be by Gudykunst and Kim (2003), cited in Romanska (2003: 2); they define cross-cultural communication as "a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures" that takes place on international grounds. Furthermore, Romanska (2003: 2-3) emphasizes the importance of the meaning of the message for more efficient communication the meaning of the message produced has to be similar to the meaning of the message that was received. In simpler terms, it's crucial that what you intend to say is accurately understood by the person you are communicating with. So, understanding the meaning of the message is necessary for accurate and successful communication to prevent misunderstandings or misinterpretations between individuals. Wierzbicka (2003: 67) establishes the need for people to be capable of understanding the other language when they live abroad because each language varies with its grammar and vocabulary and people's way of expressing that language. Thus, Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 4) explain how "without knowing the language" of a particular country, one can "miss a lot of the subtleties of a culture" and this can lead to miscommunication. For instance, Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 4) point out that many people, while travelling, try to avoid jokes or irony because they are unsure of how it will affect the other person they come to interact with, mainly because it can lead to miscommunication, and so the authors quote Hall and Hall (1990: 4) who say that "the essence of effective cross-cultural communication has more to do with releasing the right responses than sending the right message".

According to Romanska (2003: 2), the communication process involves encoding information by a sender and transmitting it through a chosen medium. Romanska (2003: 2) describes that the recipient decodes and utilizes this data, creating a one-way message exchange. Depending on the speaker's or the hearer's requests, communication can become

two-way in which the receiver decodes and replies, initiating a cycle known as *feedback* (Romanska, 2003: 2). This is a basic process of communication and the inclusion of feedback ensures greater accuracy of conversation. Both types of communication can run into some difficulties, including various disturbances, often manifesting as noises that serve as potential barriers to the exchange of the message. Thus, Romanska (2003: 3) mentions the claims of Mead (2005: 108), who states that the message will receive its efficiency only when it makes sense with its context. Understanding the context unveils a message's meaning and the intention of the speaker (Romanska 2003: 2-3).

According to Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 12-15), people rarely see the differences between their own culture and the other cultures, so they think they are similar. Due to people's intolerance and lack of interest, misunderstanding between people may occur very often because people tend to assume that every human on earth has the same emotional reactions and opinions (Hurn and Tomalin 2013: 12). Therefore, the crucial point in communicating with other cultures is recognizing the whole context of the message received, and that includes being aware of an individual's unique and different cultural background (their values, traditions, etc.) which primarily affects culture's language.

1.3. Cross-cultural pragmatics

According to Stadler (2018: 1), pragmatics is a linguistic discipline that studies the language in context. Its main focus is exploring how utterances gain meaning based on the context in which they are produced. The discipline emphasizes that the universal linguistic knowledge people possess falls short in cross-cultural exchanges because every language has its unique lexicon (Stadler 2018: 1). Instead, Stadler (2018: 1) states, pragmatics argues that the utterance's meaning has to rely on the context of the certain culture. This means that the same words or phrases can be interpreted differently based on the context of a particular culture. For people trying to understand that context, they will need not only language skills they possess

but also a specific sociopragmatic awareness that goes with it (Stadler 2018: 1). Thomas (1995: 1), explaining how it is possible to deduce the wanted meaning from the literal meaning using conversational inference, states that "people do not always or even usually say what they mean." Put differently, Stadler (2018: 1) expounds how the intended meaning is often concealed rather than plainly communicated and conversational inference, thus, enables the listener to decipher what the speaker wanted to say. This means that individuals from different cultures may use language differently and understand other people's languages in a distinct way due to their unique cultural perspectives. Therefore, Stadler (2018: 1) points out that pragmatics is crucial in understanding how people communicate. Furthermore, Rianita (2017: 2) claims that if an individual lacks specific pragmatic knowledge, for example, politeness strategy or speech acts, this can lead to miscommunication and failure, and the other individual could perceive them as being very blunt or rude. Therefore, having a thorough knowledge about a certain language is vital for successful cross-cultural communication (Rianita 2017: 2). In order for people to communicate successfully, the most important thing for Stadler (2018: 2) is to possess pragmatic competence. This competence includes uttering a message that needs to be acceptable in all cultural contexts and it has to have a certain logical meaning that other people can understand. In conclusion, understanding and utilizing the appropriate language norms and conventions for a given culture are essential for building trust, respect, and effective communication with different cultures.

As it has already been mentioned by Wierzbicka (2003: 2), there are many different ways of interaction between people. This mostly depends on a specific cultural context in which an interaction occurs, including the cultural group an individual is a part of and the language they speak. Also, it includes a certain time or space when and where an interaction is happening. Therefore, Wierzbicka (2003: 2) explains how communication with a Japanese varies from one with an American, "if you communicate with a Japanese, interaction will be much different

than it would be with an American, or perhaps if two people are both Americans, their interaction would probably depend on whether they are white, black, Jewish or non-Jewish and so on" (Wierzbicka 2003: 2).

The term "cross-cultural," for Stadler (2018: 1) means "between cultures", so in essence, cross-cultural pragmatics studies the exchange of meaning across cultures. Stadler (2018: 2) notes that people frequently behave differently while conversing with strangers than with members of their own cultural background, but that concerns the study of intercultural pragmatics. People often confuse the studies of cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics. The main difference is that intercultural pragmatics, according to Dynel (2014: 308), examines the function of language between individuals from different cultures who share a common language, and this occurs when people with different native languages interact with a language that is mutually understood by both. On the other hand, Stadler (2018: 1) states that cross-cultural pragmatics examines how language is used within a specific culture, and then it compares speech behaviour within one culture and identifies similarities or differences when contrasted with another culture. Moreover, cross-cultural pragmatics mostly focuses on "contextually derived meaning, i.e., the appropriateness of language usage in different cultural contexts" (Stadler 2018: 2). Hence, cross-cultural pragmatics, as Stadler (2018: 2) proclaims, is interested in "meaning construction (i.e., the speaker's contribution)", and "meaning interpretation (i.e., the addressee's contribution)" of the message exchange (Stadler 2018: 2). Certainly, people have to be able to properly decipher person's meaning, even if it is hidden at first (Stadler 2018: 2). This is crucial for successful communication because not all people speak directly all the time due to their cultural norms or values or social expectations.

1.3.1. Contextual knowledge

To make sense of meaning and inference across cultural contexts, Stadler (2018: 2-5) describes that there are three components to contextual knowledge that are relevant: context shaping meaning, language shaping context, and common ground.

People cannot communicate without social and situational context. Stadler (2018: 2) cites Yus (2011: 2), who notes that "the main contribution of pragmatics is, precisely, the certainty that it is impossible to analyse language outside the context in which it is produces and interpreted". The literal meaning is, therefore, never in a message but always derived from a context, which can be seen in the following example from Stadler (2018: 3):

(1) I've got a flat tire. (Stadler 2018: 3)

The meaning of this utterance, Stadler (2018: 3) explains, can vary between a request to fix or replace the tire, a request for a lift, or, on the other hand, turning down the demand for a lift, and it all depends on the speaker, and the context in which the message is uttered. Therefore, Stadler (2018: 3) asserts that given that context can have very different interpretations across cultural backgrounds, it takes a lot of effort to deduce the true meaning of the message uttered. Thus, for efficient interpretation of the meaning of the message, people need to be careful and aware of the context they find themselves in, especially when they are in a foreign country, and cultural factors are crucial in deciphering a message (Stadler 2018: 3).

Along with contextually shaped meaning, Stadler (2018: 3) remarks that language also has an influence in determining how messages are produced and understood in interaction. This is an ongoing communication cycle: language influences context as strongly as context influences language. Stadler (2018: 3) puts forward Kecskes' (2010: 7) example where a simple change of word changes the meaning of the utterance:

(2) Sam: - Coming for a drink?

Andy: - Sorry, I can't. My doctor won't let me.

Sam: - What's wrong with you? (Kecskes 2010: 7)

(3) Sam: - Coming for a drink?

Andy: - Sorry, I can't. My mother-in-law won't let me.

Sam: - What's wrong with you? (Kecskes 2010: 7)

The simple change of the word "doctor" with the word "mother-in-law" immediately changes the meaning of the utterances, Stadler (2018: 4) explains. Because of this, the meaning of the question "What's wrong with you?" is also altered. Instead of implying a concern about Andy's health in the second case, it questions Andy's rationality and decision-making by asking how he could have allowed his mother-in-law to control his way of life (Stadler 2018: 4)

Lastly, as Stadler (2018: 4) reflects, the background information we share, or at least presume to share, with our interactional partner is referred to as the common ground. When it comes to cultural contexts, this may present a potentially major issue due to the absence of shared understanding where individuals assume similarity between their language and another culture's language (Stadler 2018: 4). An example that Stadler (2018: 4) mentions and is frequently used is from Levinson's (1983: 97-98) explanation of conversational implicature, which is one of the essential ideas of pragmatics. Levinson (1983: 97) offers a clear explanation of how "it is possible to mean (in a broad sense) more than what is actually "said" (that is, more than what is literally expressed by the common sense of the linguistic expressions used)" (Levinson 1983: 97):

(4) A: Can you tell me the time? (Levinson 1983: 97)

B: Well, the milkman has come (Levinson 1983: 97)

There is no straightforward expression of the entire purpose of the conversation, and it can be completely meaningless to an outsider, according to Stadler (2018: 4). On the contrary, within a social setting where there is a milkman who regularly brings fresh milk to people's houses (for instance, in the UK), this response gives an approximate time. It does this by supposing

that everyone is aware of, for instance, that the milkman delivers the milk every day at eight in the morning. Even when B's response does not explicitly address A's question, A cannot possibly understand the meaning of B's answer if they do not understand the context of the situation it is implied to, Stadler (2018: 4) clarifies. This is a common method we use to communicate with people, and it usually goes without difficulties when individuals come from similar cultural backgrounds. However, Stadler (2018: 4) notes how people often tend to presume more resemblances with other cultures than there actually are. Due to their lack of understanding, people conclude they share an equal common ground with other cultural groups when communicating. Hence, people may use jokes that have no meaning in the other culture, which leads to failure in communication, where they misunderstand the meaning produced, which may cause offense, even when none was intended (Stadler 2018: 4). In an interconnected world, successful cross-cultural communication is very important, and it is often about building relationships and understanding. Thus, avoiding culturally insensitive jokes is crucial in maintaining good relationships.

The importance of "context" is shown in the theory of the American psychologists Edward T. and Mildred R. Hall. Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 21) briefly explain their approach in which they point out two communication styles in business: *high-context* and *low-context*. According to Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 21), who explain Hall's (1990) theory, high-context people communicate their opinions and instructions through implications or symbols rather than direct statements. It is in their nature to think that everything can be understood from the context, and thus, their explanations are never detailed but always brief and short. Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 21) state how high-context communication mostly depends on the context. In such cultures, people assume that everyone has all the information they need and there is no need for further explanation and clarification. People from high-context cultural group easily understand the process of communication and "are able to read between the lines" (Hurn and

Tomalin 2013: 22). However, to a foreigner, it might be quite challenging. This type of communication is considered to be polite, indirect, and vague (Hurn and Tomalin 2013: 22). Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 22) state that people who are not high-context communicators complain about how high-context individuals communicate as their messages are seen as incomplete and ambiguous. The essence of high-context communication is silence, even if it sounds weird, as nonverbal communication is more important than words. (Hurn and Tomalin 2013: 21-22).

On the other hand, low-context communication is precisely the opposite. Low-context communicators require a lot of knowledge when they exchange messages. Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 22) note that in this type of communication, the message "is clear, direct and detailed," so miscommunication must not appear. Low-context people don't like hidden meanings; they love getting everything out in the open. Because they are used to a lot of explaining, they think that context is not so important. Despite their clarity, Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 22) argue, low-context individuals are frequently perceived as "too direct, abrupt, and, at times, arrogant" by high-context individuals.

Hurn and Tomalin (2013: 22) present the main differences between high-context and low-context communication. Table 1 shows how high-context communicators, such as Arabs, Japanese, and Koreans, prioritize indirect communication and rely heavily on non-verbal cues. In contrast, low-context communicators, including Germans, Americans, and Scandinavians, favour direct communication and often feel uneasy with silence (Hurn and Tomalin 2013: 22).

Table 1. Comparison of high-context and low-context communication (Hurn and Tomalin 2013: 22)

High-context	**Low-context**
Arabs, Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Italians	Germans, Scandinavians, Americans, British
Indirect communication	Direct communication
High use of non-verbal communication	Less use of non-verbal communication
Comfortable with silence	Silence causes anxiety
Importance of oral agreements	Oral agreements less important
Lower importance of written documents	Greater reliance on written documents

To conclude this chapter, the main ideas of cross-cultural pragmatics, according to Wierzbicka (2003: 69), are that in different cultural societies, people converse differently, so every cultural group has a different conversational style and, through every culture, different traditions and norms are seen. The study of cross-cultural pragmatics is essential not only for enhancing individuals' understanding of diverse cultures but also for facilitating successful communication across cultures, particularly in multicultural societies like the United States. As a result, researchers of cross-cultural pragmatics try to show how every culture has a different communication style, and they typically assume it with terms like “indirectness” and “directness” (Wierzbicka 2003: 70).

2. Directness

This thesis deals with the question of what exactly are directness and indirectness and how can they be distinguished. There is no precise definition of these two terms, but Nelson, Al Batal and El Bakary (2002: 40) mainly refer to it as to the “extent speakers reveal their intentions through explicit communication” (Nelson et al. 2002: 40). For instance, Searle (1969: 43) notes

that speaker's intention is the most important premise and through interaction, speakers aim to communicate their intentions to prompt hearers to do something for them, "in speaking I attempt to communicate certain things to my hearer by getting him to recognize my intention to communicate just those things" (Searle 1969: 43). Thus, Searle (1969: 68) mentions the possibility of uttering the message without direct indication of illocutionary force if the context and the utterance are clear to the hearer. Searle's statement introduced the thought of indirectness. Furthermore, speech act theory may describe directness and indirectness (Stadler 2018: 5). Stadler (2018: 5) indicates the importance of the speech act theory, which serves as the foundational framework for studying cross-cultural pragmatics. Speech acts like requests, refusals, or apologies are commonly researched area in cross-cultural pragmatics because they are often connected with directness and indirectness (Stadler 2018: 5). Stadler (2018: 5) describes how the term "speech act" first came from Austin's (1962) theory. It is defined as "a verbal message and through the action of being uttered, it performs a certain function" (Stadler 2018: 5). According to Searle (1975: 59), speech acts can be categorized as direct or indirect. He suggests that what is stated in certain utterances differs from what is meant; hence, he offers a difference between two contexts in which a speech act is accomplished. In the first situation (a direct speech act) "the speaker utters a sentence, means what he says" (Searle 1975: 59). For instance, Searle (1975: 60) offers an example of a sentence "I want you to do it" where the speaker requests the hearer to do something. On the other hand, an indirect speech act is where "the speaker may utter a sentence and mean what he says and also mean another illocution with a different propositional content" (Searle 1975: 60). The distinction between direct and indirect speech acts can be seen through another example Searle (1975: 60) mentions when the speaker asks "Can you reach the salt?", it can mean a basic question, or it can be a speaker's request for the hearer to reach the salt.

To properly understand the terms of directness and indirectness, Grainger and Mills (2016: 1) state that research on directness and indirectness mostly focuses on the analysis of indirectness, a style of speech tightly connected with a notion of politeness. Thus, Grainger and Mills (2016: 1-2) conclude that directness is considered impolite, which is the main difference between directness and indirectness. Grainger and Mills (2016: 2) provide an example of a daily life request:

(5) Give me a lift to the cinema. (Grainger and Mills 2016: 2)

According to Grainger and Mills (2016: 2), (5) is normally interpreted as a very blunt request (unless it is between close friends or used ironically). Some cultures could perceive this request as inappropriate and impolite, and they would use a more indirect statement such as, "Could you possibly give me a lift to the cinema?", or they would try to get the answer through some hints, "Well, you're going to the cinema tonight, aren't you?" (Grainger and Mills 2016: 2).

Spears (2001: 5) defines directness as "a willingness to bring up certain topics in certain contexts". Different cultures have varying levels of comfort with discussing certain topics openly. Merkin (2012: 115) describes direct communication as "frank and clear-cut, whereas indirect communication involves hints, oblique suggestions, or third party communications". According to Nelson et al. (2002: 40), this style of communication is that the speaker clearly expresses their needs in the simplest way possible. Direct communicators articulate their thoughts, emotions, and intentions in a straightforward manner, leaving little room for ambiguity.

2.1. Directness across cultures

Directness is a highly important aspect of African-American verbal culture (Spears 2001: 2). Spears (2001: 7) presents directness as a principle of African-American language use, and he identifies it through its "form (actual sounds, words, phrases)" and "content (the meaning of what is said on the semantic and pragmatic levels)". Spears (2001: 2) explains how directness

appears in certain speech events most cultures would perceive as inappropriate and rude. Those types of speech events, Spears (2001: 2) notes, include various curse words (to quote him, “cussing out”) and insults, like trash talk. He also implies that African-Americans often get into disagreements, mostly with whites, so they “go off on someone” or “snap” (Spears 2001: 2). It must be noted that the speech of white Americans is also characterized by some aspects of directness, but Spears’ (2001) research is mainly focused on African-American speech. The characteristics of directness here involve “aggressiveness, dysphemism, negative criticism, conflict, insult and more” (Spears 2001: 5). Furthermore, Brown (2013: 58), in her research on African-American culture, expounds how African-American’s legacy and tradition can be best seen in African-American preachers because they tend to perform rather than simply speak. Thus, in the African-American tradition, it is acceptable and common for the audience to interrupt and affirm the speaker (Brown 2013: 58). Moreover, Spears (2001: 5) claims that direct communication is often complex in terms of meaning and function both of which may be substantially dependent on how the speaker feels and in which context they are in (Spears 2001: 5). The context is, again, a very important aspect, where in this case can be a decisive factor why African-Americans act in a certain kind of way when they interact with whites, especially in the United States. Spears (2001: 13), thus, examined his experience in the all-black schools in the United States, where directness was a main aspect of their speech. The one example of teacher’s directness, Spears (2001: 13) provided, an example of a teacher's directness involving verbal abuse directed to excellent student who had forgotten her homework. The teacher proceeded to criticize the student's character and family, adding, “You’re not pretty; you’re just yellow.” Here, Spears (2001: 13) asserts that, as in most African-American communities, this one suffered from colourism and light-skinned individuals were more privileged and referred as yellow. Spears (2001: 13) explains that teacher’s remark also alluded to the catchphrase "a lot of yellow gone to waste," which satirizes the alleged tragedy

of being ugly despite being yellow. However, direct communication cannot be assumed only negatively, as its motives range from encouragement and compliments to humiliation and conflict, Spears (2001: 5) states. Spears (2001: 9) remarks that it can be used to "maintain decorum, instruct, inform, entertain, pass the time, inform, show linguistic wit and inventiveness" (Spears 2001: 9).

To summarise, one of the primary characteristics of African-American language use is directness. Spears (2001: 16) explains that through their language, African-Americans show their uniqueness and positivity. According to Brown (2013: 58), because of African Americans' desire to practice their own traditions, as well as the permanence of racial segregation in America, African-American culture frequently developed apart from mainstream American culture. As a result, African-American culture became an important aspect of American society while still being a separate culture in its own right (Brown 2013: 58).

Another example of direct communication can be seen in the Israeli culture and Hebrew language, according to Wierzbicka (2003: 89). Wierzbicka (2003: 89) introduces the claims of Blum-Kulka, Danet and Gherson (1985: 133) about Israeli society that the level of directness is "relatively very high". Thus, Wierzbicka (2003: 89) provides Blum-Kulka and the other authors' example of Israeli's use of bare imperatives in public (Blum-Kulka et al. 1985: 129):

(6) (Passenger to driver: on the bus)

Passenger A: ptax et hadelet, nehag

(Open the door, driver.) (No response) (Blum-Kulka et al. 1985: 129)

Passenger B: nexag, delet axorit.

(Driver, rear door.)

(Compliance.) (Blum-Kulka et al. 1985: 129)

This example shows how, in the Israeli culture, the basic question is a "direct request for information" (Wierzbicka 2003: 89). Although American English speakers speak directly,

Wierzbicka (2003: 89) mentions the claims of Blum-Kulka (1982: 46) how their questions start with, “Excuse me” or “Can/could you tell me?”. This is the complete opposite of the Hebrew language, where one can just say, “I want you to do (say)” (Wierzbicka 2003: 89). This open confrontation is encouraged in Israeli culture as it is seen as a symbol of intimacy and spontaneity (Wierzbicka 2003: 92). These distinctions are rooted in deeper cultural values, with Israeli culture valuing solidarity and a straightforward expression of desires and opinions, while Anglo-American culture cherishes individualism and polite interaction Wierzbicka (2003: 90-92) clarifies.

3. Indirectness

Most theories about indirectness define it as more sophisticated than directness and connect it with politeness (Grainger and Mills 2016: 1). Thomas (1995: 119) claims that indirectness is “a universal phenomenon: as far as we know, it occurs in all natural languages”. According to Ogiermann (2009: 191), pragmatic politeness theories (this thesis will cover Leech’s (1983) and Brown and Levinson’s (1987) assume a very strong correlation between indirectness and politeness because people tend to be more indirect when they act polite. Pinker’s (2007: 437) definition of indirectness as “the phenomenon in which a speaker says something he doesn’t literally mean, knowing that the hearer will interpret it as he intended” can be seen as problematic because it presupposes that indirectness is obvious and easy to interpret without requiring much mental effort from the hearer. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988: 100) define indirect style as “verbal messages that camouflage and conceal speakers’ true intentions in terms of their wants, needs and goals in the discourse situation”. Thus, for the hearer to interpret the speaker’s hidden meaning, the hearer must consider the broader context of the conversation.

One of the most helpful definitions was Weizman's (1989: 73), which was cited by Thomas (1995: 133), "…not just as a lack of transparency, such as with the use of unusual words or ambiguous deictic references, but as a lack of transparency specifically and intentionally employed by the speaker to convey a meaning which differed, in some way, from the utterance meaning" (Thomas 1995: 133). As a result, Thomas (1995: 124) asserts that indirectness refers not only to the extent of politeness in speech and illocutionary power but also to the directness with which the speaker accomplishes their illocutionary purpose. Furthermore, cultural groups differ in their way of expressing themselves, and because of this, they tend to choose when they would use indirect speech acts instead of direct ones (Thomas 1995: 124).

3.1. Indirectness and Politeness theories

Politeness has become one of the most researched areas within the field of pragmatics (Thomas 1995: 149). The process of acquiring and mastering politeness techniques forms an integral component of understanding pragmatics. Most research about indirectness and politeness theories establishes a positive correlation between these two terms. Leech's (1983: 108) theory signifies how indirect illocutions are more polite than direct ones because indirectness opens optionality for the hearer. Then, the degree of politeness can be increased "by using a more and more indirect kind of illocution" (Leech 1983: 108). These examples from Leech (1983: 108) show the rising of indirect illocutions and them being more polite:

(7) Answer the phone. (Leech 1983: 108)

(8) I want you to answer the phone. (Leech 1983: 108)

(9) Will you answer the phone? (Leech 1983: 108)

(10) Can you answer the phone? (Leech 1983: 108)

(11) Would you mind answering the phone? (Leech 1983: 108)

(12) Could you possibly answer the phone? (Leech 1983: 108)

Leech (1983: 108) shows how the more indirect an illocution is, the optionality for politeness will rise; indirect illocutions are "more polite (a) because the more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be" (Leech 1983: 108).

Leech (1983: 83) also distinguishes between absolute and relative politeness. Relative politeness is related to a certain context or situation; thus, it acknowledges what is considered polite or impolite depending on that context (Leech 1983: 103). In this case, Leech explains (1983: 103), what may be considered polite in one culture or situation might not be the same in another. On the other hand, absolute politeness refers to universal politeness that is considered appropriate or polite regardless of the specific cultural background (Leech 1983: 89). He mostly deals with absolute politeness, and he establishes that it has a negative and a positive pole, "some illocutions (e.g., orders) are inherently impolite, and others (e.g., offers) are inherently polite" (Leech 1983: 83). Therefore, negative politeness consists "in minimizing the impoliteness of impolite illocutions", and positive politeness consists "in maximizing the politeness of polite illocutions" (Leech 1983: 83-84).

Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory is mainly considered to be the most influential work in politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) focus on the notion of "face" which was derived from Goffman (1967) (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). Goffman (1967: 5) defined face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact". This means that face is closely tied to how individuals present themselves to society. Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) note that "face" is something that is "emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction". Normally, the "face" of each individual is connected to

upholding the appearances of others, thus, everyone's reputation depends on other's reputations as well (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). Given this connection, people can be expected to defend their faces if necessary. Thus, Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) argue that it is crucial for people to maintain their reputation, which involves action that may signal awareness of the assumptions that could threaten an individual's "face". Moreover, Brown and Levinson (1987: 61-62) explain that, although the specifics of "face" may vary across cultures (such as the precise boundaries of personal space and the elements that constitute one's public persona), they assume that people share a universal experience of maintaining a certain public reputation among each other and they are aware of saving each other's "face" if required. They define negative face as "the want of every "competent adult member" that his actions be unimpeded by others" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). Positive face is described as "the want of every member that his want be desirable to at least some others" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). Moreover, the notion of "face" can run into some difficulties when an individual comes into an interaction with another individual; thus, Brown and Levinson (1987: 65) establish the term of face-threatening acts. Each utterance has the potential to be a Face Threatening Act (FTA), directed either toward the negative or to the positive face, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 65). Face threatening acts were described by Thomas (1995: 169) as "an illocutionary act has the potential to damage the hearer's positive face", who gave an example of an insult or disapproval which can appear damaging to the hearer or hearer's negative face when they are faced with an order that will endanger their freedom or "the illocutionary act may potentially damage the speaker's own positive face", where the speaker has to admit something embarrassing that will humble their ego or when the speaker needs to make an offer which they dislike (Thomas 1995: 169). Brown and Levinson (1987: 67-68) list that any speech act may threaten the positive or negative face of the addressee: thanking, excuses, acceptance of offers, unwilling promises (negative face threats), apologies, accepting compliments, confessions,

admissions of guilt, etc. (positive face threats). Hence, Brown and Levinson (1987: 68) state that within the framework of the shared vulnerability of "face", any individual will seek to avoid face-threatening acts or find specific tactics to reduce their potential harm. Thus, Brown and Levinson (1987: 69) establish possible strategies to minimize or avoid doing FTA:

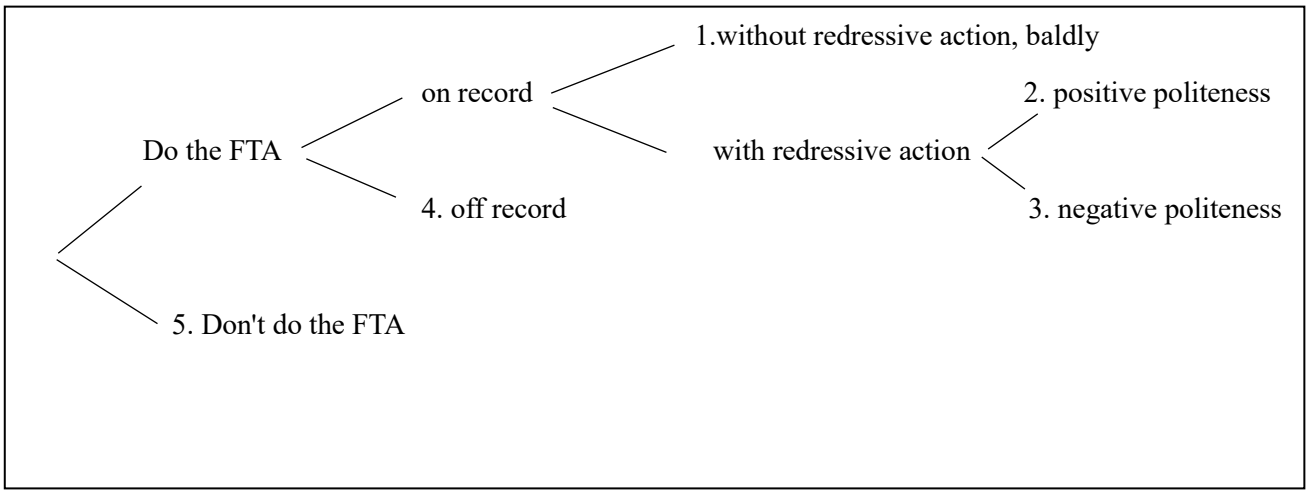

Figure 1. Brown and Levinson's strategies for FTAs (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69)

Brown and Levinson (1987: 69) organized the strategies in a hierarchical manner, sorting them by the degree to which they jeopardize the recipient's image or face. The approach with the highest level of threat is the direct utterance of an act, when the speaker goes on record, and his intention behind their speech is evident, and there's little room for interpretation (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69). However, going off record means that there is more than one potential intention behind the speaker's utterance, making it less transparent and more indirect, Brown and Levinson (1987: 69) explain. For instance, Brown and Levinson (1987: 69) offer an example of an utterance, "Damn, I'm out of cash, I forgot to go to the bank today". This can mean that a speaker asks a hearer to lend him some money, but it has no clear intention, so it can mean that this is not the first time a speaker requests something like that (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69). Moreover, to lessen the potential negative impact of FTAs, speakers employ redressive actions, Brown and Levinson (1987: 69) explain. Redressive actions can

take two forms: positive politeness and negative politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69-70). Positive politeness focuses on the positive "face" of the hearer; it is something every hearer wants to hear, like acknowledging their desires and wants (Brown and Levinson 1987: 70). In contrast, negative politeness respects the hearer's need to maintain their personal desires and individuality, it is characterized by "modesty, formality and restraint in communication" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 70). Brown and Levinson (1987: 70) specify how speakers with negative politeness can come into conflict between the need to go on record and make their intentions clear, and the need to go off record to avoid imposing on someone. This is resolved through the concept of conventionalized indirectness, where once an indirect method becomes widely accepted for conveying a special message, it shifts from being off record to being on record (Brown and Levinson 1987: 70). Thus, some indirect requests like "Can you pass the salt" are now universally understood without any alternatives (Brown and Levinson 1987: 70).

As a result, Brown and Levinson's model of politeness is very important because it portrays the notion of indirectness. Thomas (1995: 176) notes that their work has been "extraordinarily influential and very widely discussed" (Thomas 1995: 176). Although Ogiermann (2009: 191) describes directness as a universal phenomenon as it appears in all cultures, the thinking that indirectness equals politeness and the perception that pragmatic transparency and directness lack consideration of the hearer's face is established from a Westerner's point of view (Ogiermann 2009: 191). Numerous examples have shown that Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, although setting universal facts that all speakers have a positive and negative face and that verbal interaction will affect both the speaker's and the hearer's face, still does not apply to all cultures as their languages and their aspects of directness and indirectness vary (e.g., Ogiermann 2009, Blum-Kulka 1985).

3.2. Indirectness across cultures

Politeness and indirectness are expressed differently in various languages and cultures. One of the interesting cross-cultural studies includes Ogiermann's (2009), which compared English, German, Polish, and Russian requests. Ogiermann (2009: 190) states that each language has its own lexical codes and unique grammatical structures that carry specific meanings. When compared to other languages and cultures, researchers need to identify a common ground, for instance, in politeness strategies, that are present in various languages, so that they can be analysed easily (Ogiermann 2009: 190). Moreover, Ogiermann (2009: 190) indicates the importance of Grice's (1975) conversational implicature theory, as mentioned earlier. When people communicate, they don't just interpret the straightforward, literal meaning of the words spoken. They also take into account the implied or suggested meaning that arises from the context in which the communication is happening. Ogiermann (2009: 190) explains that, depending on the particular culture, people will either choose to flout maxims or follow the principles of cooperative communication. Therefore, Ogiermann (2009: 190) highlights that politeness, and thus, indirectness, are influenced both by cultural norms and values and conversational context (Ogiermann 2009: 190). Furthermore, Ogiermann (2009: 190) established that the speech act of requesting has proved to be the most frequently researched speech act connected with indirectness in cross-cultural pragmatics. Ogiermann (2009: 193) mentions the studies of Blum-Kulka (1987), who showed that people who speak multiple languages, including English, have been demonstrated to perceive conventionally indirect requests as most polite. Ogiermann (2009: 193) analyzed English, German, Polish, and Russian requests from university students, in which direct requests play a central role in Polish and Russian language, whereas indirect requests are more frequent in English and German. The following cross-linguistic analysis of preferences regarding direct and indirect expressions centres on imperative and interrogative structures (Ogiermann 2009: 189-197).

From the data collected from Ogiermann's (2009: 198) research, interrogative constructions were preferred in all four languages, and imperatives are more marginal in the English and German data. Ogiermann (2009: 209) expounds that preferences towards employing direct versus conventionally indirect methods differ among languages. The usage of imperative forms follows an escalating trend from West to East: 4% in English, 5% in German, 20% in Polish, and 35% in Russian data. Evidently, Ogiermann (2009: 209) concludes that the decision to use indirect or direct request strategies depends on a multitude of contextual factors, and while no statement possesses inherent politeness and is instead only "open to interpretation", the quantitative methodology of cross-cultural studies has demonstrated substantial consensus within a culture (Ogiermann 2009: 209). Following Ogiermann's (2009) research, the variation in the usage of imperatives and interrogatives among the languages (English, German, Polish, Russian) suggests that cultural norms and expectations influence how requests are framed.

Additionally, it is important to mention another contrastive study on American English and Chinese. Liao and Bresnahan (1996: 703) did an analysis of the speech act of refusal between Americans and Chinese. Both cultures use various expressions when declining something, and they apply different tactics, as both cultures are very opposite (Liao and Bresnahan 1996: 704). According to Liao and Bresnahan (1996: 704), Chinese individuals tend to be implicit when explaining something, whereas Americans often tend to describe everything in detail. Liao and Bresnahan (1996: 704) note that Chinese people prioritize their relationships with others over their own needs, while Americans derive satisfaction from individual recognition and standing out. They have no problem voicing their opinions in a group and often find it necessary to say something out loud (Liao and Bresnahan 1996: 704). Liao and Bresnahan (1996: 708) refer to a situation with refusing a high-status request, where their studies found that only two American women used the address form, "Mr or Mrs…I'm

sorry but I am unable to stay after school to help…" and "I'm sorry, Mr. Ron. I have so many things to do today, but please don't hesitate to ask if you need my help some other time" (Liao and Bresnahan 1996: 708). On the other hand, Liao and Bresnahan (1996: 708) note that thirty-three Chinese students first addressed their teacher "*lao-shi"* (teacher) or "*jiao-sho"* (professor) before they uttered the reason or apologized. Furthermore, Liao and Bresnahan's (1996: 724) study found that in Chinese culture, family members are the most difficult to reject, but among Americans, friends, and family members are equally important, so refusal strategies are similar (Liao and Bresnahan 1996: 724). Moreover, the most important thing to note from this study, which Liao and Bresnahan (1996: 725) claim, is that Chinese people do not dare to express their opinions first, and they tend to be more indirect. Liao and Bresnahan (1996: 725-726) conclude that in Chinese culture, a common approach to politeness when refusing something involves addressing form (if the person holds a high status) and politeness indicators such as an apology, followed by an explanation for the refusal, but they are mostly vague (Liao and Bresnahan 1996: 725-726).

3.2.1. The Japanese Indirectness

Most cross-cultural studies dealing with the phenomenon of indirectness mostly connect it with Japanese culture and language. Saying that Japanese communication is indirect or vague, Mičkova (2003: 135) notes that "observation comes from the Western point of view." She mentions the typical example of communication between a Westerner and a Japanese with a question, "Where are you going?", most Westerners would probably just answer, "to the cinema", but many Japanese would choose a more indirect utterance, *"chotto soko made"* ("just over there") (Mičkova 2003: 135). Pizziconi (2009: 223), in her study about stereotypes considering Japanese indirectness and vagueness, quotes Clancy's (1986) work, which characterized typical Japanese communicative style as indirect, especially when it comes to comparison with Westerners (Pizziconi 2009: 223).

To understand their communicative style, Mičkova (2003: 136) states that it is important to understand that in Japan, “groups are social units (like families in tribal cultures)”. Individuals conform their actions to align with the group, as straying from this alignment is perceived as self-defeating due to the advantages the group provides (Mičkova 2003: 136). Furthermore, Šoucova (2005: 137) implies that the concept of harmony in the context of Japanese culture is highly important and that this culture lives with a well-defined set of rules. According to Šoucova (2005: 137), these rules establish easy communication and cooperation among all group members, even if they hold varying social statuses. This collaboration extends to interactions both within the group and with individuals outside of it (Šoucova 2005: 137). Thus, Mičkova (2003: 137) claims communication in such a society has to be indirect because “it is a must demanded by the commonly shared value of harmony” (Mičkova 2003:137). Furthermore, Mičkova (2003: 137) points out that while individuals are members of groups, they are fundamentally unique beings with their personal preferences, emotions, thoughts, and perspectives. This individuality persists despite the inclination for group belonging, and the Japanese use two terms for this double-faced phenomenon *ura* and *omote* (back and front), Mičkova (2003: 137) explains. *Ura* is everything that remains hidden beneath the exterior of the human, true feelings of an individual, presented to the external world, referred to as *omote*. This phenomenon has given rise to another type of Japanese communication, Mičkova (2003: 137) notes, a concept known as *"honne"* and *"tatemae,"* which closely mirrors the concept of *ura* and *omote*, where *"honne"* signifies expressing speaker’s true feelings (*ura*), while "*tatemae*" is expressing what's appropriate for the situation (*omote*) (Mičkova 2003: 137). *Tatamae* is therefore used in social situations, Mičkova (2003: 138) describes, for instance, when an individual is at work, it is connected with a notion of “face” as an individual tries to save it in social settings. However, Mičkova (2003: 138) asserts that the manner in which self-expression occurs depends on context, so it's not accurate to say that Japanese people are

always indirect in their communication, as it varies based on the situation. As a result, Mičkova (2003: 138) concludes that *"honne"* and *"tatamae"* can be viewed as form and content. No matter the thoughts, emotions, or intentions, any content must undergo a suitable adaptation to align with the environment (the form) in order to be deemed acceptable, according to Mičkova (2003: 138). This is connected with an indirectness phenomenon because "things are said, but not in a straight way. They are rather implied than expressed" (Mičkova 2003: 139).

Another example of Japanese indirectness is their refusal strategies. According to Mičkova (2003: 140), for the Japanese, when they directly refuse something, it is considered impolite and harmful to their personal relationships. Therefore, a more indirect approach is expected (Mičkova 2003: 140). Mičkova (2003: 140-142) describes three types of refusals, "refusing through apologizing, positive sounding refusal and "direct" refusal".

Moreover, the Japanese language is known for its honorifics, according to Šoucova (2005: 138), or the more polite form of the language. Honorifics include nouns, verbs, pronouns, adverbs, etc., and they are referred to as *"keigo"*, which are classified into three groups, "*sonkeigo* (exalted terms)", "*teineigo* (neutrally polite terms)" and "*kenjoogo* (humble terms)" (Šoucova 2005: 138). They are mostly used when showing respect to an individual, reflecting the Japanese cultural preference for polite and indirect communication in different social contexts. For instance, Šoucova (2005: 139) offers an example, when showing a respect to an individual, the suffix ""san" or "sama" (more formal) is appended to their name: Mr./Mrs. Tanaka becomes "Tanaka san" or "Tanaka sama.""Yet, in the familial context, Šoucova (2005: 139) explains how children refer to their mother as "okaasan" or "okaachan," an older brother as "oniisan" or "oniichan," and a grandfather as "ojiisan" or "ojiichan" "(where "-chan" is an informal suffix utilized among friends and family, as opposed to the formal "-san" suffix)" (Šoucova 2005: 139).

Overall, the claims about Japanese indirectness are mostly stereotypical and assumed by Westerners. Mičkova (2003: 146) indicates that the concept of Japanese indirectness is a manifestation of their historically established traditions and cultural values and requirements. The manner in which it manifests in verbal communication, along with its alignment with various cultural principles mentioned earlier, reinforces people's perspective (Mičkova 2003: 146). However, some cross-cultural studies showed that this hypothesis might not always be true. For example, Spees (1994: 246) showed that even though Japanese students are more indirect than American students in complaints and requests, it all varied between their out-group (for example, at university) and in-group (at home or among friends) situations. However, the rationale behind this isn't necessarily that Japanese students were more indirect when addressing out-group members. Complaints and requests made by Japanese students to out-group members were not inherently more indirect than those directed at in-group members, Spees (1994: 246) explains. Thus, Pizziconi (2009: 249) states that “language forms can be indirect, but indirectness is not a fixed property of the Japanese language”. According to Pizziconi (2009: 249), speakers can be indirect or imprecise, but indirectness itself isn’t an inherent trait of speakers; rather, it emerges from a context an individual finds himself in, in which various signals are perceived to come together, creating a coherent pattern of linguistic usage that serves the purpose of conveying alignment. Furthermore, Spees (1994: 246) notes how, in recent times, Japanese society has been going through changes, and it is thought that young people have become more individual and direct than older people. Hence, modern-day Japanese communication might be gradually shifting towards a more straightforward style compared to the past. To validate this hypothesis, Spees (1994: 246) claims a need for cross-generational and cross-cultural comparisons and preferably longitudinal studies to reveal changes across generations within Japanese society and among other cultures and languages.

4. Conclusion

The most important speaker's role is to provide the meaning of the message to the hearer and for the hearer to understand it clearly. We live in a world with various cultures, and every culture has a certain language that goes with it. Moreover, every cultural group has a unique and different communicative style. This thesis deals with the basic aspects of cross-cultural communication and the challenges people go through to communicate properly. It shows that dealing with a foreign language requires dealing with distinct norms and cultural values associated with the target language. Therefore, people must recognize the differences between both cultures, especially if they live in a multicultural country, to avoid pragmatic failure. Pragmatic competence encompasses more than just speech acts, implicature, etc., as the crucial aspect is knowing how to implement politeness strategies appropriately within various contexts.

The thesis describes the terms of directness and indirectness and defines them through cross-cultural studies. It connects indirectness with politeness theories (Leech 1983 and Brown and Levinson 1987), but it also shows how these two terms are not precisely defined despite their association with politeness theories. Directness and indirectness are influenced by both linguistic factors and the specific context they occur in.

In conclusion, the field of cross-cultural pragmatics is crucial for effective communication and understanding among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Its objective is to examine and contrast cultural practices, norms, values, and behaviours to provide insights for people involved in cross-cultural communication. Cross-cultural pragmatics holds the promise of offering substantial support to the real-world requirements of an ever-more interconnected global society that will emerge in the future.

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6. Sažetak

Cilj ovog rada je definirati i usporediti pojmove direktnosti i indirektnosti u kroskulturalnoj komunikaciji. U kontekstu kroskulturne komunikacije, koncepti direktnosti i indirektnosti igraju ključnu ulogu u oblikovanju interakcija među osobama iz različitih kulturnih okvira. Rad započinje definiranjem samog pojma "kulture" i utvrđivanjem odnosa između jezika i kulture, detaljnije opisivanjem aspekata kroskulturalne komunikacije. Kako bi se bolje razumjeli pojmovi direktnosti i indirektnosti, rad ističe važnost pragmatike i ulogu konteksta u različitim komunikacijskim situacijama. Zatim slijedi analiza pojmova direktnosti i indirektnosti uz primjere istraživanja različitih jezika i kultura, kako bi se ilustrirali različiti načini komuniciranja među kulturama. Nakon analize, zaključak rada naglašava važnost razumijevanja da svaka kultura grupa ima svoje jedinstvene karakteristike i stilove komunikacije.

Ključne riječi: direktnost, indirektnost, kultura, jezik, kroskulturalna komunikacija, kontekst, pragmatika

7. Summary

The aim of this thesis is to define and compare the concepts of directness and indirectness in cross-cultural communication. The paper begins by defining the concept of "culture" itself and establishing the relationship between language and culture, going into more details about aspects of cross-cultural communication. To better understand the concepts of directness and indirectness, the thesis highlights the importance of pragmatics and the role of context in different communicative situations. Paper goes on forward to analyse the concepts of directness and indirectness, with examples of research involving different languages and cultures, to illustrate the main differences of communicating among cultures. After analysis, thesis concludes with emphasizing the importance of understanding that every cultural group has its own unique characteristics and communication styles.

Keywords: directness, indirectness, culture, language, cross-cultural communication, context, pragmatics

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