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# Master's thesis

# The Impact of Cultural Background on English Language Politeness Strategies for Ukrainian Adult Learners in Norway

**Master of Didactics of Culture and Language**

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# Abstract

Due to globalisation and constantly evolving geopolitical landscapes, educators face a multitude of challenges, including cultural clashes and complexities in human interaction and politeness within diverse societies. Naturally, these tendencies apply to Norway and its educational settings. Hence, this thesis investigates the following topic: *The Impact of Cultural Background on English Language Politeness Strategies for Ukrainian Adult Learners in Norway*. Employing a qualitative research approach, specifically a literature review, and drawing upon Hofstede's cultural dimensions as well as the theory of Brown and Levinson, this study elucidates the profound influence of cultural backgrounds on the politeness strategies of English and Ukrainian-speaking societies. It reveals that English-speaking societies predominantly employ negative politeness strategies, while Ukrainians lean towards positive politeness strategies. Furthermore, practical implications for educators are discussed, providing insights for effectively addressing cultural nuances in the English-language classroom context in Norway.

# Sammendrag

På grunn av globalisering og stadig endringer i det geopolitiske landskap, møter lærere en rekke utfordringer ved undervisning, inkludert komplekse kultursammenstøt hvor menneskelig interaksjoner preges av forskjellige høflighetstrategier basert på ulike kulturer. Disse tendensene gjelder naturligvis Norge og dets utdanningsmiljøer. Denne oppgaven undersøker påvirkning kulturell bakgrunn har på engelskspråklige høflighetsstrategier for ukrainske voksne elever i Norge. Ved å bruke en kvalitativ forskning strategi og med utgangspunkt i Hofstedes kulturelle dimensjoner så vel som teorien til Brown og Levinson, belyser denne studien den dype innflytelsen kulturell bakgrunn har på høflighetsstrategiene til engelsk- og ukrainsktalende samfunn. Studien finner at engelsktalende samfunn overveiende bruker negative høflighetsstrategier, mens ukrainere lener seg mot positive høflighetsstrategier. Videre diskuteres praktiske implikasjoner for lærere, som gir innsikt i hvordan effektivt adressere kulturelle nyanser i den engelskspråklige klasserom i Norge.

# Contents

## Tables and Figures

# 1. Introduction

The cause of human behaviour and speech is often a research subject in the academic world. The starting point for such exploration can be one's own experience and observations, and this Master's thesis is no exception. As the title "*The Impact of Cultural Background on English Language Politeness Strategies for Ukrainian Adult Learners in Norway*" suggests, the journey I am about to commence is based on my own experiences as a Ukrainian living in Norway for twenty years and working as an interpreter for Ukrainians in Norway for fourteen years.

My journey into the realm of linguistic and cultural exploration began with the role of an interpreter. For over a decade, I have had the privilege of bridging some of the gaps between Ukrainian-speaking individuals and Norwegian society. This role, which at first glance may seem trivial, gave me a deep understanding of the complex interaction of culture, language and politeness. One of the notable observations during my work suggests that the linguistic choices of politeness strategies may differ significantly between Norwegian-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking societies. Although subtle at times, these differences appear to be influenced by cultural factors within these communities and can affect how people interact, express themselves, and navigate various situations. As a student and learner of English didactics in Norway, I observed considerable differences in teaching styles, particularly concerning teacher-student relationships and instructional methods. Furthermore, I recently formulated a more detailed question while working as an interpreter and teacher assistant for Ukrainian refugees in Norway. The research question (RQ) that emerged from my years of observation and experience is as follows:

*What are the cultural differences in politeness strategies between English-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking societies, and how might these differences impact linguistic choices in politeness strategies and teaching methods for Ukrainian adult learners in an English language classroom context in Norway?*

The RQ inherently recognises the variability in language proficiency between native and non-native learners. Thus, it is noteworthy that Ogiermann (2009) claims: "Most non-native speakers […] will never achieve the cultural competence allowing them to use the language as creatively as native speakers do" (p. 24). Moreover, Kaburise (2011) emphasises that research on cross-cultural politeness strategies shows that even minor differences in how something is said, like tone or manner, can create a gap between a native speaker and a non-native speaker,

leading to communication challenges (p. 101). In the context of my study on Ukrainian adult learners of English, these viewpoints underscore the potential challenges these learners may face in fully integrating cultural nuances into their language proficiency.

However, despite these potential challenges for Ukrainian adult learners to attain native-like proficiency in English, my study aims to contribute some insights to enhance the teaching and learning of the language. Specifically, focusing on politeness and politeness strategies can provide practical guidance on fostering effective communication, acknowledging cultural differences, and promoting a more nuanced understanding of language use in diverse contexts. Furthermore, this thesis takes into consideration the Norwegian context. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of central themes while maintaining a broader view. In other words, this study acknowledges the presence of Norwegian culture and cultural norms in the English classroom for Ukrainian adult learners in Norway. However, it refrains from going into specific detail about how these cultural influences impact the subject of inquiry. Instead, the study emphasises the importance of acknowledging and being aware of the existence of Norwegian culture in this context but without exploring its nuanced influence on the topic.

As Chvala & Graedler (2010) claim, "English is a significant language in Norway and holds a position unlike that of other foreign languages taught in school" (p. 75). While recognising the unique landscape of English education in Norway, it is essential to acknowledge a key aspect: teachers may include both native English speakers and Norwegian English speakers, which adds nuance to the intercultural dynamics. Native speakers may bring authentic language experiences by introducing students to pronunciation, idiomatic expressions, and cultural subtleties. On the other hand, Norwegian English-speaking teachers can offer ideas based on their understanding of the local cultural context and language learning challenges specific to Norwegian students. By acknowledging the presence of both types of teachers in the Norwegian context, this thesis highlights the potential influence of their different backgrounds on the adaption of various politeness strategies into English language learning environments.

Moreover, as this thesis argues, linguistic choices in politeness strategies depend significantly on the cultural background of individuals. Thus, if Norwegian teachers are not aware of English politeness strategies, they might use Norwegian politeness strategies in their linguistic choices, potentially impacting communication patterns and teaching methods in an English language classroom context. As Brubæk (2012) suggests in her study, there are indications that there is neglect in the development of students' pragmatic competence in Norwegian EFL classrooms. Additionally, studies cited in Brubæk highlight significant differences between native speakers

(NS) of English and non-native speakers (NNS) in terms of strategy choice and formulation while realizing different types of speech acts (p. 15). Due to the limited scope of this research, Norwegian politeness strategies and their implication in English classroom for Ukrainian adult learners will not be studied. However, this work must take into consideration the abovementioned factors.

## 1.1. Thesis structure

This thesis comprises five chapters, each serving a distinct purpose. This first chapter introduces the study's topic, purpose, research question, and central concepts. The second chapter outlines the research methodology and the process of conducting this thesis. In the third theoretical chapter, the paper explores different notions of culture, their intersection with language, definitions of politeness and cultural influence on linguistic choices in politeness strategies and communication patterns for English and Ukrainian culture. The theories employed to address the research question are also introduced and analysed in the theory chapter, drawing from the works of linguists, sociologists, and other scholars who have explored the interplay between culture and language. This thesis seeks to bridge theoretical concepts with practical implications for adult Ukrainian learners of English and their educators. Therefore, some insights into the field of pragmatics and didactics are provided. Chapter four is dedicated to a discussion where I analyse presented theories alongside personal and professional observations and reflections on the topic and research question. Finally, the last chapter summarises findings and reflections and offers suggestions for future research.

## 1.2. Central concepts

This thesis aims to demonstrate that politeness and politeness strategies are vital aspects of communication and are deeply intertwined with both language and culture and that politeness strategies are linguistic and behavioural signs that convey respect, courtesy, and social harmony within a specific cultural context. This subchapter will introduce and define some key concepts essential to this work.

This thesis's three key concepts are *culture*, *language* and *politeness*. However, this study recognises the complexity inherent in the phenomenon of language and, thus, centres exploration around the dynamic interplay between culture and politeness, with language serving as the connective thread between these two critical concepts. By analysing the relationship between culture and politeness through the lens of language, this study aims to discover the nuances by which linguistic expressions promote politeness in a given cultural context. Simultaneously, this thesis recognises the intricate interplay between culture and language, acknowledging the challenge of definitely determining whether politeness strategies are uncovered through the lens of language or the lens of culture. Chapter 3 explores this complex interaction in more detail.

In the field of teaching English to adult Ukrainians in Norway, the importance of pragmatics can not be overestimated. Pragmatics, which examines how context shapes the interpretation of meaning, is pivotal for effective communication, especially in diverse linguistic and cultural environments and plays a vital role in teaching language. Moreover, this thesis explores how culture, language, and politeness intersect and manifest within the field of pragmatics. O'Keeffe et al. (2019) highlight the fact that "also central to pragmatics is the quest to understand language as performance rather as an internal language competence of the native speaker-hearer" (p. 1). This perspective shifts the focus from viewing language as a static set of rules and structures stored in an individual's mind to recognizing it as a dynamic, context-dependent activity. Understanding language as performance implies that effective communication involves more than just linguistic accuracy; it requires understanding how language functions in different situations, adapting to various social contexts, and being aware of pragmatic aspects such as implied and interpreted meaning by interlocutors. When teaching English to Ukrainian adults in Norway, teachers face a variety of pragmatic challenges that require a deep understanding of linguistic nuances, including politeness strategies, implied meanings, and cultural nuances. This includes teaching not only the literal meaning of words but also how they are used in different social contexts, which is crucial for effective communication. These issues will be addressed and discussed further in subchapter 3.3.

This thesis treats language as an intricate phenomenon and addresses it from various perspectives, including Saussure's structuralist viewpoint and Barker's (2008) complex approach. Encyclopedia Brittanica defines language as a system of conventional, manual (signed), or written symbols through which human beings express themselves as part of a social

group and its culture (Crystal & Robins, 2024). This definition underscores the intricate relationship between language and culture.

Similarly, culture, also intricate in nature, encompasses a wide array of definitions, ranging from being a reflection of group lifestyles (Niezegorodcev et al., 2011, p. 15) to a phenomenon that is cultivated and nurtured (Kramsch, 2009, p. 4). Moreover, Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 6) consider culture as a set of "unwritten rules of the social game". This implies that culture involves implicit norms and expectations that guide social interactions within a given community. These insights lay the groundwork for a deeper exploration of culture in subchapter 3.1 of this thesis, where the detailed descriptions of this concept are further explored.

Politeness, arguably, forms the basis for fostering respectful and amicable relationships. When we say that someone is polite, we are talking about it positively, while the expression "an impolite person" can automatically paint an unpleasant picture in our minds. Thus, we can conclude that politeness is a positive and pleasant phenomenon. Moreover, as Zhuravleva (2012, as cited in Bolotnikova, 2018a) claims, "the originality of any nation is revealed mostly in communication, in expressions of politeness as an important component of language culture, which reflects the spiritual world of its speakers" (p. 63, my translation). According to this perspective, politeness serves as a mirror reflecting the inner world of its speakers. In this context, politeness is not merely a set of external behaviours; rather, it becomes a portal into the collective psyche of a community or nation. Thus, according to this view, people's linguistic choices to convey politeness reveal their cultural norms, social hierarchies, and underlying attitudes toward relationships and interactions.

According to Toftul (2014), the Ukrainian understanding of politeness is:

> …a form of relationship between people that is manifested in attentiveness, benevolence, wishing good to another person, correctness, courtesy, delicacy and tact, in readiness to do a favour to someone who needs it; a feature of character, the moral quality of a person, which characterises the behaviour of a person for whom respect for people has become an everyday norm and a usual way of dealing with others.[…] Politeness is usually understood as […]willing to listen to the opposite side and find a compromise.[…] Politeness enables people to feel comfortable in the company and avoid relationship tension  (p. 70, my translation).

Thus, as can be seen from the above definition, Ukrainian politeness is viewed as a quality marked by attentiveness, benevolence, and a genuine desire for others' well-being. It encompasses good manners, etiquette, and the ability to engage in respectful and tactful

communication, fostering comfort and avoiding tension in social interactions while simultaneously considering politeness as a reflection of benevolence and a deep connection with others.

However, in the search for a clear and concise definition of politeness, I have found various definitions, theories, and approaches. A considerable number of researchers look at politeness from different angles and based on multiple theories. Arguably, it is almost impossible to come to an unambiguous opinion when it comes to such a complex phenomenon as human relationships. The most relevant theories were selected based on an analysis of the available options, which helped address the RQ. These theories are examined in detail in subchapter 3.2., where I also explore discrepancies between Ukrainian, English and Norwegien understanding of this concept.

As Marquez (2000, pp. 2-3) suggests, much like our understanding of language, our knowledge about politeness is constructed within our cultural framework. We learn politeness norms and strategies as part of our linguistic and cultural education. These norms shape our interactions, dictating how we express respect, deference, and courtesy in our speech and actions. The interplay between language, politeness, and culture is intricate. Language provides us with the tools to express politeness, but cultural norms determine how we wield these tools.

## 2.   Method

This chapter introduces the methodological considerations and the techniques by which the research in this study was conducted.

## 2.1. Methodological approach

To address the research question of this thesis, I utilized a qualitative methodology, specifically conducting a literature review. A literature review involves systematically examining published literature relevant to a specific topic or research question, aiming to analyze rather than simply summarize scholarly works related to the research question. It provides background information on the topic and establishes a connection between existing literature and the research question. Furthermore, a literature review differs from an annotated bibliography as it does not involve summarizing each reviewed article.  Instead, it critically analyses the works and their relevance to the research question. Unlike a research paper, where resources are selected to support a particular viewpoint, a literature review considers all sides of an argument to avoid bias, highlighting areas of agreement and disagreement (University of Pittsburg, 2024).

The research question focuses on cultural differences in politeness strategies between English-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking societies and their impact on linguistic choices in politeness strategies of Ukrainian adult learners in English-language classroom contexts in Norway. In reviewing previous research, I observed that while there is a significant body of literature on culture and politeness strategies in a general context alongside studies on English politeness, there is, not surprisingly, a lack of specific research examining the influence of cultural background on communication patterns among Ukrainian adult learners of English in Norway. Literature on Ukrainian politeness and culture is in Ukrainian, while the literature on general concepts of culture, politeness and language is in English. Therefore, I have combined relevant findings from various English, Norwegian and Ukrainian studies to address the research question. Subchapter 2.2 describes how I performed this search.

Furthermore, when conducting my search and synthesis of the found papers, I considered that it is crucial to keep in mind that the so-called "researcher effect" (Kvarv, 2021, p. 73) has a direct effect on any study and analysis:

> Research, and not least social research, is carried out by people with preconceptions, sympathies, antipathies, political convictions, etc. As a socialised person through upbringing, school and education, the researcher brings his perceptions into his research project (Kvarv, 2021, p.73, my translation).

Kvarv's assertion emphasises the idea that researchers are not detached from their research subjects or immune to personal beliefs and biases. Instead, they have preconceptions, prejudices, and worldviews that inevitably influence their analysis. However, by acknowledging this reality and adhering to rigorous research practices, I have attempted to investigate and present this work objectively and with integrity.

I considered the use of Discourse Completion Task (DCT) methods to be a useful approach to my RQ. Although DCTs can offer a more detailed understanding of politeness strategies and a more complete picture of Ukrainian students' communication patterns, their effective implementation requires careful consideration and analysis of individual participants and a range of factors. This fact highlighted the need for a thorough and careful approach to the design and implementation of DCTs and a sufficient number of participants to provide a meaningful understanding of the linguistic choices of Ukrainian adult English language learners. Therefore, I conclude that this method holds potential for future studies in this area, particularly for researchers with broader access to participants and data analysis capabilities. Consequently, my thesis can serve as a basis for the development of future DCT designs.

## 2.2. Databases and search strategy

My search strategy was shaped by the three key concepts: culture, language and politeness. Given the nature of the study, literature searches were conducted in English, Norwegian and Ukrainian to address the research question. The databases utilised for this purpose included Oria, Google Scholar, Academic Search Complete, and Academia. The following keywords were used separately and in combination: *politeness strategies, communication patterns, politeness, culture, Ukrainian, Slavic, Eastern European, English, Norwegian, linguistic choices, language, cross-cultural studies* and *pragmatics*.

Furthermore, inclusion and exclusion criteria have been utilised in the search for relevant literature. Inclusion criteria included relevance to the RQ; studies had to directly address or contribute to understanding the impact of cultural background on communication patterns

among Ukrainian adult learners of English in Norway. In addition, the publication date was taken into consideration; studies published within the last 30 years were preferred, apart from those that addressed the applied theories and definitions (e.g., Brown and Levinson's theory and its critique). The selected time frame of the last 30 years corresponds with historical events, including Ukraine's independence in 1991, which marked a pivotal moment in the empowerment and recognition of the Ukrainian language. Consequentially, exclusion criteria were applied to remove any publications dated before 1990 or those irrelevant to the research question. This step ensured that only the most recent and pertinent literature was included in the study, enhancing the findings' quality and relevance. Finally, publications that were not published in English, Norwegian or Ukrainian were excluded from the research.

## 2.3. Application of the cultural dimensions

In this thesis, I have utilized Hofstede's research, as recognized in studies on politeness and politeness strategies by scholars such as Hickey & Stewart (2005), Ogiermann (2009) and others. To address the research question, this study employs Hofstede's three cultural dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism and Uncertainty Avoidance. These dimensions are selected based on their relevance to understanding politeness strategies in English-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking societies. A detailed description of these dimensions, alongside the introduction of Hofstede's views on culture and its impact on the range of factors, will be presented in sections 3.1.3., 3.1.4., 3.1.5. and 3.1.6. However, this subchapter will outline the methodology used to conduct cultural comparative analyses between countries. This analysis aims to illustrate differences among the studied cultures and how these variances are reflected in the linguistic choices of politeness strategies.

Although this study mainly aims to investigate differences between English-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking societies, I find it beneficial to introduce the country comparison chart for the three countries: Ukraine, Great Britain and Norway. The inclusion of Norway serves multiple purposes. Firstly, the Norwegian context is significant as my observations are based in classrooms in Norway, shaping the foundation of my reflections. Additionally, as mentioned in chapter 1, English instructors in Norway are often Norwegians, and this factor plays an essential role in the dynamics of language education.

There are several ways to compare countries using Hofstede's research. Initially, Ukraine was included in one of Hofstede's dimension lists: the Long-term orientation dimension (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 264). To create country comparison charts, I have utilised two primary sources. The first is Gert Hofstede's website, which is built upon Geert Hofstede's calculations and research. Gert Hofstede provides estimates for Ukraine in the dimensions I am investigating.[1] The second source is a country comparison tool from a global analytics company, The Culture Factor Group, which also relies on Hofstede's research and was founded with the support of Geert Hofstede in 1985, offers specific numerical data for the dimensions of interest in my study. The team of Culture Factor Group includes data technicians, behavioural analytics and research scholars, and facilitators across more than 60 countries. Moreover, they sustain an ongoing partnership with various academic institutions. The latest update on their website was on October 16, 2023 (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-a.). However, I introduce the country comparison legacy presented by the Culture Factor Group based on the various data from their previous and current research. As elaborated in section 3.1.2, Ukraine encompasses both collectivist and individualist traits due to historical and sociocultural reasons. The details of this dimension will be explained in section 3.1.6 on Individualism vs Collectivism.

The Culture Factor Group scholars emphasise that culture does not suggest that every individual within a particular society follows the same programming; the variations in values among individuals within one country are often more significant than the distinctions between countries (n.d.-b.). This assertion perfectly aligns with Hofstede's claim that the dimensions used to compare countries should not be confused "with value differences at the individual level" (Hofstede, 2011, p. 2). Nonetheless, we can employ these country scores, relying on the principle of large sample sizes and recognising that most of us are significantly shaped by societal influences. It is essential to understand that assessments regarding countries are generalisations and should be considered in relation to other countries. The meaningfulness of a country's score becomes apparent only through comparison (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.).

In the charts and tables presented below, which are adapted from Hofstede's and The Culture Factor Group's data, I demonstrate a comparison of data across topical cultural dimensions.

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[1] Geert Hofstede and his son, Gert Hofstede, share the same initials. While Geert Hofstede did not include Ukraine in his calculations, except for the Long-term Orientation dimension, he acknowledged the dynamics of Eastern Europe's development (Hofstede et al., 2010). In contrast, Gert Hofstede has included Ukraine in his research, building upon his father's studies (Geert Hofstede, n.d.).

Graphs visually depict differences in cultural dimension values, while tables present the same data in tabular format.

*Figure 1. Country comparison chart based on the estimates and data of Gert Hofstede (Geert Hofstede, n.d.).*
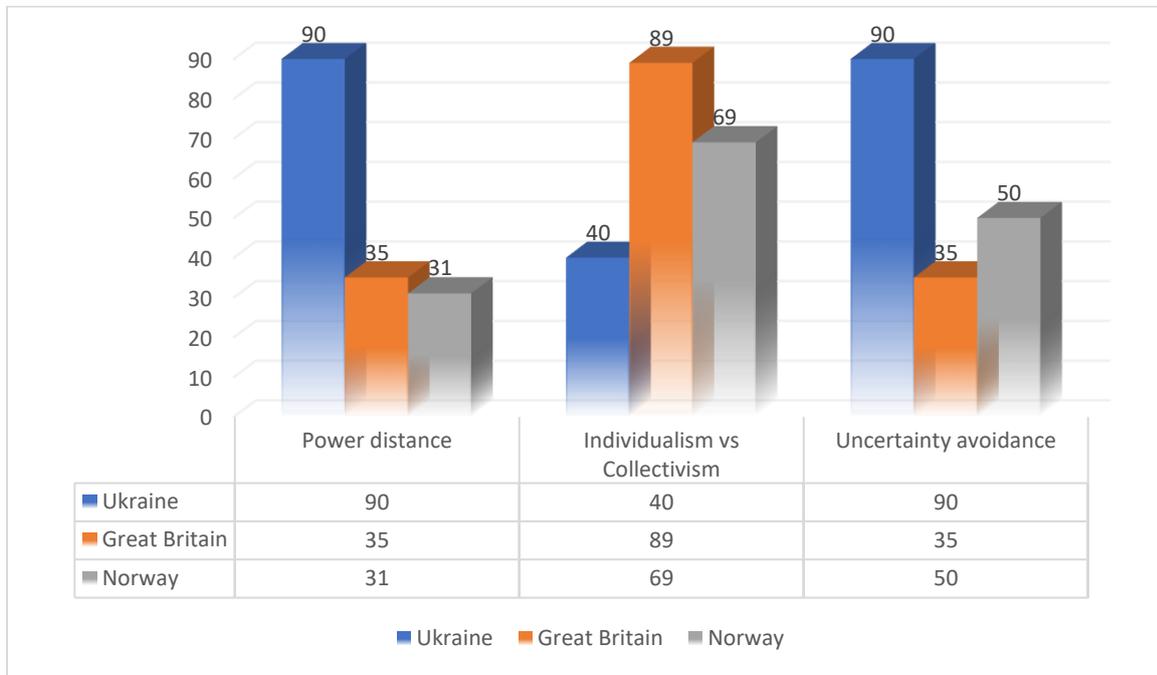


*Table 1. Country comparison table based on the estimates and data of Gert Hofstede (Geert Hofstede, n.d.).*

| Country / Dimension | Ukraine | Great Britain | Norway |
|---|---|---|---|
| Power distance | 90 | 35 | 31 |
| Individualism vs Collectivism | 40 | 89 | 69 |
| Uncertainty avoidance | 90 | 35 | 50 |

*Figure 2. Country comparison chart based on the data from The Culture Factor Group (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.).*
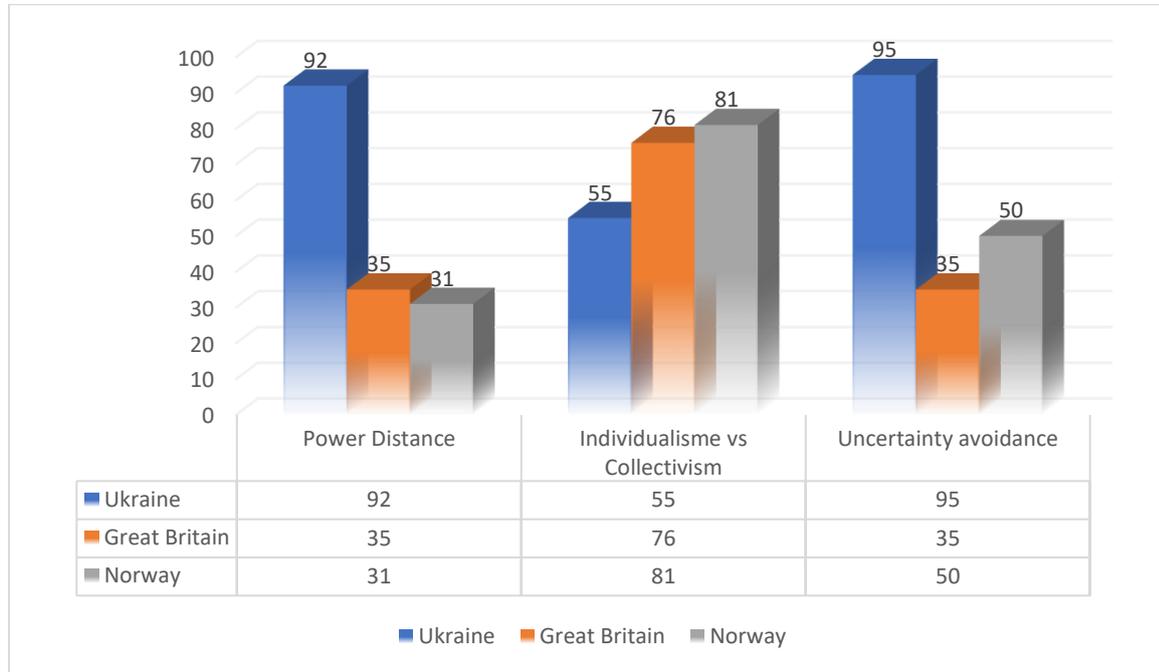


*Table 2.  Country comparison table based on the data from The Culture Factor Group (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.).*

| Country / Dimension | Ukraine | Great Britain | Norway |
|---|---|---|---|
| Power distance | 92 | 35 | 31 |
| Individualism vs Collectivism | 55 | 76 | 81 |
| Uncertainty avoidance | 95 | 35 | 50 |

The numbers align closely for most dimensions and countries when comparing Hofstede's estimates with those from the Culture Factor Group, except for the Individualism dimension, where Ukraine scores at 40 compared to 55, Great Britain at 76 to 89, and Norway at 81 to 69, respectively. Additionally, historical data from the Cultural Group, predating their most recent update, indicates that Ukraine had a score of 25 on Individualism (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-c.). These variations in the Individualism vs Collectivism dimension may be attributed to several factors, such as differences in survey samples, target groups, methodologies and access

to new technologies, such as online surveys. Moreover, the process of globalisation, among other things, has brought Ukraine closer to Western countries and cultures in recent years, potentially contributing to Ukraine's higher score in the Individualism dimension in the Cultural Factor Group's assessment. This coincides with Hickey and Stewart's assertion that there have been some changes in terms of politeness strategies in Eastern Europe in recent years (Hickey & Stewart, 2005, p. 2). However, it is essential to consider that this research focuses on adult learners, and their cultural patterns may align more closely with Hofstede's scores. Additionally, these cultural patterns are often reflected in language use, a point that is demonstrated in this study. This suggests that despite cultural shifts, the specific linguistic choices and politeness strategies of Ukrainian adult learners may still resonate with Hofstede's cultural dimensions' data.

Notably, these charts reveal distinct differences in how Ukraine scores on various cultural dimensions compared to Great Britain and Norway. Especially, Ukraine exhibits relatively high scores on the Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance dimensions when contrasted with Great Britain and Norway. This suggests that Ukraine strongly emphasises hierarchical structures and is more inclined to uncertainty than the other two countries.

Furthermore, Ukraine scores notably lower on the Individualism vs Collectivism dimension compared to Great Britain and Norway. This lower score indicates that Ukrainian society leans more toward collectivism, emphasising group cohesion and interconnectedness, as opposed to the individualistic tendencies observed in Great Britain and Norway. These cultural distinctions are significant and may influence the politeness strategies and linguistic choices of Ukrainian adult learners, a critical aspect to explore in my research.

The following theoretical chapter examines definitions of culture, language, and politeness alongside the cultural influences on linguistic choices in politeness strategies for English and Ukrainian-speaking societies.

# 3. Theoretical foundations: the interplay between language, culture and politeness.

In the following subchapters, I will present the findings from my literature review. As mentioned earlier, this study explores the connections between culture, language, and the strategies of politeness used in English and Ukrainian cultures. However, it is essential to note that through my searches, I have determined that the terms "English-speaking" and "Ukrainian-speaking" society and culture cover a wide range of diversity and nuances. To maintain precision and clarity in my study, I have chosen to focus specifically on Standard English from the United Kingdom and Standard Ukrainian phrases expressing politeness. This choice is explained and justified in section 3.1.2.

## 3.1. Culture

This subchapter explores the complex relationship between culture and language. The interplay between these two fundamental aspects is critical to understanding how communication is shaped in different social contexts. In this chapter, I strive to uncover the multifaceted layers of culture, exploring its profound influence on language structure, norms and nuances. Moreover, the concept of language is analysed from various perspectives, providing a nuanced understanding of its meaning in our cognitive processes. In addition to being simply a tool for communication, language is positioned as a cognitive filter that determines not only how we express ourselves but also how we perceive and interpret the world around us. By examining these perspectives, I aim to illuminate the complex connections between culture, language, and thought, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of their influence on communication patterns and politeness strategies in subsequent chapters.

### 3.1.1. Interplay between language and culture: language as a cognitive filter

"Culture" is a concept that defies easy definition, and scholars have offered numerous interpretations to capture its intricate nature. One definition, as articulated by Kramsch (2009, p. 4), characterises culture as "what has been grown and groomed." This succinct definition

carries profound implications. It suggests that culture is not a static entity but a dynamic force shaped by human beings over time. Hence, culture is not an inherent quality but rather something cultivated and nurtured. It highlights the notion that culture is the product of continuous human interactions, choices, and adaptations. This definition underscores culture's living nature, emphasising its ongoing evolution and transformation.

Another definition offers a more comprehensive view of culture. Nizegorodcew et al. (2011) state that culture "refers to the practices and products of a particular group of people or society. Thus, culture is said to reflect a group's way of life, its customs and beliefs, its ideas, customs, achievements and art" (p. 15). This definition presents culture as a complex phenomenon that includes a wide range of elements, such as customs, beliefs, practices, ideas, achievements, and art. It portrays culture as an all-encompassing reflection of a group's way of life, offering insights into their values, traditions, and creative expressions. From this perspective, culture is not confined to a single dimension but represents the totality of human experience within a specific community or society.

These definitions highlight the multifaceted nature of culture. They underscore that culture extends beyond superficial customs or behaviours, encompassing the entire spectrum of human expression and existence. Moreover, they recognise that culture is far from static; it evolves over time and is influenced by historical, social, and individual factors. Hence, these definitions suggest that culture is both a product and a process. It is something created and nurtured by people while simultaneously shaping their perceptions, behaviours, and identities. Hence, these diverse definitions serve as a reminder of the richness and complexity inherent in the field of culture in the context of this research and cross-cultural studies in general. They encourage scholars to approach culture holistically, acknowledging its dynamic nature and profound influence on individuals and societies. As mentioned above, while culture remains a concept that resists easy categorisation, these definitions offer valuable insights into the multifaceted and evolving nature of this fundamental aspect of human existence.

Ultimately, the notion of culture depends on the angle from which we wish to see it, whether it is some shared experience, thoughts and interests or something we ought to cultivate and nurture. Regardless of the angle from which we examine it, culture is a phenomenon that influences the people to whom it belongs. Moreover, as will be demonstrated in this thesis, it shapes thoughts, patterns of behaviour, and, consequently, language in context. In turn, language influences how we perceive and interact with the world (Kramsch, 2009, p. 11). Thus, it is a dynamic, ongoing process of reciprocal influence that is naturally reflected in linguistic

choices in politeness strategies. However, the purpose of this work is not to examine the development of politeness strategies but to analyse already existing English and Ukrainian politeness strategies.

Moreover, this thesis requires a conceptual framework encompassing language and its underlying structure to thoroughly examine the interplay between culture and language and gain insight into individuals' selection of specific linguistic choices and politeness strategies.

We acquire language at a very young age, and with that language, our culture and behaviour patterns are developed. Language shapes our perception of reality, enabling us to categorise and make sense of the world around us. This idea, namely that "the way people think is influenced by the language they speak", was presented in a series of publications in the 1930s by Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir (Perlovsky, 2009, p. 518). It is also known as a strong Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. From this perspective, language serves as the lens through which we perceive the world. Language becomes the vehicle through which we navigate and interpret our experiences. Moreover, it constructs our mental images about objects, people, different phenomena, nature, and the entire reality. However, as Kramsch (2009) highlights, the mentioned strong Sapir-Whorf hypothesis faced a serious critique since it implicitly "leads to prejudice and racism." On the contrary, the weak version, "supported by the findings that there are cultural differences in the semantic associations evoked by seemingly common concepts, is generally accepted nowadays" (pp.12-13)

Further, Barker (2008, p. 75) gives the following definition of language:

1. Language is the privileged medium in which cultural meanings are formed and communicated.

2. Language is the means and medium through which we form knowledge about ourselves and the social world.

Language is not a neutral medium for the formation and transfer of values, meanings and forms of knowledge that exist independently beyond its boundaries. Rather, language is constitutive of those very values, meanings and knowledges.

Thus, Barker asserts that language is a significant medium which plays a vital role in forming and sharing cultural meanings and knowledge about ourselves and society. It is not just a neutral tool; it is deeply connected to the values, meanings, and knowledge it conveys, shaping our cultural identity.

Simultaneously, Ferdinand de Saussure, a pioneering linguist, introduced the concept of language as a system of signs. According to Saussure's structuralism, language is not a random collection of words but a structured system where words and symbols are interconnected, with meaning arising from the relationships between these signs (Barker, 2008, p. 76). Thus, as children, we immerse ourselves in this intricate system of signs. We start building a framework for understanding the world from our first words and sentences. As we acquire language, we also absorb its cultural context. Our mother tongue becomes more than a means of communication; it becomes a symbol of our cultural identity. Our choice of words, expressions, and even our accents are markers of our cultural affiliation.

Hence, language, in its essence, takes multiple forms: it exists as a collection of diverse definitions, functions as a complex phenomenon, and serves as a fundamental means of communication. Furthermore, as Kramsch (2009, p. 3) asserts, "when it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways". She also proposes three aspects of language: "language expresses cultural reality", "language embodies cultural reality", and "language symbolises cultural reality". Thus, the spoken words of individuals rely on shared experiences, conveying information, ideas, or events that can be communicated because they are grounded in a collective understanding of the world, which others also possess ("language expresses cultural reality"). Moreover, how individuals employ spoken, written, or visual communication shapes meaning within their specific cultural group. This includes tone of voice, accent, and conversational style, which contribute to shared understanding and interpretation within that group ("language embodies cultural reality"). Finally, language functions as a cultural system of signs with significant value. Speakers identify themselves and others through their language use and perceive it as a symbol of their cultural identity ("language symbolises cultural reality").

To summarise, language can be seen and will be considered in this thesis as a multifaceted tool encompassing diverse definitions and serving as a means of communication. It is intricately linked with culture, embodying, expressing, and symbolising cultural reality in various ways. Language draws upon shared experiences and shapes meaning through elements like tone and style, contributing to shared understanding within cultural groups. Additionally, language is a cultural symbol, representing speakers' identities and their connection to their cultural heritage.

This study also considers the fact that the lack of understanding between speakers of different languages does not solely arise from the inability to translate their languages into one another, as translation is possible to some extent. The fundamental issue lies in the fact that

representatives of different cultures do not always share a common perspective or interpretation of events. They may have divergent views on the meanings and significance of the concepts underlying their words. Hence, their perception of reality, its meaning and categorisation of experiences might differ (Kramsch, 2009, p. 13).

Moreover, Kaburise (2011) emphasises that the study of meaning in language is paradoxically both obvious and complex due to its subjective nature. Although the purpose of language is clear - effective communication - the complex process of understanding meaning through complex categorisation often eludes awareness of the principles and knowledge that govern our ability to create meaning (p. 16). Thus, the study of meaning requires an acknowledgement of the intricate interplay of various factors that influence how individuals perceive and interpret language, going beyond the apparent simplicity of language's communicative purpose.

Hence, as mentioned above, language serves as a type of cognitive filter through which we process our experiences; it influences not only how we express our thoughts but also how we think about the world. When individuals speak different languages, they are often exposed to distinct linguistic structures, vocabularies, cultural connotations, and, as a result, various politeness strategies. These linguistic and cultural differences lead to variations in how they choose and express their politeness strategies. For example, certain languages may have specific words or expressions for concepts that are absent in other languages. This means that speakers of these languages may have a heightened awareness of these concepts and view the world differently.

Additionally, linguistic nuances such as tense, grammatical structure, and even the presence of gendered nouns can affect the way individuals organise their thoughts and categorise their experiences. Moreover, due to these factors, it can be challenging for individuals to comprehend the reality of another cultural group. The divergence in values among individuals leads to the adoption of distinct strategies, including politeness strategies, in their speech. These strategies reflect individuals' cultural norms and beliefs. Therefore, people from different cultures use different politeness strategies in their speech to express their intentions, build connections with others, and simultaneously conform to their cultural norms.

Notably, the acknowledgement of the significance of culture's impact on language and perception of reality was recognised and developed by modern Polish scholar Anna Wierzbicka. Moreover, Kvarv's aforementioned views in the method chapter are supported through her acknowledgement that:

It is impossible for a human being to study anything - be it cultures, language, animals or stones- from a totally extra-cultural point of view. As scholars, we remain within a certain culture, and we are inevitably guided by certain principles and certain ideals which we know are not necessarily shared by the entire human race (Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 9).

In other words, it is inherently impossible for any human being to approach their subject matter from a completely objective, culture-free standpoint. All scholars are bound by their cultural backgrounds, guided by specific principles and ideals that humanity may not universally share.

In summary, when interacting with representatives of other cultures over time, individuals can see and become aware of differences in cultural values, politeness strategies and language in general. However, this process of adapting new cultural norms and politeness strategies is, arguably, very complex and depends to a fairly high degree on each individual and the whole spectrum of his/her characteristics and the specific context in which they engage with people from different cultures. This process will be further explored in the discussion chapter, subchapter 4.4.

## 3.1.2. Exploring cultural models and language variation

In this thesis, I will focus on generally accepted norms of politeness in both English and Ukrainian cultures. The significance of disparity in both cultures' social-cultural norms is elaborated on later in section 3.1.3. and 3.2.4. This perspective aligns with the core argument of my thesis, emphasising that the observed differences in politeness and politeness strategies between Ukrainian and native English-speaking societies are deeply rooted in sociocultural and historical contexts.

As mentioned above, this study also suggests no singular cultural model of behaviour and communication, leading to the absence of a universally exclusive politeness strategy. As Gee (2015, p. 126) points out, teaching language and literacy to individuals new to a culture or who belong to non-mainstream groups and aspire to master the "standard" cultural models can be profoundly influenced by cultural norms. This statement emphasises the importance of recognising the impact of cultural models on education, particularly in the context of teaching language and literacy to individuals striving to become proficient in the standard cultural norms of the society they have entered. It acknowledges the need for culturally responsive teaching that considers the cultural backgrounds and aspirations of the learners. Moreover, as Gee (2015, p. 126) claims, teaching the entire network of cultural models for any culture is arguably

impossible. Instead, cultural models are acquired through acculturation, being receptive to and gaining experiences within a culture or social group, and engaging in language and interaction in authentic and relevant contexts.

This study does not aim to scrutinise all existing cultural models in Ukrainian and English cultures nor to investigate the difference in the communication of non-mainstream groups. It will be solely concentrated on standardised models of politeness strategies in both cultures, while recognising the vast breadth of non-standardized versions of both Ukrainian and English. Standard language varieties are often used as benchmarks for linguistic analysis, as they are well-documented and widely recognised. This work intends to create a stable and neutral comparative framework by employing Standard English and Standard Ukrainian and cultural norms. This allows for a meaningful comparison between English and Ukrainian politeness strategies. Using a consistent standard makes it easier to systematically identify linguistic and cultural differences.

In this thesis, I take into consideration the fact that, as Cutting & Fordyce assert (2021, p. 72), overgeneralisation should be avoided both in the context of "global languages" and in the context of cultures. In addition, they argue that statements about typical expressions are not appropriate:

> because […] there could be an assumption of a monolithic standard of English, a belief that it is ultimately the property of native speakers (NS) of English or, worse than that, the property of the English. The assertion ignores the fact that there are many types of "English speakers" around the world (Cutting & Fordyce, 2021, p. 72).

This claim is supported by House (2010), who asserts that currently, non-native English speakers outnumber native English speakers by a factor of 4:1. It is reasonable to assume that most interactions in English occur in settings where it is used as a foreign or second language without the presence of native speakers. Consequently, the English language is gradually ceasing to be associated exclusively with native speakers and undergoing a noticeable trend towards greater diversification. This transformation is due to processes such as hybridisation, acculturation and nativisation (p. 363). In the context of my thesis, where Ukrainian adult learners in Norway are likely to be taught English by Norwegian teachers, as mentioned in the introduction chapter, it is essential to consider the dynamics of English language learning and usage in these settings. Thus, Ukrainian learners in Norway may engage with English in educational contexts where both the learners and instructors are non-native speakers.

Furthermore, as Laperre (2020) highlights, there are several types of English, such as British English, American English, Australian English, South African English, Irish English, Canadian English, etc. This claim is also supported by Kirkpatrick (2007), who claims that the different forms of English cover a range of different varieties, illustrating, for example, that British English includes many variations of British Englishes (p. 2). However, according to Laperre (2020), Standard English does exist. It emerged in the 15th and 16th centuries, shaped by dialects in London and the East Midlands for spelling and grammar and the accent of London's high society for pronunciation. Initially used by the government, it later became the norm for the upper classes, dominating literature, science, politics, and education. This pattern is repeated globally, with government officials and academics deliberately selecting elements from dialects to form Standard English (Laperre, 2020). Notably, scholars often refer to Standard British English using terms like British English, Standard English, or Standard British English.

Within the framework of this thesis, it is important to highlight that, as Kirkpatrick (2007) asserts, some people may argue that British English serves as a better model than other forms of English, seeing it as the embodiment of "proper" English. However, it is crucial to recognise that all language varieties are nativised and include corresponding cultural nuances (p. 7). Standard British English, therefore, reflects standardised norms of British politeness strategy, which is the central theme of this thesis. This correlation will similarly extend to the Ukrainian Standard language.

Thus, the abovementioned authors elaborate on the fact that English, as lingua franca, is spoken by many people worldwide with various cultural backgrounds. It is noteworthy that Stewart (2005, pp. 116-117), alongside Kirkpatrick (2007) and Laperre (2020), highlights the diversity within British English, often characterised as "old English" or BE, in contrast to the various "new" and post-colonial Englishes spoken globally. Additionally, she illustrates differences in politeness strategies between English and Scottish people, such as the choice of phrases in a shop setting. In England, a shop assistant might inquire, "Who's next?" whereas in Scotland, the preferred question is "Who's first?" This distinction provides insights into the nuanced ways language shapes our interactions with others. Despite this diversity, Stewart (2005) suggests that British English overall tends to lean towards an "avoidance-based, negatively-oriented culture." Thus, this allows BE users to employ "conventional and non-conventional indirectness" in their communication (pp. 116-117). These observations align with Wierzbicka's (2003) emphasis on the "freedom of imposition" as a fundamental value in Anglo-Saxon culture (pp. 30-31). These ideas will be elaborated on later in the theory chapter, section 3.2.4.

Moreover, as Stewart (2005) asserts, Standard English is associated with established linguistic norms and conventions (pp. 117-128). Torgersen (2020) also highlights that earlier versions of the Norwegian curriculum prioritized British English (p. 271). Thus, British English traditionally received more emphasis in Norwegian education. Consequently, this thesis will utilise Standard British English in the research. This makes it a reliable point of reference for discussing language-related topics, such as politeness strategies.

This study uses Standard Ukrainian (SU) language and cultural norms. According to Lebedivna:

> A standard [Ukrainian] language is a codified variety of a modern language, which contains signs of polyvalence, normalisation, universality and multidimensional stylistic differentiation. In other words, by standard language, we mean a language system, which in the Ukrainian linguistic tradition is called a "literary language", which, however, does not cover all the specific features ( 2021, pp. 1-2, my translation).

Thus, according to this definition, a Standard Ukrainian language is a specific and organised form of the modern Ukrainian language. It has certain characteristics like having multiple meanings for words (polyvalence), being regulated and standardised (normalisation), being used widely and consistently (universality), and having different styles for different situations (multidimensional stylistic differentiation).

Moreover, Lebedivna (2021) emphasises that Standard (formal) and non-standard (informal) forms of the Ukrainian language consistently influence each other. This is evident in literature written in the standard language, which incorporates elements from various dialects and reflects their vocabulary. On the other hand, there is a process of incorporating standard language elements, such as vocabulary, syntax, and phonetics, into dialects, as documented in studies of regional speech. Since the 1980s, there has been a more positive societal view of dialects, and the broader use of dialect elements has contributed to the enrichment of the overall discourse in the modern standard Ukrainian language (p. 2).

However, this study, which excludes consideration of dialect norms and settings, aligns with the understanding that the relationship between standard language and dialects is dynamic, as emphasised by Lebedivna (2021). Thus, teachers instructing Ukrainian learners in an English classroom should be conscious of various dialect norms in the Ukrainian language. Moreover, acknowledging the diverse variations of English worldwide, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, parallels the recognition of numerous dialects within the Ukrainian language. By

recognising the linguistic diversity present in both languages, teachers can tailor their teaching to suit students' linguistic backgrounds, creating a more effective learning environment.

Shulman (1999, p. 1021) asserts that "the structure of Ukrainian society is basically bipolar". Hence, this structure, characterised by geographic, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and economic cleavages, underscores the intricate dynamics in society. Western Ukraine reflects a history intertwined with Polish and Austro-Hungarian rule, contributing to a significant presence of ethnic Ukrainians, many of whom are Greek-Catholic. In contrast, Eastern Ukraine, shaped by Russian/Soviet rule, is predominantly inhabited by Russified (Russian-speaking) Ukrainians, many of whom adhere to Eastern Orthodox traditions. While these divisions are evident, it is crucial to recognise the numerical predominance of ethnic Ukrainians, constituting about three-fourths of the population and, thus, their role in shaping Ukraine's cultural and linguistic landscape. Despite these differences, Ukraine maintains the Standard Ukrainian language, as mentioned above, which serves as one of the focal points of my research. While the detailed scrutiny of the discrepancies between Eastern and Western Ukraine is not within the scope of my thesis, it is essential to be aware of these cultural variations.

### 3.1.3. Cultural dimensions as presented by Hofstede

Hofstede stresses that despite the vast diversity in people's thinking, an underlying structure within this diversity can facilitate mutual understanding (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 4). To achieve this, he introduces the concept of cultural dimensions, which he suggests as a framework for describing and navigating the complexities of international communication, ultimately aiding in overcoming its challenges. According to Encyclopedia Brittanica:

> Dimensions of cultural variability, a concept that emerged from the work of Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede and that refers to the dominant values, principles, beliefs, attitudes, and ethics that are shared by an identifiable group of people that constitute a culture. These dimensions provide the overall framework wherein humans learn to organise their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in relation to their environment (Neuliep, 2024).

Thus, cultural dimensions denote a culture's shared values, beliefs, attitudes, and ethics, shaping individuals' thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in their environment. Hofstede identified the following five dimensions:

1. Power Distance.
2. Uncertainty Avoidance.
3. Individualism vs Collectivism.
4. Masculinity vs Femininity.
5. Short vs. Long-term orientation.

Later, researchers that continued his work included Restraint vs. Indulgence as an additional dimension (Nickerson, 2023).

Notably, Hofstede's findings underscore the critical importance of recognising and understanding cultural differences in the context of international collaboration and the survival of humanity as a whole. He emphasises that:

> The survival of mankind will depend to a large extent on the ability of people who think differently to act together. International collaboration presupposes some understanding of where others' thinking differs from ours. Exploring the way in which nationality predisposes our thinking is not an intellectual luxury. A better understanding of invisible cultural differences is one of the main contributions the social sciences can make to practical policy makers in governments, organisations, and institutions and to ordinary citizens ( Hofstede, 2001, p.xv).

In this assertion, Hofstede underlines the significance of international cooperation. In today's interconnected world, collaboration among individuals, communities, organisations, and nations is essential. Solving global challenges, whether they pertain to climate change, public health crises, or economic stability, often requires coordinated efforts across borders. The ability to work together effectively transcends individual and national interests. Furthermore, people from different cultures often approach problems, decisions, and actions with varying perspectives and methods. These differences in thinking can be a source of strength when utilised collectively. However, without an understanding of these variations, they can also lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, and conflicts. In order to facilitate successful international collaboration, it is imperative to comprehend where and how others' thinking diverges from our own. This understanding is not a luxury but a necessity. It is the foundation upon which effective communication, cooperation, and problem-solving can be built. Hence, Hofstede's approach can help to comprehend the essential differences between Ukrainian and English cultures and develop, to some extent, cultural competence - awareness of and sensitivity to cultural differences in both societies.

Notably, the aim of this research does not have such an extensive goal as ensuring human survival. However, the assistance in understanding different cultural differences in Ukrainian and English societies and, thus, their implications in a classroom might have an important contribution to understanding and better interplay between teachers and students. Furthermore, Hofstede emphasises the intricate relationship between nationality, culture, and our thinking processes. As mentioned above, culture and language are deeply intertwined, making it challenging to precisely quantify their respective influences on our thinking and, consequently, our behaviours, including politeness strategies. However, their impact is undeniably significant.

It is important to define relevant cultural dimensions and consider how Hofstede identifies culture and people's ways of thinking and behaving. According to Hofstede et al. (2010, pp. 4-5), each individual carries within them a set of learned patterns for thinking, feeling, and potential actions, which have developed over their lifetime. Much of this learning occurs during early childhood when a person is highly receptive to new information. Once these patterns are firmly established in a person's mind, unlearning them becomes more challenging than initial learning. Hofstede refers to these ingrained patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting as *mental programs* or *software of the mind*, drawing an analogy to the way computers are programmed. Hofstede identifies culture in this way:

> Culture is always a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same social enviroment, which is where it was learned. Culture consists of the unwritten rules of the social game. It is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others. Culture is learned, not innate (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 6).

Hofstede emphasises here that culture invariably emerges as a communal phenomenon, as it is primarily formed through shared experiences among individuals living or having lived within the same social environment where these cultural norms were initially acquired. Culture encompasses the unspoken guidelines governing social interactions, serving as the collective framework that sets apart one group or category of individuals from another. Culture is an acquired, learned attribute rather than an inherent, innate quality. Based on these assertions, we can further examine the idea of unlearning the established patterns and, thus, the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and make new linguistic choices. Elaboration on this topic will be provided in subchapter 4.2.

Hofstede's theory, like many others, faced criticism, particularly regarding its applicability to a changing world and evolving workplace values. However, in his book *Cultures and*

*organisations : software of the mind: intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival* (2010), Hofstede acknowledged changes in the political environment and underscored the role of individual characteristics, including social class and education, in shaping behaviour patterns. Moreover, in his article *Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context* (2011), Hofstede cautions against overgeneralisation, emphasising that the applicability of dimensions varies depending on the level of aggregation. The article delineates six distinct dimensions identified in the research on organisational cultures by Hofstede et al. (2010) and underscores the importance of distinguishing these from value differences at the individual level. As the author of this thesis, drawing from 20 years of personal and professional experience living in a foreign country and with support from other scholars, I acknowledge the existing critique but maintain that Hofstede's theory closely reflects reality.

As outlined in subchapter 2.3., the following subsections will provide brief descriptions of three of Hofstede's dimensions.

## 3.1.4. Power Distance (PD)

This dimension focuses on the idea that people in societies are not treated equally. It reflects how a culture views these differences among us. Power Distance measures the degree to which individuals in a country, especially those with less power, anticipate and tolerate unequal distribution of authority within institutions and organisations (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.). This dimension describes all kinds of relationships, from the family to the relationships in different institutions.

With a score of 90/92, Ukraine is characterised by a considerable distance between power holders and the general population. Shaped by its history as the largest country entirely within Europe and its nearly century-long association with the Soviet Union, Ukraine evolved into a highly centralised nation. This power dynamic creates a notable emphasis on status symbols, reflecting the significant gap between individuals of varying levels of power and influence (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.).

With a PD score of 35, Britain aligns with a society that aims to minimise inequalities among people. Interestingly, research indicates a lower PD index among the higher class in Britain than among the working class. This score initially appears incongruent with the well-established and

historical British class system, highlighting an inherent tension in British culture. This tension is rooted in the conflict between the importance of birth rank and a deep-seated belief that one's birthplace should not limit life's potential. A sense of fair play drives the idea that individuals should be treated as equals in some way (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.).

Norway exhibits a low power distance score of 31, indicating the following characteristics in the Norwegian style: independence, hierarchy for convenience only, emphasis on equal rights, accessible superiors, decentralised power, aversion to control, and direct, participative, and consensus-oriented communication  (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.).

Moreover, the expression of these PD indexes is observable in the politeness of these countries, as Marquez (2000, p. 1) asserts, emphasising their "sociocultural and historical construction." This will be illustrated in the section 4.2.1.

## 3.1.5. Individualism vs Collectivism

The central theme addressed by this dimension pertains to the extent of interdependence within a society. It revolves around whether an individual's self-image is framed in terms of "I" or "We." In Individualist societies, individuals are expected to prioritise themselves and their immediate family. In Collectivist societies, individuals are part of 'in groups' that provide support in return for loyalty (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.).

Significantly, some might associate it with a political context when Hofstede uses the term "collectivist" to describe societies. However, this term does not imply the state's power over individuals; instead, it emphasises the group's influence in a collectivist society. The primary group in our lives is typically the family we are born into. As children grow, they internalise the concept of belonging to a "we" group, a relationship inherent in nature, not chosen voluntarily. This "we" group, or in-group, becomes a significant source of identity and a secure haven against life's challenges. A mutual dependence develops between the individual and the in-group, serving practical and psychological needs (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 91). On the contrary, in an individualist society, individual interests prevail over group interests. Children raised in individualist families quickly develop a sense of themselves as unique individuals, denoted by their "I." In this context, personal identity is differentiated based on individual traits rather than

group affiliations. In both practical and psychological aspects, a healthy individual in such a society is not expected to rely heavily on group dependence (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 91).

Further, it is noteworthy that this dimension is the only one where there is a notable variance between Hofstede's research and The Cultural Group data (Ukraine scores 40/50, respectively). Moreover, as mentioned in subchapter 2.3., the historical data from the Cultural Group, before their latest update, suggests that Ukraine had a score of 25 on Individualism (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-c.), indicating a strong Collectivist orientation, while Norway and the UK maintained consistent scores on Individualist orientation in both old and new research. Notably, Ukrainian culture encapsulates both in-group and individualistic traits, a duality reflected in the analysis of politeness strategies by scholars like Bolotnikova (2018a, p. 66). Ukrainian academics such as historian Hrushevskij and philosopher Chizhevsky, who associate Ukrainians with representatives of the classical Western mentality, support this idea. Further, Kyzima (1993, as cited in Bolotnikova, 2018a, p. 66, my translation) claims that Ukraine's unique position at the crossroads of East and West contributes to a "non-classical mentality," influencing its approach to politeness. However, the impact of the abovementioned factors, like globalisation and the influence of Western culture on Ukraine, suggests a distinguishable shift towards Individualism, albeit not to the same high extent as observed in the UK and Norway. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight that this study considers adult Ukrainian learners, which predisposes the usage of older data.

Moreover, the reflection of the Collectivist dimension can be traced in the Ukrainian language. As it is aptly highlighted in Country comparison legacy (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-c.), when Ukrainians plan to socialise with friends, they often express it as "We with friends" (ukr. Ми з друзями) instead of "I and my friends." Family, friends, and sometimes even the neighbourhood play a significant role in navigating the challenges of daily life. Establishing relationships is crucial for obtaining information, making introductions, and engaging in successful negotiations. These connections need to be personal, authentic, and trustworthy, setting the stage for a communication style that is considerate to the recipient and often implicit (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-c). However, as mentioned above, these trends are currently undergoing change. It is difficult to establish to what extent and in which particular area Ukraine has been moving to a higher Individualism dimension.

With a score of 89/76, the UK epitomises an Individualist society. British individuals are notably independent and value their privacy. From a young age, children are encouraged to develop independent thinking, identify their unique life purpose, and consider their distinctive

contributions to society. Personal fulfilment is emphasised as the pathway to happiness. As wealth has grown, particularly over the past decade, accompanied by its dispersion across regions, a noteworthy phenomenon has been the perceived surge in consumerism and the bolstering of an individualistic culture often characterised as the "ME" culture (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.).

Norway, with a score of 69/81, embodies an Individualist society. In this context, the significance of the "Self" is pronounced, and individual opinions hold value and are openly expressed. Communication is direct, emphasising explicitness. Simultaneously, a strong emphasis is placed on the right to privacy, with clear distinctions between professional and personal life (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.).

Reflections and more detailed observations on this dimension are introduced in section 4.2.2.

## 3.1.6. Uncertainty Avoidance (UA)

The Uncertainty Avoidance dimension explores how a society handles the inherent uncertainty of the future and whether to employ control or embrace unpredictability. This uncertainty often brings anxiety, and diverse cultures have developed distinct approaches to managing it. The score on Uncertainty Avoidance indicates the degree to which a culture's members feel threatened by ambiguity and how they have established beliefs and institutions to mitigate this uncertainty (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.).

With a score of 90/95, Ukrainians express a high level of discomfort and unease in the face of ambiguous situations. Thus, they typically prefer context and background information in various situations. When interacting with individuals perceived as strangers, they tend to exhibit formality and maintain a certain level of distance, using formality as an expression of respect (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.).

With a score of 35, the UK exhibits a low level of UA, indicating a national inclination to embrace unpredictability and adapt plans as the day unfolds. As a society with low UA, the British are at ease in ambiguous situations, often described by the phrase "muddling through." In the UK, there are not many strict rules, but the ones that exist, like the famous love of queuing, are followed because they align with the idea of fair play (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.-b.).

Norway scores 50 on the UA dimension, showing a neutral preference in this field. It is higher than the UK's score but significantly lower than Ukraine's 90. As this study focuses on Norwegian teachers and the environment in the classroom only, this dimension plays a role to a limited extent.

Reflections and observations on this dimension, alongside its impact on communication styles, are introduced in section 4.2.3.

After exploring the complexities of culture and conducting a comparative analysis of the sociocultural characteristics of Ukraine, the UK, and Norway, this thesis shifts towards examining politeness theories. Transitioning from cultural analysis to politeness, our understanding of diverse cultural contexts will serve as a foundation for exploring how politeness strategies are influenced in these distinct environments.

## 3.2. Politeness.

The introduction chapter acknowledges the multifaceted nature of politeness, with diverse definitions and various theories posited by scholars. Building on this awareness, this chapter will focus on scrutinising some relevant theories. The goal is to collect information that will comprehensively illuminate the research question while facilitating a comparative analysis of linguistic politeness strategies in the English-speaking societies, Ukrainian and Norwegian, to some extent. By examining these theories, I aim to unravel the nuanced intricacies of politeness as it is performed in distinct cultural contexts.

## 3.2.1. Defining politeness through the lens of English, Ukrainian and Norwegian

As claimed in the introduction chapter, politeness is characterised by multiple definitions. Hickey & Stewart (2005) assert that "the concept of politeness belongs to two traditions: one primarily concerned with conventional courtesy, etiquette or good manners, the other more interactionally pragmatic or face-saving, as developed in Brown and Levinson' model" (p. 3). Hence, this notion proposes that politeness comprises both conventional courtesy, etiquette and

good manners, alongside the interactionally pragmatic and face-saving aspects outlined in Brown and Levinson's model, detailed in section 3.2.2. This model refers to linguistic politeness, which, according to Cutting & Fordyce (2021), "is a matter of rapport management: it is concerned with how language is used to show sensitivity towards one's interlocutor's feelings and desires, to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, and to comply with the rules of appropriate behaviour in a given culture" (p. 37).

Furthermore, Marques (2000) claims that politeness is a learned behaviour shaped by the cultural and historical contexts in which individuals are socialised:

> Politeness is not something human beings beings are born with but something which aquired through a process of socialisation. Politeness in this sense is not a "natural" phenomenon which existed before mankind but one which has been socioculturally and historically constructed (p. 1).

Hence, this assertion highlights that politeness is not inherent in human beings from birth but is developed through socialisation. In this context, politeness is not a pre-existing, "natural" phenomenon predating humanity but a sociocultural and historically constructed aspect. Within the context of this study, this claim is significant as it highlights potential variations in politeness across different societies, in this case, Ukrainian and English cultures. Moreover, various societies' diverse historical and sociocultural trajectories have contributed to the distinct shaping of politeness with different values in each culture. Examining and acknowledging these historical and sociocultural processes provides valuable insights into understanding the contemporary expressions of politeness in these cultures, shedding light on the nuanced ways in which politeness is perceived and practised in the modern world.

Marques (2000) introduces the concept's short history, illuminating the shaping process of politeness and, hence, underscoring the discrepancies in the concept of politeness that may arise due to historical and sociocultural processes. The term "polite" in English, originating from Late Medieval Latin "politus", meaning "smoothed" or "accomplished," dates back to the fifteenth century. While lacking direct historical clues, its association with concepts like "polished" and "refined" suggests a connection to the social conduct of the upper classes. During the Renaissance, the upper classes emphasised not only refined manners but also the importance of civilised society, where considerations that "one person owes to another" became crucial for maintaining a balanced social hierarchy. Courteous or polite behaviour is aimed at preserving "the equilibrium of interpersonal relationships within the social group" (pp. 1-2).

Furthermore, Marquez (2000) elaborates on the idea that

> Politeness, then, is not a characteristic inherent to the action itself but is constituted by an interactional relationship, a relationship based upon a standard shared, developed and reproduced by individuals within a social group. At the individual level, politeness is represented by the wide range of alternative ways in which an actor can perform an act within the shared standard. This standard is thus a collective one, common to people belonging to a certain group but maybe different between people belonging to other groups or categories within those groups.[…] Politeness is thus a form of social interaction, a form that mediates between the individual and the social (p. 3).

Hence, politeness is not a quality of action but is rather shaped by the dynamics of interaction within a social group. It is a construct based on a collectively established standard that group members share and develop. At the individual level, politeness manifests through diverse ways in which a person can engage within this shared standard. This standard is a collective norm shared among individuals within a specific group, but it may vary between groups or categories within those groups. Hence, politeness is a dynamic, group-specific phenomenon influenced by shared norms and individual variations within those norms.

Notably, the Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2024) gives two definitions of politeness: "1. good manners and respect for the feelings of others. Synonym: courtesy. […] 2. the fact of being socially correct but not always sincere". These two definitions capture the essence of the concept of politeness in its English understanding of the term. The first emphasizes good manners and respect for others, synonymous with courtesy. The second adds nuance, suggesting that politeness can involve socially correct behaviour that may not always be completely sincere. This implies using language and different speech acts in a way that people perceive as polite, balancing social correctness with sincerity. Therefore, in order to be perceived as a polite person, an English-speaking individual does not have to be sincere or actually intend to be polite, but s/he must know how to express her/himself in a socially appropriate manner that others interpret as polite.

Considering the aforementioned historical context of politeness, the idea of being socially correct in modern English society aligns with historical notions of politeness. It reflects the careful consideration of one's speech and behaviour to navigate social hierarchies and reciprocal obligations. In the context of this study, this idea underscores the complex interplay between cultural norms and language use. Moreover, this work sees the value of exploring whether sincerity holds the same meaning and is expressed in a similar manner within the English and

Ukrainian cultures. Elaboration on this suggestion will be introduced later in this chapter. Furthermore, the abovementioned ideas suggest that politeness in English-speaking culture groups may involve a degree of conformity to social norms, and the appropriate expression of speech acts becomes crucial in conveying politeness. This dual nature of politeness aligns with the historical evolution of the concept and provides a lens through which to analyze the politeness strategies of different linguistic and cultural groups.

By way of contrast, Bolotnikova introduces the term "politeness" (ukr. ввічливість) based on the Etymological dictionary of the Ukrainian language, as "a derivative formation from (ukr. увіч), which means "in sight", "in the eyes". It may have originally meant "one who is (always) in front of the eyes" with subsequent semantic development "kind, affectionate, friendly" (2018a, p. 64, my translation). Furthermore, given that many etiquette signs primarily aimed to convey peacefulness and minimize hostility or aggression, this was notably reflected in individuals' gazes. During various communication instances, such as greetings, requests, expressions of gratitude, and invitations, interlocutors typically maintained eye contact with each other. (Belous, 1991, as cited in Bolotnikova, 2018a, p. 64, my translation). The emphasis on eye contact aligns with the idea that in Ukrainian society, it serves as a visual cue to communicate sincerity and a genuine desire for friendly interaction. The practice of maintaining eye contact becomes a cultural norm associated with conveying peacefulness and fostering positive social connections. Furthermore, these ideas can be traced in the language. For instance, English 'thank you' would be translated into Ukrainian as 'щиро дякую' (ukr.), which literally means 'sincere thank you'.

Notably, the Ukrainian Academic Explanatory Dictionary (n.d., my translation) refers to the concept of a polite person thus: "One who follows the rules of decency, shows attentiveness, amiability; courteous. […] In which attentiveness, kindness is manifested". Thus, this definition of politeness strongly emphasises the concept of kindness and amiability as an essential component. It suggests that being polite involves not only following rules of decency and showing attentiveness but, crucially, demonstrating genuine amiability and courtesy. In the context of this study, this emphasis on kindness implies that politeness is deeply connected to authentic and sincere interpersonal interactions. It underscores the cultural significance of benevolence and genuine goodwill in the expression of politeness, providing a cultural perspective for understanding and analyzing politeness behaviours.

Furthermore, according to Toftul (2014), in the Ukrainian understanding of this concept:

Politeness is distinguished between formal, purely external, inculcated by upbringing, education, but not accepted by the heart of a cold selfish person, and politeness internal, the source of which is benevolence, attention to fellow creature, a deep sense of solidarity with him. The first is usually condemned: "Politeness is legalized subservience." However, it also needs to be appreciated because it requires certain efforts, self-control, and attentiveness (albeit forced) to others. A person who does not know how to control his passions will never be even formally polite (p. 70, my translation).

Thus, the distinction between external, formal politeness, often criticized as "legalized subservience," and internal politeness rooted in benevolence highlights the complex nature of this trait, requiring effort and self-control. Hence, politeness in the Ukrainian understanding of this concept includes many features common to the English idea of politeness, such as courtesy, good manners, the will to compromise with the interlocutor, and the need to control one's emotions. These ideas are strongly supported by scholars such as aforementioned Hrushevskiy, Chizhevskiy, and Bolotnikova (2018a).

However, it is essential to highlight that, in terms of English politeness, as mentioned above, sincerity is not a mandatory component, and politeness can be conveyed without necessarily revealing one's true feelings. In contrast, Ukrainian politeness seeks a warmer, emotionally connected approach. Moreover, in Ukrainian culture, a person who does not display genuine politeness, driven by benevolence and sincerity, might be viewed as a "cold, selfish person."

Hence, while English and Ukrainian politeness share common traits in valuing benevolence, having good manners and creating a comfortable atmosphere, the emphasis on emotionality and sincerity in Ukrainian politeness distinguishes it from the more indirect and potentially less emotionally expressive English politeness. Understanding these cultural nuances is vital for effective intercultural communication.

Additionally, the Norwegian Academic Dictionary (n.d., my translation) gives the following definition of politeness, referring to it as a derivative of the adjective polite: "1. About the person: who behaves considerately, kindly and well-mannered in dealings with others; who master social rules, have good manners". In the Norwegian context, politeness is characterized by considerate behaviour, reflecting a key aspect of a polite individual. The emphasis on considerate behaviour in the definition implies that being polite in Norway involves thoughtfulness and a genuine concern for others. A polite Norwegian person is someone who not only adheres to social norms and conventions but goes beyond mere formality, actively considering the feelings, needs, and well-being of others.

Thus, these definitions of politeness reveal both commonalities and distinctions in the perception of politeness in different societies. While all of them emphasize good manners, respect, and courtesy, the Oxford Learner's Dictionary introduces the aspect of being socially correct but not always sincere, suggesting a certain level of insincerity in polite behaviour. In contrast, the Ukrainian Academic Explanatory Dictionary emphasizes attentiveness, amiability, and adherence to rules of decency, portraying politeness as a manifestation of genuine kindness. Norwegian politeness, characterized by considerate behaviour, aligns with the Ukrainian emphasis on attentiveness and kindness. These differences highlight how cultural contexts shape the understanding and expression of politeness, emphasizing the need to consider these nuances in this study.

Moreover, the divergence in approaches and perceptions of politeness may give rise to a cultural clash for Ukrainian adult learners of English in Norwegian classrooms. Any potential conflict might arise from a fundamental difference: while sincerity stands as a primary condition for politeness among Ukrainians, Norwegians prioritize consideration of others' feelings, which may not necessarily require complete honesty. This cultural discrepancy can lead to intricate situations where Norwegians, in their effort to be polite, may not express their true opinions, choosing instead to prioritize the feelings of others. This could involve smiling, avoiding direct confrontation, and employing courteous gestures. On the contrary, Ukrainians, accustomed to sincerity as a hallmark of politeness, may interpret these behaviours as genuine and truthful. Consequently, a discrepancy emerges where Norwegians are perceived as polite for their considerate behaviour, while Ukrainians may later discover that the politeness was rooted in social conventions rather than complete honesty. Both parties may find themselves disappointed, having unintentionally followed their respective unwritten rules of politeness, leading to an undesirable outcome. Any clash could arise from the contrasting cultural expectations regarding sincerity and the consideration of others' feelings.

Based on all the introduced factors, we can detect how closely politeness is connected not only with individuals but also with the entire structure of society and the perception of the world by society as a cultural entity, as described in subchapter 3.1. Therefore, both English and Ukrainian politeness depend on collectively established standards that are shared and developed by group members. These standards serve as norms that govern interpersonal interactions in each linguistic and cultural context. Furthermore, at the individual level, expressions of politeness in English and Ukrainian may differ due to the different ways in which people live by their general standards, as mentioned above. Hence, understanding politeness as a dynamic

and context-dependent construct helps clarify the differences observed in the expression of politeness across languages and cultures.

After examining the basic concept of politeness and standard languages, we can explore politeness theory more deeply. This involves exploring key concepts such as "face" and face-threatening acts (FTA), as elucidated by the scholars Brown and Levinson.

## 3.2.2. Politeness and face. Brown and Levinson. Grice's maxims

The introduction of the notion of "face" will commence by presenting a globally acknowledged perspective on politeness, which involves Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness principle and their concept of Face Threatening Acts (FTA).

Brown and Levinson's exploration of politeness centres on the concept of face-saving. They characterise politeness as a sophisticated framework for mitigating actions that threaten "face". Their perspective treats politeness as a phenomenon that can be systematised, allowing linguists to assess politeness quantitatively (O'Keeffe et al., 2019, p. 103).

Brown and Levinson's concept of "face" is rooted in Erving Goffman's work (1967) and the English expressions associated with feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, or "losing face." Therefore, "face" is an emotionally charged element that can be lost, preserved, or elevated, demanding continuous consideration during interactions. Moreover, Brown and Levinson assert that while the specifics of what constitutes "face" may vary across cultures (including the boundaries of personal space and the public aspects of one's identity), they posit that the shared awareness of individuals' public self-image or face, and the social necessity to acknowledge it during interactions, is a universal phenomenon (Brown & Levinson, 1987a, pp. 311-312). Furthermore, they give the following definitions and elaborate on the notions of positive and negative face:

> …all competent adult members of society have (and know each other to have):
>
> 1."Face", the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects:
>
>> (a) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction-i.e.. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition.

(b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or "personality"(crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants.

2. Certain rational capacities, in particular consistent modes of reasoning from ends to the means that will achieve those ends (Brown & Levinson, 1987a, p. 311).

In other words, the "negative face" notion comprises our desire for personal space, independence and the right to do things without interference or pressure from others. It is the idea that we all want some level of personal freedom and control over our actions and decisions without feeling imposed upon others. The notion of a "positive face" comprises our desire to be liked and appreciated by others. Hence, it represents the wish for acknowledgement and approval from others, rooted in the presentation of a favourable and appealing self-image.

Moreover, this claim states that individuals considered competent adults share certain rational abilities within a society and are aware that others possess these same capacities. The specific rational capacities being referred to here are the ability to think logically and consistently when determining the most effective means to achieve their goals or objectives. In other words, it suggests that competent adults in a society have a common understanding of how to make reasoned decisions to reach their desired outcomes.

Notably, the notion of a common understanding of rational capacities within a society is significant in this research on politeness strategies and linguistic choices. This understanding forms the basis for how individuals perceive and employ politeness strategies, and it varies across different societies. This idea echoes Kramchs's (2009) abovementioned statement in 3.1.1. Her claims are that people from different cultures often have different perspectives and interpretations of events, leading to various understandings of basic concepts and experiences. In relation to politeness strategies, shared rational capacities can be linked to how individuals in society interpret the norms and expectations for polite behaviour. Different cultures and societies may possess distinct rational modes of reasoning when it comes to politeness, which are influenced by their cultural norms and values. For instance, what one culture regards as polite or respectful behaviour might differ from another culture's interpretation. Therefore, this research explores how these shared rational capacities, inherently shaped by linguistic models and societal norms, influence the comprehension of politeness strategies in diverse cultures. This investigation illuminates the reasons behind the variation in politeness strategies from one society to another, rooted in their unique culture.

Further, Brown and Levinson (1987a, p. 313) give the following definition of Face Threatening Acts (FTAs):

> Given these assumptions of the universality of face and rationality, it is intuitively the case that certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face, namely those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker. By "act", we have in mind what is intended to be done by a verbal or non-verbal communication, just as one or more "speech acts" can be assigned to an utterance.

In this definition, Brown and Levinson encompass the concept of positive face and negative face. They highlight that certain communicative actions inherently jeopardise an individual's face. FTAs refer to actions, whether through words or non-verbal behaviours, that, due to their nature, challenge the face-related needs or desires of either the communicator or the recipient. These acts have the potential to undermine the social identity, self-image, and autonomy of the speaker or listener, illustrating how specific communication can intrinsically threaten both positive and negative aspects of one's face.

In terms of this research, it is crucial to understand how FTAs can vary across cultures and how they affect the perception of politeness strategies. Cultural norms can significantly influence what is considered an FTA in different societies. For instance, as mentioned earlier, what might be a polite and acceptable act in one culture could be perceived as a threat to face in another. This variation in how FTAs are interpreted and managed is closely linked to the cultural models that guide polite behaviour. This thesis intends to reflect upon how cultural differences influence the definition of FTAs and how this, in turn, shapes the politeness strategies employed by English-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking individuals.

Additionally, Brown and Levinson (1987a, pp. 319-320) describe the notions of sociological variables as:

> … the assessment of the seriousness of an FTA (that is, the calculations that members actually seem to make) involves the following factors in many and perhaps all cultures:
>
> 1. The "social distance" (D) of S (speaker) and H (addressee) (a symmetric relation).
>
> 2. The relative "power" (P) of S and H (an asymmetric relation).
>
> 3. The absolute ranking (R) of impositions in the particular culture.
>
> …these are not intended as *socioligists*' ratings of *actual* power, distance, etc., but only as actors' assumptions of such ratings, assumed to be mutually assumed, at least within certain limits.

With these claims, Brown and Levinson provide insights into how individuals in various cultures evaluate the impact of speech acts on politeness regarding the assessment of the seriousness of FTAs. A more detailed explanation of the social variables presented by Brown and Levinson (1987a, pp. 320-321) and elaborated on by O'Keeffe et al. (2019, p. 113) include:

Social Distance (D). In many cultures, the social distance between the speaker (S) and the addressee (H) plays a critical role in assessing the seriousness of an FTA. Social distance represents the level of closeness or familiarity between individuals. The closer the relationship, the more tolerant both parties are of certain FTAs, as they assume greater mutual understanding. On the other hand, in more distant or formal relationships, FTAs may be considered more offensive since expectations for politeness are higher. Thus, individuals often share a deeper level of understanding and familiarity in family relationships or intimate social circles, where the social distance is minimal. In such contexts, certain speech acts that might be considered direct or blunt could be more acceptable. Conversely, in more distant or formal relationships where social distance is more significant, expectations of politeness increase.

Relative Power (P). The concept of relative power involves the assessment of who holds more authority or influence between the speaker and the addressee. In most cultures, individuals are mindful of power dynamics when performing FTAs. Moreover, as the speaker's role becomes less dominant in conversation, the employment of politeness strategies like negative politeness increases. Individuals are often careful in their choice of language and expression, especially when addressing someone with a higher power. This awareness stems from the understanding that FTAs in such scenarios may have more profound consequences, potentially leading to social discomfort and strained relationships.

Absolute Ranking (R) of Impositions. The absolute ranking of impositions refers to the cultural norms and values defining what is considered an imposition on someone's face. This ranking varies from culture to culture and includes specific rules and expectations regarding politeness. Different societies may prioritise certain forms of politeness over others. For example, some cultures may value indirectness and politeness markers (i.e. 'please' and 'if you wouldn't mind') more, while others may prioritise directness. Within the framework of this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that individuals from the English culture tend to value indirectness and freedom of imposition to a greater extent than individuals from the Ukrainian culture.

Additionally, Brown and Levinson (1987a) highlight the presence of social variables in politeness across many cultures. However, they acknowledge that these variables may not be

universal and may not be present in some cultures. Moreover, these factors are not determined by sociological measurements but rather by assumptions made by individuals during interactions. People intuitively measure the D, P, and R within their cultural context. These assumptions help guide their choices in politeness strategies, as they aim to maintain face and navigate social interactions smoothly (pp. 319-320). This research aims to explore how these factors influence the interpretation of FTAs in the context of English-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking societies. Doing so will give a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics that shape politeness behaviours.

Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1987a, pp. 315-317) introduce the following assertions about the strategies for doing the FTAs. Within the framework of mutual face vulnerability, any rational agent will endeavour to avoid actions that threaten the face or will utilise specific approaches to reduce this threat. In simpler terms, individuals must balance (a) their desire to convey the content of a potential FTA, (b) their need for efficiency or urgency, and (c) their desire to minimise the threat imposed by their FTA. The potential strategies to manage this delicate balance can be systematically summarised, as illustrated in the following figure. This figure also reflects the different linguistic choices one can make by doing the FTAs.
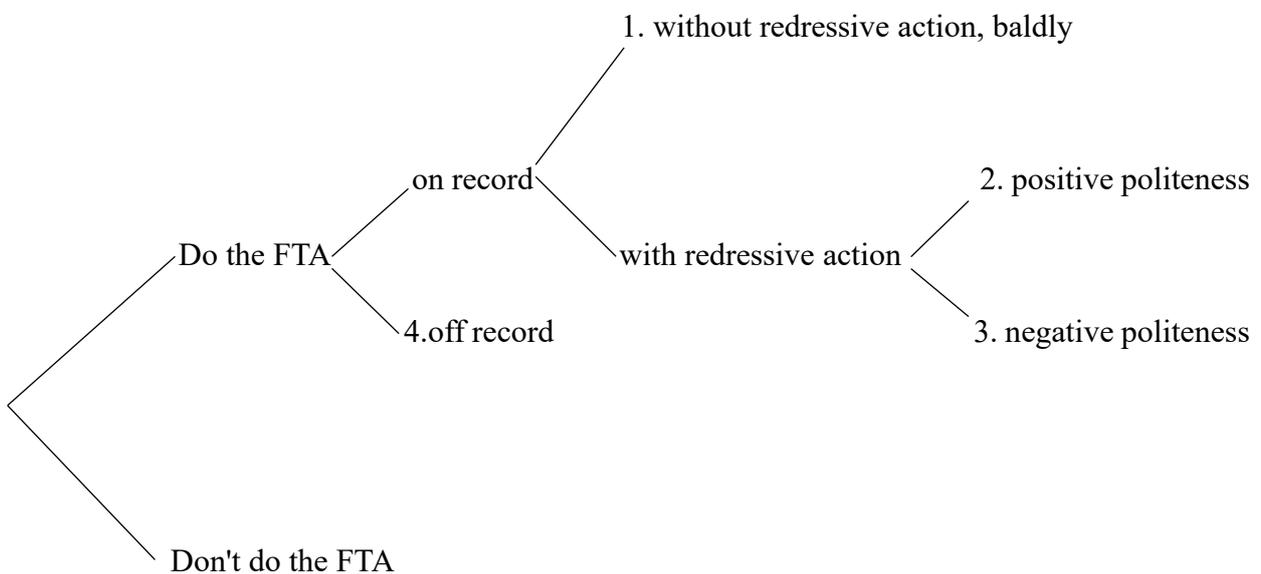


*Figure 3. Possible strategies for doing FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987a, p. 316).*

This figure encompasses the following definitions of strategies, as described by Brown and Levinson (1987a, pp. 316-317) and elaborated on by O'Keeffe et al. (2019, pp. 104-105):

*Don't do the FTA*: This strategy involves avoiding or refraining from doing an FTA. Instead of directly stating or doing something that could threaten the recipient's face, the speaker withholds the action. This strategy is used when the speaker wishes to prevent any potential damage to the recipient's face, either positive or negative. It is a way of maintaining politeness by avoiding actions that could lead to a loss of face for the recipient. Examples of this strategy could be different types of gestures, such as pointing a finger or nodding your head. However, O'Keeffe et al. (2019) point out that there are some situations where these kinds of gestures "may still constitute an FTA" (p. 104).

*Do the FTA off record*. With this strategy, the speaker conveys an FTA indirectly or subtly, typically through hints, implications, humour, metaphors, and rhetorical questions aiming to reduce the impact on the face. Brown & Levinson (1987a) suggest an example where the speaker might say, "Damn, I'm out of cash, I forgot to go to the bank today", implying that the hearer could lend the speaker some money, although the hearer may not commit him/herself to that intent (p. 316).

*Do the FTA on Record.* This strategy involves directly stating or making an explicit FTA in the communication without any attempt to mitigate its impact on the recipient's face. By choosing this strategy, the speaker chooses whether s/he performs the FTA with or without redress.

*Without redressive action, baldly*: This strategy involves directly, unambiguously and bluntly performing a face-threatening act (FTA) without taking significant measures to mitigate the potential threat to the recipient's face. This approach may include using imperatives or direct language to convey the message or request. Brown and Levinson (1987a, p. 316) suggest the use of imperatives in certain cases, such as when urgency and efficiency are prioritised over face considerations when there is minimal risk to the recipient's face, and it serves their interests (e.g., "come in", "do sit down"), or when the speaker holds significantly more power than the recipient. In these situations, the speaker chooses to communicate directly and may not use extensive politeness strategies to compensate for the potential face threat. Moreover, this strategy is considered less polite due to its direct and potentially confrontational nature of baldly performing an FTA without actively addressing or mitigating the impact on the recipient's face. It may be perceived as more abrupt, less considerate, and potentially damaging to interpersonal relationships.

Notably, Swan (2016, section 310) underscores that it is common to employ yes/no questions when making requests in English. This approach allows the listener the freedom to choose

whether to agree or decline. For instance, "Could you tell me the time, please?" is perceived as more polite than the more direct "Please tell me the time." Additionally, Swan provides examples of various structures commonly used in requests, including "Could you possibly...?", "Would you mind...?", "Would you like...?", and the use of indirect yes/no questions such as "I wonder if you could…" Additionally, Swan argues that when employing alternative structures (such as imperatives, "should", or "had better"), the communication shifts from requesting to instructing or advising. Using these structures in requests, especially in interactions with strangers or less familiar individuals, may come across as impolite. While 'please' adds a degree of politeness, it does not transform the statement into a genuine request; instead, it serves to soften the tone of an order or instruction.

*With redressive action (including positive and negative politeness).* This strategy involves making a face-threatening act but includes additional steps to address or mitigate the potential threat to the recipient's face. This may be done through the use of positive politeness or negative politeness. These redressive actions aim to lessen the impact of the FTA and maintain a balance in the interaction.

*Positive Politeness.* This strategy involves the use of politeness strategies that emphasise the speaker's recognition of the recipient's positive face, focusing on building a sense of mutual appreciation. In simpler terms, positive politeness is all about protecting and boosting the good image and positive qualities that the person you're talking to (H) believes they have. It is approach-oriented and aims to show that the speaker (S) values and supports some of H's desires and preferences. For instance, the S might say to the H: 'I really appreciate your expertise in this matter. Could you please help me understand the key points of the report? Your insights would be incredibly valuable.' In this example, the speaker acknowledges the person's expertise, expresses appreciation, and then makes a polite request. This approach helps create a respectful tone, recognising the needs of the H's positive face.

*Negative Politeness.* Negative politeness strategies involve acknowledging the recipient's negative face and emphasising respect for their freedom of imposition, autonomy, and personal boundaries. In other words, negative politeness primarily aims to address and partly fulfil the negative face of the recipient, focusing on their fundamental need to protect their personal space and autonomy. It is fundamentally rooted in avoidance strategies, seeking to minimise any potential interference. Implementing negative politeness strategies involves assuring the addressee that the speaker acknowledges and respects their negative face desires, promising not to violate their freedom of action or doing so only to a minimal extent. For instance, the S might

say to the H: 'I know you're busy, and I hate to bother you, but I could use your assistance with this task. If you have a moment, could you please help me out?' In this example, the speaker is using negative politeness by acknowledging the other person's potential busyness and expressing reluctance to bother them. The request is framed to respect the other person's time and space.

Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1987a) acknowledge the presence of conventionalised indirectness as a compromise in a natural tension in negative politeness, which consists of a choice between the desire to go on record or off record "to avoid imposing". Regardless of the specific indirect mechanism employed to perform an FTA, once it becomes fully conventionalised as a method for carrying out that FTA, it is no longer considered off record. Hence, numerous indirect requests in English are completely conventionalised, making them explicit (e.g., "Can you pass the salt?" would universally be interpreted as a request by all participants; there is practically no other plausible interpretation of the utterance except in highly specific circumstances) (p. 317). Another example of conventional indirectness could be the following request for a favour indirectly: instead of a direct order, 'Help me move this heavy furniture, please?' one may use an indirect request: 'Would you mind helping me with this furniture?' or 'I was wondering if you might be available to help me with something later.' Thus, we can see that these strategies offer diverse approaches to managing FTAs within communication, each with varying levels of directness and politeness considerations.

Furthermore, this thesis needs to acknowledge that Brown and Levinson view the bold-on-record strategy as aligning with Grice's Maxims (Brown & Levinson, 1987b, p. 94). The conversational maxims of Grice, also known as a cooperative principle, contain the four maxims: quantity, quality, relation and manner.

The first maxim of quantity suggests that speakers should provide the necessary amount of information - neither too little nor too much - to be appropriately informative. People who do not share enough information might confuse their listeners because they are unclear, while those who give too much information could end up boring their audience. The second maxim of quality emphasises the importance of speakers being genuine and expressing beliefs that align with reality. It assumes that speakers will avoid making statements they believe are untrue or lack evidence. Some speakers prefer to explicitly mention that they are sharing only what they genuinely believe to be true and may not have sufficient evidence. The maxim of relation says speakers should talk about things connected to what was said before. Some speakers like to explain how their comment fits into the conversation. The last is the maxim of manner, urging

us to be concise, organized and avoid unclear or ambiguous language (Cutting & Fordyce, 2021, pp. 25-26).

As Brown and Levinson (1987b) emphasize, these maxims establish the fundamental assumptions guiding every conversation. However, most natural conversations do not strictly adhere to these principles. Their research underscores the significant role of politeness in deviating from these norms to maintain face. Politeness, thus, emerges as a key factor influencing communication, transmitted through these deviations from strict adherence to the maxims (p. 95).

Moreover, when speakers deviate from maxims and expect listeners to understand the intended meaning, we call this behaviour flouting the maxims. Like an indirect speech act, the speaker conveys a function that goes beyond the literal interpretation of the expression. When a maxim is ignored, the speaker assumes that the listener understands that his words are not to be taken literally and can infer the hidden meaning. A speaker can be said to violate a maxim when they are aware that the listener lacks knowledge of the truth and will only comprehend the literal meaning of the words. Violating a maxim involves discreetly and subtly deceiving the listener. A speaker's infringing a maxim occurs due to their imperfect linguistic skills, such as being a child or an L2 learner. Further, a speaker's opting out a maxim signals a reluctance to cooperate, even though they wish to avoid appearing uncooperative, possibly for ethical or legal reasons (Cutting & Fordyce, 2021, pp. 26-31).

However, as Cutting & Fordyce (2021) highlight, "the rules of conversation and interaction vary from culture to culture; for example, some cultures value honesty more than others do" (p. 31). This assertion suggests that the concept of flouting, violating, infringing or opting out maxims is likely to vary between Ukrainian and English societies. What might be perceived as a breach of conversational norms in one culture might be acceptable or even expected in another. This variation emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness when analyzing politeness strategies and suggests that the strategies employed by Ukrainian learners may be influenced by the cultural norms ingrained in their communication styles.

Having introduced some of the politeness strategies in this chapter, the next section will critically examine the limitations and challenges of Brown and Levinson's theory, shedding light on areas where the universality of their concept requires careful examination.

### 3.2.3. Critique of Brown and Levinson.

As Marques (2000) points out, while scholars and reviewers have acknowledged the utility of different aspects within Brown and Levinson's framework, their theory's universality has faced severe criticism. The critiques primarily target the principle of rationality, the universality of the concept of "face" as conceptualized by Brown and Levinson, the general applicability of their politeness strategies, the inflexibility of the politeness scale concerning their three sociological variables, and the neglect of contextual considerations (p. 16).

The critique of the principle of rationality in Brown and Levinson's theory questions the assumption that individuals always act rationally in their communicative behaviour. Critics like Kasher (1986, as cited in Marques, 2000, pp.16-17), Kingwell (1993, as cited in Marques, 2000, pp.16-17), and Ide (1988, as cited in Marques, 2000, pp.16-17) argue that human communication is complex and influenced by emotional, cultural, and contextual factors, challenging the notion that people consistently make rational choices in managing politeness. The critique suggests that the theory's reliance on rational decision-making may oversimplify the intricate nature of human interaction and the equilibrium between costs and effectiveness in communication in particular. As Margues (2000) also asserts, the assumption that individuals always make rational decisions based on a clear calculation of the costs and benefits associated with politeness strategies is arguable. This critique highlights the intricate nature of communication dynamics, suggesting that factors beyond a simple rational calculation significantly shape linguistic choices (pp. 16-17).

Moreover, as mentioned above, the universality of face has also been criticized. The English expressions "losing face" and "saving face," as highlighted by Ho (1976, as cited in Marques, 2000, p. 19), are translations of Mandarin terms *miánzi* and *lián*, which encompass a spectrum of meanings rooted in the concept of "honour." Initially emerging in the English community in China, the term, particularly in the phrase "to save one's face", pertained to strategies employed by the Chinese to avoid shame or disgrace. Mao (1994, as cited in Marques, 2000, p. 19) claims that Brown and Levinson's "failure to identify the original source of 'face' and to consider its impact upon their formulation of the face has consequences for their theory's claim of universality." Thus, the failure to trace the roots of the concept of 'face' and understand its cultural underpinnings compromised the theory's applicability across diverse cultural contexts. This critique underscores the importance of considering the cultural origins and implications of key concepts in developing universal theories of politeness.

Furthermore, Fraser (1990, as cited in Marques, 2000, p. 19) notes Goffman's perspective that considers the public as an intrinsic constituent, while Brown and Levinson position it as an "external modifier." This has prompted several scholars to criticize Brown and Levinson's theory for its perceived anglocentric bias and implicit reliance on Western individualistic interactional dynamics. Moreover, Wierzbicka (2003) argues that the "freedom of imposition," considered a crucial principle by Brown and Levinson, is specific to Anglo culture, challenging its universality. Similarly, the avoidance of "flat imperative sentences," attributed by Searl to the "ordinary human conversational requirements of politeness," is argued to be more reflective of the particular concerns of modern Anglo culture rather than universal principles of politeness. Further, Wierzbicka emphasizes that these ideas, presented at the Sydney Linguistic Circle in 1983, were regarded as heretical (p. vi). However, these notions have been found to have substantial support from numerous scholars and align with Held's (2005) assertion: Brown and Levinson's theory has indeed made significant contributions in unveiling and conceptualizing the multi-level tension inherent in politeness. Nevertheless, this process has reduced the broad scope of polite behaviour to rational, goal-directed strategies where the element of respect is predominantly tied to indirectness. The focus on Anglo-Saxon contexts in linguistic pragmatics research has resulted in English not only being the primary subject of investigation and data source for linguistic politeness but also, in its role as a metalanguage, generating terminological concepts that pose challenges in translation to other languages (p. 131).

Additionally, Wierzbicka (2003) critiques Brown and Levinson's theory by highlighting distinctions between English and most other European languages in terms of politeness strategies. According to her observations, English exhibits a unique politeness system, reflecting an Anglo-Saxon cultural tradition that emphasizes individual rights, tolerance for idiosyncrasies, respect for privacy autonomy "(it's none of my business)", approval of compromises, and disapproval of dogmatism (p. 30). This critique prompts a consideration of how these distinctive cultural elements influence the politeness strategies employed by English speakers and, by extension, Ukrainian adult learners of English in Norway, thereby forming a valuable aspect of this thesis exploration.

Further, as mentioned above, Wierzbicka (2003) underscores the significant limitation on the use of imperatives in English and the extensive use of interrogative forms for various speech acts beyond questions. Thus, this claim aligns with the abovementioned correlation between indirectness and negative politeness culture. This linguistic phenomenon reflects a distinct socio-cultural attitude. In English, imperatives are primarily employed for commands and

orders, while other forms of directives often steer clear of imperatives or incorporate them with interrogative and/or conditional structures (p. 30). Thus, she summarises her suggestions in a claim: "What Anglo-Saxon culture abhors is the impression that one individual is trying to impose his or her will upon another individual" (p. 31). The illustration of these ideas is presented and reflected upon in subchapter 4.3.

Moreover, according to Wierzbicka (2003), the term "privacy" lacks an equivalent in Polish and other European languages, suggesting that the concept is distinctly Anglo-Saxon. The frequent use of the word "privacy" in everyday English reflects a cultural value prevalent in Anglo-Saxon societies. This concept assumes that individuals desire a personal boundary, similar to a metaphorical wall, at least part of the time, and this is considered natural and important. Wierzbicka proposes that the absence of an intimate T-form of address in English, unlike in some European languages, contributes to this cultural distinction. While the English "you" is democratic and promotes social equality, it can also be viewed as a tool for maintaining a certain distance. In contrast, an intimate form of address in other languages allows the speaker to establish psychological closeness, breaking through the metaphorical walls surrounding individuals. Ultimately, the English language, with its prevalent use of "you," is seen as both socially egalitarian and as a mechanism for maintaining a certain level of distance (p. 47).

However, Formentelli & Hajek (2006, p. 633) point out that Cook (2014, as cited in Formentelli & Hajek, 2006) suggests that "you" epitomizes neutrality in address, leading to the proposition of a tripartite N-V-T framework for analysis. Clyne et al. (2009, as cited in Formentelli & Hajek, 2006, p. 633) support this perspective by asserting that "you" serves as a default neutral pronoun, fulfilling the functions of both T and V without aligning entirely with either category. Exploring these concepts is not the main focus of my study. Thus, this thesis focuses on Wierzbicka's viewpoint, as it aligns with the notions of "freedom from imposition" and "privacy" within English culture.

Marques (2000) underscores a limitation in Brown and Levinson's theory by noting its lack of consideration for context. This omission becomes particularly significant when examining cases in which the illocutionary force of an utterance diverges from its propositional content. For instance, in an off-record request to close a window, the speaker might say, "It's a bit cold here" (p. 28). This example highlights the crucial role of situational context in understanding the intended meaning and pragmatic function of linguistic expressions, an aspect not fully accounted for in Brown and Levinson's model.

Other critics emphasise that both situational and cultural context is omitted in Brown and Levinson's theory. For instance, Sifianou (1989/1992, as cited in Marques, 2000, p. 28) notes that requests made to "in-group" members are not perceived as impositions within Greek culture. Greeks view it as their responsibility to assist others within the in-group, utilizing "positive politeness" strategies rather than the "negative politeness" strategies predicted by Brown and Levinson's theory.

Additionally, Hickey & Stewart (2005) stress the need for a nuanced understanding of the three sociological variables proposed by Brown and Levinson, particularly P, D, and R. As mentioned above, critiques have pointed out that these variables vary across cultures, yet there is a lack of clarity on the specific methods used for their calculation. This ambiguity poses challenges for cross-cultural comparisons, whether in linguistic or other means employed by different cultures to implement politeness strategies (p. 5). In the context of this thesis, these critiques on the calculation and universality of sociological variables raise some considerations. It prompts a critical examination of how these variables manifest in the linguistic choices of Ukrainian and English individuals.

In summary, the critiques of Brown and Levinson's theory, particularly concerning the cultural origins of the concept of face, emphasize the importance of recognizing the cultural specificity embedded in certain politeness strategies. While some scholars argue that the theory may carry an Anglo-centric bias and that its universality is questioned, these debates do not necessarily diminish the utility and applicability of Brown and Levinson's framework. The criticism highlights the need for a nuanced approach to applying the theory, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. Even with these critiques, arguably, Brown and Levinson's model could still offer valuable insights when used judiciously and supplemented with a broader understanding of cultural dynamics, making it a relevant tool for this study on politeness strategies. This approach was utilized in this thesis, and projects similar to mine may contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay among language, culture, and politeness. Moreover, according to Marquez (2000, p. 29), Brown and Levinson's framework is the most influential politeness model to date. Kasper (1994, as cited in Marquez, 2000, p. 29) emphasizes that Brown and Levinson's face-saving approach "is the only one which satisfies the criteria for empirical theories, such as explicitness, parsimony and predictiveness." This acknowledgement underscores the significant impact and empirical validity of Brown and Levinson's framework in the study of politeness. Furthermore, when discussing the concept of "freedom from imposition," the interpretation and significance of these words may vary considerably among

different cultures, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, any critique directed at Brown and Levinson primarily centres on their perceived focus on the Anglo-Saxon perspective of evaluating imposition. However, it is worth noting that Brown and Levinson do make references to the cultural aspect throughout their work, implying that they incorporate cultural variables into their analysis. This recognition suggests an acknowledgement that the meaning of imposition can indeed differ and carry distinct connotations across various cultures. This thesis further illustrates this phenomenon, drawing on Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

## 3.2.4. Politeness theory beyond Brown and Levinson

According to Ogiermann (2009, p. 35), the terms positive and negative politeness culture are commonly employed in cross-cultural pragmatics, yet they lack clear definitions. Those using these terms often do not provide explanations for categorizing a culture as positive or negative politeness culture. However, these distinctions originate from Brown and Levinson, who explain it based on culture-specific evaluations of social variables :

> …"warm", positive-politeness culture have a subjective ideal of small values for D, R and relative P which give them their egalitarian, fraternal ethos, while the "standoffish" negative-politeness cultures subscribe to a subjective ideal of large values for D, R and relative P which give them their hierarchical, paternal ethos (Brown & Levinson, 1987, as cited in Ogiermann, 2009, p. 35).

This statement suggests that cultures characterized as "warm" and positive-politeness cultures typically value small social distance (D), low degrees of imposition (R), and lower relative power (P). These small values contribute to an egalitarian and fraternal ethos within these cultures. On the other hand, "standoffish" negative-politeness cultures prefer large values for D, R, and relative P, fostering a hierarchical and paternal ethos.

Further, Ogiermann (2009) suggests that there is a problem when connecting these two types of cultures with the assessment of social variables. In Brown and Levinson's theory, politeness is closely tied to "face-redress," which means actions taken to maintain one's social dignity or face. The theory suggests that the amount of face-redress needed to make the FTA polite is determined based on assessments of social variables. It implies that the theory, which uses face-redress as a measure of politeness, might face difficulties when applied to cultures with different politeness norms. The link between the two might be problematic because the theory's criteria

for politeness may not align well with the cultural nuances and expectations of these different types of cultures. In other words, the statement raises concerns about applying Brown and Levinson's theory to cultures with diverse politeness norms, as the theory's definition of politeness may not accurately capture the cultural variations in how politeness is perceived and practised (p. 35).

Additionally, Ogiermann (2009, p. 35) asserts that in a cross-cultural context, this implies that cultures assigning small values to D, R, and P generally employ less face-redress when performing FTAs, rendering them generally less polite compared to cultures with high D, R and P values. However, the correlation between low P values and positive politeness doesn't uniformly apply to cultures like Poland and Russia, which are characterized by high power values yet classified as positive politeness cultures in previous research. The preference for positive politeness, defined as an "extension of intimacy, to imply common ground or sharing of wants" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, as cited in Ogiermann, 2009, p. 35), is notably linked to the assessment of social distance, generally low in collectivist cultures, which in this case is Poland and Russia.

Although previous research, introduced by Ogiermann, has focused on Poland and Russia, Ukraine, given its historical, sociocultural and geographical conditions mentioned above in section 3.1.2, likely shares the same values regarding positive politeness as these countries and, thus, can be categorized as a country with a positive politeness culture. This study will address these considerations in the subsequent reflections. Moreover, sections 3.1.3, 3.1.4. and 3.1.5. on Hofstede's dimensions introduces a detailed explanation of power values and collectivist culture.

Furthermore, Ogiermann (2009, pp. 36-37), drawing on the theories of scholars like Searl and Leech, underscores the general prevalence of indirectness in conveying politeness within the field of pragmatics. Rathmayr (1996, as cited in Ogiermann, 2009, p. 36) asserts a widespread scepticism toward negative politeness in Russia, where it is considered foreign. Bergelson (2003, as cited in Ogiermann, 2009, p. 36) argues that while Americans may perceive directness as rude, Russians associate it with sincerity, friendship, and solidarity. In both Polish and Russian, imperative constructions can serve as polite requests. However, a high level of indirectness is viewed as an imposition, a waste of time and dishonesty. Consequently, an elaborate request perceived as polite by a British person may be seen as an imposition by a Polish or Russian addressee. Therefore, Zemskaja (1997) states an indirect request may exert more pressure on the hearer than a straightforward one, leading to the perception of

manipulativeness by H (as cited in Ogiermann, 2009, p. 37). While Ogiermann (2009), Wierzbicka (2003) and other scholars primarily provide examples from the Polish and Russian language and culture, highlighting a free use of imperatives and a discrepancy with the interrogative structures observed in English, this thesis can also extend these examples to include Ukrainian. Based on Hofstede's research and considering that both Ukrainian and Polish belong to the Slavic language and culture, as mentioned above, this implication sheds light on potential similarities in the linguistic patterns of these languages.

Furthermore, according to Wierzbicka (2003), Anglo-Saxon culture does not promote unrestrained displays of emotions. The negative subtext associated with the word "emotional" in English clearly illustrates the disapproval of public emotional expression characteristic of Anglo-Saxon culture. Often used with negative connotations, even when not, the term implies an unexpected and somewhat embarrassing exhibition of emotions (pp. 53-54).

Additionally, as pointed out by Lutz (1986, as cited in Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 54)

> …the widely shared American (and Anglo-Saxon in general) ethnotheory of basically Protestant European, middle-class background identifies emotion primarily with irrationality, subjectivity, the chaotic and other negative characteristics. […] To label someone emotional is often to question the validity, and more, the very sense of what they are saying.

On the other hand, as Shulman (1999, p. 1019) claims, emotionalism and romanticism are frequently attributed to Ukrainians, reflecting a preference for feelings over reason and spirituality over materialism. Ukrainian scholar Chyzhevskyi (1994) coined the term "the philosophy of the heart" to encapsulate the emotional element of great Ukrainian thinkers (as cited in Shulman, 1999, p. 1019). Scholars describe Ukrainian mentality as having an "existential-frontier" and "existential heartcentric" nature, prioritizing a vivid emotional experience of life over intellectual abstraction (Bichko, 1994, as cited in Shulman, 1999, p. 1019). This emotional orientation is often contrasted with a perceived Russian inclination toward materialism, as Ukrainian nationalists tend to view Russians as less spiritually oriented. Interestingly, despite this distinction, there is an acknowledgement among nationalists that emotionalism is a shared characteristic among all Slavic peoples, encompassing both Ukrainians and Russians (Yaniv, 1950, as cited in Shulman, 1999, p. 1019).

Furthermore, as mentioned in section 3.1.2, English culture tends to be presented as "avoidance-based, negatively oriented" (Stewart, 2005, p. 117). Fukushima's study (2000, as cited in Stewart, 2005, p. 117) points out that the British not only use "conventionally indirect and off-

record strategies in requesting" but also use "a narrower variety of strategies avoiding baldly, on record even when the threat is perceived to be low, and pay less attention to context (mainly power and distance) in selecting an appropriate strategy." Thus, the emphasis on conventionally indirect and off-record strategies suggests a cultural inclination towards subtle and nuanced communication. Further, the avoidance of bald-on-record approaches, even in low-threat situations, indicates a preference for maintaining a certain level of politeness and avoiding direct confrontations. This might manifest in the form of polite language, hedging, or other indirect expressions. For instance, conventionally indirect requests may be expressed in the following way: instead of making a direct request like 'Can you pass me the salt?' a British speaker might employ a more indirect approach, saying, 'Would you mind passing the salt, please?' Using an off-record strategy, instead of explicitly stating a request, 'Can you close the window?', a British speaker might hint or suggest indirectly: 'It's a bit chilly in here; someone might want to close the window.' Another example of avoiding flat imperatives and a bald-on-record direct approach, such as 'Give me the report by five PM today', can be an indirect bald-off-record strategy: 'I was hoping to have the report by the end of the day. Do you think you could manage that?' Hence, Fukushima's study underscores the nuanced nature of British politeness strategies, emphasizing indirectness and a preference for certain communication styles.

Nevertheless, as demonstrated earlier, it is crucial to take into consideration that the choice of the bald-off-record strategy strongly relies on social variables such as P and D and, in some cases, can be considered ironic if used by interlocutors who have quite close relationships. Therefore, in the classroom context, elaborated off-record strategies in interaction between classmates might sometimes sound too formal and indicate a joke or hostile relationship.

Furthermore, Fukushima's findings align with the conclusion of Stewart's empirical research (2005, p. 128), conducted as a comparative examination of politeness in English and Spanish: "British English tends toward negative politeness and favours off-record strategies in carrying out certain face-threatening acts. It seems, at least, that to be British, a healthy degree of paranoia can help". By summarizing this assertion, it can be recognised that British English speakers may use negative politeness strategies, such as off-record strategies and expressions emphasising respect for the other person's autonomy and personal space. The statement about a "healthy degree of paranoia" suggests that being sensitive to potential face threats or impositions is essential in British communication. British English speakers may be inclined to

use subtle cues and indirect expressions, which contribute to effective communication without causing discomfort.

Additionally, it is noteworthy to pay attention to the fact that Ogiermann (2009) asserts that a widely acknowledged consensus in the literature indicates that individuals from positive politeness cultures generally exhibit more direct communication styles than those from negative politeness cultures. This connection between directness and positive politeness, as well as between indirectness and negative politeness, can be traced back to Brown and Levinson's formulation of positive and negative face (p. 38). These contrasting communication styles have practical implications as well as academic significance. According to Wierzbicka (2003), immigrants proficient in English who predominantly use flat imperatives may be perceived as impolite or ill-mannered. Conversely, they might be viewed as uncooperative or unintelligent if they do not appropriately respond to nuanced indirect expressions. The complexity of elaborate indirectness, especially when combined with explicit swearing, can be as perplexing for an immigrant as the straightforwardness, assertiveness, and emotional intensity exhibited by some immigrants may be considered offensive and bothersome to individuals from an "Anglo" cultural background (p. 64). Moreover, Ogiermann (2009) highlights that Brown and Levinson see indirectness as a strategy to avoid imposition. Yet, individuals from positive politeness cultures might perceive it as manipulative, as was touched upon in this section. Contrarily, they view positive politeness and directness as sincere and non-manipulative, even though Brown and Levinson link it to urgency and a disregard for face considerations (p. 38).

In conclusion, drawing upon the insights and assertions of the scholars discussed earlier, this thesis posits that English-speaking individuals can be categorized within a negative politeness culture while Ukrainian-speaking individuals align more with a positive politeness culture. However, it is essential to recognize that these categorizations are not rigid or absolute but rather serve as a framework to explore and understand the predominant politeness strategies within each cultural context. The dynamic nature of cultures allows for variations and nuances in individual behaviours, but these general trends offer some insights into the communicative norms and preferences within English and Ukrainian-speaking communities.

## 3.3. Didactics and Pragmatics

Pragmatics encompasses linguistic aspects and the social and cultural dimensions of language use. In the context of teaching adult Ukrainian learners, a deep understanding of English culture enriches the learning experience, providing learners with a multifaceted comprehension that goes beyond mere syntax and vocabulary. Moreover, the incorporation of politeness strategies into the teaching practice contributes to a more profound understanding of behaviour, texts, and speech. Additionally, educators' awareness of the distinctions between Norwegian, English, and Ukrainian cultures is pivotal in shaping a comprehensive teaching approach. Mastery of pragmatic competence equips educators to navigate the cultural nuances embedded in language use, fostering a more profound understanding of native speakers and diverse English texts. As mentioned in subchapter 1.2, pragmatics is crucial in teaching language. Pragmatics explores how context shapes meaning and emphasizes language as dynamic performance rather than static knowledge. Educators face pragmatic challenges, navigating politeness strategies, implied meanings, and cultural nuances for effective communication. Therefore, educators need a deep understanding of pragmatics to address these challenges effectively in the classroom setting. This section aims to shed light on some of the pragmatic problems that teachers face and highlight the vital role of pragmatic awareness in improving language teaching. Also, this section will provide counterarguments in response to the criticism of some scholars who dispute the need for teaching pragmatic competence.

For instance, Cutting & Fordyce (2021) emphasise that some theorists, like Pennycook (2000, as cited in Cutting & Fordyce, p. 95) and Phillipson (1992, as cited in Cutting & Fordyce, p. 95), argue against teaching the culture of English-speaking countries in EFL classes. They reject the notion that English is solely owned by BANA cultures (Britain, Australia, and North America) and view such teaching as promoting cultural hegemony. They assert that imposing BANA cultural competence in education perpetuates linguistic imperialism, implying acceptance of a global economic and political order (p. 95).

Moreover, Graddol (2006) asserts that

> The target model of English, within the ELF framework, is not a native speaker but a fluent bilingual speaker, who retains a national identity in terms of accent and who also has the special skills required to negotiate understanding with another non-native speaker (as cited in Cutting & Fordyce, 2021 p. 95).

Thus, Graddol claims that the target model of English in the ELF framework is a "fluent bilingual" individual, not necessarily a native speaker, acknowledging, however, that "special skills" are essential for mutual understanding. My thesis argues against excluding pragmatic competence and politeness strategies in English classrooms. Mastering pragmatic competence contributes to a profound understanding of native speakers and diverse English texts. Moreover, understanding English culture goes beyond mere language proficiency, encompassing a multifaceted comprehension that extends beyond syntax and vocabulary. Examining the subtleties of politeness strategies enriches one's understanding of behaviour, textual nuances, and speech intricacies. Norwegian educators' awareness of the distinctions between Norwegian, English, and Ukrainian cultures enhances their teaching practices, fostering a deeper engagement with diverse English texts and native speakers. Mastering pragmatic competence thus cultivates a profound understanding of linguistic and cultural nuances inherent in language use. Integrating these skills fosters effective communication in various contexts, enhancing interpersonal relationships and collaboration in multinational environments. Furthermore, teaching pragmatic competence also promotes linguistic versatility and adaptability, enabling learners to interpret nuances and adjust their communication style according to the context and audience.

Furthermore, Yates (2010) asserts that speakers with shared linguistic and cultural backgrounds often have common understandings about linguistic choices based on their roles, rights, and obligations in certain situations. This insight is valuable for adult language learners transitioning between linguacultures, as they may carry assumptions from their early cultural experiences that differ from the new context. The challenge lies in these unspoken rules being less obvious in speech than in vocabulary or syntax, as Yates puts it, making both parties potentially unaware. Additionally, non-native speakers may face language proficiency issues, struggling to fully grasp and use the range of devices employed by native speakers for specific effects (p. 288). Thus, for Ukrainian adult learners of English in Norway, acquiring pragmatic skills ensures effective communication by promoting successful interaction in diverse social contexts.

Furthermore, Yates (2010) underscores a crucial point that while non-native speakers' errors in vocabulary or grammar are readily noticeable, the transference of pragmatic norms often operates beneath conscious awareness. This subtle nature makes breaches in pragmatic norms less visible and less forgiving, with speakers who violate these norms being more likely to be judged negatively for rudeness or lack of cooperation rather than being perceived as making a

proficiency error. The repercussions of not understanding these norms can be severe, leading to serious miscommunications. Unfortunately, many language teaching programs globally overlook the pragmatic dimensions of language use (p. 288). This idea is confirmed in studies of Brubæk (2012) on Norwegian educators, described earlier in section 3.2.1. Thus, as noted earlier in this section, the awareness of various pragmatic norms in Ukrainian, English, and Norwegian languages is crucial for Norwegian teachers in English classrooms for adult Ukrainian learners.

Moreover, challenges also lie in defining native-speaker norms accurately due to the diverse pragmatic variations within language groups, as Gee pointed out, see section 3.1.2. Any portrayal of these norms tends to oversimplify and carries political implications. This complexity represents a complex problem with no simple solutions. Language use is multifaceted and driven by individual choices in specific contexts, making accurate descriptions inherently difficult. Caution is required when generalizing research findings or making pedagogical recommendations. Nonetheless, language learners can benefit from simple signposts, as imperfect as they may be, to navigate unfamiliar cultural contexts and derive meaning (Yates, 2010, p. 290).

Additionally, the importance of speech act theory lies in shedding light on various linguistic phenomena, emphasizing its relevance for understanding pragmatics and the nuanced application of politeness strategies in communicative interactions. Among others, requests attract substantial attention due to their routine occurrence and potential to cause offence if expressed inadequately. Research findings indicate that English speakers employ direct forms of requests less frequently compared to speakers of many other languages. This phenomenon was described in sections 3.1.2., 3.2.2. and 3.2.3. The use of syntax to soften requests presents challenges for speakers from different backgrounds who may be unfamiliar with signalling politeness and lack full control over linguistic means. These challenges involve sociopragmatic (choosing the correct format for the situation) and pragmalinguistic (the range of forms available) aspects, encompassing the understanding of appropriate indirect forms and the ability to manipulate the linguistic tools for this purpose. Despite decades of research, these tendencies remain puzzling for many learners and uncharted territory for many teachers (Yates, 2010, p. 291). This observation underscores the nuanced nature of linguistic preferences and the importance of understanding cultural variations in communicative practices.

Moreover, according to O'Keeffe et al. (2019, pp. 196-197), research on pragmatics across cultures highlights that both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfers between languages

can cause non-native speakers to appear overly direct, potentially leading to perceptions of rudeness or insincerity, as it was also described in section 3.2.4. However, despite the continuous research in the field, there is a widespread acknowledgement that findings on pragmatics have not been effectively integrated into classroom practices. Mainstream textbooks and syllabi often lack the incorporation of pragmatic insights, indicating a gap between research advancements and their implementation in educational materials.

Thus, in the integration of pragmatic competence within the classroom, it is crucial to consider effective contextualization and follow recommendations that enhance learning outcomes. In other words, O'Keeffe emphasises that when we teach people how to use language appropriately in different situations (pragmatic competence) in a classroom, it is essential to ensure that teaching is connected to real-life situations or contexts. The aim is to enhance how well students understand and use language in practical, everyday situations (O'Keeffe et al., 2019, p. 200).

O'Keeffe et al. also explain that explicit instruction proves to be more effective than implicit methods, as it offers learners a clear understanding of pragmatic concepts. Feedback is essential to effective instruction, providing learners with guidance and corrections related to pragmatic aspects. Moreover, instruction incorporating practical opportunities for learners to apply and practice pragmatic teaching points has shown increased effectiveness, promoting active engagement and reinforcing understanding. The length of instruction also plays an important role: continuous teaching of pragmatics over a long period leads to more significant gains in pragmatic knowledge and improved retention. This highlights the importance of consistently integrating pragmatics into the curriculum. Furthermore, the proficiency level of learners matters. Those with a higher proficiency level benefit more from pragmatic instruction. Hence, it is recommended to introduce pragmatic teaching at intermediate levels and above, where learners possess a more extensive lexical and grammatical repertoire. In summary, adopting explicit instruction with feedback, providing practical opportunities for application, considering the length of instruction, and aligning with learners' proficiency levels are key strategies to effectively integrate pragmatic competence in the language learning classroom (2019, p. 200).

In conclusion, the study and application of pragmatics in language classrooms require a multifaceted approach. Explicit instruction, feedback mechanisms, sustained teaching, and consideration of learners' proficiency levels emerge as key components of effective pragmatics instruction. Moreover, integrating cultural awareness, specifically focusing on politeness strategies, enhances the depth of language understanding. The synergy of these elements not

only contributes to pragmatic competence but also elevates the overall language learning experience.

The next chapter, Discussion, examines the practical implications of the theories presented. Here, the focus shifts to applying ideas gained from research on politeness strategies and cultural awareness into real-world language learning contexts. Through a detailed examination of these theories, this discussion aims to offer reflections and recommendations for teachers and students, promoting more effective language learning experiences.

# 4. Discussion

This chapter will examine and juxtapose the main findings from the theory chapter. As mentioned in the method chapter, this thesis employed a literature review, which involved a systematic examination of published literature to analyse scientific works related to the research question. Hence, this chapter will highlight the main points that emerge as a result of applying theories to answer the research question. The theories presented in chapter 3, alongside the scholars' viewpoints, will be compared and contrasted to introduce a complete picture of the analysis of both English and Ukrainian cultures and their linguistic choices in politeness strategies. This chapter will also introduce some practical implications for teachers in an English language classroom context in Norway. In addition, the possible strategies of doing Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) in Figure 3, as presented in section 3.2.2, will be applied to the study and discussion of English and Ukrainian politeness strategies, employing Hofstede's dimensions as a framework. Furthermore, as this discussion chapter unfolds, I will present personal reflections and observations gathered from the classroom. These examples from the classroom and real-life situations will serve to illustrate the theoretical findings and provide a practical understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in cross-cultural language education. These include instances where cultural nuances influence communication and linguistic choices in politeness strategies, how students might respond to different teaching styles, and the adaptation of politeness strategies in the English learning context. This discussion chapter will further explore the implications of these findings on English language teaching, offering practical insights for educators working with Ukrainian adult learners in Norway.

## 4.1. Fundamental insights to address the Research Question

In the analysis of politeness strategies within the context of English and Ukrainian cultures, employing Brown and Levinson's theory alongside Hofstede's cultural dimensions reveals some interesting insights. This analysis sheds light on the linguistic variations in communication styles and carries implications for English language teaching in a classroom setting for Ukrainian adult learners in Norway.

According to Hofstede (Geert Hofstede, n.d.) and data, presented in subchapter 2.3., Ukraine exhibits a high Power Distance (PD) index, indicating a preference for hierarchical structures and a greater acceptance of unequal power distribution. Norway and the UK have low PD index values, reflecting a tendency towards flatter organizational structures and a preference for more egalitarian relationships. Ukraine demonstrates traits of both individualism and collectivism, mirroring a bipolar cultural orientation. Norway and the UK lean towards individualism, emphasizing personal autonomy, self-expression, and independence. Ukraine has a high Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) index, indicating a preference for structured environments, clear rules, and a lower tolerance for ambiguity. The UK has low UA index values, suggesting a greater comfort with uncertainty, adaptability to change, and a more relaxed approach to rules and regulations. While Norway demonstrates a neutral UA score, I would suggest, based on my personal and professional observations, that its culture leans towards low UA values. Nevertheless, as emphasised in the theory chapter, individual differences can be observed despite these general cultural tendencies, especially among adult learners who may adapt to the cultural norms of the educational context.

Many theorists proposed that English culture places emphasis on negative politeness strategies, which involve minimizing imposition and giving others space. In contrast, Ukrainian culture leans towards positive politeness, emphasizing inclusivity in communication. Hence, these cultural variations indicate that politeness is not a universal construct but is shaped by specific cultural norms which impact the linguistic choices in politeness strategies.

An example of such a choice is the employment of flat imperatives, which corresponds with the bald strategy without redressive action, according to Brown and Levinson's theory, is acceptable in certain contexts within English culture. This corresponds to cases when there is urgency, efficiency is crucial, and there is a low risk of misunderstanding the person being spoken to, as well as in situations when the speaker has more power P or when interlocutors have small social distance D between each other. In these cases, direct communication is chosen, and a few politeness strategies may be used to soften the impact on the other person. However, this direct approach could be seen as less polite from an Anglo-Saxon point of view because it might be perceived as aggressive, abrupt, and less considerate, possibly harming relationships. As pointed out in section 3.2.4. and described by Wierzbicka and other scholars, this approach does not apply to Slavic cultures and languages. The following subchapters will demonstrate the practical implications of these theories. This examination begins with Hofstede's dimensions and their impact on communication patterns.

## 4.2. Hofstede's dimensions in linguistic choices of politeness strategies: English, Ukrainian, and Norwegian contexts

Educators must be aware that students may struggle to unlearn their programmed concepts before absorbing new knowledge. Thus, the difficulty of unlearning and the subsequent learning of new patterns underscore the importance of being aware of our thinking processes. As noted in section 3.1.3, a significant challenge in acquiring a new language and politeness strategies is the persistence of existing linguistic patterns of communication. Recognising the challenges associated with unlearning existing patterns holds practical significance, especially in the context of English language education for Ukrainian adults. Awareness of cognitive biases and the resistance to change can empower students to be more adaptable learners and thinkers, ultimately enhancing their capacity for growth and transformation. Hence, to unlearn existing concepts, students and teachers must initially acknowledge them. One of the methods to do so might be to acquaint them with Hofstede's cultural dimensions, which offer a framework for understanding distinct thought patterns.

## 4.2.1. Power Distance and its implication on linguistic choices in politeness strategies in English, Ukrainian and Norwegian-speaking cultures

This subchapter examines the Power Distance (PD) dimension and analyses how it impacts politeness strategies in English, Ukrainian, and Norwegian-speaking cultures.

Scores: Hofstede's research/ The Cultural Group data:

Ukraine: 90/92

Great Britain: 35/35

Norway: 31/31

In a society with a large power distance, children are typically expected to show obedience to their parents. Behaving independently as a child is not actively promoted. Respecting parents and older individuals is regarded as a fundamental virtue, and children observe and adopt this respectful behaviour from others around them (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 67). Consequently, in a

large power distance index society, in the classroom, the inequality between parents and children is mirrored in the relationship between teachers and students. This contributes to the student's established dependency. Teachers are highly respected and may even evoke fear. The education process is teacher-centred; instructors set the intellectual standards. The classroom maintains strict order, where the teacher leads all communication. Education is highly personalised, and what is taught is not viewed as impersonal "truth" but as the teacher's personal wisdom (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 69).

In societies characterised by a small power distance index, children are treated more or less as equals from an early age. The aim of parental guidance is to empower children to manage their own affairs as soon as they are capable. These societies promote active experimentation by children and allow them to express disagreement or say "no" at an early stage. Interactions with others, arguably, are less influenced by age or status, and formal respect and deference are rarely observed. In such societies, family relationships may appear less intense to outsiders. In the ideal family, adult members enjoy mutual independence, reflecting the importance of autonomy as a fundamental aspect of adult mental software (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 68-69). Consequently, in societies characterised by a small power distance index, teachers are expected to regard students as fundamental equals and, in turn, expect to be treated as equals by the students. The educational approach prioritises student-centred learning, emphasises student initiative, and encourages students to delineate their intellectual paths. This educational process leans toward the absence of human character or involvement, focusing on the transfer of objective "truth" or "facts" independent of any particular teacher. This system is built upon students' well-established desire for independence, and students' excellence and self-driven efforts significantly influence the quality of learning (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 69-70).

In this study, the depiction of societies with large and small power distance indexes has intentionally been presented in a polarised manner. In reality, specific situations tend to fall somewhere between the extremes of the power distance spectrum. Hofstede notes the significance of parents' social class and education levels in this regard. Families often cultivate their unique family cultures, which may differ from the broader societal norms. (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 68).

Overall, the differences between large and small power distance societies in the school can be presented in the following table:

*Table 3. Key Differences between Small- and Large- Power-Distance Societies (adapted from Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 72).*

| **Small power distance:** | **Large power distance:** |
|---|---|
| Students treat teachers as equals. | Students give teachers respect, even outside class. |
| Teachers expect initiatives from students in the class. | Teachers should take all initiatives in class. |
| Teachers are experts who transfer impersonal truth. | Teachers are gurus who transfer personal wisdom. |
| Quality of learning depends on two-way communication and excellence of students. | Quality of learning depends on excellence of the teacher. |

Reflecting on my experiences as a student in both Ukraine and Norway, I would suggest that Hofstede's cultural dimensions mirror reality quite closely. Moreover, an observation emerges when considering Ukrainian adult students in Norway. Over time, they tend to adapt their behaviour and attitudes towards their teachers, abandoning the initial apprehension of hierarchical power structures that may exist in Ukraine. In other words, they understand that they can act and speak as they please with minimal or no consequences. While they may quickly embrace these changes, they often struggle to comprehend the rules and politeness strategies of small power distance societies. As a result, their actions may occasionally be perceived as impolite in various situations since, from my observations, they might not be fully aware of expressions of the negative politeness strategies mentioned earlier. However, this should not be confused with a direct communication style and the use of flat imperatives inherent to Ukrainian culture. Moreover, it is important to note that among the multiple characteristics of high Power Distance societies, Ukrainian adult learners in Norway seem to tend to cling most faithfully to those aspects that allow them to maintain a sense of dependency on their teachers and avoid taking the initiative.

Furthermore, as described earlier, in countries with a high Power Distance index, like Ukraine, there is a strong expectation for teachers to assume full responsibility for the learning process, encompassing both teaching and the organization of educational activities. Consequently, in environments like Norwegian EFL classrooms, where students are expected to take on responsibilities themselves, such as self-directed learning or collaborative projects, students may initially feel uncomfortable. As a result, when teachers do not take on these expected responsibilities and instead adopt a more relaxed approach, it may be perceived as disrespectful or impolite by Ukrainian learners. This perception stems from the cultural expectation that teachers should demonstrate competence and authority in their roles, providing clear guidance and direction to students. When teachers fail to fulfil these expectations, Ukrainian learners may interpret it as a breach of social norms and a lack of respect for their position as students. Consequently, they may feel undervalued or dismissed, leading to feelings of frustration or resentment. Moreover, direct communication is often considered inappropriate in cultures with high power distance, especially when addressing authority figures. Therefore, Ukrainian learners may be hesitant to express their concerns or dissatisfaction openly, further exacerbating feelings of discomfort or perceived rudeness in the classroom.

Hence, this cultural dynamic underscores the importance of understanding and acknowledging cultural differences in educational settings. By recognizing the influence of cultural norms on teaching and learning practices, educators can better support students' transitions to more autonomous and participatory learning environments. Additionally, fostering open communication and providing guidance and support can help alleviate discomfort and facilitate the adaptation process for both students and teachers.

Furthermore, the difference in the perceived role of a teacher mentioned in Table 3 is illustrated by Wierzbicka (2003) in her reflection on teaching Australian students:

> Students' assessment questionnaires have often thrown light on my cultural dilemmas. Thus, while often very positive and praising my "enthusiasm" for a long time, they also included critical accents referring to my "intensity", "passion", and "lack of detachment.". I had to learn, then, to lecture more like a "spokesman" and less like an "advocate" (p. xii).

Thus, Wierzbicka's assertion underscores the cultural differences in teaching styles and student expectations. In her experience, students' assessment questionnaires often revealed cultural dilemmas, with positive feedback regarding her enthusiasm for teaching tempered by critical remarks about her perceived intensity and lack of detachment. This suggests that while students

appreciated her passion and dedication, they also desired a more detached and impartial approach to teaching. Wierzbicka had to adapt her teaching style to address this cultural dilemma, shifting from an "advocate" who passionately advocates for her subject matter to a more detached and impartial position, similar to a "spokesman."

The insights from Wierzbicka's experiences can be extrapolated to Ukrainian adult learners. Given the high Power Distance index prevalent in Ukrainian society, adult learners may similarly expect their teachers to exhibit passionate involvement and expertise in their teaching. They may view the teacher as a knowledgeable authority figure and anticipate clear guidance and direction in their learning process. In this context, a teacher with a Norwegian or English background who adopts a more seemingly detached or impartial approach may evoke surprise and even feelings of disrespect from Ukrainian adult learners. Therefore, I would suggest that it is essential for educators working with Ukrainian adult learners to be mindful of these cultural expectations and to adapt their teaching approaches accordingly.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, Ukrainian students may exhibit reserved behaviour in classroom interactions and be cautious when expressing opinions. The Norwegian custom of addressing even strangers and more entitled people, such as du (thou), might feel strange and uncomfortable. Although English *you* functions as both *du* and *De* (*thou* and *you*), as described in section 3.2.3. the abovementioned fact should be taken into consideration by Norwegian educators.

As time progresses, students might start adopting a more casual approach and becoming more direct in their communication. However, it is essential to recognise that the process of behaviour change, and the adoption of new politeness strategies are influenced by several factors, including the student's personality, social class, and educational background. From my observations in class, I could add that these assertions seem to be reflected in class interactions. In the interplay between students and teachers, the behaviour of each individual significantly differs and depends on several variables. Nevertheless, the trace of similar cultural traits is evident in the individuals and the overall cultural background, which arguably might and should be taken into consideration in the analysis of cultural differences and, consequently, in the communication styles and linguistic choices in politeness strategies.

## 4.2.2. Individualism vs Collectivism and its implication on linguistic choices in politeness strategies in English, Ukrainian and Norwegian-speaking cultures

This subchapter examines the Individualism vs Collectivism dimension and analyses how it impacts politeness strategies in English, Ukrainian, and Norwegian-speaking cultures.

Scores: Hofstede's research/ The Cultural Group data

Ukraine: 40/55

Great Britain: 89/76

Norway: 69/81

As Hofstede et al. (2010) highlight, countries often correlate negatively with power distance and individualist indexes. High power distance countries are more likely to lean towards collectivism, while low power distance countries tend to be more individualistic. This implies that in cultures emphasising in-group dependence, individuals are also reliant on authority figures. Conversely, in cultures where people are relatively independent from in-groups, they tend to be less dependent on powerful figures. It is important to note, however, that there can be exceptions to this pattern (pp. 102-103).

Overall, the difference between Collectivist and Individualist societies can be presented in the following table:

*Table 4. Key differences between Collectivist and Individual Societies (adapted from Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 113-117).*

| Collectivist | Individualist |
|---|---|
| Children learn to think in terms of "we". | Children learn to think in terms of "I". |
| Value standards differ for in-groups and out-groups: exclusionism. | Value standards are supposed to apply to everyone: universalism. |
| Showing sadness is encouraged, and happiness is discouraged. | Showing happiness is encouraged, and sadness is discouraged. |
| Social network is a primary source of information. | Media is a primary source of information. |

Several inferences can be drawn based on the table presented and the features described in the discussed dimension. In the classroom context, in collectivist societies, it is common to see students from different ethnic or clan backgrounds forming subgroups. In contrast, in individualistic cultures, cooperative tasks more readily lead to the creation of new groups than in collectivist societies. Moreover, in collectivist societies, it is considered immoral not to treat members of one's own group more favourably than members of others. Furthermore, in collectivist societies, the emphasis is on adapting to the skills and virtues needed to be accepted as a member of the group. Consequently, learning is often perceived as a one-time process, primarily intended for young people who need to acquire the necessary skills to actively participate in society (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 118-119). As a result, adult learners in the classroom may exhibit varying levels of motivation - either a lack of interest stemming from an unwillingness to learn, influenced by the factors mentioned earlier, or a high level of enthusiasm driven by their personality, enabling them to transcend established cultural norms of a collectivist society.

Furthermore, according to a presented table, in Collectivist cultures, in Ukrainian culture in particular, politeness often involves maintaining harmony within the group, showing respect for authority and elders, and considering the impact of one's actions on the collective. Expressing emotions openly, including sadness, may be perceived as genuine and appropriate. In Individualist cultures, such as English and Norwegian, politeness may revolve around

individual autonomy and respecting personal boundaries. Openly expressing positive emotions, such as happiness, is considered socially acceptable, while displaying sadness might be viewed as a more private matter. Based on my personal observations, I would suggest that these characteristics are evident in Ukrainian and Norwegian classrooms, respectively.

Reflecting on the Individualism vs. Collectivism dimension and its implications for classroom settings and politeness strategies, I find it the most challenging and complex due to the intricate, bipolar, and dual nature of Ukrainian culture, as mentioned in section 3.1.2. Analysing Hofstede's findings and applying them to my own experience and observations in class, I could see the features of both cultures reflected in the communication style of Ukrainian adult learners. However, as mentioned in the theory chapter, the older the students, the more they will reflect the traits of a collectivist culture.

Furthermore, Prykarpatska (2008) highlights that

> The most important Ukrainian cultural values are family, care of children and aged parents as well as maintaining strong, long-term friendship bonds.[…] In face to-face interactions Ukrainians resort to allusion, irony and tend to respond to a number of communicative situations with phrases from widely known jokes (p. 91).

According to this assertion, in Ukrainian culture, collectivism is central, emphasizing family bonds, care for children and the elderly, and enduring friendships. Politeness strategies reflect this collective mindset, prioritizing group harmony. Communication, often implicit, utilizes humour, allusion, and irony for a positive atmosphere. Allusion and irony, in this regard, allow speakers to communicate subtly while preserving politeness and avoiding direct confrontation. By resorting to humour, Ukrainians aim to foster a sense of fellowship and maintain positive social relationships, which are central values in collectivist societies.

Based on my classroom observations, it appears that Ukrainians often engage in culturally specific humour and irony amongst themselves, which serves to strengthen feelings of fellowship and belonging within their in-group. However, Norwegian teachers may perceive this form of interaction as insulting or disrespectful, potentially leading to misunderstandings. While instances of perceived insult may occur, I would suggest that the disparity in communication styles in Ukrainian and Norwegian culture significantly contributes to this confusion.

## 4.2.3. Uncertainty Avoidance and its implication on linguistic choices in politeness strategies in English, Ukrainian and Norwegian-speaking cultures

This subchapter examines the Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) dimension and analyses how it impacts politeness strategies in English, Ukrainian, and Norwegian-speaking cultures.

Scores: Hofstede's research/ The Cultural Group data

Ukraine: 90/95

Great Britain: 35/35

Norway: 50/50

Every person, arguably, encounters the inherent uncertainty of the future, and while living with this uncertainty is inevitable, extreme ambiguity can lead to intolerable anxiety. Different domains, such as technology, law, and religion, offer ways to cope with this uncertainty. Laws and rules, for instance, aim to mitigate uncertainties arising from other people's behaviour (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 189). Consequently, a greater inclination towards rules and laws can be anticipated in societies with a high uncertainty avoidance index. This inclination is manifested in institutions like schools and various organisations and interpersonal relationships, including the adoption of specific politeness strategies.

In addition, Hofstede et al. (2010) emphasise that feelings of uncertainty are not only personal but may also be shared among members of a society. These feelings, along with coping mechanisms, are acquired and learned, becoming part of the cultural heritage of societies. Basic institutions like the family, school, and state play a role in transferring and reinforcing these feelings. Collectively held values within a society are rooted in nonrational aspects and contribute to shared behaviour patterns. These patterns might appear aberrant or incomprehensible to members of other societies (pp. 189-190). In the context of this thesis, these ideas underscore the idea that cultural values shape attitudes and behaviours related to uncertainty, which, in turn, influence linguistic choices in politeness strategies and communicational styles.

Furthermore, in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, where anxiety is prevalent, expressions of emotions are common and socially acceptable. People in these cultures may use gestures, raise their voices, or display emotions openly. On the contrary, in societies with low

Uncertainty Avoidance, where anxiety is lower, showing aggression or strong emotions is frowned upon. Additionally, high Uncertainty Avoidance correlates with higher neuroticism, encompassing traits like anxiety and impulsiveness, while low Uncertainty Avoidance correlates with higher agreeableness, including qualities such as trust and modesty. These correlations offer insights into how individuals from high Uncertainty Avoidance cultures may appear busy, emotional, or suspicious to others. In contrast, those from low Uncertainty Avoidance cultures may be perceived as calm, indolent, easygoing, and controlled (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 197). These statements correlate with the abovementioned observations in chapter 3 on the expression of emotions in Anglo-Saxon and Slavic cultures, particularly Ukrainian and English cultures. Thus, cultural norms influence the acceptability and expression of emotions, contributing to different patterns of how people from various cultures convey and perceive emotions.

Overall, the difference between high and low UA index societies can be presented in the following table:

*Table 5. Key differences between Low- and High Uncertainty- Avoidance Societies (adapted from Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 203-208).*

| Low Uncertainty Avoidance | High Uncertainty Avoidance |
|---|---|
| Uncertainty is a normal feature of life, and each day is accepted as it comes. | The uncertainty inherent in life is a continuous threat that must be fought. |
| Aggression and emotions should not be shown. | Aggression and emotions may at proper times and places be vented. |
| What is different is curious. | What is different is dangerous. |
| Students are comfortable with open-ended learning situations and concerned with good discussions. | Students are comfortable in structured learning situations and concerned with the right answers. |
| Teachers may say, "I don't know". | Teachers are supposed to have all the answers. |
| Results are attributed to a person's own ability. | Results are attributed to circumstances or luck. |

As we can see from this table, in low Uncertainty Avoidance index cultures such as English-speaking societies, it is more acceptable for teachers to admit when they do not know something by saying, "I don't know." This openness acknowledges the inherent uncertainty in knowledge and emphasizes personal responsibility for understanding. Consequently, individuals in these cultures tend to attribute results to their own abilities and efforts. Thus, despite Norway's neutral score of 50, I would suggest that Norwegian culture reflects traits of a low UA society to a greater extent in a classroom context and communicational patterns.

On the other hand, in cultures with high Uncertainty Avoidance indexes like Ukraine, there is a greater expectation for teachers to possess comprehensive knowledge and expertise. Teachers are often perceived as authority figures who should have all the answers, and admitting uncertainty may be seen as a sign of incompetence or inadequacy.

These differences in attitudes towards uncertainty and authority between English-speaking and Ukrainian societies might influence communication styles and politeness strategies. In English-speaking and Norwegian cultures, communication may be characterized by an egalitarian approach, with politeness strategies focusing on maintaining mutual understanding and respect while acknowledging personal limitations. In contrast, in Ukrainian culture, where uncertainty is less tolerated, and authority figures are expected to have all the answers, communication may be more hierarchical and deferential, with politeness strategies oriented towards showing deference and avoiding confrontation with authority figures.

Additionally, Hofstede et al. (2010) illustrate the contrasting expectations between students from low and high UA societies. Students anticipate recognition for accuracy in high UA societies, while those in low UA societies seek acknowledgement for originality. The cultural variations extend to perceptions of teachers; in high UA societies, educators are revered as authoritative figures with a mastery of all knowledge. The use of complex academic language is respected, even if it requires supplementary explanations. Conversely, students in low UA countries appreciate teachers who admit uncertainty, prefer straightforward language, and value materials that simplify complex concepts (pp. 205-206). This dichotomy highlights how cultural backgrounds shape expectations and interactions in educational settings.

From my own observation, Hofstede's findings seem to correlate with the context of the Norwegian classroom. Indeed, the relatively high UA index in Ukraine indicates cultural inclinations towards a preference for structured environments, clear directives and a reduced

tolerance for ambiguity, in contrast to the UK and Norway. In the context of this research, this cultural trait may influence the politeness strategies employed by Ukrainian adult learners. Ukrainian learners prefer communication that provides explicit instructions, detailed planning, and a clear framework, aligning with their cultural inclination toward certainty and structure. As a result, understanding and adapting to these cultural differences in UA is essential for effective communication and teaching strategies in the Norwegian classroom setting.

Furthermore, as described in preceding paragraphs, Ukrainians generally prioritise accuracy over originality in their academic work. Practically, this preference for accuracy may manifest in students focusing on well-established information, adhering closely to guidelines, and being cautious about presenting novel or unverified ideas. The emphasis on accuracy aligns with a desire for precise, reliable information and a structured approach to academic work. Moreover, the high UA index suggests the expectation of a high level of responsibility among Ukrainian students, particularly in tasks like homework and throughout the study process. Students are expected to take their academic responsibilities seriously, ensuring that tasks are completed thoroughly and on time.

These cultural characteristics have implications for teaching and learning in a Ukrainian academic context. Teachers may expect that students can excel in tasks that require precision and accuracy, but they may need additional support or guidance to be creative and original in their academic work. Recognizing and understanding these cultural preferences can facilitate a more effective approach to teaching Ukrainian adult learners. Moreover, as previously noted, educators must remember that a student's personality and social background impact their development. Consequently, it is unrealistic to anticipate the mentioned qualities in every student.

## 4.3. Exploring Ukrainian and English politeness strategies

This subchapter will provide an overview of the nuances of politeness strategies in Ukrainian and English within Hofstede's cultural dimensions. While English provides a broader range of interrogative forms, Ukrainian has more narrow linguistic formulations. In addition, this subchapter will examine the impact of culture on Ukrainian politeness strategies, particularly the inclusion of flat imperatives and the crucial role of intonation in Ukrainian communication, especially in interrogative sentences. Further, this section will reveal how Hofstede's

dimensions contribute to discovering the complex interaction between language, culture, and politeness strategies in different sociolinguistic contexts.

Moreover, based on the discrepancies in politeness strategies discussed in subchapter 3.2.1 among Ukrainian, English, and Norwegian cultures, this subchapter will illustrate the potential clashes between these cultures. These clashes may arise from f undamental differences in cultural expectations regarding sincerity and consideration for others' feelings. Within the context of English classrooms for Ukrainian adult learners with Norwegian educators, these cultural disparities may lead to a variety of intricate situations, providing ample space for the expression of misunderstandings. The clashes may arise as a result of divergent approaches to communication styles and politeness, potentially creating challenges to effective intercultural communication in the educational setting.

As Wierzbicka (2003) claims, Anglo culture might interpret an emotionally charged and direct communication style as more aggressive. She reflects on her own experience, stating that she had to undergo a transformation by tempering her communication approach. This involved learning to moderate her expressions, steering away from sharpness, bluntness, and extreme judgments characteristic of Polish communication. Wierzbicka had to familiarize herself with the subtleties of Anglo understatement, a contrast to the more hyperbolic and emphatic Polish ways of speaking. Moreover, she describes the need to avoid coming across as dogmatic, argumentative, or overly emotional, traits that might be perceived negatively in the Anglo cultural context. To navigate English communication effectively, she learned to employ expressions such as "on the one hand... on the other hand," "well yes," "well no," or "that's true, but on the other hand" (p. xi). This example illustrates the cultural nuances in communication styles, where a more restrained, balanced, and nuanced approach is valued in Anglo culture. This stands in strong contrast to the direct and emotionally charged style evident in Polish and, by extension, Ukrainian culture. In accordance with recommendations regarding the use of detailed interrogative structures and flat imperatives, which are outlined in 4.3.1., I suggest that educators acknowledge the noted disparities in linguistic preferences between English and Ukrainian.

## 4.3.1. Use of imperatives and interrogative structures in linguistic choices of politeness strategies

There are several cases where we can observe the use of flat imperatives in politeness strategies in Slavic and, by extension, in Ukrainian culture. Wierzbicka (2007) vividly illustrates linguistic choices in politeness strategies made by an un-named Polish individual and his deviation from the Brown and Levinson model. Based on the concepts presented in the theory chapter, this example can be easily related to linguistic choices in politeness strategies in Ukrainian culture. At a meeting of a Polish organization in Australia, a notable Australian guest, Mrs Vanessa Smith, is warmly greeted by one of the Polish hosts who invites her to take a seat of honour, saying: "*Mrs Vanessa! Please! Sit! Sit!*". She further elaborates on this example by emphasizing that the term "Mrs" is used instead of the Polish (and Ukrainian) word "pani", which, unlike "Mrs", can be combined with first names. Noteworthy is the use of the short imperative "Sit!" in an invitation, which gives it an imperative tone reminiscent of a command, even similar to addressing a dog. A more casual offer in English may use the imperative mood, such as "Have a seat", but not "with an action verb in imperative mood". Simultaneously, more formal invitations usually take the interrogative form, such as: "Will you sit down? Won't you sit down? Would you like to sit down? Sit down, won't you?" (p. 27). However, it should be noted that social variables P, D, and R, as presented in chapter 3.2.2, must be considered in the described context. While the introduced utterance "*Please! Sit! Sit!*" might be regarded as impolite in a situation with a highly respected guest, the same expression might be perceived as more acceptable in a less formal setting.

Additionally, Wierzbicka (2003) describes her own experience in an "Anglo university": "I was learning not to use the imperative ("Do X!") in my daily interaction with people and to replace it with a broad range of interrogative devices ("Would you do X?", "Could you do X?", "Would you mind doing X?", "How about doing X?", "Why don't you do X?", "Why not do X?", and so on" (p. xi). Notably, the Ukrainian polite request formula aligns with Wierzbicka's introduction: 'Do X, (please)'.

In these instances, Wierzbicka illustrates that employing the strategy of performing FTAs, as outlined in Figure 3 in section 3.2.2, carries distinct connotations in Ukrainian and English cultures. In English culture, flat imperatives represent a bald strategy of performing FTAs without redressive action. As detailed in section 3.2.2, employing flat imperatives may be perceived as impolite and less considerate. Conversely, in Ukrainian culture, this approach

aligns with positive politeness. Consequently, the utilization of the Ukrainian polite formulation 'Do X, (please)' diverges from its classification in Brown and Levinson's model, as it leans towards a positive politeness strategy. This disparity underscores the cultural divergence in linguistic choices between English and Ukrainian cultures, providing insights into each cultural setting's distinct approaches to politeness strategies.

Moreover, the acceptance of flat imperatives in requests reflects a communication style that values directness and emotionality in Ukrainian culture. Flat imperatives convey a straightforwardness that aligns with the cultural preference for clear and emotionally charged expressions. Simultaneously, they may not have the same confrontational connotations in Ukrainian as in English. Furthermore, in English-speaking cultures, the use of more elaborate interrogative forms in requests, such as yes/no questions and indirect structures, is influenced by a cultural norm that values freedom from imposition. Politeness is often conveyed through indirectness, giving the listener the freedom to choose whether to agree or decline without feeling imposed upon. Furthermore, the more elaborate interrogative forms in English requests may align with a culture that values individual freedom and autonomy (Individualism), allowing the listener the freedom to make choices independently.

Based on my experience and classroom observations, I would suggest that using the abovementioned elaborate English expressions can create problems for Ukrainians. The abundance of interrogative forms can create ambiguity because they can be perceived as a suggestion, leaving room for interpretation and leaving people unsure whether the speaker is expecting a specific action or simply suggesting an idea. In Ukrainian culture, elaborated interrogative forms might be utilized either in extremely formal situations characterized by a high Power Distance, high social variables P and D or as a joke, as was also described in section 3.2.4. This tendency might also be explained by a high degree of Uncertainty Avoidance and a collectivist nature ingrained in Ukrainian cultural norms.

Furthermore, as Sitko (2007, p. 2) emphasises, when addressing a stranger, Ukrainians use the substitute formulas of addresses, built according to the model "or not + verb?" (ukr. чи не). Obviously, this expression can not be literally translated into English, but it has an approximate translation. For instance, in the request, 'Can you tell me how to get to the bus stop?' (ukr. Чи не скажете, як пройти на зупинку таксі?), serving for several English expressions, such as "can you", "could you", "won't you", and "would you". This example suggests the importance of explaining to both students and teachers the apparent lack of corresponding interrogative forms in the Ukrainian language. Therefore, integrating and emphasizing English interrogative

expressions (such as those above) in the classroom may be beneficial. This approach could increase adult Ukrainian learners' awareness of these expressions and differences in communication styles.

## 4.3.2. Use of intonation in linguistic choices of politeness strategies

Each form, presented in the previous section, as well as the interrogative forms discussed in section 3.2.2. by Swan (2016) exemplifies the nuanced politeness inherent in English. However, these forms are not extensively utilized and can only be translated into Ukrainian to a limited extent in terms of semantic meaning. Moreover, as Sitko (2007) argues, the Ukrainian language lacks the diversity of interrogative constructions found in English for described situations. Instead, all the nuanced meanings mentioned earlier can be effectively conveyed through intonation. In these cases, the use of intonation is a more common and characteristic feature of the Ukrainian language (p. 8). For instance, the declarative sentence 'You are reading a book' can be transformed into a question by using the interrogative form 'Are you reading a book?' in English. In Ukrainian, however, both declarative and interrogative forms will have the same grammatic structure, 'Ти читаеш книгу(?)', while the only difference in the oral speech will be intonation. In another example, the Ukrainian expression 'Даси книгу(?)' can sound like both a polite request 'Would you give me a book?' or an order 'Give me a book' depending on intonation.

However, it is essential to note that English also uses declarative forms as questions. "**You're** working late tonight?" These "declarative questions" are often used when the speaker thinks he/she knows or has understood something but wants to make sure or express surprise. A rising intonation is common. **This is** your car? (= I suppose this is your car, isn't it?)" (Swan, 2016, section 302).

The reliance on intonation in Ukrainian interrogative constructions, as opposed to the more diverse set of English structures, may be connected to cultural aspects such as emotionality and, potentially, Hofstede's dimensions. As mentioned in section 3.2.4., a certain level of emotionality and expressiveness in communication often characterizes Ukrainian culture. The emphasis on intonation in interrogative constructions allows for a more nuanced and emotionally charged expression. The use of tone and pitch can convey not just the literal meaning of the question but also the speaker's feelings and/ or intentions. Based on my personal

and professional observations in the classroom and real-life situations, I would suggest that these claims quite closely reflect reality.

In terms of Hofstede's dimensions, the preference for intonation over diverse interrogative structures might also be influenced by Power Distance. A higher PD index in Ukrainian culture may shape communication patterns where the expression of respect or deference is embedded in the tonal nuances of speech rather than relying on a variety of formal structures. Intonation becomes a subtle yet powerful tool for conveying respect or deference in interactions. Additionally, the cultural dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance could play a role. A higher UA index may lead to a clear and emotional communication preference, as mentioned in section 4.2.3. Using intonation to emphasize meaning allows for a more direct and unambiguous expression of the speaker's intentions, aligning with a cultural inclination to avoid uncertainty in communication.

Furthermore, in a collectivist culture, there tends to be a greater emphasis on group harmony and shared understanding. The use of intonation in Ukrainian interrogative constructions can contribute to the formation of a collective mode of communication, in which the group's familiarity with common intonation patterns helps understanding. Thus, Ukrainian culture places significant emphasis on interpersonal relationships, with communication characterized by nuances and subtleties, where intonation serves to convey emotional nuances and the speaker's attitude, contributing to a contextually flexible communication style.

In conclusion, the utilization of flat imperatives in English and Ukrainian reflects distinct politeness strategies and cultural interpretations. Further, as illustrated, the Ukrainian language lacks a comparable abundance of elaborate expressions in politeness strategies of the English language and lacks the grammatical structure found in English interrogative constructions. The cultural dynamics of higher PD and lower UA can explain the direct and emotionally expressive communication style observed in Ukrainian culture. This implies a society's tendency towards hierarchical structures and less tolerance for ambiguity. Conversely, English requests' more complex and indirect nature may correspond to cultural values that emphasize individual freedom and greater acceptance of uncertainty. However, I would suggest that it is important to recognize that these cultural trends are generalizations, and individual factors and situational context play a significant role in shaping communication styles in each cultural setting. Moreover, as Hofstede (2001a) underlines, "translators should be familiar not only with both languages but with the context of the material to be translated (p. 21). By applying this idea to the context of the educators of Ukrainian adult learners, we might say that both teachers and

students need to be culturally aware, recognizing and addressing cultural differences between Ukrainian and English languages. This includes understanding context, social norms, communication styles, and cultural references that may influence language use.

## 4.4. Some practical implications for teachers

The awareness of pragmatic nuances becomes paramount in the English classroom setting for Ukrainian adult learners in Norway. Teachers must recognize that learners from Ukrainian backgrounds may bring a cultural predisposition towards directness and positive politeness. Balancing this with the English cultural norms of conventional indirectness and negative politeness alongside Norwegian cultural norms may present unique challenges. Moreover, considering the non-native English-speaking environment in Norway, where both teachers and learners may lack the cultural depth of native speakers, understanding the interplay between different cultural norms becomes crucial. As Hofstede et al. (2010) also underscore, the significance of differing value patterns between teachers' and students' cultures is a potential source of challenges in educational settings. Given that language serves as the primary medium of instruction, its role becomes paramount in teaching situations. According to Hofstede, successful cultural adaptation is more likely when teachers instruct in the students' language rather than vice versa, as teachers hold greater influence over the learning environment than individual students (p. 393). Although Hofstede's assertions primarily address the learning situation for foreign students, a similar principle can be applied to teaching English to Ukrainian adult learners. While Hofstede's suggestion may pose new challenges in identifying suitably qualified teachers for the task, I would propose to consider this factor.

Moreover, understanding classroom communication dynamics can be further enriched by considering differences in Hofstede's dimensions. Recognizing potential differences in Power Distance expectations, the balance between teacher and student initiatives becomes essential to effective communication. Additionally, recognizing the interaction between Individualism and Collectivism can help develop teaching methodologies that address both individual needs and group dynamics. Hence, the analysis of politeness strategies and cultural dimensions within the English and Ukrainian context performed in this thesis might lay the foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of communication dynamics.

Based on the theories presented and my personal experience and observations alongside insights from Yates (2010) and O'Keeffe et al. (2019), presented in subchapter 3.3. it can be beneficial to introduce the transition from existing cultural norms, linguistic choices, and politeness strategies to the adaptation of new practices by Ukrainian adult learners. This description might contribute to teachers' comprehension of the process their learners are going through and thus help teachers be more efficient and successful in their teaching practices. However, it is important to highlight that this transition does not need to be applied solely to the students; rather, it can be employed by any person who is experiencing the process of studying a new culture. As Banks (2004) claims, individuals learn and internalize different sets and subsets of culture throughout their lives, encompassing beliefs, values, behaviours, and social norms. Moreover, cultural learning is not static; individuals have the capacity to unlearn aspects of their culture, discarding outdated or irrelevant practices while adopting new ones. Furthermore, educators continually engage with these issues when creating curriculum and teaching. They may address them consciously or unconsciously, but cultural considerations are always present in educational practices (p. 32). Therefore, the following text will introduce the steps involved in the transition from old to new cultural norms and communication styles.

The first step in this transition is becoming aware of the cultural differences in politeness strategies. As Yates (2010, p. 288) points out, the transition of pragmatic norms occurs on an unconscious level. Thus, conscious observation of misunderstandings or misinterpretations in intercultural interactions often serves as a catalyst for awareness. It sparks comparative analysis, where individuals contrast their cultural norms with those of others. They start to reflect on why they communicate as they do and whether there is value in adopting different approaches. However, awareness of and processing of these cultural differences naturally vary from individual to individual. At this point, educators might highlight and inform students of these differences. Additionally, they may facilitate a comparative analysis by explicitly addressing differences and similarities between Ukrainian and English cultures, as well as politeness strategies and communication patterns. Moreover, educators can promote reflective practices in the classroom. This involves encouraging learners to contemplate their communication styles and cultural assumptions; initiating discussions about the influence of culture on communication, and prompting learners to share their observations.

In addition, exposure to diverse cultures and experiences can accelerate the shift from conforming to cultural and linguistic norms to adapting to new ones. When individuals regularly interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, they may begin to notice the

limitations of their own cultural norms in new settings and the advantages of adapting to new communication styles. The class environment, including communication with teachers and peers, plays a significant role in shaping this awareness. This assertion is also highlighted by O'Keeffe et al. (2019, p. 560), who emphasises the importance of practising pragmatic competence in various situations. However, as previously mentioned, Ukrainian adult learners of English in Norway encounter challenges due to their immersion in Norwegian culture. Consequently, educators may need to explore ways to modify tasks accordingly.

Additionally, some individuals are naturally more open to change and adaptation. They may be willing to modify their politeness strategies to accommodate better the needs and expectations of others from different cultures. This openness can accelerate the shift from conforming to adopting new communication styles. Feedback from people of other cultures can be crucial in helping individuals to adapt their politeness strategies. If someone receives constructive feedback that their communication style is causing discomfort or misunderstandings, they may be motivated to adjust their approach. Thus, educators should provide constructive feedback for those who require it. This point is also confirmed by O'Keeffe et al. (2019, p. 560).

Intercultural competence, which involves the ability to effectively and appropriately communicate and interact with people with different communication styles and mindsets (Dypedahl & Bøhn, 2021, p. 81), plays a crucial role in transitioning from old to new cultural norms. Although intercultural competence is not a subject of inquiry in this thesis, it can be beneficial for educators to examine this concept in depth in order to make their learning process more effective. As individuals develop their intercultural competence, they become more capable of recognising when and how to adjust their politeness strategies to different cultural contexts.

Ultimately, transitioning from conforming to adapting to new politeness strategies involves balancing and respecting one's cultural identity and norms while demonstrating flexibility and adaptability in intercultural interactions. It is not about abandoning cultural norms but finding ways to bridge cultural gaps and communicate effectively. The shift from conforming to adapting in the context of politeness strategies and cultural norms is a nuanced process that varies from individual to individual. It is driven by factors such as awareness, exposure, openness, feedback, and contextual considerations. Intercultural competence plays a significant role in facilitating this transition, allowing individuals to navigate the complexities of intercultural communication with sensitivity and effectiveness.

# 5. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore the topic "*The Impact of Cultural Background on English Language Politeness Strategies for Ukrainian Adult Learners in Norway*". The primary objective was to examine cultural differences in politeness strategies between English-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking societies, shedding light on their potential implications for communication patterns in the context of an English classroom in Norway. The research question guiding this study was formulated as follows: *What are the cultural differences in politeness strategies between English-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking societies, and how might these differences impact linguistic choices in politeness strategies and teaching methods for Ukrainian adult learners in an English language classroom context in Norway?*

## 5.1. Summary of findings

To address the research question comprehensively, the literature review served as a methodological tool to explore previous studies and theories in depth. This literature review identified cultural differences in politeness strategies, focusing on both English-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking societies. In addition, the Norwegian cultural aspect was taken into account. This study presented Hofstede's study of cultural perspectives, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, and the perspectives of various scholars to answer the research question. The findings were then analysed to determine their impact on communication patterns and practical implications for teachers were considered.

Furthermore, the examination of FTA strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson reveals a significant disparity between Ukrainian and English politeness strategies, primarily in their emphasis on negative and positive politeness. English-speaking individuals typically prioritize negative politeness strategies, whereas Ukrainians tend to favour positive politeness strategies. Additionally, differences in the utilization of flat imperatives, interrogative structures, and intonation in English and Ukrainian were illustrated. While the bald-on-record strategy without redressive action is considered less polite in English culture, it is more widely accepted in Ukrainian culture. Moreover, English exhibits more elaborate interrogative structures, while Ukrainian primarily relies on intonation to convey various meanings in different contexts. These discrepancies underscore the differing cultural norms and values associated with politeness,

which significantly influence communication dynamics in each society. As illustrated, Hofstede's three cultural dimensions - Power Distance, Collectivism vs. Individualism, and Uncertainty Avoidance - highlight distinct perceptions of reality and consequent communication patterns in English, Norwegian, and Ukrainian-speaking societies.

By combining academic insights with my own personal and professional observations, I have provided a nuanced understanding of the complex interaction between cultural background and English politeness strategies for adult Ukrainian learners in Norway. The analysis of different theories reveals that culture significantly influences politeness strategies and communication patterns in both English and Ukrainian-speaking societies.

## 5.2. Further research

In my thesis, I underscored the importance of analysing cultural backgrounds when examining English language politeness strategies for Ukrainian adult learners in Norway. Consequently, I propose that this study could serve as a model for similar research attempts, drawing upon insights from both Hofstede's research and other scholarly contributions. Moreover, the context and structure of this thesis, focusing on foreigners learning English in a non-English-speaking country, may also be used in similar studies. Furthermore, investigating the influence of cultural backgrounds on politeness strategies holds relevance across diverse cultures and contexts. As discussed in the method chapter, section 2.1, utilizing the DCT method may offer additional benefits in conducting research in similar studies, either independently or in conjunction with literature reviews. I would recommend ensuring an adequate number of participants and carefully considering their backgrounds to enhance the applicability of the findings. My thesis and research findings offer a strong foundation for future studies employing DCT methods or any other research endeavour to explore the complex interplay between language, culture, and politeness, which is central to any language teaching situation.

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