

The Central Role of Politeness in Business Communication

The Appropriateness Principle as the Way to Enhance Business Communication Efficiency

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Abstract

The paper focuses on practical consequences of exploitation of applied linguistics, and moreover intercultural linguistics, in everyday business communication and modern management from the viewpoint of politeness principles. The authors assume that the intentional use of the theoretical principles of intercultural linguistics concerning politeness strategies can possibly improve business communication efficiency in the current intercultural environment. Therefore, intercultural linguistics is a pragmatic discipline with potential utilization in everyday business communication and international management practices. Politeness as a basic communicative principle has recently experienced a wide interest of scholars as the area of interactional pragmatics examining a vast range of topics connected to languages and their varieties and their interaction in the context of culture; however, the practical implications are still missing. The authors try to use local data to show how politeness principles and their practical exploitation can be manifested in a particular cultural context, namely the Czech Republic, and focus on projecting our identity in language and the means we use to achieve interactional goals.

Keywords: *business communication, politeness theory, international business, communication efficiency*

Introduction: Modern business communication and its recent transformation

Academic interest in intercultural communication reflected in business communication has recently seen unprecedented interest (Luzio 2001, Lehman 2006, Piller 2007). However, the aspects of politeness have been largely ignored, even if they deserve our undivided attention. New communication technologies have radically altered the characteristics of managerial communication in the last two decades. The dominant genres of business communication had been a business letter and, in the early 1990's, fax communication. In the mid-90's the arrival of email communication is visible, and this communication started to prevail in business practice. Also, the presentation format seems to dominate through Power Point or Keynote, in Europe and America, respectively. Visualization in these presentation tools is preferred and is driving out traditional reports. We can even suppose that this trend will be even stronger with the arrival of new technologies, such as smartphones and tablets. A lot of research describes this trend and pays attention to upcoming changes in managerial communication (Louhiana-Salmien, 2009).

Thomas L. Friedman, in his famous book *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (Friedman, 2007) divides globalization into three phases, and we use this division and reflect it further in managerial and business communication as follows: First, globalization 1.0, there the aim is to strengthen internationalization of individual countries. In managerial courses the focus is on essentialism in approaching particular countries, such as e.g. Geert Hofstede's theory, where culture is given and it is not possible to change it, we can only understand these cultural paradigms reflected in communication. Second, globalization 2.0, with the aim to strengthen internationalization of individual companies. In

business communication the focus is on the need to understand the diversity of a globalized business community. The key question is not what the interaction of individual members of various cultures is, but what the values of these people are. The focus is also on communication per se and on how linguistic aspects can influence our decisions and negotiations. And third, globalization 3.0: in this phase it is the individuals who internationalize. The commodification of language and communication is visible, i.e. communication competence becomes a commodity, which is paid for (Tan, 2008). The original communication in the given national language is changed into communication in English. Language and communication competencies become a must of any business activity and are demanded at any managerial level. Communication competencies are therefore transformed into economic benefits. In societies which basically focus their attention on information, knowledge transfer and services, language and communication become an indispensable element which is paid for because it can generate further profit (Pikhart, 2013, Tan, 2008).

However, we claim that it is possible to merge these three approaches without preferring each individual, be it a nation, company or an individual, so that we can utilize all the consequences of this distinction and pragmatically apply all these findings in business practice.

International management and English as a lingua franca

As late as the beginning of the 1990's, English was not the dominant language of business communication (apart from the Anglo-Saxon world) in countries such as Germany, France and in Asia. It was still the mother tongue of one of the business partners which was chosen as the means of communication. The right choice of the shared language of business communication was projected into better export results and profitability, as shown by the research (Geeritsen, 2009). In this particular example the choice of the German language by a French company was associated with better business results for the French party.

At the beginning of the 20th century, we can see a radical and unprecedented change regarding communication. This change was started by the use of new communication technologies and also by radicalization of globalization as a world-wide phenomenon. All these impacts were first present in multinational corporations (MNCs) but later they appeared even in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Since then English has been used as an official corporate language and the term English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has been coined, or even Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), i.e. English as a communication means used by non-native speakers for everyday business communication in international business (Firth, 2009, 147-148, House 2009).

Modern communication technologies and the multinational characteristics of the business context are two fundamental standpoints which dominate modern communication; the development of communication competencies is a must for anyone who is a participant in such a discourse. We can even claim that the survival of mankind will depend on the ability of people who think differently to cooperate with each other (Samovar, 2007).

In current companies the majority of work is communication-related, i.e. the transfer of information from the headquarters to the subsidiaries, from the middle management to the supervisory management and from lower managerial positions to ordinary employees is crucial. Also the information transferred from outside the company, from customers to the company management as feedback is very important for company development. Therefore, understanding and clear communication strategy with lossless transfer of information is essential for any business activity supported by modern means of communication. To sum it up, we can even talk about a transformation of linguistic into economic capital.

It is also important to bear in mind that with all these radical changes in business communication, communication has changed not only qualitatively but also quantitatively. Quantitatively, the absolute number of transferred information and data has risen dramatically, and, as a lot of research proves

(Friedman, 2007, Pikhart, 2013, Tan, 2008), the quality of information has dropped due to this enormous quantity of data and information. The changed structure of communication and business opportunities in the global business world has led to improved specialization and focus on outsourcing and key competencies in business and with that connected strategic alliances and global cooperation. The pace of globalization urges companies to strengthen their international presence, i.e. in the different intercultural context of a foreign country.

It is evident that in university language education in business schools the language focus on vocabulary and grammar is not sufficient; it is rather communication competence we should strive for to gain a competitive advantage in the global market. The main key to optimization of business communication is knowledge transfer, i.e. know-how, from best practice companies, creation of supporting programs with the experience of the best practice companies, but also training of management in intercultural communication competencies (Pikhart, 2013). The connection of management with communication and linguistics is crucial because communication is a prerequisite of any business activity. Optimizing business communication with the utilization of intercultural and applied linguistics can improve market competitiveness where communication competencies create clear competitive advantage (Hua, 2014). Further research should focus on practical implementation and improvement of communication competence courses for managers.

Communication in its sociocultural context of interactional pragmatics

After the ground-breaking work of several linguists, such as Lakoff, Leech, Brown and Levinson, to name just a few, it has become obvious that conveying information is not the only reason why people communicate but they also establish and maintain interpersonal relationships in the context of the given culture (Hickey and Steward, 2005, 3). The importance of cultural context in which politeness happens cannot be neglected as it creates the value system in which all the classic categories like power, distance, likeness, face saving etc., are created, occur and function (Wolf et al. 2006).

When doing business internationally it is crucial to *appoint* communication principles of the culture with more polite communication principles so that the message is conveyed appropriately and the communication is not considered inappropriate by the counterpart. Adhering to the politeness principles as defined by Spencer-Oatey (Spencer-Oatey 2008) brings competitive advantage and possible win-win strategies. Maintaining politeness is seen through an aspect of rapport management – regardless of the particular language. Brown and Levinson politeness model (1987) defines face-threatening acts (FTAs) as acts inherently threatening the face needs of the interlocutors. Spencer-Oatey claims a positive rapport between people may be endangered in three ways: by using techniques involving FTAs, by rights-threatening/obligation-omission behaviour and through goal threatening behaviour. Spencer-Oatey draws on Brown and Levinson (Oatey 1987, 19) to discuss further the FTAs, such as requests, offers, compliments, criticism as to their impact on speech acts and considers primarily orders and requests, apologies and compliments.

Within rapport management we can distinguish:

- Face (face saving communication – comprises respect, status and honour)
- Sociality rights and obligations (communication participants develop their behavioural expectations in relation to their perceived sociality rights and obligations, breaching of these may seriously damage the conversational agreement of the counterparts)
- Interactional goals (transactional goals – the content or purpose itself)

Different cultures may have different opinions/conventions as to what is appropriate behaviour in what contexts. There are two main functions of language which are closely interconnected:

- Transactional (information transferring)
- Interactional (maintenance of social relationships)

Fraser and Nolan (1981, 96) point out that politeness is actually a contextual judgement. No sentence is inherently polite or impolite. Politeness is a question of appropriateness.

The widespread use of English as a Lingua Franca brings about the need to clarify the level of Czech cultural roots manifested in ELF utterances. The Anglo-Saxon communication norms and conventions are being melted into the ELF and influence both the interactional and transactional functions in the use of the language. The Czech context is very Central European by combining Western Slavonic attitudes and the historically profound long-term influence of German and Austrian cultures, and provides the ELF with a blend of cultural impact, resulting in prioritizing transactional functions in social exchanges. This does not equal a statement on neglecting the politeness norms, but rather casts light on a different concept of understanding politeness, where the politeness conventions are defined by the content.

Hofstede and Gudykunst warned against applying the cultural dimensions to individuals and also referred to the impact of a specific social group on an individual. Nevertheless, nowadays Hofstede's of Trompenaars's dimensions are still considered a reliable proxy by numerous researchers in both the field of cross-cultural management and intercultural communication. The warning is, however, present and a simplified picture of international communication drawing on Hofstede's or Trompenaars's dimensions is no longer applicable for an efficient improvement of the conveyed messages. The mentioned social group influence, i.e. the socialization process of any individual thus exercises powerful implications to the language used by the member of such a social group. As intercultural communication, among others, draws on psychology, anthropology, and linguistics, a potential distortion of such a stereotypical group picture can be reduced to minimum by a contextual analysis of values and beliefs of respective social strata.

Language misunderstanding can often lead to lack of confidence in negotiations; there the managers who are aware of this will possibly use overpolite discourse strategies.

- Imperative /direct questions
- Regimentation
- High context reasoning/justification
- Providing advice without being requested
- Being overpolite
- Apologizing too much
- Silence instead feedback (self-confidence, emancipated discussions)
- Concept of efficiency – turn in talk
- Reaction time in turn taking – passivity

Research methodology and research questions

The following research questions were studied and the authors tried to provide a pragmatic approach in researching into everyday business communication.

Research Question 1:

Will ignoring the basic principles of politeness in business communication handicap the users without appropriate knowledge of the peculiarities of politeness principles of the English language?

Research Question 2:

What are the specific politeness principles of the English language to be introduced in English business communication training?

The research took place in 2012-2015 and the first part was a quantitative survey with questionnaires distributed in several European countries, namely the Czech Republic, Germany and Britain. Individual questions of the research were 7 discourse completion tasks (for the respondents labeled as scenarios), each of them containing 4 distractors (a, b, c, d). The questionnaires were completed and returned by 278 Czech, 27 English and 106 German respondents. The respondents were not restricted to choose only one option. The responses obtained from respective cultures were calculated and the number of particular options chosen by respondents from the respective country of origin was scaled against the total number of the country of origin respondents. The final ratios were expressed in percentages and the figures, for the purposes of interpretation, were rounded to whole numbers.

Before the research itself a pre-test was conducted to verify the answers by native speakers of English. After that Czech university students and Czech entrepreneurs using English for doing business were asked to fill up the questionnaire with particular scenarios of language use.

Secondly, a qualitative survey was conducted by means of an interview with native speakers based in the Czech Republic and researching into their perception of Czech socio-pragmatic inappropriateness when using English language. The research result could be transferrable to all remaining Visegrad countries, i.e. Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, as the authors of the research expect similar language situation due to practically identical historical development after WWII and also because of the fact that Central European languages of these countries tend to be considered more direct and straightforward by British people.

Interpretation of the results

To interpret the survey results the authors decided to apply the following categories for further classification of the assessed reactions. Each scenario was designed to open a potential space for intercultural politeness critical incidents. The distractors were designed to provide likely reactions from both the poles of the politeness concepts spectrum, however, based on their logical nature the distractors did not always manifest all the below enumerated applied categories as follows:

- **Interactional language function** which focuses on maintenance of social relationships.
- **Transactional language function** which focuses on information transferring.
- **Implicit communication** refers to the things we say usually without regard to the messages others receive. It might even be a decision not to communicate at all.
- **Explicit communication** refers to the things we say or write, often messages intended to influence the behaviour of others. It leaves as little room as possible for interpretation or ambiguity.
- **Positive politeness** manifests itself as a desire for approval and respect and as a wish to be liked
- **Negative politeness** manifests itself as a desire to be autonomous and not to infringe others, alleviates space for the counterpart not to feel imposed upon.
- **Face-threatening act (FTA)** describes face-endangering communication, where face is understood as a protection of a self-image.
- **Face-saving act (FSA)** is understood as communication leading to protection of image or status
- Following you can find particular business environment scenarios with the description of the category it belongs to and also the statistical occurrence.

Scenario 1: Email opening in informal business relationship

Participants: an email sender and an addressee.

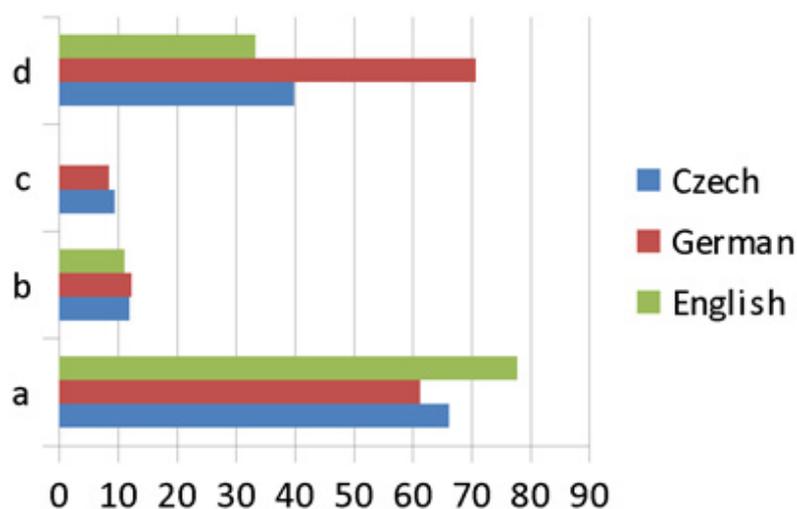
Background: A proper introduction of an email to a colleague you have been on first terms with. You are writing an email to your counterpart in England after a long time to make sure all the arrangements for the mutual project have been settled.

Reactions	Description	Occurrence
a) Hi Ryan, I am writing to find out about the arrangements...	transactional, explicit	maximum occurrence Czech and English
b) Dear Ryan, I would like to know if you have possibly managed to collect the figures...	interactional, implicit, negative politeness	maximum occurrence German
c) Hi Ryan, sorry to push you, but would you send me...	combining transactional and interactional (deprecating style), explicit	lowest occurrence
d) Hi Ryan, how are things out there? I wonder if you can send me the info about...	combining transactional and interactional, implicit, negative politeness	2nd Czech, English, German

The situation scenario is set as informal; the suggested communication does not expect any involvement of public or other participants. The scenario does not depict a situation where a conflicting issue is to be solved, neither does it explicitly stipulate any potential losses for the sender of the email. The English respondents chose as the most likely reaction the transactional informal and explicit opening (a). The German respondents chose as their first option the interactional, more formal, longer and implicit reaction, with which they preferred the negative politeness style involving cautious phrases, and even giving more space for the request to be rejected (b). The interactional element is demonstrated by the negative politeness structures (if you have possibly...) and the degree of formality (Dear Ryan, I would like to know). All groups of respondents manifested the lowest preference for the option combining transactional and interactional structures (c), however, at the same time involving evident signs of deprecation for the request and thus putting the sender into an unequal, less powerful role. The case 1 depicts a tendency of both the English and Czech respondents towards a more direct informal communication contributing to a closer relationship. The closer relationship obviously guarantees, no matter which cultural context is dealt with, that participants wish to cooperate. The politeness structures chosen by the German respondents manifest a certain tendency towards formality and cautiousness, which does not contribute to closeness in informal relationships.

Figure 1: Email opening in informal business relationship	Q1	Czech	German	English
	a	116	29	12
	b	101	57	9
	c	44	23	3
	d	91	48	9
<i>A proper introduction of an email to a colleague you have been on first terms with. You are writing an email to your counterpart in England after a long time to make sure all the arrangements for the mutual project have been settled.</i>	Q1 %	Czech	German	English
Hi Ryan, I am writing to find out about the arrangements...	a	42	27	44

Dear Ryan, I would like to know if you have possibly managed to collect the figures	b	36	54	33
Hi Ryan, sorry to push you, but would you send me	c	16	22	11
Hi Ryan, how are things out there? I wonder if you can send me the info about	d	33	46	33



Scenario 2: Reaction to a pleasantry

Participants: a compliment recipient and a compliment provider.

Background: Choose the most likely reaction. You are walking in a corridor at your workplace on a weekday. An English speaking colleague of yours meets you and greets you: "Hi Jana! Nice bag!" as she walks by.

Reactions	Description	Occurrence
a) Thank you. Yours is great as well!	interactional, positive politeness	maximum occurrence Czech and English, 2nd German
b) Oh, no, it's just an old one.	transactional, deprecating	insignificant occurrence
c) Hi Linda.	transactional, implicit, lacking empathetic component	lowest occurrence
d) Oh, thank you, Linda, will you be coming to the meeting?	combining transactional and interactional	maximum occurrence German, 2nd Czech

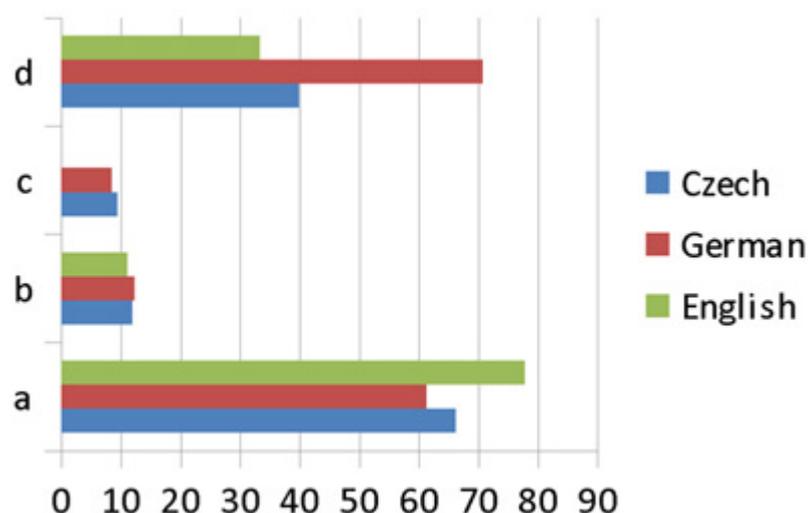
Interpretation of scenario 2

The situation scenario is set as informal and does not involve any critical issue which would put respondents' losing face at stake. The English respondents opted mostly for (a), the interactional reaction comprising a positive politeness structure (Yours is great as well). The choice made manifests a trend to pay back a compliment, obviously regardless the truth concept. The second most likely reaction chosen by the English group was (d). However, 78% chose option (a) and only 33% chose the option (d). The same choices were made by the Czech group and also the distribution of the preferences was similar: 66% respondents opted for (a) and 40% opted for (d) reactions which show an obvious tendency to involve a transactional part of the utterance (will you be coming to the meeting) into the answer. There is a slightly

higher number of Czech respondents opting for the (d) reaction than within the English group. The German group of respondents chose the (d) option as the most likely reaction (70%), their second most likely reaction (a) being the interactional and positive politeness manifesting (61%) one. The option (c) limiting itself to the minimum reaction, paying back only the obligatory greeting was not a preferred option to any group, neither was the transactional and self-deprecating option (b) .

The scenario 2 depicts a natural need or lack of need to pay back a pleasantry, regardless the value of the truth. The reaction of the Czech and English respondents shows a trend to manifesting positive politeness (pay back a pleasantry to please the counterpart), avert both self-deprecation and a reserved, distant reaction leading to a formal contact. This approach is evident also with the German group, which distinguishes that the minimalist answer (c) is not sufficient, neither the self-deprecating reaction gains any support. However, the German group focuses slightly more on the transactional component which contains an informative value.

Figure 2: Reaction to a pleasantry	Q2	Czech	German	English
	a	184	65	21
	b	33	13	3
	c	26	9	0
	d	111	75	9
<i>The most likely reaction. You are walking in a corridor at your workplace on a weekday. An English speaking colleague of yours meets you and greets you: "Hi Jana! Nice bag! ..., as she walks by. Your reaction:</i>	Q2 %	Czech	German	English
Thank you. Yours is great as well!	a	66	61	78
Oh, no, it's just an old one.	b	12	12	11
Hi Linda.	c	9	8	0
Oh, thank you, Linda, will you be coming to the meeting?	d	40	71	33



Scenario 3: Public reaction to poor argumentation

Participants: a presenter and a commenting person.

Background: The most likely reaction to poor argumentation of your colleague in his presentation.

Reactions	Description	Occurrence
a) (Silence.)	interactional, implicit, FSA	Second highest occurrence English
b) I simply don't agree with what you have said. The last month figures were missing.	transactional, explicit, FTA	lowest occurrence
c) I'm sorry I can't agree with that. Do I understand it right the last month figures have been deliberately omitted?	transactional, implicit, FTA	2nd Czech and German
d) Perhaps we can have a look at it once again after we have all the data complete ... including the last month figures.	combining transactional and interactional, implicit, negative politeness	highest occurrence

Interpretation of scenario 3

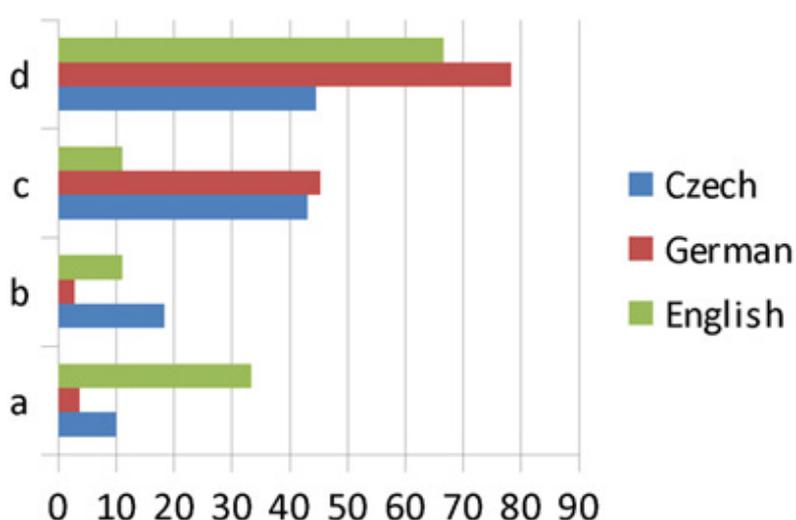
The situation scenario is set as formal, public and involving a critical incident with a potential to lose face either for the presenter or the commenting person (respondent). The English group of respondents demonstrated tendency (67%) to combine both transactional and interactional communication styles by opting for (d) as their most likely reaction. Their second most preferred option (33%) was the choice to remain silent (a). The same preference in terms of their first choices was demonstrated by the groups of Czech (45%) and German (78%) respondents. The Czech respondents opted for the transactional and implicit as their second most likely (43%) reaction; however, to a degree also opted for a face-threatening ("deliberately omitted") response (c). The German group showed almost identical reaction as their second choice (45% (c)). No group demonstrated any support to the openly transactional, face-threatening reaction.

Case 3 depicts a need to react to an obvious mistake. The scenario does not supply any information that the poor performance of the presenter would have any negative impact directly on the status of the commenting person (respondent). Some of the choices contain face-threatening structures; the option (a) is inherently face-saving, however does not contribute to efficiency of transmitting the true account of the reality within the whole communication.

The scenario shows that both Germans and Czechs feel a stronger need to put information right while seeking an acceptable format of the comment made in public (implicit (do I understand it right?), apologetic (I'm sorry), FTA (deliberately omitted)). The English group first choices comply with the ones of the Czech and German groups; however, the second most likely choice reveals a tendency to avoid FTA even at the cost of miscommunicating the true business performance if the commenting person's status is not at stake.

Figure 3: Public reaction to poor argumentation	Q3	Czech	German	English
	a	28	4	9
	b	51	3	3
	c	120	48	3

	d	124	83	18
<i>The most likely reaction. Your colleague arguments rather poorly in his presentation. The presentation has an impact on your performance assessment.</i>	Q3 %	Czech	German	English
(Silence.)	a	10	4	33
I simply don't agree with what you have said. The last month figures were missing.	b	18	3	11
I'm sorry I can't agree with that. Do I understand it right the last month figures have been deliberately omitted?	c	43	45	11
Perhaps we can have a look at it once again after we have all the data complete....including the last month figures.	d	45	78	67



Scenario 4: Reaction to a face-threatening act to secure your status

Participants: a presenter, a commenting person and participants superior to the commenting person in the hierarchy of the company

Background: The most likely reaction to a mistake endangering your position. How would you react to a misunderstanding during a presentation where the performance of your branch was ranked the last by mistake? All representatives of the parent company are present and the meeting is important to you.

Reactions	Description	Occurrence
a) I am sorry, I am not sure if the figures add up. Our performance must be much better.	transactional, explicit, FTA	maximum occurrence English
b) I strongly disagree with what you have just shown. I am sure we must have performed much better.	transactional, explicit, FTA	lowest occurrence
c) Excuse me, Kevin, actually the figures from our subsidiary don't seem to match. Can we get back	interactional, implicit, FSA	maximum occurrence Czech and German, 2nd

to it later after a check?		English
d) (Silence and waiting for a better opportunity to put the information right.)	interactional, implicit	no significant support

Interpretation of scenario 4

The situation scenario is set as formal; the suggested communication expects a public reaction of a commenting person or other participants. The scenario depicts a situation where a conflicting issue is to be solved; it explicitly stipulates a potential loss of the commenting person's status.

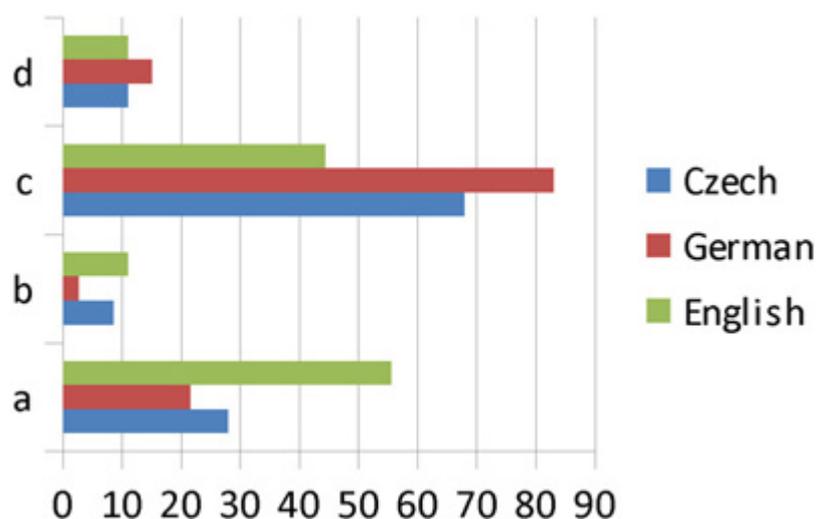
The English group opted mostly (56%) for the transactional and explicit choice, comprising FTA (a), with a clear evidence of self-reliance. Their second most likely reaction (44%) was a choice of an interactional nature, implicit and face-saving, however, still communicating the need for efficient correction and implementing self-support (c). Their second most likely choice was the first choice for both the Czech (68%) and German (83%) groups. The option (d) as the reaction, when silence would cover up for the mistake of the presenter, was not strongly supported (English 11%, German 15%, Czech 11%). That shows a tendency to avert an option lacking a self-reliant support to the commenting person. What seems to be rather interesting that the explicit reaction (b), which strongly protects the status of the commenting person and exercises a face threatening act, was the least supported option by the German group, and strongly contradicts the presumed explicitness of business negotiations in Germanic communication style.

The scenario 4 depicts a need to correct a mistake endangering one's own position while maintaining face-saving strategies in public. The dilemma to exercise self-support and the degree of the need to protect the counterpart's face in public were at stake.

The case shows that when a loss of the public face is at stake, the English group was able to opt for an explicit wording of the reaction so that they efficiently protect themselves (Our performance must be much better). The Czech and German groups seemed to decide not to explicitly protect their status, but rather to rectify the informative value of the statement. This might lead to a speculation that there is a slight apprehension to exercise one's own rights due to the positive politeness which transcends to issues of self-confidence. Exercising this attitude towards the status endangering phenomena would certainly be worth of further research.

Figure 4: Reaction to a face-threatening act to secure your status	Q4	Czech	German	English
	a	78	23	15
	b	24	3	3
	c	189	88	12
	d	31	16	3
<i>The most likely reaction. The performance of your branch was ranked the last by mistake in one of presentations at a meeting. All representatives of the parent company are present and the meeting is important for you.</i>	Q4 %	Czech	German	English
I am sorry, I am not sure if the figures add up. Our performance must be much better.	a	28	22	56

I strongly disagree with what you have just shown. I am sure we must have performed much better.	b	9	3	11
Excuse me, Kevin, actually the figures from our subsidiary don't seem to match. Can we get back to it later after a check?	c	68	83	44
(Silence and waiting for a better opportunity to put the information right.)	d	11	15	11



Scenario 5: Face-to-face first welcome

Participants: a visitor and a host.

Background: The most natural welcome. You have been in virtual contact with a colleague from abroad and you meet now for the first time.

Reactions	Description	Occurrence
a) Hi Paul, nice to meet you finally. Please do come in. Do you want to take off your coat? Sit down, please. Actually, I think you should have come earlier?	transactional, explicit, FTA	low occurrence, no English
b) Hi Paul, nice to meet you!.... Great, so would you like to make yourself comfortable? (pointing at a coat hanger) Can I get you anything to drink?	interactional, positive politeness	maximum occurrence Czech, 2nd highest German and English
c) Hi Paul. Good you are here. Shall we start?	transactional	lowest occurrence, no English
d) How are you, Paul? Very nice to meet you! Will you take a seat? Would you like to drink anything?	interactional, positive and negative politeness	maximum occurrence English, 2nd Czech and German

Interpretation of scenario 5

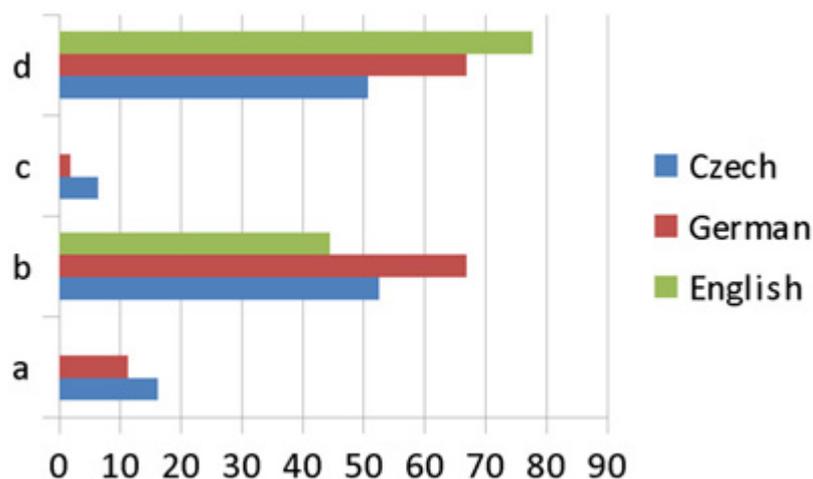
The situation scenario is set as formal, the suggested communication does not involve any public reaction, neither does it expect any potentially face-threatening communication development. The scenario depicts a situation where a host is to set a positive atmosphere to efficiently open a space for further natural personal contact.

The English group opted mostly (78%) for the interactional, both positive and negative politeness structures (d). Their second most likely choice (44%) was (b) interactional and exercising very positive politeness structures ("would you like to make yourself comfortable", showing directions, a personalized offer: "can I get you anything to drink"). The Czech group chose (53%) the (b) interactional, strongly positive politeness structures as their first choice; however, the second (51%) most likely reaction was (d) as the one combining positive and negative politeness structures. As evident from the responses, the difference (2%) is rather moderate. The German group opted equally (67%) for the choices (b) and (c).

The case 5 depicts a need to set a good start for further collaboration and seeks to find out how empathetic devices are implemented to establish effective rapport.

The case shows that options (a) and (c) gained very little support and no English group support at all. The lowest preference was given to the (c) option by all the groups, with no support from the English group. The (c) option provided a strong, almost an abrupt transactional focus, with no space for pleasantries. The reaction (a) being one of a clearly transactional nature, limits itself to explicit structures, and even a fact oriented remark reproaching the visitor missed the hosts' expectation about time accuracy. Another feature of the (a) reaction rests in rather an economical form of statements, lacking any grammatical speech tools of politeness, e.g. conditionals or question tags. Apparently, with all the groups there was a strong aversion to start the communication deliberately by stipulating constraints. However, still 16% of Czech and 11% of the German respondents saw it as appropriate, possibly with a desire to sound efficient.

Figure 5: Face-to-face first welcome	Q5	Czech	German	English
	a	45	12	0
	b	146	71	12
	c	18	2	0
	d	141	71	21
<i>The most natural welcome. You have been in virtual contact with a colleague from abroad and you meet now for the first time.</i>	Q5 %	Czech	German	English
Hi Paul, nice to meet you finally. Please do come in. Do you want to take off your coat? Sit down, please. Actually, I think you should have come earlier?	a	16	11	0
Hi Paul, nice to meet you!.... Great, so would you like to make yourself comfortable? (pointing at a coat hanger) Can I get you anything to drink?	b	53	67	44
Hi Paul. Good you are here. Shall we start?	c	7	2	0
How are you, Paul? Very nice to meet you! Will you take a seat? Would you like to drink anything?	d	51	67	78



Scenario 6: Pleasantry to close an appointment

Participants: a visitor and a host.

Background: The most natural and positive ending of a conversation. You are closing an appointment with your business counterpart you met for the first time.

Reactions	Description	Occurrence
a) It was very nice meeting you, Simon. Hope to see you soon.	interactional, implicit, positive politeness	maximum occurrence Czech, German, English
b) I am glad we met. So bye for now.	transactional, explicit, limited positive politeness	2nd Czech, 3rd German, 0 English
c) Thanks and safe journey home.	interactional, explicit	3rd Czech, 2nd German and English
d) Did you like it here?	transactional, explicit, self-assuring	lowest occurrence, 0 English

Interpretation of scenario 6

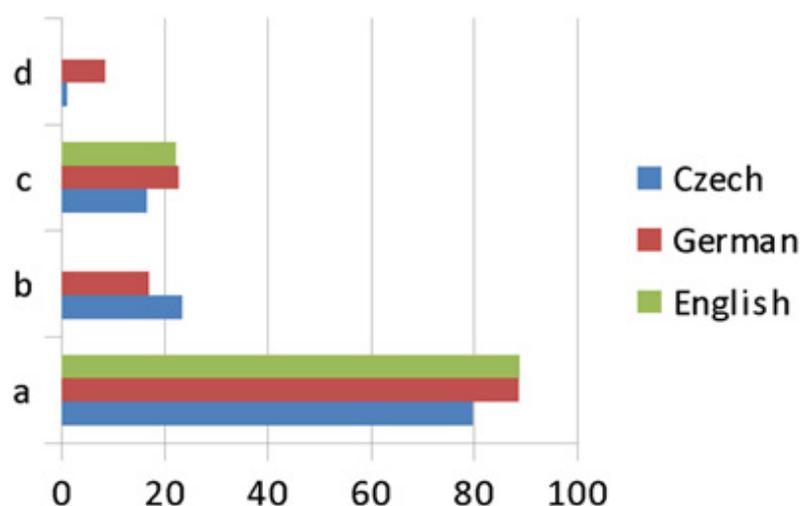
The situation scenario is set as formal, the expected communication does not involve any public reaction, nor any potentially face-threatening communication development. The respondents are instructed to sound positively; no conflicting issue is incorporated. The scenario depicts a situation where a host is to end up on a positive note to be able to continue the business relationship without constraints.

All the groups opted for (a) as the most likely reaction. The English group opted for this interactional, positive politeness demonstrating structure (a) in 89%, the German in 89% and the Czech group in 80%. The reaction (a) implicitly promises further cooperation. The second most likely reaction of the English group (22%) was (c) the interactional, structure, however, getting a much lower preference than the first option. The Czech group opted for the transactional structure manifesting rather a limited element of positive politeness (b) in their second most likely reaction (23%). The apparent lack of support for this option by the English group (0%) tends to suggest that the transactional and rather an abrupt ending does not, in their view, meet the requirement of a positive note and does not imply there would be a follow-up to this encounter. The German group opted for (c) as the second most likely reaction, choosing thus an interactional structure (23%) as the English group. The lowest support was given to (d) as the purely transactional structure which is uttered to self-assure the host but not the visitor and does not maintain rapport between the two.

The scenario 6 depicts a need or lack of need to establish rapport and to assure the feeling of a mutually pleasant encounter enabling the participants to continue smoothly in their business relationship.

The scenario shows the English group tends to imply there would be a continuation to this meeting, and so do the other groups, however, 23% of the Czech and 17% of the German respondents still find (c) as adequate, though there is no hint referring to the future involved. The German group in 8% also wanted to receive feedback instead of providing a visitor with a pleasantry. The Czech respondents manifested a preference in their second choice to the (b) before the (c) answer, which might suggest that a less experienced language user does not see the value in providing interactional structures. This, to a degree, holds true for the German group, though the tokens differ. The least favourable option for all the groups was (d), however, still 8% of the German group opted for it, ignoring that the option does provide the value to the host only. The option (d) manifests a lack of confidence (either communicative or personal) and lack of willingness to provide gain to the counterpart, though there is no cost to be borne on the side of the speaker.

Figure 6: Pleasantry to close an appointment	Q6	Czech	German	English
	a	222	94	24
	b	65	18	0
	c	46	24	6
	d	3	9	0
	Q6 %	Czech	German	English
It was very nice meeting you, Simon. Hope to see you soon.	a	80	89	89
I am glad we met. So bye for now.	b	23	17	0
Thanks and save journey home.	c	17	23	22
Did you like it here?	d	1	8	0



Scenario 7: Making it clear during negotiations

Participants: a person asking for clarification and a business counterpart.

Background: The most likely format of a question during negotiations. You are not happy about explanations and the counterpart is not a very a close friend of yours.

Reactions	Description	Occurrence
a) Excuse me, I am really very sorry to bother you, but would you have a minute to discuss it more in detail?	interactional, implicit, positive politeness, FSA, deprecating	maximum occurrence Czech and German
b) Excuse me, would you spare a minute on this?	transactional, implicit, negative politeness, formal	2nd Czech, German, English
c) Sorry, could you help me out with this?	transactional, implicit, negative politeness	maximum occurrence English
d) Don't understand it.	transactional, explicit, FTA	lowest occurrence

Interpretation of scenario 7

The situation in the scenario is set as formal; the expected communication involves a demand for clarification, which may be potentially face-threatening both for the asking person and for the counterpart. The scenario does not imply there are other participants present; neither does it suggest there is a deeper conflict besides the one misunderstanding. The respondents are encouraged to feel entitled to ask for the clarification, but they are not advised about the desired tone of such a request.

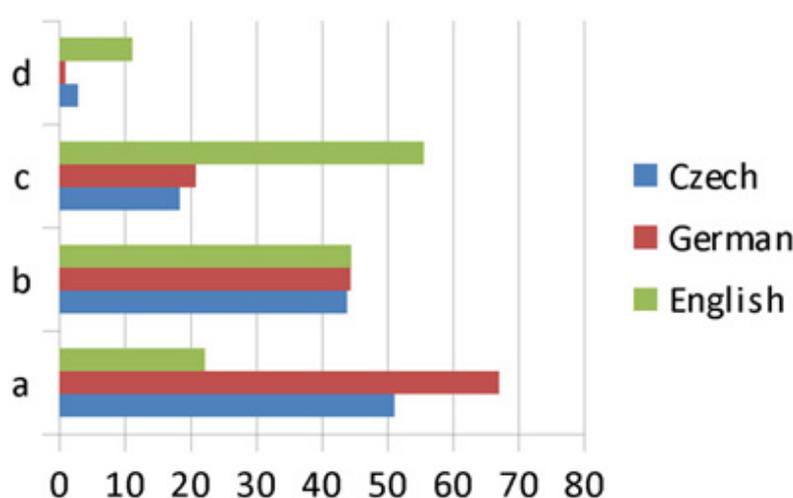
The English group chose (c) as their most likely option (56%) opting thus for a transactional, implicit and negative politeness demonstrating reaction in not a formal tone. Both the Czech (51%) and German (67%) respondents preferred (a) as the most likely option, which involved interactional structures and manifestation of positive politeness in deprecating mode, providing the counterpart an opportunity to utilize a FSA. The second most likely choice opted for by all the groups in 44% was the transactional, implicit, negative politeness demonstrating reaction (b) with a slightly higher level of formality and depersonalization than in (c). The spontaneous decision in all the groups eliminated the option (d) as the least likely. The option (c) sounds purely transactional and explicit, does not efficiently establish space for the counterpart to politely offer clarification and thus the passive aggressive tone might lead to a face-threatening interpretation.

The case 7 depicts a need or lack of need to maintain a positive tone during a transactional part of a business encounter where flow is not smooth while exercising the desired equality in roles during negotiations.

The case suggests that both the Czech and German groups demonstrated a tact maxim at their expense and bore the burden of the FSA in a form of a formal and deprecating tone. On the other hand, the English group in this situation tended to a less formal reaction, implicitly demonstrating the need for clarification and the burden of the blame to be shared, which apparently transmits a signal of self-confidence and control over the situation.

Figure 7: Making it clear during negotiations	Q7	Czech	German	English
	a	142	71	6
	b	122	47	12
	c	51	22	15

	d	8	1	3
<i>The most likely format of a question during negotiations. The counterpart is not a very a close friend of yours.</i>	Q7 %	Czech	German	English
Excuse me, I am really very sorry to bother you, but would you have a minute to discuss it more in detail?	a	51	67	22
Excuse me, would you spare a minute on this?	b	44	44	44
Sorry, could you help me out with this?	c	18	21	56
Don't understand it.	d	3	1	11



Conclusion

The dominance of English culture should not be automatic in business communication even if the concept of business English as a lingua franca is widely accepted. The conducted research evaluated how native speakers react and what they feel when talking to central European nations. The results of the survey described above lead us to a possibility of creating certain conventions for business English as a lingua franca so that communication strategies applied in business communication could lead to an automatization of politeness to gain the win-win benefits, such as pragmatic language competencies with long term profitability and sustainability of the business. Practical application of the given results are business consequences and didactic consequences for business English learning - Intercultural communication for students and management.

The concept of the Czech politeness has been developing and cannot be reduced to the aspect of indirectness only. The phase of development of the modern Czech society after the fall of the Iron Curtain reached a momentum which gives a certain ground to believe that the young democracy teething problems have been undergoing a consolidation. The more emancipated phase may cause switching politeness concepts. The rising democracy phase brought about frequent challenges in communication, first, due to the immense political and economic changes in the society, second, due to the long-lasting soul seeking so inherent to all life organisms undergoing the processes of maturation. The historical and geographical predetermination of the Czech and generally Central European communication style might lead to an impression that the negative face politeness will prevail and last. However, the influential element of ELF, the continuous globalization and the maturation of independent nations having appeared

on the map of Europe as new democracies, give a reason to perceive a gradual shifting towards the less cautious and more self-confident elements of a positive face communication. These implications, however, must be taken with the reservation of the described context, limiting thus the claims to the Czech context, possibly to the Central European countries for centuries having experienced the common historical experience under the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The evaluation of the politeness and its theoretical background production has always been an interest for linguists in the past decades; however, the production of behaviour to be applied in the practice has been neglected due to many reasons (Hickey and Stewart 2005: 7). Therefore, we have tried to implement these principles in several Czech universities, including the introduction of two new subjects focusing on the cultural aspects of business communication. Thus, we have tried to eradicate the commonly shared preference for grammar exercises and focus on grammar accuracy in communication education of management and business students, bringing the notion of cultural aspects of communication into the curriculum. Further research into intercultural business communication and the role of politeness should focus on creating particular communication strategies transferable into global business environment.

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