

Eötvös Loránd University  
Faculty of Humanities

**EXTRACT OF PHD THESIS**

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*Cognitive pragmatic research on constructing interpersonal relationships in Hungarian  
and Polish requests*

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## 1. The subject and structure of the thesis

The subject of the thesis is a cognitive pragmatic research on construing the interpersonal relation, and to be more exact, construing the interpersonal relationship in requests, which has been examined in Hungarian and Polish requests. The research presented in the dissertation concentrates not only on the construing role of *tu/ vous* forms, but also on such a language solutions with which we shape the interpersonal relationship (elaboration of the request, its directness and indirectness, stylistic solutions, social deixis). The usage of *tu/ vous* forms connects with typical social context, and also shows relation with the elaboration of the request. The typical elaboration and usage of *tu/ vous* forms occur in typical social contexts. The dissertation is an empirical study on the conjunctions of typical elaboration and typical social context. In connection with it this dimensional nature of politeness is presented, and the relations of these dimensions are studied in the thesis. One of the areas of the research are the avoidance strategies of marking interpersonal relations, since avoidance of marking the interpersonal relation is one of the ways to maintain and construct the interpersonal relation. One of the most commonly used strategy is the virtual use of plural first person forms, and so the dissertation presents also an experiment concentrated on referential interpretation of plural first person forms in relation with processed contextual factors.

The research data was gathered among Hungarian and Polish native speakers, and Polish speakers of Hungarian as a second language (who participated in the research using Hungarian as L2). For this reason in the thesis comparative pragmatic issues are also mentioned. This gives the opportunity to formulate hypotheses as to the impact of the L1 interpersonal relationships shaping the L2.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows: In the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter I describe the subject of the dissertation, used methodology, and the main research questions. The 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter I give the theoretical background of the dissertation, in which I give cognitive functional interpretation of key notions used in dissertation, the interpersonal relation, constructing, social context and deixis, the request as a speech act, and politeness. In the next chapters I present the outcome of empirical research.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter I present, in a detailed way, the relations of constructing the requests and shaping the interpersonal relation. The presented empirical research was concentrated on indirectness, expressed epistemic uncertainty, and stylistic solutions.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter is the comprehensive presentation of *tu/ vous* forms in requests and their role in shaping the interpersonal relation. The chapter presents the outcome of the

research regarding usage of *tu/ vous* forms and relating with the attitude. The 5<sup>th</sup> chapter concentrated on avoiding strategies of marking interpersonal relation – which could be observed in the answers given by Polish, Hungarian, and Polish speakers of Hungarian, in the discourse completion tests. Apart from the types of strategies the chapter presents the typical social context of their occurrence, and the relation between avoidance strategies and indirectness. The 6<sup>th</sup> chapter shows the relation and influence of spatial and social relations on virtual use of plural second person forms. The experiment presented in the chapter is a research on the spatial and social relations on referential interpretation of WE, and on interpreting the utterance as commissive or directive. The 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the dissertation summarizes the work.

## **2. Theoretical background**

The main thought of the work is detection and recognition of the interplay of language activity and social word. The language activity is understood as a social cognitive activity (Verschueren 1999), and in such terms the interpersonal and intersubjective function means the two poles of language activity (Tátrai 2017). Depending on context they are realized to different extent. Having said that people have social nature, with language activity they maintain and shape interpersonal relations. Maintenance and shaping the interpersonal relation is the main function of communication (Tomasello 2015, Dunbar 2009).

The interpersonal relations, are the relations created between and during the interaction, and which contain the attitude of participants and their contextual knowledge about each other. What is more each interpersonal relation presents such a relation, which shows socio-cultural embeddedness, the categories and roles represented by participants. The interpersonal relations are not static, they should be understood more as a process, than a form (Alder–Rosenfeld–Proctor 2011: 257). During each interaction we shape and maintain them. The duality mentioned in the sentence above (dynamic and typical character) shows in interpersonal relations and thus it shows in language activity. The interpersonal relations are dynamic since they are created each time during the interaction. The perception and processing the social word happens in a similar way as processing other elements, and so during the interaction the categorization process of social context takes place, which results in activating the known schemas (Aronson 2011: 144). Shaping and maintaining interpersonal relation means using not only *tu/ vous* forms, addressive forms, but also is the general characteristics of constructing utterance, what shows a strong relation with social context of given situation.

The context, the social world of the participants, and in connection with it their mental and physical world, has a basic role in shaping interpersonal relations (Verschueren 1999, Tátrai 2011). A context is a dynamic system of relations, participants and their interpersonal relations shape all the time with their verbal and nonverbal activity during the discourse. During the interaction participants with their linguistic choices ground social relations, but in the same time they shape them. Social deictic elements are essential manifestations of interpersonal relations, which engage contextual knowledge of interpersonal relations. The social deictic elements identify roles of participants, and activate socio-cultural knowledge. The personal deixis activate the role of the participant, attitude deixis their socio-cultural attitude (Tátrai 2017). Social deixis is expressed mainly by such linguistic elements as personal pronouns, pronominal expressions, morphological solutions (that mark person) and addressive forms. These elements very often times have two functions – they can work as personal deictic elements and also express attitude deixis (Laczkó–Tátrai 2012).

Our linguistic choices from the potential are driven by relations understood in joint attention scene, knowledge about social relation (that means also socio-cultural situatedness), and intentions regarding shaping interpersonal relation. Shaping interpersonal relation is a series of choices of language expressions, which adjust to the social expectations. The choices are made not only regarding *tu/ vous* forms, but also elaboration characteristic for the given speech act. In such a terms contextual relations have essential role in the constructing, and so in constructing interpersonal relations. Since interpretation of interpersonal relation undergoes the same processes as interpretation of the other elements of word, notions used for describing constructing can be used in description of constructing interpersonal relations.

Constructing is processing and understanding (Tolcsvai 2013), creating conceptual scene in one of more possible ways (Langacker 2008). Constructing interpersonal relations happens with language symbols, that means interpersonal relations are not mirrored by language symbols but constructed with them. Knowledge arranged in schemas are activated during given interaction. Activation of schemas happens based on perception of interaction. Nonetheless it has to be said, that the participants of interaction represent in the same time more than one social category. During the interaction such a category is activated that is thought to be adequate, the rest of the categories stay in the background (Kwiatkowska 2009).

In the whole dissertation shaping interpersonal relations are examined in requests. The request has not been chosen accidentally – to have more chances that our request will be

fulfilled by the recipient the speaker should take in to account his/ her interpersonal relation and he or she should shape it in a adequate way.

In the gathered material the purpose of the utterance is to make recipient to act in a such a way that is expected by the speaker, and in such a terms – regarding illocutionary force – that should be understood as equal with speaker's intention (Szili 2004) – utterances gathered in discourse completion test should be regarded directives. The variability of requests gathered in my material and their elaboration connected with social context are examined based on my empirical research.

Politeness in the whole thesis is understood as shaping and maintaining interpersonal relations. The motor of the politeness is people's need to maintain and shape relations with other people. That is why constructing, as a process, is a crucial characteristics of politeness. Politeness is a such a behavior, that is said to be adequate in the social context of given interaction, and which differ from not polite behavior, that the latter transcends the borders of polite behavior (Watts 2003). In my work I understand politeness similarly to Watts works, and so, as such a behavior, that maintains and shapes interpersonal relations, and which can be interpreted and evaluated in the context of given interaction, and what is more that can be described by the notion o adequacy (see: Locher 2004: 90).

### **3. Methodology used in thesis**

One of the main assumptions of cognitive linguistics is connecting theoretical and empirical studies (Tolcsvai Nagy 2013, Bańcerowski 2009, Ladányi–Tolcsvai Nagy 2008). The results of my research has been gathered not only from Hungarian and Polish native speakers but also from Polish speakers of Hungarian as a second language (who participated in the research in Hungarian).

I have been studying maintaining and shaping interpersonal relation based on the researches held between 2008 and 2016. The research in concentrated on schematic knowledge regarding maintenance and shaping interpersonal relations, activating this knowledge, and so can be used for describing tendencies, relations, connections. I have been using such a methods with which schematic knowledge is activated. Data obtained with interviews and tests, and so data induced by the researcher, is often times used in social sciences, since it makes possible to gather big amount of data. If we would like to make some hypothesis, prove or deny it, we need repeatable contexts, and we need schematic knowledge to be activated.

Data gathered with such a methodology activates schematic knowledge characteristic for the given circumstances, and in such a way engages our contextual knowledge. Of course it is worth to compare obtained data with results obtained by other researchers, from spontaneous language use, taking into account their context. Nevertheless for this moment we do not have spoken corpora neither for Hungarian, nor for Polish.

The group of responders was aged from 19 to 38, the participants or already had university diploma or were during their university studies. The participants were Hungarian and Polish native speakers, and when needed Polish speakers of Hungarian as a second language were also engaged (student in fourth and fifth year on Jagiellonian University).

The starting point of the research was discourse completion test, that I conducted in 2008. The Hungarian and Polish native speakers have taken part in it in their native language, and Polish speakers of Hungarian in Hungarian (students in fourth and fifth year on Hungarian Philology, Jagiellonian University). The number of participants was as below: 43 native speakers of Hungarian, 44 native speakers of Polish and 17 Polish speaker of Hungarian as L2. Their task was to make requests in 29 different situations.

The next test, that has been taken in 2011, contained two parts – a shorter discourse completion test and attitude test. In the research I was interested in three questions – how differ the addressive forms used in workplace depending on it if it was national or private organization, and in connection with this if we can observe differences in attitude. The third question was what is the social context that evokes avoidance strategies (in terms of marking social relation) (see also Veres-Guspiel 2012). The total number of participants was 65, 32 women and 33 men. In the given groups the number of participants was as below: women working at national company: 25, men working at national company: 8, women working at international company: 10, men working at national company: 24. The participants of attitude test (2011) were the same as for the discourse completion test. In the test I asked about frequency and typical contexts of usage for *tu* forms, furthermore what are the responders' feeling about using *tu* forms, and about frequency and typical contexts of usage for *vous* forms, furthermore what are the responders' feeling about using *vous* forms. In the last question I asked to evaluate the adequacy of asking for a way, that engaged different addressive forms.

Based on the tests from 2008 I have conducted in 2012 a test, during which I asked participants to evaluate the adequacy of given requests in given context. The given utterances were evaluated 1-6 scale, and 1-10 scale (where 1 stood for the less applicable one and 6 or 10 for the most applicable one). The test has been conducted between Hungarian and Polish

native speakers, and Polish speakers of Hungarian, who have taken part in test in Hungarian. The total number of participants was 43, the age, similarly to the tests described before, was between 21-33.

The experiment concentrated on referential interpretation of WE, and connected to it interview has taken place in 2012 and 2016. The subject of the experiment was virtual use of WE and its referential interpretation, and it built from two parts: an experiment and short interview. The total number of participants was 86. The participants were Polish and Hungarian university students and people after university studies, aged 19-36. Each of them has taken part individually. In the first step I asked them to mark on schemata to who refers WE used in given situations, and then I asked about their motivations. The answers were recorded on dictaphone. In the answers the participants often times talked about motivations, and also they mentioned how they interpreted the utterance used in the experiment.

#### **4. The outcome of the research**

##### **4.1. The research questions**

In my work I searched answers for the questions below:

- 1) What connection can be observed between constructing requests and their elaboration, indirectness, and what connection can be observed between indirectness of request and politeness, furthermore what is the connection between *tu/ vous* forms and indirectness of requests?
- 2) With what schematic knowledge (regarding interpersonal relations) connects with the usage of *tu/ vous* forms and what is their role in constructing?
- 3) In what way and in what social context the avoidance strategies are used, furthermore how is realized the avoidance of marking interpersonal relation in constructing requests?
- 4) What characterizes referential interpretation of first person plural forms, depending on processing social and spatial relations?
- 5) How are used the types of elaboration by Polish, Hungarian and Polish speakers of Hungarian as L2?
- 6) What is the connection between constructing requests and used forms with language politeness?

Based on the outcome of the research presented in dissertation it can be said, that the elaboration of request shows tendentious connections with the social context. The most important results, regarding above presented questions, are disclosed below. It has to be said, that the results regarding the question number 5 – because of its comprehensive nature – are presented in connection with certain topics.

#### **4.2. Elaboration of requests**

The elaboration stands of two compounds – the way how much the request is elaborated (addressive forms, preparatory strategies, supportive strategies), and in what way it is elaborated (indirectness, lexical choices, expressed epistemic uncertainty, conventionality). That is why the elaboration has comprehensive nature. Based on the research it has to be said, that the big extent of elaboration cannot be identified with politeness, and to be more exact not in each social context. The speaker has to take in to the account contextual relations, and elaborate the request in an adequate way.

Regarding indirectness (Panther–Thornburg 1998) of requests the bigger were social differences between the participants, that is horizontal and vertical distance, the more often times indirect requests were used, and conventional requests were used to the bigger extent. The extent of indirectness also rose when the weight of the request rose. The connection between indirectness and politeness had been investigated by other researchers (Wierzbicka 1991, Blum–Kulka 1987, 1989), in my work I focused on the connection between indirectness and usage of *tu/ vous* forms. In case of *vous* forms in the most of cases indirect requests were used, in case of *tu* forms the rate of direct requests rose, with decreasing horizontal and vertical distance. On the recipients side as optimal solutions were evaluated the most often times used ones. What is more, based on gather data, it can be said that L1 has a strong influence on production and reception in L2. The indirectness is connected with supportive strategies or their lack – in case of close, confidential relation (friend) the supportive strategies were used to the smallest extent. Nonetheless the supportive strategies were used in small extent when the request was very indirect (non-conventional indirect request).

Regarding epistemic uncertainty it has to be said, that in case of requests the extent of expressed uncertainty had and influence on evaluation of the request (in terms of adequacy). The uncertainty occurred to the smaller extent in the requests that had small weight, which the responders used when asking a friend. During the attitude test the best evaluation was given to such a requests, that contained conventional rate of epistemic uncertainty. Apart form this the extent of expressed uncertainty is not only context-dependent but also language-dependent

– in the request of Polish responders it occurred to the smaller extent than in those gathered from Hungarians.

#### **4.3. Usage of *tu/vous* forms in requests**

The interpersonal relations are continuously shaped during our language activity, and so usage of *tu/ vous* forms is not so static, nor so driven by strong expectations, as it was suggested before by descriptive works. What is more the interpersonal relations are shaped not only by *tu/ vous* forms but also by elaboration of request. The addressive system of Hungarian and Polish (in this case in a smaller extent) undergo some changes, which concern mainly usage of *tu/ vous* forms, but in the same time have influence on role of other language choices in shaping interpersonal relation. Hungarians are often times uncertain about usage of *tu/ vous* forms (see also Domonkosi 2002), the evaluation of *tu* differs, and so in shaping interpersonal relation other constructing elements, and avoidance strategies get bigger roles. That is why *tu/ vous* forms do not get independent role in shaping interpersonal relation, but in correlation with elaboration of the request.

#### **4.4. Avoidance strategies in requests**

The uncertainty regarding usage of *tu/ vous* forms gives bigger area to avoidance strategies in such a situations, in which the responder cannot or doesn't want to make a choice between *tu/ vous* form.

Differences between Polish and Hungarians couldn't be observed regarding when the responders used avoidance strategies. Regarding the types of strategies the usage was similar, although in Polish impersonal forms are used more frequently, what can be observed in other aspects of constructing requests. The avoidance strategies were used most often times when a speaker should ask not known person, or when he/she should make a request with big weight when the subordination relations were strong. One of the types avoidance strategies is statement made in first singular person, which was frequently indirect request (eg. *I don't find the fitting room.*) – which often times was not supported by any expressive speech act. The other type was first singular person statement, but supported by expressive speech act (eg.: *Excuse me!*), and due to stylistic characteristics, and due to the fact that conventionally is used with *tu/ vous* forms, partly presents interpersonal relation. The next type was the strategy using pronoun *valaki* (*someone*) which was used in a such a situations, when the speaker did not mark the person, that is concerned in the utterance, and in the interaction there were more people.

One of the most often used avoidance strategy was using first person plural forms in such a situations, when the given action, regarding its nature, could be realized by one person. When the given action can be done by one person the first person plural forms get virtual character. It is important to say, that avoiding marking person was realized with indirect requests, and strong connection can be observed between indirectness and avoidance strategies. The indirect request occurred the more often, the bigger was horizontal and vertical distance – if the speaker was on subordinate position in relation to addressee. Similarly the avoidance strategies were used when vertical and horizontal distance was big, or the weight of the request was big.

#### **4.5. Virtual use of WE and processing social and spatial relations**

The results of the test shows that processing plural pronoun in specific situations is influenced by processing spatial and social relations. It can be observed that the bigger were the differences between contextual factors, and the situation is characterized by stronger cultural expectations the more unified were the answers. Regarding socio-cultural factor that impact interpretation was the age of the participant (and in connection to this socio-culturally defined relations) and the sex of participant. The influence of spatial relations was bigger when smaller were social differences (age, sex, relations of power). The results of the test and answers to the interview questions certify that the responders interpreted the utterance as permission for closing the window. When the speaker was far from the window 50% of responders pointed out people close to the window, and interpreted the question as command. When the speaker was far from the window 50% of responders pointed out people sitting next to the window, and interpreted the utterance as a command.

#### **4.6. Elaboration of requests in typical social contexts and politeness**

Based on the results it can be said, that the requests are elaborated in correlation with understood social context, and the interpersonal relations are shaped by elaboration of speech acts. What is more, based on the results we can say that the speech acts which have primary intersubjective function have also interpersonal function as well.

Politeness understood as shaping and maintaining interpersonal relation cannot be described as set of rigid rules in pre-defined social context, but adaptive activity, that supports adequate processing and elaboration of interpersonal relations. Politeness than is a such behavior, which is evaluated by the participants of discourse as adequate in the context of given interaction, and which differs form not polite behavior in a such a way, that the latter goes

over the boundaries of expected behavior (Watts 2003). In such a way language politeness is a series of choices, and shows strong context-dependency. The purpose of politeness is shaping and maintaining interpersonal relations, and reducing potential interpersonal frictions. Consequently politeness shouldn't be described with notions of minimum—maximum, but with the notion of adequacy.

## **Publications and conference lectures related to the thesis**

### **Publications**

#### **2017**

A térbeli és társas viszonyok hatása a többes számú első személyű formák értelmezésére (The influence of spatial and social relations on interpretation of forms in first person plural)

*Magyar Nyelvőr*, accepted to print

#### **2013**

Kérések konstruálása – kidolgozottság, indirektség, konvencionáltság hatása a megnyilatkozások udvariasságára (Constructing requests – the influence of elaboration, indirectness, conventionality on politeness of the utterance) In: *Társadalmi változások – nyelvi változások. Alkalmazott nyelvészeti kutatások a Kárpát-medencében. A XXII. MANYE Kongresszus előadásai.* Editor: Tóth Sziergiej, 289-296. Budapest–Szeged: MANYE – Szegedi Egyetemi Kiadó Juhász Gyula Felsőoktatási Kiadó.

#### **2012**

A személyközi viszonyok megjelölésének elkerülési stratégiái (Avoidance strategies of marking interpersonal relationship) In: *Féluton 7. Az ELTE BTK Nyelvtudományi Doktori Iskolájának konferenciája.* Editor: Parapatics Andrea, Budapest [http://linguistics.elte.hu/studies/fuk/fuk11/Veres-Guspiel\\_KESZ.pdf](http://linguistics.elte.hu/studies/fuk/fuk11/Veres-Guspiel_KESZ.pdf)

A tegező és nemtegező formák használata a magyar anyanyelvűek és magyarul tanuló lengyelek körében (Usage of Tu/ Vous forms among Hungarian native speakers and Polish speakers of Hungarian as second language) In: *Magyar-lengyel kapcsolatok: kontrasztív nyelvészeti, irodalmi és kultúrális kutatás, Vol. I.*, editors: Koutny Ilona, Dávid Mária, Németh Szabolcs, Paweł Kornatowski, 38-47, Poznań: ProDruk

## **2011**

A tegező és nemtegező formák használata a magyar és a lengyel egyetemisták nyelvében (Usage of Tu/ Vous forms among Polish and Hungarian university students) In: *THL2: A magyar nyelv és kultúra tanításának szakfolyóirata, Journal of teaching Hungarian as 2nd Language and Hungarian Culture*. 2011/1.-2, 38–55, Budapest: Balassi Bálint Intézet.

## **Conference lectures**

### **2016**

2016. June 10-12, Split, 7th International Conference on Intercultural Pragmatics and Communication - INPRA 2016, title of the lecture: Politeness – Indirectness, Conventionality and Interpersonal Relationship

### **2015**

2015. November 25–26, Warsaw, University of Warsaw, Kerényi Grácia Emlékkonferencia (Kerényi Grácia Memorial Conference), title of the lecture: Pragmatika és fordítás – lengyel-magyar kontrasztív vizsgálatok eredményeinek alkalmazhatósága a fordításban és a nyelvtanításban (Pragmatics and translation – the possibilities of applying the results of polish-hungarian contrastive research)

### **2014**

2014. February 5–6, Budapest, ELTE BTK - Socio-cultural factors in style, title of the lecture: Influence of socio-cultural factors on elaboration and prototypicality of requests – linguistic politeness as social interaction

### **2013**

2013. March 26–28, Budapest – MANYE XXIII- NYELV-TÁRSADALOM-KULTÚRA, title of the lecture: Interkulturális és multikulturális perspektívák – Személyközi viszonyok nyelvi jelölése többes számú névmások használatában (Marking the interpersonal relationships with plural personal pronouns)

### **2012**

2012. April 12–14, Szeged – MANYE XXII, Társadalmi változások – nyelvi változások. Alkalmazott nyelvészeti kutatások a Kárpát-medencében, title of the lecture: A kérés

prototípusai – lengyel magyar kontrasztív vizsgálat eredményei (Prototypes of requests – results of polish–hungarian contrastive research)

2012. September 20–22, Łódź – Pragmatyka 2012 , title of the lecture: Grzeczność językowa a niebezpośredniość aktów mowy (Politeness and indirectness)

2012. October 3–5, Łódź – Talk – Action - Interaction title of the lecture: Influence of contextual factors on constructing meaning of first plural personal pronoun

2012. September 17–18, Wrocław – Cognitive Linguistics 2012, title of the lecture: Politeness - prototypicality, perspective and space

### 2011

2011. March 21–22, Pozna - Pomiędzy językami Europy Środkowo Wschodniej , title of the lecture: A tegező és nemtegező formák használata a magyar anyanyelvűek és magyarul tanuló lengyelek körében (Usage of *Tu/ Vous* forms among Polish and Hungarian university students)

2011. October 6–7, Budapest – Félúton , title of the lecture: A személyközi viszonyok megjelölésének elkerülési stratégiái (Avoidance strategies of marking interpersonal relationship)

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