

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

Cultural outsiders evaluations of (im)politeness in France

Isosävi, Johanna Marika

2020-07

Isosävi, J M 2020, ' Cultural outsiders evaluations of (im)politeness
in France ', Journal of Politeness Research , vol. 16 , no. 2 , pp. 249 28

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/332071>

<https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2017-0051>

unspecified

publishedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

Johanna Isosävi*

Cultural outsiders' evaluations of (im)politeness in Finland and in France

<https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2017-0051>

Received November 15, 2017; Revised June 13, 2018; Accepted July 13, 2018

Abstract: Intercultural interaction may be complicated by differing verbal and nonverbal displays of (im)politeness. Yet cultural outsiders' evaluations of (im)politeness have not been widely examined. To fill this gap, this study investigated perceptions of Finnish politeness among French people living in Finland and perceptions of French politeness among Finns currently or previously living in France. Focus groups were used in order to study culturally shared (im)politeness norms and their variations. Based on a dialogical discourse analysis of five focus group discussions, it is argued that personal space emerges as a salient factor for politeness in Finland, while verbal and nonverbal rapport is more important in France. These overarching themes – personal space and rapport – led to discussions about greetings, silence and holding doors open. Greeting and opening doors appeared more categorical in France, while silence was better tolerated in Finland. In addition to dominant norms, regional and individual variations were reported. Overall, (im)politeness norms appeared to be vaguer in Finland than in France. Building upon this study, future research should examine if changes emerge in Finnish (im)politeness norms related to rapport or if space remains more valued.

Keywords: (im)politeness, intercultural, norms, focus groups

1 Introduction

(Im)politeness plays a key role in maintaining interpersonal relationships, but problems may arise in intercultural situations based on differing verbal (e. g., greetings) and nonverbal (e. g., silence) displays of politeness. If (im)politeness is or is not present where it should or should not be (Kecskes 2015: 46), intercultural interaction may be impaired. Yet most studies of (im)politeness focus on contras-

*Corresponding author: Johanna Isosävi, University of Helsinki – Department of Languages, Helsinki, Finland, E-Mail johanna.isosavi@helsinki.fi

tive or cross-cultural analyses based on data collected separately from within different cultures (Haugh 2010: 139–140).

This study seeks to add a new perspective to (im)politeness by analyzing evaluations of intercultural interaction and concentrating on lesser studied languages and cultures (van der Bom and Grainger 2015: 173): in this case, Finnish and French. Reported differences exist in forms of address (Isosävi 2010; Isosävi and Lappalainen 2015) and in (im)politeness perceptions (Buchart 2010: 100). Most previous (im)politeness studies concentrated on cultural insiders' (*emic*) evaluations (Ogiermann and Suszczyńska 2011; Fukushima and Haugh 2014). This study, however, targets the less-studied cultural outsiders' (*etic*) perceptions, uncovering expectations and norms reflecting the concept of (im)politeness in their culture of origin.

More specifically, this study aimed to investigate culturally shared (im)politeness norms and their variations by analyzing how French people living in Finland perceive Finnish politeness and, alternatively, how Finns currently or previously living in France perceive French politeness. Applying the lesser utilized focus group method, this study examined the following questions: (1) Upon which moral grounds do Finns and French people consider the realizations or nonrealizations of different acts (im)polite? (2) What are the key verbal and nonverbal acts of (im)politeness discussed by Finns and French people? and (3) How is (im) politeness negotiated in focus group discussions? The first two questions tackle the description of verbal and nonverbal acts as well as the reasons behind their realizations or nonrealizations (cf. Barros García and Terkourafi 2015: 230). The third question concentrates on the focus groups discussions as interactional situations.

In this paper, I argue that the key feature of Finnish politeness focuses on respect for the personal space of the other person, whereas the French understanding of politeness emphasizes verbal or nonverbal rapport with another person. Despite the respective dominant norms, both regional and individual variations were reported. This paper begins by reviewing prior work on Finnish and French (im)politeness. I then discuss the discursive approach to culture and norms in section three, arguing that the sharedness and variability in norms needs to be balanced in (im)politeness research. In section four, I describe the focus group method and data. Then, in section five, I present a discussion of three primary themes: greetings, silence, and holding doors open. Finally, I discuss the implications of this proposed account of Finnish and French (im)politeness for future research.

2 Finnish and French (im)politeness studies

Little attention has been paid to (im)politeness in interactions between Finnish and French individuals, although several studies have focused separately on each of these languages. Following the classification by Grainger (2011: 169–172), I categorized previous Finnish and French (im)politeness studies into “first-wave Gricean approaches” and “second-wave post-modern approaches / discursive politeness”, based on the theoretical commitment mentioned in those papers.

First-wave studies primarily adopted Brown and Levinson's (1987) model on face-work involving categorizations of avoidance-based negative politeness (e. g., apologies, linguistic and nonlinguistic deference, hedges and impersonalizing mechanisms) and approach-based positive politeness (e. g., similar wants, familiar and joking behavior). The French linguist Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005a) developed Brown and Levinson's model by adding the face flattering act (FFA) (e. g., thank you) to positive politeness, and the categories of apoliteness, hyperpoliteness and impoliteness. Her study shows that both positive (e. g., compliments, thanks, good wishes) and negative politeness (e. g., apologies to repair territorial intrusion, indirect requests) are important in the everyday lives of the French (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005a: 40–42). During interactions in small French shops, politeness is all-pervasive, consisting of thanking, conditional requests and minimizers such as the adjective *petit*, ‘small’ (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005b). Yet the importance of positive and negative politeness is also attached to informal conversations (Traverso 1996: 229).

In contrast, Finnish politeness is described with respect to the personal space of the other person (Larjavaara 1999; 2007: 472–473), as withdrawing and being indirect and avoiding reference to the listener (Hakulinen 1987: 146; Yli-Vakkuri 2005). According to Larjavaara (1999), formal negative politeness has less value in the modern world, where age and status are losing their value, while positive politeness works better. Both Larjavaara's and Yli-Vakkuri's studies are based more on impressions and anecdotal examples rather than on empirical evidence. Thus, few empirical first-wave Finnish studies primarily focusing on (im)politeness exist. For example, Tiililä (1992) studied the violation of Gricean maxims in official letters, and Peterson and Vaattovaara (2014) compared the politeness markers *kiitos* [‘thank you’] and *pliis* [a loan of ‘please’]. In other Finnish studies, (im)politeness remains a secondary issue. For instance, Hakulinen (1987) examined avoiding personal reference, Muikku-Werner (1993) focused on imposition in public speech, and Peterson (2010) studied requests and forms of address.

Several recent Finnish and French studies adopted the second-wave approach (e. g., Watts 2003). This approach considers meaning as fluid and negotiable, placing interest on a discursive dispute – that is, what politeness means for speak-

ers (first-order politeness). The second-wave discursive approach was developed as a response to critics of the first-wave approach. These critiques argue that the approach decontextualizes speech acts, overly focusing on the speaker's intention, creating a static view of interactions, and thus ignoring participants' interpretations and claims of universality (Grainger 2011: 169–170). One second-wave French study by Beeching (2006) argues that stigmatized, post-posed *quoi* functions as a politeness marker in workplace contexts. In her comparative study of French and Japanese apologies and thanks, Claudel (2015) relates personal choices (e. g., formal vs. informal language) to politeness and social obligations (e. g., rank, status) to civility. In comparison, Isosävi (2010: 160) argues that no form of address is inherently (im)polite.

Among second-wave Finnish studies, politeness represents more of a consequence than a starting point. The discursive approach is used to argue that minimalistic linguistic expressions in service encounters in Finnish convenience stores do not reflect impoliteness, as claimed by laypeople. Rather, they are suited to the situation and are also found in other cultures (Sorjonen et al. 2009: 113; cf. also Holttinen 2016). Thus Finnish customers appear not to regard these encounters as impolite; on the contrary, it is polite to expect that both the salesperson and the customer fulfill their roles without too many mitigating strategies (Raevaara 2009: 320–312). Authentic service encounters are compared to textbook dialogues by Tanner (2012: 170), who criticizes the latter for presenting politeness as a decontextualized phenomenon. That is, an imperative is considered an impolite form or a conditional polite form, which does not necessarily correspond to reality.

Previous first- and second-wave politeness studies in Finnish and in French have largely focused on speech acts, such as requests and thanking in certain contexts, particularly in service encounters. This study, however, concentrates on cultural norms and their variations, in accordance with the second-wave discursive approach.

3 Discursive approach to culture and norms

Brown and Levinson's model has been criticized for its claims of universality and generalizations about cultures and language groups (Mills and Kádár 2011: 27–28). In their work, Brown and Levinson (1987: 245–246) distinguish between positive politeness cultures (e. g., U.S. A.) and negative politeness cultures (e. g., Britain) on the basis of the weightiness of face-threatening acts determined by social power, social distance and the imposition of the speech act. This model is

rejected by the discursive approach – each cultural group applies both types of politeness to some degree (Mills and Kádár 2011: 27). Subcultural differences are not absent from Brown and Levinson's (1987: 246) model, but rather are static. Thus dominated groups have positive politeness cultures, while dominating groups feature negative politeness cultures; furthermore, women use more elaborate positive politeness strategies than men. Discursive research has indicated that a dominant group's norms are held as natural, while other groups' norms represent deviant behavior leading to conservative evaluations of politeness (Mills and Kádár 2011: 22, 33–40).

The discursive approach underlines the variability of norms. Mills and Kádár (2011: 24) argue that “[w]ithin all cultures, there is not one single set of politeness rules which is uncontested.” In fact, Eelen (2001: 222–224) emphasizes that individuals are free to reject existing norms or to use them creatively. Does this mean that the discursive approach depends on the “minute by minute description of specific occurrences of politeness and impoliteness” (Kecskes 2017: 18)? Despite any emphasis on variability, Eelen (2001: 233) discusses the sharedness of (im)politeness norms. Furthermore, Mills and Kádár (2011: 24) do not claim that nothing can be said about (im)politeness at the cultural level, but that the variability of norms (based on region, class, gender) must be taken into account.

Nevertheless, the strong emphasis on variability has led discursive researchers to limit themselves to the study of communities of practice which do not exist in a social vacuum (Haugh 2011: 255). Christie (2015: 365) raises a pertinent question: Is a dynamic and local process of meaning-making overemphasized at the expense of the social and shared? I argue that a balance between variability and sharedness is needed in (im)politeness research, and ultimately agree with Mills and Kádár (2011: 21–23) regarding the need to develop new models to examine (im)politeness at the cultural level. That is, methodologies designed to analyze the linguistic behavior of individuals (usually only two) should not be used to study politeness at the social level (Haugh 2010). Therefore, I propose applying the method of focus group discussions. Concentrating on what (im)politeness means for speakers, the dialogical analysis of focus group discussions sheds light on both shared cultural evaluations of (im)politeness and their variations, as emphasized by the discursive approach.

4 Method and data

4.1 Focus groups as a dialogical method

By using focus groups, this study expands upon methods commonly used in (im)politeness research (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al. 2010: 701). Focus groups provide the researcher with a better understanding of how people think about an issue (Krueger and Casey 2015: 2). In a focus group, 4 to 12 participants address questions introduced by the researcher, distinguishing them from other discussion groups which are not set up for research purposes (Marková et al. 2006: 33).

One strength associated with focus groups is that they shed light on shared knowledge – that is, normative understandings and social representations. Today, sources of normative influence are complex, yet human behavior remains normative to some extent; a focus group represents a legitimate event for a collective “retrospective introspection” of taken-for-granted beliefs (Bloor et al. 2001: 4). Furthermore, they reveal ambiguities regarding norms and interpretations. A second strength is that focus groups are considered a case of “distributed cognition” where participants think together (Marková et al. 2006: 131). For this reason, no similar data could be obtained through individual interviews or questionnaires. One limitation of focus groups lies in the self-reporting of participants’ perceptions. More specifically, it is possible that participants’ reports do not fully correspond to the reality. Yet, it has been argued that the rich focus group data on group norms correspond to long-term ethnographic fieldwork (Bloor et al. 2001: 5–6).

Despite the abundance of literature on focus groups, they are rarely analyzed as group discussions. That is, interactional and dialogical aspects remain neglected when using content analysis (Wilkinson 1999: 236). This study, however, relies on dialogical discourse analysis, thereby emphasizing interactions between participants, their thoughts and arguments as well as sociocultural traditions.

4.2 Focus group data

In order to recruit participants for the focus groups discussions for this study, I used my own connections and established new contacts at an event on cultural differences between France and Finland. Focus group discussions took place in a room at the University of Helsinki library in 2016. Before the discussions, participants completed a background information sheet by answering questions

about their age, profession, time spent abroad, region of stay and region of origin. Table 1 summarizes the main background characteristics of the focus group participants.

Table 1: Background characteristics of focus group participants.

	Participants (n)	Gender: female (n) / male (n)	Age (in years)	Professions	Years living in Finland / France
FG1–France	5	2 / 3	32, 45, 47, 47, 49	curator, researcher, teacher (n = 3)	7, 9, 15, 19, X ¹
FG2–France	5	4 / 1	28, 29, 34, 35, 52	account manager, PhD student, teacher (n = 2), public relations manager	0.6, 2.5, 7, 14, 33
FG3–France	3	2 / 1	26, 51, 55	communications manager, teacher (n = 2)	2.5, 23, 24
FG1–Finland	5	3 / 2	37, 56, 57, 61, 64	director of legal affairs, teacher (n = 4)	5, 7, 10, 11, 18
FG2–Finland	4	4 / 0	23, 23, 26, 31	undergraduate student (n = 4)	0.75, 0.8, 1.5, 3
All groups	22	15 / 7	23–64	teacher (n = 11), undergraduate student (n = 4), others (n = 7)	0.75–33

Altogether, there were 22 participants. French participants (n = 13) living in Finland discussed Finnish politeness in three groups (FG1–France, FG2–France and FG3–France); Finnish participants (n = 9) currently or previously residing in France discussed French politeness in two groups (FG1–Finland and FG2–Finland). The French groups consisted of native French-speaking individuals born in France

¹ One participant was born in Finland, but had lived for extended periods in French-speaking countries.

(see footnote 1). The Finnish groups consisted of native Finnish speakers born in Finland.² All French participants were currently living in Finland. Aside from one participant, Finnish participants had all returned to Finland. Each group consisted of three to five participants. Mini focus groups provide in-depth insights allowing researchers an understanding of people's experiences (Krueger and Casey 2015: 82). In total, more women (n = 15) than men (n = 7) participated in the focus groups. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 64 years old. Participants represented highly educated individuals, thus limiting this study's strengths. Nearly half of the participants consisted of teachers (n = 11), primarily language (n = 10) or French instructors (n = 8) working mainly at universities (n = 8). Less than half of the participants (n = 7) represented other professions. One group, FG2–Finland, consisted of students of French (n = 4) who returned from Erasmus exchange programs.

French participants lived in the Helsinki metropolitan area or in the surrounding region. Some French participants had also lived in other Finnish towns. In comparison, Finnish participants lived in various parts of France, primarily residing in Paris and the Ile-de-France region. French participants had lived in Finland from less than one year to 33 years. In comparison, Finnish participants had lived in France from less than one year to 18 years. French participants originated from different regions in France (e. g., Paris, and eastern, western, central, northern and southern France), whereby the most common region of origin was northern France (n = 5). Finnish participants were primarily from the Helsinki metropolitan area or the surrounding region.

Turning to the organization of the focus group discussions and their realizations, I acted as the moderator. I presented the theme and explained that my role consisted of asking questions and ensuring that everyone would be allowed to share their views; rather than talking to the moderator, participants were instructed to talk with one another (Krueger and Casey 2015: 118). An assistant moderator – Tuuli Holttinen – took notes during the focus group discussions. These notes served as a basis for the transcriptions of discussions. During the focus group sessions, I asked ten open-ended questions, allowing participants to determine the direction of their responses:

- (1) What does politeness evoke in you?
- (2) What were your first impressions of Finnish³ / French⁴ politeness?

² One participant of FG1–Finland was born in an eastern European country, but has lived in Finland for 40 years.

³ The French participants discussed Finnish politeness.

⁴ The Finnish participants discussed French politeness.

- (3) What is considered polite in Finland / France?
- (4) What do you appreciate in Finnish / French politeness?
- (5) What causes you problems in terms of Finnish / French politeness?
- (6) What is considered impolite in Finland / France?
- (7) During your stay, have you noticed changes in Finnish / French politeness?⁵
- (8) During your stay, have you noticed changes in your behavior related to politeness?⁶
- (9) If you had one minute to describe Finnish / French politeness to a person who will move to that country, what advice would you give?
- (10) Is there something related to Finnish / French politeness which has not been discussed?

Unlike in market research focus groups (Puchta and Potter 1999), here the moderator occupied a rather retracted role, primarily intervening if participants needed clarification or forgot the question during a lively discussion. Participants engaged in multiparty conversations through unregulated turn-taking, and it was often difficult for the moderator to intervene with a question. In all groups, some participants knew one another; in most groups, however, not all participants knew each other beforehand. Because the participants were not complete strangers, the discussions may have been more lively and easy-going. The discussions lasted from 60 to 105 minutes. All five focus group discussions (total time = 7.3 hours) were audio- and videotaped, and subsequently transcribed and analyzed.

4.3 Analytical concepts and processes

In my analysis, I adopted the concepts (*proto-*)*thema*, *theme* and *topic* originating from the theory of social representations (Marková et al. 2006: 134–139; 170–178). In this theory, a proto-thema consists of basic relational categories within a culture, such as (im)polite, which carry potential meaning and often are taken for granted. When we travel to or live in another culture, the proto-thema of (im)polite may become problematic and rise to the level of consciousness. Thus, as Finnish and French participants negotiated the meaning of the proto-thema (im)polite, it became a *thema* that created *topics*. A *topic*, then, represents something participants talk about at least sequentially.

5 Isosävi (under review).

6 See Isosävi (2020).

The analytical process was as follows. While transcribing focus group discussions in their entirety, I looked for topical episodes, labeling them with the help of N/Vivo. I searched the transcripts for recurring topics that explained upon which moral grounds participants considered the (non-)realizations of different acts (im)polite (see research question 1, section 1). First, I identified the concept of space versus rapport (section 5.1). Then, I looked for the three most frequent topics that appeared in all focus groups. These were identified as the primary themes: greetings (section 5.2), silence (section 5.3) and holding doors open (section 5.4). These themes provided the key verbal and nonverbal acts of (im) politeness, as discussed by Finnish and French participants (see research question 2, section 1). The themes arose from the participants, and were not raised by the moderator (see section 4.2).

Following the dialogical approach, the analytical tools used to study how (im)politeness is negotiated in focus group discussions (research question 3) were based on four assumptions (Markova et al. 2006: 59–66). First, focus groups were considered group discussions. Second, the subjects' heterogeneity was taken into account. That is, dialogues took place not only between participants and virtual (absent) participants, but also with oneself. For example, *internal dialogism* occurs when speakers detach themselves from their utterances, such as by restricting their own authorship (Bakhtin 1984: 184). Third, focus group discussions represented a circulation of ideas. I considered both *addressivity* and *responsivity* (Bakhtin 1986: 91, 95) – that is, every utterance not only addresses somebody, but also functions as a response to the previous utterance by, for example, refuting (disagreement) or affirming (agreement) statements. Fourth, focus groups situate activities by relying on historically and culturally shared social knowledge. Shared knowledge is expressed through the use of primary themes, as discussed above. As a discursive means, for example, a *collaborative utterance* can be used. In doing so, two or more participants produce one single utterance together (Marková et al. 2006: 180–193).

Participants used various discursive means to propose issues upon which they agreed or disagreed. A *distinction* – X is different from Y – in the data serves as a comparison of (im)politeness between Finland and France. A *categorization* occurs when a particular stimulus is deprived of its particularity and placed into a general category (e. g., “in France moving towards the other person would be more polite”). In comparison, through a *particularization*, a stimulus is not regarded as identical to other stimuli (Billig 1996: 161). A particularization is often associated with examples, which are then proposed as typical of the abstract phenomenon of a categorization (Marková et al. 2006: 140) (e. g., “when other children came to the sandbox, the Finnish parents said to their children...”). *Examples* function as tests of a speaker's argument, according to the classification put

forth by Wästerfors and Holsanova (2005). Here, *specifying and restricting* examples limit arguments to certain circumstances. In turn, *objectivizing* examples aim to make an argument factual – that is, they shift the focus from the speaker to the world beyond. *Typifying* examples (e. g., *like those, that kind*) refer to a type of person or thing allowing the speaker to avoid a lengthy explanation. *Making a list* of examples gives the appearance of selecting from an abundance of items. *Questioning* examples, by contrast, cast doubt on the argument of the other speaker by referring to a difficult-to-ignore fact. Furthermore, participants express stances. An *affective stance* conveys attitudes and feelings, whereas an *epistemic* stance shows degrees of certainty of one's knowledge (Ochs 1996: 410). Finally, as recipients, participants exercise *agency*, for instance, by choosing to hold or not hold the producer responsible for an impolite action (Mitchell and Haugh 2015: 231).

5 Analysis of Finnish and French evaluations of (im)politeness

First, I discuss the concepts of space versus rapport (section 5.1). Based on these moral grounds, participants considered the realization or nonrealization of different acts (im)polite. Next, I examine the key verbal and nonverbal acts of (im)politeness discussed by Finns and French people: greetings (5.2), silence (5.3) and holding doors open (5.4). In the analysis of excerpts, I also show how (im)politeness is negotiated by participants. All excerpts were transcribed using Praat. Transcription conventions for French and Finnish are described in appendices A and B.

5.1 Space versus rapport

Personal space emerged as a salient factor for politeness in Finland, while verbal or nonverbal rapport was more important in France. In excerpt (1), French participants compared concepts of (im)politeness in Finland and France.

(1) (FG1–France: Alice (ALI) age⁷ 32, years⁸ 9; Marie (MAR) age 47, years 15; Jean (JEA) age 47⁹)

- 01 ALI *ne pas entrer dans la bulle de l'autre* \ (1.2)
'do not enter the bubble of the other person'
- 02 MAR °ou[ais°
'yeah'
- 03 ALI [*respecter une certaine distance physique/ et cetera/*
'respect a certain physical distance et cetera'
- 04 *donc [euh* (0.4)
'so uh'
- 05 JEA [*hm*
- 06 ALI *ne pas EMPIÉTER sur son territoire* (0.3) *alors qu'en France*
'do not encroach upon his/her territory whereas in France'
- 07 *ce s`rait plutôt le contraire* (0.7) *ALLER VERS L'AUTRE*
'it would be the contrary moving towards the other person'
- 08 *s`rait plus poli/* (0.8) °*ici on peut*° (0.4)
'would be more polite here one can'
- 09 MAR *moi j'ai une expérience qui m'a beaucoup éclairée/* (0.4)
'I have one experience which enlightened me a lot'
- 10 *quand les enfants étaient au bac à sable* \ (0.9)
'when the children were in the sandbox'
- 11 *en Finlande/ quand les enfants venaient au bac à sable*
'in Finland when other children came to the sandbox'
- 12 *et qu'il y avait des jouets/* (0.4) *les parents finlandais*
'and there were toys the Finnish parents'
- 13 *disaient à leurs enfants/ NE VA PAS embêter l'autre* \ (0.4)
'said to their children do not bother the other person'
- 14 *au bac à sable en France/ les parents disaient/*
'in the sandbox in France the parents said'
- 15 *VA JOUER avec les [autres* \
'go play with others'
- 16 ALI [*hm*

⁷ Age of the participant.

⁸ Years residing in Finland / France.

⁹ Jean was born in Finland, but he has lived for extended periods of time in French-speaking countries.

In line 01, Alice's categorization of Finnish politeness starts with the concept of *bulle* ['bubble'], which is followed by a recognizable pause of 1.2 seconds. After the pause, Marie quietly utters a *ouais* ['yeah'] of confirmation (Péroz 2009: 128) in line 02, while Alice's further categorization, respect for *distance physique* ['physical distance'] in line 03, overlaps. In line 05, Jean utters a minimal token response *hm*. In line 06, after a shorter pause of 0.4 seconds, Alice continues with *territoire* ['territory'], which must not be encroached. Then, she utters a distinction. That is, in France, moving towards the other person would be more polite. Many pauses demonstrate that she is weighing her words. Marie takes advantage of the pause after Alice's unfinished utterance with a quiet voice in line 08. Here, she supplements Alice's abstract categorization with a particularization. Using an objectivizing example, Marie gives a voice to virtual participants, Finnish and French parents in a sand box, created by quoting (Wibeck et al. 2004: 259). These quotes attach an "intensified authenticity" (Wästerfors and Holsanova 2005: 550), yet they are only "demonstrations" rather than an accurate reproduction of what others said (Clark and Gerrig 1990: 802). The original deixis is retained in the direct reported speech of the parents in lines 13 and 15: *ne va pas embêter l'autre* ['do not bother the other person'] and *va jouer avec les autres* ['go play with others']. Alice's *hm* overlaps Marie's final utterance.

Likewise, the participants of FG1–Finland agreed on the distinction between Finland and France concerning the requirement of verbal or nonverbal rapport. When describing France, Daniel utters that *tapakulttuuri edellyttää et toiseen ihmiseen reagoidaan* ['customs require that one reacts to the other person']. The participants show a shared knowledge through a collaborative utterance. Maria adds a nonverbal act to Daniel's *jollakin sanalla* ['with some word']: *eleellä* ['with a gesture']. Daniel makes a distinction – *Suomessahan ei tarvitse reagoida* ['in Finland, one doesn't have to react'] – and gives a specifying example regarding doors: if someone opens it, one may go through it quietly.

5.2 Greetings

Greetings emerged as the most frequent primary theme in the focus groups studied. Their discussions suggested that greeting another is more categorical in France than in Finland, since verbal rapport is important among French people. In extract (2), Finnish participants compared the complexity of greeting cultures in Finland and in France.

(2) (FG1–Finland: Daniel (DAN) age 57, years 18; Laura (LAU) age 64, years 7; Maria (MAR) age 56, years 11; Sofia (SOF) age 37, years 10)

- 01 SOF *ehkä Suomessa se yksinkertaisesti se* (0.3)
 maybe Finland.INE it simple.ADV it
 ‘simply maybe in Finland the’
- 02 *tervehduskulttuuri esmes on(.) jotenki must*
 greeting culture for example be:3SG somehow I.ELA
 ‘greeting culture for example is somehow in my opinion’
- 03 *se on EjotenkiE(.) monimutka(h)sempi ku Ranskassa*
 it be:3SG somehow complicated.COMP than France.INE
 ‘it is somehow more complicated than in France’
- 04 *et Ranskassa(.) sanot päivää kaikille kun ne*
 that France.INE say:2SG day.PTV all.ALL.PL when they
 ‘that in France you say hello to everybody when they’
- 05 *tulee sua vastaan [aamulla*
 come:3SG you.PTV across morning.ADE
 ‘come across you in the morning’
- 06 LAU [joo
 PRT
 ‘yeah’
- 07 SOF *>niin sä sanot päivää kaikille<*
 then you say:2SG day.PTV all.PL.ALL
 ‘then you say hello to everybody’
- 08 *Suomes[sa sun pitää mietti]*
 Finland.INE you.GEN have.to think.INF
 ‘in Finland you have to think about it’
- 09 MAR [siis työ- työyhteisössä]
 so work- work community.INE
 ‘you mean coworkers’
- 10 *mut ei [hississä ei metrossa]*
 but NEG elevator.INE NEG metro.INE
 ‘but not in the elevator and not in the metro’
- 11 SOF [työyhteisössä tai kun sä viet]
 work community.INE or when you take:2SG
 ‘at work or when you take’
- 12 MAR *ei ei niinkun(.) ei [tuntemat]tomat ei;*
 NEG NEG PRT NEG unknown.PL NEG
 ‘no no I mean not unknown individuals no’

- 13 SOF [siis Ranskassa]
so France.INE
'you mean in France'
- 14 *ei tuntemattomille mut öö*
NEG unknown.PL.ALL but uh
'not to an unknown individual but uh'
- 15 LAU *rapu[ssa:]*
stairway.INE
'in the stairway'
- 16 SOF *[koti] (0.3) talon rapussa]*
home house.GEN stairway.INE
'in the stairway of your apartment building'
- 17 MAR [joo]
PRT
'yeah'

Sofia attempts to make a distinction according to which the greeting culture is more complicated in Finland than in France. Her utterance includes a self-dialogism – using a hedge *ehkä* ['maybe'] in line 01 and an epistemic stance marker *must* ['in my opinion'] (Rauniomaa 2007: 222–223) in line 02, thus narrowing the scope of the validity of her own argument. Sofia continues with a particularization. That is, in France, you say hello to everybody when they come across you in the morning. In line 06, Laura's overlapping *joo* ['yeah'] signifies that Sofia's utterance is understood (Sorjonen 2001: 167). In their overlapping talk in lines 08 through 11, Maria and Sofia test the boundaries of the shared knowledge. While Sofia makes a distinction to Finland, Maria asks if Sofia's argument refers to the workplace setting. In lieu of waiting for an answer, Maria provides two questioning examples in line 09 – *ei hississä ei metrossa* ['not in the elevator and not in the metro'] – thereby casting doubt on Sofia's argument of greeting everybody. Furthermore, Sofia's talk overlaps Maria's questioning examples. Here, she agrees with greeting coworkers and begins with a specifying example in line 11 – *tai kun sä viet* ['or when you take'].

In line 12, Maria interrupts Sofia, concluding that unknown individuals are not greeted. Sofia's precision question overlaps in line 13 – *siis Ranskassa* ['you mean in France']. But, instead of waiting for an answer, she agrees with Maria that unknown individuals are not greeted. In line 14, Sofia utters *mut öö* ['but uh'], which resembles a trailing off 'but' in English, indicating that not everything has been uttered (Mitchell and Haugh 2015: 221). In a collaborative utterance in line 15, Laura completes Sofia's trailing off *mut öö* ['but uh'] with *rapussa* ['in the stairway'], and the participants begin interactively creating a list of examples of

who to greet in France. In line 16, Sofia confirms Laura's utterance by partly using her wording: *koti talon rapussa* ['in the stairway of your apartment building']. In line 17, Maria's acknowledging *joo* ['yeah'] (Helasvuo 2001: 144) overlaps her utterance. Following excerpt (2), the participants continue the list. Here, Sofia adds *koulumatkalla* ['on the way to school'] and provides more precision, whereby the person would not be the parent of a child, but because you see them every day. Others utter their agreement. Daniel lists *bussinkuljettajalle* ['to the bus driver']. Finally, Sofia concludes that, in Finland, one has to think about whom to greet.

In excerpt (3), the French participants discuss not greeting in Finland.

(3) (FG2–France: Anne (ANN) age 52, years 33; Colette (COL) age 34, months 7; Julie (JUL) age 29, years 7; Myriam (MYR) age 28, years 2.5; Pierre (PIE) age 35, years 14)

- 01 ANN *le fait de dire bonjour ou pas bonjour:/ (0.6) moi j`pensais*
 'the thing to say hello or not hello I thought'
- 02 *par exemple: à à mes voisins \ (0.3) là où j`habitais avant/*
 'for example of of my neighbors where I lived before'
- 03 *y a des voisins/ je j'ai des voisins qui*
 'there are neighbors I've had neighbors who'
- 04 *m`disaient jamais bonjour (0.8) en Finlande/ (.)°c'est okay°*
 'never said hello to me in Finland it's ok'
- 05 *(0.4) c'est [marrant parce que]*
 'it's funny because'
- 06 PIE *[hein ben oui maintenant]*
 'huh well yes now'
- 07 ANN *j'y ai pens- non mais j'ai pensé j'ai pensé s- plusieurs fois/*
 'I thou- about it but I thought about it many times'
- 08 *en Finlande:/ ils veulent pas dire bonjour ben*
 'in Finland they don't want to say hello well'
- 09 *tant pis tant pis pour [lui/*
 'too bad too bad for him/her'
- 10 PIE *[hm]*
- 11 ANN *bon il veut pas dire bonjour c'est okay//*
 'well s/he doesn't want to say hello it's ok'
- 12 *puis je vais EN FRANCE/ (0.8) euh: on interprétera ça//*
 'then I go to France uh one will interpret it'
- 13 *sûrement des les voisins/ comment ben on a d` TRÈS*
 'surely the neighbors how one has a very'
- 14 *mauvaises relations a[vec les voi[sins*
 'bad relationship with the neighbors'

- 15 PIE [hm
 16 COL [oui::
 ‘yes’
 17 MYR *ils disent pas bonjour oui*
 they say.3PL NEG hello yes
 ‘they don’t say hello yes’
 18 ANN *ils [disent] [pas bonjour]*
 they say.3PL NEG hello
 ‘they don’t say hello’
 19 MYR [oui] [pas bonjour] oui
 PRT NEG hello PRT
 ‘yes no hello yeah’

Here, Anne introduces the topic of greeting and not greeting. After a pause of 0.6 seconds in line 01, she provides a specifying example from her Finnish neighbors, who never greeted her. After a longer 0.8-second pause in line 04, Anne makes a categorization. She states in line 04 with a low voice that, in Finland, not greeting your neighbors is *okay* [‘ok’]. Pierre’s talk overlaps with Anne’s, but she does not yield the floor to him. In line 09, Anne expresses her affective stance. That is, if individuals do not want to greet one another, *tant pis pour lui* [‘too bad for him/her’]. Exercising her agency, she chooses not to be offended by the absence of a greeting. Furthermore, in lines 12 through 14, Anne makes a distinction, marking her epistemic stance as certain with *sûrement* [‘certainly’]. Thus, in France, the interpretation will be *on a d`très mauvaises relations avec les voisins* [‘one has very bad relationships with their neighbors’]. In lines 15 and 16, Pierre’s minimal token response *hm* and Colette’s registering *oui* (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2001: 99) follow. Then, in line 17, a collaborative utterance appears when Myriam displays her shared knowledge by supplementing Anne’s earlier utterance regarding neighbors, stating *ils disent pas bonjour* [‘they don’t say hello’]. Anne adheres to Myriam’s utterance by taking it up, while Myriam’s token acknowledgement *oui* [‘yes’] in line 19 overlaps. The rest of the utterance – *pas bonjour* [‘no hello’] – is spoken simultaneously by Anne and Myriam, who finally adds a confirming *oui* [‘yes’].

Following excerpt (3), participants continued discussing their experiences regarding the greeting habits of their Finnish neighbors. They agreed that there was no general rule. Julie only knew her fellow apartment building residents to greet others: *ça peut être un mouvement de tête ou un micro hei* [‘it can be a head movement or a barely audible hei’¹⁰]. In his specifying example, Pierre presents

¹⁰ *Hello* in Finnish.

two extreme cases of neighbors: *je dis bonjour il répond pas* ['I say hello he doesn't reply'] and *on dit bonjour je parle un peu de finnois avec elle* ['we say hello I speak a little Finnish with her'].

Despite extensive greeting habits in France, participants reported regional differences. First, in FG2–Finland composed of students, Stella and Anna compared their experiences from Toulouse (southern France) and Paris during various stages of their time in France. In her specifying example of extensive French greeting habits, Stella mentions a hostel in Toulouse during her internship: *kaikki vaan oli vähän silleen bonjour kaikki asiakkaat* ['all of the clients said bonjour']. Anna provides a questioning example from her internship in a lobby in Paris, casting doubt on the argument of extensive French greeting habits. Although she greeted every single individual, greetings were not always reciprocated: *ei sielkään niinku välttämät tuu aina takas sitä bonjourii* ['everyone will not necessarily greet you back']. Anna's justification for regional differences in greeting habits assumes that people are much busier in Paris. Stella, however, questions this by uttering that that notion is a stereotype. Second, in FG1–France, the participants disagree as to whether bus drivers are greeted more in Finland or in France. When Bruno says *le bonjour (...) au chauffeur de bus (...) ça se fait très très peu en France* ['hello...to a bus driver...it's done very very little in France'], Alice disagrees: *je ne suis pas d'accord là* ['I don't agree']. Jean suggests that there are regional differences: *c'est des différences entre villes* ['there are differences between towns'].

In addition, Finnish participants reported regional variation in Finnish greeting habits. In FG1–Finland, Laura and Maria shared opposing experiences of greeting hikers in forests. According to Laura, in the Helsinki metropolitan area, *suomalainen pelästyy (...) jos sitä tervehtii* ['a Finn...becomes scared if they are greeted'], while Maria's questioning example comes from western Finland: *tervehdin jokaista vastaantulijaa ja jokainen sanoi iloisesti hei* ['I greeted every passerby and everyone happily said hello']. Maria also described extensive greeting habits in eastern Finland using a typifying example: *kreikkalaista se touhu* ['the activity is like in Greece'].

Although greetings appear to be more categorical in France, participants in FG1–France agreed on a situation where greetings are more frequent in Finland, namely, in supermarkets. As Marc said, *systématiquement la caissière va dire bonjour (...) dans mon expérience c'est pas vrai en France* ['systematically the cashier will say hello...in my experience it's not true in France'].

5.3 Silence

The overarching concern for personal space among Finns and verbal rapport among the French was reflected in discussions about silence. The discussions focused on silence being better tolerated in Finland than in France.

In focus groups, stories – both generalized or personal – are used to argue a position (Marková et al. 2006: 151–154). The excerpt below relates to a specific story. In Bruno's personal story, he arrived at a table where Finns silently ate their lunch. The Finns did not even respond to him, which he found impolite. It took time for him to understand that silence was not related to evaluations of his own behavior. The discussion below in excerpt (4) followed Bruno's story.

(4) (FG1–France: Alice (ALI) age 32, years 9; Bruno (BRU) age 45, years 7; Jean (JEA) age 47¹¹; Marc (MAR) age 49, years 19)

- 01 JEA *c'est vrai que (0.4) on supporte très bien le silence*
 'it's true that one tolerates silence very well'
- 02 *en Finlande/ on le supporte ex[trêmement mal en [France*
 'in Finland one tolerates it extremely badly in France'
- 03 ALI *[hm*
- 04 MAR *[hm*
- 05 JEA *j`veux dire une discussion ou: être assis comme ça à table*
 'I intend to have a discussion or to sit like that at a table'
- 06 *le à: cinq six euh: (0.3) euh (.) si rien se [dit*
 'of five six uh uh if nothing is said'
- 07 MAR *[[((rire))*
 '((laughter))'
- 08 JEA *ça fait bi[zarre c'est c'est [puis: ç- ça*
 'it's weird it's it's then i- it'
- 09 ALI *[hm*
- 10 BRU *[[((rire))*
 '((laughter))'
- 11 JEA *[ça pèse*
 'it weighs'
- 12 ALI *[ça met mal à l'aise*
 'it makes you feel uncomfortable'

¹¹ Jean was born in Finland, but he has lived for extended periods of time in French-speaking countries.

- 13 BRU [((rire)) *[oui ben ouais]* ((rire))
‘((laughter)) yes well yeah ((laughter))’
- 14 JEA *[ça pèse euh:]*
‘it weighs uh’
- 15 JEA *et:: je:: euh:: alors qu’en Finlande/ bon c’est c’est*
‘and I uh whereas in Finland well it’s it’s’
- 16 *pas du tout ou: eh: gênant pour autant/ et c’est*
‘not at all or uh embarrassing however and it’s’
- 17 *ça ne veut RIEN DIRE en [fait*
‘it doesn’t mean anything in fact’
- 18 BRU *[voilà (.) oui (.) c’est*
‘that’s it yes it’s’
- 19 ALI *[hm*
- 20 JEA *euh:*
‘uh’
- 21 BRU *mais c’est c’est ça veut [vient peut-être: enfin on en revient*
‘but it’s it means when it comes perhaps I mean one returns’
- 22 JEA *[oui*
‘yes’
- 23 BRU *à la question de: (0.4) des règles de politesse euh:*
‘to the question of rules of politeness uh’
- 24 *pour pouvoir INTERPRÉTER un comportement quoi*
‘to be able to interpret a behavior you know’

According to Jean’s distinction, silence is very well tolerated in Finland, but viewed quite badly in France. Alice’s and Marc’s minimal token responses *hm* in lines 03 and 04 overlap Jean’s utterance. Referring to Bruno’s story, Jean expresses his affective stance in line 08 – that is, sitting silently at a table of five or six people is *bizarre* [‘weird’]. In lines 09 and 10, Alice’s *hm* and Bruno’s laughter overlap Jean’s stance. Here, participants demonstrate shared knowledge by expressing negative affective stances towards silence at a table. In lines 11 and 12, Jean’s *ça pèse* [‘it weighs’], and Alice’s *ça met mal à l’aise* [‘it makes you feel uncomfortable’] overlap. Furthermore, in line 14, Jean repeats his stance. After a hesitation, Jean utters a categorization. To his mind, in Finland, silence is not embarrassing nor does it mean anything. In line 18, Bruno utters a confirmation marker *voilà* [‘that’s it’] (Col et al. 2016: 19), followed by *oui* [‘yes’]. Finally, he returns to the question of politeness rules, discussed earlier in the group. Those rules are necessary in order to interpret behavior.

Although Finns seem to tolerate silence better than the French, silence remains a complex phenomenon. In FG1–Finland, participants described the

difficulties related to Finnish silence as follows: *oletusarvo et ollaan hiljaa mut ei kuitenkaan liian hiljaa* [‘the starting point that one is quiet but not too quiet however’] (Sofia) – *ja millon ollaan* [‘and when one is [silent]’] (Laura). How much silence is tolerated and in which situations are not straightforward questions to answer. In extract (4), Bruno shared an experience whereby Finns were eating silently and not talking to him. In FG1–Finland, Sofia expressed her positive affective stance towards silence while eating: *ei mulle oo kiusallista jos [...] mun perheen kanssa syödään hiljaa* [‘it’s not awkward to me if...I’m eating quietly with my family’]. In studies by Tulviste et al. (2003) and Tryggvason (2006), during family meal interactions, Finns – along with Estonians – were indeed more silent than Swedes. Other situations where silence was not awkward for participants of FG1–Finland included being in a car with a friend or in a sauna.

Tolerating silence may also represent an individual preference. In FG1–Finland, when Daniel utters a categorization where for Finns silence can be *rauhallinen ja semmonen lempeä* [‘calm and gentle’], Maria replies with a conditional *joillekin* [‘for some’]. Daniel agrees by narrowing the scope of the validity of his categorization and qualifies his statement with *joillekin ainakin* [‘for some at least’]. Finnish participants agreed with the distinction made by Daniel, according to which for the French silence is *kauhistus* (‘a horror’) and *kylmä* (‘cold’). We see this as shared knowledge when Maria adds a justification for the feeling of coldness, emphasizing the importance of rapport for French people – that is, the other person is not taken into consideration in relation to silence.

Silence can be evaluated either negatively by indicating anger or positively when associated with respect (Tannen 1985: 94–95). In many Western cultures, silence bears a negative connotation (Sifianou 1995: 95). This is illustrated by Philippe (FG3–France) who expressed a negative stance: *une pause ou un silence (...) pour moi c’est une forme d’agressivité* [‘a pause or a silence...for me it’s a form of aggression’]. Due to its ambiguity, the interpretation of silence represents a common source of misunderstanding (Nakane 2007: 198–199, 206). Pierre (FG2–France) expresses a source of this difficulty: *ne pas savoir ce que l’autre pense parce qu’il ne va pas l’exprimer* [‘not knowing what the other person thinks because they won’t say it’]. According to Sofia (FG1–Finland), learning a culture of silence is more difficult: *pystyy opettelemaan helpommin kun se oletusarvo on se että reagoidaan (...) kuin opetella sit sellainen hiljaisuuden kulttuuri* [‘it’s easier to learn when the default value is to react...than to learn such a culture of silence’].

Olbertz–Siitonen and Siitonen (2015: 323–324) regard the “silent Finn” as an academic myth: they rightly criticize many communication studies for their lack of empirical evidence and point out the overreliance on the same reprinted studies. In linguistic studies, a more nuanced picture is presented. Based on their study of lingua franca business English discourse, Louhiala–Salminen et al. (2005: 413)

explain that the perception of Finns as “few worded” relates more to the nature of their talk than the actual number of words spoken. Thus, there is a “tendency towards issue orientation, a relatively low level of interpersonal orientation, and relative scarcity of metadiscourse, queries and questions” (Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005: 413). Clearly, more empirical research is needed to uncover what specifically underlies this perception of Finns as more oriented towards silence than, for instance, the French.

The exaggeration of Finnish silence can render participants overly cautious during intercultural interactions (Olbertz–Siitonen and Siitonen 2015: 328–329) and lead to faulty generalizations ignoring that a Finn may be the most active speaker in a multicultural business meeting (Poncini 2004: 282). Furthermore, the concept of silence – like any (im)politeness norm – may be changing. Indeed, participants of FG1–Finland suggest that the internet, mobile phones and travelling affect notions of silence (*cf.* Wilkins and Isotalus 2009: 6–7). Tulviste et al. (2003: 262) argued that Finno-Ugric speech communities may change, as Sweden has, because of the influence of more talk-oriented cultures.

5.4 Holding doors open

The concern with personal space among Finns and verbal or nonverbal rapport among the French also contributed to discussions of the third major theme, namely, holding a door open for another person. The topic discussed situated holding a door open as categorical in France, but not in Finland. In excerpt (5), participants discussed the deviant case of holding doors open in Finland – in particular, among young men.

(5) (FG3–France: Marguerite (MAR) age 51, years 24; Philippe (PHI) age 55, years 23; Rebecca (REB) age 26, years 2.5)

- 01 PHI *la porte je n` sais pas encore \ je je n` sais pas très bien*
 ‘the door I don’t know yet I don’t know very well’
- 02 *si il faut (0.8) LAISSER PASSER une femme par exemple (0.8)*
 ‘if one must let a woman pass for example’
- 03 *euh:: systématiquement par [politesse c` que moi*
 ‘uh systematically as a courtesy which I’
- 04 MAR *[hm*
- 05 PHI *je f` rai toujours/*
 ‘I will always do’
- 06 MAR *ils le font dans mon immeuble [((toux))] les jeunes mecs (0.3)*

- 07 PHI 'they do it in my apartment building ((cough)) the young men'
[ouais]
'yeah'
- 08 MAR *et j` pense pas [qu'ils m` prennent pour une vieille*
'and I don't think they see me as an old lady'
- 09 REB [*mais les JEUNES les jeunes le font (.) le font*
'but the young do it do it'
10 *beaucoup plus je [j'ai remarqué*
'a lot more I have noticed'
- 11 PHI [*peut-être*
'maybe'
- 12 REB *ça fait*
'since'
- 13 PHI *peut-être [qu'ils voyagent plus*
'maybe they travel more'
- 14 REB [*peut-être quelq-] (.) quelques: depuis qu`*
'maybe som- some since'
15 *j` suis revenue/ j'ai: j'ai l'impression que*
'I came back I've I've had the impression that'
16 *tous les les les hommes JEUNES*
'all the the young men'
17 *maintenant le maintenant le font*
'now do it'
- 18 MAR *oui moi j'ai l'imp[ression aussi]*
'yes I I have that impression too'
- 19 REB [*ehh systématiquement]*
'uh systematically'
- 20 MAR *enfin jeunes trente trente-cinq quoi*
'that is young thirty thirty-five you know'

Regarding doors in Finland, Philippe does not know if one must systematically, for example, let a woman pass as a courtesy, something he states that he always does. Marguerite replies with a particularization – in her apartment building, young men hold doors open. Philippe's overlapping *ouais* ['yeah'] in line 07 marks Marguerite's utterance as heard (Péroz 2009: 132). In lines 08 and 09, Marguerite and Rebecca's utterances overlap – that is, Marguerite does not think that young men see her as an old lady, while Rebecca recounts that she too has noticed young men holding doors open, at least more often than they used to do. In line 13, Philippe offers a reason for why young men hold doors open using the hedge *peut-être qu'* ['perhaps'] to narrow the scope of validity of his utter-

ance *ils voyagent plus* [‘they travel more’]. Rebecca attempts a categorization of young men involving a self-dialogism. In line 15, *j’ai l’impression que* [‘I have the impression that’], which takes into account that everybody does not necessarily adhere to her categorization, according to which all young men hold doors open nowadays. Marguerite agrees by saying that she also has the same impression, adding a precision related to the age of these young men, namely, that they are 30 to 35 years old.

In excerpt (6), French participants expressed their stances towards holding doors open, and discussed what happens when doors are not held open in Finland.

(6) (FG3–France: Marguerite (MAR) age 51, years 24; Philippe (PHI) age 55, years 23; Rebecca (REB) age 26, years 2.5)

- 38 REB *je n’arrive pas à (.) °ne pas tenir la porte° c’est: (0.5)*
 ‘I am not able to not hold the door it’s’
- 39 *c’est impo[ssible c’est c’est trop*
 ‘it’s impossible it’s it’s too’
- 40 PHI *[ouais*
 ‘yeah’
- 41 *ben oui c’est difficile ça*
 ‘well yes it’s difficult that’
- 42 REB *[trop^ancré*
 ‘too engrained’
- 43 MAR *hm*
- 44 REB *(.) mais eh:: voilà j’ai a- j’ai a- j’ai appris à*
 ‘but uh that is I have l- I have l- I have learned to’
- 45 *me prendre des <((en souriant)) portes dans la face parce que>*
 ‘take doors in my face because’
- 46 *<((en souriant)) je m’attendais à: à [ce que à ce que>*
 ‘I waited for for for’
- 47 PHI *[ouais ouais*
 ‘yeah yeah’
- 48 REB *la port[e: reste ouverte/*
 ‘the door to stay open’
- 49 PHI *[tu il faut que tu apprennes à ah: tu sais [à*
 ‘you have to learn to ah you know to’
- 50 *[mais euh::*
 ‘but uh’

- 51 PHI à *GLISSER* [*entre deux portes*
 'to slip through two doors']
 52 MAR *[oui oui*
 'yes yes'

Here, French participants' affective stances demonstrate a shared knowledge – that is, holding doors open is important to them. For Rebecca, in line 39, not holding doors open is *impossible* ['impossible']. In line 40, Philippe's *ouais* ['yeah'] serves as confirmation (Péroz 2009: 128) overlapping Rebecca's stance. In line 41, Philippe adds *c'est difficile* ['it's difficult'], which overlaps Rebecca's *trop ancré* ['too engrained'] in line 42. Rebecca smilingly states that she has learned to take doors in her face, because she waited for them to remain open. Philippe's emphatic *ouais ouais* of confirmation overlaps Rebecca's talk in line 47. It seems that young Finnish men holding doors open, as discussed in excerpt (5), represents a deviant case (Wästerfors and Holsanova 2005: 549–550). Philippe offers a solution to Rebecca – that is, she must learn to slip through doors. In line 52, Marguerite's *oui oui* ['yes yes'] emphasizes her agreement (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2001: 107).

In Finland, holding doors open is not necessarily interpreted as an act of politeness – as is the case in France – but neither is it an act of impoliteness. As for negative reactions, Laura's (FG1–Finland) objectivizing example provided a reply from a Finnish woman when Laura's husband opened a door for her: *mitä sä kuvittelet tekeväs* ['what do you think you are doing']. Yet it does not seem to be a gender issue. Anna (FG2–Finland) shared a reply she received from a Finnish man in his 80s when she held a door open for him: *on se vähän raskas mut kyl mä saan sen itteki auki* ['it's a little bit heavy but I can open it myself']. Maria in FG1–Finland suggested that not holding doors open is not related to impoliteness. She suggested *ne elää siin omassa kuplas ne ei oo epäkohteliaita (...) nille ei tuu mieleenkää (...) et joku voi tulla takaa* ['they live in their own bubble they are not impolite...it doesn't occur to them...that somebody might come behind'].

6 Conclusions

In this article, I examined the lesser studied cultural outsiders' evaluations of (im)politeness, concentrating on Finland and France. To do so, I adopted focus groups – a rarely used method in (im)politeness research – in order to study culturally shared (im)politeness norms and their variations applying the discursive approach. During the focus groups, French people living in Finland talked about

Finnish politeness; by contrast, Finns currently or previously living in France discussed French politeness. All participants in this study completed at least a university-level education, representing one limitation to this study.

In order to examine the focus group discussions, I adopted dialogical discourse analysis. (Im)politeness was negotiated by the participants with the help of various discursive means, including distinctions, categorizations, particularizations and examples, stances, expressions of agency and collaborative utterances. I found that personal space emerged as a salient factor for politeness in Finland, while verbal and nonverbal rapport are more important in France. Greetings and holding doors open – actions implying a rapport with the other person – were identified as less categorical in Finland where value is placed upon the space of the other individual. Furthermore, silence appears to be better tolerated by Finns than by the French, who emphasize rapport with others. Participants reported that different perceptions of (im)politeness caused them problems during intercultural interactions, but they also learned how to interpret interactions.

It is well documented that variation exists vis-à-vis (im)politeness norms across regions, classes and gender as emphasized by the discursive approach. Participants from both countries reported regional variation. Despite the importance of greeting in France, it appears to be more common in southern France than in Paris. Similarly, in Finland, greeting was reported as more common in smaller towns than in the Helsinki metropolitan area. It was also suggested that greeting bus drivers in France is subject to regional differences. Furthermore, individuals can value or interpret dominant (im)politeness norms differently, leading to individual variation in (im)politeness norms. For example, in Finland, some neighbors may value space more, while others will value rapport more, as illustrated by frequent greetings. Similarly, some Finns may be eager to hold doors open for others. Thus, too rigid generalizations should be avoided when discussing (im) politeness norms: in certain situations, such as the case of supermarket cashiers, Finns appear to greet more than their French colleagues.

Yet, (im)politeness norms appear to be more explicit in France than in Finland, where there seems to be less clarity regarding whom to greet, how individuals react to holding doors open and what kinds of silence are acceptable and in which situations. This lack of explicit norms has contributed to the recent publication of numerous newspaper articles and opinion columns, all of which share a concern: Because Finns greet less frequently than individuals from central Europe, do others consider us impolite? Furthermore, (im)politeness norms are not stable – they constantly evolve. The question then becomes: Will Finnish (im) politeness norms evolve due to foreign influences? Perhaps the current ambiguity in norms leaves room for change, whereby globalization represents only one source of influence (Sifianou 2013). If the space of the other person remains

highly valued, (im)politeness norms in Finland are less likely to evolve towards norms more typical for the French.

Some themes discussed during the focus groups fell beyond the scope of this article. For example, participants' adaptation to the (im)politeness norms of the target culture is discussed in Isosävi (2020). Turning to the focus group methodology, such discussions are often used – as I applied them in this study – during the initial phase of research to understand a new analytical topic (Marková et al. 2006: 34). The methodological limitation of focus groups here is that participants reported their own perceptions of (im)politeness, which did not necessarily fully correspond to the complex reality. Therefore, a study of authentic intercultural interactions is necessary. For this purpose, about 12 hours of authentic interactions in French between Finnish and French individuals have been videotaped in Helsinki, Lyon, and Paris in 2017. The recordings include both professional (e. g., work meetings) and private (e. g., family meals) interactions and settings. Analyzing these recordings will show how different perceptions of space versus rapport are realized in actual intercultural interactions. For example, these recordings will allow for a more detailed study of silence, together with overlapping talk. The latter is related to the concept of silence, which could not be examined here. Finally, the analysis of these recordings will enable a study of possible metapragmatic comments of (im)politeness made by interactants during actual intercultural interactions.

Acknowledgments: I would like to express my gratitude to Tuuli Holttinen for acting as an assistant moderator during the focus group discussions, and to Mari Wiklund for helping me get started with Praat. In addition, I thank all of my colleagues, especially Hanna Lappalainen, who provided helpful comments to earlier versions of this article. I also extend my thanks to Emilie Jouin–Chardon for checking the French transcriptions and to Vanessa Fuller for English-language revision. In addition, I extend my gratitude to two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the Kone Foundation for its financial support of this research.

References

- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1984. *Problems of Dostoyevsky's poetics*. (ed.) Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1986. *Speech genres and other late essays*. (ed.) Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas.
- Barros García, María Jesús & Marina Terkourafi. 2015. Combining self-report and role-play data in sociopragmatic research: towards a methodological synthesis. In Kate Beeching and Helen Woodfield (eds.), *Researching sociopragmatic variability. Perspectives from variational, interlanguage and contrastive pragmatics*, 230–250. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Beeching, Kate. 2006. Politeness markers in French: post-posed *quoi* in the Tourist Office. *Journal of Politeness Research* 2. 143–167.
- Billig, Michael. 1996. *Arguing and thinking. A rhetorical approach to social psychology*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press and Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.
- Bloor, Michael, Jane Frankland, Michelle Thomas & Kate Robson. 2001. *Focus groups in social research*. London: Sage.
- Brown, Penelope & Stephen Levinson. 1987. *Politeness: some universals in language use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Buchart, Mélanie. 2010. Dimensions culturelles dans l'enseignement du FLE en Finlande. In George Alao, Héba Medhat-Lecocq, Soyong Yun-Roger and Thomas Szende (eds.), *Implicites, stéréotypes, imaginaires. La composante culturelle en langue étrangère*, 97–104. Paris: Éditions des Archives Contemporaines.
- Christie, Christine. 2015. Epilogue. Politeness research: sociolinguistics as applied pragmatics. *Journal of Politeness Research* 11(2). 355–364.
- Clark, Herbert H. & Richard J. Gerrig. 1990. Quotations as demonstrations. *Language* 66(4). 764–805.
- Claudel, Chantal. 2015. Apologies and thanks in French and Japanese personal emails: a comparison of politeness practices. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*(4). 127–145.
- Col, Gilles, Charlotte Danino, Dominique Knutsen & Julien Rault. 2016. Rôle de *voilà* dans l'affirmation: valeur confirmative et marque d'intégration d'informations. <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01377898> (accessed 8 September 2017).
- Eelen, Gino. 2001. *A critique of politeness theory*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Fukushima, Saeko & Michael Haugh. 2014. The role of emic understandings in theorizing im/politeness: the metapragmatics of attentiveness, empathy and anticipatory inference in Japanese and Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics* 74. 165–179.
- Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Pilar, Nuria Lorenzo-Dus & Patricia Bou-Franch. 2010. A genre approach to impoliteness in a Spanish television talk show: evidence from corpus-based analysis, questionnaires and focus groups. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 7(4). 689–723.
- Grainger, Karen. 2011. First order and second order politeness: Institutional and intercultural contexts. In Linguistic Politeness Group (ed.), *Discursive approaches to politeness*, 167–188. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Hakulinen, Auli. 1987. Avoiding personal reference in Finnish. In Jef Verschueren and Marcella Bertuccelli-Papi (eds.), *The pragmatic perspective. Selected papers from the 1985 International Pragmatics Conference*, 140–153. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Haugh, Michael. 2010. Intercultural (im)politeness and the micro-macro issue. In Anna Trosborg (ed.), *Pragmatics across languages and cultures*, 139–166. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

- Haugh, Michael. 2011. Epilogue: Culture and norms in politeness research. In Dániel Z. Kádár and Sara Mills (eds.), *Politeness in East Asia*, 252–264. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Helasvuo, Marja-Liisa. 2001. *Syntax in the making: the emergence of syntactic units in Finnish conversation*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Holttinen, Tuuli. 2016. Stratégies de requête dans un bureau de tabac et dans son équivalent finlandais R-kioski. Congrès Mondial de Linguistique Française (CMLF 2016), *SHS Web of Conferences* 27, 1–17. https://www.shs-conferences.org/articles/shsconf/pdf/2016/05/shsconf_cmlf2016_02007.pdf (accessed 17 September 2017).
- Isosävi, Johanna. 2010. *Les formes d'adresse dans un corpus de films français et leur traduction en finnois*. Helsinki: Société Néophilologique de Helsinki [PhD thesis]. <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/19243> (accessed 14 September 2017).
- Isosävi, Johanna. 2020. Cultural outsiders' reported adherence to Finnish and French politeness norms. *Journal of Pragmatics* 155. 177–192.
- Isosävi, Johanna (under review). Historical changes in politeness norms: are Finnish and French conceptions of politeness moving closer to one other? In Gudrun Held, Daniel Kádár and Annick Paternoster (eds.), Double Special Issue, *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*.
- Isosävi, Johanna & Hanna Lappalainen. 2015. First names in Starbucks: A clash of cultures? In Catrin Norrby and Camilla Wide (eds.), *Address practice as social action: European perspectives*, 97–118. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kecskes, Istvan. 2015. Intercultural impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics* 86. 43–47.
- Kecskes, Istvan. 2017. Context-dependency and impoliteness in intercultural communication. *Journal of Politeness Research* 13(1). 7–31.
- Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Catherine. 2001. Oui, non, si: un trio célèbre et méconnu. *Marges Linguistiques*(2). 95–119.
- Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Catherine. 2005a. Politeness in France: how to buy bread politely. In Leo Hickey and Miranda Stewart (eds.), *Politeness in Europe*, 29–44. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Catherine. 2005b. *Le discours en interaction*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Krueger, Richard A. & Mary Anne Casey. 2015. *Focus groups: a practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Larjavaara, Matti. 1999. Kieli, kohteliaisuus ja puhuttelu [Language, politeness and forms of address]. *Kielikello*(2). <http://www.kielikello.fi/index.php?mid=2&pid=11&aid=510> (accessed 14 September 2017).
- Larjavaara, Matti. 2007. *Pragmasemantiikka* [Pragmasemantics]. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Louhiala-Salminen, Leena, Mirjaliisa Charles & Anne Kankaanranta. 2005. English as a lingua franca in Nordic corporate mergers: two case companies. *English for Specific Purposes* 24(4). 401–421.
- Marková, Ivana, Per Linell, Michèle Grossen & Anne Salazar-Orvig. 2006. *Dialogue in focus groups. Exploring socially shared knowledge*. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Mills, Sara & Dániel Z. Kádár. 2011. Politeness and culture. In Dániel Z. Kádár and Sara Mills (eds.), *Politeness in East Asia*, 21–44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitchell, Nathaniel & Michael Haugh. 2015. Agency, accountability and evaluations of impoliteness. *Journal of Politeness Research* 11(2). 207–238.
- Muikku-Werner, Pirkko. 1993. *Impositiivisuus ja kielellinen variaatio. Julkisten keskustelujen käskyt ja kysymykset kielenopetuksen näkökulmasta* [Imposition and linguistic variability.

- Orders and questions in public speech from the perspective of language teaching]. Joensuu: University of Joensuu.
- Nakane, Ikuko. 2007. *Silence in intercultural communication: perceptions and performance*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ochs, Elinor. 1996. Linguistic Resources for Socializing Humanity. In John Joseph Gumperz and Stephen C. Levinson (eds.), *Rethinking linguistic relativity*, 407–437. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ogiermann, Eva & Małgorzata Suszczyńska. 2011. On im/politeness behind the iron curtain. *Politeness Across Cultures*, 194–215. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Olbertz-Siitonen, Margarethe & Marko Siitonen. 2015. The silence of the Finns exploring the anatomy of an academic myth. *Sosiologia* 4. 318–333.
- Péroz, Pierre. 2009. “On ne dit pas ouais!” *Langue française* 161(1). 115–134.
- Peterson, Elizabeth. 2010. Perspective and politeness in Finnish requests. *Pragmatics* 20(3). 401–423.
- Peterson, Elizabeth & Johanna Vaattovaara. 2014. Kiitos and pliis: The relationship of native and borrowed politeness markers in Finnish. *Journal of Politeness Research* 10(2). 247–269.
- Poncini, Gina. 2004. *Discursive strategies in multicultural business meetings*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Puchta, Claudia & Jonathan Potter. 1999. Asking elaborate questions: focus groups and the management of spontaneity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 3(3). 314–335.
- Raevaara, Liisa. 2009. Epilogi [The epilogue]. *Kieli kioskilla. Tutkimuksia kioskiasioinnin rutiineista* [Language at the convenience store. Studies of routines in convenience store service encounters], 296–315. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Rauniomaa, Mirka. 2007. Stance markers in spoken Finnish. *Minun mielestä ja minusta in assessments*. In Robert Englebretson (ed.), *Stancetaking in discourse. Subjectivity, evaluation, interaction*, 221–252. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Sifianou, Maria. 1995. Do we need to be silent to be extremely polite? Silence and FTAs. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 5(1). 95–110.
- Sifianou, Maria. 2013. The impact of globalisation on politeness and impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics* 55. 86–102.
- Sorjonen, Marja-Leena. 2001. *Responding in Conversation: A Study of Response Particles in Finnish*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Sorjonen, Marja-Leena, Liisa Raevaara & Hanna Lappalainen. 2009. Mä otan tän. Käynnin syyn esittämisen tavat kioskilla [I will take this. Ways of presenting the reason for the encounter]. *Kieli kioskilla. Tutkimuksia kioskiasioinnin rutiineista* [Language at the convenience store. Studies of routines in convenience store service encounters], 90–119. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Tannen, Deborah. 1985. Silence: Anything but. In Deborah Tannen and Muriel Saviile-Troike (eds.), *Perspectives on Silence*, 93–112. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Tanner, Johanna. 2012. *Rakenne, tilanne ja kohteliaisuus. Pyyntöt S2-oppikirjoissa ja autenttisissa keskusteluissa* [Linguistic structures, situation and politeness: requests in Finnish as a second language text-books and in authentic service encounters]. Helsinki: University of Helsinki [PhD thesis]. <https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/32474/rakennet.pdf> (accessed 22 April 2020).
- Tiitilä, Ulla. 1992. Keskustelun periaatteista kohteliaisuuteen. Uusia näkökulmia virkakirjeiden ongelmiin [From principles of conversation to politeness. New perspectives to

- problems from the letters of officials]. *Kielikello*(3). <http://www.kielikello.fi/index.php?mid=2&pid=11&aid=854> (accessed 14 September 2017).
- Traverso, Véronique. 1996. *La conversation familière: analyse pragmatique des interactions*. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon.
- Tryggvason, Marja Terttu. 2006. Communicative behavior in family conversation: Comparison of amount of talk in Finnish, SwedishFinnish, and Swedish families. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38. 1795–1810.
- Tulviste, Tiia, Luule Mizera, Boel De Geer & Marja-Terttu Tryggvason. 2003. A Silent Finn, a Silent Finno-Ugric, or a Silent Nordic? A Comparative Study of Estonian, Finnish, and Swedish Mother-Adolescent Interactions. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 24. 249–265.
- Wästerfors, David & Jana Holsanova. 2005. Examples as crucial arguments in discourse on others. *Text* 25(4). 519–554.
- Watts, Richard J. 2003. *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wibeck, Victoria, Viveka Adelswärd & Per Linell. 2004. Comprendre la complexité: les focus groups comme espace de pensée et d'argumentation à propos les aliments génétiquement modifiés. *Bulletin de Psychologie* 57(3). 253–261.
- Wilkins, Richard & Pekka Isotalus. 2009. Finnish Speech Culture. In Richard Wilkins and Pekka Isotalus (eds.), *Speech Culture in Finland*, 1–16. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Wilkinson, Sue. 1999. A Feminist Method. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 23(2). 221–244.
- Yli-Vakkuri, Valma. 2005. Politeness in Finland: Evasion at All Costs. In Leo Hickey and Miranda Stewart (eds.), *Politeness in Europe*, 189–202. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Appendix A: Transcription conventions for French

The French speech was transcribed according to the orthographic conventions developed for French language by the ICOR group (ICAR laboratory, Lyon). For a full version see http://icar.univ-lyon2.fr/projets/corinte/documents/2013_Conv_ICOR_250313.pdf.

/ \	rising or falling intonation of the preceding segment
.	short pause (<0.2 seconds)
(1.2)	timed pause in seconds and tenths of seconds
[]	beginning and end of overlap
EMPIÉTER	emphasis
°ouais°	low volume
:	stretching of prior syllable
s-	cut-off
((rire))	transcriber's comments
`	non-standard elision
^	optional liaison
< >	length of vocal production (e. g., smiling voice)

Appendix B: Transcription conventions for Finnish

The Finnish speech was transcribed according to conventions commonly used in conversation analysis.

;	slightly falling pitch at the end of a prosodic unit
<u>päivää</u>	prominent stress
>niin sä sanot<	accelerated speech rate
rapussa:	lengthened vowel
<u>monimutka</u> (h)sempi	word produced laughingly
£jotenki£	word produced smilingly
[overlap of speech begins
]	overlap of speech ends
(.)	micropause (duration of less than 0.2 seconds)
(0.3)	pause (duration measured in seconds)

Appendix C: Symbols used in glossing

2sg	second-person singular ending
3SG	third-person singular ending
ADE	adessive (“at,” “on”)
ADV	adverbial
ALL	allative (“to”)
COMP	comparative
ELA	elative (“out of,” “from”)
GEN	genitive
INE	inessive (“in”)
NEG	negation
PL	plural
PRT	particle
PTV	partitive (“part of”)

Bionote

Johanna Isosävi

Docent Johanna Isosävi, PhD, is a researcher of French at the University of Helsinki. She has also worked as a visiting researcher at the ICAR Laboratory, in École normale supérieure de Lyon. Her research interests include intercultural (im)politeness and forms of address.