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Politeness as a Linguistic Concept in the Croatian and English Languages – a Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

Despite Brown and Levinson's original claims that politeness is a universal concept perceived identically in all cultures, it has long been established that different societies perceive this concept differently. A lack of understanding regarding these differences may lead to intercultural conflict and thus research is required, especially in cultures in which such research is scarce, such as that of Croatia. This article focuses on the comparative corpus analysis of both the word politeness in English and its Croatian "counterpart," the word *pristojnost*, in dictionaries and their use in corpora. Furthermore, it aims to establish how Croatian speakers perceive *pristojnost* and the quality of *pristojnost* (or the lack of it) in people. For this purpose, a qualitative and quantitative comparative corpus analysis based on the definitions of the words in question in certain English and Croatian dictionaries, their usage in their respective corpora and their translations in each of the two languages, as well as a small-scale quantitative and qualitative analysis of a questionnaire, completed by Croatian participants, were conducted. On the basis of such a four-step analysis, it has been concluded that both English politeness and Croatian *pristojnost* have two meanings, one connected to culture/etiquette, and one oriented towards interpersonal relationships; however, *pristojnost* has another meaning, that of satisfactoriness. It has also been deduced that *pristojnost* slightly differs from politeness, as it focuses more on interpersonal behaviour and interaction, rather than social norms and etiquette, which the concept of politeness seems primarily to focus on. Understanding these differences is crucial for high quality communication, especially in intercultural and multicultural contexts, e.g. in academic settings. For this reason, research on a larger scale should be carried out to establish how politeness and its equivalents are perceived in various cultural contexts; this article thus serves as a call for research expansion.

Keywords

politeness, concept, Croatian, English, comparative linguistics, cultural differences, semantics

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

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Сравнительный анализ вежливости как лингвистического понятия в хорватском и английском языках

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Аннотация

Несмотря на первоначальные утверждения Браун и Левинсона о том, что вежливость является универсальным, одинаково воспринимаемым понятием во всех культурах, давно установлено, что разные общества воспринимают это понятие по-разному. Отсутствие понимания этих различий приводит к потенциальному межкультурному конфликту и, таким образом, требует исследований, особенно в культурах, в которых таких исследований мало, например, в хорватской культуре. Эта статья посвящена сравнительному корпусному анализу слова «politeness» в английском языке и его хорватского «аналога» слова «pristoјnost» в словарях и их использованию в корпусах. Кроме того, данная статья направлена и на установление того, как носители хорватского языка воспринимают pristoјnost и качество pristoјnosti (т. е. ее отсутствие) у людей. С этой целью проводится качественный и количественный сравнительный корпусный анализ, основанный на определениях рассматриваемых слов в некоторых английских и хорватских словарях, их использовании в соответствующих корпусах и их переводах на каждый из двух языков, а также мелкомасштабный количественный и качественный анализ анкеты, заполненной хорватскими участниками. На основе такого четырехэтапного анализа был сделан вывод о том, что и английское politeness, и хорватское pristoјnost имеют два значения, одно из которых связано с культурой/этикетом, а другое ориентировано на межличностные отношения, тогда как pristoјanost имеет другое значение – порядочность. Также был сделан вывод, что pristoјnost немного отличается от politeness, поскольку pristoјnost больше фокусируется на межличностном поведении и взаимодействии, а не на социальных нормах, стандартах и этикете, на которых концепция politeness, по-видимому, в первую очередь сосредоточена. Понимание этих различий имеет решающее значение для качественного общения, особенно в межкультурном и мультикультурном контексте, например, в академической среде. По этой причине необходимо провести дополнительные исследования в более крупном масштабе, чтобы установить, как вежливость и ее эквиваленты воспринимаются в различных культурных контекстах, и эта статья служит призывом к расширению таких исследований.

Ключевые слова

вежливость, концепт, хорватский язык, английский язык, сравнительное языкознание, культурные различия, семантика

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Кроме того, я хотела бы выразить искреннюю благодарность всем участникам исследования, которые щедро поделились с нами своим временем, опытом, мнениями и идеями. Их готовность участвовать в данном исследовании сыграла важную роль в его успехе и завершении.

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Introduction

Politeness, as a concept in linguistics, has for the past forty years been discussed from various points of view [Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Brown and Levinson, 1987; Wierzbicka, 2003; Watts, 1992/2003; Larina, 2009/2015; Locher, 2002/2004 etc.]. Although the pioneers in this field, namely Robin Lakoff [1973], Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson [1987] and Geoffrey Leech [1983] initially stated that politeness may be viewed as a universal concept, their assertion has over time been disproved. Specifically, it has been concluded that, although the majority of cultures recognise politeness as a phenomenon, how it is understood depends on the culture itself, that is to say on its members and society [Ide, 1989; Larina, 2015; Leech and Larina, 2014; Wierzbicka, 2003; Kharlova, 2014 etc.]. Thus, it can be concluded that what is subsumed under the term politeness in English does not fully correspond with the “equivalents,” or “translations,” of that word in other languages. The problem is that the notion native speakers of one language have in mind while discussing this term is often not known to multi-lingual persons with a different native language, which can lead to misunderstanding, tension, and even conflict [Larina, 2009; Leech and Larina, 2014; Kolar, 2022 etc.]. This is often the case in countries, such as Croatia, with a lack of research in the field of (linguistic) politeness. The aim of the study, therefore, will be to get an initial insight into the meaning and usage of the word *pristojan/pristoynost*, in Croatian, and compare it to its English equivalent, *polite(ness)*. This will be done through a qualitative comparative corpus analysis based on the definitions of the words in question in certain English and Croatian dictionaries, their usage in their respective corpora and their translations in each of the two languages, as well as through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a small-scale *pristoynost*-related questionnaire, completed by Croatian participants. The thesis in the article is that the words *politeness* and *pristoynost* have semantic differences and are not a perfect match, even though Croatian *pristoynost* is used as a translation of *politeness* in Croatian and vice versa.

Literary review: defining politeness

For the purpose of better understanding of this article, what is meant by politeness as a socio-linguistic concept will be determined with the help of Watts' [1992, 2003], Locher's [2002, 2004] and Locher and Watts' [2005] definition. According to their article, *Politeness Theory and Relational Work*, politeness is a “discursive concept arising out of interactants' perceptions and judgements of their own and others' verbal behaviour” [2005, p. 13]. They further divide this concept into first order politeness (politeness1) and second order politeness (politeness2), in accordance with which politeness1 reflects how people perceive social behaviour and use the word *polite(ness)*, while politeness2 refers to politeness as a theoretical concept with degrees [2005, p. 14–15; Kharlova, 2014, p. 119]. Considering the topic of this research – how *pristoynost*, the Croatian cultural “equivalent” of politeness, is perceived by Croatian speakers in comparison to how *politeness* is viewed by Anglophones – the politeness we shall be referring to is politeness1.

Methodology

To get an initial insight into what is considered polite, or *pristojan*, in Croatian and English, the analysis that will be conducted here will be similar to that conducted by Kharlova [2014]. Thus, firstly, the definitions of the words *polite* and *pristojan*, as well as their synonyms, will be collected

from the following dictionaries: *Macmillan Dictionary and Thesaurus*, *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster Online: Dictionary and Thesaurus* and *Thesaurus.com* for English, and *Školski rječnik hrvatskog jezika*, *Hrvatski jezični portal*, *Veliki rječnik hrvatskog jezika* by Vladimir Anić and *Kontekst.io* for Croatian, upon which they will be compared, analysed and discussed. Secondly, their usage will be studied in the *Corpus of Contemporary American English – COCA* and the corpus of Croatian language – *hrWaC*. For the purpose of the analysis, the usage of the word in the first 50 sentences in both corpora will be analysed. Thirdly, their translations will be compared with the help of two prominent bilingual dictionaries in Croatia – the *Croatian-English Dictionary* and the *English-Croatian Dictionary* by Željko Bujas – and the online English-Croatian/Croatian-English dictionary, *Glosbe*. Finally, to gain a deeper understanding of what *pristojnost* means to Croatian people, a questionnaire, which was conducted for the purpose of this article and focused on the perception of *pristojnost* in Croatian, will be analysed. More details about the questionnaire will be given below.

On the basis of this four-part analysis, we shall compare how each of the two terms is perceived in the analysed languages and thus conclude what *politeness* and *pristojnost* mean in both Anglophone and Croatian cultures. It must be noted that while *polite* is a gender-neutral term in English, the term which will be analysed in Croatian, *pristojan*, is the masculine form of the adjective, but will be used here universally, as Croatian dictionaries still use masculine adjectival forms as the prototypical forms denoting characteristics of all genders in the Croatian language. It must also be noted that the questionnaire was conducted only with a Croatian audience, as there is significantly less insight in the meaning of the word *pristojnost* than there is in the word and concept of *politeness*. With this in mind, we believe more emphasis should be put on Croatian and the perception of *pristojnost*, with *politeness* serving primarily as a point of reference, which is also why *politeness* was studied more generally, rather than from a point of view of various English vernaculars and Anglophone cultures. Finally, it must be emphasised that the questionnaire in this research was purposefully conducted on a relatively small audience, as well as on the basis of a limited amount of data, as it primarily serves as a “trial research”, a first look into the topic of *pristojnost*. Significantly more research, on a larger scale, is needed to establish more detailed results, but we believe the methodology used here allows for a good general overview of the topic, as well as a basis for further study.

Results

To start with the English definitions, the word *polite* in the *MacMillan Dictionary* is defined as a characteristic of someone who “behaves towards other people in a pleasant way that follows all the usual rules of society”. Furthermore, *Merriam-Webster* offers five definitions of this word: “of, relating to, or having the characteristics of advanced culture; marked by refined cultural interests and pursuits especially in arts and *belles lettres*; showing or characterized by correct social usage; marked by an appearance of consideration, tact, deference, or courtesy; marked by a lack of roughness or crudities”. Finally, interestingly, *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* offers three definitions. According to it, the term *polite* can be interpreted in the three following ways: “having or showing good manners and respect for the feelings of others,” “socially correct but not always sincere,” and “from a class of society that believes it is better than others.” Among the synonyms for the word *polite* in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* are the terms “civil, courteous, genteel, gracious, mannerly, well-bred,” whereas in the *Thesaurus.com* database one can find such words as “mannerly, civilized, affable, amiable, attentive, civil, conciliatory, considerate, cordial, courteous, courtly, deferential, diplomatic” and so on.

In the above-mentioned Croatian dictionaries meanwhile, there are several definitions of the word *pristojan*. Thus, in the *Školski rječnik hrvatskog jezika*, *pristojan* describes someone/something that, firstly, knows how to act in a well-mannered way, respects common rules of behaviour and is civil (or

refers to someone who knows how to do so / act in such a way), and/or is of a satisfactory quality or quantity; is decent. In *Hrvatski jezični portal* and *Veliki rječnik hrvatskog jezika*, the definitions are quite similar: polite means respecting societal rules, rules of politeness and rules of civility, but also something of a satisfactory quality, confirming that the word *pristojan* in Croatian has two distinct, very different meanings. *Pristojnost* also has a specific definition in the *Hrvatski jezični portal*, being defined as the totality of behavioural rules and rules of direct acting accepted in a society. In *Kontekst.io*, the thesaurus of synonyms and antonyms for the Croatian, Serbian and Slovene languages, the most common synonyms of the word *pristojan* in Croatian are “uljudan, uljuđen, civiliziran, obziran, skroman, obazriv,” which may be translated as civil, civilised, thoughtful, humble and considerate.

When it comes to the usage of these words in their respective national corpora, starting with the word *polite* in *COCA*, all of the 50 analysed sentences refer to politeness as a human characteristic of following societal norms, acting pleasantly towards someone directly or following etiquette. In most cases, due to a lack of greater context, these meanings cannot be separated, and often they are mixed, which may be seen from the following sentences:

1. Girls like men that don't behave rudely to people and are also **polite**.
2. Either the dishes are all really good or everyone is being **polite**, because no withering criticism is uttered.

On the other hand, when it comes to the use of the word *pristojan* in the Croatian language corpus, out of the 50 analysed sentences, the meaning which reflects the “primary” meaning of the word – its usage in the context of denoting someone/something acting in accordance with societal rules and norms and/or acting nicely towards others – is used in 23 sentences. This usage may be seen in the following sentences:

3. *Moj prvi dojam o Suzani bio je da je vrlo **pristojna** i poprilično ukočena. Sjela je na stolac čvrsto držeći u rukama svoju torbu i promatrajući me pomalo iskosa...*
My first impression of Suzana was that of a very **polite** and rather stiff person. She sat onto a chair, clutching her purse tightly and looking at me slightly askance...
4. *Nezadovoljni kandidat o rezultatu može na **pristojan** način porazgovarati s instruktorom i ispitivačem.*
The candidate, if dissatisfied, can discuss the result in a **polite** manner with the instructor and the examiner.

As in *COCA*'s examples, the two meanings in these sentences are mixed. However, more than half of the sentences analysed (27 of them) refer to the “secondary” meaning of the word, carrying the notion of *satisfactoriness*, as is the case with the following sentences:

5. *Unutrašnjost (auta) obiluje i **pristojnom** količinom pretinaca za odlaganje sitnica, što je uvijek korisno.*
The interior (of the car) has a **decent** amount of compartments for storing miscellaneous items, which is always useful.

When it comes to the translations of these words in English-Croatian/Croatian-English dictionaries, *Glosbe* translates the word *polite* as “uljudan, pristojan, učtiv, uglađen, klasičan, odgojen,” all of which point to the primary meaning of the word in English: using one's manners and ability to follow social norms and etiquette. Bujas's repertoire appears similar, as the same word is translated as “uljudan, fin, uglađen, pristojan” in Croatian, all of which again focus on an individual's ability to adhere to societal rules, as the definitions of the word suggest. On the other hand, the most common translations of *pristojan* in *Glosbe* seem to be “decent, polite, proper,” whereas the less common translations include words such as “gentle, seemly, decorous, becoming, modest, civil, apposite, well-behaved, respectful, courteous, affable, urbane, bland, civilized, well-mannered, well-spoken, nice, neat,” which seems to correspond to both meanings of the word in Croatian. In Bujas's

English-Croatian Dictionary, *pristojan* is translated with a similar range of words, including: “polite, civil, courteous, good-mannered, appropriate, proper, becoming, fitting, respectable, genteel, decent, fair, acceptable, handsome, goodly, reasonable,” which serves to prove the same point.

To gain a better insight into the perception of *pristojnost* by Croatians and its usage in real life, a small-scale questionnaire focusing on peoples’ view on *pristojnost* was implemented and later analysed and assessed.

The questionnaire was created via Google Forms and shared on social media. Apart from requests for statistical information (focusing on participants’ gender, age, mother tongue, nationality, birthplace and residence, and education level), the questionnaire contained four questions:

1. *U nekoliko riječi/rečenica opišite što za vas predstavlja riječ pristojnost, na način: Pristojnost je...*

In a few words/sentences describe what the word *pristojnost* (politeness) means to you, in the form of: Politeness is...

2. *U nekoliko riječi/rečenica opišite što su za vas karakteristike pristojne osobe, na način: Pristojna osoba je...*

In a few words/sentences describe what characteristics you believe a polite person has, in the form of: A polite person is...

3. *Navedite primjer ponašanja koje/koja smatrate pristojnim.*

Give an example of behaviour you consider to be polite.

4. *Navedite primjer ponašanja koje/koja smatrate nepristojnim.*

Give an example of behaviour you consider to be impolite.

These questions formed the main part of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was filled out by 53 participants, of whom 69.8 % were female and 30.2 % were male. The participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 62, with an average of 27 years. All participants’ mother tongue was Croatian, as was their nationality. All participants were born and live in Croatia. As for their education, 70.6 % of participants have finished graduate studies, 11.3 % have finished undergraduate studies and the remaining 17.6 % have a high school diploma.

When it comes to the first question, focusing on what *pristojnost* means to people, the answers can be divided into six categories, as follows: *pristojnost* is a form of respect, *pristojnost* is a result/ reflection of (good) upbringing, *pristojnost* is (a result of) culture, *pristojnost* is positive behaviour towards others, and *pristojnost* is respecting social norms and etiquette, plus several answers in which *pristojnost* was characterised as a specific deed/action (focused on showing positive behaviour towards others, such as not interrupting them when they are speaking, saying hello, thank you and so on). Their distribution can be seen below (fig. 1).

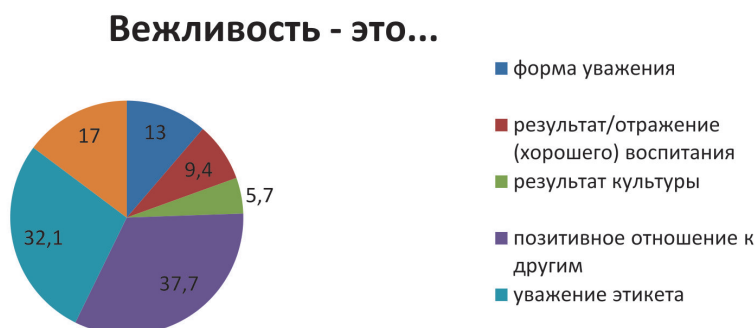


Fig. 1. Definition of politeness (*pristojnost*)

Some participants opted for several answers, but, as can be deduced, for Croatians, *pristojnost* is most commonly an inner quality focused on good behaviour towards others (37.7 %) or a learned, socially accepted and taught quality focused on certain rules of Croatian culture (32.1 %). This signifies that, in Croatia, showing other people that you care about them is the most important form of *pristojnost*, while following societal rules and norms is of secondary importance, which slightly differs from the view on *politeness* in the English-speaking world. It must be noted that the secondary meaning of *pristojnost*, that of satisfactoriness, was not mentioned by any of the participants in the questionnaire.

When defining what a polite person (*pristojna osoba*) is to the average Croat, which was the focus of the second question, the answers can be divided into several categories, as can be seen in the fig. 2.



Fig. 2. Definition of a polite person (*pristojna osoba*)

As can be deduced, the most common characteristics of a *pristojna osoba*, according to Croatian speakers, include: being cultured and civilised as well as following etiquette (21.05 %), being empathetic and in general good towards others (15.79 %) and not being pushy and showy when in contact with others (9.65 %). Out of the other categories, the majority (respect towards others, patience and calmness, the willingness to help others, respect towards interpersonal differences, not interrupting others, and the ability to hold pleasant communication), again, are focused on peoples' behaviour towards other people, rather than on etiquette. Even in the category labelled "other," the ideas that were expressed primarily referred to *pristojnost* as a way of treating / acting towards other people (being open, realistic, positive, honest, assertive and so on). This, again, slightly differs from the dictionary definitions of *pristojnost*, in which etiquette and good behaviour towards others are equally important in the understanding of the word in Croatian. Thus, it is again confirmed that, while etiquette and culture are important for the understanding of *pristojnost* in Croatia, how a person treats others seems to be much more important in this regard.

When defining what, exactly, constitutes behaviour typical of a polite person, the results of the question focusing on this topic broadly correspond to the results of the previous two questions, which can be observed below (fig. 3).

Вежливое поведение - это...



Fig. 3. Definition of polite behaviour (*pristojno ponašanje*)

The participants answered this question, providing 94 examples of polite behaviour. Again, while respecting etiquette (expressed by categories, such as using the “four magic words” (thank you, you’re welcome, please and sorry) (10.64 %), dressing appropriately (3.18 %), and using table manners (2.13 %) is quite important, treating others well and giving them attention seems to be much more important to an average Croat or speaker of Croatian in the context of defining a type of behaviour as *pristojno*. This especially refers to treating the elderly, and in general people older than ourselves, with respect (15.96 %). How important positive people-oriented behaviour is for Croats when defining *pristojnost* can be seen in categories in which behaviour, described as *pristojno*, includes helping others, respecting others and giving up your seat in public transport/spaces to others, which subsumes over 15 % of answers in the questionnaire. Furthermore, it seems that being a good communicator is particularly important in this regard, as greeting people, being pleasant to talk with and not interrupting others while they are speaking were things mentioned in over a third of the responses in this questionnaire (over 35 %). As for the category with answers not belonging to any of the other categories, the majority of them refer to behaviours which include respecting other people (their time, privacy and workspace) and treating them nicely (opening doors for them, smiling at them, not talking deprecatingly about them and so on), which once again indicates that, in Croatia, *pristojnost* is seen primarily through the prism of peoples’ behaviour towards others, and secondarily through the lens of culture and civilisation.

The last question, which required participants to give examples of impolite (*nepristojno*) behaviour, was the most diverse with regard to answers provided, as can be seen in the fig. 4.

Out of the 92 examples, almost a quarter (21.74 %) consisted of answers that cannot be categorised, as they only appeared once. These included eye rolling, nose picking, walking naked in public, breaking wind, gossiping, arrogance, rudeness, loud chewing, lying, being pushy, throwing trash on the floor, not using the “magic words,” and disobedience. As can be deduced, these are mostly focused on behaviour in public, etiquette and “taboo behaviour,” whereas the answers related to our behaviour towards other people come in second place. This differs from the results of the previous three questions, in which the most common answer category was the one in which *pristojnost* is primarily connected to our behaviour towards other people. Nevertheless, answers from almost all

Невежливое поведение - это...



Fig. 4. Definition of impolite behaviour (*nepristojno ponašanje*)

the other categories included *nepristojnost* in the sense of negative behaviour aimed at other people (swearing, insulting, yelling at, deprecating, ignoring, interrupting and acting aggressively towards others). This means that, in over half of the answers (51.09 %), for the questionnaire respondents, the idea of both *pristojnost* and *nepristojnost* is connected primarily to how we treat other people, and then secondarily to etiquette, or how we act regarding our surroundings.

Discussion

First and foremost, it must be once again emphasised that the questionnaire-related part of this research is conducted on a rather small scale. The results in it are innovative, as they provide new information with regards to a topic that has not been studied yet, and insightful, but cannot be seen as conclusive and complete – to get such results, significantly more research is to be carried out (on a larger scale). Furthermore, additional research should be conducted with people of more diverse (education) backgrounds, as the majority of questionnaire participants happened to hold a university degree, and as such research would enable a broader insight into the perception of *pristojnost*. Therefore, the results and conclusions presented in this article should be taken *cum grano salis* and as a basis for further research.

Having said that, on the basis of this analysis, we may draw three main conclusions. The first is that dictionary definitions of both *politeness* and *pristojnost* refer to culture/etiquette on the one hand and (positive) behaviour towards others on the other, which is confirmed by the comparison of dictionary definitions of the words *politeness* and *pristojnost* and their use in corpora.

In English, *polite* behaviour in this sense primarily refers to behaviour fitting the rules of society, and often even to one's position within a culture. What these rules encompass in English and how they are to be followed, however, is (partly) explained only in one definition by *Merriam-Webster*, in which one can see it subsumes “consideration, tact, deference, or courtesy; marked by a lack of roughness or crudities.” However, further “explanation” may be seen in the synonyms of the word in *Thesaurus.com*. Based on these definitions, we can see that the concept of *politeness* primarily refers to how one acts, rather than how one treats others, as amiability, cordiality, attentiveness and consideration – all of which can primarily be seen in relation to others – seem to have secondary

importance within its frames. In fact, definitions in the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* point to the fact that *politeness* does not necessarily come “from one’s heart” or denote one’s respect towards others, but rather displays one’s understanding of rules others follow.

In Croatian, meanwhile, we can come to a (preliminary) conclusion that the quality of *pristoјnost* also primarily refers to one’s ability to follow societal rules and act pleasantly, with civility and thought towards others. However, we find that there is a third meaning to the word, which does not correspond with the meaning of *polite* in English and would be closer to the meaning of the English words *decent* or *satisfactory* – which is also the second conclusion in this analysis. In Croatian, therefore, the factor of society and acting well in general, rather than towards others, in the context of *pristoјnost*, seems to have equal importance. However, unlike in English, there is also a completely different meaning of the word *pristoјan*, which seems to be used even more often than its “primary” meaning in the corpora. This displays how differently the concepts of *politeness* and *pristoјnost* are viewed in these two languages, even though they are often used synonymously.

Finally, by conducting a questionnaire among Croatian participants, we arrive at a third conclusion, according to which for Croatian people, *pristoјnost* is primarily connected to interpersonal behaviour, and not etiquette. Although the different dictionary definitions, as well as their usage in corpora, suggest equal frequency – corresponding to the meaning of politeness – the questionnaire findings somewhat disproved this idea. Here, in all four questions, the definitions of *pristoјnost*, characteristics of a *pristoјna osoba* and examples of *pristoјno* and *nepristoјno* behaviour that were given by the respondents all primarily referred to good behaviour towards others, rather than etiquette. This is not to say that culture, etiquette, education and civilised behaviour are not important for the understanding of *pristoјnost*, as they were still mentioned in at least 30 % of answers in all four questions. Nevertheless, they were mentioned at least slightly less than the interpersonal-behaviour-related meaning of the concept. What must also be emphasised is that behaviour that Croats especially respect, which is not mentioned in the definitions of *pristoјnost*, includes good behaviour towards the elderly and older people. This meaning cannot be deduced from the usage of the words *pristoјnost/pristoјan* in the dictionary and corpora but seems to have an especial significance to the mental image of these concepts in the Croatian mind. Another interesting characteristic of *pristoјnost* and *(ne)pristoјno* behaviour is that in many responses it refers primarily to communication, which might also emphasise the importance of close(ness and) interpersonal relationships in Croatian culture. It must be noted that, counter to the dictionary and corpus definitions of *pristoјnost*, which attest that there is a tertiary meaning of this word in Croatian, the respondents did not mention this meaning in any way. While this may seem unusual, an explanation could be that the respondents were probably aware of the context in which the word *pristoјno(st)* was used in this questionnaire. In other words, while *pristoјno* may mean decent, we cannot use the word *pristoјno* in this sense in relation to people, but, as was mentioned earlier, regarding concepts, such as life, salary, clothes and so on. Thus, this does not disprove the conclusion from the dictionary and corpus analysis, but rather shows that this particular meaning of the word bears tertiary importance.

In addition to all of this, it must be added that the differences in the analysed terms are not only a reflection of linguistics or *politeness/pristoјnost* as concepts *per se*, but rather of the differences in the context of history and political state in Anglophone countries, such as the US and UK, and Croatia, respectively. As history and politics are not the topic of this research, this will not be discussed in greater detail, but it is worth mentioning how much they have impacted our mental images and language.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to compare the English word *politeness* and its Croatian “equivalent,” the word *pristoјnost*, to establish the differences and similarities between them. For this purpose, a comparative qualitative and quantitative analysis of different materials, including various English and

Croatian dictionaries, *COCA* and the Croatian national corpus, as well as the results of a questionnaire, was conducted. On the basis of dictionary and corpora analysis, it has been established that both *politeness* and *pristojnost* have two meanings, one connected to etiquette and one oriented towards interpersonal relationships, but *pristojnost* has another meaning, that of satisfactoriness. On the basis of the questionnaire analysis, it may also be concluded that Croatian people view politeness primarily in the sense of positive behaviour towards others, and secondarily as a way of enforcing etiquette, which seems to slightly differ from the meaning of *politeness*. While this research has shed some light on the perception of *pristojnost* in Croatia, more research should be done in this regard on a significantly larger scale, with a more versatile audience, especially in the context of education. Furthermore, research focused on *nepristojnost* and *impoliteness* would also make a great addition, as the notion of *politeness/pristojnost* cannot be fully understood without them. Thus, with this article, we call for more research on the topic, so as to create a fuller image of *politeness/pristojnost*. In addition to that, as previously mentioned, the idea of *pristojnost* in Croatia is severely under-researched, meaning that non-native speakers of Croatian, and even young Croatians, often do not know how to act in accordance with standards, as they do not know what standards are and what, in general, is meant by *pristojnost*. This is especially problematic in the academic community in Croatia, considering that academic mobility has become popular, leading to a great influx of foreign speakers into Croatian academia. This article, therefore, serves as a call for more research in the field, as well as a contribution to an on-going research by Kolar [2021, 2022], focusing on politeness in teacher-student email communication in the university context, which will, hopefully, cast further light on the understanding of *pristojnost* in Croatia and lead to less intercultural conflict and more comfortable social scenarios.

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