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National Culture in the Language of Politics

The objective of this paper is to prove that linguistic manifestations of cultural differences can be found in texts produced in culturally distinct environments. Hofstede's 5D model concerning cultural differences will be presented and applied to an analysis of two texts: speeches delivered by the Polish Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, and the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown. It will be shown that specific characteristics of both texts correspond to the cultural dimensions introduced in the 5D model, especially the dimension of power distance, the dimension of individualism vs. collectivism and the dimension of uncertainty avoidance. The importance of the implementation of the results of such an analysis will be underlined, especially in the context of migration. It will be proven that the linguistic application of Hofstede's model seems to be an indispensable tool in the research into the pragmatics of intercultural communication. It may also be helpful in preparing acculturation courses for future expatriates who are bound to experience a cultural shock. The paper is based on literature on intercultural communication and text analysis and the transcripts of both speeches.

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Since the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 *migration* has become an increasingly frequent word in Poland. The thought of living in another country turned to be less challenging and many Poles, especially the young, have put such a thought into action. For some it was a matter of choice meanwhile for others a matter of necessity. They have moved in search for a better salary, a better living or simply for an adventure. Some

have been transferred by their employers; some have followed their wives or husbands. All of them have faced a cultural shock.

Naturally, with time immigrants start to understand the behaviour, learn the etiquette and get to know the customs of the residents of the country which became their second home. However, the so called *acculturation*, which Sam and Berry see as “the meeting of cultures and the resulting changes” (2006: 1), is hindered by the fact that the cultural differences are hard to name. Furthermore, few immigrants realize that learning a foreign language does not only mean getting to know the words or grammar, but also learning to adjust their utterances to the context. The effort they put into it could be reduced by relating the manifestations of cultural differences to the linguistic system they try to master.

In the last few years most Polish emigrants chose the United Kingdom as their new home country. Hence, the British culture and the Polish culture, and especially their linguistic manifestations will be the subject of this paper. The research method will be based on a study of Hofstede’s 5D model concerning cultural differences across nations, developed in a course of a research carried out by Hofstede among IBM employees in over 50 countries and described in *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (2000).

First, I will shortly introduce the division of cultures and then present Hofstede’s cultural index values for Poland and the United Kingdom. Finally, a leadership acceptance speech given by the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and a speech delivered by the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk in the Polish Sejm, will be compared to demonstrate the abundance of the linguistic manifestations of differences between the Polish and the British culture.

Hofstede distinguishes five cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term vs. short-term orientation.

The power distance (PDI – Power Distance Index) dimension concerns the inequalities in a society and people’s attitude towards the phenomenon. It is about the power relations which occur in a society in all the fields: in the family, at school, at work. It concerns the expectations and acceptance of the unequal distribution of power by the less privileged members of a family or an organization (Hofstede, 2000: 63). In the countries with a low PDI the emotional distance between the subordinates and the superiors is scarce. They treat each other as partners, employees’ respect is gained with experience, knowledge and professional skills; self-reliance and creativity are appreciated. Children are taught to be independent,

their practical skills are developed and they are encouraged to express their opinion.

In the countries with a high PDI there occurs distance between the superiors and the subordinates. The relations are more official and the division to certain social roles more distinct. The superiors are perceived as authoritarian, their employees do not express their opinion, they are expected to be submissive. In the family the husband and father is the most important figure. Age is another elevating factor, as any decisions are made by the older members of the family. Children are to be obedient and they are looked after even after they attain full adulthood. Parents are very protective.

The next dimension (IDV) divides cultures into the individual and the collective. It concerns the relation of an individual and the society, describes the influence that the society imposes on the individual and answers the question of which is more important: the individual or the group. Individualism naturally appreciates the individual: his or her freedom and goods are to be secured. Interpersonal relations are weak. People take care only of their close families and themselves. The predominant family model is nuclear. Achieving success is of major importance especially as it enhances the individual's self-esteem and self-respect. Success is ascribed only to the individual, not his/her family. In such a culture confrontation is natural, unavoidable and even desired. Also a specific notion of 'shame' is characteristic of individualism: a person disobeying social rules feels deep shame and this feeling comes from their self-awareness as a kind of a build-in "code guard". Work is very much appreciated and could even be perceived as a measure of one's worth. The relations between the co-workers are strictly professional.

In a collective culture the group comes first. It is formed by a family, a group of friends, a team of co-workers or a community. The interpersonal relations are tight and the members have a strong sense of belonging to the group. In return for the loyalty, the group gives them attention and protection. Extended families live together in one house where harmony and unanimity are salient. Children are brought up not only by their parents but also by other members of the family. Success is perceived not only as an achievement of an individual but as an achievement of the whole group. In a collective culture it is important to keep 'face' which means to follow the rules prevailing in a society. Breaching such rules leads to a loss of face not only by the wrong-doer but also by the whole group. Confrontation is avoided and seems inappropriate. Also at work the interests of the group are more important than the individuals'.

People often work with their relatives and become friends with their co-workers.

Even though it seems that the dimension of power distance and individualism vs. collectivism correlate, there are countries which are individualistic and have a high PDI, such as France, and collective countries with a low PDI such as Costa Rica and these support the thesis.

The next dimension (MAS), femininity vs. masculinity, refers to traditionally different social roles of women and men. It opposes the need of an assertive or even aggressive comportment to obedient and modest bearing. The masculine cultures value strength, competition and success; the feminine – harmony, warmth and interpersonal relations. Therefore, e.g. at work: wages, respect, promotion and challenges are more important in the masculine cultures and good relations with the superior, cooperation or stability of employment in the feminine cultures. A masculine culture values work and the material goods that go with it. Rivalry is important and it is desired to be better than others. At school the education is adjusted to the best students, who are often praised. Their educational choices are determined by the prospects of a successful career. Employees are expected to be aggressive and to show initiative. The wages are dependent of one's results.

Femininity is characteristic of the cultures that value protectiveness, good cooperation skills, modesty, sensitivity and good quality of family life. Children, both boys and girls, are taught to be humble, to keep their excellence to themselves. Ambition is a bad quality and can be ridiculed. Both at school and then at work it is important to maintain good relations with other people. Employees pay attention to comfort at work. Strategic decisions are made at meetings and are aided by thorough discussions. Much attention is paid to environmental issues. The choice of a career is not dictated by a prospect of a success but as a way of self-realization. The wages depend on the needs of the employees.

In a masculine culture the division into traditional roles between men and women is more evident than in a feminine country where the sexes cooperate on a more equal basis. As far as these roles are concerned the PDI often correlates with the masculinity vs. femininity dimension.

The uncertainty avoidance dimension (UAI) concerns peoples' attitude towards the unknown and unpredictable. In this context Hofstede differentiates between *fear* and *anxiety*, where *fear* is a reaction to a given person, situation or thing, and *anxiety* is groundless. Some beliefs or institutions are to reduce people's anxiety and these may be religion, law, regulations, technologies that protect us from phenomena such as natural

disasters. However, according to Hofstede people do not share the same level of anxiety. In the high UAI cultures its level is higher than in the low UAI cultures.

The members of the high uncertainty avoidance cultures seem to be livelier: they talk fast and loudly and gesture a lot. They share their emotions with no hesitation and seem to be always busy, impatient, impulsive, aggressive and active. They assess their health, their family and work as worse than they are. They are rarely satisfied. They avoid ambiguity and prefer to define the threat and face it rather than stay calm and passive, which means that they do not shun risk. The consumption of alcohol in such cultures is high since it reduces the stress. The law is strict, though not always obeyed. Children are brought up in a strict manner. There are many taboos. Employees are punctual, precise and continue the started actions till they are finished.

The members of low uncertainty avoidance cultures seem to be calm and composed. Emotions are not publicly displayed, and impulsive or noisy people are disliked. People consume much tea and coffee which are to stimulate them; they assess their life positively. They are often content and satisfied. They do not hurry, they drive slowly and are not afraid of changes; on the contrary they find them interesting. They abide the law which is not that strict. Children are brought up according to rules which are adjusted to the current situation and are subject to change if the parent decides so. The norms concern mostly honesty and politeness, which nevertheless can be interpreted freely. Also at work the projects can be transformed or dropped at any time.

The fifth dimension is long-term vs. short-term orientation. It has not been distinguished in the course of Hofstede's research, but by Michael Bond who studied Asian cultures. However, Hofstede included the dimension in his later work and thus we are able to compare cultures in terms of orientation within his model. Long-term orientation is characteristic of the Far East. Its main features are persistence, thriftiness, the importance of status in interpersonal relations, foresight and sense of shame. The short-term orientation prevails in the West and could be characterized by: stability, balance, protection of 'face', respect for tradition and reciprocation of greetings, favours and gifts. Short-term orientation cultures focus on the past and the presence, they are more static. There is also a major difference in perception of faith and actions. While the East attaches much significance to actions, the West gives it to faith. One could also describe it as the pursuit of Truth in case of the West, and Virtue in the East.

On Hofstede’s website one can find the scores for individual countries and compare one’s home culture to their host culture.

The 5D Model of professor Geert Hofstede

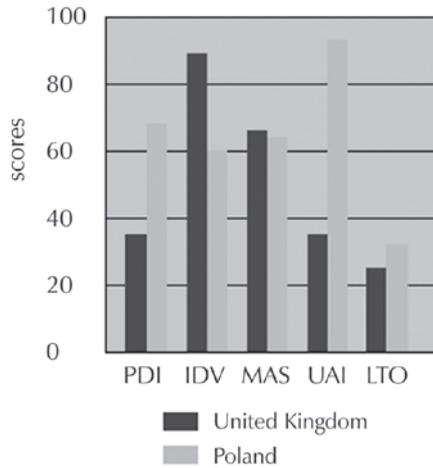


Fig. 1. Geert Hofstede’s 5D model for Poland and United Kingdom (source: <http://www.geert-hofstede.com>, 7 Dec 2009)

Having compared Polish culture and British culture one observes the biggest difference in the Uncertainty Avoidance Index. Whereas Poland scores over 90 per cent, United Kingdom scores only below 40 per cent. Also in the PDI dimension Poland scores much higher than United Kingdom: almost 70 per cent to UK’s 35 per cent. On the other hand United Kingdom shows more individualism (90 to 60 per cent). In the dimensions of masculinity vs. femininity and long-term vs. short-term orientation the difference is slight and therefore these dimensions will not be included in the further study.

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The following analysis is based on two speeches: one delivered by the Polish Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, and the other by the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown. Both politicians delivered their speeches concerning national matters before they were officially appointed as Prime Ministers.

Uncertainty avoidance

The most profound differences can be observed in the UAI dimension, since the high UAI cultures do not deal with anxiety as easily as the low UAI cultures. While Brown’s speech is well-structured, rather calm, factual and

predominantly concerns the future, Tusk's text lacks coherence, its structure is a little chaotic and demagogic, and most importantly, it concerns the past. The Polish Prime Minister's speech expresses harsh criticism of the government of Jarosław Kaczyński. The reproachful character of the speech might be seen as typical of a high UAI culture, especially if one takes into consideration its dramatic and at times aggressive tone. Tusk uses such expressions as: "kapitulacja" (capitulation¹), "bankructwo" (bankruptcy), "zdradzić" (betray), "okrutna miara naszej solidarności" (cruel measure of our solidarity), "bezwstydną [...] deklaracja" (shameless declaration), "rozpasana władza" (profligate authorities), "plugastwa" (filth), "zwykły aferzysta" (common swindler), "upiorna racja" (ghastly right), "rozpaczliwa [...] niesprawność" (desperate inefficiency), "szpetny [...] rząd" (ugly government). His incriminations are serious and express hostility, he accuses the government of hypocrisy, irresponsibility, inconsistency, cynicism, clumsiness, carelessness and negligence. He ridicules their actions: "wy jesteście jacyś czarni jeźdźcy" (you are some Black Riders), "hiper-super specjalne służby" (hiper-super secret service), "dobry scenariusz do jakiegoś nasyconego czarnym humorem filmu" (a good scripts for a black humour comedy), "triumfalny komunikat, otwarto pierwszy odcinek autostrady A1 – 500 metrów" (a triumphant announcement, the first part of the A1 highway was opened – 500 metres), "budowa autostrad będzie wymagała 2280 lat" (to build the highways it will take 2280 years), "pani poseł już się dzisiaj nakrzyczała" (*pani* MP has already shouted her head off today), "zorganizowanie mistrzostw [...] na rok 4287" (organising the championships in 4287).

He also makes mistakes in his speech ("nie będziecie oszczędzam", "porażające niezdarność") and repeats phrases: "nie trzeba być wybitnym matematykiem, ale nie trzeba być wybitnym matematykiem" (you do not need to be an excellent mathematician, but you do not need to be an excellent mathematician), "w imię tej fałszywej, albo bardzo cynicznej tezy, w imię tej fałszywej, albo bardzo cynicznej tezy" (in the name of the false and very cynical thesis, in the name of the false and very cynical thesis).

However, the most evident example of the influence of the high level of uncertainty avoidance is the clause: "to byłby wystarczający powód żebyście [...] powiedzieli przepraszam i dali Polakom spokój" (it was enough to say I'm sorry and leave the Poles in peace), since peacefulness is exactly what the members of high UAI cultures seem to want. The other one is "o zgrozo" (horror of horrors).

¹ All translations are literal.

The mood of his speech is conditional (“ja bym dzisiaj” [today I would], “używałbym” [I would use], “byłby” [it would be], etc.), refined (“wielka kontrrewolucja nihilizmu” [huge counterrevolution of nihilism], “jedyny profetyk” [the only prophet], etc.) and metaphorical (“jak w soczewce” [as in a lense], “które przy tym stoliku dzisiaj siedzą” [who today sit by this table], etc.).

Brown on the other hand uses simple language, his speech is calm, optimistic and factual. Unlike in a high UAI culture he treats problems as challenges (not threats), and welcomes all that is new as a gift. He talks of “new priorities”, “new challenges”, “a new action”, “a new start” and even “a new government” as of something good and desired. He is glad with “the challenge of change”, “economy founded on dynamic, flexible markets and open competition” and calls his party “the party of progressive change”, party “born because of a demand for change”. He does not mention laws but values that guide him and the nation, which are a “moral compass”. He confronts his party’s mistakes in a calm way calling them “lessons learnt”. He also tackles difficult subjects as environmental issues, “immigration”, “disability” and “gay rights”. He calls for rejecting the “prejudice and discrimination”. When it comes to the insecurities of the British life he gives specifics.

Also the analysis of the thematic structure (van Dijk, 1988) of both speeches proves the differences. Gordon Brown introduces topics one by one, developing them as the speech follows. He starts from the acceptance of leadership and expression of gratitude to Tony Blair, Neil Kinnock, John Prescott and Harriet Harman. Then he continues to talk about the new challenges that the party has to face, explains why and how they are going to do it. He assures his audience that they will succeed and names the individual challenges that will have to be met. He gives a detailed list of measures that will be taken and concludes with his readiness to serve the country.

The thematic structure of the Polish Prime Minister’s speech is much more complicated and seems slightly chaotic. He does mention the three missions which PiS² promised to complete, names them and gives arguments suggesting PiS’s failures. However, these arguments are seldom factual nor are they given one by one. He repeats the same information only changing the words, gives the same argument to prove many points. Often he criticizes the party as a whole, not giving any specifics. The accusations concern mostly characteristic features of PiS, not explicitly their actions. Only knowing the context one can refer them to real events. It seems that the purpose is to prove general incompetence of PiS. Moreover, many clauses have a purely phatic function in the text.

² PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) – Law and Justice, a Polish political party

Power distance

Since Poland scores higher in PDI than the UK, there are more fixed polite expressions in Tusk's speech, such as "Panie Marszałku! Wysoka Izbo!" (Mister Speaker! Honourable Chamber!). He addresses his audience as "proszę państwa", "państwu" (ladies and gentlemen as a group), and the actors of the discourses he describes as "panowie" (gentlemen), "pana" (gentleman's), "pani" (lady's). He often introduces his statements in a form of negation, somehow disclaiming responsibility, staying in the shadow: "to nie ja jestem autorem tych zdań" (I am not the author of these words), "nie używałbym tej argumentacji, gdyby" (I would not use this argument if), "nie będę się nad wami znęcał" (I will not bully you), "nie będę wymieniał tych przedziwnych polityków, [...] którzy" (I will not name the strange politicians, who), "ja nie jestem wybitnym matematykiem [...], ale" (I am not an excellent mathematician, but), "nie chcemy władzy zdobytej poprzez służby specjalne" (we do not want power gained with the help of secret service). This may signify his unwillingness to underline his status, his place in the hierarchy.

Brown on the other hand emphasizes the lack of emotional distance between him and his audience treating himself and them as equals, and furthermore addressing Tony Blair on first-name basis, saying "Tony [...] thank you". He underlines the equality between men and women thanking Harriet Harman for increasing "women's representation in Parliament" and campaigning and delivering for "maternity and paternity rights". In his speech there are no expressions that would suggest his supremacy: he wants to "serve" his country, he wants the employers to be "better at listening to and valuing [their] staff", he wishes to "put more power in the hands of the people" so that they would be able "to control their lives".

Individual vs. collective

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Within this dimension the differences are least distinct as both cultures are individual. However, the higher IDV level of the British culture is manifested in the texts. Right from the start Gordon Brown expresses his gratitude to individual people: Tony Blair, Neil Kinnock, John Prescott, Harriet Harman, not the government or the party as a whole, for the effort they put into governing the UK. He also underlines that the policy of the Labour Party should cater to "individual needs" and that the leaders should consult "every member" of their community. Talking about the needs of his people he addresses individuals in a group, not the group as one entity, so he talks

about talent “that each and everyone of us has” and “each and everyone of us should use”, a chance “that each and everyone of us should have”, a responsibility “that each of us has [...] to each other”, “one-to-one support”, a right to education “for every boy and girl” and rights that “every individual citizen has”. According to Brown reforms should “ensure learning personal to their [the students’ – A.Z.] needs”, patients should have access to health care “at the hours that suit them” and people should be engaged in “the decisions that matter to their lives”. He talks of “personal responsibility” and calls “all individuals” to join the government to “make Britain a world leader in tackling climate change”. He refers to a group he met as “every person I have met”. He mentions “young couples” that should have a “home of their own”, and people who want “a better life for themselves and their children” (not their extended families!).

The central objective that is pursued in the individual cultures, namely success, also plays a major role in Brown’s speech. He talks of “a Britain of rising aspiration”, “better chances of education” which are “the great liberating force” and which, aided by “hard work”, are the ultimate “route to a career”. In his opinion it is wrong when the “aspirations” stay “unfulfilled” and “potential unrealised”. He promises to continue “successful reforms” and to be “world class in education” providing the government will build on the Labour Party... “successes” and “work hard” to “do better”. He believes that his party is “ready not just to fight but to win a General Election” and that they “will meet the challenge of change”. He also refers what he says to himself more often than the Polish PM (79 to 42 times), who apart from talking in his own name does not present any distinctly individualistic features.

Conclusions

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Living in a foreign country may for some be exciting, for some frightening. It depends on the culture in which one was raised and their personal traits. Having to adapt to a new situation, learning new codes of social conduct and communication, sometimes even religion, makes knowing the language of the host country the most significant tool for an expatriate. Putting much work into adjusting to the new culture is much easier if one knows it. However, the sole knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, even when aided with theoretical knowledge of the host traditions and customs, may be too little to cope easily in the new environment. Therefore, one should search deeper in the structures of linguistic means of communication to find the sources of the differences between cultures. In this way one

will be able to address them, learn to communicate in a culturally different environment and minimise the downsides of living in a foreign country: the feeling of alienation, helplessness, rejection and anxiety.

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