Evaluations Related to Finger Pointing in a Request: a Multi-method Pragmatic Analysis of an Intercultural Encounter

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Abstract

Drawing on cross-cultural pragmatics, this paper examines an intercultural interaction in French between a Finn and two French people, during which meta-pragmatic comments related to finger pointing by the Finn occurred. This language-anchored, bottom-up study combined multiple methods: the interaction was transcribed using multimodal conversation analysis, evaluated by Finnish and French informants through a questionnaire, and a post-interaction follow-up interview was conducted with the original Finnish interactant. Although the results reveal a discursive dispute related to finger pointing, the L2 speaker did not fully understand the ‘problem’ with her behaviour. A cross-cultural difference appeared as finger pointing in general was evaluated more negatively by French informants than by Finnish informants. This study emphasises the importance of examining multimodality in cross-cultural pragmatics and the usefulness of a multi-method approach to allow the voices of both cultural insiders and outsiders to be heard.

Keywords

cross-cultural pragmatics – (im)politeness – intercultural – request – pointing – multimodality
1 Introduction

In everyday interactional encounters, rarely are politeness or other relational characteristics explicitly mentioned by interactants. Although one may assume that such comments occur more frequently during intercultural encounters than during intracultural interactions, my dataset, consisting of 12 hours of intercultural interactions between multiple Finnish and French speakers, illustrates just how extremely rare they are. Given this rarity, one salient feature – French interactants commenting on finger pointing by a Finnish interactant – merited closer analysis. While some have argued that evaluations of politeness tend to be multimodal (Brown et al., 2023: 12), multimodal im/politeness to my mind remain relatively understudied. My study attempts to fill this gap.

Comments on finger pointing appear in both the Finnish and French media, where its negatively marked character is emphasised. According to a French article, “it is not polite to point a finger at someone”, while a Finnish article stated that “you should avoid finger pointing everywhere you go”. Both articles underlined the universality of the recommendation: finger pointing is “not appropriate in any culture”. In various cultures, a distinction is made between different types of pointing: open hand pointing is employed to assign a right to speak such as during a meeting, while index finger pointing is considered “highly impolite” (Brown et al., 2023: 6).

My study falls within cross-cultural pragmatics, in which I employ a multi-method qualitative analysis. In doing so, my research questions are as follows: 1) What kinds of evaluations do French interactants make related to finger pointing by a Finnish interactant during an actual interaction?; 2) Are evaluations related to the finger pointing cultural or personal?; and 3) How does a Finnish interactant evaluate comments on her finger pointing following this interaction? To answer these questions, first, I transcribed the actual intercultural interaction using multimodal conversation analysis; second, I showed the transcriptions to Finnish and French informants and asked them to complete a questionnaire about the interaction; and, third, I conducted a post-interaction follow-up interview with the original Finnish interactant. The structure of the article is as follows. In section 2, I focus on cross-cultural pragmatics and present previous research on pointing. In section 3, I describe my methodological framework. Section 4 summarises the analysis and results, while section 5 includes a discussion of the implications of these findings.

2 Cross-Cultural Pragmatics and Pointing

In this section, I first focus on cross-cultural pragmatics (section 2.1). I, then, summarise studies of pointing, specifically within specific cultural contexts (section 2.2).

2.1 Cross-Cultural Pragmatics

Pragmatics research distinguishes between cross-cultural and intercultural approaches. Cross-cultural pragmatics focuses on “the comparative study of the use of language by human beings in different languages and cultures”, whereas intercultural pragmatics examines “encounters between members of two or more cultures” (House and Kádár, 2021: 1–2). The starting point of this study is intercultural encounters representing an interaction between individuals from different cultural backgrounds – a Finn living in Paris and two French speakers – examined through the lens of cross-cultural pragmatics. In other words, I focus on the similarities and differences in the ways Finns and French people interpret the use of language and multimodal resources, in this case, a verbal request accompanied by finger pointing.

Culture is a complex phenomenon, whereby researchers debate the relationship between regularities and variation in the behaviour of individuals. Studies of im/politeness have moved away from essentialism, especially with the discursive turn, to emphasise “culture as an interactionally constructed notion” (Kádár and Haugh, 2013: 46). What does cross-cultural pragmatic research do to avoid essentialism? It must be emphasised that cross-cultural pragmatics does not compare cultures as such, which would involve essentialism, but compares “conventionalised language use and related evaluations across linguacultures” (House and Kádár, 2021: 15). I agree with House and Kádár (2021: 29), who argue that we cannot contrast idiosyncratic behaviour, but the phenomenon must be conventionalised – that is, sufficiently recurrent when people use and evaluate language. The finger pointing episode examined in this study is just such a phenomenon (cf. also Introduction: comments in the Finnish and French media).

In previous cross-cultural pragmatics studies focusing on evaluations of such conventionalised phenomena, it is worth highlighting the work of Chang and Haugh (2011) and a study by Haugh and Chang (2019), all of whom inspired my study. Concentrating on a case involving an intercultural apology in a telephone conversation, these researchers examined cultural evaluations of im/politeness among speakers of Australian English and Mandarin Chinese (Taiwan). Methodologically, they employed questionnaires and follow-up interviews. In their first study, the researchers found both cross-cultural differences and intracultural variation, particularly among Australian informants. In
their later study, the researchers focused on the neglected individual variation of im/politeness evaluations, revealing significant individual variation across evaluations.

My previous studies on the perceptions of Finnish and French politeness have identified cross-cultural differences in the moral order (space versus rapport) and conventionalised patterns of behaviour in both verbal and non-verbal behaviours (Isosävi, 2020a; 2020b; 2023a; 2023b). These previous studies focused on the etic perspective in focus groups, during which French people living in Finland discussed Finnish politeness, while Finns living or having lived in France discussed French politeness, illustrating how im/politeness is constructed in discourse. As conventionalisation relates to pragmatic competence, second language speakers may not know what type of behaviour is conventionalised in a specific context (House and Kádár, 2021: 35). My studies showed that when arriving in the target culture and not necessarily speaking the target language, cultural outsiders observed differences related to non-verbal politeness, such as holding doors open for others or not (Isosävi, 2020a; 2023b). After spending time in the target culture, cultural outsiders reported adapting to politeness norms, such as greeting less (French participants) or more (Finnish participants), in order to avoid a marked behaviour judged as impolite (Isosävi, 2020b; 2023b).

2.2 Previous Studies on Pointing

Although the 2000s marked an embodied turn in studies on social interactions (Nevile, 2015: 127), to date little research has focused on cultural interpretations of gestures (Wilkins, 2003; Kita, 2009: 159; 163; Gullberg, 2012: 49) or their role in intercultural interactions (Ladilova, 2023: 62). Interestingly, there seems to be growing interest in multimodality. The recent edited volume, Multimodal Im/politeness (Jucker et al., eds, 2023), addresses different modalities of im/politeness in signed, spoken and written languages, examining various European and Asian languages, but only sporadic observations focus on finger pointing (e.g., Boyes Braem and Tissi, 2023: 40). More cross- and intercultural studies on gestures are needed, since gesture families can be quite varied in different cultures (Ladilova, 2023: 69) and pointing gestures can be culture-specific (Kita, 2009: 147). In what follows, I concentrate on previous research of pointing gestures, the focus of my study.

A pioneer in gesture studies, McNeill (e.g., 2005: 38–43) distinguishes between four dimensions of gestures (iconicity, metaphoricity, deixis and beat). Pointing gestures are deictic gestures, which include pointing with a hand or other body part, and may be either abstract or concrete. Kita (2003: 1) defines the prototypical pointing gesture as follows: “[...] a communicative body
movement that projects a vector from a body part. This vector indicates a certain direction, location or object”. For Kita (2003: 1–2), a pointing gesture is an essential constituent of human communication. Pointing has been studied specifically in the language of children (e.g., Franco and Butterworth, 2008; Tomasello et al., 2011) as well as among people with communication challenges, such as aphasia (e.g., Goodwin, 2003; 2006) and autism (e.g., Paparella et al., 2011).

In cultural contexts, pointing gestures have often been studied in lingua cultures outside Europe, but not in relation to im/politeness. Pointing gestures are examined in the fundamental edited volume Pointing: Where language, culture and cognition meet (Kita, ed., 2003). The central topics in that volume focus on biological determinism and the supposed universalism of index-finger pointing, along with semiotic processes related to interpretations of pointing gestures (Kita, 2003: 2–4). For instance, Wilkins (2003) questions the universality of index-finger pointing by describing the differences in hand shapes used when pointing in Arrente (Central Australia) and in America, while Kendon and Versante (2003) analyse a pointing system in the gesture-rich Neapolitan culture (Italy). Other cultural observations include the taboo of pointing with the left hand in Ghana (Kita and Essegbe, 2001), in Yoruba and in different cultures in sub-Saharan Africa (Orie, 2009). More specifically, in Yoruba, index-finger pointing is not generally used to identify people, since it is considered the “accusing finger” and the “enchantment finger”, although age and social status are important variables to consider: index-finger pointing is negatively marked, especially when addressing older people or authority figures (Orie, 2009: 241). Furthermore, the primary and secondary pragmatic functions of pointing gestures were identified in a study in rural Laos (Enfield et al., 2007). In a recent study, Satti (2023) found cross-cultural differences in how speakers of various Spanish dialects used gaze and other cues such as hand gestures in requests for verification.

In multimodal conversation analyses, pointing gestures have been described as a part of embodied actions, relevant to my study, applying transcription conventions developed in the field (see section 3). These studies specifically examine requests as recruitments aiming to get an interlocutor to do something without explicitly asking them to, although further studies are needed on the types of gestures used in recruitment (e.g., their size and transparency) (Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014: 16, 19, 29). Similarly, Rossi (2014) studied requests performed without language: interestingly pointing was not frequent (the most frequent forms were holding out and placing). In her study of requests in a surgical operating room, Mondada (2014) observed that a directive often co-occurred with a pointing gesture, indicating the location or the target.
rendering the deictic reference visible. Although conversation analysis does not generally examine culture or intercultural communication, a recent edited volume, *Multimodal Communication in Intercultural Interaction* (Schröder et al., eds., 2023a), emphasises the applicability of the tools of conversation analysis in the multimodal study of intercultural interactions (Schröder et al., 2023b: 245). In computer-mediated communications, pointing gestures are used as important resources in YouTube videos, where the audience is absent and imagined (Frobenius, 2013). Furthermore, cross-cultural differences have been observed between Finnish, French and Hungarian YouTubers (Isosävä and Vecsernyes, 2022).

Finally, there is growing interest in studying gestures and multimodality in second language acquisition, shown for instance by the recent edited research guide by Stam and Urbanski (2023); yet, analyses on pointing remain scarce. For instance, Inceoglu and Loewen (2023: 30) emphasise that deictic gestures are frequently used by teachers in classrooms. Among language learners, Gullberg’s (1998) study of Swedish learners of French and French learners of Swedish demonstrated that strategic gestures did not replace speech, but complemented it. Gullberg’s (1998) findings raised a question regarding the effectiveness of gestures among L2 speakers, since learner gestures were not considered helpful by L1 speakers. Spencer et al.’s (2009: 329) study, however, indicated a facilitation role of hand gestures in learning newly acquired words by L2 speakers. Thus, gestures can play a specific role in the speech of L2 speakers, which is important to keep in mind when studying the intercultural interaction involving an L2 speaker of French.

3 Methodological Framework

In this section, I describe my research procedure and data (3.1) and, then, I present the theoretical framework (3.2).

3.1 Research Procedure and Data

This study began with the observation that rare meta-pragmatic comments on finger pointing by a Finn appeared in a larger dataset consisting of authentic intercultural interactions. More specifically, my data include about 12 hours of recordings of authentic intercultural interactions between multiple Finns and French people recorded in Helsinki, Lyon and Paris in 2016–17. The data contain both private and professional intercultural discussions, and the participants were recruited using my contacts and via social media. The authentic intercultural interaction analysed here was recorded in Paris in the autumn of
In addition to Anna, two French people took part in the interaction: Anna's boyfriend, Paul, and Paul's brother, Matthieu; all interactants were in their twenties and spoke French. During the specific intercultural interaction analysed (for transcription, see 4.1), Matthieu began evaluating the finger pointing of Anna, and later, involved Paul in the discussion.

The setting for this intercultural interaction was not staged, but took place unprompted by researcher given that the interactants were meeting each other that day and agreed to have their discussion recorded. The interactants were not provided any instructions, and they did not know that I was interested in im/politeness; I had only told them that the object of my study would be intercultural interactions between Finns and French people. Thus, the interactants had a freeform conversation on their chosen topics without any influence from me as the researcher. I did not take part in the interaction, but remained in another room throughout it. This setting corresponds to the observation by Haugh and Chang (2019: 219), according to which experimental im/politeness studies need to be based on “contextualized, naturally occurring discourse rather than constructed [...] instances of language use". To more closely examine the recorded intercultural interaction, I transcribed it using Elan, a program designed for the study of video recordings. I applied conventions of multimodal conversation analysis (cf. Mondada, 2017) to the transcriptions, given that these conventions provide an efficient way of describing and analysing both linguistic and multimodal elements, such as pointing gestures.

However, I did not want to limit my study to the mere analysis of this intercultural interaction for two reasons. First, although explicit meta-pragmatic evaluations appeared during the interaction, a question arose regarding if they had something to do with cultural frames of expectations or if they were only personal behaviours. Second, the authentic intercultural interaction primarily revealed the evaluations of the French people, whereas the Finn did not share at the time much regarding her feelings. Therefore, I applied two additional methods: a questionnaire distributed among Finnish and French informants, and a follow-up interview with the original Finnish interactant. When studying the complex phenomenon of politeness, there is no reason to restrict oneself to only one approach (Ogiermann, 2019: 151; Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2021: 327–328). I agree with House and Kádár (2021: 3–4) who emphasise that in cross-cultural pragmatic research it is beneficial to include both contrastive and ancillary research in the form of questionnaires and interviews.

3 Pseudonyms are used throughout to refer to the interactants.
In terms of the questionnaire, I recruited Finnish and French informants, showed them the transcription of the intercultural interaction and then asked them to complete a questionnaire made available via Google Forms. I was interested in determining if cross-cultural differences would emerge in their interpretations of the finger pointing in a small dataset. Most of the informants were young Finnish and French students – that is, their background mirrored the background of the original interactants in the actual interaction (cf. Chang and Haugh, 2011). Finnish informants completed the questionnaire as a part of a Master’s-level course, *Spoken language and conversation analysis*, within French studies, which I co-taught at the University of Helsinki in the spring of 2022 via Zoom. French informants, who were recruited from the Universities of Lyon II (France) and Cambridge (United Kingdom), were identified through personal contacts and mailing lists, and completed the questionnaire in the winter of 2023 during two Zoom meetings. I chose not to recruit L1 speakers of French from Finland, since my previous study (Isosävi, 2020b) showed that cultural outsiders reported modifying their behaviour according to the politeness norms of the target culture and, thus, their behaviour was considered marked in the culture of origin. In this study, I was interested in the French frames of expectations. Altogether, 11 Finnish informants (10 students and one teacher, all female) and six French informants (five students and one teacher; four females and two males) completed the questionnaire. Seven informants were L1 speakers of Finnish, three were L1 speakers of Russian and one was an L1 speaker of Arabic; all had been living in Finland for quite some time and spoke Finnish. French informants spoke French as their L1. Based on the finger pointing and meta-pragmatic comments which appeared during the authentic intercultural interaction (see section 4.1), I asked the informants to evaluate the following elements in the questionnaire:

4 English translations of questions and all of the responses (see section 4.2) are provided.

1. How do you evaluate the finger pointing by the Finnish woman, Anna, related to the request?
2. How do you find the remarks of Matthieu regarding the finger pointing?
3. How do you find the remark by Paul regarding the finger pointing?
4. How do you find the whole discussion related to the finger pointing?
5. More generally, how do you evaluate a request accompanied by finger pointing?
6. Do you have any other remarks related to the extract?

The first three questions relate to the specific finger pointing and meta-pragmatic comments expressed during the actual intercultural interaction...
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Question 4 concentrates on the entire discussion, whereas question 5 addresses more general cultural evaluations of finger pointing and aims to determine if dominant cultural norms related to finger pointing exist. In question 6, participants were given the possibility to discuss other remarks related to the extract.

In addition, I conducted a follow-up interview with the original Finnish interactant in the spring of 2022 via Zoom. I showed her the recording of the intercultural interaction a couple of times. Afterwards, I asked her a few questions and took notes during the interview. The Zoom session was also recorded. I planned to ask one main question during the follow-up interview: *Do you remember how you felt when the French person started to comment on you pointing with your finger during the request?* Based on the things the informant said during the interview, I also asked several additional questions beyond the evaluations of the actual interaction:

- What do you think about French people commenting on the behaviour of a foreigner?
- Did you have the impression that French people commented a lot on the behaviour of foreigners?
- What would you do if a French person commented on your behaviour now?
- What is the best way to balance cross-cultural differences and the habits of a culture?

Although follow-up interviews have been shown to confirm the interpretations emerging from data analysis (Ogiermann, 2019: 171), some researchers have questioned whether *post facto* evaluations correspond to the evaluations made during the actual interaction (Haugh, 2007: 310). In my study, the time gap between the actual interaction and the follow-up interview was quite long – 4.5 years – carrying both advantages and disadvantages. Unfortunately, the informant may not remember everything which took place; yet, the gap may allow her to reflect upon the situation from a broader perspective than she might have had during a follow-up interview conducted shortly after the original interaction. The latter seemed to be the case for this specific follow-up interview.

Finally, regarding the analytical procedure, all three of the datasets – the video recording of an authentic intercultural interaction between a Finn and two French people, the questionnaire completed by Finnish and French

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5 The interview was conducted in Finnish, but the questions and the replies (see section 4.3) have been translated into English.
informants and the follow-up interview with the Finnish interactant – were analysed using the theoretical framework, which I discuss next.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Although my study focuses on first-order politeness – that is, on lay people’s own understandings of politeness – I apply theoretical notions from relational work (Locher and Watts, 2005, 2008; Locher, 2006). Thus, my study combines first- and second-order analyses of politeness. Relational work emphasises the continuum of marked (positively and negatively) and unmarked evaluations of behaviour, which range, for example, from rude and impolite to appropriate, normal and polite. Important theoretical notions include frames of expectations, discursive disputes and face. Frames of expectations are created by individuals based on their own experiences of social practices. A discursive dispute is a disagreement about judgments, which can occur specifically during intercultural interactions. The notion of face (derived from Goffman, 1967) is understood not as a concept related to an individual (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987), but as discursively constructed with other group members, and compared with masks which are on loan to us.

Finally, politeness and relational work are not only related to culture but also to identity (see Kádár and Haug, 2013: 238–239). Actions related to cultural identities can be either positive or negative. As such, actions related to a positive identity are called associations, whereas actions related to a negative identity are called disassociations. In associations, the cultural outsider attempts to show that they belong to the group by using conventions such as a local speech habit, whereas in disassociations the cultural outsider emphasises their own politeness norms, which differ from local norms.

4 Analysis and Results

First, I analyse an authentic interaction between a Finnish woman and two Frenchmen related to finger pointing, which resulted in a discursive dispute (4.1). Then, I examine the evaluations of the Finnish and French informants related to that interaction (4.2) and summarise the follow-up interview with the Finnish woman (4.3).

4.1 Transcriptions: Pointing with a Finger

In Extract 1A, a Finnish woman, Anna, makes a request accompanied by finger pointing to her boyfriend, Paul, who left the room for the kitchen to prepare aperitifs. Paul’s brother Matthieu is sitting on the sofa with Anna.
In Extract 1A, Anna addresses her boyfriend using his first name, accompanied by pointing with her finger (line 01). Because Anna’s hand is partly out of view from the camera, the direction of her pointing cannot be seen. Yet, as the pointing occurs together with the first name, she appears to be pointing directly at Paul. Anna continues pointing her finger while making a request related to aperitifs: tu veux bien […] demander si [la chercheuse] si elle veut elle en veut (‘would you like to ask if [the researcher] if she wants if she wants it’) (lines 04–05). Paul agrees by uttering oui multiple times and leaves the room (line 07). Then, Anna makes another request – prends une assiette de la cuisine (‘take a plate from the kitchen’) – again accompanied by pointing her finger (line 08). The pointing could be directed either at Paul or to indicate the location, the kitchen. Paul agrees with oui, and Anna puts down her finger (line 09). Anna’s pointing gestures are supplementing gestures, since they “express additional non-redundant meaning” (Gullberg 1998: 64).

After Extract 1A, Paul goes to kitchen and serves aperitifs to the researcher in another room. Meanwhile, Anna and Matthieu talk in the living room. In Extract 1B, Matthieu mentions Anna’s finger pointing.
In Extract 1B, Matthieu makes an evaluation: *c’est rigolo* (‘it’s funny’) (line 18). His evaluation does not refer to politeness, but more broadly to relational work. Matthieu expresses his uncertainty regarding Anna remembering and refers to the pool in summer, raising and moving his finger (line 19). Then, Matthieu produces a self-correction: *tu disais à Paul euh non c’est Paul qui disait* (‘you said to Paul uh no it’s Paul who said’) (line 20). He refers to what Paul said about Anna: *des fois [...] elle fait comm’ ça comm’ ça* [rire] *en lui disant [j` sais pas quoi (.)]* (‘sometimes … she does like this like this [laughter] then she says to him I don’t know what’) (lines 21–22). Matthieu illustrates his reference with a rhythmic pointing up and down with a finger (lines 21–22), and his deictic gesture resembles a beat gesture. Anna replies by laughing (line 23). The evaluation *rigolo* (‘funny’) at the beginning of Extract 1B shows that, for Matthieu, Anna’s pointing represents a marked behaviour, indicating a discursive dispute.

Following Extract 1B, Anna points at herself and asks a question with a rising intonation *ah moi* (‘oh me’) to ensure that *elle* (‘she’) in the speech refers (cf. Extract 1B) to her. Then, she points with a finger and asks Matthieu if that is what she does. In Extract 1C, Matthieu provides additional evaluations related to Anna’s pointing and Anna asks a question.
In Extract 1C, Matthieu repeats his evaluation related to Anna’s pointing (cf. Extract 1B): *rigolo* (‘funny’) (line 36). Then, Anna asks if she should not do it; first, she looks down and then at Matthieu (lines 37, 39). Matthieu denies this by uttering *non* (‘no’) multiple times (line 40). After a hesitation, he utters an evaluation which is positively marked: *j` trouve ça mignon* (‘I find it cute’) (line 42).

Following Extract 1C, Anna jokes and provides an example of a request accompanied by finger pointing – *va me faire un cocktail* (‘go make me a cocktail’) – and laughs. Then, Paul returns to the living room with the aperitifs, and the three talk about other things. Suddenly, Paul wants to know what Matthieu said about Anna. In Extract 1D, Matthieu mentions Anna’s finger pointing, and Paul provides an evaluation.

**Extract 1D**

01 MAT  ouais quand Anna te disait euh: (0.9) de faire quèq`
>>{finger raised}-----------------------------------
‘yeah when Anna asked you uh to do something’

02 chose ðµ du genreÅ en montrant du doigt tu vois comme just`
----> Δ_________Δ points with a {finger}---------------------
‘like pointing with a {finger} you know just like’
In Extract 1D, Matthieu raises his finger and directs his words at Paul: *quand Anna te disait* (‘when Anna asked you to’) (line 01). He hesitates (*euh*, uh) and there is a significant pause of 0.9 seconds (line 01). Then, Matthieu mentions doing something and he points with a finger while uttering: *montrant du doigt tu vois comme just’ tu viens d’ faire là* (‘pointing with a finger’) (lines 02–03). Matthieu says that they talked about that. A long silence of 4 seconds follows while Paul and Matthieu eat. After the silence, Paul utters a negative evaluation related to finger pointing: *ni l’un ni l’autre n’aime prendre nos ordres haut d’un doigt* (‘neither of us like to take our orders above from a finger’) (lines 06–07). When Paul mentions a finger, he raises his own finger (line 07). Paul uses an inclusive form *ni l’un ni l’autre* (‘neither of us’), which may refer either to Anna and himself or to Matthieu and himself. Nevertheless, he presents the negative evaluation as a shared evaluation for the frame of expectation. The discursive dispute about finger pointing ends here, and Anna does not comment on Paul’s negative evaluation.

### 4.2 Evaluations from Finnish and French Informants

In this section, I compare the evaluations from Finnish and French informants (cf. section 3.1) related to the transcriptions of the intercultural interactions (cf. section 4.1). I classified the evaluations into two categories: polite/impolite and effective/ineffective.

First, the evaluations from the informants related to Anna’s finger pointing (cf. Extract 1A, section 4.1) showed that both the Finnish and French informants emphasised its effectiveness in the speech of the L2 speaker (examples 2 and 3), although the French informants referred to its impoliteness according to French frames of expectations in other contexts (example 3).
(2) Anna wants to make her request clearer. This may be due to the fact that she is not a native speaker of French and wants to be certain that she is understood. (Finnish informant)

(3) In France, they say to us not to point using a finger because it is impolite, but I think that it's to help [her] to speak French and make herself understood. (French informant)

A few informants evaluated the pointing of Anna as negatively marked. Two Finnish informants judged it negatively, but hedged their evaluations (a little bit impolite, a little bit odd), whereas one Finnish informant evaluated the pointing as appropriate (normal). Two French informants evaluated the finger pointing of Anna as negatively marked (strange and directive), stating that it transforms the request into an order. The evaluations related to cultural frames of expectations diverged: one Finnish informant judged Anna's finger pointing as marked for a Finn (atypical), while a French informant related it to a Finnish frame of expectation: it is a cultural habit, for her it's not nasty. One Finnish informant hesitated between a cultural and personal interpretation, attaching the face of a teacher to Anna (example 4):

(4) I wonder if it's cultural or personal; intuitively, I turn to the latter. Perhaps Anna is an elementary school or nursery school teacher or she has learned the model in another context. (Finnish informant)

Second, the informants' evaluations of the remarks from Matthieu on Anna's finger pointing (cf. Extracts 1B and 1C, section 4.1) revealed a cross-cultural difference. Specifically, the French informants evaluated the remarks from Matthieu as positively marked (example 5), whereas the Finnish informants doubted the sincerity of these evaluations, suggesting that the genuine evaluation of Matthieu would be negatively marked, that is, not polite (example 6).

(5) He finds that it's an atypical behaviour which he evaluates positively. (French informant)

(6) I think that Matthieu also finds the gesture bizarre and not polite, but he doesn't want to say it. (Finnish informant)
One French informant raised the question of the influence of gender: *if a man had made the same gesture, would he have also found it cute and not rude or impolite?* One Finnish informant proposed a justification indicating a perceived “insincerity” to Matthieu’s evaluation: *I think that Matthieu did not want to insult Anna.* Yet, one Finnish informant thought that Matthieu *could be nicer* to Anna. French informants also referred to the effectiveness of Matthieu’s remarks, which they judged as *not offensive*, but rather as *useful, Anna doesn’t necessarily know what she’s doing.* Two Finnish informants referred to different frames of expectations, such as *it’s typically French to make remarks on how foreigners behave and the gesture may be too ‘strong’ in France, whereas in Finland it may not draw attention.*

Third, the informants, particularly the French informants, had more difficulty evaluating Paul’s remarks related to finger pointing (cf. Extract 1D, section 4.1) (example 7) than they had when evaluating Anna’s behaviour and Matthieu’s comments. They also evaluated the remark itself negatively (example 8).

(7) *I did not understand what he wanted to say with ‘above from a finger’; maybe he doesn’t like the gesture because it seems authoritarian.*
(French informant)

(8) *He said “One doesn’t give us an order and even less with a raised finger”. If that’s what he says it’s very haughty!*
(French informant)

A French informant suggested that Paul’s tone was *humorous*, although *the remark can also hide a real frustration.* Among the Finnish informants, they mostly agree that Paul’s evaluation of Anna’s finger pointing is negatively marked (example 9).

(9) *I think that Paul doesn’t like the habit either. He, too, uses the word “order”, meaning he views the request more as an order.*
(Finnish informant)

One Finnish informant referred to the *politeness* of the evaluation despite its negatively marked nature (*he tries to say it in a polite way*), whereas another Finnish informant raised the issues of a discursive dispute (*maybe Paul hasn’t correctly interpreted Anna’s gestures*).

Fourth, the informants provided their evaluation of the entire discussion (Extracts 1A–1D, section 4.1), evaluations which showed a cross-cultural difference. Unlike the Finnish informants, the French informants emphasised the *effectiveness* of the discussion in teaching French frames of expectations in
order to avoid a negatively marked behaviour (example 10) and a discursive dispute (example 11).

(10) It’s good that this discussion happened because in certain situations this finger pointing could prove impolite and it’s important that Anna knows this.  
(French informant)

(11) This discussion allows everybody [...] to negotiate a space of discussion where cultural and interpersonal differences pose less risk of causing misunderstandings.  
(French informant)

Among the Finnish informants, they emphasised the marked nature of this type of discussion related to a discursive dispute (example 12).

(12) I think that it’s rare that people make remarks about the gestures of other people, but perhaps it means that the participants of the discussion are very close.  
(Finnish informant)

One Finnish informant referred to interpersonal differences – that is, that the French people, Matthieu and Paul, evaluated Anna’s finger pointing in different ways, which means, according to them, that it’s not simply an issue of cultural differences. Interestingly, two French informants (and not the Finnish informants) suggested that Anna had negative feelings: Anna seems a little embarrassed and uncomfortable. Many informants described the intercultural discussion related to finger pointing as interesting, which included much information and different perspectives.

Fifth, the informants more generally evaluated a request accompanied by finger pointing, revealing both similarities and differences. Although the evaluations among both Finnish and French informants were mostly negatively marked, French informants used stronger expressions of impoliteness (e.g., using the adverb very) and referred to the frames of expectations taught to them as acceptable in French (examples 13 and 14; cf. example 3).

(13) As a French person, these requests suggest an order which can even seem aggressive and emotionally very marked. I could even feel myself threatened [...]. Since I was very little finger pointing (even at a person on the street or some other place) has been prohibited, a pointed finger and moving from down to up is synonymous with fault and anger.  
(French informant)
(14) *It seems to me that the gesture is acceptable if it is directed towards an object (can you pass me x) or to a space (can you go and have a look in the kitchen if...).*

(French informant)

In contrast to French evaluations, Finnish informants hedged their negatively marked evaluations (e.g., *a little*), while they also referred to finger pointing with “order”, to which an authoritarian face was attached (cf. example 13).

(15) *It’s true that it makes a little bit of an “order”, a little like a parent who talks to a child, etc.*

(Finnish informant)

A few Finnish informants evaluated pointing negatively, sometimes with hedging: *impolite to me (depending on the situation), not sympathetic and it wouldn’t please me to get that kind of a request.* Yet, one Finnish informant emphasised the effectiveness of pointing: *[it] helps in understanding.*

Finally, a few informants provided other thoughts related to the extracts. One Finnish informant suggested, with a hedge, a difference related to the frames of expectations – *perhaps in France pointing is even more impolite than in Finland* – an observation confirmed by the responses of the informants (cf. examples 13 and 14). One French informant raised the question of whether Matthieu is *biased because he knows Anna and because she addresses his brother/her boyfriend.* The justification for them is as follows: *a French person without any context would have found this gesture a little bit uncalled for* (cf. the evaluations by Finnish informants related to the insincerity of the remarks from Matthieu, example 6).

In summary, the evaluations of the Finnish and French informants showed that, generally, finger pointing was more strongly negatively evaluated by French than Finnish informants during a discursive dispute. Although the French informants thought that finger pointing by an L2 speaker can be used effectively, they emphasised the relevance of the discussion related to the discursive dispute, where French norms are taught to L2 speakers.

### 4.3 Follow-up Interview with the Finnish Interactant

During the follow-up interview (see section 3.1), Anna shared her feelings after watching the video of the intercultural interaction. The follow-up interview revealed her perspective, which she did not share during the actual intercultural interaction. Anna’s narrative shows that she was not fully aware of the discursive dispute that took place during the intercultural interaction (example 16).
(16) I don’t remember that I was bothered by the comment. I did not understand that it was the finger that was the problem. [...] I did not understand the situation. I did not understand that I was behaving somehow badly. If this had happened a year later, for instance, I would have said something.

While French informants found such a discussion on different frames of expectations helpful (cf. section 4.2), the L2 speaker may not have fully understood what was marked in her behaviour given her insufficient language skills, as Anna’s interview shows. This does not necessarily come through during the actual interaction (cf. Extracts 1A–D, section 4.1), such that the follow-up interview proved insightful. Thus, the French interactants may not be aware of the fact that their Finnish interactant did not fully understand the discursive dispute. During the interview, Anna mentioned that her French-language skills were much improved compared with her skills at the time of the original interaction in 2017, and that she would no longer remain silent.

Anna’s narrative reveals that Paul, with whom she was no longer involved, treated her as a learner needing to acquire French frames of expectations (example 17).

(17) I had to learn the patterns of behaviour. For instance, when I was waving a fork, he was bothered by it. We talked about it openly. My way of talking and being was not in line with his norms and the habits common for his social class. He commented a lot on how I behaved.

According to Anna, Paul evaluated Anna’s habits as negatively marked (my ... being was not in line with his norms). Interestingly, Anna relates this not only to cultural frames of expectations, but also to his social class, which she did not specify. Previous im/politeness studies have demonstrated the influence of social class on judgments (e.g., Mills, 2009).

However, Anna’s reflections show her need for an association, that is, to belong to the French group of people while living in France, although she highlights the problems it may involve (example 18).

(18) From my side, I wanted to be part of everything and be like all of the others. Many of us Finns have this need because we are tired of questions asking where we are from. Although nobody wants to become a French person. From the point of view of the relationship, it’s about power, it’s wrong that one person needs to adapt to the other one. [...] I remember the first time when I was waving the fork, it was very interesting. The moment was somehow about stopping me. Why do you interfere in my way of being?
Anna attaches the need for an association not only to herself but also to other Finns in order to avoid a marked behaviour and the face of foreigner attached to them (we are tired of questions asking where we are from). Anna provides boundaries to an association: it does not reflect a desire to “become a French person”. Then, she considers relationships, relating them to the need to adapt to power. She returns to the example with the fork, evaluating that moment as stopping her, and questions the French person’s interference in her way of being. According to Anna, French people did not necessarily comment often on the behaviour of foreigners (cf. a contradictory comment in section 4.2.), but relates it more to their social background (cf. example 17).

The time gap between the actual interaction and the follow-up interview allowed for additional reflection regarding how Anna would react if a similar situation happened to her now. Anna emphasised different frames of expectations: I would be able to say that in Finland we do this. There are different habits. Yet, her experiences on finger pointing as a marked behaviour contributed to a change in her behaviour (cf. also Isosävi, 2023b): Now, I do like this with my hand, with an open hand, not with my finger (on different ways of pointing, cf. McNeill, 2003: 293).

Intercultural experiences have taught Anna to balance between different frames of expectations, and to take responsibility during intercultural interactions (example 19).

(19) I’ve acquired skills and I can cope, that’s something I’ve learned the hard way. If they [French people] don’t have the competence, everything hinges on me. It’s best that you go through these situations. We cannot influence the skills of our interlocutor. We shouldn’t make evaluations regarding why we behave a certain way.

Anna emphasised the skills that she had learned, recognising that it had not come easily. She also emphasised a tolerance for different behaviours (cf. Isosävi, 2023b). Anna felt that after these experiences during intercultural encounters she is in a better position than French people (example 20).

(20) I can understand more broadly than they can. But I’ve made a decision for myself: I don’t go to France to be a Finn, I assimilate.

Anna emphasised, once again, the need for an association to French norms, and her own responsibility regarding deciding to go to France. Finally, Anna described the evolution of her relationship with Paul and the need to balance between different frames of expectations (example 21).
Over the years I came to understand my own perspective. He learned perspectives related to Finnishness. He was in contact with Finns who couldn’t adapt. At the beginning of our relationship, he couldn’t stand when people were different. [...] I felt that we occupied some intermediate terrain. Did I adapt or did he accept? I don’t know if he adapted to Finnish habits.

Over time and despite the desire for an association with French norms, Anna started to reflect on her own perspective. According to her, Paul learned Finnishness, since he was in contact with Finns who did not associate with French norms. Anna observed a change in Paul’s evaluations, which were initially negative towards different behaviours. Anna hesitated, deciding upon a reason for why they occupied some intermediate terrain, whether it was a question of her own association with French norms or his acceptance of Finnish norms.

The follow-up interview with Anna reveals, first, that the L2 speaker does not necessarily share her perspective nor her problems in understanding the target language during an actual intercultural interaction. Second, the follow-up interview highlights the complex relationship between the need and willingness for an association from the L2 speaker and the power of a cultural insider from the target culture to shape the behaviour of the foreigner. This might interfere with their identity, the right of which can also be questioned.

5 Conclusions

This study contributes to the research on cross-cultural pragmatics by examining an intercultural encounter from an understudied multimodal perspective. Based on a bottom-up and language-anchored approach, my study relied on evidence drawn from three different corpora. First, an authentic intercultural interaction between a Finn and two French people was transcribed using the conventions of multimodal conversation analysis. Second, Finnish and French informants evaluated the interaction by responding to a questionnaire. Third, a follow-up interview was conducted with the original Finnish interactant.

My study showed that different frames of expectations related to gestures can create a discursive dispute among friends. During the discussion, the finger pointing by a Finnish interactant was explicitly evaluated as a marked behaviour by the French interactants. Yet, the follow-up interview revealed that the L2 speaker may not have fully understood the ‘problem’ in her marked behaviour due to her insufficient language skills at the time. Thus, we can question if comments on the behaviour of foreigners are necessarily useful for L2 speakers in attempts to teach cultural norms. The evaluations of Finnish
and French informants showed cross-cultural differences, given that finger pointing received more strongly negatively marked evaluations by French than Finnish informants, although the French informants did not negatively evaluate the behaviour of the foreigner. The situation seems different, however, in long-term relationships, where behaviour adhering to frames of expectations may be required. Although the interview with the Finnish interactant shows a need among cultural outsiders for an association with cultural frames of expectations, it also questions their right to interfere with the behaviour of a foreigner, behaviour which is linked to their identity. Overall, this study confirms my previous observations (Isosävi, 2020b), whereby pragmatic variation in behaviour is not easily tolerated in the target culture.

This study has shown the usefulness of employing a multi-method approach to cross-cultural pragmatic research. It emphasises the complexity of voices and evaluations, which are not always explicitly shown during actual interactions, whereby complementary corpora are needed. The results of this study increase our understanding of im/politeness in intercultural interactions: as cultural insiders may have the power, empowering L2 speakers takes time and requires both sufficient language and pragmatic skills. Although one limitation of this study is that the number of the informants responding to a questionnaire was small – studies with a larger number of informants are needed – it revealed that some cross-cultural differences can be observed even in this small dataset. Despite some general tendencies, the responses of the informants also showed and raise questions about intracultural variability; a systematic study is still needed in im/politeness research (cf. Haugh and Chang, 2019).

Cross-cultural pragmatics has much to offer, not only in the study of language, but also in examining the multimodal aspects of interactions. To date, little research in cross-cultural pragmatics has focused on multimodality, although its bottom-up approaches help us avoid essentialism and provide information relevant both for second language acquisition and intercultural communication.

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Transcription Conventions

Conventions for French Transcription
French speech was transcribed according to the orthographic conventions developed for French language by the ICOR group (ICOR lab, Lyon): http://icar.cnrs.fr/documents/2013_Conv_ICOR_250313.pdf.

/ rising intonation of the preceding segment
. short pause (less than 0.2 s)
(0.7) timed pause in seconds and tenths of seconds
: stretching of the previous syllable
[] beginning and end of an overlap
` non-standard elision
((laughter)) transcriber’s comments

Conventions for Multimodal Transcription
Gestures were transcribed according to conventions developed by Lorenza Mondada: https://344cc026-c96f-49aa-b4bc-071b454d3061.filesusr.com/ugd/baodbdb_986dd4993a04a57acf2a0a6e2b9a34.pdf.

** beginning and end of the embodied actions of Anna
++ beginning and end of the embodied actions of Paul
ΔΔ beginning and end of the embodied actions of Matthieu
-->* action continues until the same symbol is reached
-->1.6 action starts from line 1 and ends at line 6
>> embodied action begins before the beginning of the excerpt
.... action preparation
,,, action retraction

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