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Translating Politeness for the Screen.

Politeness Strategies in *Sex and the City* and its Polish Subtitles.

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**ABSTRACT:**

In particular American TV series are popular around the world. In their new context they are subtitled or dubbed. In subtitling there is a shift from spoken to written mode which affects the translation. Due to the restrictions of time and space on screen, the original text needs to be condensed.

The primary goal of the present study has been to examine what happens to verbal politeness in requests in the subtitling of *Sex and the City* into Polish. The material consisted of the last six episodes of final season of the series. Only the requests of the four main characters, Carrie Bradshaw, Samantha Jones, Miranda Hobbes, and Charlotte York, were taken into consideration. As the theoretical background for the study, I have used Penelope Brown's and Stephen Levinson's (1994) theory of politeness, while the analysis of the translation strategies has been based on Gideon Toury's (1980) view of potential expressions of matricial norms.

It has been assumed that because the main characters are "new women" and close friends, most of their requests would be delivered on-record. The hypothesis was that the need for condensation as well as the language differences will have an impact on the strategies. In consequence they are likely to be changed into shorter and less time-consuming ones in the translation.

The analysis revealed, first of all, that on-record politeness was used most commonly to express requests in the original English soundtrack. Secondly, the most frequent translation strategy was to retain the original politeness strategy. On-record and off-record politeness were usually retained, whereas negative and positive politeness were more likely to be removed or modified, causing a shift towards on-record politeness.

The changes that appeared in the translation were mostly due to the constraints of time and space of subtitling. Long expressions were likely to be replaced with shorter and less time consuming ones. There were also a few examples where the alterations were clearly caused by the differences between the English and the Polish languages as well as between the source and the target culture.

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**KEY WORDS:** subtitling, politeness, face, face-threatening act



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Politeness plays an important role in everyday communication, and societies have their norms concerning it. When we talk to somebody it is important that we do not appear rude or offensive. The rules of politeness may differ one from culture to another, but they also depend on the situation. A formal conversation with one's superior will require more polite behaviour than a casual chat with a friend. Fictional characters in literature and TV are, on the other hand, allowed more freedom in the way they behave and speak, because they are not real people but only constructions of the author. In some genres, politeness may, in fact, be an important part of both characterisation and/or the story, and it may also be the source of humour in them (e.g. Longhurst 1999; Kuula 2006). This is, for example, the case in many widely popular American or British TV series, as well as more local ones, which have international distribution.

For a foreign programme to be shown in a new country, it first needs to be translated into the local language. This can be done either by dubbing, which means covering the original voice by another voice, or subtitling, in which synchronised captions are displayed at the bottom of the screen. Larger countries like, for example, Germany or France, usually choose dubbing, whereas smaller ones like the Netherlands, Sweden or Finland prefer subtitling. (Dries 1995: 9–10.)

In subtitling the original text needs to be condensed due to the limited time and space on screen. This need for compactness reduces the spoken element to number of characters. In consequence, some elements, characteristic of spoken language such as repetitions, or hedges, need to be reduced. The need for compactness should not, however, affect, for instance, the original dialogic patterns of the film. The character that has the most prominent position in the original dialogue remains dominant in the subtitles as well (Remael 2003). Nor does it have to affect, for example, language/culture specific details (Temonen 2003).

Deviation from politeness, impoliteness, may create an unorthodox image of a rude character. It may also make him/her a source of humour (Longhurst 1999). Even though some characters are not joking but aiming to be serious, their speech is still considered a source of humour because it does not follow the generally established rules of politeness (Kuula 2006).

A central concept in the study of politeness is face, that is, public self-image that every person has and wants to maintain. One's positive face is their desire to be involved in human interaction, whereas negative face is their wish to remain independent. (Brown and Levinson 1994: 61.) Because it is sometimes difficult to grasp the meaning of what the speaker wants to say, certain utterances can create a possible threat to the hearer's face. There is, however, a way to deal with such face-threatening acts. A set of politeness strategies has been proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1994). The five strategies are: on-record, positive, negative, off-record politeness, and avoiding the FTA. The use of these strategies is culturally determined. It may be customary in some cultures to use a lot of direct language, whereas in other cultures this might be regarded as offensive and more indirect strategies might be employed (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2002).

Politeness which may be tied to a range of language specific elements may not fare so well in translation because of the constraints of subtitling as well as the differences between the source and the target culture. In addition to repetitions or hedges, expressions of politeness may disappear in subtitles because the picture complements the subtitles and, for example, a friendly smile or look can make verbal politeness redundant. However, Basil Hatim and Ian Mason (2000: 444) found that, when politeness disappears from the subtitles, it may be difficult, in particular, to retrieve the interpersonal meanings intended by the speakers.

The present work studies politeness in the subtitling into Polish of *Sex and the City* (*SATC*) series. The focus is on what happens to verbal politeness as one of the areas that are likely to undergo changes in the translation from spoken language to written

subtitles. I am interested in particular in situations where there is a shift from one politeness strategy to another in the translation. The changes may be due to a number of reasons. Verbal politeness may be expressed differently in different languages. Some languages, like, for example, Finnish, do not have a word representing “please” which in some other languages is one of the basic expressions of politeness. Another example is the distinction between informal and formal “you”, an important part of politeness in Polish, which does not exist in English. Also, verbal politeness, when combined with the politeness expressed by body language, might be redundant and, therefore, omitted as the verbal element needs to be compressed anyway. *SATC* was chosen as material, not only because this is a well-known and controversial series, but also because the main characters present politeness in a new way. As friends they talk openly about sex, (in)fidelity and relationships, but also are free to ignore the rules of politeness. They, thus, break the stereotype of a polite woman and show that women do not have to be “nice”.

In the present study, I will focus on requests as an example of a face-threatening act. I am interested in which verbal politeness strategies have been used in requests in the original English soundtrack and their subtitling into Polish. As material for the study, I have chosen the six last episodes of the sixth and final season of *SATC* series. In the analysis I will compare the English soundtrack and the transcribed dialogue with Polish subtitles in order to see what happens to politeness. The characters are close friends who break the stereotype of a polite woman, therefore most requests will be delivered on-record. My hypothesis is that the constraints of time and space will have an impact on the strategies and change them into shorter and less time-consuming ones in the translation.

In what follows the discussion begins with a presentation of the material and the method of the present study. It is followed by a closer look at the way the main characters of *SATC* have been constructed to give the background also to the way they speak and their choice of strategies. In the second chapter I will examine subtitling as one of the forms of translation and focus particularly on the constraints of this form for

translation. I will also draw attention to some changes that might appear in the shift from spoken to written language. Individual subtitling strategies will also be discussed there. The third chapter will focus on defining the concepts of politeness and face as well as face-threatening acts and the strategies of on-record, positive, negative, and off-record politeness. I will then proceed to the analysis of politeness in the screen translation of *SATC* into Polish and to the discussion about the effect of this on politeness and characterisation. Conclusions will be drawn in the final chapter of the study.

### 1.1 Material

The material for the present study comes from one of the most popular and controversial American situation comedy *series*<sup>1</sup> of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – *Sex and the City* (*SATC*) which is based on Candice Bushnell's book by the same title. The programme has been created and produced by Darren Star for Home Box Office (HBO), one of the biggest American cable television networks. The series consists of six seasons with the total of ninety four episodes. The original episodes were shown between 1998 and 2004 in America, and even though the series is no longer produced, the reruns of the old episodes are still shown in many countries (Sohn 2004; HBO Online 2006). There are also plans to make it into a film (*Hufvudstadsbladet* 2007: 17). In Poland the series was broadcast as *Jak upolować mężczyznę czyli seks w wielkim mieście* [How to Catch a Man – Sex in a Big City] by TV2, the Polish public channel, from 1999 to 2005 (TV2 Online 2007). Now it is also available in DVD format with Polish subtitles which have been created by Ryszard Radwański (Luka 2006).

For my analysis I have used the DVD version of the series. I have chosen to study the soundtrack of the six last episodes taken from the sixth and final season of *SATC* and

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<sup>1</sup> This means that each episode is self-contained and the time between two episodes is of no narrative importance as opposed to a *serial* in which consecutive episodes create a continuous narrative (Ang 1993: 52).

their Polish subtitles. This amounted to approximately 185 minutes of material divided into 131 scenes<sup>2</sup>. I studied the four main characters of the series – Carrie Bradshaw, Samantha Jones, Charlotte York, and Miranda Hobbes and their way of using politeness in requests. The typical verbal behaviour of the main characters is established in the first episode of the first season and does not change much throughout the whole series. Already there, one can see that the person most likely to bend the rules of politeness is Samantha who uses bold language. Carrie and Miranda vary their use of politeness depending on the circumstances, whereas Charlotte tries to be as polite as possible in every situation.

My material consisted of the speech of the main characters on the original English soundtrack and my transcription of the lines involving requests as well as the corresponding Polish subtitles. In the analysis I concentrated on the use of requests as examples of potential threats to one's face (FTAs). All requests expressed verbally were included regardless of the functions that they serve. All other forms of FTAs like, for example, threats, criticisms or apologies were disregarded in this analysis.

## 1.2 Method

Politeness can be expressed both verbally and non-verbally, but in the present thesis, the focus was on verbal politeness, that is, on the ways in which people express politeness through language. I have studied the verbal politeness strategies employed by the four main characters of the series – Carrie Bradshaw, Samantha Jones, Charlotte York and Miranda Hobbes and compared them with the Polish subtitles of their original English lines to see if the change of the medium from spoken to written language as well as the mode of translating, subtitling, has had an impact on the strategies. Also the language shift from English to Polish may affect the subtitles. I have been interested in

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<sup>2</sup> For the complete list of episodes analysed with the author's scene division see Appendix 2.

what happens to the politeness strategies in subtitling as well as whether the linguistic profile of each character changes.

The analysis was divided into three stages. The first step was to identify the situations that involve threats to a character's face, that is, their public self-image or status<sup>3</sup>. Such face-threatening acts (FTAs)<sup>4</sup> are linguistic actions which may, through their directness, offend the hearer and damage their public image. (Brown and Levinson 1994: 60, 65, 211–214; Yule 1996: 134; Spencer-Oatey 2005: 108.) In my analysis, I concentrated on requests which are one category of a face-threatening act and a good example of speech acts which can imply an intrusion on the hearer's right to privacy. By asking for something, the speaker restricts her interlocutor's freedom of action, she wants the hearer either to do or to refrain from doing something. She is thus threatening the hearer's face. The requests have been classified into the following categories:

1. requests for somebody to do something, like for example when Samantha's colleague asks her in an indirect way: "Listen . could I get Smith Jerrod's number?"<sup>5</sup> (episode 17, scene 16)<sup>6</sup>.
2. requests that take the form of proposals to do something, for example when Miranda asks her husband "Do you think we should go for a walk or something?" (episode 15, scene 7) and by this implies that she wants them to go for a walk.
3. orders for somebody to do or not to do something, for instance when Carrie does not want her ex-boyfriend to contact her again, she says "Don't call me . ever again" (episode 19, scene 2).

The non-verbal requests expressed by body language have been excluded from the study because they are not represented in the subtitles.

The second step in the analysis was to identify the verbal politeness strategies used by the speakers in making requests. Different strategies can be used in requests in order to

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion on face, see section 3.1.

<sup>4</sup> Face-threatening acts will be discussed closely in section 3.2.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1 for the transcription conventions (based on Coates [1996: xii–xiv]).

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 2 for the episode/ scene division.

reduce the force of the request and to avoid, thus, a threat to somebody's face. I based my classification of the politeness strategies<sup>7</sup> on the model proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1994: 60). These included:

1. a *bald on-record FTA* without redressive action to ensure that the meaning of the message is very clear. This strategy is a direct request and used, for example, by Samantha when she requests Carrie to give her purse by saying "Carrie . my purse" (episode 15, scene 2).
2. an on-record FTA with redressive action (*positive politeness*) to pay attention to the hearer's need for involvement by expressing agreement or approval. For example, when Carrie and Charlotte promise that they would take care of Miranda's baby for her, she asks: "You guys would really do that?" (episode 15, scene 3). By calling her friends "guys", Miranda emphasises that they are important to her and at the same satisfying their positive faces. She also wants to soften the request by using the hedge "really".
3. an on-record FTA with redressive action (*negative politeness*) to ensure that the hearer's right to independence is respected by using expressions of defence, hedging and maintaining distance. This strategy can be observed, for instance, when Carrie and one of her friends are having lunch and the woman needs to ask her a favour. "I was hoping that you might- %can't believe I have to ask this% Does he have a single friend that he could bring along . for me?" (episode 18, scene 1). The speaker is embarrassed that she needs to ask for such a favour and apologises by adding the phrase "can't believe I have to ask this". She, thus, shows that she is aware of the fact that she might be threatening Carrie's negative face.
4. an *off-record FTA* to allow some ambiguity of your intention and by this avoid responsibility for possible violation towards the hearer's face. This strategy is employed by Miranda when she is having a romantic bath with her husband but begins to feel bored. She knows that a direct request like "Let's get out of the bath" would hurt her husband's feelings. She, therefore,

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<sup>7</sup> Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies will be discussed in detail in sections 3.2.1–3.2.4.

chooses to use a softer indirect “I’m starting to look like a prune” (episode 15, scene 10) and hopes that her husband will understand the implication without getting offended.

5. not performing the FTA and by this avoiding to offend another person. Carrie, for example, uses this strategy a few times. Once she is having a conversation with her partner’s ex-wife, and whenever the woman criticises something, Carrie avoids saying something unpleasant by changing the topic of the conversation or by biting her lips and saying nothing (episode 20, scene 1).

Most of the original requests were easy to categorise. Some, however, were more problematic. In cases where the request in itself was not enough to establish the politeness strategy, also the immediate context was taken into consideration.

The third step in the analysis was to compare the strategies used in the original soundtrack with the ones in the subtitles to determine how politeness was expressed in writing. For the identification of the translation strategies I applied Gideon Toury’s (1980: 54) view of matricial norms<sup>8</sup> which guide the translator’s behaviour. On the basis of Toury’s outline, I established three translation strategies to describe what had happened to the verbal expressions of politeness of the original English soundtrack when the series had been subtitled into Polish. The three strategies consisted of:

1. politeness strategy retained: the politeness strategy stays the same in the original and the translation, even though the original polite phrase might be substituted with a different expression of a similar length. For example, when Miranda and her husband Steve take a bath, he asks her to hold the soap.

Hold the soap/ (episode 15, scene 10)

Trzymaj mydło.

Hold the soap.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Toury’s matricial norms will be discussed in section 2.3.

<sup>9</sup> The following pattern for presenting examples will be used. First, the original passage from the soundtrack will be given. It will be followed by the Polish subtitles. Finally, the author’s own back translation into English will be given.

In this example the request uses the same direct on-record expression (an order) both in the original and the subtitles, therefore the politeness strategy remains unchanged.

2. politeness strategy removed: the long expression of politeness used in the original, or a part of it, is removed from the translation, causing the politeness to shift towards a more direct strategy. One of such cases is when Charlotte asks Carrie to take care of Miranda's son for a little longer.

**Well . why don't you just keep Brady a little while longer/ Till dinnertime at least/ (episode 15, scene 9)**

Weż jeszcze Brady'ego.  
Chociaż do obiadu.

Take Brady still. At least till dinner.

In this example the negative politeness strategy is employed in the original, and it is characterised by the use of hedges such as “well”, “just”, or “a little while longer”. The translation, however omits these elements creating a bald on-record request. Also the change of the rhetorical question (“why don't you”) into a direct request (“take”) makes the request more direct.

3. politeness strategy modified: the original long expression is replaced with a shorter polite phrase in order to make the utterance more concise. This may involve a change of politeness strategy. For example, in a situation when Carrie and Alek are about to go out, he asks her whether they should take the cab.

**So . *shall*<sup>10</sup> we get a cab? (episode 16, scene 1)**

Bierzemy taksówkę?

*Are we* taking the cab?

The original request contains “shall” which suggests asking for an opinion rather than requesting a particular action. The translation, on the other hand, uses a direct question. The original is therefore more polite than the subtitles.

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<sup>10</sup> In the examples from the material certain words or phrases will be marked in the following way: *italics* indicate the phrase that attention is paid to, words in **bold** have been omitted in the subtitles, underlined phrases have been replaced in the subtitles.

On the basis of the findings it was then possible to conclude what happens to verbal politeness strategies in the subtitles. It also became evident whether the alterations were due to the change of medium from spoken to written, change of language from English to Polish, or the constraints of subtitling.

### 1.3 Politeness in Modern New York

In real life people make choices concerning their own behaviour and the way they speak. That is why it is not always possible to predict their next move. Fictitious characters, on the other hand, are the result of the writer's choice and their set of behaviours has the purpose of creating their personality. (Culpeper 2001: 145.) The construction of a character can serve many functions. Some characters can be presented as very dramatic ones, while others as humorous. In *SATC* the women are portrayed as modern and successful.

The four main characters in *Sex and the City* are very different but at the same time similar. They differ from each other in terms of their careers. Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker) is a journalist who writes a newspaper column about the war of the sexes. Charlotte York (Kristin Davis) is an art dealer searching for "prince charming". Samantha Jones (Kim Cattrall) is a public relations executive who believes that women can use men just the same way as men use women. Miranda Hobbes (Cynthia Nixon) is a corporate lawyer tired of dating but not willing to settle for less than she deserves. (HBO Online 2006.) The thing that makes them similar is that they are all single and successful in what they do.

The personalities of the main characters have been created in such a way that all four women, to some extent, break the stereotype of a woman who speaks and behaves in a

more polite way than a man<sup>11</sup>. Each character is slightly different and possesses features which modern women around the world can relate to. They want to show that a woman can have other aspirations in life than to be a perfect wife and mother. They all present a new, fashionable and very successful type of a woman. What is more, the way they behave and speak proves that they feel confident and are not afraid to express their opinions and needs.

The characteristics of the “new woman” are especially visible in such areas of characters’ lives as work, relationships, free time, and the language they use. In their professional life, all four women have successful careers and are good at what they do. Carrie and Charlotte work individually, whereas Samantha and Miranda are members of corporate teams where they have equal or even higher position than men. Relationships are another important theme of the series and constitute a large part of the characters’ lives. The women are single and proud of it. They are open and ready to experiment with different men. And even though there are times when they are in stable relationships (Charlotte has been married twice, Carrie is engaged for some time), the main focus is still on them and not on men who play minor and not so significant roles. Also the way they spend their free time differs from a traditional view of a woman. They do not rush home after work. Instead they go shopping, visit new restaurants and clubs or attend various cultural events. But the thing they enjoy the most is talking with each other. The list of their preferred chat topics is rather long and subjects range from marriage, fidelity or commitment to more controversial ones like favourite sex positions or the location of the g-spot.

The fact that the main characters are presented as “new women” has influence on the way they speak. Because they are not afraid to break the stereotype of a polite woman whose main aspiration is to be a good mother and wife, they are also not afraid to bend the rules of politeness when they speak. The fact that they are an all-female group of close friends makes the communication more informal and personal (see Coates 1996).

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion about gendered language see, for example, Holmes (1995a; 1995b), Mills (2003), Coates (2004), or Brown (2005).

This closeness and intimacy between friends affects the way they request something from each other. They are close enough in order to ask each other to do something in a direct way without it being considered offensive (Márquez Reiter 2000: 36).

The four characters differ from each other in the way they use requests. The most direct person of the four friends is Samantha. She is confident in the way she speaks, uses a lot of direct language, swears, and does not follow the rules of politeness. Her speech is more characteristic of that of men than women (see e.g. Holmes 1995b; Mills 2003: 165). Her requests are usually delivered on record<sup>12</sup>. Carrie and Miranda use different politeness strategies for requests depending on a situation. When they are with someone they do not know so well, they try to use positive or negative politeness in order not to be considered rude. When they are with their closest friends, they are likely to use on-record politeness to request something. Charlotte is the most polite woman of the four friends. She tries to follow the rules of politeness in all situations. She uses the on-record strategy only on rare occasions, but this happens when she is with the other women friends or when she loses her temper.

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<sup>12</sup> Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies will be discussed in sections 3.2.1–3.2.4.

## 2 SUBTITLING AS TYPE OF TRANSLATION

In the times of people's constantly growing curiosity about other nations and their cultures the spread of foreign TV programmes is unavoidable. Some American TV shows, like reality shows (e.g. *Big Brother*), talk shows (e.g. *The Oprah Winfrey Show*), or series (e.g. *ER*, *CSI*) are becoming so popular that not only the original version is watched all over the globe but also the format is spreading. What comes with the spread of foreign TV is the growing need to find suitable techniques for translation of these programmes.

The two best-known and most widespread techniques of screen translation are *dubbing* and *subtitling*. Dubbing is oral and can be defined as covering the original voice by another voice. This method of translation includes such subcategories as lip-sync dubbing (the foreign dialogue is adjusted to the mouth movements of the actor in the film), the voice-over (the sound level is reduced and one narrator reads the dialogue of all the characters), narration (an extended voice-over where the priority is to match the sequence in which the information is delivered with the visual information provided, without it being synchronous with the original soundtrack) and free commentary (the purpose is not to follow literally the original spoken text but to adapt the programme so that it is more suitable for the target language audience). Subtitling, on the other hand, is visual and consists of a written text on the screen. This translation technique involves not only translating from the source into the target language but also from a spoken dialogue into a written one. The version which appears on screen needs to be condensed because of the constraints of time and space. (Dries 1995: 9, 26; de Linde and Kay 1999b: 46; Baker and Hochel 2001: 74; Kruger 2001: 177; Luyken in O'Connell 2003: 66–69.)

Dubbing and subtitling have a number of differences. First of all, dubbing, as opposed to subtitling, demands less cognitive effort from the viewer. The audience needs to concentrate only on watching the images and listening to the dialogue, whereas in subtitled programmes they need to follow the written translation as well. Moreover,

dubbing requires less compression of the message than subtitling, in which the constraints of the time and space have an impact on the translation. In addition, dubbing is a more expensive and time consuming technique than subtitling. (Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997: 45–46.)

In subtitling, the audience has the chance to hear the original dialogue of the actors, although some claim that “[t]he subtitles are distracting and can absorb much of a viewer’s energy” (Giannetti qtd. in Sinha 2004: 172). If the viewer is used to one form of TV-translation (e.g. dubbing), it is difficult to accept the other (subtitling). Subtitles give the viewers an opportunity to hear the original dialogue. Also cultural differences may cause problems when the body language and facial expressions are linked with dubbed dialogue in a foreign language. (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998: 35; Ivarsson 1992: 18–19; Remael 2003: 232.) Subtitling has also been seen to serve an educational purpose. Watching films and programmes in their original language contributes to our knowledge of that language and may improve our pronunciation. (Ivarsson 1992: 19; Ivarsson and Carroll 1998: 35.)

Big countries favour dubbing, whereas the smaller ones choose subtitling as the main technique for screen translation. In Europe, dubbing is the standard method of translating in countries like France, Germany, Italy or Spain, whereas subtitling is used in the Nordic region and countries like the Netherlands, parts of Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Wales, Luxembourg and Ireland (Dries 1995: 10; Ivarsson and Carroll 1998: 5–7; de Linde and Kay 1999a: 1). In Sweden, for instance, an estimate of 350 hours of subtitled television programmes and films are shown every week (approximately 20 000 hours per year). If one was to assume that one hour equals thirty pages of print, this time would amount to 3000 books a year. (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998: 5.) Although used mostly in smaller countries, subtitling is gaining in popularity worldwide. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, it is a relatively inexpensive form of translation when compared with dubbing. It may also be that viewers demand “authenticity of the original version”, as has been suggested by Jan Ivarsson and Mary Carroll (1998: 1).

In Poland 14% of programmes shown on Polish public TV channels and 58% shown on private channels are of foreign origin. They include films, TV series, soap operas, reality shows, and talk shows. They are mostly American or British productions, but there are also European ones such as German, Danish, or French as well as South American like Argentinian or Brazilian. (TV1 Online 2007; TV2 Online 2007; TVN Online 2007; POLSAT Online 2007.)

Voice-over is the standard practice of TV translation in Poland. This is a non-synchronous technique in which one narrator reads the lines of all the characters, while the volume of the original soundtrack is reduced (Gambier 2003: 173–174). The technique is easy and cheap to produce as only one actor is needed. Dubbing is more expensive and therefore used in Poland only to translate children's programmes. (Gottlieb 2001: 244; 2004: 88.) Subtitling has not been a popular form of television translation in Poland. It is, however, used in cinema and DVD translation.

## 2.1 Subtitling

In the contemporary global village (McLuhan 1989), subtitling is one of the aids that helps the spread of foreign TV programmes. In it, synchronised captions are displayed at the bottom part of the screen, and they can be based on either a written translation (the script/ transcript) of the dialogue in a foreign language or one in the original language. They can, thus, be aimed at people with a hearing disability or those whose knowledge of the language is not sufficient. These two types, *interlingual* and *intralingual* subtitling differ from each other as their audiences have different needs. Intralingual subtitles contain, not only linguistic information derived from the dialogue, but also additional information like tone of voice, accents and foreign languages, sound effects, music, etc. This can be done by using, for instance, capital letters to emphasize the increased volume, exclamation mark to indicate sarcastic tone of voice or a # sign to mark that the text is a song lyrics. Interlingual subtitles, on the other hand, do not

indicate such non-verbal signals. (Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997: 161; de Linde and Kay 1999a: 1, 12–14.)

Subtitles can also be divided into *open* and *closed* type on the basis of their technical features. Open subtitles, which include cinema subtitles and interlingual television subtitles that are part of the picture, cannot be removed from the screen. Closed subtitles, on the other hand, appear only when selected by the viewer, and they can be accessed, for instance through Teletext. They include television subtitles for viewers with hearing difficulties and interlingual television subtitles. They are also useful for learners of the foreign language who, by turning the subtitles on, can hear the spoken language and see the written text at the same time. (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998: 2, 129–130; O’Connell 2000: 170; Gottlieb 2001: 247.)

Because of the medium of transmission, the TV or film screen subtitling has some limitations that do not constrain traditional translation of written texts. Factors, such as the synchronisation of text, sound and image and also the restrictions of time and space, characterise subtitling (de Linde and Kay 1999a: 5–6).

The constraints in subtitling can be divided into three main categories. Technical constraints include space and time limitation. Textual constraints comprise the need to synchronise the visual and the verbal elements of the original with subtitles and the change in medium. Linguistic constraints are due to the differences in grammar, syntax and culture related elements between the source and the target language. (Guardini 1998: 97.)

One of the challenges subtitling sets on the translator is the spatial restriction, which is one of the technical constraints of subtitling. Because of the space limit on the screen, subtitles generally take up the maximum of two lines with the average of thirty three and the maximum of forty characters each, depending on the width of the letters. For example, the letter “l” will take less space than “w”. (see Karamitroglou 1998; de Linde and Kay 1999a: 6; Hatim and Mason 2000: 430.) The space on screen becomes even

more restricted in countries with more than one official language, like Finland, where two languages, Finnish and Swedish, must be visible on the screen.

Another technical restriction is time. The subtitles should remain on screen for at least two seconds for one line to the maximum of five to six seconds for full two lines. If the subtitles are on the screen for too short a period of time, there is a risk that the eye will not register them. If, on the other hand, they are visible for longer than seven seconds, the viewers unconsciously start rereading them. (see Hervey and Higgins 1992: 159; Karamitroglou 1998; de Linde and Kay 1999a: 7; Hatim and Mason 2000: 430.)

In addition to the speed of the dialogue, also the reading speed of the target viewers influences the time during which the subtitles must be shown on screen. According to Luyken et al. (qtd. in de Linde and Kay 1999a: 6), the average speed of reading a written text, for example a novel, lies between 150 and 180 words per minute. However, reading subtitles differs from reading any other written text. When we watch a subtitled film, our brain needs to absorb not only the text itself but also the aural and visual images. This means that our ears need to register the sound, and eyes need to move between the visual image and the subtitles, which takes the eye about one third of a second for every movement to and from the subtitles. (Ivarsson 1992: 38; Ivarsson and Carroll 1998: 64.) It has been also observed that when we read subtitles our eyes do not move in a normal reading pattern. Instead of reading every single word they jump from one keyword to another. (Delabastita 1990: 98.) Finally, the subject matter of what we are watching affects the reading speed of the viewers (de Linde and Kay 1999a: 6). If the viewer is familiar with or interested in the theme of a programme, he or she will understand the subtitles better and therefore read them faster.

The spatial and temporal restrictions, thus, set physical limitations on the subtitles. Compared with the soundtrack, the text needs to be condensed; some elements may need to be paraphrased, reduced or even omitted, and redundancy reduced (Hatim and Mason 2000: 430–431). Some characteristic elements of speech, such as hedging or

repetitions, may be considered superfluous and therefore omitted in the translation (Gottlieb 2001: 247).

Synchronisation, which is one of the textual constraints, is another aspect which needs to be taken into account in subtitling. Both the synchronisation between the soundtrack and the content of subtitles as well as between the image that appears on screen and the subtitles are crucial to comprehension (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998: 73; de Linde and Kay 1999a: 7). It is difficult to understand subtitles if their content does not match what we hear. However, it becomes even more complicated to follow the story if the subtitles do not match the images on screen. Therefore the subtitles should reinforce the image present on the screen at that particular moment (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998: 73–75). For example, if there is a scene presenting a telephone conversation, the subtitles should correspond with the dialogue of the person visible on screen, not the one who is not present.

Finally, also linguistic constraints influence the creation of subtitles, and they relate to both the structural and cultural aspects of a language. The subtitling of wordplay, idioms and proverbs, or slang are probably some of the most difficult tasks in screen translation. For example, when Samantha says that “[a]fter the big C[ancer] you *don’t sweat the small stuff*” (episode 17, scene 6), the italicised idiom is paraphrased in the subtitles as “takie błahostki mnie nie ruszają” [such small things don’t bother me]. Or, for instance, when Mr. Big complains that Carrie never has time to meet him: “If the mountain won’t come to Muhammad...” (episode 19, scene 2), the translation uses the same proverb that exists in Polish. Also references to aspects of the source culture and society may not be easy to translate. (Guardini 1998: 103–109.) For instance, when Miranda says: “‘Good humour’ to me” (episode 16, scene 2), the Polish audience would not associate the name “good humour” with ice-cream.

The change of medium from spoken to written has an impact on the translation. This influence as well as the differences between the spoken and the written language will be discussed in the following section.

## 2.2 Shift from Spoken to Written Language in Subtitling

Subtitling is a type of translation in which there is a change of form from spoken to written language. Some features of speech, like different dialects, accents, or intonation of the speakers disappear because it is difficult to represent them in written form. Also additional information and explanations cannot be included in the subtitles because of the limited space and time on screen. Thus, the elements that seem to be affected most by the constraints of subtitling as well as the transformation from the spoken to the written mode are language style and text cohesion (de Linde Kay 1999a: 26).

There are a number of differences between spoken and written language, and some elements of speech are usually affected by the change of form from speech to writing. One of the main differences is that uttered sentences are longer and have a more complex structure than the ones in written texts (Halliday qtd. in de Linde and Kay 1999a: 26). A long sentence from the soundtrack may, therefore, be translated into a few shorter ones in the subtitles. In addition, spontaneous speech, either genuine as in talk shows or acted as in films, is characterised by pauses, hesitations, self-corrections and interruptions. Unfinished sentences and structures that are not grammatically correct may also be typical of speech. (Gottlieb 2004: 18.) These elements do not usually appear in written text and, therefore, might be omitted in the subtitles.

Another feature affected by the shift from spoken to written language is text cohesion. Cohesive elements that refer back to some aspect in a text or conjunctions link different parts of a text together making it easier to follow and comprehend. Such cohesive elements, however, are usually omitted in subtitles because they are non-content bearing (Gottlieb 2004: 28).

Both the change of form from oral to written and the spatial and temporal restrictions of subtitling have an influence on what is omitted in the translation. The characters in *SATC* are not real-life people and therefore their speech is not authentic either. It is, however, visible in the subtitles that the text is condensed. The elements that seem to be

omitted are personal names and forms of address, interjections (“that’s right”), hedging (“I mean”, “you know”), and generally phrases that do not bear important information. This can be visible, for example, in the following conversation between Carrie Bradshaw and Mr. Big, her ex-lover:

(A) Big: **Carrie/ Carrie . stop/ What are you doing?** Saying goodbye and jumping out of the car like that? . Are you moving **to Paris?** [...] (episode 19, scene 2)

Zaczekaj!  
Dlaczego tak nagle  
żegnasz się i uciekasz?  
Przeprowadzasz się?

Wait! Why are you saying goodbye and running away? Are you moving?

(B) Big: **Oh come on . it’s a joke Carrie/**

To tylko żart.

It’s just a joke.

(C) Carrie: You do this every time . **EVERY TIME/ What?** Do you have some kind of radar? Carrie might be happy/ it’s time to sweep it and shit all over it/

Robisz tak za każdym razem.  
Może masz specjalny radar?  
Carrie jest szczęśliwa,  
więc czas to wszystko zepsuć.

You do this every time. Maybe you have some special radar? Carrie is happy, it’s time to destroy it.

(D) Big: **What? No . no look** I came here to tell you **something/** I made a mistake/  
You and I-

Chciałem tylko powiedzieć,  
że popełniłem błąd.  
Ty i ja...

I just wanted to say that I’ve made a mistake. You and I...

As it can be visible from the example above, some parts of the original text have not been included in the subtitled version. First of all, the speech tempo in the example is considerably fast and the dialogue needs, therefore, to be reduced in the subtitles. It is

especially evident in lines A and C where the number of words in the original is almost double compared to the subtitles. Also the oral flavour of the dialogue is affected. Phrases characteristic of spoken language like “oh come on” (B) or “no no look” (B) are omitted in the subtitles because they are non-content bearing. Repetitions, which are also a part of spoken language, are reduced because they do not bear new information. For example, in speech C the phrase “every time” is repeated twice, whereas the subtitles translate it only once. Finally, additional information like, for example, the fact that Carrie is talking in a loud voice in dialogue C, are not included in the subtitles.

It can be also observed that some phrases have been replaced with shorter ones. For instance, in line A “jumping out of the car like that” has been changed to “running away”. In line C, the utterance “it’s time to sweep it and shit all over it” becomes “it’s time to destroy it” in the translation.

### 2.3 Subtitling Strategies

The constraints of the audiovisual medium of TV or film screen shape the operational norms that guide the translational behaviour. In particular, they shape the matricial norms, which, according to Gideon Toury (1980: 54), relate to the completeness of the target text. They determine what elements of the source text will be translated into the target language and how, as well as the location of these elements in the target text. Matricial changes (Toury 1980: 102) include:

- addition – an occurrence of a linguistic element in the target text which has no counterpart in the source text. The additions might be the result of differences between the source and the target language and include both form words (prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns) and content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs). It can also mean, for example, adding an explanation to a concept that does not exist in the target culture.
- omission – an absence of a linguistic element in the target text which may be regarded as a counterpart of an element in the source text. For example,

omitting an explanation to a concept that is generally known and understood in the target culture. Also, when there is a need for condensation, repetitions and elements of the text that are considered non-content bearing can be omitted.

- change of location – a change of location of an element in the target text in comparison with the source text. For example, an in-text explanation that appears in the original may be moved to a footnote in the translation.
- replacement – a culture specific thing is changed into something more general or substituted with a local variant in the translation. For example, the original Kleenex (the American brand producing tissues) could be translated as tissues or replaced with the name of the local brand.

The elements that can be transferred using the above listed strategies are among others cultural references, humour, and wordplay. Another feature that can be transferred is politeness. Study of politeness in subtitling is, thus, a study of what verbal expressions of politeness are omitted or replaced. The politeness strategy may be, therefore, retained, removed or modified in the subtitles.

### 3 POLITENESS AND FACE

Politeness is something that every individual acquires and learns about in the course of their life. From when we are born, we are constantly exposed to other people and through this process of socialisation we gradually learn to distinguish between what is polite and what is not. This distinction between polite and offensive is, however, not the same for every culture and every period in time. It is because politeness has been constructed both culturally and historically.

Politeness can be viewed from different angles. The four main approaches in politeness research are as follows. The “social-norm view” assumes that every society has a set of rules and social norms which regulate what is regarded as polite. This theory represents a person’s understanding of what is considered to be polite and includes not only the language itself but also behaviour like, for instance, table manners. Another view of politeness, the “conversational-maxim view”, relies on Grice’s co-operative maxims and has been further developed by such scholars as Robin Lakoff (1973) or Geoffrey Leech (1983). The “conversational-contract view”, proposed by Bruce Fraser (1990), suggests that partners in a conversation know what to expect from their interlocutors on the basis of their rights and obligations. (Fraser 1990: 220–234.) In this study politeness is used in the sense suggested by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1994), and it could be described as “face saving view”. This view relies on Erving Goffman’s (1967) concept of face and, unlike the conversation-maxim view, is based on the assumption that in order to be polite one should not follow strictly the conversational maxims proposed by Grice. It has been the most quoted and most influential work on politeness to-date.

In the following sections, central concepts of politeness will be discussed. First, face and face-threatening acts will be explained. Also strategies of politeness will be discussed. Finally, criticism of Brown and Levinson’s theory will be presented.

### 3.1 Politeness and Face

A central concept in the linguistic study of politeness is *face*, a term introduced by Goffman (1967), and it has been later adapted by other scholars. Face is the “public self-image that every member [of a group] wants to claim for himself [sic]” (Brown and Levinson 1994: 61). It is “the negotiated public image, granted each other by participants in a communicative event” (Scollon and Scollon 1995: 35). The definitions emphasize the social aspect of face, that one’s face is created through interaction with other people. Face, or the public image, one has is not stable and it can always be renegotiated. Moreover, our face is not only created by us but also by our conversational partners. An important aspect of conversation is, therefore, to attend to and maintain both our own and our interlocutor’s face as well as show our awareness of the other person’s face (Yule 1996: 134).

The concept of face has two sides. On the one hand, every person has a desire to be involved in human interaction. This is their positive face. On the other hand, there is the need to maintain some degree of independence and also show other people that we respect their independence. This is the negative face. (Brown and Levinson 1994: 61.) The involvement aspect of face is shown in discourse through paying attention to others and their needs, showing interest in their affairs, expressing admiration or approval, or using first names. Independence, then, is shown by using more formal names and titles or giving others wide range of options. (Scollon and Scollon 1995: 36–37.) We may, for instance, assume that another person would want us to notice them and say “hello” (involvement) or, on the other hand, we may assume that that person would prefer to be left alone (independence).

The involvement and independence elements of face make it paradoxical. This is because both the negative and the positive aspect of face, even though they are contrasting concepts, are present in any communication. The speaker needs to involve their interlocutor but also grant them independence. Giving too much emphasis to one aspect means a threat to the other one. For example, if the speaker grants the hearer too

much involvement, they might feel that their independence is being threatened and that they are being drawn into an activity they do not want to participate in. If, conversely, the hearer is granted too much independence, they might feel that their involvement is being limited. (Scollon and Scollon 1995: 38.)

One's face can be threatened by particular utterances in a conversation. These face-threatening acts will be discussed in the following section.

### 3.2 Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

Certain acts or utterances that go against the face wants of a person can threaten or damage their face. These *face-threatening acts* (FTAs) can be expressed verbally as well as non-verbally, and they can appear in one or be spread across many utterances. (Brown and Levinson 1994: 65.) FTAs can damage both the speaker's (S's) and the hearer's (H's) positive or negative face, that is, their need for involvement or their right for independence. They can be divided into four categories depending on which and whose face they threaten. The first two categories include FTAs that threaten the negative and positive face of the hearer and the last two consist of acts that can damage the positive and negative face of the speaker.

FTAs to the hearer's face can damage both their positive and negative face. The hearer's positive face can be threatened when the speaker is indifferent to the hearer's feelings and desires, and they show that the hearer's wants are not considered important. This can be done, for example, by challenging the hearer or expressing criticism or disapproval of some aspects of the hearer's positive face. The hearer's negative face can be damaged, for instance, if the speaker deliberately restricts the hearer's freedom of action. Orders, requests and suggestions are examples of such actions. They indicate that the speaker wants the hearer to do or to refrain from doing something. The hearer's negative face can also be damaged by the speaker putting pressure on the hearer to accept or reject an offer or a promise. (Brown and Levinson

1994: 65–67.) An example of such a situation is when Carrie and Alek accidentally meet friends in a restaurant.

Alek: Come and join us/

Guests: No . we wouldn't wanna =

Alek: = Yes . of course/ (episode 17, scene 1)

Here the hearers are pressured to accept the invitation to join Carrie and Alek, even though they might not be willing to do this. Their independence is, thus, limited.

The speaker's positive face can be intimidated when, for example, they apologise, accept a compliment or lose control over their body or emotions. When we apologise, we are admitting that we regret having done or said something and therefore we threaten our own face to some extent. Accepting a compliment also hurts the speaker's positive face because this act puts pressure on the speaker to either minimise the object of the hearer's compliment or to compliment the hearer in return. An example of this can be found in *SATC* when Carrie's bag is complemented on, and she tries to belittle the bag or be modest by saying: "oh . thank you/ it's- it's vintage/ the silk lining is about a hundred million years old and . I'm still in love with it" (episode 20, scene 1). She minimises the complement by exaggerating the age of the bag.

The speaker's negative face can be threatened when they express gratitude, make an excuse, accept an offer or make reluctantly a promise. When the speaker thanks somebody, for example, they acknowledge a debt and, by doing this, restrict their own independence. Moreover, by making an excuse, the speaker wants to prove that they had a good reason to perform an act which has been criticized by the hearer. For example, when Carrie chooses to stay in with her partner instead of meeting her friends, she calls them and says: "[...] bad news/ I don't think I'm gonna make it/[...] I'm just all the way downtown with the Russian and it's very cold out" (episode 17, scene 7). She uses hedges, which suggests hesitation and fear that her friends would criticize her decision. Making promises reluctantly is also an act which can threaten the speaker's negative face. By making a promise, we commit ourselves to an act which we do not want to perform and, therefore, damage our own negative face. At the same time, if

their unwillingness is discovered by the hearer, also the hearer's positive face is damaged. This last example shows that a single act does not always perform only one FTA and sometimes can threaten different people's negative and positive faces at the same time. (Brown and Levinson 1994: 67–68.)

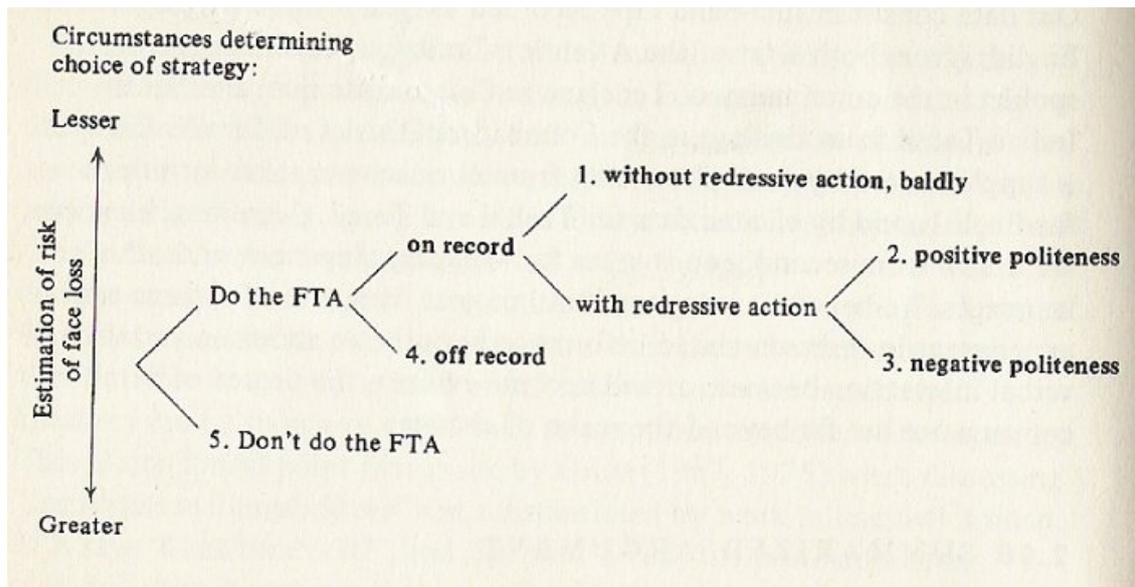
Certain politeness strategies can be employed in a conversation in order to reduce the threat of a particular utterance. There are five categories of politeness strategies which can be used to soften the impact of an FTA. These include the following in the order from the most to the least threatening:

- 1) doing FTA without redressive action, baldly on record
- 2) doing FTA on record with redressive action to satisfy the hearer's positive face, that is, their need to be involved (positive politeness)
- 3) doing FTA on record with redressive action to satisfy the hearer's negative face, that is, their right to independence (negative politeness)
- 4) doing FTA off record
- 5) not doing FTA<sup>13</sup>

The following Figure 1 shows the five politeness strategies and the circumstances that determine their choice. If a situation is not threatening to face, the bald on-record strategy (strategy 1 on the diagram) can be used. The more threatening the act is, the more the speaker will want to eliminate the risk of a face loss. In such situations, strategies 2, 3 and 4 can be used. If the risk of losing face is great, the speaker can choose not to perform the FTA (strategy 5).

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<sup>13</sup> The fifth strategy, because it is non-verbal and therefore cannot be represented in the subtitles, will not be taken into account in this analysis. For a more detailed study of this strategy see, for example, Sifianou (1995) or Nakane (2006).



**Figure 1.** Strategies of FTAs (Brown and Levinson 1994: 60).

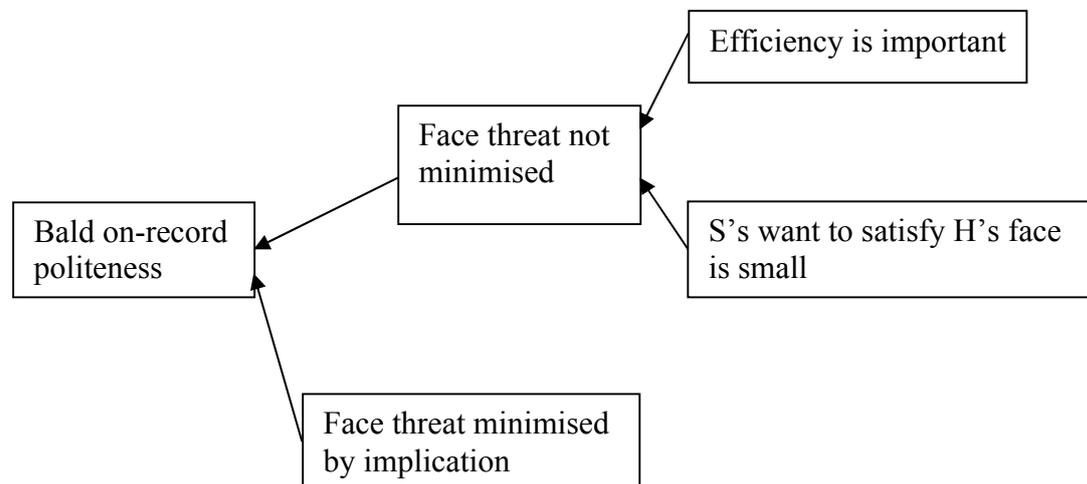
Apart from the seriousness of an FTA, the choice of a politeness strategy is also determined by the social distance between the speaker and the hearer, the power that the hearer has over the speaker, and the degree to which a particular FTA threatens face in that culture (Brown and Levinson 1994: 76; Brown 2005: 84). We are likely to be more polite to people we perceive to be higher than ourselves on the social scale (e.g. doctors, lawyers, priests). Also people superior to us, and consequently with more power, would be treated in a more polite way than the ones inferior to us. We would also take into consideration the seriousness of the FTA. The more face threatening the act we are about to perform is, the more polite we are likely to be (Brown and Levinson 1994: 60). In *Sex and the City* the characters are equals in terms of their position on the social scale and the power they have therefore the requests are likely to be delivered on record.

In the following sections the politeness strategies will be discussed in detail.

### 3.2.1 Bald On-record Politeness

The bald *on-record politeness* strategy is the one showing the least concern for face and involves communicating the message “in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible” (Brown and Levinson 1994: 69). The request that the speaker wants to make should be unambiguous. If one says “Open the window”, they want to unambiguously request something from the hearer, in this case for the hearer to open the window.

According to Brown and Levinson (1994: 95)<sup>14</sup>, the main reason why the speaker would choose the bald on-record strategy is that they want to do the FTA with maximum efficiency more than they would want to satisfy the hearer’s face. The use of bald on-record strategies varies in different circumstances depending on the speaker’s motives and include situations in which the face threat is not minimised and those in which the face threat is minimised by implication. This is illustrated in Figure 2. Both in English and Polish, on-record requests are expressed linguistically by an imperative (order) with or without politeness expressions.



**Figure 2.** Bald on-record politeness (Brown and Levinson 1994: 94–101).

<sup>14</sup> From this point onwards when discussing politeness strategies, Brown and Levinson’s (1994) book will be referred to, unless otherwise stated.

The face threat is not minimised in two situations. The first situation is when the speaker knows that efficiency is important. For example, cases of great urgency or desperation require maximum efficiency, and redressive action, that is, making the request as polite as possible, might make it sound less urgent than it is. If we desperately need help, we scream “Help!”, whereas in a non-urgent situation we can use a more polite expression and say “Could you, please, help me?”. Also, when faced with communication difficulties like a bad phone connection, we are likely to speak more efficiently. We are also likely to use the bald-on politeness strategy when we feel that we do not have to satisfy the hearer’s face. This is the case especially when the power distance is in favour of the speaker. An example of such situation and the use of a bald on-record FTA in *SATC* is when Carrie has a conversation with her female superior who asks Carrie to find her a partner for a date: “Carrie, I got you a job, you get me a man” (episode 18, scene 1). In making this request she uses her power over Carrie.

The third situation in which the bald on-record strategy is used is face-oriented. In this case the bald-on strategy is used when the speaker assumes that the hearer will be concerned with the speaker’s face. The speaker can help the hearer by deliberately inviting them to impose on their face. Welcomings, farewells, and offers are examples of such strategies. If we invite somebody home, we give the other person a chance to accept the invitation and impose on our negative face, that is, our right to be left alone. An example of such an invitation is when Carrie invites her friends to see her boyfriend’s apartment “Do you guys still wanna see the apartment?” (episode 17, scene 20). Farewells, on the other hand, are an opportunity to leave and thus threaten the speaker’s positive face. This is done, for example, by Miranda whose reply to Carrie’s invitation in the example above is “Oh . it’s late/ I- I should get back to Brooklyn [...]” (episode 17, scene 20). Finally when the speaker offers something, they insist that the hearer can impose on the speaker’s negative face.

Apart from the above mentioned situations, the bald on-record politeness strategy is also frequently used when there is a close connection between the speaker and the

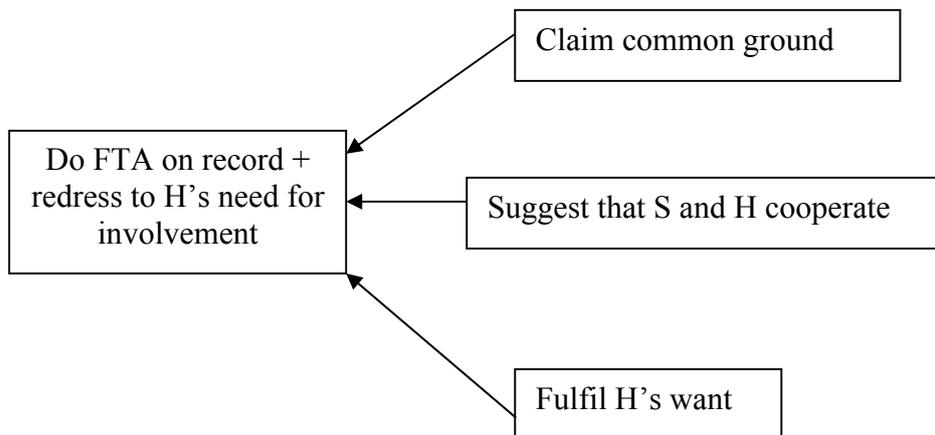
hearer. Familiarity increases the use of the strategy without making it offensive. In *SATC*, for example, the women are close friends and therefore they can make requests to each other and do not have to fear that an on-record request would offend the other person.

The speaker can benefit from choosing the bald on-record politeness strategy. The most obvious advantage is that the message is unambiguous and misunderstanding impossible. Moreover, this politeness strategy may make the speaker appear straightforward and sincere.

### 3.2.2 Positive Politeness

*Positive politeness* is one of the on-record politeness strategies, which means that even though the utterance is not direct, the message is easy to understand. However, unlike the bald on-record, this strategy shows more concern for face. This approach uses redress concentrated on supporting the hearer's positive face which is their need for involvement and desire that their wants are attractive and desirable to others. Therefore the strategy's main point is for the speaker to communicate that their wants are to some extent similar to the wants of the hearer. (Watts 2004: 86.)

Positive politeness can be realised by claiming common ground, suggesting that the speaker and the hearer cooperate, and fulfilling the hearer's want. This is illustrated in Figure 3. In English and Polish positive politeness can be realised by conditional structures, statements with or without hedging, or polite commands like "let's" or "why don't we".



**Figure 3.** Positive politeness (Brown and Levinson 1994: 102).

A person may claim common ground by indicating that the speaker and the hearer are members of the same community or group and that their wants, beliefs or values are similar. This can be done in different ways. Complementing is one of the methods to show solidarity between the speaker and the hearer (Holmes 2005; 1995b: 116). When Charlotte's dog is praised by a stranger on the street: "This is the most precious little thing" (episode 17, scene 2), this also suggests that by admiring the dog the person shows interest also in Charlotte at the same time. Comments of praise like "What a fantastic garden you have" or questions with a positive subtext like "What a lovely dress! Is it new?" emphasize that the speaker is interested in the hearer. Also by using a particular set address forms, in-group language or dialect the speaker may suggest that s/he and the hearer belong to the same group. The women in *SATC* call each other "guys", "girls", or "sweeties", which emphasises the close relation that they have. Finally, avoiding disagreement shows that the speaker claims common point of view or belief with the hearer.

Positive politeness can also be realised by conveying that the speaker and the hearer cooperate and, therefore, share the same goals. This can be done, for instance, by showing that the speaker knows what the hearer wants, and is willing to be flexible with his/her own wants. An example of such behaviour is when Miranda has problems

while taking care of her mother-in-law but decides not to say anything to her husband. She says to her maid “Let’s . not make a big deal of it to Steve/ It’d just upset him” (episode 20, scene 24). By saying this she shows that at this moment her husband’s peace is more important than the fact that she would want to talk about her problems. Also offers in which both the speaker and the hearer are included, emphasize that the speaker and the hearer cooperate. Phrases like “Let’s have tea” or “Why don’t we go to the movies” suggest, in fact, that it is the speaker who wants to have tea or go to the movies but, by using “we”, involves the hearer and makes the proposal attractive to them.

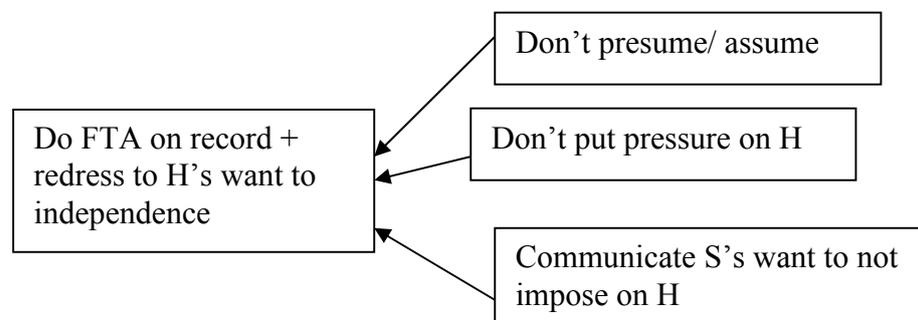
Fulfilling the hearer’s wants is the third way to employ positive politeness. By helping the hearer in achieving their goals, the speaker indicates that they want the hearer’s wants to be fulfilled for. For example, by showing their sympathy and understanding to the hearer, the speaker satisfies the hearer’s want to be understood, liked, or cared for.

The advantage of using positive politeness is that the impact of an FTA can be minimised. By assuring the hearer that the speaker respects them and finds their wants desirable they create friendly atmosphere. This allows even criticism to be acceptable and not damaging the hearer’s face.

### 3.2.3 Negative Politeness

*Negative politeness*, like positive politeness, is also one of the on-record politeness strategies and it also shows concern for face. But unlike positive politeness, this strategy is redressed to please the hearer’s negative face, that is, their right to independence and freedom of action. Negative politeness, therefore, is based on avoidance which means that whatever the speaker does, they need to assure the hearer that they recognises the hearer’s negative face and do not want to impose on their independence (Watts 2004: 86).

There are three different ways to perform FTA with redressive action to please the hearer's negative face. The speaker makes no assumptions about the hearer's wants, does not put pressure on the hearer, and communicates the wish not to impose on the hearer. This is illustrated in Figure 4. Both in English and Polish negative politeness can be expressed through conditional structures or statements with or without hedges, that is, words or phrases (e.g. like, sort of, I think) that modify the force of a speech act and express speakers certainty or uncertainty about something (Coates 2004: 88).



**Figure 4.** Negative politeness (Brown and Levinson 1994: 131).

As can be seen from the figure, one of the ways to redress the FTA to the hearer's negative face is to avoid presuming that the FTA you are about to perform is also wanted by the hearer. This includes assumptions not only about the hearer's wants and interests, but also about willingness to do certain things. The distance between the speaker and the hearer can be maintained with the use of hedges. In *SATC* it is Charlotte who uses hedges most frequently in her speech. One of the examples is when she is considering re-entering her dog in a dog competition:

*I think* it was because her last owner wasn't *very* supportive/ *I think* she misses the competition/ (...) I'm *thinking* of re-entering her/ *I think* with my love and *a bit* of encouragement she can *actually* win/ (episode 17, scene 2)

In this case hedging is used to express Charlotte's confidence in her dog's ability to win the competition.

Another way to redress the hearer's negative face is not to put pressure on them. Whenever the situation involves the speaker trying to persuade the hearer to do something, like requesting their aid, this is done in a way in which the hearer has a choice also not to do the act. This can be done by hedges or indirectness. Also by requesting, for instance, "You couldn't by any chance lend me your car for the evening", the speaker gives the hearer an option to refuse.

Negative politeness involves also communicating the speaker's want not to impose on the hearer. The speaker shows awareness of the hearer's negative face and takes it into account when deciding to perform an FTA. This can be achieved in two ways. The first way is to apologise for doing an FTA. In *SATC*, for example, Samantha is disturbed by a stranger who wants to talk to her. He makes an apology for disturbing her by saying: "Hi/ sorry to interrupt/ we've met before" (episode 17, scene 4) and by this communicates that he does not wish to inconvenience her. The other way is for the speaker to convey their reluctance to impose on the hearer by implicating that it is somebody else than the speaker who wants to impose on the hearer. This can be done by avoiding pronouns such as 'I' and 'you' and when possible substituting them with the plural forms.

The advantage of negative politeness strategy is that the message can be communicated on record. This means that there is no possible other interpretation and no misunderstanding. When negative politeness is employed, the hearer understands that they are given a possibility of opting out even if the speaker is only pretending to be giving the hearer an option.

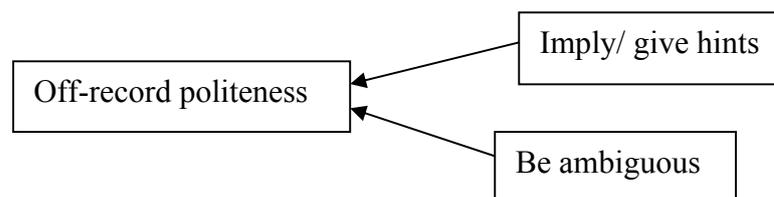
#### 3.2.4 Off-record Politeness

The above mentioned on-record strategies are most likely to be used in situations when the risk of losing face is minimal. However, when the FTA becomes greatly damaging

to face, the speaker may employ the off-record strategy or choose not to perform the act at all.

The *off-record politeness* strategy is based on ambiguity. This means that a particular communicative act does not have only one possible reading but can be interpreted in more ways than one. The hearer is, therefore, given an option to respond either to the imposition or to some other possible reading. By choosing to go off-record, the speaker avoids responsibility for committing an FTA since it is the hearer who decides how s/he wants to interpret the act.

Off-record politeness is performed by means of an implicature (Grice 1975) which indicates that what the speaker means differs from what the sentence used by the speaker means. The ambiguity of an off-record utterance is created by using indirect language. This can be achieved by the speaker saying something more general or different than the message itself. By a statement, like, “It’s cold in here” the speaker may not only want to state the fact but also want to suggest that they should close the window. Off-record politeness can be expressed by implicature or ambiguity, as can be seen in Figure 5. In English and Polish statements or questions are used to mark off-record politeness.



**Figure 5.** Off-record politeness (Brown and Levinson 1994: 214).

One of the ways to achieve indirectness is to use implicature. An utterance “There’s no milk in the fridge” can be interpreted as a statement of a fact or as a request for the

hearer to go to the shop and get some. This could also be done by an under- or overstatement. When asked for an opinion about something, one could use an understatement in order not to offend the other person.

The speaker may also be vague or deliver an ambiguous message. This can be achieved, for instance, by not specifying to whom the FTA is directed. For example, when Charlotte's husband says "Do you think someone is getting a bit chunky?" (episode 18, scene 8), she thinks that he is talking about her, when in fact he is referring to their dog. It is, however, a nicer way than to say baldly that the dog is fat, as this would offend Charlotte. Over-generalisation is another way to be ambiguous. Instead of saying "Do the dishes", one could just mention that "Some people help do the dishes sometimes", and, by this, leave the decision to the hearer.

The obvious advantage of going off-record is that, because the act is ambiguous and indirect, the speaker can avoid responsibility for a possible face threat. What is also important is that when the speaker chooses not to be direct, they can be regarded as being tactful.

### 3.3 Criticism of Brown and Levinson's Theory

Even though Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is the most ground breaking and considered to be "a touchstone" for scholars who have the need to go beyond it (Mills 2003: 5; Locher and Watts 2005: 10), it has also received criticism (see e.g. Werkhofer 1992; Meier 1995; Kitamura 2000; Locher and Watts 2005).

The first and probably most important criticism is that Brown and Levinson presume that politeness is universal and functions in the same way in all languages. According to some scholars this is due to "Anglocentrism", that is, the assumption that if a model works in English, it can automatically be applied to other languages as well (Bargiela *et al.* 2002). However, such an assumption is false because politeness is not the same

across cultures, and people from different cultures may have different views of what counts as politeness or imposing (Janney and Arndt 1992: 29). For example saying “Hi” instead of “Good morning” to one’s grandmother might be acceptable in Polish culture, whereas in Japanese would be regarded as offence and showing disrespect to the elderly.

Another important criticism of Brown and Levinson’s theory is that their model, as Watts (2004: 85) observes, concentrates on the speaker only and disregards the importance of the hearer in the interaction. However, it is the hearer who has to assess the intentions of the speaker and ultimately decides whether the utterance spoken is sincere enough to be regarded as polite (Mills 2003: 110).

Finally, Brown and Levinson assume that the concept of face is an individualistic one. This idea of a person being able to choose between privacy and belonging to a group of people can only be applied in societies where the focus is on individualism. In collectivist societies like China, where the position of an individual in a group is more important than their right to independence or their need to achieve own goals, the notion of negative face can have little or no meaning at all. (Watts 2004: 102.) This point, however, will not affect this study since it focuses on American society, one of the most individualistic societies in the world, and Polish society, in which there is a high degree of individualism (Hofstede 1997: 53).

#### 4 POLITENESS IN *SEX AND THE CITY*

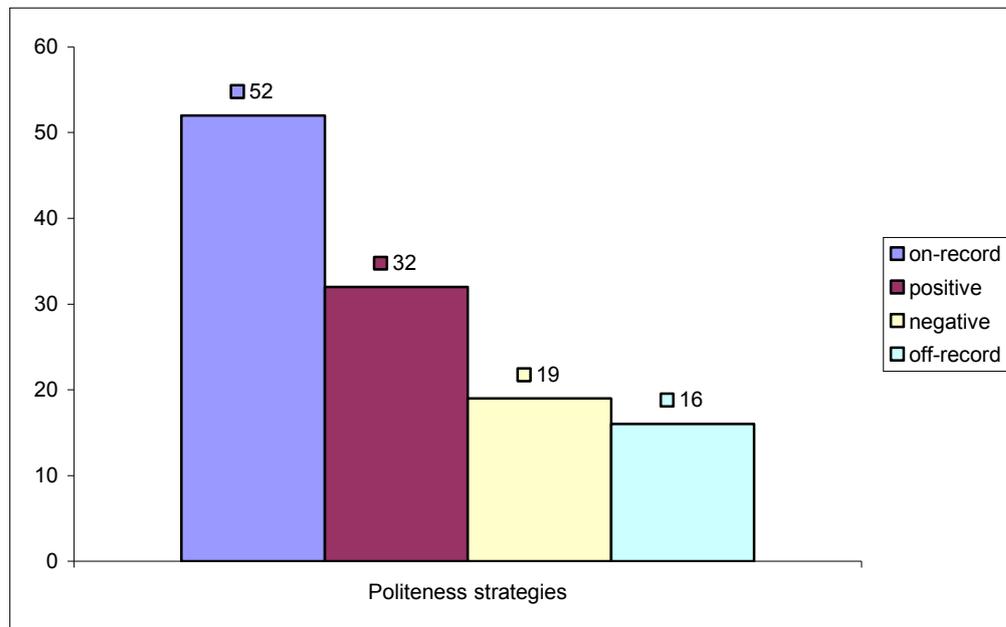
The primary goal of this study has been to discover what happens to politeness strategies in requests in the subtitling of *Sex and the City* into Polish. It was assumed that because the characters are “new women” and close friends, most of the original request on the soundtrack would be delivered on-record. The hypothesis is that the need for condensation because of the constraints of time and space as well as the language differences will have an impact on the strategies. In consequence they might be changed into shorter and less time-consuming ones. Thus on-record and off-record politeness strategies would be most likely to remain unchanged in the translation, whereas positive and negative politeness strategies might be translated into on-record politeness because of the spatial and temporal constraints of subtitling. Also because the characters are “new women”, the politeness strategies can smoothly be changed into more direct ones.

The study has been conducted on the six last episodes from the sixth and final season of *SATC*, which were further divided into 131 scenes. The material consisted of the speech of the four main characters on the original English soundtrack, my transcription of the lines involving requests as well as the corresponding Polish subtitles.

The study has been performed in three steps. First, requests as one category of FTAs were identified. All requests, requests in a form of proposals, and orders were chosen for the analysis. The second step was to identify which verbal politeness strategies in accordance with Brown and Levinson’s (1994) classification were used in the original English soundtrack. Finally, the politeness strategies used in the soundtrack of *SATC* have been compared with their representation used in the Polish subtitles to see whether the politeness strategy had been retained, removed or modified.

Altogether 119 instances of requests were identified in the original English soundtrack. The most frequent politeness strategy was on-record politeness with 52 instances, making it 44% of all cases. Positive politeness was used 32 times (27%). There were 19

cases of negative politeness (16%) and, finally, 16 cases of off-record politeness (13%). Politeness strategies and the number of their occurrence are presented in Figure 6.



**Figure 6.** Politeness strategies.

The on-record politeness strategy was used by all four characters. Carrie used it most frequently (24 times). Samantha and Miranda used this strategy often (14 and 11 times respectively), and Charlotte seldom (5 times). Positive politeness was employed 14 times by Carrie, 11 times by Miranda, 4 times by Samantha, and twice by Charlotte. Negative politeness was used only by three women – Carrie (14 times), Samantha (4 times), and Charlotte (once). Finally, the off-record strategy was used 4 times by Carrie, Samantha and Miranda, and 3 times by Charlotte.

The most common requests (50 out of 119) were the ones in a form of a question where the speaker asks the hearer to do something or for a permission to do something. Like, for example, when Charlotte is given a puppy and asks her husband if she can keep it: “She’s a present/ Can we keep her?” (episode 16, scene 21). The second category of

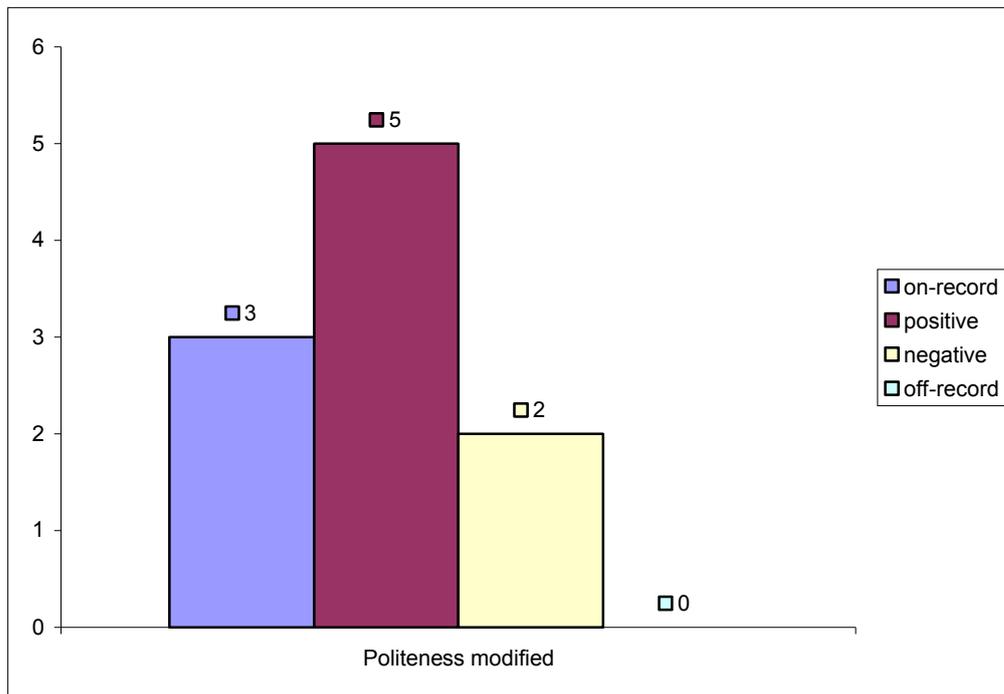
requests (45 out of 119) was orders for the hearer to do or not to do something. For instance, when Samantha is shopping for a wig and gets upset with the shop assistant, she says: “DON’T touch my head” (episode 16, scene 16). The last category of requests (24 out of 119) was proposals where the speaker suggests an activity that both the speaker and the hearer can participate in or offers his/her help to the hearer. One of such situations is when Alek needs help with his cufflinks and Carrie proposes: “Here . let me do this for you” (episode 20, scene 26).

The results of the comparison between the soundtrack and the subtitles show that in most cases the politeness strategy remained unchanged in the translation; the strategy had been retained in 88 cases which amounts to 74% of all the requests. The politeness strategy, or a part of it, was removed 21 times (18%) and modified 10 times (8%). The results of the analysis will be now presented starting from the cases most relevant for this study, that is, situations where the politeness strategy was modified (section 4.1) and removed (section 4.2). Cases where the strategy was retained will be discussed in section 4.3. Finally, conclusions regarding the characterisation of the women in *SATC* will be drawn in section 4.4.

#### 4.1 Politeness Modified

Politeness modified is a strategy where the original long expression is replaced with a shorter polite phrase in order to make the utterance more concise. This may, but does not have to, result in a change of politeness strategy. The most probable shift of this kind can be observed in positive and negative politeness because these strategies tend to employ longer expressions than, for example, on-record politeness.

Figure 7 shows that 16% (5 of 32) of positive, 11% (2 of 19) of negative, 6% (3 of 52) of on-record politeness has been modified. They were usually replaced with a shorter phrase.



**Figure 7.** Politeness modified.

### Positive politeness

Politeness phrases were modified most frequently in case of the positive politeness strategy, which is based on cooperation between the speaker and the hearer. To achieve this, the speaker can, for example, propose activities that involve both the hearer and the speaker as a team. One of such cases is, for instance, when all four friends are in a restaurant and Carrie proposes that they could go and visit her boyfriend.

- (1) Why don't we finish this off [the drinks] . crack this open [a bottle of Champagne] . **give him some time** and go over there to say hello? (episode 17, scene 19)

Skończmy drinki, wypijmy szampana  
i chodźmy do niego. Co wy na to?

Let's finish the drinks, drink the Champagne and go to him. *What do you say?*

The original proposal is a typical example of positive politeness. By employing the polite command “why don't we”, Carrie suggests that she would like all of her friends

to be involved in the activity she is about to propose. The translation paraphrases this expression into another polite command, “let’s”, which also suggests that the activity is meant for the whole group. Moreover, the translation adds the question “What do you say?” which strengthens the fact that Carrie is not only proposing an activity but is also willing to hear the opinion of her friends about it. Even though the polite phrases have been replaced in this example, the positive politeness strategy has not changed.

There have been, however, cases of modifying a positive politeness phrase by replacing it with another expression which caused a shift towards another politeness strategy in the translation. In the following example Miranda asks Carrie if she would like to go out and have some food.

- (2) Do you wanna go get something to eat? (episode 18, scene 22)

Jesteś głodna?

Are you hungry?

Miranda’s proposal has characteristics of positive politeness. First of all, she is interested in what Carrie wants and, secondly, she wants to do something together with Carrie. The whole original question has been replaced with a shorter ambiguous “Are you hungry?” in the subtitles, which can be interpreted either as a plain question towards Carrie to establish whether she is hungry or a hidden suggestion to have some food. In consequence the original positive politeness shifted to off-record politeness strategy in the translation.

### Negative politeness

The second politeness strategy that has been modified in the subtitles is negative politeness, by which the speaker can show, for example, that they do not want to put pressure on the hearer to do something. In the following situation, Carrie wants to persuade her boyfriend to finally meet her girlfriends.

- (3) ***Well . I was thinking that*** since I met *some* of your friends the other day *maybe you could* meet *some* of my friends/ (episode 17, scene 10)

Ponieważ nie tak dawno

poznałam twoich przyjaciół,  
może mogłbyś poznać moich.

Because not so long ago I met your friends maybe you could meet mine. In this example Carrie uses hedging (“well”, “I was thinking”, “some”, “maybe”), which is a typical way to express negative politeness. She wants to show Alek that she understands such a proposal might threaten his freedom. By using hedges she also wants to minimise the seriousness of the request. The translation omits the starting phrase but keeps some of the hedges. Also the phrase “the other day” is changed into “not so long ago” which is also a hedge. This means that the politeness strategy remains unchanged.

### On-record politeness

Finally, the least frequently modified politeness strategy was on-record politeness, that is, the most direct way to request something. One of such cases is example 4. This situation takes place at a dinner party which Carrie and her boyfriend Aleksandr Petrovsky organise for Carrie’s friends. Charlotte is interested in Petrovsky’s art and asks him to tell them something about his newest exhibition.

(4) Tell us about your sculpture exhibition in Paris/ (episode 18, scene 3)

Te rzeźby na wystawę do Paryża...

These sculptures for the exhibition in Paris...

In this example Charlotte uses a request in a form of an order to request some details about the exhibition. In the translation, however, the whole utterance is replaced with an off-record implication. The expression used in the subtitles is less threatening than the original because Alek himself can decide whether to treat it as a request for him to describe his work or whether to ignore it.

Another example of the modification of the on-record strategy is connected with the language differences between English and Polish. In this situation Samantha is in hospital and has just been told she has breast cancer. She gets angry and tells the doctor to show her the chart.

(5) Give me my chart/ (episode 15, scene 2)

Proszę podać mi kartę.

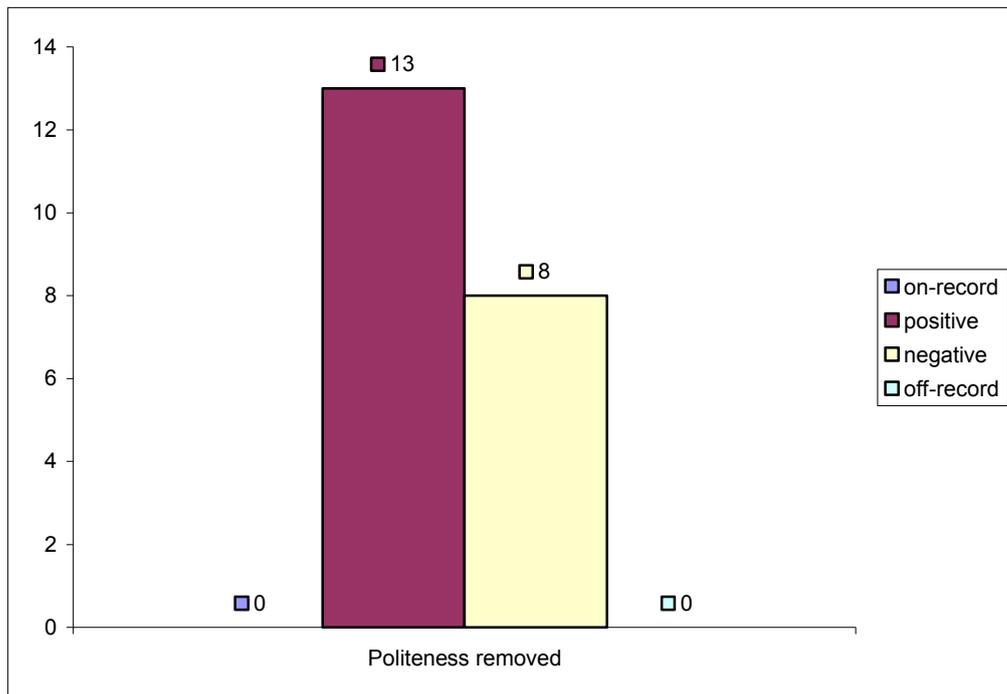
Give (formal "you") me my chart.

In the original, Samantha's request in a form of an order is delivered on-record. The translation also employs the direct strategy. However, it uses the formal and respectable way to address people one is not close with. Such a distinction between informal "you" and formal "you" is an important part of communication in Polish. Such differentiation exists in other languages as well like, for example, Italian (Guardini 1998: 103). It does not, however, exist in the English language. This example shows that the changes between the soundtrack and the subtitles can be caused not only by the need for condensation but also by the differences between the English and the Polish language.

#### 4.2 Politeness Removed

Politeness may be removed in the subtitles by omitting an originally polite phrase or a part of it and thus shifting towards a more direct and less polite request. This is most likely to happen in case of negative and positive politeness because of the restriction of time and space on screen. This means that a conditional or a question may be translated as an imperative with or without politeness expressions.

Figure 8 shows that in 42% (8 of 19) of negative and 41% (13 of 32) of positive politeness, the polite phrase has been removed and therefore the politeness strategy changed towards a more direct one.



**Figure 8.** Politeness removed.

### Negative politeness

Politeness was removed most frequently in the case of negative politeness, that is, when the speaker indicates understanding of the hearer's need for independence. 42% of all negative politeness instances shifted towards on-record in the subtitles. One of such examples is when Smith, Samantha's boyfriend, is abroad working on a film, and Samantha calls him and asks him not have sex with somebody else, even though she pressed him to do that before he left.

- (6) **Well . if it would be ok with you . TRY not to [have sex]/ Unless you already have and then . that's fine/ (episode 20, scene 15)**

Spróbuj się jednak  
powstrzymać.  
Chyba, że już to zrobiłeś.  
Żaden problem.

Try to abstain. Unless you already have done it. No problem.

In this example the negative politeness in the original is characterised, among others, by the use of a hedge "well". However, the key phrase in the original utterance is "if it would be ok with you", which is the conditional expressing uncertainty. This suggests that Samantha knows her request might threaten Smith's freedom and acknowledges this by admitting that this is not her intention. The translation, however, omits the hedge and the phrase creating a direct request, but the concession "no problem" is used to soften the request.

Negative politeness was also removed in an utterance where the speaker's needs were emphasized and the needs of the hearer disregarded. For example, when Carrie is speaking with her boyfriend and gets upset because he does not let her finish what she has to say:

- (7) I need you to NOT talk so that . I can say this without you confusing me/ (episode 16, scene 22)

Pozwól, że dokończę,  
Zanim zbijesz mnie z tropu.

Let me finish, before you confuse me.

In this case Carrie uses negative politeness, that is, she expresses her own needs ("I need you not to talk") without considering the needs of the hearer. The translation, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of the other person in the conversation. The phrase "let me finish" suggests Carrie asking for permission to speak rather than ordering her boyfriend to be quiet. The translation, therefore, shifts from negative to positive politeness.

### Positive politeness

The other politeness strategy that was removed frequently was positive politeness. 41% of all positive politeness instances shifted towards on-record in the subtitles. One of the cases where positive politeness was removed is questions regarding a wish of the speaker. For example, when Miranda and Steve move to a new house, Miranda is curious whether her husband has installed the Internet connection, and asks:

- (8) Did you get the chance to install my DSL line **today**? (episode 17, scene 3)

Podłączyłeś internet?

Did you connect the Internet?

In the above example Miranda uses a question which puts more emphasis on the final result of her request than on the request itself. She uses one of the ways to employ the positive politeness strategy, namely being optimistic. By using the expression “did you get the chance” she shows that she hopes and has a feeling that Steve managed to do it. The translation, however, uses the on-record strategy of simply asking whether he connected the Internet. Also the specific “DSL line” was translated as “the Internet” which is a more general term.

Positive politeness was also removed in questions that served the function of a proposal. One of such situations is, for instance, when Carrie wants her friends to meet her boyfriend and proposes it to them by saying:

- (9) Do you **guys** wanna have drinks with the Russian **tomorrow night**? (episode 17, scene 13)

Chcecie poznać Rosjanina?

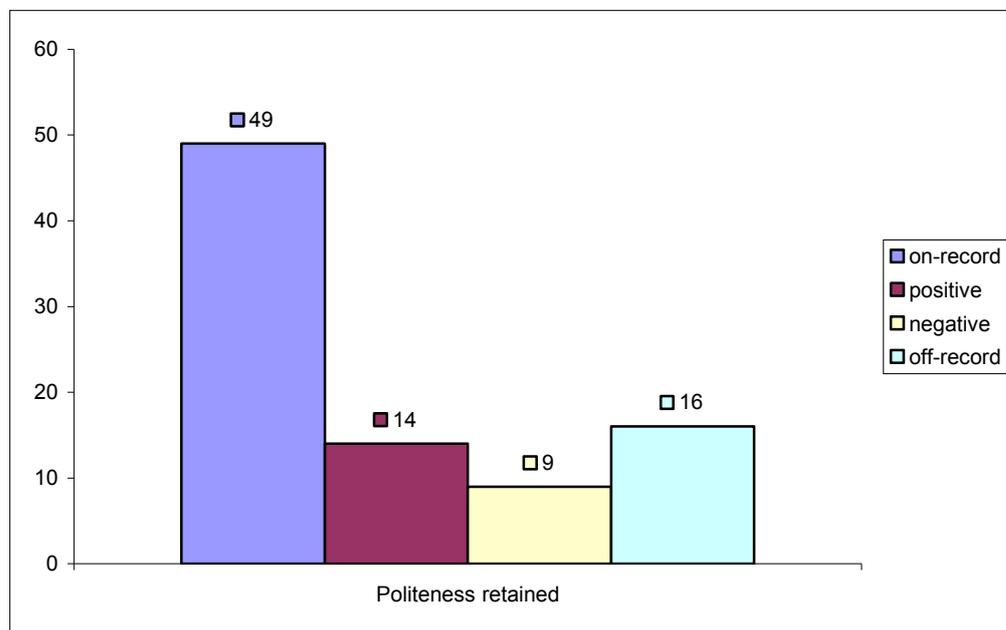
Do you want to meet the Russian?

In this example positive politeness is demonstrated by expressions that emphasize intimacy between people involved in a conversation. Carrie uses informal language and calls her friends “guys”. This suggests she addresses a group of her close friends. Also the fact that she uses a question that serves the function of a proposal implies that not only would she herself want them to meet him, but she would also want them to be involved in her personal life. The translation contains only the original proposal to meet Carrie’s boyfriend. Such details as the time of the meeting (“tomorrow night”) as well as the form of address (“guys”) have been omitted, and the original suggestion to “have drinks” has been replaced with the more general “meeting”.

### 4.3 Politeness Retained

One of the subtitling strategies is a strategy in which politeness strategy used in the original soundtrack remains unchanged in the translation. This strategy of translation can be used in case of all four politeness strategies, although it would be most expected in on-record strategy, because it is the most direct one, and in off-record strategy, because it is the most ambiguous one.

This translation strategy was used most frequently. Out of the total of 119 instances 88 fall into this category. In 88 cases all 16 cases of off-record, almost all (49 of 52) of on-record, 44% (14 of 32) of positive, and 32% (9 of 19) of negative politeness strategy of the original soundtrack, the strategy remained the same in the subtitles. The numbers can be seen in Figure 9.



**Figure 9.** Politeness retained.

### Off-record politeness

Off-record politeness, in which the message is communicated in an ambiguous way, was without exception carried into the Polish subtitles. One of such situations is, for instance, when Carrie is walking with her boyfriend and suddenly wants to go back home because she is getting cold.

(10) I am kind of cold/ (episode 15, scene 19)

Zimno mi trochę.

I'm a bit cold.

In this example Carrie uses the off-record strategy of making a statement about herself instead of saying that she wants to go back home. Instead of a direct request she just implies it by saying that it is getting cold and hopes that her boyfriend will understand it. In the translation there is a small change in the degree of how cold she is, but the implied request to go home is retained.

The off-record politeness strategy was also retained in a situation when the implied request is in a form of a question and serves the function of asking for permission to do something. When Charlotte meets the dog she likes in the park, she asks the owner if she can feed it:

(11) **It's** turkey bacon/ Is that all right? (episode 15, scene 15)

Boczek z indyka. Może być?

Bacon from turkey. Can it be?

The underlying request in this example is “Can I feed your dog?”. However, Charlotte does not ask this question directly but uses the off-record strategy, that is, implying something instead of saying it in a direct manner. In this example it is used to ask for consent to feed the dog. Both the original and the translation use a more indirect expression which suggests asking for the dog's preference in food rather than permission to feed it.

### On-record politeness

The second most frequently retained politeness strategy was on-record politeness with 98% of the cases. This strategy involves speaking in a direct and unambiguous way so that the request can easily be comprehended. It is used most often in situations of great urgency where an utterance needs to be concise in order to be understood immediately. One such instance is when Charlotte and her husband are making love, and she suddenly notices that the baby they are taking care of is watching them. She panics and screams to the child:

(12) **Brady** . look away/ (episode 15, scene 16)

Nie patrz tu.

Don't look here.

In this case a direct request in a form of an order to do something has been uttered. The translation omits the name and uses an order not to do something. The directness of the request has been retained.

There are also examples of retaining on-record politeness where a request takes the form of an order for the person to do or not to do something. The following situation shows Carrie arguing with her ex-boyfriend Mr. Big.

(13) Don't call me . **ever again**/ Forget you know my number/ **In fact** . forget **you know** my name/ (episode 19, scene 2)

Nie dzwoń do mnie!

Wykasuj mój numer!

Zapomnij jak mam na imię.

Don't call me! Delete my number! Forget my name.

Here the use of the on-record politeness strategy has been triggered by the circumstances. Carrie is upset and therefore she uses very direct language. The on-record request in this example functions as an order. The utterance has been shortened by deleting “ever again”, “in fact” and “you know” and also replacing the original “Forget you know my number” with a shorter “Delete my number”. This, however,

does not influence the politeness strategy, which remains an on-record order in the subtitles.

### Positive politeness

The third frequently retained politeness strategy was positive politeness. Its use assumes that the speaker and the hearer are members of the same group, cooperate, and share their wants. This can be achieved, for instance, by proposing activities that involve both the hearer and the speaker. For example, after an evening out with the friends, Charlotte proposes to Carrie that they could take the same taxi back home.

(14) Do you wanna **come share a cab with me up town?** (episode 17, scene 20)

Chcesz wziąć razem taksówkę do domu?

Do you want to take a taxi home together?

In the original a question which serves the function of a proposal is used. Positive politeness in this example is expressed through Charlotte showing to Carrie that their wants are similar and that both women can cooperate in what they do. The translation also uses the form of a question but changes some expressions. This, however, does not have influence on the politeness strategy. It remains unchanged in the subtitles.

Another example of retaining positive politeness is in utterances where the conditional structure was used. In the following situation Samantha is trying to get an appointment with a doctor for herself and for another woman. The doctor is very busy and does not have time in the next few months. Samantha decides to “bribe” the receptionist, who is a fan of Samantha’s actor boyfriend. She says:

(15) He would *probably* come here **with me** . IF I had an appointment/ (episode 15, scene 18)

Przyszłoby tu pewnie,  
gdybym miała wizyte.

He would probably come here if I had an appointment.

[...]

If you could get HER an appointment . he [Samantha's boyfriend] *might* kiss you . ON THE LIPS/

Jeśli doktor przyjąłaby tę panią,  
może pocałuje panią w usta.

If the doctor takes her, maybe he'll kiss you on the lips.

The above example was one of the more complex ones to classify. The original uses the conditional structure twice (“He would ...”, “If you could ...”) and hedges (“probably”, “might”), both characteristic of negative as well as positive politeness. On the other hand, Samantha is willing to do something for the hearer, which is characteristic of positive politeness only. That is why this request has been classified as positive politeness. In the original Samantha uses a conditional twice. She knows what the receptionist wants and is willing to help her achieve it. She also knows that this act will help her achieve her goal. The translation is shortened but keeps both conditionals and the hedges.

### Negative politeness

Finally, the politeness strategy that has been retained least frequently is negative politeness. This strategy is based on the assumption that the hearer wants to remain independent and does not want to be pressured to do something. Therefore when requesting something, one should express uncertainty and hesitation. This can be achieved, for instance, by hedging. For example, when Alek asks Carrie to move with him to Paris, she tries to make him understand that she is not ready for it by requesting in return:

(16) *Maybe we could – do long distance for a while?* (episode 18, scene 13)

Może przez jakiś czas moglibyśmy  
spróbować związku na odległość?

Maybe for some time we could try a long distance relationship?

Carrie is not sure if she wants to sacrifice her life and friends she has in New York and move to Paris with Alek. Instead of accepting the offer, she tries to make a counter offer, but softens it by hedges (“maybe”, “could”, “for a while”), that is, words that

modify the force of an utterance. The Polish version keeps all three hedges (“maybe”, “for some time”, “could”). Negative politeness is, thus, retained in the subtitles.

#### 4.4 Changes in Characterisation

Fictional characters in TV drama are constructed in such a way that even though they are not authentic, they aim at representing real life. Even though the focus of the present study is on requests on the original soundtrack and the Polish subtitles, it is also important to see whether the change of mode from spoken to written caused any significant changes in characterisation.

The study revealed that the most prominent character of the four friends is Carrie Bradshaw (56 requests). She remains dominant in the subtitles as well, which supports the findings of Aline Remael’s (2003) study. Carrie is the main character of the series as well as the narrator. Her requests are most often delivered on-record. This strategy becomes even more frequent in the translation, since many of her utterances that employ positive and negative politeness shift towards on-record politeness strategy in the subtitles. This can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Carrie’s requests.

|           | on-record p. | positive p. | negative p. | off-record p. |
|-----------|--------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| ORIGINAL  | 24           | 14          | 14          | 4             |
| SUBTITLES | 33           | 9           | 10          | 4             |

Carrie’s requests were mostly delivered on-record because they were usually directed to people she is close with and, thus, were acceptable and not regarded as offensive. A typical example of English – Polish correspondence is when Carrie asks her boyfriend to tell her about his exhibition. She simply says:

(17) Tell me about your show/ (episode 17, scene 5)

Opowiedz mi o twojej wystawie.

Tell me about your exhibition.

In this situation asking about the show on-record seems to be the most natural way because of the intimacy between the two people. The translation uses the same order as the original.

The next example shows a typical situation where positive politeness became on-record politeness in the translation. Carrie gets to know that a group of her fans want to throw a party for her and wants her boyfriend to come with her.

(18) Are you up for it? (episode 20, scene 12)

Przyjdiesz?

Will you come?

In the original the request is in a form of a question focusing more on the boyfriend's willingness or ability to come to the party than on Carrie's request. In the translation, this positive politeness strategy is substituted with a direct question. The strategy shifts, therefore, towards on-record politeness.

Samantha and Miranda both made 26 requests in the episodes that formed the material. Samantha employed all four politeness strategies, although also with her on-record politeness was the most frequent one. In the translation 3 positive politeness and 2 negative politeness utterances shifted towards the on-record strategy. Samantha's requests are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Samantha's requests.

|           | on-record p. | positive p. | negative p. | off-record p. |
|-----------|--------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| ORIGINAL  | 14           | 4           | 4           | 4             |
| SUBTITLES | 19           | 1           | 2           | 4             |

A typical example where both the original and the Polish subtitles used the same strategy is, for instance, when Samantha's boyfriend finds her hair on the pillow. She realises that she is losing her hair after chemotherapy. She gets upset and says:

(19) **Just** give it [her hair] to me/ (episode 16, scene 11)

Daj mi je.

Give it to me.

In this case an on-record order is used in both the original and the Polish subtitles.

Some requests that Samantha made shifted from positive and negative politeness towards the on-record strategy in the subtitles. One of the cases is when she is in a restaurant and asks the waitress to bring more water.

(20) Could I get some water . please? (episode 19, scene 5)

Poproszę wody.

Water, please.

In the original a polite question is used. The translation, on the other hand, uses a shorter and more direct order with a polite word “please”.

Miranda used three politeness strategies in her requests. On-record and positive politeness were employed equally frequently, while off-record politeness was used 4 times, and negative politeness not at all. In the subtitles, almost half of the positive politeness examples were changed into the on-record. There was also an unusual shift from positive to off-record politeness. This case (Example 2) has been analysed on page 47. Miranda’s requests are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Miranda’s requests.

|           | on-record p. | positive p. | negative p. | off-record p. |
|-----------|--------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| ORIGINAL  | 11           | 11          | 0           | 4             |
| SUBTITLES | 16           | 5           | 0           | 5             |

The most common subtitling strategy for Miranda’s requests was to retain the original politeness strategy. One of the examples is when Miranda’s husband tells her about his plans to redecorate their house. She becomes interested and encourages him to explain more by saying:

(21) Continue/ (episode 16, scene 19)

Mów dalej.

Keep talking.

In this case Miranda uses the direct order as an encouragement for her husband to speak rather than an order. The expression has been paraphrased in the translation but the meaning and the directness of the phrase have been retained.

Charlotte was the character who spoke least when compared with the other three women. Only 11 requests of Charlotte's were identified in the material. She employs all four politeness strategies to similar extent. The on-record strategy is, however, the most frequent one. In the translation all of her requests retain the original politeness strategy which means that her character is the same in the original and the subtitles. This can be observed in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Charlotte's requests.

|           | on-record p. | positive p. | negative p. | off-record p. |
|-----------|--------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| ORIGINAL  | 5            | 2           | 1           | 3             |
| SUBTITLES | 5            | 2           | 1           | 3             |

An example where the original strategy was retained in the translation is when Charlotte receives a call from Miranda, who is on her honeymoon. Charlotte reassures her friend that her son is all right and says:

(22) Go back to your honeymoon/ (episode 15, scene 17)

Wracaj do miesiąca miodowego.

Go back to the honeymoon.

Both the original and the translation use the on-record strategy. In this case it serves the function of convincing Miranda that there is no problem and that she can relax without having to worry about her son.

On-record strategy was used most frequently both in the original and the Polish translation. This was caused by the fact that the four women are close friends and, therefore, requesting for something in a direct way is acceptable. Also, requests

delivered on-record were usually accompanied by such non-verbal elements as a friendly smile or gesture, which softened its impact.

It can be concluded that the characterisation of the women did not change significantly in the translation. On-record politeness was the most frequently used politeness strategy and it remained the most common strategy in the translation. The most frequent shift that appeared between the original English soundtrack and the Polish subtitles was from positive to on-record politeness. There were also some cases where negative politeness was changed into on-record politeness.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The present study set out to examine what happens to politeness in requests in the subtitling of *Sex and the City* into Polish. It was assumed that most request would be delivered on-record because the characters are “new women” and close friends. The hypothesis was that such factors as the constraints of time and space as well as the language differences would have an impact on the politeness strategies. This might result in the politeness strategies being changed into shorter and less time-consuming ones. On-record and off-record politeness strategies were, therefore, assumed most likely to remain unchanged in the translation, whereas positive and negative politeness strategies might shift in the translation to on-record politeness. It was also assumed that because of the characterisation of the main characters as the “new women”, the politeness strategies were more likely to be changed into more direct ones.

The material consisted of six episodes of the *SATC* series, with the total of 131 scenes. For the analysis I used the speech of the four main characters of the series – Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte, and Miranda on the original English soundtrack, my transcription of the lines involving requests, and the corresponding Polish subtitles.

The study was conducted in three steps. First, requests were chosen and identified in the soundtrack. They were classified as requests, requests in a form of proposals, and orders. Second, verbal politeness strategies used in the original requests were categorised according to Brown and Levinson’s (1994) classification. Finally, the politeness strategies used in the soundtrack of *Sex and the City* were compared with their representation used in the Polish subtitles to see whether the politeness strategy had been retained, removed or modified. The subtitling strategies were constructed on the basis of Gideon Toury’s (1980) view of matricial changes in translation.

On-record politeness strategy was used most frequently to express requests in the original English soundtrack. The second most common strategy was positive politeness.

Negative and off-record politeness were the least frequently used strategies in the original.

The study revealed that most frequent translation strategy was to retain the original politeness strategy. The strategies that were retained most frequently are the on-record and off-record politeness strategy. Negative and positive politeness were more likely to be removed or modified, causing the strategy to shift towards on-record politeness. Thus, the hypothesis was shown to be correct.

The changes that appeared in the translation were mostly due to the constraints of time and space. Long expressions were usually replaced with shorter and less time consuming ones. There were, however, a few examples where the alterations were clearly caused by the differences between the English and the Polish languages as well as between the source and the target culture.

The characterisation did not change greatly in the subtitles. Requests were delivered most frequently on-record both on the original soundtrack and in the subtitles. This is caused by the fact that the characters are icons of “new women” and close friends. Politeness strategies were more likely to shift towards on-record politeness in the translation not only because of the medium (subtitling) but also because the characters are an example of the “new women” who break the stereotype of a polite woman and who do not follow the generally established rules of polite behaviour. Moreover, on-record politeness was acceptable because of the non-verbal elements. Most of the direct requests were accompanied by a smile, a gesture, or a friendly tone of the voice, which made them less threatening.

The analysis of politeness on the basis of the Brown and Levinson (1994) model was somewhat complicated. The biggest problem was deciding which politeness strategy was employed in a particular utterance. Some requests were obvious and easy to categorise, whereas others were more problematic. This, I believe, was caused by the fact that definite models for each politeness strategy do not exist and sometimes the

context was crucial for establishing the strategy. Thus, the same utterance produced in two different contexts could be classified as two different politeness strategies.

The study offers a variety of ideas for further research. For example, other forms of face-threatening acts, like criticism or apologies, could be studied in subtitles. Also, a different pair of languages could be used. Finally, the theoretical framework of this research could be used in studying politeness employed by different characters in other series. For example, studying characters and their use of politeness in a situation comedy (e.g. *Married ... with Children*, *Friends*) might bring different results than this study, where the series analysed was a TV drama.

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## Appendix 1: Transcription Conventions (based on Coates [1996: xii–xiv])

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| /                      | indicates the end of a tone group or chunk of talk  |
| ?                      | indicates the end of a chunk of talk analysed as a question   |
| -                      | indicates an incomplete word or utterance   |
| .                      | indicates a short pause (less than 0.5 second)  |
| —                      | indicates a long pause  |
| [                      | indicates the start of overlap between utterances   |
| =                      | at the end of one speaker's utterance and at the start of the next utterance indicates the absence of a discernible gap |
| (( ))                  | indicate that there is a doubt about the accuracy of the transcription  |
| ((xx))                 | indicates that the material is impossible to make out   |
| <>                     | give additional information   |
| <b>CAPITAL LETTERS</b> | are used for emphasised utterance, louder voice   |
| %                      | encloses words or phrases that are spoken very quietly  |
| .hh                    | indicates that the speaker takes a sharp intake of breath   |
| [...]                  | indicates that material has been omitted  |
| <b>XX</b>              | indicates the phrase that has been omitted in the subtitles   |
| <u>XX</u>              | indicates the phrase that has been replaced in the subtitles  |
| <i>XX</i>              | indicates the phrase that attention is paid to  |

## Appendix 2: Season 6: Episodes 15–20

Season 6:

episode 15 “Catch-38”

- Scene 1: Carrie Gets the Keys
- Scene 2: Samantha in Hospital
- Scene 3: Girls Talking
- Scene 4: Carrie Babysitting
- Scene 5: Samantha’s Doctor Appointment
- Scene 6: Carrie and Brady
- Scene 7: Miranda’s Weekend Away
- Scene 8: Alek Takes Care of Brady
- Scene 9: Alek Doesn’t Want to Have Kids
- Scene 10: Miranda and Steve Relaxing
- Scene 11: Miranda Gets Bored
- Scene 12: Carrie Writing
- Scene 13: Samantha out with Smith
- Scene 14: Alek Talks about his Daughter
- Scene 15: Carrie and Samantha Talking about Babies
- Scene 16: Charlotte in Bed with Harry
- Scene 17: Charlotte Phones Miranda
- Scene 18: Samantha in the Waiting Room
- Scene 19: Carrie and Alek Walking

episode 16 “Out of the Frying Pan”

- Scene 1: Alek at Carrie’s Place
- Scene 2: Girls Visit Samantha in Hospital
- Scene 3: Carrie Shopping
- Scene 4: Charlotte Gets Bad News
- Scene 5: Charlotte Running
- Scene 6: Miranda Looking for a Flat

- Scene 7: Carrie Argues with Alek
- Scene 8: Carrie Alone at Home
- Scene 9: Charlotte Falls in Love with a Dog
- Scene 10: Miranda's Trip to Brooklyn
- Scene 11: Samantha Loses Hair
- Scene 12: Carrie Worries about Samantha
- Scene 13: Carrie Writing
- Scene 14: Harry and Charlotte Consider Adoption
- Scene 15: Charlotte Meets the Dog Again
- Scene 16: Samantha Shops for a Wig
- Scene 17: Angry Samantha
- Scene 18: Samantha Shaves Head
- Scene 19: Miranda in Brooklyn
- Scene 20: Samantha and Smith on a Movie Premiere
- Scene 21: Charlotte Gets the Dog
- Scene 22: Carrie Talking about Death
- Scene 23: Girls out

episode 17 "The Cold War"

- Scene 1: Carrie and Alek in a Restaurant
- Scene 2: Charlotte Walking the Dog
- Scene 3: Miranda Coming Home from Work
- Scene 4: Samantha in a Restaurant
- Scene 5: Carrie and Alek Talking
- Scene 6: Girls Having Lunch
- Scene 7: Carrie on the Phone with Charlotte
- Scene 8: Carrie at Home
- Scene 9: Carrie Visiting Miranda
- Scene 10: Carrie at Alek's Place
- Scene 11: Carrie Writing
- Scene 12: Samantha

- Scene 13: The Dog Show
- Scene 14: Charlotte Grooming the Dog
- Scene 15: The Dog Show 2
- Scene 16: Samantha Meets an Old Friend
- Scene 17: Samantha in Bed with Smith
- Scene 18: Charlotte and Harry in the Park
- Scene 19: Girls Night Out
- Scene 20: Unexpected Visit to Alek
- Scene 21: Miranda Back Home
- Scene 22: Carrie Having Doubts

episode 18 "Splat!"

- Scene 1: Carrie's Lunch with the Boss
- Scene 2: Carrie and Alek Preparing a Dinner for Friends
- Scene 3: Dinner with Friends
- Scene 4: Girls Chatting
- Scene 5: Carrie and Alek Discussing Paris
- Scene 6: Talking about Paris with Miranda and Samantha
- Scene 7: Carrie Writing
- Scene 8: Harry Worries about the Dog
- Scene 9: The Dog Is Pregnant
- Scene 10: Harry and Charlotte Discuss the Dog
- Scene 11: Carrie and Samantha Discussing Paris
- Scene 12: Carrie Learning French
- Scene 13: Carrie and Alek Discussing Paris
- Scene 14: Carrie Arrives at the Party
- Scene 15: Miranda Criticising Alek
- Scene 16: The Party Continues
- Scene 17: Carrie Meets an Old Friend
- Scene 18: Puppies
- Scene 19: Carrie and Alek at the Party

Scene 20: Carrie Decides to Go to Paris

Scene 21: Lexie's Funeral

Scene 22: Miranda and Carrie Talk

episode 19 "An American Girl in Paris (Part Une)"

Scene 1: Carrie Packing

Scene 2: Carrie Meets Mr. Big

Scene 3: Girls Having Last Dinner

Scene 4: Carrie Leaves for Paris

Scene 5: Samantha in Breast Cancer Meeting

Scene 6: Carrie in Paris

Scene 7: Carrie, Alek and His Daughter

Scene 8: Carrie Waiting for Alek

Scene 9: Charlotte and Harry Getting Ready for Adoption

Scene 10: Alek Is Late

Scene 11: Samantha Preparing Her Speech

Scene 12: Carrie Falls in Dior

Scene 13: Carrie Back from Shopping

Scene 14: Carrie Calls Miranda

Scene 15: Samantha's Speech

Scene 16: Big's Message

Scene 17: Big Meets Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda

Scene 18: Carrie Gets a Necklace

episode 20 "An American Girl in Paris (Part Deux)"

Scene 1: Carrie Meets Alek's Ex Julie

Scene 2: Charlotte Shopping

Scene 3: Samantha Getting Her Hair Done

Scene 4: Naughty Samantha

Scene 5: Carrie's and Julie's Lunch Continues

Scene 6: Carrie Smokes Again

- Scene 7: Day Alone in Paris
- Scene 8: Steve Worries about His Mother
- Scene 9: Samantha's Proposal
- Scene 10: Steve's Mum Moves in
- Scene 11: Carrie Meets Her Fans
- Scene 12: Party Plans
- Scene 13: Charlotte Meets the Parents
- Scene 14: Angry Harry
- Scene 15: Samantha Gets Flowers
- Scene 16: Carrie Changes Her Plans
- Scene 17: Charlotte Visits Miranda
- Scene 18: Carrie Late for the Party
- Scene 19: Miranda Looking for Mary
- Scene 20: Carrie Gets Angry
- Scene 21: Big Comes to Rescue
- Scene 22: Carrie and Big on the Bridge
- Scene 23: Charlotte and Harry Get a Baby
- Scene 24: Miranda Taking Care of Mary
- Scene 25: Smith Is Back
- Scene 26: Carrie and Big Back in New York
- Scene 27: Carrie Meets Her Friends