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**Defining Formality Levels:
Cultural Scripts as a Guide to the Formality Scale of Register**

by

Maggie Sue Gemmell, B.A.

Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2009

The Report committee for Maggie Sue Gemmell

Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:

**Defining Formality Levels:
Cultural Scripts as a Guide to the Formality Scale of Register**

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Hans C. Boas

Marc E. Pierce

Acknowledgements

I would like to give special thanks to my supervising committee, whose feedback and patience were greatly appreciated and invaluable to this report. I would also like to thank my family, who has always supported my pursuit of higher education, and especially my grandfather, without whom I would never have had the motivation to pursue graduate studies.

July 24, 2009

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Maggie Sue Gemmell, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2009

SUPERVISOR: Hans C. Boas

This report presents a new way of applying cultural scripts (a form of reductive paraphrase) to the study and description of culturally specific linguistic behavior. Cultural scripts are used to define levels of formality in German culture. This is done by describing typical situations that range from formal to informal in terms of how members of German culture typically conceive of them. The purpose of these levels is to create a scale of formality that can be used to rate particular linguistic expressions in a reference source, thus approximating native speaker intuitions about linguistic formality, and helping readers understand the norms of (in)formal linguistic behavior in German culture. Such a reference source would be immeasurably helpful for students of German, as register variation, particularly formality variation, can be quite difficult for foreign language learners to master. This reference source should help students determine when it is appropriate to use one linguistic expression over another with a similar meaning (and a different level of formality). It would inform students, for example, that a word like “Bulle” in German (“cop” or “pig”) is not appropriate in an academic presentation on European law enforcement agencies, and that the less colloquial terms, “Polizist” or “Polizeibeamte”, would be better suited to such a context.

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Section 1: Introduction

The purpose of this report is to develop an analysis by which levels of the formality scale of register (sometimes referred to as style) can be defined using cultural scripts, a form of reductive paraphrase that grew from research on the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) (see Goddard & Wierzbicka 2004). Consider the following situation: a high level position has just opened up with a successful American company. One of the most qualified applicants is a German speaker who learned English in school, and had American friends as a teenager, but has never interacted with English speakers in a professional or business setting. The applicant arrives for the first interview and sincerely greets the potential employer with, “Hey man, how’s it goin’? I’m really stoked to be here.” This is not the greeting the interviewer expects, and although the rest of the interview goes smoothly, the inappropriate greeting leaves a first impression that keeps the applicant from receiving a call back for a second interview. In this situation, it is clear that behaving and speaking in an appropriately formal way is important for those who learn a foreign language and use it to interact with others of a different culture. Similarly, if a non-native speaker were to behave as appropriate in an interview while attending a casual social gathering, there could be undesirable consequences. Students of a second language would certainly benefit from learning about the relative (in)formality of its linguistic expressions. This report provides a means to assist American learners of German in determining what linguistic expressions are appropriate in formal and informal settings so that they can avoid making these kinds of mistakes.

To establish points of reference for formality, situations that range from formal to informal are described in terms of typical ways people think about them. For this, simple language is used (although not the NSM) so that the cultural scripts are easily understood.

This scale could greatly benefit the foreign language learner, as register is one of the most difficult aspects of learning a language. Students must often choose from synonyms listed in a bilingual dictionary, but without having heard the words in context, they cannot determine which is most appropriate for their own purposes. Teachers could use these scripts to help students distinguish between linguistic forms that are appropriate to more formal situations, like job interviews or academic presentations, and those that are appropriate in less formal settings with friends or peers.

If formality ratings were added to a dictionary, they would make it easier for language learners to choose between (near) synonyms, so if a German speaker were to look “wütend” up in a bilingual dictionary and find: “angry, berserk, enraged, furious, irate, livid, mad” among others, the formality levels proposed here would help them see that “angry” and “mad” are more likely to be used in less formal situations than “enraged” and “irate”. Although this would only indicate the likelihood of words appearing in certain types of contexts, it would be an invaluable resource to language learners, who could use the classification system to get a general idea of the words’ usages in different registers until they are able to judge for themselves (based on their own experience) how the words should be used.

I start by discussing the notion of cultural scripts (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2004, Goddard 1998b) and how they are drafted. The following section contains a review of current research on politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987, Márquez Reiter 2000, Terkourafi 2004, 2005), so that the current analysis of formality is situated within the broader realm of politeness theory. Then an explanation is given of what is meant by register (Gregory & Carroll 1978, Montgomery 2008) and its significance for the task at hand. I discuss current theories on register and its subparts, and outline how I was motivated to create these scripts. This leads to the (top down) application (Section 5) of

the theories discussed to the task of writing cultural scripts that would be able to convey a type of situation such as a 'formal' one from one culture to another. The scripts created are descriptions of German culture for American English speakers, and it is important to note that they are specific to these cultures and only applicable cross-culturally once mediating scripts between these and other cultures are developed. After the scale and its values are defined, two sets of related German words that are members of different formality registers are classified according to our model, with the (English speaking) language learner in mind. This will expose any weaknesses in the system, and allow us to see whether this would be practical for its intended use (e.g. as a classification system that could be added to reference works or textbooks and that would aptly describe the range of situations to which certain words are best suited). Finally, conclusions are drawn and suggestions are made for further applications and research.

Section 2: Cultural Scripts and the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM)

This section outlines the concept of cultural scripts (Goddard 1998b, Goddard & Wierzbicka 2004) and how they are drafted. Cultural scripts have been chosen for this project because of their accessible nature; they are written in plain language that would be easily understood by language learners once they became familiar with their format, so they could be combined with a reference source such as an online dictionary without much difficulty (for some examples of cultural scripts, see pages 8-10). Many scholars have already analyzed data from various languages to create cultural scripts, such as those found in the journal *Intercultural Pragmatics* (vol.1, i.2, 2004).

It is important to be aware that any description of a foreign culture runs the risk of ethnocentrism, especially when a concept from one culture is applied universally.¹ It must be made clear that while the following discussion of cultural scripts draws on examples from other languages and cultures, this report (and the cultural scripts it proposes) focuses on and describes German culture with reference to the American English speaking language learner. The scripts presented in Section 5 below are intended for use by American students learning German, and are not necessarily translatable cross-culturally. This report does not employ any form of Natural Semantic Metalanguage, but still strives to keep the language of the scripts simple so that they are as accessible as possible.

¹ This can be minimized by keeping descriptions simple, and not making assumptions about the audience's prior knowledge. While NSM is very handy for this task, it must be taken as a tool, and one should always keep in mind that making a priori claims can undermine the validity of an entire analysis when based on flawed or ethnocentric assumptions. For this reason, this report keeps the discussion of NSM to a minimum, avoids claims of universality, and strives to keep practical applications in mind.

2.1 CULTURAL SCRIPTS

Goddard (1998b) points out that traditional approaches to cultural variation have focused on norms of interaction, and have been comparative in nature, often somewhat ethnocentric, and plagued with terminology and translation issues. In NSM² he sees a solution to the problem of describing cultural practices and values which can be used with reductive paraphrase. He believes that a descriptive framework that uses the simplest expressions available will naturally carry less ethnocentrism (because the words are not as culturally-charged) and could be translated with much more success than previous attempts (1998b:342). Goddard & Wierzbicka (2004:153) see cultural scripts in this way:

The term cultural scripts refers to a powerful new technique for articulating cultural norms, values, and practices in terms which are clear, precise, and accessible to cultural insiders and to cultural outsiders alike. This result is only possible because cultural scripts are formulated in a tightly constrained, yet expressively flexible, metalanguage consisting of simple words and grammatical patterns which have equivalents in all languages.

As a first attempt at German formality level description, this paper will not be burdened with the limitation of making sure the words used have equivalents in *all* languages, but rather is constrained to very simple language that could be translated easily between (American) English and German. This should produce close to the same

² The Natural Semantic Metalanguage was developed on the assumption that there are semantic primes – units of meaning that cannot be broken down into any more basic parts and for which there are direct translations in all languages – and that a form of language whose lexicon is made up entirely of such primes could retain its natural structure while ensuring the easy translation of texts that use it (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2002:5). NSM has been criticized by many linguists, often because of its proponents' claim that it is a form of "natural" language. Since the current approach does not use NSM, these criticisms are not relevant; for details on NSM and its critiques, see Goddard (1998a, 2003), Durst (2003), Riemer (2006), Matthewson (2003), and Barker (2003). Despite the problems of NSM, it is apparent that simple language is generally easier to translate than complex language. Thus, the simplistic nature of cultural scripts facilitates the cross-linguistic application of the scripts, whether NSM is used or not. Those presented in this paper, for instance, could easily be translated into other languages whose cultures are somewhat similar, such as French, although such an application (and the necessary empirical testing of its validity) is beyond the scope of the current analysis.

result, the major difference being a lack of universal applicability. Simple vocabulary free of heavy cultural baggage should be the goal for any description of a culture to be used in foreign language education so that it is more accessible to students. Although the current account makes no effort to restrict the cultural scripts to a metalanguage of semantic primitives, the NSM is still worthy of mention because it opens the door to future cross-linguistic application of cultural scripts.

Cultural scripts attempt to capture the logic of the speaker in choosing appropriate linguistic forms; they explain *why* certain forms are chosen over others, and therefore give the language learner insights into native speaker motivations. One may raise the objection that not all native speakers agree on all aspects of culture, and this is indeed the case. However, there do seem to be typical ways of thinking about different situations that are standard or common in the culture, and although not all members of a culture would think and act in the same way, members are normally aware of the typical ways of doing things in their culture. Thus we can envision cultural scripts as part of the cultural background knowledge shared by a community, much in the way that frames constitute background knowledge about the world (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2004:157).

Semantic frames (Fillmore 1982) are a way of organizing semantic information that is encoded linguistically; they represent the knowledge that speakers have about how typical events take place and who or what is involved. A simple example is the motion frame, listed in Berkeley's internet database of English frames, FrameNet (<http://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu>). The motion frame presents background knowledge about what happens when something moves. In FrameNet (Fillmore et al. 2003), a basic definition of the frame is given, showing which frame elements appear in the frame (color-coded for your convenience), followed by some (authentic) example sentences that show how the frame elements are realized in English:

Definition:

Some entity (**Theme**) starts out in one place (**Source**) and ends up in some other place (**Goal**), having covered some space between the two (**Path**). Alternatively, the **Area** or **Direction** in which the **Theme** moves or the **Distance** of the movement may be mentioned.

That kite you see just to the right of his head was **MOVING** around pretty fast but the camera seemed to catch it ok.

There are several accounts of the stench **DRIFTING** to shore from the ships in the middle of the river

Dust particles **FLOATING** about made him sneeze uncontrollably.

The grill, unsecured, **ROLLED** a few feet across the yard.

The swarm **WENT** away to the end of the hall.

The frame definition is simplistic and conveys the basic concept of motion without using complex language. These definitions in FrameNet are paraphrases of the general concept the frame portrays,³ much like a script, although the above example describes a notion that would not be considered cultural and does not limit itself to simple linguistic forms. Frames have a close relationship with linguistic practices, and scripts are closely related to cultural practices.

Several frames inherit from the motion frame, that is, they extend the concepts it denotes, like the self motion frame. The frames that inherit from the motion frame are more specific designations of the concept of motion. This shows that frames can be used to describe both general and more specific types of events or scenarios, just like cultural scripts. In Section 5, a general script for German formality is given, which is something

³ The lexical entries in FrameNet also list syntactic valence patterns that show how the semantic elements are realized linguistically.

like what the German frame definition for formality would be, and specific scripts for using linguistic expressions of formality (e.g. when to address someone as “du” or “Sie”) would inherit concepts from the general script. The main difference between frames and scripts are the methodologies they employ. Frames and their elements are identified in corpus examples and then described, but cultural scripts are not as grounded in linguistic data. Rather, they are drafted to explain specific cultural phenomena and tend to be more abstract and culturally determined. Both tools describe knowledge that speakers of a language possess; frames present information about how the world works, and cultural scripts present information about how speakers think about the world. This is most apparent in the form taken by cultural scripts, so let us now look at some samples.

From the perspective of the language learner, it is often the more subtle cultural differences that are most difficult to grasp. The practice of saying “excuse me”, for example, differs in German and American culture. Americans tend to use “excuse me” much more often than Germans use “entschuldigen Sie” or “Entschuldigung”, which could result in Germans being seen as rude when speaking English, if they transfer the German cultural norms associated with excusing oneself, rather than following American cultural norms. Here is a very general script for the use of “excuse me” in American culture, which could be used to help German learners of English grasp how Americans use the phrase:⁴

many people think like this:
 some things people do are like this:
 these things interrupt the things others are doing
 it is not good if someone does one of these things
 if they don’t have a reason or if they did it because they wanted to do
 something bad to someone else
 it is good if someone says to another person after doing something like this:

⁴ Note that this script does not cover ritualized usages of “excuse me” (e.g. after a belch), and that such uses would be described in other scripts (e.g. one that has to do with cultural attitudes toward bodily functions).

“excuse me”

The first line lets readers know that the script is not absolute, but rather intended to represent a common way of thinking (naturally, not all Americans care what others think of them, and some chose to be rude by ignoring this script). It starts by outlining what goes on in a situation where one is expected to say “excuse me”, then explains that in American culture, excusing oneself is seen as a good thing to do after one interrupts another person. This script is quite vague, but gets the general idea across. The major point it is missing is an explanation of why it is considered good to excuse oneself and why interrupting another person is considered a bad thing. A more detailed version of this script would look like this:

many people think like this:

some situations are like this:

sometimes, when a person does something, what that person does keeps others from doing what they were doing

people don't like it when they are interrupted for no reason, so people will think bad things about a person that purposely interrupts someone else, because that means they wanted to do something bad to the other person

if someone does such a thing, they can change what people might think about them if they say something that shows they either had a reason for doing what they did or did not do it intentionally (that is, did not want to do something bad to the other person)

when a person does such a thing they think something like:

I inconvenienced this other person (or these people). I want to acknowledge this so that others can think good things about me.

this is why people say “excuse me”

This script lets the reader know why a negative judgment is associated with interrupting others, and also explains why a speaker would utter the phrase after interrupting someone. Because there is no consistent methodology in place for the creation of cultural scripts, there are no specific guidelines for how detailed descriptions should be. The script's subject and intended function play an important role in this decision; the more complex the subject, and the fewer the similarities between the culture being described and the culture of the intended audience, the more detailed the

description should be. Like frames, scripts can be used to describe both general and specific scenarios, and can be arranged in a sort of inheritance hierarchy. This is a great advantage to both approaches because generalizations over situations can be made at many levels, expanding the descriptive capability of the frameworks. Cultural scripts give the reader insight into how members of a culture typically perceive a situation or concept, which helps them understand why members of the culture act the way they do. The scripts above describe when and why it is appropriate to excuse oneself, which is quite specific, so let us now examine some scripts whose subject matter is more abstract.

The following examples from Goddard (1998b) were created to express the “verbal caution” (careful production of speech) of Malay and Japanese speakers respectively:

before I say something to someone, it is good to think:
I don't want this person to feel something bad
I don't want this person to think something bad about me (1998b: 346)

before I say something to someone it is good to think something like this:
I can't say all that I think
if I do, someone could feel something bad (1998b: 344)

This shows that Malay speakers are motivated to think before speaking in two ways: to avoid hurting others' feelings and to avoid being judged negatively by others. The script conveys this cultural attitude in a clear and straightforward way that is easily accessible to the reader. The second script shows that Japanese speakers are typically motivated to limit what they say by the desire to avoid harming others, but not necessarily by the desire to avoid looking bad in others' eyes. The differences in wording of the scripts reflect different priorities of the cultures they describe.

It may seem at first glance like there is hardly a difference between some scripts if one is not familiar with the way they are formulated. Slight differences in the language of the scripts (such as “I don't want this person to think something bad about me” versus “I

want this person to think something good about me”) or their structure can change what they convey, so anyone using cultural scripts as a reference guide should compare the unknown scripts to those of a culture they know to get a better idea of how the two differ. A little attention to detail will go a long way in distinguishing between cultural scripts, whether they pertain to different cultures or to different aspects of the same phenomenon, and once one closely examines a few, they become easy to read and understand.

An advantage to cultural scripts is their ability to capture any common thought process of a community while remaining accessible. Also, if some pertinent aspect of a cultural practice were left out of a script, one could easily go back and add a simple sentence to supplement the original. Revisions can be made without much difficulty, and because the scripts use simple, natural language, there are no limits as to what can be described. All of this allows for a finer-grained description than traditional approaches to ethnopragsmatics (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2004:158), and the accessibility of this form of description is a huge advantage when it comes to real world applications of the scripts (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2004:160).

Still, some researchers object to reductive paraphrase explanations, primarily due to the methodology used (and its lack of consistency), but also because cultural scripts grew out of NSM research, which means it inherits the problems of that approach. The weaknesses of cultural scripts, however, are outweighed by their advantages, because features like simplicity, flexibility and accessibility are more important to the language learner, and facilitate the application of the scripts. Like any descriptive framework, scripts have limitations and must be used appropriately to be effective. If the formality scripts proposed in this paper were used to classify words in a reference source, the rankings would not be absolute, but would serve as more of a guide for language learners

until they can base decisions of which words to use on their own experiences within the culture.

2.2 DRAFTING CULTURAL SCRIPTS

As shown above, the subject matter of cultural scripts can range from the specific, such as particular words, to the most general, like pervasive attitudes of the target culture, and can be used to describe variation within a culture as well, such as differing regional practices (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2004:158). This flexibility allows for the potential description of all aspects of a culture at any desired level of specificity (although this would obviously be an immense, if not impossible task). If a complete description of a culture were created using cultural scripts, this would more or less represent the sum of members' shared background knowledge about their cultural values and practices. This sort of information is precisely that which is inaccessible to foreign language learners. Currently, they must rely on either what they have been taught or the general (sometimes ethnocentric) information found in travel guidebooks or internet sites. These sources, however, tend to present specific situations (like how to leave a tip in a restaurant in Germany), rather than providing the background knowledge that speakers have about how to act in general (like the fact that Germans tend not to engage in conversation with random strangers). Thus, language learners are often forced to use tired stereotypes and isolated social practices to construct general guidelines of their own for behaving within the target culture. To remedy this, the current account will provide language learners with a general script of formal behavior, along with a set of contexts of varying degrees of formality, described in terms of typical ways of thinking about the situations. By placing these scripts on a continuum from formal to informal, they can be used as reference points so that we can make generalizations about the likelihood that certain linguistic forms would occur in formal or informal situations (and those in between).

Since cultural scripts attempt to capture the probable thought processes of native speakers in selecting appropriate linguistic forms, value judgments are quite common (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2004:157). Terms like “good” and “bad” appear frequently, and although they are vague and ill-suited to definition, they are sufficient for our purposes, since individuals are typically expected to want good things and to avoid bad things, and this is nothing new to either of the cultures involved here.⁵

When drafting cultural scripts, the main objectives are to keep the language simple and to capture all the relevant aspects of how the target community views what is being described. At the onset of each script, there is normally a sort of disclaimer, in the form of “people think like this” so that it is clear to the reader that the following description is an generalized approximation of what cultural background knowledge is shared by the community as a whole. Language learners would be able to get into the mindset of native speakers by reading and comparing cultural scripts for different situations.

Ideally, the accuracy of cultural scripts would be ensured by basing them on the results of an empirical study, but the current analysis proposes scripts based only on personal experience and observation, leaving them to be tested empirically at some later date. Thus the hypotheses presented here (see Section 5) remain tentative.⁶

⁵ The abstract opposition between good and bad may vary cross-culturally, so if these scripts were to be used with other cultures, it would be necessary to create more specific designations of what is good or bad. Here, the terms are used to express either positive or negative judgments of participants, and no attempt is made to identify what American or German culture sees as good or bad.

⁶ In the literature to date, no systematic or formalized way of creating cultural scripts has been identified. Many analyses that use cultural scripts start by identifying semantic primes of the language, constructing an NSM, and then proceed to paraphrases of the culture, but there is no consistent methodology in place, making it impossible to independently test and falsify the claims made by such analyses.

Section 3: Politeness – The Foundation of Formality

This section gives a brief overview of current politeness theory to ground our discussion of formality in a sociolinguistic theory of polite behavior. Part of being polite in German and American culture is being formal when it is appropriate (and to a fitting degree, of course), so any account of formality must situate itself within the greater realm of politeness. Section 3.1 gives an overview of Brown & Levinson (1987), the most influential (and perhaps controversial) work on linguistic politeness to date, and the following section outlines some more current accounts of linguistic politeness. Politeness is approached from the perspective of the language learner with reference to the idea of formality variation (and the registers in which it is apparent), and this paper takes a perspective somewhere in between the traditional approach and more recent accounts in adopting Terkourafi's (2005) frame based model that is presented as a compliment to existing views of politeness rather than an alternative (238). Section 3.3 looks at formality through the lens of current politeness theory to explain why it is important (for the language learner) to be appropriately formal at the appropriate times.

3.1 POLITENESS: BROWN & LEVINSON (1978, 1987)

In 1978, Brown & Levinson published the first edition of an analysis of politeness that claimed universal applicability.⁷ At the heart of their account is the notion of “face” and the idea that it is constantly being negotiated in interaction. Face can be divided into positive face and negative face, which are in some sense at odds with one another. The analysis is based on individual speech acts, some of which are classified as face-threatening, and the authors incorporate some of Grice's principles of interaction. Let us begin with the major assumptions of the theory (Brown & Levinson 1987:61):

⁷ This paper uses the updated 1987 edition.

We make the following assumptions: that all competent adult members of a society have (and know each other to have)

- (i) 'face', the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects:
 - (a) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition
 - (b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants
- (ii) certain rational capacities, in particular consistent modes of reasoning from ends to means that will achieve those ends.

This means that all "competent adult members" of any society are concerned about the image of themselves presented to others and are also aware that others are concerned about their own images. It also means that all such members have the capacity to reason, which is included because interactants seem to choose the course of action that involves the most efficient satisfaction of their face needs (i.e. the option that gets the most results with the least amount of effort). These are fairly grand claims, because they are presented as universal, and the notion of society is not clearly defined. Brown & Levinson (1987) go on to reformulate the concepts in (i) above, defining positive and negative face in terms of wants of the individual (61):

negative face: the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others

positive face: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others

During interaction, the face (positive and/or negative) of participants is put in jeopardy by "face-threatening acts" in the form of pressure applied by one individual on another (examples: requests would threaten the addressee's negative face, criticism would threaten the addressee's positive face). In Brown & Levinson's (1987) view, face can be gained, lost, or maintained, and is in a constant state of negotiation during

interaction. They claim that all people have face vulnerabilities, and thus individuals tend to assume each other's cooperation in maintaining face during the course of an exchange. Defending one's face is seen as threatening to others' faces, and individuals are expected to defend their faces when they are threatened, so generally trying to maintain face is seen as best for all involved (61).

Several strategies for performing face-threatening acts (these include defending one's face, since this is seen as inherently threatening to another's face) are presented by Brown & Levinson (1987:68-70), and the claim is that different strategies are chosen to fulfill different face needs in different circumstances because individuals will always try to use them as efficiently as possible. Speakers are said to determine the degree of politeness appropriate to a particular context by evaluating three independent variables that they claim are universal in the sense that they are always determining factors in politeness (1987:78-80). Márquez Reiter (2000:13) provides a succinct summary of these factors:

First is the social distance (D) between the speaker and hearer, where the speaker and the addressee are on a scale of horizontal difference. The second variable is the relative power (P) between the participants, where the speaker and the addressee are located on a scale of vertical difference. The third variable is the absolute ranking (R) of impositions in a particular culture, the degree of imposition intrinsic to a particular act.

The variables D and P are specific to the relationship between participants, and R is specific to the culture within which their exchange takes place. These variables relate directly to the current analysis; cultural scripts give foreign language learners a picture of how certain (linguistic) acts can be arranged in terms of R (that is, how much one is imposing on others when one performs these acts), and also let learners know how D and P affect linguistic choices. D and P are key components in any social relationship, and are thus directly linked to the notion of tenor discussed in Section 4.2.

Before ending this discussion, some of the weaknesses of Brown & Levinson's (1987) account must be considered. This theory of politeness invigorated interest in sociolinguistic research on the subject, and although the authors may not have presented a flawless theory, their analysis is invaluable because it motivated others to suggest empirically based alternatives and revisions. Only major objections to this theory are worthy of mention here in the interest of space; data from several languages challenges the following aspects of Brown and Levinson's theory, listed by Meier (2004:8): the universality of their claims (like the inverse nature of the relationship between politeness and directness), their focus on individual (rather than collective) face, and their designation of what constitutes a face-threatening act. Terkourafi (2005) identifies the main problems of traditional approaches as a Gricean focus, a focus on speech acts, and anglocentrism (240). "In short, Brown and Levinson's theory presents significant problems, thereby offering a dubious basis for empirical work (especially that with a cross-cultural or intercultural focus)" (Meier 2004:9). Because of these issues, the current approach will not adopt Brown & Levinson's theory of politeness, in favor of a more moderate view that incorporates aspects of this and other approaches.

3.2 A BRIEF OUTLINE OF POST MODERN APPROACHES

For the current analysis, post-modern theories will be only briefly discussed, in favor of Terkourafi's (2005) frame-based view, but it is necessary to identify some of the problems of traditional approaches and recent attempts to avoid them.

Eelen (2001), Mills (2003) and Watts (2003) suggest alternate models for politeness theory that share two major components: the distinction between first and second order politeness, and insights from social theory, such as Bourdieu's notion of habitus (Terkourafi 2005:240). They also reject the Gricean framework adopted by Brown & Levinson (1987) and other more traditional accounts such as Lakoff (1973) and

Leech (1983). Post-modern accounts assume the perspective of the addressee, and rapport management is central in their view of politeness (Terkourafi 2005:241).

Let us begin with the distinction between first and second order politeness (Eelen 2001 uses the terms politeness1 and politeness2, respectively). Watts et al. (2006:3) see first order politeness as

the various ways in which polite behaviour is perceived and talked about by members of sociocultural groups. It encompasses, in other words, commonsense notions of politeness. Second-order politeness, on the other hand, is a theoretical construct, a term within a theory of social behaviour and language usage.

This distinction is not used for classification of the data, but is intended instead for use in the evaluation of previous accounts of politeness; a valid account should not construct a theoretical version of politeness that does not correspond to first order politeness. Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory would be seen as a theory of second order politeness because of its claims to universality; it is not based on particular sociocultural groups, like a theory of first order politeness would be.

The main problem with using a theoretical construction of politeness to account for first order politeness is that notions of first order politeness are specific to particular sociocultural groups and vary between them, which makes second order generalizations difficult. Not only do lay notions of politeness vary extensively between cultures, but they are also open to debate within cultures. Tipping practices, for example, vary from person to person in the United States. Some people see tipping as an obligation, and consider it rude to leave a restaurant without tipping the staff unless the service was outright awful. Others are more reluctant, and feel that good tips must be earned through superior service. Still others reject the practice of tipping altogether (although this stance is less common and generally viewed negatively by others), arguing that tipping the waiting staff is unfair, given that other laborers receive no such compensation. This

illustrates how even simple practices as common as leaving a tip in a restaurant can be difficult to deal with from a theoretical standpoint; competing opinions of what should be considered appropriate can complicate descriptions of politeness practices. After all, how can one make generalizations or predictions about polite behavior if it cannot be adequately described?

Watts (2003) claims that theories of second order politeness should focus on first order politeness and avoid creating a second order term “politeness” that does not reflect notions of first order politeness. In short, researchers should make sure that they are studying first order politeness to avoid positing a theory of second order politeness that has lost sight of reality. Post modern theories focus on first order politeness as reflected in the data, while traditional approaches tend to be preoccupied with second order politeness, universal generalizations about polite practices.

With this basis in discourse and practice, post modern theories claim that no predictions can be made about the (im)politeness of particular linguistic forms without first knowing the context in which the form is used (Terkourafi 2005:241). This is an important point to remember for the current analysis, since the formality designations are intended for use in reference sources. The factors that influence how language is used are so great that it is impossible to claim that any one word cannot be used politely in a particular situation (sarcasm, irony and humor make this particularly problematic). Politeness and formality are not properties of word meanings precisely because they are socially constructed; word meanings are independent of context, but (im)politeness and (in)formality only exist in context; they are not static variables that can be measured because they exist in the minds of participants, and individual judgments of these variables is not always consistent. If words in a reference source were labeled by

formality level, the designation would not imply that particular words are never used at other levels, but simply that it is most accepted at certain levels.

The following example shows how the context of an utterance can affect whether it is polite or impolite; words that are normally seen as impolite, such as profanity, can be used politely more than one might assume. The word “motherfucker”, for example, is normally considered impolite. Imagine a situation where someone calls another person a motherfucker to their face; most English speakers would assume that this is an impolite act, but there are situations where this is not the case. I recently observed three different people independently wishing one individual happy birthday in exactly the same words: “Happy birthday, motherfucker!” The addressee thanked each one afterward, which is indicative of his acceptance of the others’ behavior as polite.⁸ All three of the individuals who used this phrase were men in their early or mid twenties (as was the addressee), were friends of the addressee, but not friends themselves, and each spent their childhood in different states. Two lived in Texas and one in Oregon at the time. Each produced the phrase without hearing any other use it, and none of the participants typically address one another as “motherfucker”.

For these reasons, it is apparent that the polite use of “motherfucker” is not specific to this circle of friends; it must be accounted for in some other way. For the sociocultural group represented by these individuals (American males in their early to mid twenties), it is not only polite to call someone a motherfucker when wishing them a happy birthday, but seems to be ritualized in some way, since all three independently produced the same phrase. This goes to show that the evaluation of linguistic forms as (im)polite can vary drastically depending on the context in which they are used. Still, it

⁸ Both the general perception of the word as impolite, and its polite usage in this particular context would fall into the category of first order politeness, because both are manifestations of how politeness is perceived.

hardly seems appropriate to tell German students that calling someone a motherfucker is considered polite by some Americans, and doing so would certainly create more problems for learners of English than it would solve. Formality is dependent upon context in the same way as politeness, because both are determined by how individuals other than the speaker evaluate the act. Thus, if designations of formality for certain words are added to a reference source, it must be made clear that these designations are only indicative of how (in)formal the situations are where the word would normally occur, and are not without exception.

The formality levels proposed in Section 5 (that consist of cultural scripts describing situations of differing levels of formality) are not intended to indicate how (in)formal linguistic forms are (which would imply that formality is a property of words), but rather should indicate the contexts in which linguistic forms are more likely to occur (in comparison with the other situations in the scale), thus approximating native speaker intuitions about the words rather than actual occurrences of the forms.⁹

3.3 TERKOURAFI (2004, 2005): A FRAME BASED APPROACH

As mentioned above, the frame-based approach proposed by Terkourafi (2005), which is based on an empirical study of Cypriot Greek (Terkourafi 2004), is intended not as an alternative, but as a complement to existing approaches, both modern and traditional, so concepts from both views are adopted: the analysis is very much based in data representing instances of first order politeness, which is more characteristic of modern theories, and individuals are still seen as having the objective of fulfilling their own face needs at the least possible cost, one of the basic tenets of traditional politeness

⁹ Most native speakers of English would claim that profanity and risqué topics are not appropriate in formal academic papers, but in linguistics, data samples that contain just that are often included. This is further evidence that cultural scripts capture norms (reflecting how speakers think) rather than accounting for all exceptions; listing exceptions to scripts in a reference source would complicate them to the extent that they would no longer be useful in such a setting.

theory. The Gricean framework is revised and incorporated as well (Terkourafi 2005:249-251). The elements from this approach that are most relevant to the task at hand (and therefore adopted in this report) are the focus of this section, and many theoretical aspects of the approach are neglected because this report is of a practical nature and aims to avoid claims of second order politeness.

The data from Terkourafi's (2004) study was analyzed to find regularities of occurrence between particular linguistic forms and particular extralinguistic contexts, which reflect preferences for certain forms over equivalent ones in certain situations (Terkourafi 2005:247). To find these regularities, frames were used to represent contexts; they are seen as "structures of co-occurring components" (or combinations of particular frame elements), such as age, social class, setting, relationship of participants, etc. (2005:247). The cultural scripts proposed in Section 5 define contexts by participants' judgments about the context, or frame of occurrence, rather than by the frame itself. This creates generalizations over contexts that are perceived in similar ways by members of German culture.

An advantage to Terkourafi's (2005) approach is that specific linguistic acts are classified as polite or impolite based on observable evidence from the data in the form of other participants' acceptance or rejection of the act (such as when, in the example on pages 18-19 above, the addressee responded with "thank you", showing that he considered the previous utterance polite). Thus politeness is assumed if an act goes "unchallenged" by other participants, which is in line with Brown and Levinson's claim that cooperation in maintaining face is generally assumed in interaction. The frame based view claims that the regularities from the data are considered polite for no other reason than that they are regular; or, put differently, conventionalized (2005:248).

Cultural norms are the basis of both politeness and formality, and cultural scripts provide a framework for describing what is conventional in a particular community. An adequate description of a phenomenon is necessary before it can be analyzed. Cultural scripts are valuable to politeness research because they provide a flexible yet accurate way of describing socially constructed phenomena. The need for an adequate descriptive framework is apparent in the above discussion of first and second order politeness; theories encounter problems because their subject has not been properly defined. Before one can make generalizations about second order politeness (that still reflect first order politeness), one must be able to understand, compare, and analyze diverse forms of first order politeness, which is impossible if there is no adequate way to describe them, because that would mean there is no adequate way to talk about them. Both frames and cultural scripts are valuable tools, because they provide adequate descriptive frameworks; they are flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of real world data, but are still easily comprehensible.

Terkourafi (2005) also points out that in negotiations of politeness, individuals can only successfully use those linguistic forms that will be recognized and which therefore mean (more or less) the same thing to both the speaker and the addressee (249). This comment gets at the heart of the problems that foreign language learners encounter when they participate in exchanges outside their native cultures. The problem is that linguistic forms do not mean the same thing to language learners as they do to native speakers until learners have developed their own intuitions about politeness and social behavior in general for the target culture. Returning to the cultural scripts for saying “excuse me” in American culture, this point can be illustrated easily. If an American learner of German said “entschuldigen Sie” to a German they were passing in an aisle in the grocery store (thus getting in their way), the German would not automatically know

that the American was simply acknowledging that they inconvenienced the other person and meant no harm by it. Instead, the German might be inclined to think that the American was trying to get their attention (thus interrupting what they were doing), and might interpret it negatively if the American then turned and continued down the aisle. The German would be making an assumption about the American's intent based on German cultural norms, which were not the norms that actually motivated the action.

Societal rationality is evoked when hearers of an utterance conclude that the speaker had a particular intention when uttering it. For Terkourafi, this is part of the process that creates and maintains norms of behavior (2005:249):

When the addressee recognizes and ratifies the speaker's behavior, both as to its intention, and as to its face-constituting potential, as manifested by his/her uptake, this behavior enters their common stock of collective experiences...This is how norms of polite behavior are born.

Norms, or conventionalized ways of behaving in certain types of situations, are key in any account that deals with social behavior. People will expect others' behavior to match the norms in their community. If individuals do what is expected of them, they are seen as polite, but if they break from the norm, they may be seen as impolite or sometimes even overly polite (which can be a negative judgment). Terkourafi (2005) writes that face-constituting and rationality "are responsible for gearing behavior toward the generation and re-enactment of norms (or, if you prefer, habits) of polite behavior" (250). Foreign language learners do not have the same access to cultural norms as native speakers, or even more advanced non-native speakers, because they lack the experience required to judge what is normal (i.e. common or expected). The cultural scripts and formality scale proposed in this paper can help them approximate these norms. The likelihood that particular linguistic forms will be used in a certain context is a reflection

of how normal it is that the two would co-occur. A resource that could convey established norms of a culture would help students decide how to behave.

There are, however, many situations for which there is no pre-established norm. When members of a community are confronted with a new situation, for which there are no pre-existing frames to use as a guide, they must improvise, using their own judgment and their knowledge of the culture and its practices to determine how to behave. “On such occasions, attaining the goal of face-constituting is necessarily more effortful...and the speaker will need to rely more extensively on trial and error” (Terkourafi 2005:250). This is what it is like for the foreign language learner. American students of German are not totally incompetent when it comes to behaving appropriately within the German culture, but it is more difficult and requires constant effort and attention. The reference source proposed in this report would make this process easier for them so that they have an idea of what at least some of the norms for German culture are.

While many analyses emphasize the need to look at specific data when making general claims, Terkourafi (2005:256) claims that the opposite is true as well:

What the frame-based view claims is that, above and beyond this micro-level analysis, there are socio-historically emergent ways of using particular linguistic tools, and that how one *uses* these tools at the micro-level cannot be studied independently of how these tools *are regularly used* in the place and time at hand.

This means that in order to understand particular instances of (im)politeness, one must take the community’s norms of social behavior into account. The relationship between instances of (im)politeness and social norms in a community is one of reciprocal determination and maintenance. Generalizations over particular instances create norms of behavior; an individual’s behavior in a situation is determined (or at least influenced) by the prevailing cultural norms. This dynamic relationship, and the variation on both ends (variation in behavior on the part of individuals and change in societal norms over time),

cause many of the difficulties in politeness research, especially when it comes to analyzing empirical data, but all in all, Terkourafi (2004, 2005) seems to have developed a sound method.

3.4 POLITENESS AND FORMALITY: RELEVANCE FOR THE CURRENT ANALYSIS

First, let us recognize some basic features of politeness in personal interaction that are of key importance to the language learner. When American students are first confronted with social interaction in German, certain concerns arise. The most obvious of these is probably the fact that students generally want to fit in with the people around them; they want to be accepted by others. This is similar to Brown & Levinson's (1987) claim that a crucial part of positive face is the desire for others' acceptance or approval (61). If students are trying to fit into German culture, they will try to avoid using English and looking like a tourist, but students are often lacking in their knowledge of how to act like a German would, and not like an American. If students are unaware of differences in cultural norms, they will not know to modify their behavior. The inappropriate use of "entschuldigen Sie" by an American discussed above (page 20), is a good example of what kind of misunderstanding can occur because of small differences in underlying cultural norms of behavior. The difference between German and American scripts in this case is fairly subtle, but it is enough to affect how others interpret an individual's actions. Fortunately for the language learner, native speakers can usually identify non-native speakers by their accents, and adjust their expectations accordingly. Natives would be more likely to see an individual's inappropriate act and assume it was inadvertent if that individual was thought to be from outside the community and thus ignorant of cultural norms and conventions. If a student spoke the language with native-like fluency and accuracy, but still made these sorts of mistakes, they would be more likely to be judged negatively by natives because they would expect a fluent speaker to be familiar with the

cultural norms of the community. This is one reason that cultural competence is so important in language teaching; speakers who make mistakes, but also make an effort to conform to established norms are often received better than speakers who use perfect grammar and a wide vocabulary, but who have no grasp of the culture's norms and therefore make no effort to conform to them.

Unfortunately, few references exist for students who would like to learn about cultural norms. There are books that compare German and American culture, but many focus on stereotypical notions or give commentary on a limited range of topics. Such publications often neglect the linguistic side of behavioral norms, and thus fall short as a practical guide. Those that include specific linguistic forms and deal with particular aspects of the culture are most valuable for students looking to behave in a way consistent with established cultural norms and say the right thing at the right time; a great example is the book whose title says it all: "Scheisse! The Real German You Were Never Taught in School" (Besserwisser 1994). In its pages are all the slang and profane expressions students could desire to impress their German friends, along with explanations, English equivalents, and even illustrations. Although this is a useful resource for one aspect of linguistic behavior, it is limited in scope. Because cultural reference sources do not exist alongside dictionaries in any more complex a form than labels like "colloquial" and "slang" (which are not clearly defined), they are not easily accessible to foreign language learners, especially at the beginning stages where their intuitions about formality and appropriate word use are least developed.

Because the scale presented below is intended to provide language learners (specifically English speaking learners of German) with a reference source for norms of (in)formal situations, some variables in politeness study can be left out for practical reasons, such as the effect of gender, since the scale is meant to have broad coverage that

will give learners of any gender an idea how to use a particular word or phrase. Our focus here will be to provide a scale that can give learners additional information about the words and phrases they are using so that they have a basis for judging when and with whom it is appropriate to use those lexical items. In other words, the scripts should help learners approximate the cultural norms of the target community. These norms are generalizations about what is expected in certain types of situations. The formality scale presented in Section 5 uses descriptions of (in)formal types of situations so that words can be identified as likely or not likely to occur in these general types of contexts. The frame based view of politeness conceptualizes generalizations over contexts in terms of frames, where varying frame elements, such as age and relationship of participants and setting of the interaction, are defining factors. The general script for German formality in Section 5 is like a general frame definition, and the subsequent scripts that define formality levels make generalizations over situations according to how members of the German culture typically think about the situations. Together, the scripts for these different types of situations cover those that range from formal to informal, and will serve as guideposts, or levels, on the formality scale. Words in a reference source can then be linked to the levels in which they are most likely to occur, allowing learners of German to make better informed decisions when choosing between similar linguistic forms.

When students choose appropriate forms, native speakers may not even notice, but that is to be expected because politeness and formality are confirmed by the lack of objection by other participants; only when an act does not fit in with participants' ideas of what is appropriate for the situation is it noticed and objected to. Teaching students of German how to avoid such objections (how to conform to cultural expectations or norms), allows them to fit in and be viewed as regular members of society rather than as outsiders. They can avoid the awkwardness caused by culturally motivated

miscommunications or misunderstandings (e.g. inadvertently offending people). These are the main things that cause problems for non-native speakers of a language, and they are centered in the non-native speaker's lack of experience within the culture.

If someone is inexperienced in a culture, they are unfamiliar with what behaviors are normal for that culture, and what types of things are said in what types of situations. This all connects back to Terkourafi's (2005:248) definition of politeness:

It is the regular co-occurrence of particular types of contexts and particular linguistic expressions as unchallenged realizations of particular acts that creates the perception of politeness. Politeness resides, not in linguistic expressions themselves, but in the regularity of this co-occurrence. The child growing up does not stop to wonder about the politeness of particular expressions uttered in particular contexts around him/her. To the extent that these expressions go unchallenged by participants, they *are* polite.

Members of a culture, raised in that culture, have a vast number of experiences with other individuals upon which they can base frames of reference for what is normal, when, and with whom. Terkourafi (2005) goes on to write, "From this point on, politeness is a matter not of rational calculation, but of habit, and frames (which aim to capture polite "habits") may be thought of as implementing the Bourdieuan habitus" (250). This report intends to provide a way to compensate for language learners to compensate for their lack of habits within the culture.

In simple terms, there are only a few ways of making a politeness or formality mistake linguistically, all resulting when what one says is not what is expected: either one says less than one is supposed to, more than one is supposed to, something different, or nothing at all. All these types of mistakes can, but do not always, result in a negative judgment of the speaker by other members of the culture. Since politeness and formality are social constructions that are manifest in the judgments and behaviors of others, it is the ways these others think that motivates polite and formal behavior. This is reflected in the scale of formality presented in Section 5.3.

Section 4: Formality as a Variant of Register

This section deals with issues of register, its definition, and its relation to formality. Section 4.1 describes register and its three main subparts, field, mode, and tenor, as well as how these can affect the degree of formality used by an individual. When I was learning German, register was difficult to grasp, particularly formality. One German even laughed at my word choice in a letter to an employer, but fortunately, she was only proofreading it. Students with limited access to native speakers might not be so lucky; traditional reference sources like dictionaries and textbooks provide little guidance in these situations. I have seen several German students struggle with similar issues, regardless of their proficiency level. The lack of information available on linguistic (in)formality and register variation in specific languages is a major weakness in the reference literature of foreign language education. This report suggests one way to provide students with a reference source that can help them approximate the linguistic norms of (in)formality in German.

The next section focuses on tenor, which this paper claims is the least accessible aspect of register to the foreign language learner. Tenor is looked at in more detail with relation to social network theory, and the notion of strong versus weak social ties is identified as a useful distinction in our analysis of formality. The third section discusses formality as a linguistic phenomenon and the problems with which it is associated.

4.1 THE KEY ASPECTS OF REGISTER: FIELD, MODE AND TENOR

In research on register, it is generally seen as having three subparts: field, mode and tenor. Fields fall into two categories; intrinsic and extrinsic. “Where utterances are embedded in an ongoing activity so that they help to sustain and shape it, then the notion of *field* refers to the activity itself” (Montgomery 2008:90). This sort of field is

considered extrinsic, because the utterances are based on the extra-linguistic activity. Some examples of when language is used with an extrinsic field are requests or commands. When language is not used in this way, but refers to a particular topic instead (often quite remote from the immediate context of production, such as in newspaper articles), the field refers “to the subject matter of the text”, and is considered intrinsic because it is not directly linked to an ongoing activity (90). Montgomery (2008) notes that vocabulary is most affected by field, since specialized vocabularies can emerge from particular fields, such as computer science (91). Linguistic forms like “download”, “reply all”, and “spam filter”, for instance, are typically used only when the field has to do with computers and the internet, and make up part of a specialized vocabulary that is specific to topics within this field.

The medium chosen for language use can also affect the form an utterance takes; this factor is termed *mode*. Spoken language is often quite different than written language, for example.¹⁰ Montgomery (2008) claims: “The principal distinction within *mode* is between those channels of communication that entail immediate contact and those that allow deferred contact between participants”.

The last aspect of register, *tenor*, “refers to the kind of social relationship enacted by the text” (2008:91). *Tenor* is the linguistic reflection of the social situation, which includes the relationships between those present. Whether participants in an exchange address each other by first names or a title, for instance, indicates something about the nature of their relationship. It is important to note that the three aspects of register discussed here are not delimited by neat boundary lines. These are not independent variables; much the opposite, in fact, because one can influence the others. In a

¹⁰ An extreme example of this is text messaging, whose forms are limited for practical reasons. Texting has evolved into a new form of the language that is sometimes incomprehensible to those who are not familiar with it.

conversation between American participants whose social relationship was distant, for example, certain intrinsic fields would not be considered appropriate (e.g. bodily functions). This restriction of field is a reflection of tenor, so it is obvious that it is the interplay of these three factors that determines register, and it is impossible to consider them distinct from one another.

In the literature on register, formality has been the primary focus of study, perhaps because formal settings seem to use some of the most formulaic and ritualized linguistic expressions, making them an easy target. Formality, however, is not the only type of register variation; register varieties could also be placed on other continuums such as that from joking to serious or layman to academic. To distinguish formality from other registers, Trudgill (1983) uses the term “style”, but because there are so many meanings already associated with this word, and it has no more to do with the idea of formality than it does with other varieties of register, the term is not adopted here. Instead, we refer to the formality continuum of register, or simply formality register (which would include all registers on the continuum from formal to informal).

As one can see, the term “register” comes with its own set of problems, primarily because scholars do not agree on how much of contextual linguistic variation the term should cover. In this paper, we use the term in a loose sense (so that we can use more specific classification terms for particular varieties), as a pattern of language use that is conventionalized and/or expected in certain situations, potentially including all types of linguistic phenomena, such as particular lexemes, pronunciations, grammatical constructions, etc.. Some examples of specific registers would be the types of language normally used by lawyers in a courtroom, by friends at a party, or in a religious service. Gregory and Carroll (1978:64) see register as a combination of three variables:

The concurrence of instances of the contextual categories previously examined [field, mode and tenor of discourse] produces text varieties called registers. These varieties represent instances of language defined in terms of the similar points they occupy on the continuums of field, mode, and personal and functional tenors of discourse. Situationally, these texts reflect similar purposive roles, medium relationships and functional and personal addressee relationships. Language texts which can be placed on the same points within the contextual categories belong to the same register. Register is therefore a useful abstraction linking variations of language to variations of social context.

Of these variables (for more see chapters 3, 4 and 5 of Gregory & Carroll 1978), tenor (the relation between participants) is the most important factor in teaching foreign language learners about formality in the target culture, because field (purposive role) and mode (medium relationship) are more easily recognizable as formal or informal, at least in this context where we are dealing with relatively similar cultures. Let us look at some of the examples given by Gregory & Carroll (1978:10): which field would be more formal, technical English or non-technical English? Which mode, spoken English or written English? For the former, it seems intuitive that technical language would need to be more formalized than non-technical language (this goes for technical/non-technical German as well), simply because of the precision that is normally required in technical fields. For our purposes, since we are dealing with American and German culture (which have a considerable amount in common considering the diversity found in the world's cultures), fields pose less of a problem to the language learner; although there is also much variation between the cultures, similar sorts of formal situations are found in both (weddings, church services, job interviews, etc.). It is assumed that the language learner already has a reasonable grasp of which fields are more or less formal, that is, they can estimate the relative formality of different fields. As for modes, they play a much smaller role in the determination of formality; at first, it might seem that written language is more formal, since it is used in books and legal documents, but what about personal correspondence in letters or emails? Clearly mode has less influence as a determining

factor of formality. It can, however, affect the linguistic forms chosen in a certain situation; consider a situation where an individual would like some information from a company. If they wrote the company a letter, they would not likely use the same language as they would if they were writing an email or calling on the phone. In this case, the mode would be a determining factor in the language used, but the differences in the linguistic forms produced would not be nearly as great as if the determining factor were, say, tenor, and the person contacted could be either unknown or already a good friend.

Because mode is often independent of formality level, it is not as important for the current analysis. Tenor, like field, can be a determining factor in formality. For instance, if two strangers are waiting at a bus stop and strike up a conversation about the weather, neither mode nor field call for formality. Still, if the participants are not related in any significant way and thus have little or nothing in common, they could quite possibly opt for a more formal variety of speech. The language learner is bound to encounter situations where neither mode nor field provide adequate evidence of how formal one is expected to be, and in these cases, tenor can assist in making this determination.

4.2 TENOR AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Tenor is directly related to the notion of social networks,¹¹ since both have to do with interpersonal relationships between participants in a linguistic exchange. Social network theory accounts for linguistic innovation and change by examining individual social networks, which are more or less the sum of an individual's relationships to others. The nature of the relationship between individuals (divided broadly into strong and weak

¹¹ This report adopts a somewhat broad interpretation of social network theory; generalizations about types of ties could be defined by the relationships that constitute the ties in combination with their strength (based on empirical research). They could then be used with cultural scripts to give language learners more information about what linguistic forms are appropriate, based on the relationships of the speaker with those present. This would be a valuable addition to reference literature on register variation.

ties) has been shown to account for the diffusion (or lack thereof) of linguistic innovations throughout speech communities (Milroy & Milroy 1985, Milroy 1980, Penny 1992, Edwards 1986, among others). Strong and weak ties correspond roughly to “friend/family” and “acquaintance”, respectively, but this definition is obviously lacking precision, so we adopt Penny’s (1992:134) explanation:

In this context, a strong social tie is one which connects one individual with another at many different levels, so that the two individuals concerned are not only related by blood or marriage, but live close together, meet socially, work together, worship together, and so on. By contrast, a weak social tie is one which links one individual to another at a single level, so that the two individuals concerned may, for example, work together, but have nothing else in common.

The relationship between individuals is influenced to a large degree by what they have in common and do together. Weaker ties are more common between people who interact on only one level; this sort of tie is termed “uniplex” by Milroy (1980). Stronger ties are more common between individuals who interact on many levels; Milroy (1980) terms this type of tie “multiplex”. People who work together, but have very different interests would not be as likely to develop a strong tie as those who work together and share many interests. This is because their shared interests would allow them to interact on a new level (e.g. as fans of the same sports team).

The strength of ties can be seen as part of the tenor in discourse because tie strength is one aspect of interpersonal relationships (the other aspect being the content of the tie, e.g. a parent-child relationship). Since other factors that affect the nature of interpersonal relationships are usually much harder to access from an observation standpoint (such as participants’ feelings toward one another, which may also be variable, or their history of interaction), tie strength as a measure of participants’ degree of commonality is a valuable tool for both the language learner and the researcher when evaluating the appropriateness of a particular action in a particular context with respect to

formality. The problem is that, considering the infinite possibilities of types of human relationships, the distinction between strong and weak ties leaves much to be desired; this distinction alone is much too simplistic to capture the full range of relationship types, so a method must be developed to determine the degree of a tie's strength. Milroy (1980) proposes a formula for calculating an individual's "multiplexity score", the ratio of their multiplex ties to all relevant ties (51). This is problematic in two ways. First, this formula tells nothing of the content of specific ties, but signifies only how many of an individual's ties are multiplex. Secondly, there is no systematic way to determine which ties are "relevant". The multiplexity score cannot be used in measuring the strength of particular ties, so no generalizations about the strength of particular types of ties can be made from the data using this ratio.

To measure tie strength, this paper suggests that the features which, if shared by participants, are most likely to forge a strong tie should be extracted from the data (perhaps from the studies by Milroy 1980, Edwards 1986 and Penny 1992) and then used as a classification tool. The relative similarity of participants with respect to these features would allow researchers to make generalizations; it might be predicted, for instance, that individuals with higher degrees of similarity in all areas would be more likely to forge a strong tie. Empirical testing would allow researchers to discover how influential each factor is in determining the strength of the tie, which may vary between cultures and social groups. An approach using key features would be somewhat similar to componential analysis (see Goddard 1998b:43-50), but rather than a plus/minus designation of whether the individuals share these features, it would employ a designation that allowed for differing degrees of similarity for each feature. If, for instance, the most relevant features to tie strength were gender, age, geographical

proximity, and kinship group,¹² it is obvious that certain factors would vary more than others. For example, gender is a somewhat straightforward designation, but age would have to be classified on a scale of similarity to show the degree of closeness in age between participants; considering the immense range of possibilities, it would be useful to distinguish between people of different ages while keeping in mind that they may still belong to the same general age group. For example, we would want to distinguish between an eighty year old and a twenty year old, but it would not make sense to consider the age-relationship between them equivalent to that between a twenty year old and a thirty year old. We would need some way of indicating that the latter pair would probably have a lot more in common (based on age alone) than the former pair. Generalizations about the key features could be presented in the form of cultural scripts about abstract social networks that are linked by a specific feature or combination of features (e.g. men, working class members, women in their twenties, etc.). This sort of application would make a considerable contribution to the description of specific cultures, but is beyond the scope of the current report.

For the scale presented in Section 5.3, the distinction between strong and weak ties will have to suffice; generalizations about what sorts of relationships could exist between participants can be formulated in terms of strong and weak ties. This should help students grasp the concept of formality; words associated with levels that do not typically involve individuals bound by weak ties would be those that are probably inappropriate for use with complete strangers. Highly formal situations may or may not involve strongly tied participants (weddings, for instance), but informal interaction does not typically occur between weakly tied participants. Incorporating the notion of tie strength

¹² I am making no claims that these are the factors relevant to linguistic behavior – an analysis of empirical data would be required to substantiate any such claim.

into our analysis of German formality adds another perspective and another way to classify, and thus talk about, interpersonal relationships.

4.3 WHAT IS FORMALITY?

The current project deals with a somewhat broad aspect of register: formality. This term is also not without problems, partly because a person's idea of formality varies depending on the culture and social groups within which they operate (e.g. some Americans might consider a tuxedo T-shirt appropriate attire for their wedding, but this view is not shared by all Americans). The main issue with "formality" is its lack of precision. Trudgill (1983:107) remarks,

'Formality' is not, in fact, something which it is easy to define with any degree of precision, largely because it subsumes very many factors including familiarity, kinship-relationship, politeness, seriousness, and so on, but most people have a good idea of the relative formality and informality of particular linguistic variants in their own language.

The key word in this quote is "relative"; if we are to provide language learners with a useful reference source, it should reflect the relative nature of speaker intuitions about (in)formality. It is also necessary that the information it contains be widely applicable, and given the range of factors involved, the only way to do this would be to use a flexible classification system that conveys the relative formality of different situations and the linguistic forms appropriate to them.

Formal situations restrict the linguistic forms available for use by participants. The term "formal" conveys this limitation; situations are formal when they are expected to take a particular form. Whether particular situations are seen as (in)formal depends on the field, mode and tenor of the exchange in combination with cultural norms of behavior. Formality, like politeness, is a social construction, and only exists within particular contexts. Thus, formality cannot be a property of word meaning. Situations,

acts or linguistic forms are formal if they are judged as formal, so any linguistic form has the potential to be formal (or informal) because formality is context-dependent, because individuals do not always evaluate the formality of a situation in the same way, and because notions of formality are not static. If any linguistic form could potentially be used at any level of formality, then how would it be possible for formality ratings to be added to a reference source? Cultural scripts that capture typical ways members of a culture think about formality allow this to be done by linking words to the types of situations in which they are most commonly used. This does not mean that the words cannot be used appropriately in other types of situations, but provides a point of reference for the language learner. Cultural scripts serve well as reference points because they are based in common perceptions; the goal of a reference source for formality is to approximate these perceptions.

Formal situations are those where one's behavior is most limited by others' expectations and by cultural norms. Informal situations are those in which one is free from the limitations of pre-determined forms; in the most informal settings (sometimes referred to as "intimate" settings), individuals can be as free to express themselves as possible while still in the company of others. This is not to say, however, that people always say and do as they please in these contexts. Rather, the limitations in intimate settings are of a different nature; they stem from norms that are particular to the personal relationships involved, not from formality norms of the prevailing culture, and as such cannot be included in a description of cultural notions of formality. If, for example, an American man is talking to a few close male friends about getting a new dog, he might avoid describing puppies as "cute" or "cuddly". His motivation for doing so would be closely tied to the expectations of the others present and the potential consequences of such behavior, but these concerns are not based on the cultural notion of formality. Other

socio-cultural norms of behavior are at work here, and could be explained with cultural scripts that determine the behavior of members of abstract social networks (i.e. American men who want to appear as masculine as possible).

Perhaps the most important aspect of formality is how judgments made by others about an individual's (non)conformance to formality norms can impact a speaker. If a speaker does not conform to the norms of formality within a culture, members of the culture could judge the speaker negatively, possibly resulting in the speaker being laughed at, shunned, or even ostracized. As one might expect, the repercussions of a foreign language learner's formality faux-pas tend to be less harsh than those for a native member of the society who has made the same mistake. This is because native speakers often expect non-natives to make errors that pertain to cultural practices. Their leniency toward non-natives can be seen as a result of the fact that since non-natives are expected to slip up now and again, doing so only ensures that they conform to the expectations of the native speakers. As has been shown above, norms play quite an influential role in politeness. This is true for formality as well. Norms of formality are members' shared expectations about which forms will appear in a context based on the situation (including the other people involved).

Ceremonies like weddings or graduations are typical examples of formal situations, and it makes sense that certain forms would be favored over others in such ritualized practices because ceremonies are often based in tradition. In both German and American culture, there are a variety of other events in which participants' actions are typically governed by cultural norms that call for particular forms, and these are also thought of as formal.

Being with one's close family or friends in an everyday situation is an example of an informal setting. People tend to be more relaxed and expectations of others' actions tend to be less based on cultural norms in informal contexts.

There are, of course, situations which fall somewhere in between formal and informal. Interacting with strangers at the grocery store, for instance, calls for somewhat more formal behavior than chatting with friends over coffee. The behavior appropriate to a formal ceremony (like a funeral) would be excessive, so it is obvious that formality is relative, and varies along a continuum from situation to situation. The cultural scripts defined in the next section outline typical ways of thinking about five types of situations, ranging from formal to informal. They are specific to the German culture, and created for use by American English speakers. Each script should serve as a point of reference on a continuum from formal to informal. The purpose of the scale is to allow language learners to better understand the cultural norms of German culture regarding formality. Words can be classified according to the types of situations in which they are most likely to appear. Such classifications should match native speaker intuitions about formality so that language learners are given an accurate reference source for German formality variation.

Section 5: Cultural Scripts for Formality

When foreign language learners interact with native speakers in the target community, they enter into a new social network whose rules and practices may be different from the (abstract) social networks to which the learner belongs in their native community (e.g. norms of behavior for college students in the U.S. are not the same as those for college students in Germany). The current project seeks to facilitate this transition so that the language learner can more readily adapt to new social networks and more easily gain an understanding of how these networks function. Section 5.1 deals with the problems that language learners encounter when attempting to use registers with differing levels of formality, which is the motivation for the current project. The next section presents a general cultural script for the notion of formality for the German culture. Further cultural scripts, constructed as guideposts to a continuum of formality, are presented in Section 5.3, and the following section takes them for a test run, to see if a set of similar German words, differing in levels of formality, can be classified in a logical way by using these cultural scripts. The usefulness of our attempt is evaluated in terms of practicality and accessibility to the language learner.

5.1 FORMALITY AND THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNER

Among the difficulties that students encounter when studying a foreign language is the trouble of determining which words are appropriate in which contexts, a large part of which is formality. The most obvious formality problem encountered by American students of German is the distinction between the formal and informal forms of address, “Sie” and “du”. This is not, however, the only situation where formality poses a problem for foreign language learners; when learning a new word, one is often presented with a single translation for it, and students sometimes overextend its use to situations where it

is inappropriate, because they have not received an accurate explanation of the word and its connotations. The German slang word, “Bulle”, for example, might be introduced to students as “cop”, which is also slang. This English word, however, is not quite as informal as the German word, so if students tried to use “Bulle” in the same contexts, they might use it inappropriately. If students were given a translation that read “cop/pig”, they would have a better idea of the connotations associated with “Bulle”, and would be less likely to use the word infelicitously. The same sort of issue arises when students must choose which of the words listed in a bilingual dictionary is closest to the meaning they intend and most appropriate for the context. In dictionaries, there is usually only way in which information about a word’s formality is provided: when it is marked as slang. This is obviously not adequate as a reference for words’ formality, as it covers only one aspect of formality variation. Since current reference sources do not provide much information about formality, and since learners of a foreign language (and culture) lack the data that would form the basis of a native speaker’s intuitions about formality, there is no way of predicting which words or expressions are likely to occur in a given situation. The scale in Section 5.3 should serve as a tool for learners to help learners make these kinds of judgments.

There are many different concerns that foreign language learners might have when traveling abroad and using a foreign language to interact with others of a different culture. Most of these have to do with politeness in some way. The two primary concerns are usually that one is not judged negatively for one’s behavior, and that one does not offend others. Obviously these go hand in hand, as one is usually judged negatively when one has offended another, and like other aspects of politeness and social behavior, it is difficult to draw distinct lines between these objectives. Different concerns (e.g. not imposing, retaining one’s own freedom of expression, being friendly, not appearing to be

an outsider, etc.) will play different roles for each individual language learner (for instance, some may be nervous about their pronunciation and grammar, while others may be more concerned with not reinforcing common stereotypes). For this reason we aim for a scale that is compatible with as many theories of politeness as possible,¹³ without taking on any of the a priori assumptions that are often the weak points of these approaches (such as the assumption of Brown and Levinson (1987) that the same rules of politeness apply universally).

The resulting scale of formality describes German formality and is designed for learners with a background in American culture, thus, it is quite ethnocentric. This is not only intentional, but necessary for finding common ground between these two cultures, although it limits the potential applications of the scale. For determining register equivalents between cultures that have much less in common than those in the current attempt, a new scale would be needed, and it may even be best to create an entirely different scale for each language, if this approach were to be applied cross-culturally.

5.2 A GENERAL SCRIPT FOR THE NOTION OF FORMALITY IN GERMAN CULTURE

This section provides a general script that defines the notion of formality for the German culture. It can be seen as a general frame description for how members of the culture typically conceive of formality variation, and outlines the cultural background knowledge speakers possess. This script should be able to give readers an idea of what German speakers typically associate with formality. Possible applications of this script would be to add it to the German FrameNet, or to use it in the classroom with several examples of formal and informal situations to help students grasp the concept of formality. In a reference source using the scale in the next section, this general

¹³ If Brown & Levinson's (1987) model were to be adopted, the concerns of foreign language learners would be seen as part of their face needs.

description would be found in an appendix, along with the descriptions of the different formality levels (and plenty of examples) so that readers have the necessary background knowledge to interpret the formality ratings.

German Script for Formality:

People think something like this:

I should act differently in different situations. Sometimes people have expectations about how people should act in a certain type of situation. Because of this, some behaviors or actions are inappropriate in these situations. In order to fit in with my society, I should behave in a way that is expected by other people because that will be considered appropriate. If I behave in a way that others don't like, they will think something bad about me, and I won't fit in as well. I want to fit in and I want others to think good things about me, so I should act appropriately toward people around me. The situation and my relationship with the person or people around me determine what is appropriate. The closer I am to a person, and the more I identify¹⁴ with them and they with me, the less 'formal' I have to be, and the less I have to try to do only what is appropriate. The further I am from a person, the more I should try to be 'formal', to do only what is appropriate, to do what they expect of me, to show that I have good intentions, and not to offend them.

The script shows that both the situation at hand and the other people involved affect how formal one should (or is expected to) act. It does not, however, provide information about what kinds of actions (or linguistic forms) are considered inappropriate. This would be included elsewhere (e.g. a list of words where formality levels are assigned to each). It also shows that in an intimate setting, one does not have to be formal, but in public settings, some degree of formality is expected. Although the script pays special attention to interpersonal relationships, because this will most benefit the language learner, it is imperative that we remind ourselves this is not the only aspect of register that is relevant to formality; field and mode also play a role (represented above as parts of the situation).

¹⁴ The notions of closeness and identification between individuals are difficult to define, because they can occur on multiple levels (e.g. professionally, ethnically, socially, etc.). This aspect of formality needs further investigation. It might be possible to define these concepts more precisely using abstract social networks.

Naturally, intimate and formal settings vary across cultures, so this report proposes cultural scripts to define settings of varying degrees of formality by describing (with examples) how members of the German culture tend to think about them. If one behaves as is expected, one's actions will be deemed appropriate by others, because one would be conforming to established cultural norms.

5.3 CULTURAL SCRIPTS FOR FIVE LEVELS OF FORMALITY

The scripts presented here pertain to German culture, and were designed with the American English speaking language learner in mind. In order for these scripts to be used successfully as a reference source, extensive examples of situations that fit each level would need to be provided to readers.¹⁵ Similarly, teachers using these scripts to help students understand German culture would have to give several examples of real-life situations so that students can determine which types of situations would be viewed in the ways described in the scripts.

Formality levels are listed in order from most to least formal, with sample situations at each step. These scripts describe the possible thought processes of an individual (operating within German culture) when encountering situations that are thought of as either more or less formal (that is to say, this scale is *relative*). The top two levels both describe formal situations, but differ in degree of formality:

Level 5: Formal

People think something like this:

This is an important situation. There are people who will see this and think something about me because of something I do here. It is important to me that they think good things about me, not bad things. There are specific ways of doing things and saying things in this type of situation. I will do things in the way that is most common, so that I fit into the expectations that others have about what should happen in this situation. If I don't behave in this way, others will think bad things about me.

¹⁵ Here, only a few examples are provided for each level, but to implement the scale as a tool for foreign language education, many more would be needed.

Examples: legal proceedings, ceremonies (weddings, funerals, graduations, church services, political ceremonies, etc.)

Level 4: Somewhat Formal

People think something like this:

This situation is somewhat important. There could be people who see this and think something about me because of something I do here. It is important to me that people do not think bad things about me. Things are usually done and said in certain ways in this type of situation. I should do things in a way that is common for this type of situation. If I don't behave in this way, others could think bad things about me.

Examples: business meetings, job interviews, conferences, professional conventions, public presentations

The highest formality level encompasses those situations for which exist the most rigid cultural norms. Such rigidity is characteristic of ritualized or traditional events like those given as examples. Level 4 is slightly less formal, but still calls for formal behavior. The scripts show that formal behavior is socially motivated; speakers choose forms that are appropriate to the situation so that others do not judge their actions negatively (and by extension, the speakers themselves).

A slang word like “Bulle” (discussed in 5.1 above) would probably not appear in situations at these levels of formality, so in a reference source, they would not be associated with such words. “Polizist” (“policeman”), however, is more likely to appear at these levels, and would therefore be linked to them (along with any other appropriate levels) in a reference source. This would indicate that only the first of the following sentences would likely appear in a courtroom setting or at a law enforcement convention (if speakers were polite and conformed to cultural norms):

(1) Sind Sie der **Polizist**, der den Angeklagten verhaftet hat?

Are you the policeman who arrested the defendant?

(2) *Sind Sie der **Bulle**, der den Angeklagten verhaftet hat?

**Are you the pig who arrested the defendant?*

If an American college student studying criminology attended a professional gathering of law enforcement in Germany, and posed question (2) to an officer there, it would probably not go over well. The officer would most likely interpret the question as an insult or possibly even a threat. If, however, the same student had checked the word's formality levels in a reference source that used the present scale, they would know that "Bulle" is inappropriate in this type of situation, and would instead ask the question in (1). Recall that formal situations are those accompanied by specific or rigid expectations; the use of this derogatory term would certainly not be expected by a police officer at a professional law enforcement convention.

The next level on the formality scale is one where participants' expectations are more vague, and the social consequences for behaving more or less formal than appropriate are less severe than at the other levels. This is reflected in the script:

Level 3: Everyday Courteous

People think something like this:

This situation is not unusual. There could be people who see this and think something bad about me because of something I do here. There are many ways of doing things in this type of situation. I should do things in one of these ways so that I act how others would act in this situation, and so that I do not stand out from others. If I do not behave in this way, I will not fit in with the people I am interacting with, and I will look like an outsider.

Examples: in the workplace, at the grocery store, ordering a meal in a restaurant

This level occupies a space on the scale that is on the border between formal and informal. Situations at this level do not, in themselves, call for particularly formal or informal behavior. These situations can play out in a slightly more or less formal way, depending on context specific factors, like personal preferences of the participants and abstract social network memberships. If, for instance, both a customer and a cashier at the grocery store were teenagers, they would likely interact in a more informal way than if

one were thirty years old and the other over fifty. Words associated with this level of formality would not have strong formal or informal connotations.

The next two levels on the scale represent informal situations, varying in degree of informality. The consequences of behaving formally at these levels are different from those for behaving informally at the higher levels (4 and 5); for instance, if a non-native speaker addressed a friend in a Level 1 informal setting with the formal German “you”, “Sie”, the friend would probably not be offended, but would invite the speaker to address them with the informal “du”. If, on the other hand, a non-native speaker were to address a respected participant in a situation at Level 5 as “du”, that participant would most likely be offended, and the speaker could be seen as rude or otherwise judged negatively. At the informal levels, social consequences can take different forms because of the nature of the relationship between participants. Behaving too formally may incite teasing, for example, where a formality mistake at the higher levels would probably not. Still, mistakes at high and low levels may produce the same overall sorts of effects, such as the speaker being excluded from the social group or being viewed as an outsider.

Level 2: Somewhat Informal

People think something like this:

This situation is common. I feel comfortable with the people around me, and I know how to act around them. My actions are not very limited, because the people around me don't have as many expectations about how I should behave.

Examples: with one's peers at a social gathering, conversing with fellow students in class

Level 1: Informal

People think something like this:

I am comfortable in this situation, and I am most free to express myself in this type of situation. The people around me know me well, so I don't think they will think anything bad about me if I say the wrong thing. They don't have as many expectations about the words or forms I use. I will say what I feel like saying.

Examples: with family at home, hanging out with close friends, with one's spouse

Level 2 includes situations that are relaxed, but still carry social consequences for inappropriately informal behavior. Level 1 carries less severe social consequences, as those people with whom one is intimate are less likely to judge the speaker negatively for a formality mistake (this is not to say there are *no* consequences at this level; teasing or poking fun often follow formality mistakes at this level, but this is usually done in good humor, and decidedly less severe than being shunned or ostracized).

The scripts show that participants in an exchange at Level 2 are typically comfortable and confident, but that their actions are somewhat inhibited by the social context, while at the lowest level of formality, speakers are least inhibited and tend to behave in whatever way they desire. It is obvious that people do not always say whatever they want, even in intimate settings (e.g. one might hold back to spare another's feelings), but this restraint on action would be covered by some other general cultural script about how one should treat other people, like the ones for networks discussed in 4.2 (e.g. individuals might not feel free to say just *anything* around their mothers – like expletives – even though they might consider the setting intimate and informal).

Levels 4 and 5 are characterized by typically (although not necessarily) weak ties between the individuals present (or who could be witnesses), while the lower two levels are characterized by strong ties between participants (after the definition given by Penny 1992:134; see 4.2 above). Level 3 falls somewhere in between, and the abstract social networks of participants (e.g. age group, profession, socio-economic class, etc.) will play larger roles in determining which forms are appropriate and which are not.

Levels 3, 4 and 5 would typically call for the use of the formal form of address, “Sie”, although this may vary because forms of address are more heavily influenced by the personal relationship between the speaker and addressee than by formality alone

(such exceptions could be accounted for with the help of additional, more specific cultural scripts pertaining to forms of address). “Sie” would be marked for use in these levels. This does not mean that “Sie” is the only appropriate form of address at all three levels; “du” might just as easily appear, depending on who is speaking to whom (e.g. “du” is used at a wedding when the bride and groom say their vows, despite the traditional nature of such an exchange, because of the close relationship between bride and groom).

Words in a reference source could be linked to levels on the scale, indicating that they would most likely be used in situations at those levels.¹⁶ Users of the reference source would need to keep in mind that the ratings cannot be considered absolute (since social constructions like politeness or formality are context dependent and cannot be part of word meaning), and that, given the appropriate context, any word can be used in a situation at any level of formality. The rating system would convey tendencies and likelihoods, not rules. Still, the scale has been designed to provide non-native speakers with native speaker-like intuitions, so if a student went by these ratings as if they were absolute until able to form their own intuitions about formality, they would not likely commit a formality faux pas. The following section examines two sets of words to see how formality ratings would appear if the scale above were used as a reference.

5.4 DATA: HOW USEFUL ARE THESE SCRIPTS ANYWAY?

Since the main emphasis of this report has been the applicability of cultural scripts for a formality scale, this section puts the above analysis to the test. Formality levels are assigned to each variant in two sets of semantically similar German words, as

¹⁶ When applying this scale to a reference source, it may be better to use only levels 1, 3, and 5, making it less granular in order to save time and significantly reduce the workload. Similarly, if ratings were obtained from a corpus study, fewer levels would simplify the process of tagging the corpus.

they would be in a reference source.¹⁷ Applying the scripts allows for a practical evaluation of their usefulness for reference and teaching. The first set of words are near synonyms meaning “to look”: “schauen”, “gucken”, and “sehen”. The second set are verbs meaning “to die”: “sterben”, “entschlafen”, and “krepieren”.

First, to get an idea of what a language learner might discover about these verbs using traditional bilingual dictionaries, let us consider their definitions from the Pocket Oxford-Duden German dictionary. “Schauen” is defined as “look” or “watch”, depending on whether it is used transitively or intransitively, and is identified as common to Southern Germany, Austria and Switzerland (Clark et al. 2003:305). “Gucken” is defined as an intransitive verb meaning “look” or “peep”, and is marked as colloquial. This verb also has the shortest entry of the three (2003:168). “Sehen” is defined as “see”, “look”, or “watch”, and is marked for either transitive or intransitive use. This entry is the longest and includes definitions for several other related expressions (2003:322).

Using this dictionary alone, non-native speakers can see that the three words mean approximately the same thing. It is also clear that “gucken” is more appropriate in informal settings than in formal ones. Experienced dictionary users might even deduce that “sehen” is the most common (as it is also used for “see”, and because “schauen” is marked with particular regions) but that says nothing about the relative formality levels of “sehen” and “schauen”. The longer entry for the verb “sehen” is the only indication (albeit a weak one) that the word can be used in a wider range of situations than “schauen”. In the case of “gucken”, however, both the short entry and its colloquial designation serve as clues to the reader that the word is typically used in informal settings alone. For a student who is unfamiliar with all of these verbs, and looking for a word to

¹⁷ For this report, ratings are assigned based on personal experience. For the scale’s application in a reference source, it would be best to assign ratings based on empirical data from a corpus study, where a variety of common situations are represented and rated according to formality level, so that the likelihood of a specific word being used appropriately at each level could be more accurately determined.

use in an important academic presentation, it would be obvious that “gucken” is not appropriate, but there is no indication that “schauen” would be less appropriate than “sehen”.

Part of the problem with translating “schauen”, “gucken” and “sehen” into English is that the English words for “to look” (e.g. glance, peek, stare, etc.) differ not according to their relative formality, but according to some other aspect of their meaning (e.g. speed, as with “look” vs. “glance”). This makes translation more difficult because English lacks informal words for “to look” that could be used to define “gucken” and “schauen”. If formality ratings were included, however, the relative formality of this set of words could easily be represented, despite the lack of equivalent words or expressions in English. It would be clear that “sehen” is used in the widest variety of situations (in terms of formality), that “gucken” tends to be used informally, and that “schauen” falls somewhere in between. The ratings associated with each word indicate which formality levels are associated with the word, representing the range of situations in which the word is typically expected to appear¹⁸:

“to look”	Formality Ratings	Sample Sentence
sehen	5 4 3 2 1	Die Studenten sehen aus dem Fenster.
schauen	3 2 1	Die Studenten schauen aus dem Fenster.
gucken	2 1	Die Studenten gucken aus dem Fenster. <i>The students look out the window.</i>

Here, the versatility of the verb “sehen” is made clear; it can be used felicitously in situations ranging from most to least formal, so the sample sentence could have occurred in a situation at any level described in Section 5.3. It is also obvious that “schauen” is not typically used (and thus, not expected) in formal settings.¹⁹ This sample

¹⁸ Note that these three verbs, although interchangeable in the sample sentences listed, do not have the same syntactic distributions. Not all of them can be used transitively, so students would need to have access to both pragmatic and syntactic information in order to use the verbs appropriately.

¹⁹ Remember that this does not mean “schauen” can *never* be used in formal settings. This only indicates that such use is somewhat unlikely, as the rating system is meant to approximate native-speaker intuitions.

sentence sounds slightly more informal than the first, although it does not sound too strongly like slang. “Gucken” is marked for typical use in informal settings only, which reflects its colloquial status, and indeed the sample sentence has an informal ring to it. The ratings show that words typically associated with different degrees of formality can sometimes be used at the same level(s); that is, the ratings that near synonyms receive can overlap. This is as expected, because there is rarely only a single way to express a particular idea appropriately in a given situation.

For our next set of words, translation presents less of a problem, because there are several terms for dying in both languages, and in each case, there are some that vary only in terms of formality. This is apparent in the following entries from the Oxford-Duden dictionary. “Entschlafen” is defined as “pass away” (Clark et al. 2003:114), “sterben” as “die” (341), and “krepieren” as “snuff it” (221). Both “krepieren” and its English counterpart are marked as slang. The English definitions given for this set of words give the reader a much better idea of the differences between them than those from the first set of words above. In this case, traditional dictionaries suffice to show the differences in formality of these near synonyms. Still, formality ratings provide a clearer designation of the range of situations in which the words are typically used²⁰:

“to die”	Formality Ratings	Sample Sentence
entschlafen	5 4 3	Die Frau ist in der Nacht entschlafen .
sterben	5 4 3 2 1	Die Frau ist in der Nacht gestorben .
krepieren	2 1	Die Frau ist in der Nacht krepiert . <i>The woman died in the night (at night).</i>

The first verb, “entschlafen”, would typically be found in more formal settings, such as a newspaper account of a prominent personality’s death, or in a death announcement. “Sterben” could occur at any level of formality, and it does not have a

²⁰ Regional preferences may also play a role in determining which of these expressions is appropriate in a given context. To choose between them, students would need access to this information as well.

particularly formal or informal connotation; the sample sentence given above could be used appropriately in just about any situation. The last verb, “krepieren”, is clearly not expected in formal situations. Unlike the others, this word would most likely be avoided in somber situations, like in a eulogy; its sample sentence would be more accurately translated as “the woman kicked the bucket in the middle of the night”.²¹ This word is also unlikely to appear in other sorts of formal situations (e.g. obituaries, death certificates, at memorials, etc.).

This set of words shows that dictionary definitions can adequately represent formality, but as with the first set examined, this is not always possible. In both sets, one term stands out as much more versatile than the others. In the first set, this was “sehen”, and in the second set, it was “sterben”; both seem to be somewhat neutral in terms of formality, in that they are not expected to occur at any particular level. Despite the seemingly wide range of usage these two verbs possess, there is nothing in the dictionary definitions to indicate that these could be used in a wider variety of contexts than their counterparts. Students typically acquire such information from foreign language instruction, by looking up a versatile English term, or by trial and error. Formality ratings, however, make it obvious, which of the similar terms is most versatile (in terms of formality variation), so students would have access to more information if formality ratings were included in a dictionary or if word ratings were available in an online database.

The sets of words above illustrate how bilingual dictionaries can show formality differences adequately if the languages have equivalent terms (i.e. terms associated with

²¹ The above formality ratings have been assigned without reference to emotional factors that are sometimes involved in discussions of death. The more formal “entschlafen” might be used in informal settings to soften the impact of the statement, e.g. if the speaker is informing someone that their spouse has died. Similarly, “krepieren” would likely be avoided if someone was informing another of the death of a loved one for the same reasons that it would be avoided at a funeral. Other formal situations typically call for some reverence as well. Further cultural scripts could be used to account for these considerations.

the same formality levels). Formality ratings give more detailed accounts of how the words are typically used than dictionary definitions, and can get such information across whether there are equivalent terms in both languages or not. Because it is unlikely that even equivalent terms will have exactly the same distribution in both languages, definitions relying on these sorts of translations fail to convey the full extent of the word's potential usage and meaning. If the goal of foreign language education is to teach students to communicate within the target language, the social, context specific aspects of a word's meaning must either be taught or available in a reference source. Communication cannot take place without more than one person, and as soon as multiple participants take part in a linguistic exchange, societal pressures, cultural knowledge and norms of behavior become factors that affect participants' actions. Formality ratings provide more accurate information concerning a word's expected or typical level of formality than traditional dictionaries. The cultural scripts used to define levels on the scale are accessible, and would not take long for readers to master. Language learners could study the above ratings and then make accurate judgments about where and when each word can be used appropriately. The ratings elucidate the intuitions native speakers have about the types of situations (formal to informal) in which a word is likely to occur.

The ratings using this scale are not absolute because formality, like politeness, exists only in social context and cannot, therefore, be a property of word meaning. On the contrary, these ratings are intended as a guide to native speaker expectations, which do not always correspond to actual usage. Still, it is useful to distinguish between the common, appropriate uses of a linguistic form and the socially awkward or just plain rude uses of the same form. From a student's perspective, this information is extremely valuable; students who travel to a foreign country will almost certainly want to fit in with the new people they encounter, and to communicate with them without causing a cultural

misunderstanding like accidentally insulting someone. Even in the beginning levels of instruction, where not all students are planning to travel abroad to use the language, the ratings could help them choose words that are most appropriate to their assignments (e.g. students would have a resource to tell them not to use “Bulle” in a presentation in class).

Section 6: Conclusion and Applications

The previous sections have shown how cultural scripts can be used to describe points on a scale of formality (in terms of situations and ways of thinking about them), how formality ratings associated with words can be used as a reference for language learners (e.g. in a bilingual dictionary), and how these ratings can help disambiguate semantically similar forms. Section 5.4 demonstrates that formality ratings can provide useful information to language learners – information that is not available in bilingual dictionaries or cultural guidebooks. It also outlines a practical new way of using cultural scripts to account for a social aspect of linguistic meaning. Although this report assigned formality ratings based on intuition and experience, a more sound methodology would be needed to apply this formality scale to the large number of words in a reference source.

A corpus study could be carried out with a corpus that contains a wide variety of social contexts to accurately represent the broad range of situations that can occur within a culture, and each corpus example could be tagged with a formality level. Researchers could then use Terkourafi's (2004) methodology, where the appropriateness of a linguistic form is assumed unless participants object in some way, to determine which words can be used felicitously in which types of situations. These observations can then be used as the basis for associating particular formality ratings with specific words and expressions in a bilingual dictionary or online database; linguistic forms could be linked to the levels in which they most often occur without objection, providing a substitute for the experience based intuitions of native speakers.

Terkourafi's (2005) comment on the predictive nature of theory relates directly to the potential application of the analysis presented in this report: "Predictions (and so the theories that engender them) are by nature *probabilistic* and *temporary*, and are only

useful to the extent that they are ratified by the data” (245). Formality ratings will only make a useful reference source if they are accurate, and empirically verified. They will be of no help to students if they do not correspond to what experience shows (and by extension, to trends observed in the data). If a corpus study is too large a task, perhaps an online database could be created where native speakers could help assign formality levels by familiarizing themselves with the scripts and then rating sets of semantically similar words. In any case, a consistent methodology for assigning formality ratings must be established before they can be used in a reference source.

The scripts developed in this report could form the first step in a description of register variation in German; similar scales for other registers (such as technical vocabulary or slang) could be developed and combined to form a database of cultural scripts that represent a facet of German culture and capture typical ways native German speakers think about the world. Although this would be quite a task, it could be done with the help of technology; using a wiki, authors from all over the world could collaborate to develop cultural scripts for formality (or other registers) within their own languages, and researchers could monitor the entries for accuracy. For this to be done responsibly, a systematic method of drafting cultural scripts must be developed. Scripts describing the practices and behavioral norms pertaining to abstract social networks, or particular relationship types or interpersonal (network) ties (see Section 4.2) could also be included in such a database, and would vastly extend the amount of information it contained. This could eventually be expanded to a complete description of German culture using cultural scripts (which would reduce the difficulties of translation and potentially make the entire description available to students and researchers across the world).

The scripts in Section 5 could also be used in combination with frames to describe the concept of formality in German. Together, they could represent the background

knowledge shared by a speech community, including the knowledge speakers have concerning their social groups and cultural norms of behavior. The general script for formality can give insight into native speaker attitudes and perspectives, and formality levels associated with particular situations could enrich existing frames by adding a cultural dimension.

Yet another potential application of the scripts is in foreign language education. Teachers could use them in the classroom to help students understand what factors are involved in determining which words are appropriate in different social contexts. This would of course be easiest if a reference source were developed first, so that teachers would not have to come up with their own ratings and examples. If the scripts were used in a German class, students would need to know that the ratings do not mean that a word cannot occur at a particular level, and that the ratings are intended as a guide to provide them with a general idea of the word's meaning in context.

This report contributes to the body of linguistic research on register variation, proposing a new application for cultural scripts that allows for the categorization of linguistic forms according to situations in which they are most likely to be used appropriately (with respect to formality, of course). Future applications of cultural scripts would greatly benefit from a standard methodology for their creation, and once that is in place, an internet database of scripts for a variety of cultures could be created, using contributors from all over the world. The scripts presented above have much lower aspirations, but are also of a more practical nature. A theoretical or descriptive framework is valuable only to the extent that it can be applied to expand or convey our knowledge of a phenomenon; given the descriptive capability of cultural scripts, numerous other applications will surely be identified.

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Vita

Maggie Gemmell was born November 19, 1985 to Debra and Al Gemmell. She grew up in a small town called Applegate in southern Oregon, and attended South Medford High School. Following graduation in 2003, she continued her education at Southern Oregon University, earning a B.A. in foreign language and culture with an emphasis in German and a minor in French in June of 2007. While attending SOU, Maggie participated in the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, which gave her the means to pursue studies at the graduate level. The program also provided her first publication, "State Manipulation of Women's Roles in National Socialist Germany (1933-1945)" in the SOU McNair Scholars Journal. Maggie was admitted to the Germanic Studies department at the University of Texas at Austin in the fall of 2007, and worked as a teaching assistant there for a year before she began teaching introductory German courses. Maggie hopes to use this experience in language teaching to add a practical perspective to her future research in linguistics.

Permanent address: 11316 Jollyville Rd. #122
Austin, TX 78759

This report was typed by the author.