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Modern Estonian culture and its effect on language use

Research paper

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Running head: Modern Estonian culture and language use

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Abstract

This study explored the effect of other-face-threat and cultural background on disclosure of positive information in situations requiring other-facework. Estonian, US and Vietnamese participants were tasked with choosing a lexical choice in scenarios which could include an explicit, possible or non-existent other-face-threat. We found that cultural background and scenarios had an effect on the lexical choice used, however no interaction between the two independent variables was found. Vietnamese participants answered with the lowest mean lexical choices across all scenarios, but showed a similar pattern of answers as the other cultures. Estonian participants' answers were most similar to the US sample. Estonian youth showed high scores in independent self-construal and Hofstede's individualism dimension, demonstrating individualism levels similar to the US sample.

Keywords: culture, language use, face, facework

Kokkuvõte

Antud uuring uuris teise-näoohu ja kultuurilise tausta mõju positiivse informatsiooni välja andmisel olukordades, mis vajavad teise-näotööd. Eesti, Ameerika Ühendriikide ja Vietnami osalejatele anti valida keelelist valikut erinevates olukordades, mis võisid sisaldada kas nähtavat, varjatud või olematut teise-näo-ohu. Uuringus leiti, et nii kultuuriline taust kui ka antud näo-ohu olukorrad avaldasid mõju keelelistele valikutele, kuid nende kahe mõjutaja koosmõju ei esinenud. Vietnamlastest osalejatel olid madalaimad keskmised keelelised valikud kõikides olukordades, kuid nende vastused olid sarnase mustriga teiste uuringus osalevatega kultuuridega. Eesti osalejate vastused sarnanesid kõige rohkem USA osalejate vastustega. Eesti noortel oli kõrged tulemused nii iseseisvas enese-ehituses kui ka Hofstede individualismi dimensioonil, mis näitavad, et Eesti noorte individualismi tase sarnaneb USA valimiga.

Märksõnad: kultuur, keelekasutus, nägu, näotöö

Introduction

Have you ever been in a situation where after achieving something great like getting a good grade on an exam or getting a big payraise, you diminish your accomplishments so as not to make your friend sadder, because your friend, who attended the same exam or went to ask for a payraise after you, didn't perform as well? If you have, then you have engaged in something called "facework" (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), where you chose an appropriate communicative behaviour to support your friend's "face". This is due to your "other-face concern", which describes your concern for your friend's identity image in a conflict situation (Ting-Toomey, 2015).

While "facework" is something that nearly everyone engages in, it does not mean it is the exact same between cultures (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Cultural dimensions, like the individualism and collectivism dimension, have been used to measure and map out different cultures in regards to their characteristics (Hofstede, 2011). How individualistic or collectivistic a culture is; has been found to have direct and indirect effects on conflict styles used in face-threatening situations (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). A person's self-construal or the way they view themselves in relation to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) has also been linked to the different ways people approach conflict resolution or whose "face-threat" to focus on in conflict situations (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003).

The mapping of Estonian culture can become complicated, with some placing Estonia as more collectivistic (Schwartz, 1994) and others as more individualistic (Realo & Allik, 1999; Realo, 2003). In this study, we aim to investigate how modern Estonian culture maps itself out in comparison to an individualistic and a collectivistic culture and how culture affects language use with the mediating factor of other-face threat.

Individualism and Collectivism

Although Hofstede brought up many cultural dimensions for comparing cultures (Hofstede, 2011), none has been as prominent as the individualism and collectivism dimension (I-C). The I-C dimension is used to measure different cultures and map where they fit on the dimension in relation to one another. Hofstede (2011) wrote that the I-C dimension is related to the integration of individuals into primary groups. Individualist cultures are described as cultures where the ties between individuals are loose, everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family, while in collectivist cultures people are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups from birth, often with extended families that continue their protection in exchange for loyalty and opposing other in-groups (Hofstede, 2011).

One closely related concept to I-C, that will come up in this study, is the concept of self-construals. Self-construal refers to an individual's view of oneself in relation to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Markus & Kitayama (1991) investigated the two divergent self-construal forms noticed between the more individualist Western World and the more collectivist East, independent and interdependent self-construals respectively. The independent self-construal emphasises the separation of distinct individuals and strives for independence from others and self-expression of one's unique attributes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The interdependent self-construal emphasises the fundamental connectedness of humans to one another and strives to maintain interdependence among individuals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). People with a more independent self-construal see themselves as separate from others and base their self on their ability to express it, while those with an interdependent view see their relationship with others as defining their self and value the ability to adjust and maintain harmony within a social context (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Complications in Measuring Estonian Culture

In comparison with cultures like the culture of the US or Chinese culture, fitting Estonia on the I-C scale has been much more complicated. Schwartz (1994) positioned Estonia as a more collectivistic country due to its high conservatism and low autonomy. Realo (2003) found that 77.3% of Estonians believe Estonian culture to be more individualistic, however how individualism and collectivism is conceptualized by cross-cultural psychologists, in terms of value dimensions and cultural orientations, vs in an Estonian layman's mind, in terms of solitude (working/being alone) and self-prioritization, which could at least partially explain the difference of opinion between the groups. When testing collectivism in terms of social relations, Estonia was found to be significantly less collectivistic regarding peers and society than the US (Realo & Allik, 1999), which is usually considered as a typical individualistic culture.

In addition, Estonia has undergone big changes socially and economically with the collapse of the Soviet Union, going from having a command economy to a free market economy and gaining independence. A change as grand as this can certainly be expected to affect the culture of a nation, especially considering that since then Estonia has aligned itself more and more with the Global West and its values. Tulviste et al. (2017) found that younger Estonians (<30yo) are more open and lean more towards self-enhancement (both emphasize individuality and self-interest) compared to their older counterparts. Additionally, in a three-generation comparative study it was found that Estonian adolescents had a higher

independence score than their mothers and lower interdependence scores than their grandmothers and mothers (Tõugu et al., 2017). It was found that Estonian grandmothers had a lower interdependence score than German and Russian grandmothers as well as independence scores for Estonian mothers and grandmothers being in the middle of scores from their counterparts from Germany and Russia, suggesting that Estonian culture is in between the independence-interdependence self-construals and thus somewhere in between individualism and collectivism. These studies illustrate how in the 34 years since the fall of the Soviet Union, there have been shifts between the values of older generations, who grew up before the fall of the Soviet Union and the generations that have grown up in independent Estonia. This further illustrates the difficulties of mapping where Estonian culture falls on the I-C scale, especially in regards to the modern Estonian culture of Estonian youth.

“Face”, Language and Culture

Ting-Toomey (2015) describes “face” as “...how we want others to see us and treat us and how we actually treat others in association with their social self-conception expectations.” In layman’s terms one could describe face as a person’s social self-image or self-worth. Every day, people constantly make conscious or unconscious choices concerning face-saving and face-honoring issues in different interpersonal and international contexts (Ting-Toomey, 2015). “Facework” refers to communicative behaviours used to regulate social identity and to support or challenge other’s face (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), such as politeness, tact and “white” lies for example. Holtgraves & Perdue (2016) found that messages were conveyed with greater uncertainty in face-threatening conditions, than in non-face-threatening conditions and that probability estimates of an event happening varied as a function of conveyed uncertainty. The study demonstrates how face impacts language, and how that impacted language impacts our judgements.

While face and facework are universal phenomena, the framework of meaning and how we act out facework differ from culture to culture (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Independent self-construal was associated positively with self-face concern, which was itself associated with dominating conflict styles, while interdependent self-construal was associated positively with other-face concern and other-face concern was associated with avoiding and integrating styles of conflict (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003).

Recent studies have investigated the effect of culture on language use comparing cultures from Estonia, China, and the US (Tepp, 2025; Lyu et al., 2026). The authors asked the participants to imagine they came back from an exam and got a very good score, and were asked to describe their performance. They manipulated the presence or absence of a close

friend of the speaker (i.e., participants), and the friend's performance, which was either good (non-face-threatening) or bad (face-threatening). They found a significant two-way interaction between the friend's score and participant's country of origin. In the US and Estonian samples, participant's tended to lower their score when their friend got a bad score, but in the Chinese sample participants tended to use moderate scores, regardless of whether their friend got a good score or a bad one. The present study will build on the previous study's results and examine different social contexts where other-face-threat concerns are more nuanced.

Present Study

The present study will investigate how culture affects language use with the mediating factor of other-face threat. In the present study modern Estonian culture (represented by those born after the collapse of the Soviet Union) will be compared with US and Vietnamese culture. The USA is typically considered to be an individualist culture while Vietnamese culture is typically considered to be more collectivistic and they will be used as references for determining modern Estonian culture.

The participants will be asked to imagine they got a very high grade on their exam and are talking with their best friend after the exam when they are approached by a classmate from another course, who asks them how it went.

Unlike previous studies (Lyu et al., 2026; Tepp, 2025), in this study we had the friend on-site (i.e., the friend was contextually present with the participant while the participant was asked about their performance) in all scenarios.

Within each culture, we manipulated the friend in the scenario as being in one of the four conditions: A. friend positive, B. friend negative, C. friend absent, and D. friend unknown, as illustrated below. The study will use a between-subjects design so that each participant will be assigned only to one condition.

- A. Friend positive: Your best friend also got a very high score on the exam.
- B. Friend negative: Your best friend got a very low score on the exam.
- C. Friend absent: Your best friend didn't attend the exam
- D. Friend unknown: Your best friend attended the same exam, but you don't know their score

The participants are then tasked with choosing how they will describe their performance from a list of given choices ranging from lowest degree of performance to the highest: "*I failed*"; "*It went very bad*"; "*It went bad*"; "*It went so-and-so*"; "*It went normally*"; "*It went well*"; "*It went very well*"; "*It went excellent*".

Condition B contains an explicit other-face threat, where the respondent definitely knows that the best friend got a poor score on the exam. Condition D contains a potential other-face threat, where the respondent doesn't know their best friend's score and where more collectivistic cultures consider other-face threat as a possible risk and more individualistic cultures focus more on self-face. Condition A has no other-face threat and in condition C the friend was absent from the exam.

The present study thus comprises a 3X4 (cultureXfriendlevel). We have the following hypotheses. The first hypothesis (H1) is that within individualistic cultures, in this case the US, conditions A, C and D will have similar answers (e.g. "*It went very well*") with condition B having weaker answers (e.g. "*It went so-and-so*"). Condition B is the only condition where the best friend's face is under explicit threat, as it is the only condition where the participant definitely knows that the best friend got a poor score. As face is a universal phenomenon (Holtgraves & Perdue, 2016; Tepp, 2025), we expect the US participants will manage the explicit other-face threat in condition B. Due to the other conditions not having an explicit other-face threat, we expect the US participants to answer similarly in conditions A, C and D.

The second hypothesis (H2) is that we expect collectivistic cultures, in this study Vietnam, will have similar answers in conditions A and C and to an extent with B and D as well. Conditions A and C are conditions where there is no *explicit* or *potential* other-face threat, because of which we expect the answers will be similar. However conditions B and D both contain an other-face threat, condition B being an *explicit* threat and condition D having a *potential* threat. Due to collectivistic cultures being more focused on other-face threats and thus more on alert for possible other-face threats, we expect them to lower their scores in conditions B and D compared to conditions A and C. We expect a lesser extent in regards to condition D, because the other-face threat in condition D is a *potential* one (i.e., not everybody, even if they're from collectivistic cultures, may interpret it as an other-face-threat).

Lastly, we have the third hypothesis (H3), in which we expect that modern Estonian culture is more individualistic and as such, will have the weakest answers in condition B, with other conditions having similar answers or in other words, we expect that Estonian results will show a similar pattern as the US results.

Methods

Participants

Six participants were excluded from the Vietnamese data set for reported age and date of birth mismatch. From the Estonian dataset 40 participants were excluded on the basis of

them not identifying themselves fully as Estonian, reporting below average language proficiency or being over the age of 35. No participants were excluded from the US data. All in all, 46 participants were excluded from data analysis. The total number of participants included in the analysis was 406. All the participants were born after 1991, as that's when the Soviet Union fell and when the Estonian cohort under study started living in an independent Estonia. The US and Vietnamese samples were matched to the Estonian respondents. Demographic information of respondents is shown in table 1.

Table 1

Demographic information of participants

	EST	USA	VNM
Number of participants (N)	115	123	168
Mean age (years)	25.670	25.260	21.030
Male participants	40	47	57
Female participants	73	76	111
Participants of other gender	2	0	0

The Estonian samples were collected from Tartu University students, through outreach to different Estonian communities as well as from Reddit r/Eesti subreddit. The US samples were obtained with the online platform Prolific (www.prolific.com) and the Vietnamese samples were collected with the help of a collaborator in Vietnam. All participants provided informed consent forms as well as agreed to participate and have their necessary data processed for the study. Participants were able and had the choice to leave the study at any point.

Materials

For this study we adopted the Estonian and English questionnaires used by Tepp (2025), but modified the scenarios into the present study's design. The questionnaire was then translated into Vietnamese for the Vietnamese sample using ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025), after which it was proofread by a native Vietnamese speaker. The three groups of participants completed the survey in their respective native languages.

The questionnaire contained four parts. In the first part participants were asked to think of a non-romantic best friend and write down their name. The name was referred to in the story to increase the believability of the story. The participant was then presented with a situation, where they got a very good score on an exam (i.e. A in the English and Estonian version and a 9.7 in the Vietnamese version) and the best friend's score was manipulated (see Present Study). After reading the story, the participants were asked to choose from a list of choices to describe their test performance in the context of the story. The given choices, going in order from lowest to highest on the scale, were: *"I failed"*; *"It went very bad"*; *"It went bad"*; *"It went so-and-so"*; *"It was okay"*; *"It went well"*; *"It went very well"*; *"It went excellent"*. After answering the questions the participants were asked a follow-up question, asking why they answered how they did. The given choices were: *"To show my competence"*; *"I didn't want to brag"*; *"To change the subject"*; *"To not hurt my friend's feelings"*; *"To be truthful"*; *"To be modest"*.

The second part contained two manipulation checks, the first asking the participant what would be a very good, very bad and mediocre grade on their respective grading scales (A-F in the English, 1-5 in the Estonian and 0-10 in the Vietnamese version) and the second asking them to rank the aforementioned list of choices in order of best to worst descriptions about someone's performance. Due to the data collection occurring in batches, the second manipulation check was only used in the Vietnamese and part of the Estonian samples. The purpose of including the two manipulation check questions was to ensure our manipulation of the score and the lexical choice in the story were valid.

The third part of the questionnaire measured the participants' culture of origin and self-construal. For measuring I-C, four questions from Hofstede's (2013) Values Survey Module regarding the Individualism Index (IDV) were used. For measuring self-construal of the participant, a 10-question shortened version of Singeli's (1994) Self-Construal Scale (SCS) was used (D'Amico & Scrima, 2016).

The fourth part recorded the participant's demographic information, consisting of age, gender, education and employment status, current nationality and nationality at birth if needed, ethnicity, mother tongue and language proficiencies.

Results

The collected data was analysed using the JASP statistical analysis program. The version of JASP used was the 0.19.1 version.

Manipulation checks

Grade manipulation check

The first manipulation check consisted of asking the participants to rate what they would consider a very good, mediocre or very bad grade. Tables A1, A2 and A3 (see Appendix A) show how US, Estonian and Vietnamese participants ranked very good, mediocre and very bad scores respectively.

The scoring of good, mediocre and bad grades in all cultures aligned with our expectations and thus we consider this manipulation check valid.

Lexical choice ranking manipulation check

The second manipulation check asked participants to rank 8 lexical choices about someone's performance from best to worst. Tables B1 and B2 (see Appendix B) summarize the data collected from this manipulation check for the Estonian and Vietnamese samples respectively.

Estonian respondents ranked the lexical choices more akin to how it was expected they would rank them (percentages in bold). In the Estonian sample on average approximately 67.3% of instances the lexical choices were ranked how it was expected they would be ranked. In the Vietnamese sample this percentage dropped to approximately 48.6%.

For the Vietnamese respondents, the percentage of rankings for rank 4 and 5 (expected answers were "*It went okay*" and "*It went so-and-so*" respectively), were flipped in comparison to the expected answers, with "*It went okay*" being ranked fifth 44.0% of the time and "*It went so-and-so*" being ranked fourth 41.7% of the time. This would suggest that the Vietnamese sample perceived something being "okay" as being worse than if it were "so-and-so", which is inverted from usual more Western understandings of these phrases.

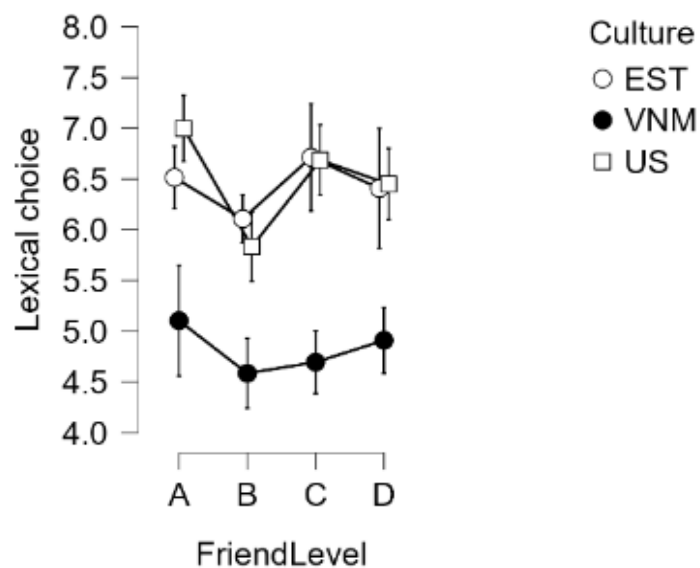
However, looking at the results of the second manipulation in broad strokes, it can be deduced, that a majority of the participants still ranked expected positive lexical choices in the upper half of the ranking list (more positive) and negative lexical choices in the lower half of the ranking, which for the purposes of this study's manipulation is adequate and thus the manipulation is valid.

Lexical choice

In this study, lexical choice was coded as an ordinal numeric variable ranging from 1-8. The lowest lexical choice (1) was "*I failed*" and the highest (8) was "*it went excellent*". The mean lexical choice used in each friendlevel condition by participants in each culture is shown in table 2 and illustrated in figure 1.

Table 2*Mean lexical choice in friendlevel conditions divided by culture*

Friendlevel	Culture	Mean	SD
A	EST	6.515	0.870
	VNM	5.105	1.657
	US	7.000	0.871
B	EST	6.109	0.795
	VNM	4.586	0.907
	US	5.833	0.913
C	EST	6.714	0.914
	VNM	4.696	1.159
	US	6.688	0.965
D	EST	6.409	1.333
	VNM	4.911	1.083
	US	6.452	0.961

*Figure 1: Descriptive ANOVA plot of participant's culture by friendlevel effect on lexical choice*

A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run on the data, which included two independent variables in a 3 (culture) by 4 (friendlevel) design. Table 3 shows the results of the ANOVA analysis.

Table 3

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the effects of participant's lexical choice

Cases	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	η_p^2
Culture	243.907	2	121.954	107.723	<.001*	0.354
Friendlevel	25.723	3	8.574	7.550	<.001*	0.054
Culture X Friendlevel	8.906	6	1.484	1.289	0.261	0.019
Residuals	453.691	394	1.151			

Note. * $p < .001$; η_p^2 - partial eta squared; Culture - participant's culture that they hail from (Estonia, Vietnam, USA); Friendlevel - friend scenario conditions as explained in the "Present study" portion of the paper

The ANOVA results indicate that the independent variables both had a statistically significant effect on participant's lexical choice. Out of the two independent variables, culture was the one with the largest effect on lexical choice and explained ~35% of variability in lexical choice ($\eta_p^2 = 0.354$). The friendlevel variable accounted for ~5% of variance in lexical choice ($\eta_p^2 = 0.054$). While Vietnamese respondents did exhibit a lower mean lexical choice in all conditions, opposite from what we hypothesised (H2) would happen, the independent variables showed no statistically significant interaction effects on lexical choice. Due to there being no interaction between the independent variables, we can reject our second hypothesis, which was dependent on the interaction between (Vietnamese) culture and friendlevel.

To test the first hypothesis, the mean lexical choice between friendlevel conditions for the US group was measured. In condition A, the mean lexical choice given by US participants was 7.000 ("it went very good"), 5.833 in condition B (between "it went okay" and "it went good"), 6.688 in condition C (between "it went good" and "it went very good") and 6.452 in condition D. Observing the recorded means shows that condition B had the lowest lexical choice out of the four friendlevel conditions. Due to the previously observed

null interaction between culture and friendlevel that showed the same response style between all cultures, Tukey's post hoc test for friendlevel conditions will be completed including all three cultures. The post hoc test shows that condition B was statistically significantly different from condition A ($p < .001$), condition C ($p = 0.008$) as well as condition D ($p = 0.040$). Between one another, conditions A, C and D showed no statistically significant differences. These results match up with and support our first hypothesis and thus we can confirm it.

The hypothesis that Estonian participants would answer similarly to US respondents (H3) can be accepted on the basis that all cultures exhibited a similar pattern of lexical choice manipulation between friendlevel scenarios. Tukey's post hoc test shows that there is no statistically significant difference between Estonian and US culture ($p = 0.922$) in regards to effect on lexical choice used. This exemplifies the similarities in answering patterns between the two samples. For comparison, Vietnamese respondents differed significantly from both Estonian ($p < .001$) and US respondents ($p < .001$).

Motive

Estonian respondents' motive for their answer was predominantly "*To be truthful*" regardless of friendlevel condition, with "*I did not want to brag*" being the second most picked motive in all conditions. In conditions where the friend attended the exam and got a known score (conditions A and B), the motive "*To be modest*" was the third most picked motive (12.1% and 13.0%), however the motive did not appear in condition C, being replaced by "*To show my competence*" (7.1%), and was only picked once in condition D, where the third most picked was instead "*To not hurt my friend's feelings*" (9.1%).

US respondents also predominantly chose to follow the motive of "*To be truthful*" in all conditions. The second most chosen motive in conditions A and B, where their friend's exam score is known to them as either positive or negative respectively, was "*I did not want to brag*" followed by "*To be modest*", which was in inverse order in conditions C, where the friend was absent from the exam, and D, where the friend's score is not known to the respondent. The motive "*To not hurt my friend's feelings*" passed the frequency of one only in condition B, where the friend's score is bad, with a frequency of 6 (20% of choices).

The Vietnamese sample differed the most in motives chosen compared to Estonian and US respondents, as they did not have one dominant motive in all conditions. In condition A, where the friend's exam score is positive, the most picked motive was "*To be modest*" (36.8%), followed by "*I did not want to brag*" (23.7%), "*To show my competence*" (15.8%) and "*To be truthful*" (13.2%). In condition B, where the friend's exam score is negative, the

most picked motive was “*To not hurt my friend’s feelings*” (41.4%), with the motives “*To be truthful*”, “*I did not want to brag*” and “*To be modest*” being second, third and fourth together with them representing 17.2% of motives in this condition each. In condition C, where the friend did not attend the exam, the most chosen motive was “*To not hurt my friend’s feelings*”(28.6%), followed by “*I did not want to brag*” (26.8%), “*To be modest*” (25.0%) and “*To be truthful*” (14.3%). In condition D, where the friend’s score is unknown, the most chosen motive was “*I did not want to brag*” (35.6%), the second most chosen being “*To be truthful*”, third being “*To be modest*” and fourth being “*To not hurt my friend’s feelings*”.

Individualism index (IDV)

The individualism index was calculated using the Hofstede and Minkov (2013) manual. The individualism index for the Vietnamese sample is 2.54, 56.58 for the US sample and 77.37 for the Estonian sample. According to the index, Estonian youth culture is more individualistic than US youth culture and Vietnamese culture is exceptionally collectivistic. The results for the Estonian sample support the findings in Tepp (2025), where the Estonian sample was also found to have a higher individualism index than the US sample.

Self-construal

The average Estonian independent self-construal scale value was 3.896, which was higher than the Vietnamese group’s average of 3.827, but lower than the US participant’s average of 4.170 ($F = 15.523$; $p < .001$; $\eta_p^2 = .072$). Statistically significant differences in Tukey’s post hoc tests were found between Estonia and the USA ($p = .037$) and between Vietnam and the USA ($p = .002$). No statistically significant differences were found between the Vietnamese and US respondents for the independent scale ($p = .789$).

For the interdependent scale, the average score for Estonians was 3.729, which is lower than both the Vietnamese average score (3.865) as well as the US’s (4.259) ($F = 15.523$; $p < .001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.072$). Statistically significant differences in the post hoc Tukey’s test were found between the Estonian and US sample ($p < .001$) and between the Vietnamese and US samples ($p < .001$), but no significant differences were found between the Estonian and Vietnamese sample ($p = 0.310$).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how culture affects language use with the mediating factor of other-face threat as well as how Estonian youth is positioned between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The first aim was investigated using vignettes of a situation in which a friend’s exam score and/or presence is modified to induce or remove

possible other-face threat for the participant. The second aim of establishing Estonian youth's position on the I-C scale was investigated using the lexical choices used in this study, Hofstede's (2013) Values Survey Model as well as by measuring the self-construal of the different cultures in this study.

Other-face threat and language use across cultures (H1 & H2)

The hypothesis that within individualistic cultures, in this study the USA, that all conditions but condition B will have similar answers, with condition B having weaker answers (H1) was confirmed. In fact, the results of the study show this pattern to apply for all cultures in the present study. Participants from all three cultures lowered their lexical choice in condition B, where the friend's face was explicitly threatened. The findings in Tepp (2025) also corroborate the results that condition B's explicit other-face-threat causes all participant's to lower their lexical choice, as in his study participant's from individualist cultures also lowered their lexical choice in explicit other-face-threatening scenarios.

However the hypothesis that collectivistic cultures, Vietnam in this study, would have similar answers in conditions A and C as well as between conditions B and D respectively (H2) was rejected. ANOVA results showed both culture and friendlevel conditions as having statistically significant effects on the mean lexical choice used, however no interaction between the two variables was found, leading to a similar pattern of responses in all three cultures.

We theorize that the reason as to why the Vietnamese response pattern showed similarities with the US sample's pattern, could be due to Vietnamese culture being very face-conscious (Nguyen, 2024). In the results of this study, the Vietnamese sample scored highest in condition A, the positive friend grade condition, with all other conditions having a lower mean lexical choice score, however the differences between the conditions in their cultural group were not statistically significant. From this we theorised, that the Vietnamese sample could've perceived all situations in which the friend's score isn't explicitly stated as positive as having an other-face threat, even condition C, where the friend was absent and more Western cultures wouldn't perceive it as having an other-face threat. The idea that Vietnamese respondents were much more on alert for face-threats in all conditions, regardless whether the threat is explicitly stated, is supported by the findings in Togans et al. (2021), where all participants used more negative emotional markers (emojis in the study) in face-threatening situations, however East Asians were more sensitive to potentially face-threatening situations.

Vietnamese motives for lexical choices also offer additional support for this interpretation. In all conditions Vietnamese respondents were much more focused on modesty or not bragging to a friend compared to Estonian and US respondents, which could further support the notion of them feeling an other-face threat even in situations, where we had hypothesised that they wouldn't feel other-face threats as much.

Due to the prevalence of the "*I did not want to brag*" motive found in Vietnamese respondents, a self-face threat could've impacted the lexical choice used by participants as bragging or even just explicitly saying that they got a high grade could be seen as a threat to one's face through immodesty.

As an interim conclusion, we interpreted the reason as to why the Vietnamese sample answered in a similar pattern as the US sample as well as why there was no interaction found between culture and friendlevel scenarios to come from the Vietnamese sample's modesty and possible cultural "overthinking" of social scenarios, evidenced by their larger variety of motives and their motives more focusing on modesty, as well as their alertness to possible face-threat scenarios even when they are not explicitly stated.

Estonian youth on the I-C scale and its effect on language use (H3)

In this study Estonian youth was found to answer similarly to US respondents between friendlevel scenarios, showing no statistically significant difference between all scenarios (figure 1 illustrates the similarity in the pattern of answers between the two succinctly).

Estonian youth was also found to score higher on the IDV than even the US respondent's, however they did score lower on the independence self-construal scale when compared to the US sample. Of interest, is that the Estonian youth sample also scored lower on the interdependence self-construal scale than US youth, making them simultaneously have a lesser independent and interdependent self-construal.

The aforementioned results support the claim that Estonian youth is more individualistic rather than collectivistic. This is consistent with the findings in Tepp (2025) as well as in Realo & Allik (1999), where Estonian samples were found to be more individualistic than even the US ones, as well as supporting Realo's (2003) findings that most (77.3%) Estonians consider Estonian culture to be individualistic rather than collectivistic. Tulviste et al. (2017) findings, where Estonian youth was found to be more focused towards Openness to Change and Self-Enhancement, when compared to older generations of Estonians, as well as Tõugu's et al. (2017) find that Estonian adolescents had a higher mean

independence score than their mothers, but not their grandmothers, support the high individualism score Estonian participants got in this study.

All in all, the results of this study support the notion that Estonian youth is quite individualistic, with that cultural individualism being showcased in their values, self-construal as well as in their language use.

Limitations of the study

Some ANOVA assumptions were breached in order to make the analysis. Firstly, the dependent variable was made into an ordinal scale, however for the purposes of this study the lexical choice scale was treated as an interval scale. Secondly, Levene's homogeneity test was also statistically significant ($p < .001$), however we decided to not take this into consideration, as ANOVA is very robust with a large sample size (in this study 406 participants) as well as Levene's test becoming extremely sensitive with large sample sizes, possibly giving false positives (R. Naar, personal communications, December 5th, 2025). Due to the aforementioned reasons, the statistical significance of Levene's homogeneity test was ignored and we proceeded with ANOVA analysis.

Another possible source of limitation is the uneven distribution of participants between condition groups. This was caused by the random distribution of questionnaire versions between participants, as the distribution of the questionnaire wasn't limited by age (as it is part of more studies than just this one) and later, when participants were separated by age, some conditions happened to receive less young adults in them. The goal for the study was to receive at least around 30 valid submissions for each friendlevel condition, which due to circumstance, sadly wasn't distributed as evenly as we had hoped.

Further research

This study extends the literature on face-threats as well as facework by researching how those concepts affect disclosure of positive information in other-face-threat scenarios. Literature on these have up until now mainly focused on negative situations and/or negative information disclosure. Further research in this newer avenue of research could provide novel and interesting results for the domain of "face" in psychology.

Another avenue of further research could be focused on how Vietnamese cultures perceive face-threats, or rather more specifically, whether due to the low mean lexical choice recorded in this study, Vietnamese perceive face-threat conditions much more regularly and widespreadly compared to Western as well as other Eastern cultures like Chinese, Japanese or Korean cultures, which also have roots in Confucian tradition like Vietnamese culture does.

Another domain worthy of further research is expanding further on the generational differences in Estonia. Tulviste et al. (2017) and Tõugu et al. (2017) have gathered interesting results on the topic, showing generational differences in self-construal oscillating between generations as well as how different Estonian generations perceive the World around them and what their goals/motivations are. Further research in this domain could also help explain how different studies have marked Estonia as either more individualist (like this current study) or as more collectivist, like in Schwartz (1994).

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Appendix A

Participants ranking of good, mediocre and bad scores

The following tables summarize US, Estonian and Vietnamese samples' scoring of very good, mediocre and very bad grades respectively.

Table A1

US participants' scoring of a very good, mediocre and very bad grade (N = 123)

Grade	Very good score	Mediocre score	Very bad score
A	69.1%	2.4%	23.6%
B	4.1%	44.7%	4.1%
C	4.1%	50.4%	8.1%
D	9.8%	2.4%	24.4%
E	1.6%	0.0%	4.9%
F	11.4%	0.0%	35.0%

Table A2

Estonian participants' scoring of a very good, mediocre and very bad grade (N = 115)

Grade	Very good score	Mediocre score	Very bad score
5	93.0%	0.0%	0.0%
4	6.1%	49.6%	0.0%
3	0.9%	48.7%	7.8%
2	0.0%	1.7%	49.6%

1	0.0%	0.0%	42.6%
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Table A3*Vietnamese participants' scoring of a very good, mediocre and very bad grade (N = 168)*

Grade	Very good score	Mediocre score	Very bad score
10	56.5%	0.6%	0.0%
9	30.4%	8.3%	0.6%
8	10.7%	29.2%	1.2%
7	1.2%	35.7%	6.5%
6	0.6%	17.3%	23.2%
5	0.6%	7.7%	22.0%
4	0.0%	0.6%	14.3%
3	0.0%	0.6%	32.1%
2	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Appendix B

Participants' ranking of lexical choices

The following tables summarize the ranking of lexical choices in the second manipulation check for Estonian and Vietnamese respondents respectively. Due to the data collection occurring in batches, this manipulation check was only used in Vietnamese and Estonian samples.

Table B1

Estonian participants' ranking of lexical choices (N=115)

Rank	It went excellent	It went very good	It went good	It went okay	It went so-and-so	It went bad	It went very bad	I failed
1	68.7%	3.5%	2.6%	2.6%	5.2%	2.6%	7.0%	7.8%
2	6.1%	70.4%	4.3%	6.1%	6.1%	1.7%	3.5%	1.7%
3	8.7%	8.7%	74.8%	4.3%	0.9%	2.6%	0%	0%
4	9.6%	6.1%	4.3%	70.4%	8.7%	0.9%	0%	0%
5	1.7%	7.0%	9.6%	7.0%	64.3%	9.6%	0%	0.9%
6	0.0%	0.9%	3.5%	6.1%	7.0%	65.2%	11.3%	6.1%
7	0.9%	2.6%	0.9%	0%	3.5%	9.6%	61.7%	20.9%
8	4.3%	0.9%	0%	3.5%	4.3%	7.8%	16.5%	62.6%

Note. Rank 1 - best (expected answer: “*It went excellent*”), rank 8 - worst (expected answer: “*I failed*”); Percentages in bold represent the percentage of times the lexical choice was put in the position that was expected it would be put in; Sum of percentages in a column may exceed 100% due to rounding

Table B2

Vietnamese participants' ranking of lexical choices (N=168)

Rank	It went excellent	It went very good	It went good	It went okay	It went so-and-so	It went bad	It went very bad	I failed
1	67.3%	0.6%	1.2%	6.5%	6.0%	3.6%	3.6%	11.3%
2	3.6%	60.1%	7.7%	5.4%	4.8%	4.2%	9.5%	4.8%

3	4.8%	13.7%	60.1%	6.0%	4.8%	6.5%	2.4%	1.8%
4	5.4%	8.9%	9.5%	25.6%	41.7%	7.1%	0.6%	1.2%
5	10.7%	7.1%	7.1%	44.0%	26.8%	1.8%	1.2%	1.2%
6	0.6%	3.0%	10.7%	4.8%	3.6%	51.8%	20.8%	4.8%
7	1.2%	6.0%	1.8%	4.2%	2.4%	10.1%	48.2%	26.2%
8	6.5%	0.6%	1.8%	3.6%	10.1%	14.9%	13.7%	48.8%

Note. Rank 1 - best (expected answer: “*It went excellent*”), rank 8 - worst (expected answer: “*I failed*”); Percentages in bold represent the percentage of times the lexical choice was put in the position that was expected it would be put in; Sum of percentages in a column may exceed 100% due to rounding

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German Miller