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An Interlanguage Study of Request Perspective: Evidence from German, Greek, Polish and Russian Learners of English

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Abstract

The present study examines request perspective, the least researched form of mitigation in requesting, while focusing on a type of request characterized by a strong preference for speaker perspective in English and for hearer perspective in most other languages researched to date. It examines requests produced by 900 speakers from nine different (inter)language groups: five groups of native speakers (English, German, Greek, Polish and Russian) and four groups of advanced learners of English as a foreign language (German, Greek, Polish and Russian L1s).

While our learners used more conventionally indirect forms than did the native speakers of the respective L1s, showing awareness of this English pragmatic norm, they retained a preference for the hearer perspective. These results suggest reliance on pragmatic universals as an alternative explanation to pragmatic transfer, also illustrating the need to address less salient pragmatic features in English language teaching.

Keywords

request perspective – learners of English – German – Greek – Polish – Russian

1   Introduction

This paper contributes to the study of contrastive pragmatics by examining a pragmatic phenomenon, i.e. request perspective, from both a cross-cultural and interlanguage perspective.

Research in the field of interlanguage pragmatics has documented the pragmatic competence of language learners with a wide range of L1s and at different levels of proficiency. The focus has been mainly on the production of various speech acts, reflecting the learners' "ability to employ different linguistic formulae in an appropriate way when interacting in a particular social and cultural context" (Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2007: 349). This research is closely related to that conducted in cross-cultural pragmatics which, by establishing cross-linguistic differences, has revealed culture-specific pragmatic norms, and has thus enabled researchers to identify "aspects of L1 pragmatic behaviors and interactional practices that learners transfer to L2" (Taguchi and Roever, 2017: 6).

Unlike cross-cultural research, however, which often compares more than two languages, interlanguage pragmatic studies tend to focus on one L1, combining it with comparable interlanguage and target language data. Studies examining the pragmatic competence of learners from different L1 backgrounds (e.g. Bella, 2012a), on the other hand, usually do not include L1 data in their analyses. Accordingly, while the availability of L1 baseline data encourages interpretations of pragmatic transfer, i.e. the "use of L1 pragmatic knowledge to understand or carry out linguistic action in the L2" (Kasper, 1997a: 119), research involving learners with different L1s places greater emphasis on identifying deviations from the L2, while also providing some insight into general interlanguage pragmatic features.

This study examines five languages, English (the target language), German, Greek, Polish and Russian, and four interlanguages, those of German, Greek, Polish and Russian learners of English, which permits a more multifaceted interpretation of the results. It focuses on request perspective – as indexed by expressions such as *Can I borrow* vs. *Can you lend me* – the least studied and least salient feature of requesting, and one that, unlike conventionally indirect forms and politeness marking, has not received any attention in language instruction.

The study starts with a literature review collating and interpreting previous findings on request perspective derivable from cross-cultural and interlanguage request studies. The results section begins by outlining the preferences for in/direct request forms across the examined (inter)languages. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the distribution of hearer vs. speaker

perspective in the data, comparing: 1) the five L1s, 2) the four interlanguages with the target language, and 3) the interlanguages with their respective L1s. Drawing on Kasper's (1992) operational definition of pragmatic transfer, the discussion problematizes the interpretations of both negative and positive transfer and suggests alternative explanations. It also discusses the varying degrees of conventionalisation underlying the notion of in/directness vs. that of perspective in requesting. The conclusion completes the paper by discussing implications for English language teaching, language teacher education, and materials development.

2   Literature Review

Requests are not only highly ubiquitous but also the most extensively researched speech acts. They have been studied across multiple research areas, including cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics, but also conversation analysis, as well as language acquisition and socialization. The conceptualization of requests that has informed research in all these areas goes back to the taxonomy of illocutionary acts developed in pragmatic theory, where requests fall under the category of directives. Searle defines them as "attempts (…) by the speaker to get the hearer to do something" (1976: 11), which makes them beneficial to the former and costly to the latter. Similarly, in politeness theory, requests are regarded as acts that threaten the hearer's negative face, i.e. their right to non-distraction and freedom from imposition (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61).[1]

Research on requests conducted within contrastive pragmatics has primarily focused on request strategies, their level of directness and the different forms of internal and external modification affecting their illocutionary force (e.g. Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Weizman, 1993; Barron, 2003; Hassall, 2003; Ogiermann, 2009a; Schauer, 2009; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2012; Bella, 2012a; 2012b). Although relatively few studies have included request perspective in their analyses, its function is comparable to that of the level of directness and modification, as it can modify the force of a request (Blum-Kulka, 1991: 266). Specifically, requests can be hearer-oriented (*Can you*), thus foregrounding the hearer's role, or speaker-oriented (*Can I*), shifting the agency towards

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1   Although requests are generally viewed as acts threatening the hearer's negative face, it has been suggested that certain types of requests can also threaten their *positive* face (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008: 114) and even *enhance* the hearer's positive face (see e.g. Sifianou, 2010: 34; Turner, 1996: 4).

the speaker. Alternatively, requests can be phrased as inclusive (*Can we*) or as impersonal (*Can one*).

According to Blum-Kulka (1989: 58–59) these four perspectives "are often available to speakers within a single situation, though not necessarily for the same request strategy." Their choice is regarded as strategic since "avoidance to name the hearer as actor can reduce the form's level of coerciveness" (1989: 59). Similarly, Leech (1983: 134) argues that a request can be softened "by omission of reference to the cost to h", which makes a speaker-oriented request marginally more polite than a hearer-oriented one.

At the same time, Blum-Kulka argues that "languages may differ not only in their general preferences in choice of perspectives, but also in the conventionalization of perspectives within strategy types" (1989: 59), and there is a growing amount of evidence that the social implications of the different request perspectives vary across languages as well. It has, for instance, been argued that in Russian, speech acts formulated in the second person are generally more polite than those formulated in the first person as they acknowledge the role of the hearer (Rathmayr, 1996: 22). Similarly, the hearer perspective in Japanese has been interpreted as expressing the speaker's indebtedness, thus functioning as a mitigation device (Niki and Tajika, 1994: 121). In Greek, the use of the speaker perspective has been linked to formality (Sifianou, 1992: 142). According to Sifianou, the request form *μπορώ* (*can I*) is preferred "when the requested action is seen as beyond the socially acceptable duties of the addressee, or when a special ability for the performance of the request is involved" (1992: 144).

While requests have been studied extensively and their acquisition has been well documented (see Taguchi and Roever, 2017: 110–111 for an overview), relatively few request studies include perspective in their findings, and only one study has focused solely on request perspective (Niki and Tajika, 1994). Most of the relevant research has been conducted in the field of interlanguage pragmatics, primarily in the form of single moment studies (Blum-Kulka and Levenston, 1987; Niki and Tajika, 1994; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Woodfield, 2008; Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2012), although there are a few developmental (Ellis, 1992), predominantly cross-sectional (Pinto, 2005; Félix-Brasdefer, 2007; Lin, 2009) studies that mention request perspective as well. These interlanguage studies have provided some insight into learners' choices of perspective, in comparison with the perspectives preferred in the target language. Cross-cultural request studies (e.g. Blum-Kulka, 1989; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Ogiermann, 2009a), on the other hand, have illustrated the preferences for request perspective in various

languages, thus helping interpret the choices made by L2 learners with these L1 backgrounds.

In the following sections, we will first discuss the general preferences for request perspective in different languages and interlanguages, as documented in previous contrastive pragmatic research (2.1). And then we will look more closely at factors other than language that impact the choice of request perspective and narrow down the available evidence to the context which forms the focus of the present study, namely requests to borrow something (2.2).

2.1 (Inter)language-Specific Preferences for Hearer vs. Speaker Perspective

The cross-cultural research conducted to date has documented a marked preference for the hearer perspective in a wide range of languages. Blum-Kulka (1989) examined conventionally indirect requests in five DCT (Discourse Completion Task) scenarios and four languages: Australian English, Argentinian Spanish, Canadian French and Hebrew. She found that in all these languages, the majority of conventionally indirect requests were hearer-oriented, although the proportion of these requests ranged from 54.8% in Hebrew to 97.4% in Spanish, with English and French showing the strongest preference for speaker-oriented requests.

Márquez Reiter's (2000) role-play study, which compared 12 request situations in British English and Uruguayan Spanish, confirmed the overall preference for hearer-oriented, conventionally indirect requests in the tested situations, as well as the fact that this preference was considerably higher in Spanish (98% vs. 69.5%). Ogiermann's (2009a) DCT study compared the preferences for request perspective in English, German, Polish and Russian. She found that, unlike English and German, the two Slavic languages showed a marked preference for the hearer perspective. While 18% of the English and 35% of the German requests assumed the hearer perspective, in Polish, the hearer perspective accounted for 85%, and in Russian, for 96% of the data.[2]

Further evidence for the hearer perspective being particularly prominent in Spanish comes from Pinto's (2005) DCT study which provides both a cross-cultural and interlanguage perspective on requesting in Peninsular and

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2 Unlike Blum-Kulka's and Márquez Reiter's results, which only refer to conventionally indirect requests, Ogiermann's calculations are based on all requests in the data. The inclusion of all relevant data is likely to increase the discrepancies between English and other languages, given that imperatives are hearer-oriented and tend to be rare in the studied varieties of English (e.g. Blum-Kulka, 1989; Ogiermann, 2009a).

Mexican Spanish and American English in four different situations. A comparison of the native Spanish data with the requests produced by American learners of Spanish at four different levels of proficiency demonstrates that the learners move towards the target language norm as they become more proficient in Spanish. An increase in the use of hearer-oriented requests with increasing proficiency has also been observed in Félix-Brasdefer's (2007) study, which investigated the request production of three groups of American learners of Spanish in four role-play situations. Félix-Brasdefer observes that, while no major differences were found between the beginner and intermediate groups, advanced learners favoured the hearer over the speaker perspective when formulating requests.

Given the very clear preference for the hearer perspective in Spanish and the much higher preference for speaker-oriented requests in English, the aforementioned studies provide evidence of the transfer of speaker perspective in Spanish requests formulated by learners with English L1, which becomes less prominent with growing proficiency.

Interlanguage studies looking at learners of English with different L1 backgrounds have documented the reverse trend. As far as we are aware, there is only one observational developmental study that has examined request perspective (Ellis, 1992). This study took place in a classroom context, over a period of two years, and involved two beginner learners of English (Portuguese and Urdu L1s). The two learners relied heavily on the hearer perspective, particularly in the early stages of acquisition when they mainly used imperative constructions. The speaker perspective became more prominent as they acquired other types of requests, such as query preparatories and want statements, although the hearer perspective remained dominant.

All other interlanguage studies to have examined request perspective in L2 English rely on elicited data and, unlike the studies of L2 Spanish discussed above which follow a cross-sectional design, tend to take the form of single moment studies. All these studies illustrate a stronger preference for the hearer perspective in the learner data, when compared with L1 English data. Among the learner groups that have featured in previous research are German and Greek learners of English, i.e. two of the learner groups involved in the present study. Working with a small sample of 12 British English students and 12 advanced learners of English (six Japanese and six German native speakers), Woodfield (2008) elicited requests by means of a DCT consisting of 18 scenarios. She reported an overall preference for the hearer perspective in both learner groups, while the English native speakers employed both hearer and speaker perspectives equally.

These findings were corroborated in a joint study with Economidou-Kogetsidis (Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010) where requests produced in one of the scenarios (a student's request for an extension) were complemented with data from Cypriot Greek ESL learners. In this particular request situation, both the native speakers and the learners showed a preference for the speaker perspective. At the same time, the learners opted for the hearer perspective significantly more frequently, and for the impersonal perspective significantly less frequently, than the native English speakers.[3]

Similarly, in another follow-up study (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2012), which compared the requests made by 14 Cypriot Greek intermediate EFL learners with those of 16 (American) English native speakers in five role-played request scenarios, it was found that although the speaker perspective prevailed in both the learner and native speaker data, the learners used significantly fewer speaker-oriented requests and significantly more hearer-oriented ones than the native English speakers.

A slightly different picture emerges from Lin's (2009) study, in which she employed a 20-item DCT to compare the use of query preparatory modals (such as *can*) by Chinese and English native speakers, as well as by two groups of Chinese EFL learners at different levels of proficiency. Lin found that although all four groups showed a preference for the hearer perspective (with the English native speakers using it least often), the two learner groups used this perspective significantly more often than the English *and* the Chinese native speakers (a finding which we will return to later).

2.2   *Context-Specific Preferences for Hearer vs. Speaker Perspective*

Overall, the above discussed contrastive studies have shown that 1) English speakers show a stronger preference for speaker-oriented requests than speakers of other languages, 2) they retain this perspective when learning to speak Spanish until an advanced level of proficiency is attained, and that 3) learners of English tend to rely more heavily on the hearer perspective than native English speakers.

While these general tendencies provide a very clear picture, there are some limitations on the comparability of the surveyed studies, one such limitation being that some studies provide the frequencies for all the requests found in the data, while others limit their discussions to conventionally indirect requests or

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3   The authors further note that the high frequency of speaker perspective in the learner data was a result of the extensive use of need and want statements by these learners, a finding that would not have emerged if the focus had been solely on conventionally indirect requests.

even query preparatory modals (see footnotes 2 and 3). What further restricts comparability across studies is that most of them report the frequencies of pooled data for a range of request situations, without taking into account the constraints that these situations may place on the choice of perspective.

This issue has been systematically addressed in studies which have examined email requests, such as the recent paper by Sell and Haggerty (2019) which looked at company-internal email exchanges in an ELF context. The authors report significant differences between the request perspective that was adopted for requests for information (essentially questions) and requests for action. While the former were mainly formulated in an impersonal way (71.19%), more than half of the latter (52%) adopted the hearer perspective. Biesenbach-Lucas' (2007) study, on the other hand, examined the perspective of email requests to faculty in a corpus of emails written by native speakers and non-native speakers of English from different Asian backgrounds. Biesenbach-Lucas established that, in her data, requests for an appointment tended to assume the inclusive perspective, requests for feedback the hearer, and requests for an extension the speaker perspective. At the same time, her findings show that non-native speakers used the hearer perspective more often than native speakers across all types of requests.

A closer look at Lin's (2009) study, which established an increased preference for the hearer perspective in the learner data, shows that this tendency goes back to the learners' heavy reliance on this perspective in four of the 20 tested situations, all of which involved borrowing an object. Niki and Tajika's (1994) study, which compared native English speakers to intermediate level Japanese learners of English, focused specifically on requests involving the verbs *lend* and *borrow*, which automatically encode the hearer and speaker perspectives. Unlike previous studies, theirs distinguished between 'requesting', which included imperatives and other requests with the hearer perspective, and 'asking for permission', represented by formulations with the speaker perspective. While the native English speakers preferred the 'asking for permission' strategy, the Japanese learners relied more on the hearer perspective, which the authors viewed as emphasizing the speaker's indebtedness, making the request more polite.

Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1987) discuss the use of request perspective by native speakers and English learners of Hebrew, and while the main finding of their study is an over-reliance on impersonal requests by the learners, the highest percentage of speaker-oriented requests in the learner data was observed in the 'Notes scenario' (in which the speaker asks the hearer for the notes of a lecture s/he has missed). Pinto (2005), who studied English learners of Spanish, also took a closer look at the situations which elicited requests for

objects in his data and described the 'Notes scenario' as "a prominent case of negative transfer" (2005: 11). It was in this situation that even advanced learners transferred their native preference for speaker-oriented requests while native Spanish speakers did not use this strategy at all.

Overall, it seems that the greatest discrepancies between learners and native speakers of English in their use of perspective appear in situations which involve borrowing objects,[4] such as lecture notes, that belong to the hearer and are handed by the hearer to the speaker. Unlike in all other studied languages, in English this process of obtaining an object involves asking for permission (*Can I*), rather than asking the hearer to provide them with the required object (*Can you*).

The 'Notes scenario' has featured in many cross-cultural and interlanguage studies (see Ogiermann, 2009a: 196 for an overview). The present study builds on Ogiermann's (2009a) cross-cultural study which showed a marked preference for the hearer perspective in Polish and Russian (with English and German favouring the speaker perspective) in the 'Notes scenario'. The present paper extends the cross-cultural comparison to include Greek, while focusing primarily on the interlanguage data. By examining as many as four interlanguages, namely those of German, Polish, Russian and Greek learners of English, we hope to provide a broader perspective on pragmatic transfer and other pragmatic interlanguage phenomena.

3   Method

3.1   *Discourse Completion Tasks*

The little that we know about request perspective is derived primarily from data that has been elicited by means of DCTs (Blum-Kulka and Levenston, 1987; Blum-Kulka, 1989; Niki and Tajika, 1994; Pinto, 2005; Woodfield, 2008; Lin, 2009; Ogiermann, 2009a; Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010) and role plays (Márquez Reiter, 2000; Félix-Brasdefer, 2007; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2012). The reliance on experimentally elicited data when studying request perspective is not surprising, given that systematic preferences for request perspective only become apparent when large amounts of comparable data are

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4   It is worth noting that the types of requests for objects that have been examined in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics differ from those featuring in recent conversational analytic work (e.g. Zinken and Ogiermann, 2013; Mandelbaum, 2014). While CA studies have mainly examined requests for immediate action, such as requests for objects to be passed (e.g. at the dinner table), contrastive pragmatic studies have looked at future-oriented requests with a higher imposition, involving personal objects that need to be returned.

examined. And it is exactly its ability to reveal general patterns in language use that makes the DCT the most commonly used data collection method in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics.

At the same time, it should be borne in mind that DCT data differ from naturally occurring speech.[5] One of the disadvantages frequently reported in the literature is that DCTs elicit written, one turn responses, which cannot convey prosody or body language, and which are isolated from their sequential environment (e.g. Golato, 2003: 110–111). Although DCTs cannot be used to study all aspects of social interaction, they are perfectly suitable for studies like the current one, which focuses on just one aspect of the request head act across nine speaker groups. In fact, a review of studies comparing DCT responses with naturally occurring speech and data elicited by other methods (Ogiermann, 2018: 242–244) has shown that although these data collection methods vary in many ways, they do elicit the same range of semantic formulae used to implement speech act head acts.

Another way in which DCTs differ from naturally occurring talk is that their experimental design involves accessing available pragmatic knowledge rather than using it (Barron, 2003: 85). Since DCT responses represent "a participant's accumulated experience within a given setting" (Golato, 2003: 92), one could argue that a high degree of agreement among participants regarding the use of particular speech act features reflects what is regarded as socially and culturally appropriate in a given speech community (Ogiermann, 2018: 233).

3.2   *Participants*

Unlike previous interlanguage research drawing on L1 data, which typically focused on one group of learners (occasionally at different levels of proficiency), this study involves nine different speaker groups, including five L1s and learners of English with four different language backgrounds. Each group comprises 100 participants, all university students. The five native speaker groups include speakers of British English (the target language), German, Standard Modern Greek, Polish, and Russian. The four learner groups consist of German, Greek, Polish and Russian students of English Philology,[6] study-

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5   There is even some evidence that English speakers might prefer the hearer perspective in naturally occurring speech, as opposed to DCT data, as demonstrated by Economidou-Kogetsidis' (2013) study of a service encounter situation. It still needs to be shown how request perspective plays out sequentially, in particular when the request is produced in response to initiating turns such as "How can I help?" or "What can I do for you?", as they occur in service encounters, but also in relation to pre- and re-requests.

6   The L1 data were collected at Cardiff University, Swansea University, Middlesex University, University of Oldenburg, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, University of

ing to be teachers of English. Therefore, they were considered to be advanced learners of English (B2 or higher).

The present study thus examines data from a total of 900 speakers, with each participant producing a request to borrow lecture notes, in response to the scenario: "You got ill and cannot attend an important lecture. You ring up a fellow student to ask if you can copy his notes". This scenario was taken from a 10-item DCT which was designed to elicit apologies, complaints and requests (Ogiermann 2009b). The focus of our analysis is on request perspective in a type of request (borrowing objects) that previous research has identified as being particularly problematic for language learners.

4 Results

This section first examines the native speakers' and learners' preferences for direct vs. indirect requests (4.1). After clarifying the criteria underlying the analysis of perspective (4.2), it then compares the five L1s (4.2.1), the four interlanguages with the target language (4.2.2), and the interlanguages with their respective L1s (4.2.3).

4.1 *In/directness*
The analysis focuses on head acts, i.e. the core component of a request. The 900 requests were coded according to two (related) criteria: level of directness and request perspective. Regarding the former, all groups showed a strong preference for conventionally indirect requests, represented by various interrogative constructions (including embedded ones, as in the English example below):

I was wondering if I could borrow your
   notes to look at.

Darf ich mir deine Notizen kopieren?   *May I copy your notes?*

Θα μπορούσα να δανειστώ τις σημειώσεις σου? *Could I borrow your notes?*

Możesz mi pożyczyć notatki z ostatniego   *Can you lend me the notes from*
   wykładu?   *the last lecture?*

Не одолжишь мне свои конспекты?   *Won't you lend me your notes?*

Wrocław, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and Moscow State University. The L2 data were collected at the University of Oldenburg, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, University of Silesia in Katowice and Moscow State University.

As interrogative constructions are a syntactic category, research in cross-cultural pragmatics has linked them to a pragmatic category called query preparatory. Query preparatory requests refer to the preparatory conditions[7] of a request concerning the hearer's ability to perform it, i.e. that "*H is able to do A. S believes H is able to do A*" (Searle, 1969: 66), extended to include expressions referring to willingness and possibility (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989a: 18; 1989b: 280).

The second most frequent, although considerably less prominent, head act realisation found in the data is the imperative, a syntactic format conventionally associated with the illocutionary force of a (direct) request.

Get the notes for me mate.

Bring mir mal eben die Notizen vorbei. *Bring me the notes.*

Στείλε μου σημειώσεις. *Send me notes.*

Pożycz mi swoje notatki. *Lend me your notes.*

Дай мне переписать свои конспекты. *Let me copy your notes.*

TABLE 1   Imperatives vs. interrogatives across languages (NSs) and interlanguages (NNSs)

		English	German	Greek	Polish	Russian
NSs	Imperative	4	5	11	20	35
	Interrogative	97	88	86	75	65
	Other	/	8	3	6	/
	TOTAL	*101*	*101*	*100*	*101*	*100*
NNSs	Imperative		3	10	1	10
	Interrogative		92	87	92	84
	Other		5	3	7	6
	TOTAL		*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*

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7   Preparatory conditions are part of a set of felicity conditions necessary for the successful performance of a speech act. The full felicity conditions for the speech act of requesting run as follows (Searle, 1969: 66):
    Propositional content: Future act *A* of *H.*
    Preparatory condition:
    1. *H* is able to do *A*. *S* believes *H* is able to do *A*.
    2. It is not obvious to both *S* and *H* that *H* will do *A* in the normal course of events of his own accord.
    Sincerity condition: *S* wants *H* to do *A*.
    Essential condition: Counts as an attempt to get *H* to do *A*.

As table 1 illustrates, imperatives are more popular among speakers of Polish and Russian than they are among English and German speakers (see Ogiermann, 2009a), with the Greek speakers' choices being closer to the two Germanic languages than the Slavic ones. While there are no statistically significant differences between English and German, and English and Greek respectively, the differences between English and Polish (χ^2 (df= 1, N= 200)=10.67, p<0.0022*) and English and Russian (χ^2 (df= 1, N= 200)=24.64, p<0.001*) do reach statistical significance (see footnote 9).

At the same time, all language groups show a marked preference for interrogative constructions. Given the relatively strong preference for these indirect requests in both Greek and German, the choices of Greek and German learners resemble those made in their respective native languages, with only a slight increase in the use of interrogatives. The Polish and Russian learners' requests, on the other hand, show a greater increase in the use of this indirect strategy. Although none of the increases is statistically significant, it can be argued that all learner groups succeed in approximating the choices of the native speakers of English, which reflects their awareness of the pragmatic requirements regarding indirectness in English.

4.2   *Request Perspective*

The choice of the level of directness has a direct impact on the request perspective, which forms the focus of the current study. While imperatives automatically take the hearer perspective, indirect requests can take a range of different perspectives: hearer, speaker, inclusive or impersonal.

There are no instances of the inclusive perspective in the data, and the impersonal perspective is typically realised by expressions which include the adjective *possible*. However, depending on the verb with which it is combined, the perspective can shift towards the speaker's (compare: *Is it possible to copy?* vs. *Is it possible to borrow?* – see also Blum-Kulka and Levenston, 1987: 160). The hearer and speaker perspectives prevail in the present data, thus foregrounding either the speaker or the hearer as the agent of the required action. Most commonly, this occurs in interrogative clauses containing the modal verb *can*, which account for 77% (319 of 411) of all the indirect requests in the native data.

According to the figures in table 2, Polish (48 / 84%), Greek (64 / 89%) and Russian (46 / 92%) show a clear preference for the hearer perspective in requests with the modal verb *can*. In fact, the Russian data do not contain any requests equivalent to the English *Can I* (я могу) or *Could I* (я мог бы). The form можно is an impersonal construction that, through the addition of

TABLE 2   Speaker vs. hearer perspective in requests with the modal verb *can* across
languages

| English		German		Greek		Polish		Russian	
can I	45	kann ich	32	μπορώ	5	mogę	4	(можно я)	4
could I	15	könnte ich	14	θα μπορούσα	3	mógłbym	5		/
can you	10	kannst du	16	μπορείς	34	możesz	14	можешь	5
could you	3	könntest du	5	θα μπορούσες	30	mógłbyś	34	ты не мог бы	41
	73		67		72		57		50

the first-person pronoun *I* (я) results in an expression that translates as *Is it
possible for me*, thus shifting the perspective from impersonal to the speaker's.
English and German, on the other hand, rely predominantly on the speaker
perspective, with only 13 (18%) of the English and 21 (31%) of the German *can*
constructions adopting the hearer perspective.

While head acts with the modal verb *can* may be used to encode either the
hearer or speaker perspective (as in *Can I borrow* vs. *Can you lend*), other modal
verbs dictate the use of one of the perspectives (as do other syntactic con-
structions, such as imperatives). Head acts containing the modal verb *will*,[8]
for instance, inevitably express the hearer's perspective (*Will you lend me*) and
may the speaker's (*May I borrow*). Yet, whether the request contains an expres-
sion referring to ability, allowing for both perspectives, or another request
construction which entails a specific perspective, it is ultimately the speaker
who chooses a particular formulation and the perspective it entails, thus either
emphasising or minimising the role of the hearer in carrying out the requested
action. Therefore, we have decided against limiting our analysis to expressions
containing the verb *can* or indirect requests (as is the case in the majority of
previous studies) and, in what follows, will analyse all speaker- and hearer-
oriented requests found in the data.

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8   While the English modal verb *will* denotes willingness (which is viewed, along with ability
and possibility, as a preparatory condition for the successful performance of a request), this
function is expressed differently in the other languages analysed in the present study. Rather
than using a modal verb, Greek and German use the present indicative, and Russian and
Polish the perfective aspect.

4.2.1   Request Perspective across Languages
Of the 500 requests produced by the native speakers of the five languages
under investigation, 320 were formulated from the hearer's and 159 from the
speaker's perspective, with the remaining 21 requests adopting the impersonal
perspective. Although the hearer perspective is dominant overall, a compari-
son of the preferences for the hearer vs. speaker perspectives across languages
reveals very clear language-specific preferences.
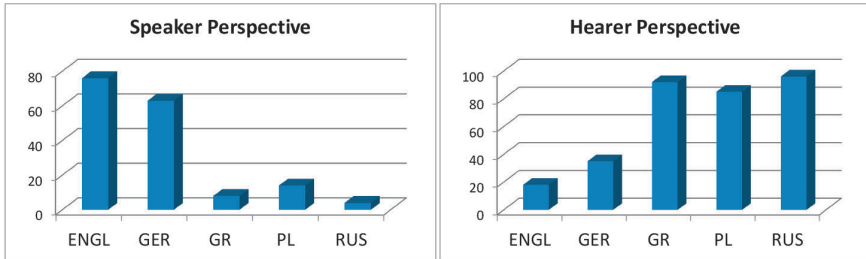
DIAGRAMS 1A & 1B   Speaker vs. hearer perspective across native language groups

As diagrams 1a and 1b illustrate, the English speakers show a strong preference
for the speaker perspective, while Polish, Greek and Russian speakers clearly
prefer the hearer perspective. The choices made by German speakers are
more in keeping with those found in the English data, creating a division
between English and German, on the one hand, and Greek, Polish and Russian,
on the other (the exact frequencies are provided in table 3 below). This distri-
bution resembles that of the direct vs. indirect forms discussed above, although
the cross-linguistic differences are even greater.

   Since an initial chi-square test of independence confirmed the differences
across languages and perspectives to be highly significant (χ^2 (df= 8, N= 500)=
232.05, p<0.000*, Cramer's v= 0.4803), and since we were interested in learn-
ing more about the differences between the target language, i.e. English, on
the one hand, and each of the native languages of our English learners, on the
other, we performed eight separate chi-square of goodness of fit tests[9] for each
of the language pairs and the speaker and hearer perspectives, respectively.

9   Given that speech act data are classified as nominal data, the chi-square test is commonly
    used in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics (see Ogiermann and Saβenroth, 2012).
    In request studies, it is typically used to compare different levels of directness, and the
    goodness of fit test has been specifically used in the context of request perspective (e.g.
    Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2012). In the present study, the calculated value of chi-square (for
    df=1) has been corrected for continuity.

TABLE 3   Perspective: English native speakers vs. other native speaker groups

	ENG vs. GER		ENG vs. GR		ENG vs. PL		ENG vs. RUS	
Speaker Perspective	76	63	76	8	76	14	76	4
		$\chi^2=1.04$		$\chi^2=53.44$		$\chi^2=41.34$		$\chi^2=63.02$
Chi-square		df=1		df=1		df=1		df=1
		$p= .308$		$p= .000^*$		$p= .000^*$		$p= .000^*$
Hearer Perspective	18	35	18	92	18	85	18	96
		$\chi^2=4.84$		$\chi^2=48.44$		$\chi^2=42.3$		$\chi^2=52$
Chi-square		df=1		df=1		df=1		df=1
		$p= .028$		$p= .000^*$		$p= .000^*$		$p= .000^*$

$p<.01^*$

The goodness of fit test confirmed the differences between English and Greek, English and Polish, and English and Russian to be highly statistically significant for both speaker and hearer perspectives. The differences between English and German, however, have proven not to be statistically significant.

4.2.2   Request Perspective: English vs. Learner Groups
The second step in our analysis was to compare the performance of the learners with the choices made by the native English speakers. Compared to the requests produced by native speakers of German, Greek, Polish and Russian (see diagram 1a), the four learner groups have considerably increased their use of the speaker perspective (84 vs. 142 overall), thereby reducing their use of hearer perspective and moving closer towards the target language norm.
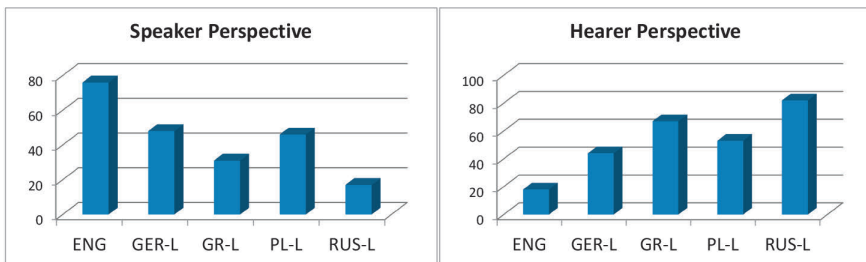
DIAGRAMS 2A & 2B   Speaker vs. hearer perspective: English vs. learner groups

A comparison of diagrams 1a and 2a illustrates the increased use of speaker perspective by speakers of the two Slavic languages and Greek when speaking English. At the same time, diagram 2b shows that the hearer perspective is still considerably more frequent in the learner data than it is in English. The Russian learners of English used it nearly 5 times as often as the native speakers of English, the Greek learners nearly 4 times as often, and the Polish learners of English more than 3 times as often.

TABLE 4   Perspective: English native speakers vs. the four learner groups

	ENG vs. GER-L		ENG vs. GR-L		ENG vs. PL-L		ENG vs. RUS-L	
Speaker Perspective	76	48	76	31	76	46	76	17
		$\chi^2=5.88$		$\chi^2=18.1$		$\chi^2=6.9$		$\chi^2=36.18$
Chi-square		df=1		df=1		df=1		df=1
		$p=.015$		$p=.000^*$		$p=.008^*$		$p=.000^*$
Hearer Perspective	18	44	18	67	18	53	18	82
		$\chi^2=10.08$		$\chi^2=27.1$		$\chi^2=16.28$		$\chi^2=39.7$
Chi-square		df=1		df=1		df=1		df=1
		$p=.001^*$		$p=.000^*$		$p=.000^*$		$p=.000^*$

$p<.01^*$

The chi-square goodness of fit tests we performed confirm that the differences between each of these three interlanguages and native English are statistically significant. While the same is true for the difference in the use of hearer perspective between German learners and native English speakers, with German learners using it more than twice as often as native English speakers, the difference in the use of speaker perspective does not reach statistical significance at $p<.01$. In other words, while there were no significant differences in the use of perspective between German and English native speakers (see table 3), such differences do materialise when the speakers of German speak English. This shows that the German learners of English move away from the target norm – and, potentially, from their L1 norm.

4.2.3   Request Perspective: Native vs. Learner Groups

The final comparisons that are needed to complete our analysis then are those between each of the native languages and the interlanguages of the speakers of these languages.

TABLE 5   Perspective: learner groups vs. their native counterparts

	GER vs. GER-L		GR vs. GR-L		PL vs. PL-L		RUS vs. RUS-L	
Speaker Perspective	63	48	8	31	14	46	4	17
		χ^2=1.76		χ^2=12.42		χ^2=16.02		χ^2=6.86
Chi-square		df=1		df=1		df=1		df=1
		p=.185		p= .000*		p= .000*		p=.009*
Hearer Perspective	35	44	92	67	85	53	96	82
		χ^2=0.82		χ^2=3.62		χ^2=6.96		χ^2=0.94
Chi-square		df=1		df=1		df=1		df=1
		p=.365		p=.057		p= .008*		p= .332

p<.01*

As table 5 illustrates, the differences between the Polish native and learner groups are statistically significant for both hearer and speaker perspectives, showing a clear departure from the L1 towards the target norms. Likewise, the Greek and Russian data also exhibit statistically significant differences, albeit only in the use of speaker perspective, which becomes more prominent in the respective interlanguages. While this could be interpreted as an approximation towards L2 norms, the differences in the use of the hearer perspective are not sufficiently significant to be interpreted as a departure from L1 norms.

The differences between the native Germans and German learners of English, in contrast, are not statistically significant. This finding seems to be in line with the fact that no statistically significant differences were found between English and German native speakers (see table 3), i.e. the pragmatic choices are similar in the two languages and, hence, also in the interlanguage. However, such reasoning does not account for the significant difference in the use of the hearer perspective between native English speakers and German learners of English (table 4).

What also needs to be taken into consideration is that while the statistical tests we have performed show whether the differences between the native and learner groups are significant, they will do so irrespective of whether these differences are due to an increase or a decrease in the use of target norms. The Greek, Polish and Russian learners of English used the speaker perspective more often and the hearer perspective less often than they did in their native languages, thus approximating the target norms. The German learners, however, used fewer instances of speaker and more of hearer perspective when

speaking English than when speaking their native language. In so doing, they not only moved away from the target norm, but also from the preferred request perspective in their own language.

5   Discussion

The above analysis has established that the five languages under study differ significantly in their preferences for hearer vs. speaker perspective. It has also shown that, overall, the choices made by the four learner groups differ from those made in their respective L1s and from those made by the native speakers of the target language. With the exception of German learners of English, the learners' choices of request perspective moved closer to the preferences of the native English speakers, compared to the preferences in their respective L1s. Yet, all four interlanguages still differed significantly from the target language norms, suggesting that the learners may be transferring their preferred request perspective from their L1.

Pragmatic transfer is, admittedly, difficult to attest in the type of quantitative data analysed here. After all, both request perspectives exist in each of the examined languages and, in many situations, they are used interchangeably. At the same time, transfer has been shown to result in both avoidance and overuse of certain forms (Ellis, 1994: 29), and a heavy reliance on a request perspective not favoured in the L2 in a given situation could result in pragmatic failure.

Kasper (1992) offers an operational definition of negative transfer, according to which it occurs when there are "statistically significant differences in the frequencies of a pragmatic feature between IL-L2 and L1-L2" and there is a "lack of statistically significant differences between IL and L1" (1992: 24). The first criterion, i.e. statistically significant differences between IL and L2 and between L1 and L2 is met in the Greek, Polish and Russian data. The second criterion i.e. the lack of statistical differences between IL and L1, applies to the German, Greek and Russian data, although in the case of the latter two languages, only to the hearer perspective.

According to Kasper's formula then, there is negative transfer in the Greek and Russian data, albeit only in the case of the hearer perspective. The fact that the Russian data did not contain any speaker-oriented requests with the modal verb *can* (Ogiermann, 2009a: 199) supports such an interpretation. The differences in the Polish data are statistically significant across all three comparisons. The Polish learners still use considerably fewer requests with the speaker perspective than English native speakers, but in comparison with

the native Polish data, their use increases to such an extent that the differences between their choices in the L1 and IL become statistically significant. Hence, although Kasper's formula does not apply to the Polish data, their distribution mirrors that of the Greek and Russian data.

The German data, on the other hand, follow a different pattern. Unlike Greek, Polish and Russian, German exhibits a preference for the speaker perspective in the request situation examined. This similarity between German and English could be viewed as facilitative of positive transfer which, according to Kasper, occurs when there is a "lack of statistically significant differences in the frequencies of a pragmatic feature in L1, L2 and IL" (1992:24). In the case of the German data, these conditions are fulfilled in the case of the speaker but not the hearer perspective, as the German learners of English use the hearer perspective significantly more frequently than the native speakers of English, i.e. there is a statistically significant difference between L2 and IL. Importantly, this difference is statistically significant (unlike the differences between German and English native speakers) because the number of requests with the hearer perspective increases in the learner data, thus moving away from both the L1 and the L2 norms.

A general trend emerging from the learner data is that although the learners relied more on conventionally indirect requests and significantly decreased their use of imperatives compared to their respective L1s (from 71 to 24), thus displaying awareness of the role that indirectness plays in English requests, they still showed a marked preference for the hearer perspective. The prevalence of the hearer perspective in the learner data is in line with previous research, and demonstrates that even fairly advanced learners of English rely heavily on the hearer perspective (e.g. Ellis, 1992; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Woodfield, 2008; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2012), and especially so in situations involving the borrowing of objects (Niki and Tajika, 1994; Lin, 2009). In Lin's (2009) study, Chinese learners of English used hearer-oriented requests not only more frequently than native English speakers, but also considerably more often than native Chinese speakers – a distribution mirroring that found in our German data.

Lin points out that requests are, by definition, hearer-oriented; their function, as defined by Searle and reflected in the felicity conditions for the speech act of requesting (see footnote 7), is to get the *hearer* to do something (2009: 1651). The felicity conditions portray the request as an act that is accomplished by the hearer (propositional content), with the role of the speaker being confined to merely *wanting* the hearer to do A (sincerity condition) and *attempting* to get the hearer to do A (essential condition). Given that the felicity conditions reinforce the agency of the hearer in accomplishing the request, the

preference for speaker-oriented requests in English constitutes a deviation from the constitutive rules established by traditional speech act theory. This deviation has undergone a process of conventionalisation as a form of mitigation in the English language, comparable to the evolution of indirect speech acts, where a grammatical form associated with a specific illocutionary force, such as asking, is used to render another illocutionary force, such as that underlying directive speech acts.

Unlike request perspective, indirect speech acts have been dealt with extensively in both speech act theory (e.g. Searle, 1975) and empirical research. In addition to research conducted in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics, studies in historical pragmatics have traced the development of indirect request forms such as "*Can you X*" in English (Culpeper and Demmen, 2011). This interrogative format, enquiring about the hearer's ability to perform a task, emerged as a request form during the 19th century, although it continued to be used with an ambiguous requestive force, expressing "some uncertainty over the addressee's ability to comply" (2011: 70) throughout the century. Over time, "the requestive implications of can you X have become strengthened so that today it is interpreted by default as a standard request and not an enquiry about an addressee's ability: it is conventionally indirect" (2011: 61). A corpus study of Russian requests (Berger, 1997) has demonstrated that the use of the modal verb *мочь* (*can*) in requests is a fairly new development in Russian as well. In fact, the use of constructions questioning the hearer's ability to do something (hence query preparatory) to perform requests has been documented in a wide range of languages, where they appear to have undergone a similar process of conventionalisation.

In/directness in requesting has been conceptualised as being indicative of optionality for the hearer (Leech, 1983: 108), and the difference between direct and indirect requests has been linked to the "degree to which the speaker assumes control over the recipient's actions, or the recipient retains autonomy over their own conduct." (Kent, 2012: 712). The basic claim that politeness constitutes the "chief motivation for indirectness" (Searle, 1975: 64), reflected in the markedly negative attitude towards the use of imperative constructions in English, has implications for language pedagogy and, indeed, has received due attention in that field.

The use of the first person to reduce the imposition inherent in a request, in contrast, largely remains below the level of consciousness for both lay speakers and language educators. Yet, they function in similar ways: While the format *Can you X* enquires after the hearer's ability to perform a task (and was used with that meaning when it first emerged in requestive contexts), the primary illocutionary force of the expression *Can I X* (as well as *May I X*) is

that of a request for permission. Grammatically, they are both polar questions which require a yes or no answer. Pragmatically, they function as requests for action.[10]

Research to date tends to view request perspective as a form of mitigation, an optional element comparable to internal and external modification. Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989b) classical framework places both *Can I* and *Can you*, as well as other request formulations, in their broad category of preparatory, where "the speaker questions rather than states the presence of the chosen preparatory condition" (1989b: 280). The hearer and speaker perspectives could, however, be seen as representing two different request categories or even different speech act categories, requesting and asking for permission, as suggested by Niki and Tajika (1994).

According to Gordon and Ervin-Tripp (1984), "true permission requests imply that the addressee has control over the speaker, and that the speaker's wishes are subject to the hearer's approval" so that "borrowing the social implications of a permission request in asking for something is a very marked way of avoiding the appearance of trying to control or impose on another" (Gordon and Ervin Tripp, 1984: 308, cited in Blum-Kulka, 1989: 60). Both the use of indirect forms in general, and speaker-oriented query preparatories in particular, fit with the (British) English conceptualisation of politeness, which is avoidance based. This stands in stark contrast to understandings of politeness based on values such as directness, explicitness and honesty (e.g. House, 2005: 21; Ogiermann, 2009a: 191–192). Similarly, the use of the first person in requesting may go against the need to acknowledge the speaker's indebtedness in making a request, as has been suggested for languages such as Japanese or Russian (Niki & Tajika, 1994; Rathmayr, 1996).

It would appear that the use of speaker perspective as a form of mitigation tends to remain unnoticed by learners of English, not only because it is less salient, even among native speakers of English, but also because it is less common in languages other than English. Although some languages still rely more heavily on imperatives than English, indirect requests are now fully conventionalised in a wide range of languages. The scarce research that has been conducted to date on request perspective, in contrast, has shown that this feature of requesting is less (or not at all) conventionalised in languages other than English. A consistent preference for the hearer perspective has

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10   This discrepancy between grammatical forms and pragmatic functions illustrates the problematic nature of traditional speech act theory. Searle postulates that primary and secondary illocutionary forces co-exist, arguing that "responses that are appropriate to their literal utterances are appropriate to their indirect speech act utterances" (1975: 70).

been best documented for Spanish (Blum-Kulka, 1989; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Pinto, 2005), but has also been confirmed for other languages, such as Russian (Ogiermann, 2009a).

It seems that while asking instead of telling people to do something has become an intuitive choice for speakers of many languages, rendering an action to be performed by the hearer as something speaker-oriented does not come naturally to English learners. This brings us back to our German learners of English who – unlike English learners of Spanish, who have been shown to transfer their preference for the speaker-oriented perspective when they speak Spanish – were more reluctant to use this request perspective when speaking English than when they were speaking German, even though it would have resulted in positive transfer.

As Kasper (1997b) points out, learners often take their transferable L1 pragmatic knowledge for granted. In order for positive transfer to occur, learners need to be aware of the similarities between their native and the target language, and request perspective is not something that speakers reflect upon. The relatively strong preference for the hearer perspective in our learner data, irrespective of L1, could go back to the common sense understanding of the function of requests as involving an action to be performed by the hearer. Incidentally, the felicity conditions for the speech act of requesting, which foreground the hearer as the agent of the requested action, have been said to refer "to mental states and attitudes" (Sbisà, 2013: 45), functioning below the level of consciousness. Given the uncertainty about the transferability of phenomena that are less salient, and a tendency towards literalness and explicitness which characterises interlanguages (Kasper, 1997b), it seems that the majority of our learners opted for what can be regarded as the default request perspective.

One question that still remains to be answered is why English speakers do not revert to this default perspective when speaking Spanish. One possible explanation is that this type of request, being much more conventionalised in English than in German, has become the default option for British speakers, particularly in borrowing contexts (see Pinto, 2005) – and that, for these speakers, considerations of politeness outweigh those of clarity (as suggested by the theoretical accounts of politeness proposed by Anglo-Saxon researchers). Another difference that has been established between English and German communicative styles, and that may be relevant here, is that speakers of German tend to use more *ad hoc* formulations, individually tailored towards the communicative context at hand, while speakers of British English rely heavily on recurrent, formulaic realisations (House, 2005).

6   Conclusions

This study has discussed request perspective, the least researched form of mitigation in requesting – and one that remains unnoticed in the context of English language teaching. It has focused on a type of request characterized by a strong preference for the speaker perspective in English and for the hearer perspective in most other languages researched to date. The hearer perspective has also been found to prevail in requests produced by learners of English, which strongly suggests that learners tend to transfer their preferred perspective into the target language.

Unlike previous interlanguage pragmatic studies which have discussed request perspective, the present study has examined several native languages and interlanguages, thus enabling us to provide a more comprehensive perspective on this phenomenon. Our analysis has shown that while English and German relied predominantly on the speaker perspective, Greek, Polish and Russian showed a marked preference for the hearer perspective. The four interlanguages all differed from their respective L1s: The Greek, Polish and Russian learners of English relied more heavily on speaker-oriented requests than in their respective L1s, thus approximating the target norms, while the German learners increased their use of hearer-oriented requests.

However, the shift towards the speaker perspective in the Greek and Russian interlanguages was not statistically significant. The relatively strong reliance on hearer perspective in these interlanguages was, therefore, interpreted as negative transfer. The choice of request perspective by the Polish learners of English, in contrast, differed significantly from both the L1 Polish and L1 English, with the significant increase in speaker perspective in the learner data precluding an interpretation in terms of transfer. The most unexpected finding, however, was the significant increase of the hearer perspective in the German data, which led away from both the native and the target language preferences, creating a statistically significant difference between the IL and L2.

While these findings do not permit a uniform explanation in terms of pragmatic transfer, what all four interlanguages do have in common is a marked preference for the hearer perspective, resulting in statistically significant differences between each of them and English. We have therefore considered an alternative explanation accounting for all the learner data, namely an underlying conceptualisation of the requested action as something to be done by the hearer. An awareness of what appears to be a pragmatic universal not only accounts for the learners' choice of request perspective, but is also in keeping with the general preference for explicitness which is characteristic of interlanguages.

While an analysis across several interlanguages has enabled us to go beyond the commonly offered interpretation of negative transfer, our findings remain tentative as they rely exclusively on performance data. As Takahashi points out, "performance data alone do not tell us whether learners actually rely on the L1 or how they perceive the role of the L1 in realizing speech acts" (1996: 190). We do not know either the extent to which learners' pragmatic choices are influenced by the instruction they have received and other input they may have been exposed to. We do know, however, that, unlike other aspects of requesting which have received some (albeit very unsystematic) coverage in teaching materials (see e.g. Ogiermann, 2010; Petraki and Bayes, 2013; Barron, 2016), request perspective is not a subject of instruction and generally remains unnoticed when request forms are acquired – or even when they are used by native speakers.

For pragmatic learning to occur learners not only need to notice, or register, the occurrence of relevant linguistic forms, such as the alternate use of the first and second person when making requests, but also to understand them, i.e. recognise a general pattern (Schmidt, 1993), as well as the socio-cultural values encoded in certain linguistic forms, such as the function of the speaker perspective as a means of avoiding imposition. Understanding further involves "relating the various forms used to their strategic deployment in the service of politeness and recognizing their co-occurrence with elements of context such as social distance, power, level of imposition" (Schmidt, 1995: 30).

Despite the wealth of empirical research that has been conducted in interlanguage pragmatics, and the numerous intervention studies demonstrating the importance of raising metapragmatic awareness and the explicit teaching of pragmatics for the development of pragmatic competence (e.g. Rose and Kasper, 2001; Rose, 2005; Ishihara and Cohen, 2010), "L2 pragmatics is not well integrated into curricula and is often just treated incidentally in the classroom." (Taguchi and Roever, 2017: 227).

The current paper has focused on a subtle, yet highly recurrent feature of English requests. As our analysis has shown, this feature had not been mastered by our participants, even though they were advanced learners and, even more importantly, future teachers of English. It remains a challenge to ensure that research conducted in the field of interlanguage pragmatics becomes more accessible to language teachers – and teacher trainers. And it seems that this is particularly important for studies which reveal pragmatic phenomena that not only pose difficulties to learners but also function below the level of consciousness for native speakers.

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