

A contrastive perspective on Moroccan learners' (in) directness in their interlanguage requests

Mustapha TALAY^{1, *}

¹Department of English at Moulay Ismail University, Meknes

Received: 26.06.2022

• Accepted: 02.07.2022

• Published: 27.07.2022

Abstract: This study investigated interlanguage request performance by Moroccan learners of English (MLs) from a contrastive perspective. More specifically, it explored how MLs' interlanguage requests converged or diverged from English Natives' (ENs) requests in the use of strategy types and (in) directness. First, a contrastive pragmatic analysis of requests by Moroccan natives (MNs) and ENs is deemed necessary to provide native baseline data and establish MNs' and ENs' pragmatic norms of request performance. Second, an interlanguage request analysis is conducted to reveal the pragmatic features of MLs' requests. The three sets of data for this study were collected via an open questionnaire as it serves the purpose of this investigation. The results revealed that MLs deviated from the ENs' pragmatic norms of (in) directness, mostly by falling back on their native pragmatic norms, which bears testimony to pragmatic transfer. Requests do not seem to be conceived of in the same way by MNs and ENs, and MLs transferred their native request conception when performing in English. MLs used more direct strategies. The study predicts instances of cross-cultural misunderstanding and pragmatic failure in intercultural encounters between MLs and ENs, which is likely to cause undesirable cross-cultural clichés and stereotypes. The paper suggests some pedagogical implications to alleviate this problem among MLs.

Keywords: contrastive request strategies, interlanguage requests, (in) directness, pragmatic transfer.

1. Introduction

Since the introduction of 'communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) in anti-thesis to 'linguistic competence', research on pragmatic competence (Kasper, 1992, Rose & Kasper, 2002) has gained a special status in Applied Linguistics. It is now established that for EFL learners to operate effectively in the FL; they need to know, besides the 'rules of usage' (lexis and grammar), the 'rules of use' (i.e., the pragmatic norms governing language use in context). As Hymes (1972: 281) has put it, "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless." More specifically, if we apply Hymes' (1972:281) four dimensions of communicative competence to interlanguage requesting behaviour, our focus in this paper, then learners need to know whether (and to what degree) a request strategy (in) directness level is *possible, feasible, appropriate, and in fact done*. It is our contention that a contrastive perspective on MLs' requests is likely to reveal the pragmatic features of MLs' (in)directness in their interlanguage requesting behaviour. This paper is organized as follows: first, a theoretical background of the study is provided to sketch the theoretical concepts underlying our investigation; second, the methodology of the present study will be outlined in relation to research questions, informants, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, the cross-cultural and pedagogical implications of the study are discussed

* Corresponding Author: m.talay@umi.ac.ma

2. Theoretical background

Pragmatic competence, a crucial component of communicative competence, is the focus of pragmatics. A widely quoted definition of pragmatics is the one provided by Crystal. According to Crystal (2008), pragmatics is:

“... the study of LANGUAGE from the point of view of the users, especially of the *choices* they make, the CONSTRAINTS they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the *effects* their use of language has on the other participants in an act of communication (Original Capitals and italics is mine).” (p. 379)

Crystal's definition makes reference, albeit implicitly, to the two components of a language user's pragmatic knowledge: *pragmalinguistic* knowledge and *sociopragmatic knowledge* (Leech, 1983, 10-11). *Pragmalinguistic knowledge* accounts for the language user's linguistic knowledge, which encompasses the set of strategies for the performance of a request and the mitigating devices used to either soften or boost its effect on the requestee. In (directness) is usually employed as an illocutionary modification device, either upgrading the illocutionary force of a speech act (e.g. offers and invitations) or softening its illocutionary force of other speech acts (e.g. requests and complaints) (Searle, 1975, House & Kasper, 1981, Brown & Levinson, 1978, Leech, 1983, Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, to mention but a few). *Sociopragmatics* refers to “the sociological interface of pragmatics” (ibid, p.10), viz., language users' perceptions of those contextual and socio-cultural constraints present in the social situation which impact and determine how they perform and interpret speech acts in context.

Requests have been extensively studied in cross-cultural pragmatics for their intricate and nuanced relation with politeness across languages and cultures (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Schauer, 2009). A request is classified as a *directive* (Searle, 1976), an *impositive* (Leech, 1983), and an ‘*anti-Y* [Hearer]’ (House & Kasper, 1981) speech act and is, therefore, a *face-threatening act* (Brown & Levinson, 1978). A request, so defined, inherently directs, imposes a course of action on the requestee, and limits his/her freedom of action. To attenuate this inherently impolite nature of requesting, requesters tend to play it safe by using a range of linguistic devices, mainly indirectness (Searle, 1975, Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, House & Kasper, 1981, Schauer, 2009). Studies in cross-cultural pragmatics have demonstrated that pragmatic norms of request performance vary across languages and cultures, which may lead learners to pragmatic difficulties in intercultural encounters. House and Kasper (1981) conducted a contrastive study of requests in English and German and concluded that “English speakers not only use lower directness levels with requests but also more downgraders than German speakers.” This finding is further evidenced by House and Kasper (1987) in their investigation of requests by Danish and German learners of English.

A plethora of research in interlanguage pragmatics has demonstrated that pragmatic competence is one of the tedious and most challenging components of a learner's communicative competence in the L2. Al Masaeed (2017: pp.1-2) attributes the difficulty of FLL's difficulty to coping with pragmatic competence in an FL to the “nuanced control of two independent knowledge bases: the linguistic resources that are needed to accomplish a particular speech act [pragmalinguistics] and the use of the speech act in the appropriate context [sociopragmatics]”. Ishihara and Cohen (2010, p. 76-77), claim that “if no formal instruction is provided, it is said to take at least 10 years in a second language context (as opposed to a foreign language context) to be able to use the language in a pragmatically nativelike manner.” (p. 75). They cite 5 potential causes

of learner pragmatic divergences from the target native norms: (1) negative transfer of pragmatic norms; (2) limited grammatical ability in the L2; (3) overgeneralization of L2 pragmatic norms; (4) effects of instruction or instructional materials; and (5) resistance to using L2 pragmatic norms. “The first four reasons for pragmatic divergences can lead to pragmatic failure and are primarily related to cognitive functioning in language use and learning” (ibid. pp. 76-77). The fifth reason, resistance, “concerns cases where learners are aware of the pragmatic norms and linguistically capable of producing native-like forms, but make a deliberate choice not to adhere to them on a particular occasion.” (ibid. p.77)

3. Methodology

3.1. *Research questions.* This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Do MNs and ENs perform requests with similar strategy types and (in) directness levels?
2. Do MLs converge with/diverge from ENs’ norms of strategy types and (in) directness?

To answer these questions, we undertook the following steps:

1. A contrastive study to provide native baseline request data.
2. An interlanguage study to establish the pragmatic features of MLs’ requests.
3. An examination of MLs’ requests in terms of our contrastive findings to check their convergence with or divergence from ENs’ pragmatic norms of requesting.

3.2. Data collection instrument

The open questionnaire as a data collection instrument served the purpose of this investigation for two main reasons: (1) to ensure the comparability of our 3 sets of data, i.e., the data should be elicited in similar scenarios characterized by similar contextual variables. The questionnaire was originally written in English and then translated to Arabic. It was administered in person to the three groups of informants: the English version to ENs at East Anglia University, Norwich, England and MLs at Ibn Zohr University, Agadir. The Arabic version was administered to MNs at the same university as MLs. These are the scenarios included in the questionnaire:

1. [Requesting time from a stranger on a bus]
2. [Requesting a classmate to shut a classroom door]
3. [A student asks a student unknown to S in a university library to share H’s desk]
4. [S asks His/her teacher to let him/her hold on to a book he/she borrowed]
5. [S asks a non-intimate friend for a £10/DH100 loan to buy a book]
6. [Professor asks a student to return a book the student borrowed]
7. [S asks his younger brother to go to the tobacconist and buy him a pack of cigarettes]

Informants: A total of 120 students participated in this study:

- (i). MNs group: 40 undergraduate students (20 males and 20 females with a mean age of 23.4) enrolled in different departments at Ibn Zohr University, Agadir.
- (ii). ENs group: 40 Open University students (20 males and 20 females with a mean age of 25.6) enrolled in different departments at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, England.
- (iii). MLs group: 40 Fourth semester students (20 males and 20 females with a mean age of 21.9) enrolled in the department of English at Ibn Zohr University, Agadir.

4. Data Analysis

The elicited request utterances were segmented along the coding scheme developed within the Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) CCSARP project, where indirectness is determined by the strategy type used in the *Head Act*, i.e., that part of the utterance which performs the request by itself, independently of the adjuncts (i.e., the other parts of the request utterance)

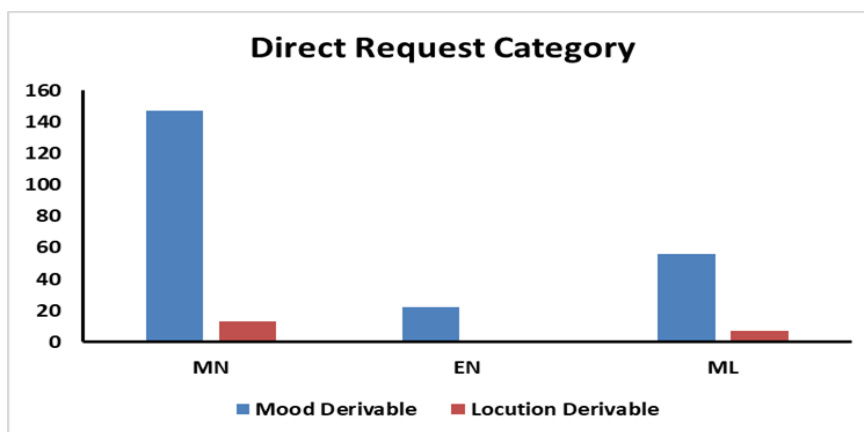
4.1. (In) directness

The (in) directness level of a request utterance was determined by the strategy used in the Head Act. Blum-kulka and Olshtain (1984) and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) distinguish three categories of (in) directness: the *direct category* comprising 'mood derivable' and 'performatives'; the *conventionally indirect category* comprising 'suggestory formulas' and 'reference to preparatory conditions'; and *non-conventionally indirect category* comprising 'hints'. Our data analysis revealed the results displayed in Figures 1 and 2 below. For clarity of analysis, we grouped the (in) directness levels found in our data into two major categories: a *direct request category* and an *indirect request category*.

Direct request category

The direct requests account for 71.1% (160 tokens) of MNs' requests compared to 12.3% (22 tokens) of ENs'. That is, MN used direct requests 5.9 times as often as EN. MLs adhered to their native norm by displaying a tendency for more directness compared to ENs. MLs used direct requests 2.8 times as often as ENs (63 tokens vis-à-vis 22 tokens, respectively). A Chi-square test (χ^2) for independence indicated a highly significant difference between MNs and ENs in the use of direct request category: χ^2 value= 104.6 p value = 0.000; a similarly high significant difference was indicated between MLs and ENs in the use of the direct request category: χ^2 value = 19.776; p value = 0.000.

Figure 1. Fig. 1: Frequency of direct request category in the three sets of data



As shown in Fig.1, the direct request category in our 3 sets of data was mostly realized by Level1, mood derivable, and only scarcely by Level2, locution derivable. Therefore, we shall focus on Level1, *Mood derivable*, in our analysis. *Mood derivable* occurred 5.5 times as often in MNs' data (65.3 %, i.e., 147 tokens) as it did in ENs' (12.3%, i.e., 22 tokens) and was used by MLs (30.4%, i.e., 56 tokens) 2.3 times as often as by ENs. *Mood derivable* was realized by means of *the imperative structure* and *the direct question*.

(a) The imperative structure

The imperative was the most frequent request strategy in the 3 sets of Level 1 requests. However, while in EN data the imperative was used exclusively in – (minus) social distance situations and were employed only by the interactant in a position of power, in MN data, the imperative occurred in both + (plus) and – (minus) social distance and power relationships by both interactants as in (1):

1. (a) [A student asks a teacher to let him keep longer a book he borrowed]
 - /Lah ykhalik ila kan mumkin khallini nzid waḥed yumayen/ (MN)
 - (May God preserve you, if possible, let me keep it for two more days)
- (b) [A student to another student unknown to him in a crowded university library]
 - /ila smaḥti [khalini negles ḥdak waḥed rba' sa'a]/ (MN)
 - (If you permit, let me sit near you for 15 minutes)
- (c) [A student asks another student (not close) for a loan to buy a book]
 - / [Ahmad lah ykhalik ila m'ak 100 dh dwezhali ḥetta lghedda]/
 - (Ahmad, may God preserve you, if you have 100dh pass it to me till tomorrow)

The imperative in MLs' requests was used in a way similar to its use by MNs. It was found in both + (plus) and – (minus) social distance and power situations. In + (plus) power situations, it was used both upward and downward. Equally importantly, requests for material goods were frequently formulated by MLs using the imperative:

2. (a) [A student asks a teacher to let him keep longer a book he borrowed]
 - Please teacher, leave me this book for three more days (ML)
- (b) [A student asks another student (not close) for a loan to buy a book]
 - Please lend me 100 DHs to buy a book. I will give it to you when we go home (ML)

(b) The direct question

The direct question is a Level 1 request pattern when the request object is information. In MNs' data *direct question* was used 100%, i.e., 40 tokens vis-à-vis 5% in ENs' in (3) below:

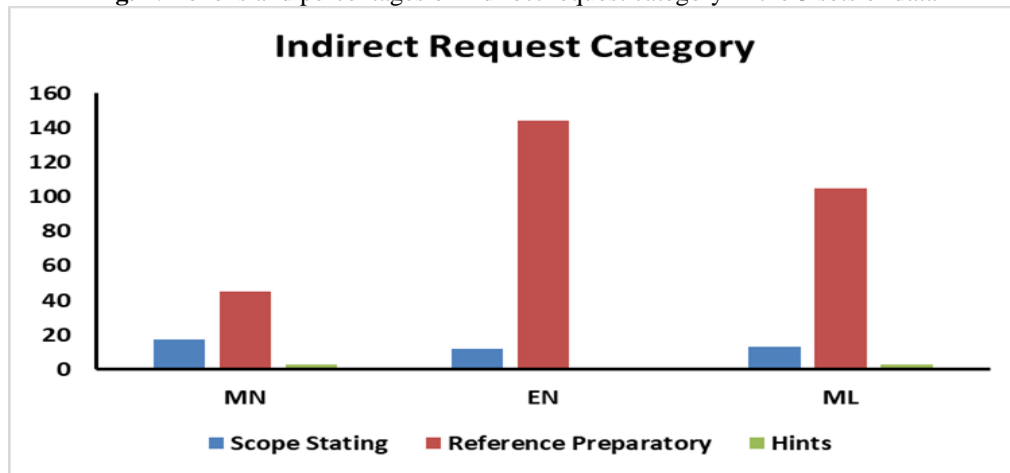
3. [Requesting time from a stranger on a bus]
 - /al?akh shḥal hadi f sa'a lah yjazik bikhir?/ (MN)
 - (Lit. Brother, what time is it may God reward you with good)
 - What time is it, please? (ML)
 - Do you have the watch, by any chance, please? (EN)
 - Could you tell me the time please? (EN)

MLs' use of *direct question* amounted to 70% in requesting time from a stranger" (i.e., 28 out of 40 tokens) The 65 % gap between MLs and ENs in the use of direct question is a significant divergence from the ENs' norm and is readily explained in terms of L1 transfer

Indirect request category

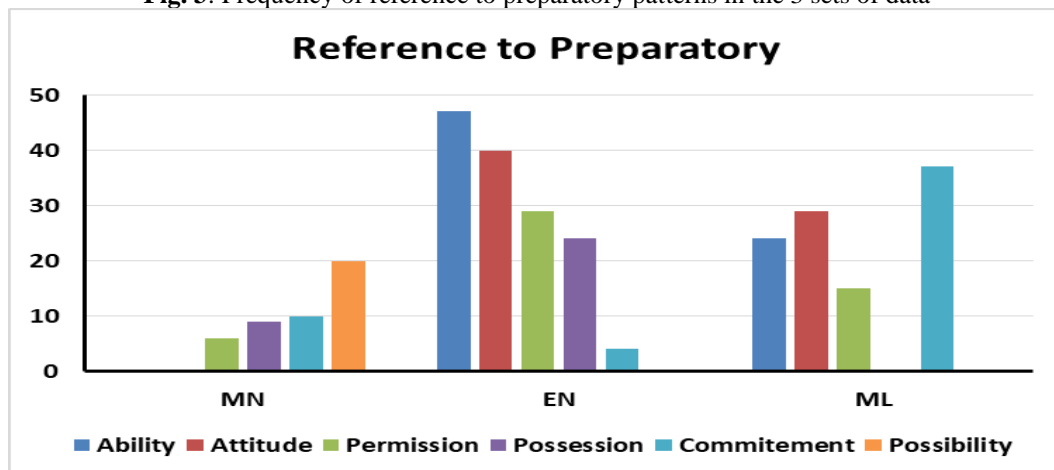
As shown in Fig. 2, indirect requests were realized through Level 3, *scope-stating*, Level 4, *reference to preparatory conditions*, and Level 5 *hints*. Level 4 stands as the most frequent (in) directness level in ENs' requests. ENs used it 4 times (80.4%) as often as MNs (20%) and 1.5 times as frequently as MLs (57%). A Chi-square test (χ^2) for independence indicated a highly significant difference between MNs and ENs in the use of indirect request category: χ^2 value= 40.53 and p value = 0.000. A similar high significant difference between ENs and MLs in the use of the indirect request category: χ^2 value= 38.5 and p value = 0.000.

Fig. 2: Tokens and percentages of indirect request category in the 3 sets of data



Due to the low frequency of scope-stating and hints in the three sets of data, we shall focus on Level 4 (reference to preparatory) requests. Our analysis of level 4 requests yielded the patterns in Fig. 3:

Fig. 3: Frequency of reference to preparatory patterns in the 3 sets of data



(a).Reference to H's ability

Reference to H's ability, the most frequent indirect ENs' request pattern, was mostly realized by means of 'can/could you questions'. It accounts for 32.2% of ENs' Level 4 requests. Interestingly, this pattern was employed by ENs in all situations but those characterized as (+ power), in which case it was used exclusively by the one in the position of power. Thus, while it was never used in a situation where 'a student asks his teacher to let him hold on to a book he borrowed', it was frequently employed by "a teacher asking his student to return a book he borrowed". This may be due to the ENs' perception of "can/could you do x", a conventionally indirect strategy, as

pragmatically transparent (Searle, 1975) and therefore judged direct when addressed to a person in a higher position than the speaker or when the request involves a high degree of imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1978: 135ff). This point is evidenced by a consideration of the distribution of this procedure across other situations. Thus, while *reference to ability* amounts to 30% in ‘asking a stranger about time’ (3), and 48.3 % in ‘asking a classmate to shut a classroom door’; it amounts to only 4.5 % in ENs’ requests in (4b, below) “asking another student in a crowded library to share his desk”

Reference to ability, though a possible procedure in MA. The MA form /*wash teqder*/ is literally translated into English as ‘are you able to ...?’ and, therefore, unlike the English “can you”, it is more likely understood as a question about ability than a request for action. To borrow Morgan’s (1978) terms, the English ‘can you ...’, a form characterized by both a ‘convention use’ and a ‘convention of usage’ works as a short-circuited implicature. Its MA translation equivalent ‘*wash teqder*’ works more like a genuine conversational implicature in a way similar to ‘are you able to ...?’ in English.

While *reference to ability* was also used by MLs, its frequency and distribution of use did not conform to the English norm. For instance, *reference to ability* accounted 16.7% of MLs’ requests elicited in the situation where “a student asks his teacher to let him keep longer a book he borrowed” where, to our surprise, ENs never used it. MLs also used this procedure almost 3 times as often as ENs did (12.5% vis-à-vis 4.5%) in “asking another student in a crowded university library to let him share his desk”

(b). *Reference to H’s attitude*

Reference to attitude was the second most frequent indirect request realization in ENs’ data (27.6%). It was realized mainly through linguistic forms such as: “*would/do you mind if x?*” “*You don’t/wouldn’t mind if ... do / would you?*” “*Would it be ok/alright/inconvenient if ...?*” This pattern was almost exclusively used by ENs (97.5%, i.e., 39 out of 40) in the two situations below where *reference to H’s ability* was never used:

1. (a) [S asking S’s teacher to let S hold onto a book S borrowed]
 - *Would it be alright if I keep the book a bit longer?* (EN)
- (b) [A student to another unknown to him in a crowded university library]
 - Excuse me mate, *you wouldn’t mind if I share this desk, would you?* (EN)

Reference to attitude may, therefore, be said to be perceived by ENs as more polite than *reference to ability*. In fact, by referring to H’s attitude, the speaker implies his awareness that requests performed in situation depicted (4, a & 4, b) involve a higher degree of threat to the hearer’s face than in ‘requesting time from a stranger’, ‘asking a classmate to shut a classroom door’, or ‘asking one’s student to return a book he borrowed.’

Though ‘*Reference to attitude*’ is possible and feasible in MA, it was completely absent from our MNs’ data. In fact, MA makes available to its speakers a set of linguistic expressions which refer to H’s attitude such as: ‘*wash mafîha bas ila x?*’ (Isn’t there any harm if I x?); ‘*wash mashi mushkil ila x?*’ (Isn’t there any problem if x?); ‘*wash mafîha hetta shi mani’ ila x?*’ (Isn’t there any inconvenience if x?). The absence of such forms from MNs’ requests maybe due either to their low degree of *convention of use* or to MNs’ tendency for directness.

Reference to attitude occurred with almost the same frequency in MLs' requests as it did in ENs' (i.e., 27.6% vis-à-vis 27.8%). However, its linguistic realization and distribution across situations showed significant divergences from the English norm. Unlike ENs, MLs used almost exclusively "would you mind + Gerund" in situations ENs would judge it as hyperpolite. For example, MLs used this linguistic form 30% of the time in "requesting time from a stranger on a bus" compared to never by ENs. Moreover, MLs used *reference to attitude* less frequently than ENs in situations depicted in (4) above. While MLs used this procedure only 20.6% of the time in (4, a) and 20.8% in (4, b), EN used the same procedure 55.3% in (4, a) and 79.2% in (4, b). Sometimes MLs used linguistic forms never used by ENs as in (5):

2. (a) [S asking S's teacher to let S hold on to a book he borrowed longer]
- Would you like teacher to keep it to me (sic) till next week? (ML)
- (b) [A student to another unknown to him in a crowded university library]
- Please would you want me to share the desk with you? (ML)

Both 'would you like' and 'would you want', though referring to the hearer's attitude towards the requested action, may not be considered appropriate as request strategies as they presuppose that the hearer will want to comply with the requested action, a presumption which conflicts with Brown and Levinson's (1978) negative politeness strategy 'Be pessimistic'. The MA utterance '*wash tebhgi negles 7dak*' would not be unusual in (5, b). If this is true, then MLs' use of these forms may be interpreted in terms of pragmalinguistic transfer.

(c). *Reference to H's permission*

The third largest group of ENs' indirect request patterns refer to permission. This pattern is termed by Gibbs (1985, p. 102) 'permission requests', i.e., questions by means of which "the speaker asks that the hearer grant permission for the speaker to have his/her request fulfilled". Both English and MA put at the disposal of their speakers linguistic expressions to realize this indirect request pattern. The English 'May/ can/ could I x?' and the MA expressions '*wash yemken-li x?*' (Is it possible for me to x? / *wash tsmeh-li x?*) (Do you allow me to x?) are cases in point. However, *Reference to permission* occurred with a higher relative frequency in ENs' indirect requests than it did in MNs' (i.e., 20.1% vis-à-vis 13.3%, respectively) and was most frequently used by "a student asking an unfamiliar student in a crowded university library to share his desk", and by "a student asking his teacher to let him hold on to a book he borrowed" by both groups of natives. *Reference to permission* occurred in MLs' indirect requests almost as often as it did in MN's (i.e., 14.3% vis-à-vis 13.3%), which can be explained in terms of L1 transfer.

(d). *Reference to H's commitment*

Reference to commitment concerning the performance of the requested action was used by the three groups of informants with different relative frequencies. It accounts for 22.2% of MNs' Level4 requests compared to only 2.8% of EN's. Its highest relative frequency was found in MLs requests (34%), where it stands as the standard Level4 request strategy. Moreover, its distribution across situations showed equally interesting differences between ENs, on the one hand, and MN and ML, on the other. Thus, while ENs' use of this procedure was used in a situation where the speaker is in a position of power (e.g., "a teacher asking his student to return a book he borrowed", MNs and MLs used it upward as well (e.g., "a student asking his teacher to let him keep a book he borrowed longer")

- 6- a- [A professor asks a student to return a book he/she borrowed]
I need the book urgently, will you bring it me back today? (EN)

- b- [A student (S) asks S's teacher to let S hold onto a book S borrowed]
- ustad ila kan mumkin wash tkhellilih li hetta nkemlu bleqraya?
- (Teacher, if it's possible, will you leave me the book till I finish reading it?)
- (Will you please give me two days more?) (ML)

To sum up, MNs showed a tendency for more use of direct requests than did ENs who, instead, opted for the conventionally indirect request strategies. MLs did transfer the range, frequency and distribution of the direct request strategies from their native requesting behaviour. Moreover, although MLs used indirect request strategies more frequently than MNs, their use of this category of requests did not totally conform to ENs' pragmatic norms, and displayed both pragmatolinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer. MNs and ENs do not seem to conceive of requesting in exactly the same way. MNs seem to display more readiness to request than ENs (Talay, 1989) in similar situations. Talay (1989), following Bonikowska's (1988) postulation of the opting out choice as a pragmatic decision in its own right, analysed cases where MNs and ENs chose to refrain from performing the request in certain questionnaire situations and the reasons lying behind their decision to do so. The results of the study revealed that MNs displayed more readiness to request in situations where ENs chose to opt out of requesting and a qualitative analysis of the provided reasons revealed cross-cultural differences in their perception of requesting, in general, and the contextual variables of the given situations, in particular.

5. Cross-cultural implications

The most important cross-cultural implication of this study is that requests are not conceived of in exactly the same way by ENs and MNs and MLs tend to transfer their culture-specific conception of requesting to their interlanguage requesting behaviour. MNs' tendency for directness is indicative of a solidarity culture (Scollon & Scollon, 1983) or a positive politeness culture (Brown & Levinson, 1978) where requesting goods and services is common behaviour. ENs' tendency for indirectness in similar situations is indicative of a distance culture (Scollon & Scollon, 1983) or a negative politeness culture (Brown & Levinson, 1987) where the individual's privacy and personal property are valued.

If we adopt the widely used theories of politeness (Lakoff, 1973; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983) in pragmatic research, as heuristic means of interpretation, one may say that ENs would be perceived more polite than MNs in their requesting behaviour. For Lakoff (1973), MNs would be said to observe to a lesser degree than ENs her rules of politeness "Don't impose" and "Give options". For Brown and Levinson (1978), MNs seem to attach less importance to their negative politeness strategies, especially the strategy "Be pessimistic" than do ENs. For Leech (1983), MNs do not seem to attach as much importance as ENs do to the negative side of his Tact Maxim, "Minimize the cost to h".

However, House and Kasper (198, p.184) provided what seems to us a tenable explanation for such cross-cultural differences in terms of Pike's distinction between '*emic*' and '*etic*' standpoints for the description of behavior. The *emic* standpoint refers to "studying behaviour relative to context and function within a system of cultural meaning" and the *etic* standpoint refers to "(studying) behaviour relative to a system as seen by an outside observer". Thus, from an *emic* point of view, within Moroccan culture, MNs' readiness to request and their tendency for more directness and less internal mitigation in requesting may be perceived as normal verbal behaviour within Moroccan culture. Likewise, ENs' tendency for less requesting and more indirectness may be

perceived as equally normal verbal behaviour, within British culture. However, in intercultural encounters, MLs' transfer of their pragmatic norm of directness when requesting in English may result in pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983). Or even worse, MLs may be viewed by ENs as pushing, presumptuous and intrusive.

6. Pedagogical implications

Pedagogically, classroom research on teaching L2 pragmatics has tested the extent to which different methods can alleviate learners' pragmatic difficulties since the early 80s. Tagushi (2015), in a state-of-the-art article, reviewed 58 interventional studies to verify if L2 pragmatics instruction is effective and, if so, what methods are more effective in teaching L2 pragmatics. According to Tagushi (2015), classroom researchers have a consensus that explicit instruction is superior to implicit instruction of L2 pragmatics. However, to my knowledge, no interventional study has ever tested the effectiveness of contrastive metapragmatic information in developing EFL learners' pragmatic ability. The present study suggests a metacognitive approach based on contrastive metapragmatic information. We suggest that such an approach would consist of two components:

(1). A teacher-fronted explicit instruction drawing on contrastive metapragmatic information to foster learners' cross-cultural awareness of the different sociopragmatic norms governing requesting behaviour in Moroccan Arabic and English (e.g., different assessments of such contextual variables as social power, social distance, and the size of imposition, in the two cultures; the value of privacy in English culture; etc). This teacher-fronted explanation will cater for learners' *understanding* (Schmidt, 1993) of the cultural rationale behind the requesting behaviour in each of the two cultures (*etic* VS *emic* perspectives), and therefore develop their *cross-cultural pragmatic awareness*.

(2). Consciousness-raising tasks focussed on targeted pragmlinguistic forms of requesting (strategy types and mitigating devices) in English in different contextual situations to ensure form-meaning mappings. Such consciousness-raising activities should urge learners to use the gained metapragmatic knowledge to reflect upon the pragmlinguistic forms woven in the tasks as problem-solving activities. We assume that these activities will lead learners to both *noticing* (Schmidt, 1993) the targeted forms (request strategies and mitigating devices) and have more *control over their analyzed pragmatic knowledge* (Bialystock, 1993).

7. Conclusion

This study explored Moroccan learners' interlanguage performance from a contrastive perspective. MNs displayed their tendency for more directness than ENs and MLs followed carried over their native norm when requesting in English. Differences between MNs and ENs, on the one hand, and MLs and ENs, on the other, in their requesting behaviour were statistically significant, which bears testimony to negative pragmatic transfer. Cross-culturally, MLs' divergences from ENs' pragmatic norms are likely to lead to pragmatic failure, which may be conducive to MLs' being viewed by ENs as pushy, imposing and presumptuous. Such negative impressions, if repetitive, may spiral into stereotypes, which may hinder intercultural communication. Pedagogically, the study suggests the incorporation of contrastive metapragmatic information to develop MLs' metapragmatic awareness to foster their pragmatic competence, minimize the risk of pragmatic failure and ward off any possibility of MLs' resistance of ENs' pragmatic norms out of lack of awareness of the cultural rationale behind their use. More specifically, we propose that the

sociopragmatic side be dealt with through teacher- fronted explicit comparative explanation of the pragmatic norms governing requesting in the two cultures. As for the pragmalinguistic level, teachers may proceed by weaving this metapragmatic information in consciousness-raising tasks focussed on targeted requesting strategies and their situational mappings. However, any claimed merits for such a teaching approach based on contrastive metapragmatic information deserves the attention of researchers in the field of instructional pragmatics and calls for experimental classroom research to verify how it compares to alternative approaches proposed in instructional pragmatics research.

References

- [1] Al-Masaeed, K. (2017). Interlanguage Pragmatic Development: Internal and External Modification in L2 Arabic Requests. *Foreign Language Annals*, 5(4), 1-14. Retrieved from <https://sci-hub.se/10.1111/flan.12293>
- [2] Bialystock, E. (1993). Symbolic representation and attentional control. In Kasper, G. & Sh, Blum-Kulka (eds.) *Interlanguage pragmatics* (pp.43-58). Oxford: OUP
- [3] Blum-Kulka, Sh & Olshtain, E. (1984). Request and apologies; A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics*, 5 (3). pp. 196-213. Retrieved from <https://sci-hub.se/10.1093/applin/5.3.196>
- [4] Blum-Kulka, S & Olshtain, E. (1986). Too many words: Length of utterance and pragmatic failure. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 8 (2), 165-179. Retrieved from <https://sci-hub.se/10.1017/S0272263100006069>
- [5] Blum-Kulka, Sh. House, J. & Kasper, G. (eds.) (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- [6] Bonikowska, M. P. (1988). The Opting out choice. *Applied Linguistics*.9 (2), 168-81. Retrieved from <https://sci-hub.se/10.1093/applin/9.2.169>
- [7] Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1978), Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena. In E. N. Goody (ed.) *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction*. Cambridge: CUP
- [8] Crystal, D. (2008). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Blackwell: UK
- [9] Gibbs, R.W. (1982), A Critical examination of the contribution of literal meaning in the Understanding of Non-literal Discourse. *Text* (2), 09-27
- [10] House, I. & Kasper, G. (1981). Politeness markers in English and German. In Coulmas, F. (ed.): *Conversational routines* (pp. 157-185). The Hague: Mouton.
- [11] House, J. and Kasper, G. (1987). Interlanguage pragmatics: Requesting in a foreign language. In: Lörcher, W. and Schulze, R. (eds.), *Perspectives on language in performance* (pp. 1250- 1288). Festschrift for Werner Hüllen on his 60th Birthday , Tübingen, Germany: Gunther Narr Verlag.
- [12] Ishihara, N. & Cohen, A. D. (2010), Learners' pragmatics: potential causes of divergence. In: Ishihara, N. & A. D. Cohen (eds.), *Teaching and Learning Pragmatics*. London: Longman
- [13] Kasper, G. 1992. Pragmatic transfer. *Second Language Research*, 8 (3), 203-231.
- [14] Lakoff, R. (1973). The logic of politeness, or minding your p's and q's. *C.L.S*, 9, 292-305.
- [15] Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman
- [16] Morgan, I. L. (1978). Two conventions in indirect speech acts. In *Syntax and semantics*, Vol. 9: Pragmatics (pp. 261-280). New York: Academic Press, pp. 261-280.
- [17] Rose, K. & Kasper, G. (2001). *Pragmatics in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- [18] Schmidt, R. (1993). Consciousness, learning and interlanguage pragmatics. In Kasper, G. & Blum- Kulka, Sh. (eds.), *Interlanguage Pragmatics* (pp. 21-42). Oxford: Oxford University Press
- [19] Scollon, R., & Scollon, B.K (1983). *Face in interethnic communication*. In. Richards, I. C. & Schmidt, R. (eds.): *Language and communication*. London: Longman.
- [20] Searle, J. (1975). Indirect speech acts. In Cole, P. & Morgan, I. (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech acts*. New York: Academic Press.
- [21] Searle, J. (1976). A classification of illocutionary acts. *Language and society*, 5, 1-23.
- [22] Schauer, G. A. (2009). *Interlanguage pragmatic development*. London: Continuum.

- [23] Talay, M. (1989). *Contrastive speech act strategies: A case study of requests and invitations in Moroccan Arabic and English*. Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the DES degree in Linguistics. Sidi Mohammed Ibn Abdullah University, Fes, Morocco.
- [24] Tagushi, N. (2015), Instructed pragmatics at a glance: Where instructional studies were, are, and should be going. *Language Teaching*, 48, 1-50. Retrieved from <https://scihub.se/10.1017/S0261444814000263>
- [25] Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4, (2), 91-112