



**TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO**

**«THE ACQUISITION OF  
APOLOGIES AND REQUESTS  
IN SPANISH BY SECOND  
LANGUAGE LEARNERS»**

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# Index

Abstract .....	i
1 Introduction .....	1
The role of pragmatics in L2 .....	3
Theory of apologies and requests .....	4
Apologies .....	7
Requests .....	8
2 State-of-Art .....	9
3 Research questions .....	14
4 Materials and method section .....	15
Methodology .....	15
Participants .....	15
Materials .....	16
Data Collection Procedure .....	17
5 Results section .....	18
6 Discussion section .....	30
7 Conclusion .....	35
8 Bibliography .....	36
Appendix 1 .....	38
Appendix 2 .....	41

## **Abstract**

The present paper involves discovering how native culture affects when learning a language, in this case Spanish, and how far students shift their behavior resembling the Spanish native speakers attitudes. The investigation deals with the analysis of the apologies and requests in Spanish of 42 students from the United States and several European countries, including Spain, who took part voluntarily in this project. The results found that culture may be considered to be a potential agent which is able to interfere in the process of learning. Also, the study showed that participants were able to acquire cultural expressions after spending, at least, 6 months in Spain.

**Key words:** pragmatics, second language, speech acts, apologies, requests

Este documento consiste en descubrir como la cultura nativa afecta a la hora de aprender una lengua, en este caso el español, y hasta qué punto los estudiantes modifican su comportamiento, asemejándose al de los hablantes nativos de español. Esta investigación se encarga del análisis de las disculpas y peticiones, en español, de un total de 42 estudiantes tanto americanos como de varios países europeos, incluyendo España, los cuales participaron voluntariamente en este proyecto. Los resultados obtenidos demostraron que la cultura puede ser considerada un agente potencial que es capaz de interferir en el proceso de aprendizaje. Además, el estudio reveló que los participantes fueron capaces de adquirir expresiones culturales después de pasar, al menos, 6 meses en España.

**Palabras clave:** pragmática, segunda lengua, actos de habla, disculpas, peticiones

# 1 Introduction

This section deals with Pragmatics as a science focused on the study of language within intercultural communication. Some fundamental aspects such as the Speech Acts Theory or Gricean paradigms are mentioned to help the reader to get a brief approach to this field.

Teaching a second language (L2 from now onwards) implies a development of both personal and cultural skills. During the last decades, the methods used for teaching foreign languages have been placed on the edge due to radical changes in routines adopted by the teachers. Nowadays, it is not enough knowing about the grammar or lists of vocabulary translated into the mother tongue as it was stated by the Grammar-Translation Method (Cerezal Sierra, 1995). According to my personal experience, in these days, the search for a learner, whose communicative skills are brilliant besides a great cultural background, is essential for the process of learning. In this sense, a new era regarding language learning theories has begun. In this current language order, Pragmatics<sup>1</sup> plays an important role towards the acquisition of a second language since this science constitutes the basis for human communication. Thus, it could be said that the relationship between communication and the acquisition of a language are directly linked.

According to Diaz Perez (2001), language as a field of study has suffered an important change. Some linguists pointed out the idea of developing aspects which contribute to the communicative functions of language. As a result, around the 1950s, linguistic studies developed an interest on language as a communicative system to pay special attention to how human beings use language and how they interact with each other in certain situations or contexts. In other words, Pragmatics as a science was born to describe the relationship between Linguistics and communication (Díaz Pérez, 2001).

Culture and language are rigorously linked to each other and the key is placed on human communication. The communicative intention of the speakers is vital to share their ideas with the hearers. In this act of communication, intercultural communication has been given much relevance, since the mixture of cultures is increasingly present in our life. However, in order to

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<sup>1</sup>According to the Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, Pragmatics is defined "*as a branch of linguistics that is concerned with the relationship of sentences to the environment in which they occur*".

talk about the concept of “intercultural communication”, it is important to define both terms. According to LanQua<sup>2</sup>, *Communication* designates the relationship a group of people have thanks to language whereas *intercultural* involves that something is taking place or pertaining between two or more cultures. Then, the mixture of both terms establishes a communication between individuals belonging to different cultures or societies and so having specific codes and values.

Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) tried to describe a universal principle for human communication which led them to propose the theory of speech acts. This theory establishes that the minimal unit of human communication is the performance of certain kind of acts such as asking questions, giving orders or describing (Searle et al., 1980). Sociocultural factors may limit the interaction between speakers who belong to different cultures creating, in this case, mismatches or misunderstandings in intercultural communication. Notwithstanding, linguists such as Grice (1975) also tried to portray communication as a powerful and universal phenomenon which succeeds in every single language without paying attention to cultural differences. His theory of the Cooperative Principle is ruled by a Cooperative Principle and nine conversational sub-maxims which describe how communication succeeds. Grice enounced four conversational maxims which are the following (Grice 1975: 45):

- Maxim of Quantity. Regarding information, the speaker should make his/her contribution as informative as is required.
- Maxim of Quality. Regarding the truth, the speaker should not say something which s/he believes to be false or to lack evidence for.
- Maxim of Relation. Regarding the relevance, the speaker should be relevant.
- Maxim of Manner. Regarding the clarity of speech, the speaker should avoid obscurity, ambiguity, be brief and be orderly.

However, the problem presented in intercultural communication is based on the differences given by cultures. For instance, in a specific culture “being brief” (Maxim of Manner) could be impolite and discourteous while for another could mean a proper way of exposing a statement. Thus, Grice’s theory may help diminish the difficulties in relationships. Notwithstanding, it

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<sup>2</sup> “The LanQua Toolkit has been developed by the Language Network for Quality Assurance (LanQua), a three-year project (October 2007 – September 2010) funded by the Commission of the European Communities Lifelong Learning Erasmus Network programme”.

could not be a definite answer for the problems between international speakers since the linguist never attempted to provide an explanation for second language acquisition but an explicit theory of communication. However, if speakers respected these maxims, communication would succeed.

Therefore, it is important to highlight the idea of introducing Pragmatics as a module in L2 classrooms since not everything in language is related to grammatical or phonological aspects, but to how human beings communicate and how L2 is developed due to the communicative intention<sup>3</sup> of the learners. Something significant is knowing that L2 classrooms refer to the emplacements where students are learning a second language or a foreign language. Moreover, the technique second language speakers use to express themselves is also a remarkable element to study since linguists should take notice of whether they are translating structures from their mother tongue or using the proper ones from the language they are learning. Therefore, Pragmatic awareness is playing an irrefutable role in the acquisition of a second language.

### The role of pragmatics in L2

The relationship between culture as a subjective amount of experiences and the development of a L2 learner can be considered very complex since every single person is different; that is, each one has distinct skills which let speakers make progress in a language. A great challenge in education is called to shape learners with the potential ability to “identify and respond to indication of linguistic differences in encultured behavior” (Cohen & Sykes, 2013: 3). For instance, a student should be able to distinguish the differences between interacting with people from Western cultures and people from Eastern cultures since social norms and politeness strategies might differ:

L2 learners need to develop the attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, critical cultural awareness, and political education to be able to see the relationships among cultures different from their own. Development of intercultural education calls for taking a fresh look at beliefs about language and culture. L2 pragmatics has an important role to play in intercultural communication. (Cohen & Sykes 2013:4)

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<sup>3</sup> “Communicative intention is one of the phenomena helping hearers to recognize the meaning of an utterance” (Stojanović-Prevelević, 2011).

The main goal of including pragmatic learning in a L2 classroom is twofold: first, it provides a proper explanation for the learner's performance and interpretation of the meanings of expressions to avoid misunderstandings; and second, it shows the intentions of speakers, i.e. to what extent learners are able to identify "the norms of politeness, directness, and formality" around the L2 (Cohen & Sykes 2013:5).

Thus, language strategies seem to be quite important in the field of intercultural communication since learners could be able to perform different speech acts according to the norms of a given culture. According to Cohen and Sykes (2013), strategies are useful for non-native speakers of L2 to avoid misunderstandings or difficult situations such as in a funeral when speakers do not know exactly what to say or how to behave. Thus, from that, it can be assumed that the introduction of a pragmatic competence in a L2 classroom with the use of devices such as websites oriented to the acquisition of learning strategies or even more traditional methods such as role-plays could develop an intercultural awareness beneficial in the process of learning a second language.

## Theory of apologies and requests

The present paper is going to focus on performance of speech acts, especially apologies and requests, by some international and Spanish students. The interest in these two specific speech acts is based on using the same pattern that Cohen and Shively (2008) used in their experiment as described in section 2.

Before starting to explain the dimension of the apologies and requests, it is important to recognize the decomposition of a speech act and its forces. According to Trosborg (1995: 16), speech acts are defined as the minimal discourse unit. They can be classified into direct and indirect speech acts as reported by Austin (1962) and Searle (1975).

Direct speech acts develop an utterance whose form has a one-on-one relationship with the illocutionary act<sup>4</sup> performed by the sentence (Austin 1962). This kind of speech acts are commonly identified by their forms. For instance, if a speaker wants to ask something, s/he is

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<sup>4</sup> An illocutionary act, according to Austin's framework, is an act performed in saying something; the intended meaning of an utterance (Austin, 1962).

going to use a question or if someone wants to order something, that person is going to use the imperative form of the verb. On the other hand, indirect speech acts develop an utterance which does not form a one-one-one relation between form and meaning (Searle 1975). Then, from a practical point of view if a speaker wants to convey that s/he is cold, it would be possible to do it directly or indirectly. By using a direct speech act, the speaker would perform the "I'm cold" statement while, by using an indirect speech act, the speaker could declare an utterance such as "Could you close the door?".

Pioneers in speech acts were Austin and, later on, Searle. The last one, taking information based on Austin's works since he was his disciple, distinguishes 5 basic speech acts:

1. Representative/Assertives commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. For example, asserting, suggesting, swearing... "I love you".
2. Directives try to make the hearer do something. For example, asking, ordering, requesting... "Could you please close the window?"
3. Commissives commit the speaker to do something in the future. For example, promising, offering, betting... "Don't worry, Benjamin, I'll be there for you".
4. Expressives express a psychological state or attitude. For example, thanking, apologising, welcoming... "I'm sorry that I couldn't do it".
5. Declaratives change the state of the world immediately and tend to rely on extralinguistic institutions. For example, declaring war, christening, appointing... "I pronounce you man and wife" (Searle, 1975)

Before introducing the basic theory about the speech acts of apologies and requests, the following variables, "the relative social status of the hearer", "social distance" and "degree of imposition (for requests), or severity of the offense (for apologies)", need to be explained.

They were introduced by Brown & Levinson (1987) in their Politeness Theory. These concepts are defined as follows according to CARLA (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition):

- Relative social status of the hearer refers to "*the power relationship between speaker and hearer*".
- Social distance refers to "*the relationship between the interlocutors*".



- Degree of imposition (for requests), or severity of the offense (for apologies) refer to *“the importance or degree of difficulty in the situation”*.

When a speaker is performing a request, something important to highlight is the element of “relative social status of the hearer” and “social distance”. Both of them focus on the register that the speaker should use when pronouncing a request; it is not the same asking for something to your sister or your mother where the social distance is lower than to a professor who implies a higher level of social distance. Moreover, in certain languages as Spanish or German, speakers should use specific pronouns to emphasize the politeness of the speech act. For instance, pronouns as “usted” or “Sie”<sup>5</sup> in Spanish and German, respectively, denote a particular level of courtesy when referring to the second person singular which is impossible to demonstrate in English because the pronoun “you” is equally used for formal or informal registers. Notwithstanding, in Spanish and German, the verb tense is also a sign of politeness, since the second person singular is differently conjugated by using “tú” or “usted”, “Du” or “Sie”.

*“**Could you please** speak a bit slower?”*

*“¿**Podría usted, por favor,** hablar un poco más lento?”*

*“¿**Puedes (tú), por favor,** hablar un poco más lento?”* → Informal form

*“**Könnten Sie bitte** etwas langsamer sprechen?”*

*“**Kannst Du bitte** etwas langsamer sprechen?”* → Informal form

These requests show the degree of social distance in different languages. In addition, a significant element regarding the use of requests is the degree of imposition. In this kind of speech act, speakers should differentiate between a big favor, linked to a higher level of politeness, and a small one, connected to a more informal context.

Regarding apologies and the significant concepts which define them, the importance of the severity of the offense should be highlighted since it is one of the variable that participants in a conversation should look out. When a speaker is going to pronounce an apology, s/he should pay special attention not only to the concepts explained up to then, but also to the element which

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<sup>5</sup> The pronoun “sie” may also refer to the third feminine person singular, “she”, and to the third person plural, “they”. Particularly, these two forms are not written in capital letter as “Sie” when it is used for referring to the courteous form of “du”.

refers to the severity of the offense, shows the degree of the mistake, and the effect it will have on the speaker-hearer relationship.

## Apologies

Apologies are considered to be part of expressive speech acts and, according to Leech, its social goal is based on providing harmony between speakers and hearers (Trosborg, 1995: 372). Apologies are used to recover a situation in which there are two different participants: one who fails in doing something or offends someone, and another who is offended. Therefore, apologies can be seen as a remedial act where speaker and hearer interchange utterances so that the speaker is able to mend a certain behavior not accepted by the social norms. For instance, if someone is late for a date, this person should apologize for its impolite attitude towards the other person. According to Goffman, apologies can also be taken as an element of face-saving<sup>6</sup> since they have connotations of a “*protective orientation towards saving the interlocutor’s face*” and a “*defensive orientation towards saving one’s own face*” (Trosborg, 1995:374).

The act of apologizing can be made directly by using a verb which explicitly conveys an apology (apologize, be sorry, regret...) or indirectly, if a speaker tries to give an explanation to excuse him/herself. So, the apologizer may use different strategies to apologize: justification, blaming someone else, attacking the complainer or minimizing the degree of the offense (Trossborg, 1995: 376-379). In addition, according to Olshtain and Cohen (1990), there are five strategies which define the act of apologizing:

- “*The explicit expression of an apology*” when the speaker precisely uses “excuse me”, “I am sorry”...
- “*The expression of the responsibility*” when the speaker admits the fault.
- “*The explanation*” when the speaker justifies and explain the mistake.
- “*The offer of repair*” when the speaker tries to solve the problem.
- “*The promise of forbearance*” when the speaker swears the capacity of avoiding make the mistake once again.

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<sup>6</sup> The notion of “face” has to do with the Politeness Theory proposed by Brown and Levinson. This concept refers to “something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintaining, or enhance, and must be constantly attended to in interaction” (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

- “*Intensification of apologies*” for creating support and humiliation while facing the hearer.

## Requests

Requests are considered to be part of the directive speech acts. According to Trosborg, there is a speaker who wants to transmit to the hearer the communicative intention of requesting something in benefit of the speaker (1995: 187).

Requests are used when the speaker wants the hearer to do something; so, in a way, the speaker is imposing some sort of obligation or duty on the hearer since the former is expecting a positive interaction to her/his request. When individuals ask for something, they do not expect a rejection. The degree of the imposition depends on the situation given and on the nature of the request regarding its direct or indirect form. For instance, this variation is shown in the following context:

Imagine the requester wants the living room to be cleaned, so s/he can perform the following utterances:

- “*There is too much dust in the living room*”
- “*The living room is a mess*”
- “*The living room is a mess. Why don’t you clean it?*”
- “*The living room is a mess. Could you please clean it?*”

By using these utterances, the speaker intensifies the degree of imposition. The first two sentences convey certain desire but hide the communicative intention in some way since s/he is requesting the hearer to do something; s/he is using politeness makers such as “*please*” in the last sentence, beginning a conversation about the chaos in the living room or using indirect requests such as “*Why don’t you...?*” in order to avoid rejection. However, in the last two sentences, the speaker openly requests the hearer to do something by using a performative verb and also uses politeness markers. Other verbs can be used such as *request* or *demand*.

Something important regarding this type of speech act is the degree of politeness of a request. According to Trosborg, the use of indirect requests is more polite than an order since the speaker

does not exert any pressure over the hearer to reach something. Then, we should consider several internal modifications based on the strategies below (Trosborg 1995: 209-215):

- Use of past tense/negation: *“I was wondering if you were busy tonight”*
- Use of a tag question: *“Pass me the salt, won’t you?”*
- Use of a conditional clause: *“I would like to borrow some of your notes if you don’t mind lending me them”*
- Embedding: *“I wonder if... I hope you... I’d appreciate if... I’m afraid you...”*
- Use of –ing-forms: *“I was thinking that maybe you could lend me your notes”*
- Use of modal verbs: *“Could I come with you?”, “I thought that you might let me eat some of your biscuits”*
- Use of lexical/phrasal downgraders<sup>7</sup>: *Please, would you mind..., just, simply, possibly, kind of, sort of, somehow, you know, I mean, right?, okay?...*
- Use of upgraders<sup>8</sup>: *really, so, terribly, I’m sure, I’m absolutely positive...*

## 2 State-of-Art

Some studies claim that teaching pragmatics in the field of L2 acquisition is quite important for the development of the target language (TL from now onwards). In this case, Spanish will be the L2 since we will analyze foreign students’ acquisition. Two different studies provide a foundation for the present project since both of them focus on the pragmatics of apologies and requests; namely the paper by Shively & Cohen (2008) since the goal of the present project is to replicate the patterns used in this research to prove different hypothesis.

Cohen (2008) investigated the role of technology in making pragmatics accessible to learners. When a student learns a foreign language, s/he produces a specific type of language which falls between the mother tongue and the language system being learnt, also known as the target language.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the MacMillan Dictionary, the act of downgrading refers to minimize something. Thus, linguistically speaking, downgraders are words or expressions which minimize the impact of a statement on the hearer.

<sup>8</sup> In contrast, the act of upgrading refers to give something a higher status. Then, from a linguistic point of view, upgraders are words or expressions which intensify or emphasize the impact of a statement on the hearer.

According to the MacMillan Dictionary, interlanguage is defined as “*a mixture of two languages, especially one used by someone learning a new language, that contains features of the person’s first language mixed with those of the language they are learning*”. In other words, the interlanguage dimension of a speaker is the language used while processing and learning the L2. The borders between the concepts of interlanguage and L2 are especially distinguished since the former, by definition, is the mixture of the first language (L1 from now onwards) and the new language the speaker is learning which may be referred to as the L2. This interlanguage knowledge allows students to embrace the language they are learning. For instance, some misunderstandings, such as polite expressions or jokes, are due to the lack of pragmatics awareness, which could foster, sometimes, unpleasant situations between native speakers and non-native speakers. One of the sources given by the aforementioned paper is the web site “Dancing with Words” which seems a useful tool to learn strategies for Spanish pragmatics, the patterns students should use in order to develop their skills in the TL. In the aforementioned study (Cohen 2008), students were first asked to do a pre-test where they had to perform several role-plays in the Synthetic Immersive Environment (SIE from now onwards), which Sykes (2008) describes as a digital space that produces “*explicit, educationally related outcomes in simulated, relevant interactional contexts*”. Then, students were requested to interact with the virtual program to assess their pragmatic awareness. This concept, the SIE, is related to the virtual reality platform, called *Croquelandia*, created for L2 learners to interact with other students and for investigators to assess the development of students. Afterwards, students had to complete several modules on the website to be able to do the post-test, identical to the pre-test.

The project developed by Cohen (2008) involved ten advanced learners of Spanish who firstly received some orientation about technology to be familiar with the devices they were going to use later on. Then, as mentioned, they had to complete several tasks on the website “Dancing with Words” to be able to perform the pre-test. The assignments focused on completing different modules about requests, service encounters and apologies. Students took between one and two hours to complete each assignment. The website is composed by the following set of modules:

- Compliment

This module is focused on the details of complimenting and answering to compliments in Spanish. Students were exposed to videos, situations and strategies which give them a brief

overview of compliments in Spanish. As dialect variation is important in this language, students could also get some practice about compliments in different Spanish dialects.

- Gratitude & Leave Taking

This module presents two different communicative acts. While expressing gratitude allows the speaker to thank someone for something (some action, present...), expressing leave taking lets the speaker close/end a conversation properly.

- Requests

The module of requests presents students the details of expressing requests in Spanish. They were able to watch videos as examples of this speech act, published with a transcription to facilitate the understanding. Moreover, within the module, students had to complete situations in which they were asked to use requests in Spanish. Besides, strategies focused on enouncing requests were also taught through this module.

- Apologies

The module of apologies was provided by the same information and structure than the previous module: videos in Spanish which showed people using apologies, strategies, and descriptions of what an apology is and how to use it.

- Invitations

This module teaches students to negotiate when a speaker tries to invite the hearer to do something. Students could find here more videos and exercises to familiarize themselves with this kind of communicative act.

- Service Encounters

This module could be taken as a summary of strategies previously mentioned in the preceding modules to perform properly the communicative acts mentioned before. Service Encounters have to do with politeness and pragmatic strategies which make possible the interaction between speaker and hearer. The main different with the previous modules in that it works as a summary or a revision module for learners. The module is focused on three specific elements: Openings and Tone Setting, Negotiation Service, and Closing the Interaction and Leave Taking.

- Advice, Suggestions, Disagreements, Complaints and Reprimands

This module presents three different sections. Students were taught useful strategies used to give advice and make suggestions as well as strategies to express disagreement and complaining or reprimands.

- Consideration for the Pragmatic Performance

The last module is based on additional resources for learning about Pragmatics. It is more a reference module focused on being a resource guide which the user is able to use it when needed as a supplement of other pragmatic areas.

Each module contained an introduction of the mentioned speech acts, strategies given for the pragmatic performance, socio-cultural factors, language varieties and a brief summary of the pragmatic awareness needed. The study developed by Cohen, “*Teaching and assessing L2 pragmatics: What can we expect from learners?*”, presented the pre-test, based on performing three role plays in the SIE, so that the researchers could be able to assess learners. Students were called to complete several tasks as the mentioned:

A request to borrow their host sister’s course notes, a service encounter with a street vendor (buying souvenirs), and apologizing to their sister for spilling Coke on the notes in their backpack and ruining them. (Cohen, 2008: 17)

In the pre-test, students had to complete a written multiple rejoinder Discourse Completion Task (DCT), which refers to the traditional written test used in interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics. It is the most recurrent instrument used to assess L2 learners’ skills to perform a certain speech act in a target language (Labben, 2016). According to the author mentioned before, DCT items are made up for “*descriptions of speech acts situations followed by incomplete discourse sequences that students are requested to complete*” (Labben, 2016: 69-70). The test carried out by Cohen focused on situations from the website, two requests, two apologies, and a service encounter which were part of the DCT.

Thereafter, the participant group attended a seminar based on strategies and completed three modules (requests, service encounters, and apologies) from the website, “Dancing with Words”. Once they had done that task, they took part in an interview of 10-20 minutes per learner where researchers were able to assess students. Afterwards, students were called to complete the post-test comprising the same test as the pre-test but with different requests and apologies: They had to pretend that they needed to make a request to borrow some money from their host sister, or they were asked to formulate an apology because they had lost the money.

As a result of this research, students highly improved their Spanish skills regarding sociolinguistic aspects, especially when trying to interact with others. For example, the pre-test showed that they exclusively used the phrase *lo siento* (“I’m sorry”) at the beginning of the

current study. However, after completing the post-test, students proved that they were able to use other structures such as *discúlpame* (“I apologize”) and *perdóname* (“Forgive me”). Moreover, the group of students showed that they improved their capacity to organize a speech by formulating correct sentences from the beginning to the end, and showing some kind of cohesion. Researchers paid special attention to the use of greetings and leave takings since they produced an important effect on the results, although students still had mistakes in their productions. (Cohen 2008: 19).

On the other hand, another study developed, this time, by Shively and Cohen (2008) also demonstrated that students improved their sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills in Spanish through the practice of every-day-situations, in which they were supposed to use speech strategies regarding apologies and requests. This time no technological devices were used but the results were similar. Students’ responses were analyzed according to the four instruments<sup>9</sup> discussed by Cohen, Paige, Shively, Emert and Hoff (2005).

This project investigated the impact of environmental and cultural factors on a group of American students whose native language was English and who were learners of Spanish as a L2. Furthermore, the study dealt with the development of their Spanish skills through the analysis of apologies and requests after studying abroad in a Spanish-speaking country for a semester. These students were exposed to the contact with Spanish-native speakers around 4-5 months during the spring or fall semester in 2003. Shively and Cohen wanted to test how learners become more native-like in using requests and apologies (Shively & Cohen 2008: 69).

The investigation dealt with the analysis of a group of 67 American students who were spending one semester abroad and were asked to complete entrance and exit questionnaires focusing on their background and language contact profile, respectively. Thus, they had to take several questionnaires to provide personal information such as a year rank at school or the Spanish-speaking country they were spending their semester in. Besides, students were asked about the amount of time they had experienced in another culture. These pieces of information would give an approximation to the researchers about their interlanguage awareness. Furthermore, they completed a request and an apology written production questionnaire.

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<sup>9</sup>An entrance background questionnaire, an exit language contact profile, the “*Intercultural Development Inventory*” written by Hammer & Bennet, (1998; 2001) and a request and apology written production questionnaire.



The entrance questionnaire was taken before their arrival at their host country and they were mainly asked about their background information. Regarding language, students had to complete some information about their native language, dominant(s) language(s) used with their family, and how much time they had studied the Target Language, in this case, Spanish. The exit questionnaire was taken at the end of their stay abroad to check their experiences abroad, opinion about study programs abroad, and the classes they had taken. Moreover, students had to explain their practical experiences with the target language; for instance, where they lived, activities that they had participated in, people they had been practicing Spanish with, or even where their friends were, and how much contact they had with the TL.

In this case, students had to take the same pre-test and post-test so that the results could be compared at the end of the experiment. This test, the request and apology written production questionnaire, was a multiple-rejoinder DCT. It was based on ten different situations where learners had to provide certain knowledge of apologies and requests in Spanish. For instance, one of the situations was apologizing for spilling wine on a tablecloth during dinner. Then, students had to fill in the gaps to build a dialogue with a native speaker. In this questionnaire, the relative social status of the hearer, social distance and degree of imposition (for requests), or severity of the offense (for apologies) were taken in consideration. Additionally, researchers created two different versions of the apology and request questionnaire to get a regional dialectal variation. Thus, students who were living in Latin American countries and students who were living in Spain took different tests.

### **3 Research questions**

The goal of my research is to approach how cultural factors such as nationality or language experiences are an important agent which influences how people learn a L2. Therefore, the present project deals with the analysis and comparison of the development of the communicative skills in Spanish of a group of Erasmus students and American students by checking the apologies and requests that they produce in a questionnaire. Furthermore, it will be compared their responses with the answers given by a group of Spanish native speakers, who will act as the control group; this task is something that varies from Shively & Cohen experiment.

Thus, the research questions of the present study, which are analyzed and answered in detail in section 5 & 6, are the following:

- Do we talk about apologies and requests as universal strategies? Or, on the contrary, do we talk about cultural specificity regarding the speech acts of apology and request to what extent they vary between cultures? Does translocation exist, letting the native culture or language interfere with the second language?
- Do students respect the variables, the relative social status of the hearer, social distance and degree of imposition (for requests), or severity of the offense (for apologies) used by Shively and Cohen (2008)?
- To what extent do Erasmus and Americans students become more or less native-like in their apology and request performance?

## **4 Materials and method section**

### **4.1 Methodology**

42 students voluntarily took part in this test by completing a background questionnaire and a DCT on apologies and requests. The test was conducted online (since it was on a Google Form format) and the link was sent by email to all the participants in order to facilitate its completion.

#### **Participants**

The participants/subjects in the present study were 14 Erasmus students from different European countries, 14 American students of Spanish, and 14 Spanish-native students from Cadiz, Seville, Cordova, Las Palmas and Corunna. The background questionnaires for the Spaniards were different from the ones created for the international students (that is, the American and Erasmus students), but the DCT was the same (see Appendix 1). Such a difference is due to the impossibility of asking the Spanish students about their experiences abroad and their L2 acquisition in Spanish. Thus, the background questionnaire for Spanish native students focused on their experience with an L2 and experience abroad. The first one, the group of Erasmus students, stayed at least 6 months in Cadiz (Spain) studying a degree within the program of Erasmus+ and also attended classes of Spanish in the CSLM (Centro

Superior de Lenguas Modernas of the University of Cadiz). The American students were from different universities in the United States such as the University of Denver (DU) in Colorado or Valdosta State University (VSU) in Georgia. They were called to do the test 2-3 weeks after their arrival in Spain.

## Materials

The material used for the apology and request questionnaire in this experiment will replicate the questionnaire used in the Shively and Cohen work (2008), which is a DCT focusing on 4 requests and 4 apologies (see Appendices 1 & 2). However, the DCT used by Shively and Cohen consists of 10 scenes: 5 requests and 5 apologies. The questionnaires done for the American Students, Erasmus students and Spanish-native students are exactly the same to be able to compare them regarding the three aforementioned variables<sup>10</sup>. Before the test, students completed a personal questionnaire to check if cultural agents such as nationality, age, gender, contact with languages, or experiences abroad interfered in some way with the L2 acquisition. The set of instruments, including the background questionnaire and the request-and-apology test, were both used in Google Form:

### - Background questionnaire.

The background questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was composed of 8 questions and set at the beginning of the test to get some personal information about the language learning background of the subjects who took part in the project and to understand the personal environment of the students prior to the study. This previous set of questions as well as the rest of the test was written in Spanish. It was anonymous and the information was exclusively used for scientific/research purposes. Within the background questionnaire, there were two different types of questionnaires: one created for the two groups of international participants (Erasmus and American students), and another one for the Spanish-native speakers. As mentioned before, the reason for this difference lied on the fact that questions about their experience with Spanish were of no importance for Spanish native speakers, so they were asked about their experience with other second languages (see Appendix 2).

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<sup>10</sup> The relative social status of the hearer, social distance and degree of imposition (for requests), or severity of the offense (for apologies) were taken as the dependent variables of this test.

- Discourse completion task (DCT).

The apology-and-request production questionnaire focused on a direct evaluation of every-day spoken language in the form of a DCT. It consisted of 8 scenes divided into four apologies and four requests, thought to approach situations that students could face in their daily lives. Moreover, the scenes designated both formal and informal registers of the spoken language. Students were supposed to distinguish the registers to achieve a proper level of Spanish pragmatics awareness (see Appendix 1 for the complete DCT).

The 8 scenes are taken from the experiment conducted by Shively and Cohen in 2008 as described in Section 5. The DCT was the same for the three groups: the Erasmus students, the American students, and the Spanish-native speakers to be able to do a proper and precise comparison. In addition, the variables of “relative social status of the hearer”, “social distance” and “degree of imposition” (for requests) and “severity of the offense” (for apologies) are taken into consideration, as in Shively and Cohen’s project. The detailed description of each scene is stated in Table 5 within the result section.

#### Data Collection Procedure

First of all, a beta version of the whole test, including the background questionnaire and the DCT, was sent to a group of subjects to specifically detect ambiguities or mistakes within the test. The errors or ambiguities that individuals reported were corrected, such as reformulating some questions to make them understandable.

The experiment was carried out in three different phases/stages: the one done to Erasmus students in May 2016, the second one done to the American students in June 2016 when participants had just arrived in Spain, and the third and last one carried out with Spanish-native speakers during June and July 2016. The test format was a Google Form document completed online.

The requirements for Erasmus students at the University of Cadiz to take part in the test were a minimum stay of 6 months in our country and a B1/B2 level of Spanish according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Afterwards, the link to the test (the background questionnaire and the DCT) was sent by e-mail to the participants. Once the replies were collected, a process of positive discrimination was carried out to check

that the participants fulfilled the requirements needed. Around 6 students were dismissed for not fulfilling the preliminary conditions, since they had just stayed three months in Spain.

14 American students from the CSLM Spanish intensive courses volunteered to carry out the test. The researcher of this project met the students from B1 and B2 levels during the second class of their course to briefly tell them about the project (the first one was used for doing a placement test), and the students voluntarily provided their e-mails so that they could be sent the tests.

Finally, 14 Spanish native students volunteered for the present study. They belonged to different degrees and Spanish Universities such as the University of Cadiz (UCA), University of A Coruña (UDC), University of Seville (US), and University of Cordova (UCO). The variable of degrees divided students into “degrees of languages”, including English and Spanish Studies, and “other BSs” like Medicine, Sport Sciences, Education or Engineering. This distinction was made for avoiding just analyzing tests from people who presumably were more familiar with language structures than others. Finally, the test especially created for the Spanish native speakers group was sent to the participants via e-mail as well.

## 5 Results section

The first part of the experiment dealt with the analysis of the background questionnaire of the 3 groups of participants.

Erasmus Students belonged to a huge variety of nations including France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Lithuania, Holland, and Sweden. The average age of the students was within the 20-27 age range (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Background information about the Erasmus Student Group**

Age/Gender	Nationality	Degree	Time in Spain
20♀	Lithuania	English and Spanish Linguistics	9 months
20 ♂	Holland	European Studies	9 months

23 ♀	Italy	English and German Studies	9 months
25 ♂	Germany	Industrial Engineering	9 months
24 ♀	Italy	Languages	8 months
24 ♂	Sweden	Spanish Studies	8 months
27 ♂	Germany	Mechanic Engineering	8 months
25 ♂	Germany	Mechanic Engineering	10 months
23 ♂	Italy	Economics	6 months
27 ♂	Germany	Economic Engineering	6 months
25 ♀	Finland	English Studies	9 months
22 ♀	Poland	English Studies	12 months
23 ♀	France	Sport Sciences	8 months
22 ♀	Slovenia	Education and Philosophy	10 months

The group of American Students spoke American English as their first language (L1)/ mother tongue. Their level of Spanish was B1-B2 according to the CEFR, after passing a placement test in the CSLM to evaluate their language level. The average age of this group of students was within the 19 to 55 age range (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Information about American Students**

Age/Gender	Nationality	Studies	Time in Spain
19 ♀	USA	Nursing	5 weeks
28 ♀	USA	Tourism and Spanish	3 weeks
23 ♂	USA	Spanish	4 weeks
26 ♀	USA	Spanish	5 weeks

55 ♀	USA	Languages	1 week
25 ♂	USA	Spanish	3 weeks
21 ♀	USA	Criminology and Spanish	3 weeks
19 ♀	USA	Education and Spanish	1 week
20 ♂	USA	Nutritionist and Spanish	3 weeks
20 ♀	USA	Criminology and Spanish	1 week
22 ♂	USA	Education and Spanish	2 weeks
20 ♀	USA	Spanish	1 week
21 ♂	USA	Laws and Spanish	2 weeks
21 ♂	USA	Spanish and French	3 weeks

12 of the Spanish-native speakers stated that they were learning, at least, an L2 such as English, French, German or Italian while the rest indicated that they were not studying any language at that time, as shown in Table 3. When asked about their language proficiency and certificates, some of them pointed out that they had a certificate (in all cases, of English) and 4 of these 12 students indicated their proficiency in a third language (without evidences or certificates).

**Table 3: Background information about the Spanish-native speaker group**

Age/Gender	Studies	Language(s)	Certified level
21 ♀	English Studies	English	C1 (No certificate)
23 ♂	English Studies	English	B2 (Trinity)
22 ♂	English Studies	English	B2 (No certificate)
21 ♂	English Studies	English and German	C1 (English, No certificate) / A2 (German, No certificate)
23 ♀	Spanish Studies	No languages currently	B1 (Cambridge)

22 ♂	English Studies	English and French	C1 (English, No certificate) / A1 (French, No certificate)
24 ♀	English Studies	English	B1(EoI) <sup>11</sup>
21 ♀	Biology	English	A2 (No certificate)
22 ♀	Medicine	English	B1 (Cambridge)
22 ♂	Sport Sciences	English	B2 (Cambridge)
25 ♂	Economics	English	B1 (Cambridge)
22♂	Aerospace Engineering	English and German	C1 (English, Cambridge) / A2 (German, EoI)
22 ♀	Psychology	English and Italian	C1 (English, Cambridge) / A1 (Italian, EoI)
24 ♀	Education	No languages currently	A2 (No certificate)

The gender variable, aiming at having the same number of men and women in all groups, was controlled in the Erasmus group and the Spanish-native speaker group. However, it was not possible to control it in the American student group because of the higher number of women in the Spanish courses of the CSLM.

Looking at the Spanish experience of the Erasmus participants prior to their Erasmus Program, more than 60% of the individuals from the group of Erasmus reported that they had never been before to a Spanish-speaking country while the rest of them explained that they had visited Cuba, Mexico, or Peru in holidays for a period no longer than 3 weeks. None but one Erasmus student -from Germany- pointed out that he had spent 3 months in Peru in 2009 as part of a voluntary work in an NGO. As regards the group of American students, the results to this question were similar. 10 of them stated that they had never been to a Spanish-speaking country before their arrival in Spain. The rest of them exposed that they had visited Mexico, Guatemala, and Costa Rica in previous holidays for a period no longer than 10 days.

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<sup>11</sup>EIO: Escuela Oficial de Idiomas that is the Official institution in Andalusia (Spain) which works as a Language School. It offers foreign language exams such as English, German, French, or Italian at all CEFR levels (A1 to C1) to certify the students' language level.



With reference to the group of Spanish-native speakers, it was meaningless asking them about their Spanish experience since they were native speakers of Spanish. Thus, their background questionnaire focused on their international experiences, including their stays abroad and experience with other languages. The participants were asked about a stay abroad in an Erasmus Program, as AuPairs<sup>12</sup>, language courses, or even working abroad. The answers were very rich and varied since 7 students reported that they had spent some time as Erasmus students in Tallinn (Estonia), Cracow (Poland), Koblenz and Karlsruhe (Germany), Loughborough (England), and Parma (Italy). Two students related that they had spent no longer than 2 months in England to participate in a language course. Just one participant reported that she had stayed in London (England) 2 years as an AuPair. The rest, 4 of them, did not specify any international experience.

Furthermore, the group of Erasmus and American students was asked about the amount of time they had been learning Spanish prior to the present study. Their responses are shown in Table 5.

**Table 4: Amount of time spent learning Spanish by international students**

Amount of time	Participants	Percent
Never	1	3,57%
3-8 months	2	7,14%
1-2 years	11	39,28%
3-6 years	8	28,57%
Over 6 years	6	21,43%

Regarding the way in which they learnt another language (Spanish in the case of the international students and English in the case of the Spanish students), the Erasmus and American students reported similar responses since more than 80% of them (23 students) had studied Spanish in the University. Within this percentage, 8 out of 23 had also learned Spanish at high school. The group of Spanish-native speakers presented a higher variety of responses.

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<sup>12</sup> According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term AuPair designates “a young person from a foreign country who lives with a family and helps to care children and do housework in return for the opportunity to learn the family’s language”

All of participants reported that they studied English as L2 in school and high school period. However, around 50-60% of them showed that they continued studying their L2 in private language schools.

After analyzing the responses the participants had reported in the background questionnaire, the answers of the American group to the 8 scenes in the DCT were analyzed to establish whether the 3 variables established (“relative social statuses of the hearer”, “social distance” and “degree of imposition” (for requests) and “severity of the offense” (for apologies)) had been kept. Hence, the criteria established in the present paper to determine that they had respected them sets that at least the 70% of the participants should have respected the variables. The mentioned criterion has not been taken from another works but determined by the researcher of this project.

The following table (see Table 5) the vignettes presented to the students in the DCT. Each variable is attached to a specific level depending on the hearer: The social status depends on the condition of the hearer; when the speaker is lower in social status than the hearer, the speech act should tend to be polite. For this reason, scene #3 is labelled with a high social status of the hearer. On the other hand, the social distance is subordinated to the closeness relationship between the speaker and the hearer. That is, when the speaker is talking to his/her sibling, the relationship is closer than talking to an elderly person. Then, scenes #8 and #4 are labelled with a low and high social distance, respectively. Finally, regarding the third variable, a distinction is made between apologies or requests. For the speech act of apologizing, the level of the severity of the offense is based on the mistake made by the speaker. Consequently, almost all apology scenes are linked to a high level of offense because of the nature of the mistakes: spilling some coke on the exam’s notes or being late to a professor meeting (for the second time) are considered to be big errors according to social standards. For the speech act of requesting, the degree of imposition depends on the importance of the situation. If the speaker is asking for a big favor, the rank of imposition is higher. For instance, in scene #4, the speaker requests a seat shift which is considered to be a big favor, according to social standards.

**Table 5: Description of the apology and request scenes on the DCT**

<b>Vignette number and title</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Relative social status of hearer</b>	<b>Social distance</b>	<b>Severity of the offense (apologies)/ Degree of imposition (requests)</b>
<b>Apologies</b>				
<i>#1/8 "Spill coke"</i>	At the home of a friend from University, a student apologizes to his/her friend for spilling a can of coke on the following exam's notes.	Equal	Mid	High
<i>#3/8 "The lost book"</i>	A student apologizes to his teacher for having lost a book that the teacher had lent him/her.	High	Mid	High
<i>#5/8 "Sibling stuffs"</i>	A student apologizes to his/her sister/brother for having ruin certain outfit that the sister/brother had previously lent him/her for a party.	Equal	Low	Mid/High
<i>#7/8 "Prof meeting"</i>	A student apologizes for a missing scheduled meeting, for the second time, with his/her professor.	High	Mid	High
<b>Requests</b>				
<i>#2/8 "Slower speech"</i>	A student requests that the professor speak more slowly in class because s/he cannot understand him.	High	Mid	Mid
<i>#4/8 "Airplane seat"</i>	Upon boarding an overseas flight, a student requests that the older passenger in the adjacent seat switch places with his/her friend so they can sit together.	High	High	High
<i>#6/8 "Less food"</i>	A student requests that his/her mother gives him/her less food for dinner because the portions are too large.	Equal/High	Low	Low
<i>#8/8 "Leaving for school"</i>	A student requests that his/her 15-year-old brother/sister gets up earlier so that they can walk to school together without the student arriving late.	Low	Low	High

The first situation, “*Spill the coke*”, refers to an informal apology. Around 60% of the Erasmus students used the expression “*lo siento (mucho)*” (I’m -very- sorry) although 40% of them also wrote down “*perdón*” or “*perdóname*”, which denotes a higher level of vocabulary as Cohen (2008) stated after passing the post-test to the students (see section 2). All of them tried to offer a solution to the hearer in order to solve the mistake. 100% of the American group just formulated the expression “*lo siento*” and only 21% provided a solution to the problem. In addition, 50% of them used “*mierda*” (“shit”, translated into English). In the context of this scene, the use of this offensive word could be accepted since it is a conversation between friends so a formal register is not required. Besides, it could be taken as a literal translation from English (mother tongue of American students) to Spanish since the expression *shit!* is used in English as an interjection. According to the results of the native group, 64% of them apologized by using an informal register as it was expected for this situation and they also offered a solution for the problem. The rest, 35% of Spanish native speakers, just wrote down expressions for indicating surprise or shock; for instance, “*Dios!*” (Oh my God!). Therefore, in the first situation, it could be said that the three groups respected the social status of the hearer (set as equal) as well as the social distance (set as mid) since both speaker and hearer were friends and the statements were performed within an informal register. Notwithstanding, the severity of the offense was just respected by the Erasmus and the native participants.

The second scene, “*Slower speech*”, concerns a formal request. 71% of Erasmus students used a formal register to talk with the professor. They wrote down expressions such as “*¿Podría ... por favor?*” (Could you please...?), “*Perdone, ¿puede ...?*” (Excuse me, can you...?) or “*señor*” (Mr.) which denote the polite level required by the request. Notwithstanding, these expressions imply different levels of politeness being the first one higher. Likewise, 65% of the Americans performed an order using the imperative tense rather than a request; for instance, “*Repite, por favor*” (Repeat, please), “*Más despacio, por favor*” (Slower, please). However, 28% used a formal register performing a request. On the other hand, 100% of the Spanish native speakers performed a polite request such as “*Disculpe, ¿podría...?*” (Excuse me, could you...?). Thus, for the second scene, both Erasmus participants and Spanish native speakers respected the three variables by using formal expressions. Moreover, they were able to accept that the degree of imposition was “mid” since it was not a big favor. Nevertheless, the American students did not respect the variables because of the use of the imperative, considered an informal register/imposition when talking to a higher status speaker such as a professor.

The third, “*The lost book*”, deals with a formal apology. 78% of the Erasmus participants used “*lo siento (muchísimo)*” to apologize as well as a proposal to buy a new book. All the statements they performed followed an informal register such as “*lo siento muchísimo pero te voy a comprar otro*” (I’m very sorry but I’ll buy you another one). However, the rest of the Erasmus, 21%, tried to lie with excuses such as “*lo ha comido mi perro*” (my dog has eaten the book) or “*todavía necesito un poco de tiempo para leer algunas partes del libro*” (I still need some time to read some parts of the book) instead of apologizing for the mistake. Notwithstanding, 92% of the American students apologized for the loss using the expression “*lo siento*” and looking for an alternative solution. All of them addressed to the professor in an informal register; “*Voy a comprarte*” (I am going to buy you...), “*he perdido el libro tuyo*” (I have lost your book), “*voy a buscar otro para ti*” (I am going to look for another book for you)<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, 78% of Spanish native speakers wrote down apologies using a formal register, for example, “*disculpe pero no encuentro su libro*” (Excuse me but I don’t find your book). The expected level for this apology based on the use of a formal register. Therefore, none of the participants except the natives respected the variables since all of them flouted the social distance and status of the hearer by referring to him/her in an informal register.

The fourth vignette, “*the airplane seat*”, had to do with a formal request. On the one hand, more than 80% of the Erasmus students referred to the old man in a formal register using expressions such as “*perdone*” or “*disculpe*” to request a seat shift. Both expressions denote a high level of politeness and respect for the hearer. On the other hand, all except just one American student went directly to the point and did not perform any request, for instance, “*podemos cambiar para que mi amigo y yo vamos juntos*” (We can shift the seats so that my friend and I travel together”). However, the one who referred to the old man used a very polite request: “*¿Estaría usted dispuesto a cambiar los asientos con mi amiga?*” (Would you be willing to swop the seats with my friend?). Moreover, regarding the results reported by the Spanish native speakers, 100% of them referred to the old man with polite and formal expressions such as “*disculpe caballero, ¿le importaría cambiar el sitio?*” (Excuse me sir, would you mind shifting the seats?) or “*me preguntaba si le importaría cambiar su asiento*” (I was wonder if you would mind shifting your seat). Thus, it could be said that the Erasmus students and Spanish native speakers respected the three variables since they wrote down polite and formal requests. They accepted the social distance with the hearer as well as the higher status of the elderly man. In

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<sup>13</sup> The expressions are conjugated with the subject “tú” (you) instead of “usted” (polite form of the pronoun “you”).

contrast, the American participants violated the variables sounding impolite for a Spanish-native speaker.

The fifth situation, “*Sibling stuff*”, describes an informal apology. The Erasmus students exactly performed an apology to a brother/sister or someone who belonged to the same social status. They used an informal register and reported the use of expressions such as “*lo siento*” or “*perdoname*”, they tried to compensate the hearer with an alternative solution. Likewise, the American participants did the same. Therefore, it could indeed be said that both groups (28 participants) respected the variables using the informal register for this situation and looking for a solution due to the severity of the offense. According to the results given by the Spaniards, only 35% of them used the common expression of apologizing (I am sorry, etc) although in all cases they tried to give a solution to the hearer. Thus, even though they did not explicitly apologize, they did not flout the social distance and social status of the hearer because they used the informal register required in this apology and provided solutions in agreement with the severity of the offense.

The sixth scene, “*Less food*”, describes an informal request. A high percent of the Erasmus students, 71% of them, did not perform a request but a complaint against his/her mother; for instance, “*¡Mamá! ¿Quieres que engorde o qué?*” (Mom! Do you want me to get fat?). The rest, 28% of the Erasmus, politely and kindly asked their mother to serve them less food. The American students wrote down similar responses to the ones given by the Erasmus. On the other hand, 64% of the Spanish native participants explicitly ordered their mothers not to serve them more food instead of requesting it; for instance, “*mama, no me echas más*” (mom, don’t serve me more food). The rest, 35% of them, just complained about the situation: “*¿dónde va ‘oma?’*” (what are you doing?!). Therefore, the three groups flouted the variable based on the social status since they showed an impolite attitude and an excess of familiarity with the hearer. As the social distance was qualified as “low” because of the kinship, this variable was respected. The degree of imposition was “low” as well, so students assumed perfectly that it was not a big favor and the situation was not very formal. Hence, they did not pay much attention to the use of complex language structures such as “I was wonder if you could serve less food”, for example.

The seventh vignette, “*Prof meeting*”, refers to the last apology of the test. The expected level of this apology was a very formal register. It is a similar situation to scene #3. 85% of the Erasmus participants reported responses by using the expressions such as “*lo siento*

(*muchísimo/mucho/ de verdad*)” or “*disculpe/discúlpame*” and adding reasons for their delay. However, most of participants used an informal register such as “*lo siento mucho por molestarte*” (I’m so sorry for bothering you). A correct and formal apology would be given by the use of the verb tense required for “*usted*, in this case “*molestarle*”. Thus, it could be said that Erasmus students did not respect the variables since they wrote down responses using the informal register when referring to a higher status hearer. The answer given by the American students cannot be assessed since they just wrote down “*lo siento*” or “*perdón*”. Even though the American participants provided an apology, they did not show any key word so that the variables could not be analyzed since there are no evidences to state whether they flouted the variables. According to the Spanish native speakers’ results, they neither provided any proof for analyzing the level of politeness in the apology; therefore, no evidence for assessing the variables. However, they gave more elaborated utterances than the Americans considering that they also provided an explanation such as “*he tenido un problema con la moto*” (I had a problem with the motorbike). Only one of them gave a piece of formal register by saying “*Disculpe, le prometo que no volverá a pasar*” (Excuse me, I promise you that it will not happen again”.

The last scene, “*Leaving for School*”, has to do with an informal request. 100% of the Erasmus participants used orders instead of requests in this situation; for instance, “*Mañana levántate más temprano*”, “*Mañana te levantas mas tempranito*” (Wake up earlier tomorrow) or “*Desde mañana vamos juntos a la uni así que te levantas mas temprano*” (From tomorrow we go together to the University so wake up earlier). The same results were reported by the group of Spanish native speakers. All of them used an order instead of a request; for example, “*Picha<sup>14</sup>, mañana te levantas más tempranito eh*” (Dude, wake up earlier tomorrow). On the other hand, the American students showed a higher level of politeness in this scene since more than 71% of the participants used a request for asking his/her brother/sister about going together to the University. Therefore, the three groups of participants used an informal register as needed in this situation, but just the Americans respected the variables by using polite requests within the mentioned register. The following tables show the rate of the used strategies that, theoretically, a speaker needs in order to perform apologies and requests.

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<sup>14</sup> According to “*El habla de Cádiz*”, the word “*picha*” designates a term of endearment used for referring to a male individual. This expression is commonly used in Cadiz (Andalusia, Spain).

**Table 6. Strategies used in apologies' performance**

Strategies	% of Erasmus	% of Americans	% of SNS <sup>15</sup>
<b>The explicit expression of an apology</b>	~ 90%	~ 90%	~ 65%
<b>The expression of responsibility</b>	14%	0%	7%
<b>The explanation</b>	28%	7%	~ 90%
<b>The offer of repair</b>	~70%	~40%	~90%
<b>The promise of forbearance<sup>16</sup></b>	21%	14%	42%
<b>Intensification of the apology</b>	14%	0%	~ 60%

**Table 7. Strategies used in requests' performance**

Strategy	% of Erasmus	% of Americans	% of SNS
<b>Use of past tense/negation</b>	This strategy is not used in Spanish		
<b>Use of a tag question</b>	21%	7%	14%
<b>Use of conditional clause</b>	0%	0%	14%
<b>Embedding</b>	0%	0%	0%
<b>Use of -ing forms</b>	This strategy is not used in Spanish		
<b>Use of modals</b>	50%	~10%	~ 80%
<b>Use of downgraders</b>	~ 70%	~30%	40%
<b>Use of upgraders</b>	~ 50%	0%	~ 50%

<sup>15</sup> Spanish-native speakers<sup>16</sup> This strategy was only used in scene #7



## 6 Discussion section

According to these results, the present paper tries to give responses to the research questions (RQ) established at the beginning of it:

1st RQ: Do we talk about apologies and requests as universal strategies? Or, on the contrary, do we talk about cultural specificity regarding the speech acts of apology and request? To what extent do they vary between cultures? Does translocation exist, letting the native culture or language interfere to the second language?

In general terms, as mentioned in sections 1.2.1 & 1.2.2, there are certainly universal strategies which can be combined so that speakers can perform a correct apology or request. However, according to the results, the three groups did not follow the same patterns when apologizing or requesting since they used the strategies differently; not even the Spanish native speakers used the same strategies when apologizing or requesting. Thus, we can talk about cultural specificity regarding the performance of the studied speech acts. The American participants seem to be much more straightforward than Europeans as it could be appreciated in the tables. For instance, the European students mainly provided an explanation and tried to repair the mistake when apologizing. Notwithstanding, a low percentage of Americans used these strategies, which denotes a more direct attitude since they limited themselves to perform the explicit expression of an apology. Hence, it is probably fair to say that culture affects to how a speaker performs apologies and requests.

Regarding the second part of this research question, translocation refers to the linguistic interference from the mother tongue to the target language. In other words, this phenomenon happens when the speaker uses a native structure in the L2. One representative example of it has been provided by the American students. When they wanted to perform a request, they wrote down responses such as “*¿es posible de cambiar el asiento?*” (is it possible to change the seat?) or “*¿es posible que levantas mas temprano?*” (is it possible to wake up earlier?). These utterances are grammatically incorrect in Spanish and so this structure is not used either. Therefore, we can state that translocation does exist, interfering with the L2.

2nd RQ: Do students respect the variables: the relative social status of the hearer, social distance and degree of imposition (for requests), or severity of the offense (for apologies) used by Shively and Cohen (2008)?

Table 8 shows how the participants respected the variables. To limit the complexity of the table and ensure readers' comprehension, the legend provides a description for the different categories:

<u>Participants</u>			<u>Variables</u>		
<b>E:</b>	Erasmus students		<b>1:</b>	Social status of the hearer	
<b>A:</b>	American students		<b>2:</b>	Social distance	
<b>S:</b>	Spanish native speakers		<b>3:</b>	Degree of imposition (requests) Severity of the offense (apologies)	

**Table 8. Variables' results**

<b>Vignette</b>		#1			#2			#3			#4			#5			#6			#7			#8		
<b>Participants</b>		E	A	S	E	A	S	E	A	S	E	A	S	E	A	S	E	A	S	E	A	S	E	A	S
<b>Variables</b>	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	-	-	✗	✓	✗
	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	-	-	✗	✓	✗
	3	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	-	-	✗	✓	✗

According to the results of the present study, this table draws the following interpretations:

1. In the first situation, American students were the only group who flouted the “severity of the offense” because they restricted themselves to the apology instead of trying to find a potential solution to sort out the problem as the native and the Erasmus participants did. From that, it could be assumed that the American culture is more direct than the European culture.
2. In the second situation, only the group of American participants did not respect the variables since they used orders instead of requests. However, for informal registers, in Spanish the use of the imperative may be accepted but this is not the case. In this scene, it could be appreciated that the main problem for Americans was the lack of the acquisition of the strategies. They were supposed to have a B1 or B2 level of Spanish but, as the test was sent at the beginning of the language course, probably they had not

learnt/developed strategies to perform a polite request at that moment.

3. Regarding the third situation, it could be said that, to fulfill the variable of social distance and status of the hearer, the speaker should use verb tenses according to the personal pronoun "*usted*" instead of "*tú*" because they are referring to a teacher who requires a formal register. Thus, only the native speakers respected the variables. From that, it could be interpreted that the Erasmus and American students did not use this polite tense because of the lack of it in their mother tongue. Another reason may be the lack of acquisition of this tense and/or its use.
4. In the case of the fourth scene, only the group of American participants violated the variables since they asked for shifting the seat very directly. Therefore, it could be stated that Spanish culture tends to be less direct or wordier, avoiding so rude attitudes like the one used by the American students, which may result in a discourteous behavior when a speaker requests something in Spanish.
5. The fifth situation draws interesting information regarding the results achieved. This scene was based on an informal apology. All the participants respected the variables but just the American and Erasmus students used the explicit expression of an apology (for instance, I am sorry). However, it is important to highlight that Spanish native speakers, in general, do not tend to apologize directly but justifying and compensating the hearer in informal situations. From that, it could be assumed that apologizing explicitly, as the international students did, does not imply the resemblance to the native attitudes but a high level of linguistic awareness.
6. A conclusion pointed out by the sixth scene is that when the relationship between the members of the conversation is very close, the status of the hearer and the social distance tend to be violated regardless of nationalities or cultures.
7. The seventh scene was difficult to assess since both Americans and Spanish native speakers did not provide any proof to analyze the register used. Notwithstanding, from the results achieved in this scene, the American students seem to be more direct since they just restricted themselves to apologize again. On the other hand, the native and the Erasmus students gave more elaborated utterances. Then, it is fair to state that one of the main differences between the American and European culture is the extreme practicality and the effectiveness of the former compared with the latter.

8. According to the eighth situation, only the Americans respected the variables because they indeed performed a request. However, an interpretation achieved by this scene it is based on the fact that the use of the imperative in Spanish does not always imply an order when talking in an informal register, as mentioned before. Erasmus participants and native speakers used the same structures, orders, when they needed to request something to a close hearer. Hence, it could be stated that the Erasmus students seemed to have acquired a higher level of native expressions than the Americans.

3<sup>rd</sup> RQ: To what extent do Erasmus and Americans students become more or less native-like in their apology and request performance?

To address this question, the apology and request questionnaires completed by Erasmus and American students were compared to the ones filled by the Spanish-native speakers. The strategies stated by Trosborg (1995) for requests and the strategies stated by Olshtain and Cohen (1990) for the apologies were useful to determine the similarity between the speech acts performed by the native and the non-native speakers of Spanish. Likewise, the acquisition of cultural expressions was also analyzed.

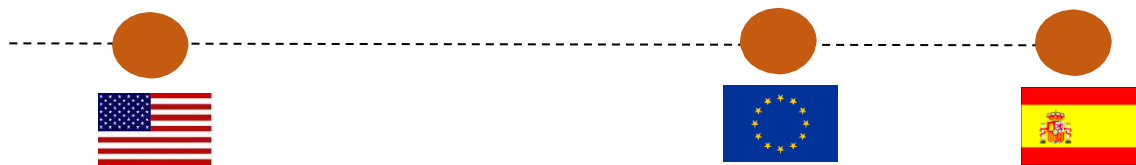
The results achieved by this study show that following the strategies given by linguists to perform apologies and requests does not imply a high and direct resemblance to native speakers. For instance, an elevated percentage of Erasmus participants used the explicit expression of an apology which it is not the common routine for Spanish native speakers, when apologizing in informal registers. Besides, the group of Erasmus students provided a higher percentage than the Spanish students in the use of downgraders for performing a request. Thus, it could be interpreted that what it is linguistically correct may not represent a native performance.

On the other hand, the Americans' responses seem to be very direct and short in comparison to the responses given by the Erasmus and the native speakers. This fact indicates that American participants have not acquired the Spanish culture yet and therefore, the American culture has interfered in the apology and request performance. Hence, it might be objected that the differences found in the present paper could be produced by the amount of time spent in Spain by both groups. While the Erasmus students had spent at least 6 months in the country, the

Americans had just arrived in Cadiz although it is important to highlight that both groups reached the same level of Spanish proficiency.

Notwithstanding, Erasmus students' responses showed that Erasmus participants had acquired a high level of cultural expressions since they used the same words or expressions as Spanish native speakers. They added suffixes such as “-ito, -ita” in order to use diminutives which is a common practice in Spanish; for instance, “*tempranito*”, “*despacito*”, “*pequeñita*” or “*poquito*”. They also wrote down “*quillo*<sup>17</sup>”, “*quilla*” or “*picha*” which are words typically used in Cadiz. In addition, as aforementioned, in Spanish the use of the imperative does not always imply an order when referring to an informal context. Erasmus participants used the imperative for requesting something as Spanish native speakers did.

For all the interpretations, it could be stated that American students had not acquired a high level of Spanish attitudes. However, Erasmus participants seem to be more native-like in their apology and request performance in spite of not having used the strategies in the same way as the natives. The next diagram shows the distance to the native performance based on the results obtained.



The American group is represented by the American flag which has a relevant distance to the Spanish native speaker group represented by the Spanish flag. As can be seen, the Erasmus group, represented by the European flag, is in the middle but closer in performance to the native group.

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<sup>17</sup> According to “El habla de Cádiz”, the word “quillo” refers to the diminutive of “chico” (boy) which is used to allude to someone. The feminine version is “quilla”. These terms are commonly used in Cadiz (Andalusia, Spain).

## 7 Conclusion

This present paper has been focused on the development of apologies and requests by L2 learners of Spanish. The main aim was to analyze how far the native culture interferes with the target language and to assess to what extent European and American students' production grows into a more or less native-like speech act performance. The results achieved from this research stated that, in fact, background characteristics do impact on the pragmatic development. Moreover, the project confirmed that the Erasmus participants acquired a high level of linguistic resemblance to native speakers of Spanish after spending, at least, 6 months in the country. By contrast, American students did not show similarities regarding the native performance. Hence, based on these results, I would quote Flora Lewis by saying that "*learning another language is not only learning different words for the same things, but learning another way to think about things*" (Flora Lewis, 2000: Dialogue among Civilizations United Nations).

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## **Appendix 1**

### **TEST DE NIVEL DE PRAGMÁTICA (Erasmus & Americans)**

Al comienzo del test, hay cinco preguntas generales sobre la forma en la que aprendiste español. A continuación, leerás la descripción de ocho situaciones cotidianas. Escribe lo que dirías en cada situación LITERALMENTE. El test solo te tomará 5 minutos.

Este test es completamente ANÓNIMO y forma parte de una investigación para un proyecto "Fin de Grado" CON FINES EXCLUSIVAMENTE ACADÉMICOS sobre Pragmática Intercultural. Por tanto, tus datos personales no serán revelados a terceros.

Muchas gracias por tu tiempo y colaboración.

### **BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE**

Edad:

Género:

Nacionalidad:

¿Qué estudias en tu país de origen?

¿Cuánto tiempo llevas en España?

¿Has estado en otro país de habla hispana? Si tu respuesta es afirmativa, ¿cuánto tiempo y dónde?

¿Cuántos años has estudiado español?

¿Dónde has estudiado español: en el instituto, en la universidad y/o academias privadas?

## DISCOURSE COMPLETION TEST

¿Qué tipo de respuestas darías para cada situación? Por favor, anota qué dirías en estas situaciones cotidianas.

1/8. Estás en casa de tu amigo de la Universidad y, de repente, tu vaso de Coca Cola cae sobre sus apuntes. Éstos son muy útiles para el examen que tenéis la próxima semana.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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2/8. Estás en clase y tú profesor empieza a hablar cada vez más rápido, de manera que no puedes entenderle.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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3/8. Tu profesor/a encargado/a de supervisar tus prácticas te prestó un libro hace dos meses. Tú aún no se lo has devuelto porque lo has perdido.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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4/8. Estás viajando en avión hacia Canadá. Tu asiento es el H9, mientras que el de tu compañero es el A12. Queréis cambiarle el asiento al señor que se encuentra en el asiento H8 para poder ir juntos durante el vuelo.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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5/8. El viernes pasado tenías prisa y no sabías qué ropa llevar a la fiesta. Le pediste consejo a tu hermano/a y este/a te dejó prestado una prenda de ropa a la que le tenía mucho cariño. En agradecimiento, quisiste lavarla y plancharla antes de devolvérsela, pero el agua caliente hizo que esta prenda encogiera y quedara demasiado pequeña.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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6/8. Estás comiendo y tu madre te sirve grandes porciones de comida. Por este motivo, quieres pedirle que, por favor, no te ponga tanta cantidad para la cena.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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7/8. Has llegado tarde, por segunda vez, a una reunión con tu profesor/a.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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8/8. Quieres pedirle a tu hermano/a de 15 años que, por favor, se levante un poco más temprano para ir juntos a la escuela/universidad sin que ninguno de los dos llegue tarde.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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## Appendix 2

### TEST DE NIVEL DE PRAGMÁTICA (Españoles)

#### BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Al comienzo del test, hay cinco preguntas generales sobre la forma en la que aprendes una segunda lengua. A continuación, leerás la descripción de ocho situaciones cotidianas. Escribe lo que dirías en cada situación LITERALMENTE. El test solo te tomará 5 minutos.

Este test es completamente ANÓNIMO y forma parte de una investigación para un proyecto "Fin de Grado" CON FINES EXCLUSIVAMENTE ACADÉMICOS sobre Pragmática Intercultural. Por tanto, tus datos personales no serán revelados a terceros.

Muchas gracias por tu tiempo y colaboración.

Edad:

Género:

Nacionalidad:

¿Qué estudias?

¿Estudias algún idioma?

¿Dónde has aprendido tu segunda lengua (L2)?: escuela, universidad y/o academias privadas?  
Si únicamente has estudiado tu L2 durante secundaria o bachillerato, por favor, indícalo.

¿Qué nivel consideras que tienes de tu L2? Indica si tienes algún certificado oficial (Cambridge, TOEFL, Trinity, EoI...)

¿Has estado en otro país estudiando o viviendo (Erasmus, AuPair, cursos de idioma)? Si tu respuesta es afirmativa, ¿cuánto tiempo y dónde?

## DISCOURSE COMPLETION TEST

¿Qué tipo de respuestas darías para cada situación? Por favor, anota qué dirías en estas situaciones cotidianas.

1/8. Estás en casa de tu amigo de la Universidad y, de repente, tu vaso de Coca Cola cae sobre sus apuntes. Éstos son muy útiles para el examen que tenéis la próxima semana.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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2/8. Estás en clase y tú profesor empieza a hablar cada vez más rápido, de manera que no puedes entenderle.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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3/8. Tu profesor/a encargado/a de supervisar tus prácticas te prestó un libro hace dos meses. Tú aún no se lo has devuelto porque lo has perdido.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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4/8. Estás viajando en avión hacia Canadá. Tu asiento es el H9, mientras que el de tu compañero es el A12. Queréis cambiarle el asiento al señor que se encuentra en el asiento H8 para poder ir juntos durante el vuelo.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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5/8. El viernes pasado tenías prisa y no sabías qué ropa llevar a la fiesta. Le pediste consejo a tu hermano/a y este/a te dejó prestado una prenda de ropa a la que le tenía mucho cariño. En agradecimiento, quisiste lavarla y plancharla antes de devolvérsela pero el agua caliente hizo que esta prenda encogiera y quedara demasiado pequeña.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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6/8. Estás comiendo y tu madre te sirve grandes porciones de comida. Por este motivo, quieres pedirle que, por favor, no te ponga tanta cantidad para la cena.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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7/8. Has llegado tarde, por segunda vez, a una reunión con tu profesor/a.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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8/8. Quieres pedirle a tu hermano/a de 15 años que, por favor, se levante un poco más temprano para ir juntos a la escuela/universidad sin que ninguno de los dos llegue tarde.

En respuesta, tú dirías: "..."

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