

METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATION FOR THE STUDY OF REQUEST PRODUCTION IN TELECOLLABORATION

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Second language (L2) request production has long been a central area of inquiry in interlanguage pragmatics, including how L2 learners mitigate their requests and whether such strategies correspond to or differ from those of first language (L1) speakers. Methodologically, such research often involves elicited speech and tends to isolate the speech act from the surrounding discourse using instruments such as discourse completion tasks. While some naturalistic speech contexts (e.g., academic advising sessions) have been investigated, few studies to date have analyzed requesting in synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC). The current study responds by presenting a multifactorial analysis of L1 and L2 request production that occurred during eight one-hour web conferences between L2 learners of German for professional purposes and L1 German professionals. Three taxonomies traditionally used in face-to-face pragmatics research were adapted for analysis of the SCMC, enabling the use of a generalized linear mixed model. Findings indicate that while both groups of speakers used predominantly direct requesting behavior, L1 speakers used significantly more internal modification devices than did L2 learners.

Language(s) Learned in this Study: German

Keywords: Telecollaboration, Computer-mediated Communication, Pragmatics, Research Methods

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INTRODUCTION

A central area of inquiry in pragmatics research has been the production of requests by second language (L2) learners, including the means by which L2 learners mitigate their requests and how such strategies correspond to or differ from strategies employed by native speakers and more proficient users of the target language (e.g., Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008, 2009, 2012; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Félix-Brasdefer, 2007; Rose, 2000; Trosborg, 1995).

Methodologically, much research has tended to isolate speech acts from surrounding discourse using controlled instruments such as discourse completion tasks (DCTs; e.g., Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, 1986; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008, 2009, 2010; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). Although DCTs, especially in written form, are simple to administer and yield quantifiable data, they have been criticized for a lack of authenticity and inattention to social parameters (Golato, 2003). As it more closely approximates authentic spoken discourse than data gathered from written or oral DCTs (Kasper, 2000; Sasaki, 1998; Yuan, 2001), another instrument used widely in ILP studies is the open role play (e.g., Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2012; Göy, Zeyrek, & Otcu, 2012; Hassall, 2001, 2012; Otcu & Zeyrek, 2008; Woodfield, 2012). In an effort to capture even more authentic production data, researchers have also collected and analyzed naturally occurring conversations (e.g., Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Félix-Brasdefer, 2007; Golato, 2003; Yuan, 2001). The analysis of naturally occurring data is methodologically complex, and these studies are invariably linked to a specific speech context. While such communicative contexts as telephone conversations (Beebe & Cummings, 1996), academic advising sessions (Reinhardt, 2010) and e-mails (Chen, 2001; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996) have been investigated, little research has investigated synchronous computer-mediated

communication (SCMC). An exception is Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006), who investigated request production by first language (L1) speakers in synchronous chat, finding that the participants “take practices from ordinary conversation and apply them to their interaction within this new form of communication” (p. 316). In order to shed further light on request production in SCMC, the current study presents an empirical analysis of L1 and L2 request production that occurred during eight 1-hour web conferences between L2 learners of German for professional purposes and L1 German professionals. In so doing, the study illustrates two methodological innovations that facilitated the analysis of request production in telecollaboration: 1) examination of telecollaborative discourse as a context for naturalistic pragmatic production and data collection and 2) application of multilevel statistical models that allowed for exploration of different aspects of request production.

BACKGROUND

L2 Request Production and Mitigation

Requests are an inherently face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987) that often must be mitigated to maintain interpersonal relations while also achieving the requestive end (Weizman, 1989). Mitigation of requesting behavior can be achieved through indirectness, internal modification, and external modification. Direct requests occur when a speaker states without ambiguity what he or she desires, whereas indirect requests contain an implicit meaning that may not be readily deducible from the linguistic expression itself. Internal modification is achieved through “elements within the request utterance proper [i.e., head act]...the presence of which is not essential for the utterance to be potentially understood as a request” (Blum-Kulka, 1989, p. 60). Faerch and Kasper (1989) further classify internal modifiers into two groups: syntactic modifiers (i.e., conditional sentences, tense and aspect markings, interrogatives, etc.) and lexical modifiers (i.e., word choices such as the politeness marker *please*). External modifiers, in contrast, are “supporting statements that are used by requesters to persuade the hearer to carry out a desired action” (Schauer, 2007, p. 201). They are extraneous to the head act of the request and instead address the context in which the speech act is embedded, thus indirectly modifying the illocutionary force. External modifiers serve a range of functions, from signaling that a request is shortly forthcoming (i.e., the *alerter* or *preparator*) to expressing gratitude for the granting of the request (i.e., the *appreciator*).

In the following sections, I review existing research of request modification, as achieved through (in)directness, internal modification, and external modification. Although the review addresses L2 German requesting behavior, it is organized according to the three focal features described previously and, in order to be comprehensive, studies examining other languages have also been included.

Directness in Request Production across Languages

Much research examining directness in requesting behavior can be traced to the Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) project (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum-Kulka, House, & Olshtain, 1989). Rating requests from most direct (1) to least direct (9) allowed the researchers to compare the linguistic realization of requests in eight languages and language varieties. The CCSARP project proved foundational for the study of directness in requesting behavior, with many researchers adopting the project’s investigative framework for research of pragmatic production in face-to-face communication (e.g., Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010; Fukushima, 1996; Ogiermann, 2009; Taguchi, 2006, 2011; Trosborg, 1995).

As regards request directness in L1 German and English, studies have shown differing results: whereas House (2006) suggests that “Germans prefer more direct expressions when complaining or making a request” (p. 251), often drawing on explicit imperative structures to perform requests, Ogiermann (2009) argued that both English and German speakers dispreferred the use of direct request expressions (as compared to Polish and Russian speakers). To wit, English speakers used direct expressions (i.e., imperatives) in only 4% of cases and German speakers used direct expressions in only 5% of the requests analyzed (p. 209). Research comparing the directness of L1 and L2 German request production has not, to my knowledge, drawn on the CCSARP framework. Instead, such studies are situated in the tradition of

conversation analysis and have shown, for instance, that both L1 and L2 speakers of German “treat the social action of requesting as dispreferred” (Taleghani-Nikazm & Huth, 2010, p. 190) and instead rely on pre-request sequences designed to elicit offers.

Internal Modification in L2 Request Production

Research has indicated that L2 learners tend to underuse internal modifiers when compared to native speakers or learners of higher proficiency levels (Chen, 2001; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008, 2009; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001, 2012; Göy et al., 2012; Trosborg, 1995; Wigglesworth & Yates, 2011). Faerch and Kasper (1989) showed that Danish learners of German used comparatively fewer syntactic modifications than German native speakers. Regarding lexical modifications, Danish learners of English and German overused conventionalized politeness markers (e.g., *please*) and underused downtoners in comparison to native speakers. Trosborg’s (1995) study of Danish learners of English shows that, across proficiency levels, they underused internal modifiers compared to native speakers, but that this usage went up as proficiency in the target language increased. Göy et al. (2012) investigated request production in three different populations: two groups of Turkish learners of English with differing proficiency levels and a group of American English speakers. Subjects performed similarly in situations where the difference in power between speakers was minimal; however, when this difference became greater, the native speakers used more syntactic and lexical downgraders than the learner groups, except for the politeness marker *please*.¹

External Modification in L2 Request Production

In comparison to L1 speakers, L2 learners tend to overuse external modifiers (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001, 2012; Kasper, 1981). Faerch and Kasper (1989) explain this tendency by pointing to the very explicit politeness function associated with their use, while Hassall (2001) notes that learners may be able to use these linguistic elements more easily than comparatively complex internal modification devices. Regarding specific devices, learners tend to make use of the *grounder* more frequently than other modifications (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008, 2009); however, their overuse sometimes resulted in provision of repetitive information and compromised pragmatic ability (Hassall 2001, 2012).

To summarize the previous sections, research suggests that differences in request directness by German and English speakers may exist, but are likely minimal, especially when compared with speakers of Polish and Russian. Given the prevalence of the CCSARP framework, it is surprising that no such studies could be found that compared the directness of requests between L1 and L2 speakers of German, making the current study all the more urgent. Regarding request modification, L2 learners have shown preference for external modification over internal modification (excepting the lexical modifier *please*), but overuse of external modifiers may lead to compromised pragmatic ability. With these findings in mind, the focus of the literature review will now shift to methodological concerns regarding collection of requesting data.

Data Collection Procedures for the Study of Requests

When researching request production, there exists a certain tension among various data collection methods. A great many studies utilize DCTs. DCTs present L1 or L2 speakers of a language with a particular social setting and interlocutor in order to elicit a linguistic response. DCTs are most often written instruments and have been used to examine many aspects of requests, including L1 request production across languages and cultures (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010; Faerch & Kasper, 1989), request production of L1 and L2 speakers (Byon, 2004; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010), request modification in L2 speakers (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008, 2009), selection of request strategy by L2 learners (Kuriscak, 2015), and the effect of instruction on L2 request production (Cohen & Shively, 2007; Li, Q. 2011). Less common are DCTs that collect oral production data. Such studies have probed L1 request strategies in British English and Japanese (Fukushima, 1996), the effect of instruction on L2 request production (Li, S. 2011; Pearson, 2006), and the influence of proficiency and

study abroad on L2 request production (Taguchi, 2011).

From a research perspective, the advantages of DCTs are numerous. Researchers can collect large data sets quickly (Beebe & Cummings, 1996), while, in the case of written DCTs, avoiding the time-consuming process of transcription. Despite these benefits, the use of DCTs is not without criticism. Golato (2003) notes that “while DCTs provide researchers with data rather quickly, that data can be very different from naturalistically collected data” (p. 110). They therefore do not shed light on how pragmatic knowledge is realized in more naturalistic settings. Golato (2003) further argues that DCTs are essentially metapragmatic in nature, enabling researchers to understand how learners might react in situations that—although possible—remain nonetheless hypothetical at the time of data collection.

In response to the perceived lack of authenticity that characterizes DCTs, many research protocols implement role-play tasks, noting that they are more likely to elicit authentic language use while still allowing a certain measure of control and standardization (Kasper & Dahl, 1991). Such studies have investigated development in L2 request production as a result of study abroad (Barron, 2003; Schauer, 2004; Woodfield, 2012), L2 request mitigation (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2012), the impact of recasts on L2 request production (Fukuya & Zhang, 2002), the influence of bilingualism on third language request production (Safont Jordà, 2003), and the effect of proficiency level on L2 request production (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012, 2014; Göy et al., 2012; Roever & Al-Gahtani, 2015). Among this latter group of studies, Al-Gahtani and Roever (2014) is of particular interest since the participants did not know that they were participating in a role play.² The authors characterize this data collection method as “semi-authentic” (p. 197) in that there was less control and contrivance than a traditional role play, but it still did not have the same degree of authenticity that characterizes naturally occurring data. Although role plays can approximate natural interaction more closely than DCTs, Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005) cautions that they still do not constitute a “faithful representation of reality” (p. 29).

If authenticity and granularity are prized, researchers may opt to collect request production data from naturally occurring conversations, despite the methodological complexity involved. In the case of Ellis (1992), the researcher used a case-based, longitudinal approach to study the development of L2 requests in two school-aged boys in the context of classroom discourse. More recently, language corpora have facilitated the study of naturally occurring request data. For example, Placencia (2008) created a small corpus of 171 interactions collected from five different corner stores in Ecuador in order to compare request production in two varieties of Spanish. Reinhardt (2010) utilized two large corpora, ITAcorp (International Teaching Assistant Corpus) and MICASE (Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English), to compare novice and expert produced directives in office hour consultations. (To be clear, only the data from MICASE represent naturally occurring conversation; the data from ITAcorp had been collected from office hour role plays.)

Ultimately, choices regarding data collection should reflect the particular focus and research goal of the study (Placencia, 2008). If we seek insight into learner intuitions and metapragmatic awareness, the use of DCTs is a methodologically sound choice. If, on the other hand, the goal is to investigate how learners can operationalize their metapragmatic awareness under the pressure of actual communication, as in the current study, then it is appropriate to collect and analyze more naturalistic production data.

Pragmatics and Telecollaboration

Before moving to a discussion of the methodology used in the current study, it is first necessary to illuminate the specific relationship between pragmatics and telecollaboration. As Belz (2007) notes, “telecollaborative activity, by nature, is tightly aligned with the teaching and learning of L2 pragmatics” (p. 54). Accordingly, many studies have focused on the development of pragmatic competence and the role of instruction in telecollaboration in such areas as German *da*-compounds (i.e., pronominal referential constructions) and modal particles (Belz & Vyatkina, 2005, 2008; Vyatkina & Belz, 2006), modality markers (Cunningham & Vyatkina, 2012), and modified external support moves in requesting behavior (Cunningham, 2016). These studies demonstrate that pedagogical intervention based on participant

production data can lead to development in a variety of morphosyntactic features that index pragmatic intent.

To my knowledge, no studies to date have compared L1 and L2 production in telecollaboration, despite the rich history of such comparative research in other contexts. A small number of studies, however, have examined the naturalistic production of requests in non-telecollaborative asynchronous CMC (ACMC). Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) examined request production in e-mails of L1 speakers and L2 learners of English, finding that L1 speakers more often downgraded face-threatening requests through mitigators, which resulted in more positive evaluations from the faculty member recipients. Chen's (2001) analysis of e-mail requests of American and Taiwanese speakers of English revealed that the L1 speakers used more internal modifications in their requests than their L2 counterparts, both syntactically and lexically. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) found that e-mails written by L2 learners of English were overly direct, lacked sufficient lexical and syntactic modifications, and used inappropriate address forms. It thus seems that even in ACMC, wherein L2 learners are afforded as much time as necessary to compose their messages, there are still gaps between their pragmatic abilities and those of L1 users.

As the above review demonstrates, studies comparing the pragmatic performance of L1 and L2 speakers are well represented in the literature. However, the setting for such studies tends to be in-person communication or, in rare cases, ACMC. Furthermore, studies that examine pragmatics in telecollaboration predominantly have a developmental focus. The current study attempts to bridge this divide by comparing the oral request production of L2 learners of German with expert speakers of German in SCMC-based telecollaboration.³ The following research questions guided the investigation:

1. Is the request directness of L2 German learners similar to or different from the request directness of expert German speakers in SCMC-based telecollaboration?
2. Is the use of internal modification by L2 German learners similar to or different from the use of internal modification by expert German speakers in SCMC-based telecollaboration?
3. Is the use of external modification by L2 German learners similar to or different from the use of external modification by expert German speakers in SCMC-based telecollaboration?

Based on my review of the literature, I expected that the requesting behavior of the L2 German learners would differ from the expert participants in the following ways: 1) learners would use more direct request strategies than experts; 2) learners would use fewer internal modifiers than experts; and 3) learners would use more external modifiers than experts.

METHODS

Participants and Research Context

The study took place in the context of an intermediate-level language for specific purposes course, *German for the Professions*, at a large public university in the Midwest of the United States. Participants were L1 speakers of English (N = 17) who communicated synchronously with L1 German speakers (N = 5) employed in a variety of professions in Germany. As the instructor of the course, I was present during all SCMC interactions and, in certain instances, needed to produce requests of my own. As a highly proficient speaker of L2 German, my request production was classified as that of an expert speaker for analytical purposes. Recognizing, however, that my own presence could potentially influence the output of the participants (Placenia, 2008), I attempted to mitigate this possibility by maintaining as unobtrusive a presence as possible. In this regard, my requests were constrained to management of logistical and technical details during the web conferences.

The learner participants in the study also took part in an instructional intervention that focused on the use of indirectness and internal modification for request mitigation. Analysis of the pre-intervention and post-intervention production data showed statistical non-significance. Although linguistic development did take

place in certain learners, it was subtle and only revealed through qualitative analysis (Cunningham, 2016). For that reason, I do not differentiate between learner pre-intervention and post-intervention production data in the design of the current study.

Web Conferencing with Adobe Connect Pro

During two fall semesters, L2 learners of German participated in eight web conferences with L1 German-speaking professionals in Germany. A web conference is a type of multi-person, multimodal SCMC, in which participants interact in a virtual conference room. The moderator of a virtual conference room can design the space to facilitate the intended communicative purpose of the interaction by selecting the preferred modes of communication and arranging the visual layout of the room. In this case, participants used video, audio, text chat, and a virtual white board to communicate. The main channel was oral/aural, with occasional use of the text chat box for informal small talk or management of technical issues. Although the video was turned on, due to its relatively small size and low resolution, it did not always clearly show the current speaker's face.

Table 1. *Invited Guests, Areas of Expertise, and Discussion Topics*

Guest	Area of expertise	Discussion topic
Cohort 1		
Guest	Area of expertise	Discussion topic
Roland	Teacher at upper-level vocational school	Discussion 1: Vocational education and entry into the working world
Erika	Project manager at Siemens	Discussion 2: Project management at a multinational corporation
Thomas	Employee of community bank and student internship coordinator	Discussion 3: Banking in Germany
Thomas	Employee of community bank and student internship coordinator	Discussion 4: Internships and other professional opportunities in Germany
Cohort 2		
Thomas	Employee of community bank and student internship coordinator	Discussion 1: Internships and other professional opportunities in Germany
Gisela	Active member of Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD)	Discussion 2: Comparing German and American politics
Roland	Teacher at upper-level vocational school	Discussion 3: Controversies in the German educational system
Manfred	Managing editor of <i>Die Sendung mit der Maus</i> ("The Show with the Mouse")	Discussion 4: The influence of television on children

Learner and Expert Roles

The web conferences, each lasting approximately one hour, were moderated by student dyads and triads. Student moderators prepared a set of 10–12 discussion questions that focused on the invited experts' respective areas of expertise (see Table 1). Student non-moderators were directed to respond to discussion questions, but were also free to question the invited expert on their own. The role of the invited expert was to respond to students' questions, providing both linguistic and topical expertise. Prior to participating, experts were briefed as to their expected role in the web conferences. It was explained to them that the web conferences were an integrated part of the course curriculum designed to provide course participants the

opportunity to engage in meaningful interaction and acquire new content knowledge. The experts were also invited to prepare visual support for their talk in the form of PowerPoint slides. Three of the invited experts (Roland, Thomas, and Erika) prepared such slides, while two (Manfred and Gisela) did not. Similarly, Roland, Thomas, and Erika produced multiple requests in their interaction with the learners, whereas Manfred and Gisela did not produce any requests.

Data Collection with Adobe Connect Pro

Although the web conferencing platform enabled multimodal communication, the main channel was oral/aural. Accordingly, data for the current study come from oral interactions between the web conference participants. Given the communicative context, the data cannot be considered as naturalistic as other contexts in which unmonitored language production is recorded (e.g., Placenia, 2008); nevertheless, the data more closely approximate naturalistic data than data collected via DCTs or role plays and may help further our understanding of how requests are produced in SCMC.

As both the instructor of the course and the primary investigator, I reviewed the audio data for all instances of request production (N = 239) and transcribed them. Understanding that requests are not produced in isolation, but usually occur over multiple turns, I began transcription of each request sequence at the first instance of external modification, or, when lacking external modification, at the beginning of the head act. I concluded transcription of request sequences after the interlocutor's response to the request.

Taxonomies Used in the Study

For coding purposes, the study draws on three taxonomies previously utilized in the study of pragmatics. These taxonomies were developed based on a thorough review of existing literature and an extensive process of piloting and revision undertaken with two other raters (see below). In so doing, the study repurposed existing frameworks in order to elucidate further the relationship between second language acquisition (SLA) and computer-assisted language learning.

Directness Taxonomy

To measure the focal construct of directness, I developed an 8-level taxonomy ([Appendix A](#)). As noted previously, many studies have adapted the directness taxonomy first developed for the CCSARP project. For example, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) compared the directness level of British speakers of English and Greek speakers of English as a second language, noting the emergence of two new requesting strategies not present in the original framework: the "reminder request" and "pre-decided statements" (p. 2270). In Taguchi (2006), the author investigated the request directness of Japanese learners of English, adding three additional levels to the coding taxonomy (for a total of 12) "in order to fine-tune the linguistic analysis" (p. 521). Taguchi (2011) utilized a 9-level scale of directness, plus an additional category of "conventional questions." It is thus clear that there is flexibility in determining the number and nature of directness levels, according to the specific research setting and goals. Based on the taxonomy developed for the present study, raters were able to identify the directness of the head act in transcribed request sequences.

Internal Modification Taxonomy

To measure the focal construct of internal modification, I developed a taxonomy to include both syntactic and lexical modification ([Appendix B](#)). In adapting the framework of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), I combined both categories of internal modification (syntactic and lexical downgraders) into one taxonomy for ease of use. Only those categories that could be attested with examples from the oral production data were included. Each level of the revised internal modification taxonomy features a description of the modifier and attested examples coming directly from the transcribed data set. Based on this taxonomy, raters were able to identify the type and frequency of internal modifiers in transcribed request sequences.

External Modification Taxonomy

To measure the focal construct of external modification, I developed a taxonomy based on Schauer's (2007)

model, but with certain adaptations (Appendix C). First, the category of *Head* was eliminated due to the fact that it is not actually an external modifier, but instead signifies the core requestive move. Additional external modification categories (i.e., imposition minimizer, sweetener, promise of reward, and considerator) were not included in the revised taxonomy due to the fact that they were not attested in the actual production data. Based on this taxonomy, raters were able to identify type and frequency of external modifiers in transcribed request sequences.

Interrater Reliability

Two additional raters rated a portion of the data independently. One was a native speaker of German and participated as an expert guest during both instances of the study. The other was a PhD student of German Applied Linguistics at the institution where the study took place. After reviewing a set of coding instructions and participating in a norming session, each additional rater received an identical set of 24 randomly selected request sequences, an amount sufficient for establishing confidence in the rating procedures (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Reliability was calculated using Fleiss' Kappa, a variation of Cohen's Kappa that allows for the inclusion of more than two raters. Fleiss' Kappa demonstrated a high degree of agreement among the three raters as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Interrater Reliability

Focal area	Fleiss' Kappa
Directness	0.873
Internal modification	1.000
External modification	0.884

Analytical Methods

The study employed a mixed-methods, multifactorial analysis in order to compare the requesting behavior of L2 German learners and expert German speakers along three dimensions: directness, internal modification, and external modification. Quantitative analysis was performed using a Generalized Linear Mixed Model (GLMM), a relatively new statistical tool in SLA research. An assumption underlying the use of most statistical analyses (e.g., ANOVA, T-tests, etc.) is that the data must fit a Gaussian distribution. GLMMs, in contrast, allow for analysis of a data set that is not normally distributed, which, due to the small sample size in this study, is the case. GLMMs are also useful for analyzing data collected in non-clinical settings because they are robust against missing data and they effectively account for the influence of randomness that is not part of the research design (Baayen, Davidson, & Bates, 2008), making interpretation of dynamic linguistic phenomena more feasible (Cunnings, 2012). A final advantage lies in the fact that the model can include multiple predictors, allowing the researcher to consider the simultaneous influence of several factors (Baayen et al., 2008; Cunnings, 2012). Accordingly, GLMMs can accommodate binary data (one of two possible outcomes), ordinal data (outcomes that can be organized into a set beginning at X and ending at Y), or count data (more than two outcomes, but the data are not ordered). Binary analysis was used for the following predictors: Conditional, Tense, Mood, Subjectivizer, Disarmer, Small Talk, and Appreciator. Ordinal analysis was used for Directness, Internal syntactic modification, Internal lexical modification, Politeness markers, Downgraders, and Understaters. Count analysis was used for the remaining predictors: Consultatives, Appealers, External modification, Alerters, Preparators, and Grounders. Parallel to the quantitative analysis, I performed a qualitative discourse-based analysis to provide further insight into meaningful differences in the request production of the two groups.

RESULTS

Quantitative Analysis

With statistical significance set at $p < .05$, the results show that directness in L1 and L2 requests was not significantly different (Table 3). However, L1 speakers used significantly more internal modifiers than L2 speakers. No significant difference was observed in the use of external modification by L1 and L2 speakers. In sum, one of the predicted outcomes (i.e., higher frequency of internal modification in expert group) was met, whereas two of the predicted outcomes (i.e., higher degree of directness and higher frequency of external modification in the learner group) were not observed in the data.

Table 3. Learner versus Expert Performance

Predictor	Estimate	SE	Wald-Z	p
Directness	1.21	0.66	1.84	.0655
Internal modification	1.11	0.25	4.35	.0000*
<i>syntactic:</i>	1.42	0.49	2.90	.0038*
conditional clause	1.65	0.61	2.70	.0069*
subjunctive mood	1.28	0.69	1.85	.0646
<i>lexical:</i>	1.15	0.34	3.38	.0007*
politeness marker	0.63	0.57	1.10	.2720
downtoner	1.33	0.47	2.85	.0044*
understater	1.13	1.02	1.12	.2640
appealer	-0.14	0.83	-0.17	.8640
External modification	-0.10	0.34	-0.29	.7710
alerter	-0.14	0.40	-0.35	.7267
preparator	-0.60	0.41	-1.49	.1365
grounder	1.86	1.31	1.42	.1550
disarmer	18.12	8829.00	0.00	.9980
small talk	-0.79	0.90	-0.88	.3810
appreciator	-17.89	5197.13	-0.00	.9970

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis compares the proportional use of directness, internal modification, and external modification in the L2 learner group and the expert group. I present several salient tokens in each of the focal areas to exemplify similarities and differences in request production. Due to low frequencies of certain tokens, I performed a simple count analysis, illustrating the results in the form of proportional graphs.

Learner Directness versus Expert Directness

The difference in directness level between groups was not statistically significant ($p = .0655$); however, despite both groups using an overall majority of direct request strategies, the L2 German learners used proportionally more direct expressions than expert speakers (Figure 1). I will first discuss directness in the learner group, before proceeding to a discussion of directness in the expert group.

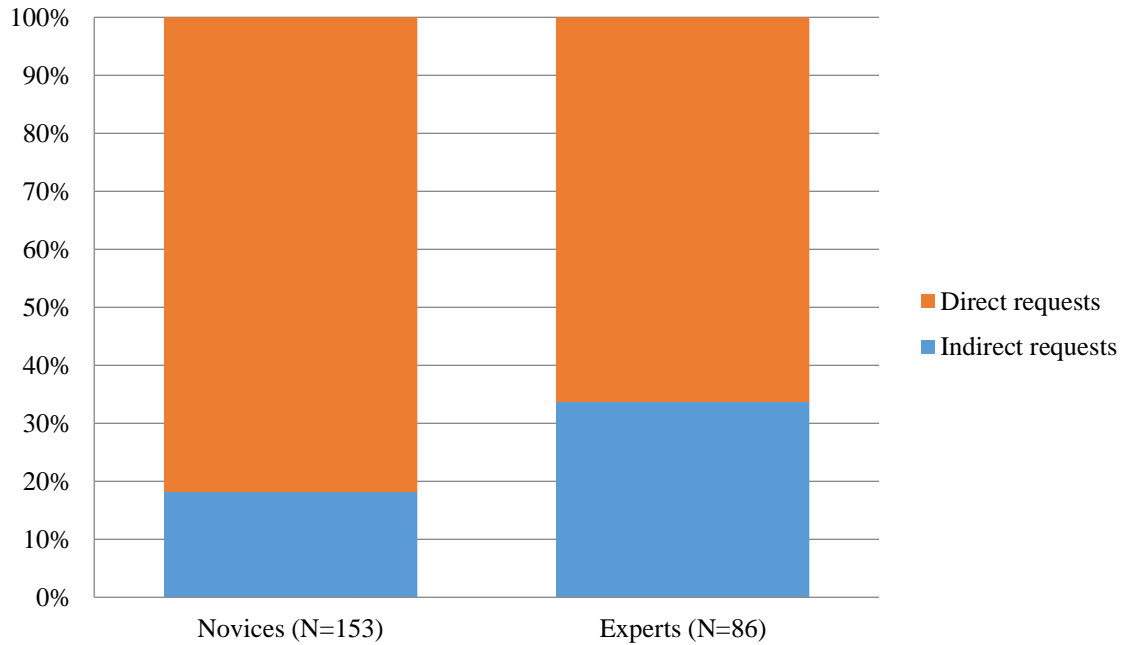


Figure 1. Comparison of within-groups distribution of request strategies by directness

Table 4. Ratio of Direct to Indirect Requests per Individual Learner

Pseudonym	Frequency of direct requests (N=130)	Frequency of indirect requests (N=23)
Beth	9	2
Tim	7	4
Karl	5	0
Gregor	7	1
Andrea	3	5
Jackson	3	1
Kate	15	1
Bill	7	0
Jenny	9	2
Chuck	3	4
Henry	8	0
Grant	9	0
Carson	16	0
Lisa	9	2
Max	11	0

82% of the requests produced by learners were direct requests (i.e., rated between directness levels 1–4), whereas only 18% of requests were indirectly formulated (i.e., rated between directness levels 5–8). On an individual level, only two learners, Andrea and Chuck, produced indirect requests with greater frequency

(Table 4). Qualitative analysis revealed a possible explanation for the directness strategies of the L2 speaker group: In order to maintain the flow of conversation and consistently engage their interlocutors, learners produced a high frequency of direct requests for information. Illustrative tokens of such requests are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *Direct Requests for Information in the Learner Group*

Pseudonym	Request head act
Beth	Als Managerin, wie motivieren Sie Ihre Mitarbeiter? <i>As a manager, how do you motivate your employees?</i>
Gregor	Ähm, und wie schwer ist es aus als Ausländer äh in Deutschland zu studieren? <i>Um, and how difficult is it to study in Germany from as a foreigner?</i>
Andrea	Also, wie wichtig ist es für Ihre Mitarbeiter und Sie äh Fremdsprachen zu kennen? <i>So, how important is it for your employees and you uh to know foreign languages?</i>
Jackson	Wie wurde Siemens von der Wirtschaftskrisis getroffen? <i>How was Siemens affected by the economic crisis?</i>
Kate	Was für eine Arbeit machen Sie in der Kreditabteilung der Volksbank Eutin? <i>What kind of work do you do in the credit division of the People's Bank of Eutin?</i>
Bill	Wie gut sollen Praktikanten Deutsch sprechen können? <i>How well should interns be able to speak German?</i>
Chuck	Gibt es Studenten, die...zweimal oder dreimal Praktikum machen? <i>Are there students who...do an internship twice or three times?</i>
Joshua	Also, ist eine Ausbil–Ausbildung in Deutschland total kostenlos? Oder..muss man bezahlen? <i>So, is an educ–education in Germany totally free? Or..do you have to pay?</i>

Similar to the learners, experts produced an overall greater proportion of direct requests (see Figure 1 and Table 6). Three of the four expert participants produced a greater frequency of direct requests than indirect requests, while John produced an equal proportion of direct and indirect requests. One explanation for this outcome lies in the difference between requests for information and requests for action. In the case of Erika, three of the four indirect requests she produced were requests for action and occurred in the context of John helping her to navigate through her slides using the Whiteboard function of Adobe Connect Pro (Table 7). Similarly, John's indirect requests occur primarily in the context of attending to logistical aspects of the web conference administration and, as such, are also requests for action.

Table 6. *Ratio of Direct to Indirect Requests per Individual Expert*

Pseudonym	Frequency of direct requests (N=61)	Frequency of indirect requests (N=25)
Erika	8	4
Roland	33	2
Thomas	6	5
John	14	14
Gisela	0	0
Manfred	0	0

Table 7. Erika's Indirect Requests for Action

Request number	Request head act
2	Ähm, John, könntest du dann bitte mal die erste Folie aufblenden bitte? <i>Um, John, could you please go ahead and show the first slide then please?</i>
8	Ähm, John, wenn wir mal auf Folie sieben gehen könnten. <i>Um, John, if we could go to slide seven.</i>
12	Ähm, John, könntest du mal bitte auf Folie drei springen? <i>Um, John, could you jump over to slide three?</i>

In contrast to her indirect formulations, Erika produces direct requests for information when engaged in dialogue with the students, often using these questions to prompt the learners and facilitate conversation (Table 8). In this regard, the use of direct questions reflects a similar discourse strategy to that seen in the learner group.

Table 8. Erika's Direct Requests for Information

Request number	Request head act
3	Weiß denn jemand von Ihnen, wie viele Mitarbeiter Siemens hat heute? <i>So do any of you know how many employees Siemens has today?</i>
6	Ähm..kennt jemand von Ihnen den Unterschied zwischen einem Projekt und einem Programm? <i>Um..do any of you know the difference between a project and a program?</i>
10	Ähm, wie wird denn in den USA mit dem Thema ähm Fortbildung umgegangen? <i>Um, how does one handle the topic of continuing education in the USA?</i>

Expert participant Roland also produced a majority of direct requests, and like both Erika and participants in the learner group, these are requests for information and serve to stimulate conversation and build rapport. A particular salient example of this is found in Roland's interaction with the learner Jenny (Excerpt 1).

Learner Internal Modification versus Expert Internal Modification

The overall frequency of internal modification was significantly higher in the expert group ($p = .0000$) and both groups produced approximately the same ratio of syntactic to lexical modifiers, using twice as many of the latter type than the former. In fact, the entire range of internal modifications produced by the two groups shows a similar distribution (Figure 2).

Excerpt 1. Roland's Interaction with Jenny

Request 13	Roland (expert)	Was haben Sie denn in Stuttgart studiert? <i>So what did you study in Stuttgart then?</i>
	Jenny (learner)	Architektur. <i>Architecture.</i>
	Roland	Ah ja, okay. <i>Oh yes, okay.</i>
Request 14	Roland	Und das Studium war aber dann auf Deutsch? <i>And your studies were in German then?</i>
	Jenny	Ja, genau. Aber mit Architektur ist ein bisschen anders weil es soviel mit Bildern hat zu tun hat so viel mit Bildern zu tun. <i>Yes, exactly.</i> <i>But with architecture is a little different because it has so much with pictures to do has so much to do with pictures</i>
	Roland	Ja, das verstehe ich.
Request 15		Und haben Sie dann Ihr ganzes Studium in Deutschland gemacht? Oder nur ein Semester oder zwei oder wie auch immer? <i>Yes, I understand.</i> <i>And did you complete your entire course of studies in Germany?</i> <i>Or just a semester or two or what ever?</i>
	Jenny	Ja, zwei Semestern. Also ein Jahr. <i>Yes, two semesters. So one year.</i>
	Roland	Okay. Mm hm. Na, gut.
Request 16		Und haben Sie noch Kontakt nach Stuttgart? <i>Okay. Mm hm. So, good.</i> <i>And are you still in touch with Stuttgart?</i>
	Jenny	Ja..ein bisschen. <i>Yes..a little.</i>

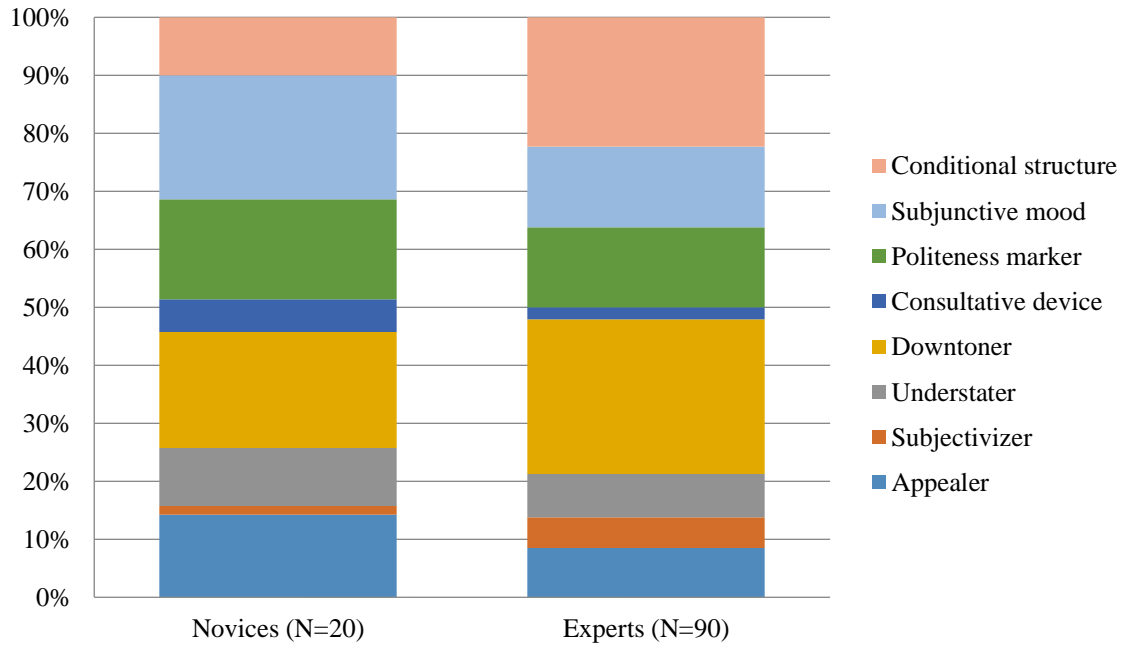


Figure 2. Comparison of within-groups distribution of internal modifiers

In the case of the lexical modifier Understater, no significant difference was found between groups ($p = .2640$). This similarity in the use of the modifier type Understater, however, does not reflect the difference between the two groups' use of specific lexical tokens. A token analysis of the L2 production data revealed seven instances of an Understater: *ein bisschen* (a little bit) was used six times (86%), and *kurz* (briefly) was used just once (14%). There are also seven instances of an Understater in the native speaker production data: five occurrences of *kurz* (72%), one instance of *irgendwie* (sort of, 14%), and only one instance of *ein bisschen* (14%). The difference between the two groups therefore lies in the speakers' choice of specific lexical items, a fine-grained distinction not captured by the quantitative analysis of modifier types. While it is possible to analyze for such differences using a GLMM, the overall low frequency of such modifiers in the production data would result in quantitatively insignificant results.

Learner Internal Modification versus Expert Internal modification

Although the two groups did not exhibit statistically significant differences in their use of external modification ($p = .7710$), there are certain variances in the proportional use of external modifiers between the L2 and L1 groups (*Figure 3*).

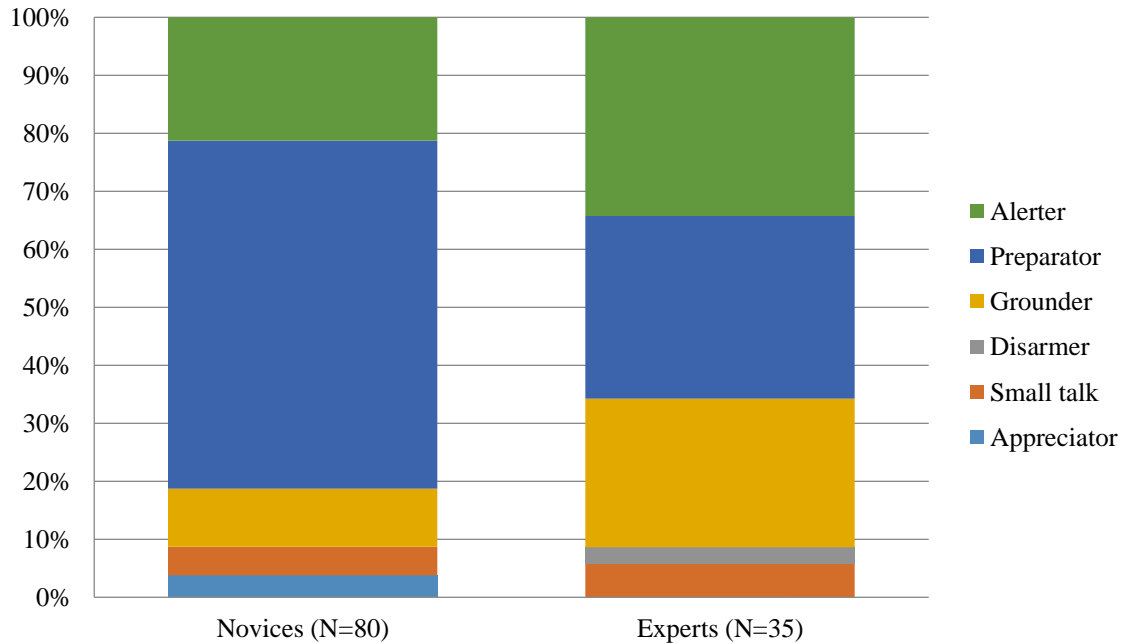


Figure 3. Comparison of within-groups distribution of external modifiers

Of the 35 external modifiers coded in the expert group, 23 of these instances (66%) occurred as Alerters or Preparators. Similarly, the learner group produced a total of 80 external modifiers, 65 of which (81%) occurred as Alerters or Preparators. Grounders, Disarmers, Small talk, and Appreciators comprise a comparatively small part of the data set for both groups, showing that these strategies were dispreferred when modifying requests externally. The preponderance of Alerters and Preparators in both the learner and expert data reflect the need for all participants to signal availability and manage turn-taking in a very explicit manner. In the learner group, however, not all participants managed their contributions to equal effect. Excerpt 2 illustrates a felicitous usage of external modification to manage the discourse.

Excerpt 2. Andrea's Interaction with Erika

Andrea (learner)	<p>Sehr gut. Guten Tag. Wir freuen uns darauf, Sie durch diese Sitzung zu führen äh Jackson und ich sind heute zuständig für die Leitung des Gespräch, aber alle in dieser Klasse werden in die Diskussionen teilnehmen. Wir haben einige Fragen vorbereitet, und wir möchten damit anfangen, und vielleicht werden Sie einige unsere Fragen beantworten, und neue Fragen geweckt könnten. Äh vielen Dank für Ihre Aufmerksam-äh-samkeit, und ich darf Sie nun bitten, sich vorzustellen.</p>
Request 1	<p><i>Very good. Hello.</i></p>

	<p><i>We are looking forward to leading you through this meeting uh, Jackson and I are responsible today for leading the discussion but everyone in this class will take part in the discussion We have prepared some questions, and we would like to begin with that, and perhaps you will answer some of our questions, and could awake new questions. Uh thank you very much for your atten-uh-tion, and I would now ask that you introduce yourself.</i></p>
Erika (expert)	<p>Ja, mein Name ist Erika Schmidt. <i>Yes, my name is Erika Schmidt.</i></p>

Prior to the request head act (*ich darf Sie nun bitten, sich vorzustellen*), Andrea utilized several external modifiers: an Alerter (*Guten Tag*); Small talk (*Wir freuen uns darauf, Sie durch diese Sitzung zu führen*); and an Appreciator (*vielen Dank für Ihre Aufmerksamkeit*), which have the effect of not only laying the groundwork for a successful discussion, but also appropriately frame the forthcoming request that Erika introduce herself. In contrast to Andrea's introduction, we see a less successful instance in Carson's request sequence (Excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3. Carson's Interaction with Gisela

Request 1	Carson (learner)	<p>Ja, äh...bitte...äh vorstellen Sie...unsere ähm, ja. <i>Yes, uh...please...uh introduce...our um, yes.</i></p>
	Gisela (expert)	<p>Ja...vorstellen. Mein Name ist Gisela Ziegler. <i>Yes...introduce. My name is Gisela Ziegler.</i></p>

Whereas Andrea made extensive use of external modifiers to frame her request, Carson produced the request with no framing through external modification. The difference in production is all the more striking given that both learners are essentially making the same request of their respective interlocutors in the same SCMC context. One potential explanation could be the relative amount of preparation that the two learners completed prior to the discussion. Whereas the more elaborate formulations of Andrea point to a planned introduction, the lack of external modification coupled with the frequent pausing in Carson's production seem to indicate that he produced his request with little or no planning.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated requesting behavior in learner-expert telecollaborative interaction. Comparison of the two groups through statistical analysis showed that they varied in just one aspect of their requesting behavior, with the L2 German speakers producing a lower frequency of internal modifiers than the experts. These results were in keeping with the research hypothesis and largely support previous research observations that L2 speakers underuse internal modification as compared to expert speakers (Chen, 2001; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008, 2009; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001, 2012; Göy et al., 2012; Trosborg, 1995; Wigglesworth & Yates, 2011). A qualitative token analysis of the lexical modifier type Understater showed further differences between groups. Even though the quantitative analysis showed a

non-significant difference for this particular modifier, the learners preferred to use *ein bisschen* (a little bit), whereas the experts preferred to use *kurz* (briefly). Such differences in production should therefore be made salient to the learners through focused instruction.

Regarding directness of requests, no significant differences were found between groups. In this regard, the study corroborates previous research that showed similarity in the request directness of L1 speakers of English and German (Ogiermann, 2009) and of L1–L2 speakers of German (Taleghani-Nikazm & Huth, 2010); however, the study does not support House's (2006) contention that German speakers use more direct requesting behavior than English speakers. There are two possible explanations for this result. One is an effect for task: the student moderators needed to prevent the discussion from flagging and produced a high frequency of direct requests for information to keep the invited experts engaged and talking. Of interest here is also the respective requesting behavior of the experts. Whereas Roland and Erika produced many direct requests, in essence adopting shared responsibility for maintaining an active discussion, Gisela and Manfred produced no requests, meaning that the expert data set was heavily weighted towards Roland and Erika, possibly skewing the overall picture of L1 German request directness. As for the second explanation, it may be that the learner group did not produce many indirect requests because they did not need to address logistical or technical difficulties. Such requests were usually made on an expert–expert basis, obviating to a large extent the need for the learners to produce action-oriented requests that would have called for more indirect request formulation.

There was no observable difference regarding external modification in both groups. The most likely explanation is that both groups used such moves to manage synchronous computer-mediated interaction in a group setting. The Preparator in particular played a crucial role in signaling intent to claim the floor and was proportionally the most frequently produced external modifier in both groups. This tendency would seem to contradict the findings of Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008, 2009) and Hassall (2001, 2012) that the *Grounder* represents the most frequently employed external modifier in L2 speakers' requests; however, the communicative context and goals of the requests must be considered. Whereas Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008, 2009) and Hassall (2001, 2012) focused on requests for action in face-to-face interaction, the current research predominantly dealt with requests for information in computer-mediated interaction, wherein the Preparator was indispensable for managing turn-taking and negotiating topics.

Study Limitations

The present research is limited to a small sample of students and experts in a particular SCMC context, and the claims should be understood as preliminary. Because two of the expert participants did not produce any requests during interaction, the expert data set is limited to requests produced by four people in total. It will therefore be of considerable interest to determine whether future investigation of SCMC-based interaction between L2 and expert speakers bear out these findings.

Methodological Considerations

This study contributes important methodological innovations to the study of pragmatic production in SCMC. First, it demonstrates that telecollaboration provides a context for more naturalistic request production and data collection. Second, the study shows that it is possible to conduct mixed-methods research in a SCMC context by combining multilevel statistical models and type-token qualitative analysis. This research approach allowed for in-depth exploration of different aspects of request production and may serve as a template for future investigations of pragmatic production in SCMC interaction. Although transcription, adaptation of existing taxonomies, and establishing interrater reliability are time-intensive and complex endeavors, they are essential elements of the process if we seek to understand what learners actually *do* in SCMC interaction.

APPENDIX A. Coding Taxonomy for Directness (based on Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1989; Taguchi, 2011)

Directness level	Request Strategy	Descriptors	Tokens
<i>Direct expressions</i>			
1	Direct questions (requests for information)	The request is conveyed by a direct question.	<i>Wie lange arbeiten Sie schon bei einer Bank?</i> (How long have you worked at a bank?)
	Imperatives (requests for action)	The grammatical mood of the verb in the utterance marks its illocutionary force as a request	<i>Sagen Sie doch mal was!</i> (Go ahead and say something!)
2	Indirect questions (requests for information)	The request is conveyed by an indirect question.	<i>Wissen Sie, wie viele Bundesländer es in Deutschland gibt?</i> (Do you know how many federal states there are in Germany?)
	Performatives (requests for action)	The illocutionary force of the request is named by the speaker	<i>Ich bitte unsere zwei Moderatoren, die Diskussion zu starten.</i> (I request that our two moderators begin the discussion.)
3	Obligation statements	The illocutionary force is derivable in obligatory sentences	<i>Du musst wohl wieder auf diese andere Seite gehen.</i> (You probably need to go back to the other page.)
4	Want statements	The illocutionary force is derivable in want/wish/need sentences	<i>Ich möchte wissen, wie viel Deutsch muss man sprechen können.</i> (I would like to know how much German one must be able to speak.)
<i>Indirect expressions</i>			
5	Preparatory questions and statements	Reference to preparatory conditions such as the hearer's ability, willingness or possibility to perform the action	<i>Können Sie sich alle bitte vorstellen?</i> (Can you all please introduce yourselves?)
6	Suggestions	The illocutionary intent is phrased as a suggestion	<i>Ich würde vorschlagen, dass wir jetzt beginnen.</i> (I would suggest that we get started.)
7	Permissions	The speaker asks for the hearer's permission	<i>Ich darf Sie nun bitten, sich vorzustellen.</i> (May I ask that you introduce yourself?)
8	Hints	Questions or statements with implicit reference to the action	<i>Er hat ein bisschen mehr vorbereitet.</i> (He has prepared a little bit more.)

APPENDIX B. Coding Taxonomy for Internal Modification (based on Blum-Kulka et al., 1989)

Lexical modifiers		
Name	Definition	Tokens
Politeness marker	an optional element added to a request to bid for cooperative behavior	<i>bitte; gerne</i> (please; feel free)
Consultative devices	expressions by means of which the speaker seeks to involve the hearer directly bidding for cooperation	<i>glauben Sie, ist es nicht so...</i> (don't you think it's the case..)
Downtoners	modifiers which are used by a speaker in order to modulate the impact his or her request is likely to have on the hearer	<i>vielleicht; eigentlich; doch; mal; eher; einfach; denn</i> (perhaps; actually; in fact; just; rather; simply; then)
Understaters	adverbial modifiers by means of which the speaker underrepresents the state of affairs denoted in the proposition	<i>irgendwie; ein bisschen; kurz; ein paar</i> (somehow; a little bit; briefly; a couple)
Subjectivizers	elements in which the speaker explicitly expresses his or her subjective opinion vis-à-vis the state of affairs referred to in the proposition, thus lowering the assertive force of the request	<i>ich glaube...; ich denke...</i> (I believe...; I think...)
Appealers	addressee-oriented elements occurring in a syntactically final position. They may signal turn-availability and are used by the speaker whenever he or she wishes to appeal to his or her hearer's benevolent understanding	<i>...oder?</i> (...right?)
Syntactic modifiers		
Name	Examples	
Conditional clause	<i>Wenn ich zu schnell spreche, bitte geben Sie mir Bescheid.</i> (If I speak too quickly, please let me know.)	
Subjunctive mood	<i>Wenn Sie ein paar Kommentare zu dieser Frage <u>hätten</u>, <u>wäre</u> das auch interessant zu hören.</i> (If you <u>had</u> a couple of comments on this question, that <u>would be</u> interesting to hear.)	

APPENDIX C. Coding Taxonomy for External Modification (based on Schauer, 2007)

Name	Definition	Tokens
Alerter	linguistic device that is used to get the interlocutor's attention; precedes the Head [act]	<i>Entschuldigung, hey, Herr/Frau...</i> (Excuse me; hey; Mr./Mrs...)
Preparator	short utterance that intends to prepare the interlocutor for the request; can follow or substitute the Alerter	<i>ich habe eine Frage; ich möchte eine Frage stellen; darf ich eine Frage stellen?</i> (I have a question; I'd like to ask a question; May I ask a question?)
Grounder	provides an explanation for the request	<i>dann können wir mit unseren Fragen anfangen</i> (Then we can begin with our questions)
Disarmer	used to preempt the interlocutor's potential objections	<i>Entschuldigung, ich möchte nicht unterbrechen</i> (Sorry, I don't mean to interrupt)
Small talk	short utterance at the beginning of the request that is intended to establish a positive atmosphere	<i>wir freuen uns darauf, Sie durch diese Sitzung zu führen</i> (We are pleased to lead you through this meeting)
Appreciator	usually employed at the end of the request to positively reinforce it	<i>vielen Dank</i> (Thank you very much)

NOTES

1. Many other studies (e.g., Barron, 2003; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House, 1989; Taguchi, 2011) have pointed out the overuse of *please* by L2 learners.
2. The researchers obtained permission from their institutional review board and potential risks to participants were kept to a minimum.
3. The term *SCMC-based telecollaboration* is used to mean synchronous audio interaction taking place in a video-enhanced environment. The study does not treat synchronous text-based interaction, which also took place in certain instances.

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