Offering help in Greek: Divergence from the native-speaker norm and developmental patterns in Greek FL learners' performance of offers

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Abstract
This study investigates developmental patterns in the ability of Greek foreign language learners to make offers. Drawing data from role-plays and retrospective verbal reports it attempts to explore the initial offer strategies and the degree of insistence that learners of three different proficiency levels (lower intermediate, intermediate and advanced) employ when performing offers in different social situations.

The results suggest that, although there is a great deal of grammatical and pragma-linguistic development in regard to both initial offer strategies and syntactic modification devices, this does not guarantee concomitant levels of socio-pragmatic development (cf. Bardovi-Harlig 1999).

Keywords: pragmatic development, Greek, offers, interlanguage, insistence

1. Introduction

Searle (1976) classifies offers as commissives, since they commit the speaker to some future action. Yet, other researchers claim that offers represent "hybrid speech acts that combine directive with commissive illocutionary force" (Aijmer 1996: 198; Hancher 1979). Furthermore, Barron (2003: 124) maintains that "the linguistic form of realisations of offers reflects their colorful nature", and cites Schneider (1980), who identifies three main strategy types for realising offers: a) preference questions, e.g. *Would you like some wine?,* which point to their conditional nature, i.e. the fact that offers are conditional on the hearer indicating in some way that s/he wishes the speaker to carry out the deed in question, b) execution questions pointing to their commissive nature, e.g. *Can I get you anything?,* and c) offers of the imperative form, e.g. *Have a drink*, pointing to their directive nature.

Therefore, in spite of the fact that offers are seen as positive politeness devices that indicate or enhance the existence of solidarity relations (Sifianou 1992a), they can also be threatening for the speaker's and the addressee's negative face (Brown & Levinson 1987). Thus, "both participants can be placed in delicate positions and we

have to know the conventions of a particular society in order to safeguard the mutual preservation of face and behave appropriately" (Sifianou1992a: 62). Hence, offers can be particularly challenging for L2 learners, since their appropriate performance demands a great deal of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge.

However, the only study that investigates the development of learners' ability to produce offers is Barron (2003), which examines offer development in a study-abroad context.

The present study aims at contributing to this direction by investigating the realisation of offers for help by foreign language learners of Greek (henceforth FL) of different proficiency levels in different social situations. Specifically, I will focus on two issues: (a) the differences attested between native speakers (henceforth NSs) and FL learners of different levels regarding the choice of strategies for making their initial offer, and (b) the difference regarding the degree of insistence they employed.

The next section presents the method of the study. The results are presented and discussed in sections 3 and 4 respectively. The conclusions of the study are summarised in section 5.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

A total of 140 subjects participated in the study: 35 native speakers of Greek all coming from Athens, and 105 FL learners of Greek from various L1 backgrounds. The native speakers were all students at the University of Athens. The learners had just arrived in Athens at the time of the study in order to attend the six-week language courses supplied by the University of Athens' Programme of Summer Scholarships for Greek Studies, and belonged to three different proficiency levels (35 learners for each group). The competence of beginner learners (Ls1) corresponded roughly to the A2 level, that of the intermediate (Ls2) to the B1 level and that of the advanced learners (Ls3) to B2-C1 level, as described in the CEF.

2.2 Instrumentation

The data were collected using open role-plays supplemented by retrospective verbal reports.

The role-play instrument consisted of 12 Situations, three of which involved offers for help and will be examined here. The detailed presentation of the three Situations

was the following[1]:

Situation 1 (-P, +D):[2] You are at the airport. You see a girl your age with two huge bags. As you haven't much luggage yourself, you offer to help her.

Situation 2 (-P, -D): You study engineering at the University of Athens. The end of the term advanced maths exam is next week. Maria, a good friend of yours, mentions that she is worried about it as she finds maths difficult. You have passed this exam last term and you offer to help her.

Situation 3 (+P, +D): You have just started a traineeship in a large company. During the coffee break on your second day you overhear your boss talking about how weak her son is at computers at school. As you study computers, you offer to help.

In all Situations, the participants had to interact with a NS, a female postgraduate student who was instructed to refuse all offers.

All role-play interactions were transcribed and the offers were classified according to a modified combination of Barron's taxomonies for offers (Barron 2005), adapted to fit the Greek data.

IMPs	
Imperative	*έλα στο σπίτι να σου τα δείξω* ('come at my place, I'll explain everything to you')
State future act of hearer	*θα καθίσεις δυο ώρες να σου τα εξηγήσω* ('you'll spend two hours with me and I'll explain')
State future act of speaker	*θα σας πάμε εμείς στο σπίτι* ('we will take you home')
State permission	*μπορείς να με ρωτήσεις ό,τι θέλεις* ('you can ask me whatever you want')
State willingness	*θέλω να σε βοηθήσω*

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[1] Due to space limitations, I provide only the English translations of the situation descriptions, which were originally presented in Greek.
[2] The initials P and D stand for Power and Distance respectively.

CI	
Question future act of speaker	*να βοηθήσω;* ('shall I help?')
Question desire	*θέλετε να σας βοηθήσω εγώ;*('do you want me to help you?')
Question need	*χρειάζεστε βοήθεια;* ('do you need help?')
Question ability	*μπορώ να βοηθήσω;* ('can I help?')
State ability	*μπορώ να σε βοηθήσω εγώ* ('I can help')
NCI	
Hint	*εγώ έχω λίγα πράγματα* ('I have very little stuff')

Table 1: Super-strategies and sub-strategies for realising offers
(adapted from Barron 2005: 157-158)

The taxomony involves three super-strategies for realising offers, i.e. impositives (IMPs), conventionally indirect strategies (CIs) and non-conventionally indirect strategies (NCIs). Each super-strategy can be manifested via different sub-strategies. Table 1 presents these sub-strategies on a continuum from maximum imposition to maximum indirectness.

For the purposes of the present study, insistence was calculated as the means of the number of attempts to insist each group made in each situation.

The interviews with the participants took place immediately after the completion of the role-plays. For the present purposes, I will focus on the participants' answers to only two of the interview questions:

1. How difficult did you find it to answer?
2. Are you satisfied with how much you insisted?

3. Results

3.1 Role-plays: Strategies and insistence

Table 2 presents the overall distribution of IMPs, CIs and NCIs by the four groups in the three Situations (see Table 3 for means and standard deviations).

Strategies	Situation 1								Situation 2								Situation 3							
	NSs		Ls1		Ls2		Ls3		NSs		Ls1		Ls2		Ls3		NSs		Ls1		Ls2		Ls3	
IMPs	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Imperative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	8.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
State future act of hearer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	22.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
State future act of speaker	0	0	8	22.9	2	5.7	0	0	12	34.3	7	20	3	8.6	2	5.7	2	5.7	7	20	0	0	2	5.7
State permission	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
State willingness	0	0	8	22.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	25.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	25.7	0	0	3	8.6
TOTAL: IMPs	**0**	**0**	**16**	**45.7**	**2**	**5.7**	**0**	**0**	**24**	**68.7**	**16**	**45.7**	**3**	**8.6**	**2**	**5.7**	**2**	**5.7**	**16**	**45.7**	**0**	**0**	**5**	**14.3**
CIs																								
Question future act of speaker	18	51.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	25.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	11.4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Question desire	3	8.6	3	8.6	17	48.6	16	45.7	2	5.7	5	14.3	15	42.9	15	42.9	5	14.3	4	11.4	15	42.9	12	34.3
Question need	6	17.1	0	0	0	0	7	20	0	0	0	0	1	2.9	9	25.7	4	11.4	0	0	3	8.6	4	11.4
Question ability	8	22.9	0	0	9	25.7	12	34.3	0	0	1	2.9	10	25.7	9	25.7	3	8.6	1	2.9	8	22.9	10	28.6
State ability	0	0	11	31.4	7	20	0	0	0	0	9	25.7	6	17.1	0	0	17	48.6	9	25.7	6	17.1	4	11.4
Total: CIs	**35**	**100**	**14**	**40**	**33**	**94.3**	**35**	**100**	**11**	**31.3**	**15**	**42.9**	**32**	**91.4**	**33**	**94.3**	**33**	**94.3**	**14**	**40**	**32**	**91.4**	**30**	**85.7**
NCIs																								
Hint	0	0	5	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	11.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	14.3	3	8.6	0	0
Total: NCIs	**0**	**0**	**5**	**14.3**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**4**	**11.4**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**5**	**14.3**	**3**	**8.6**	**0**	**0**
Total strategies	**35**	**100**	**35**	**100**	**35**	**100**	**35**	**100**	**35**	**100**	**35**	**100**	**35**	**100**	**35**	**100**	**35**	**100**	**35**	**100**	**35**	**100**	**35**	**100**

Table 2: Overall distribution of substrategies by the four groups in the three situations

		S1 (-P, +D)		S2 (-P, -D)		S3 (+P, +D)	
		IMP	CI	IMP	CI	IMP	CI
NSs	Mean	0	1	0.94	0.06	0.17	0.83
	SD	*0*	*0*	*0.23*	*0.23*	*0.38*	*0.38*
Ls1	Mean	0.46	0.40	0.46	0.43	0.46	0.4
	SD	*0.5*	*0.49*	*0.5*	*0.5*	*0.5*	*0.49*
Ls2	Mean	0.06	0.94	0.09	0.91	0	0.91
	SD	*0.23*	*0.23*	*0.28*	*0.28*	*0*	*0.28*
Ls3	Mean	0	0.94	0.06	0.93	0.14	0.83
	SD	*0*	*0.2*	*0.23*	*0.23*	*0.35*	*0.38*

Table 3: Means and standard deviations in the use of super-strategies
by the four groups in the three situations

As shown in Tables 2 and 3 Ls1 learners employed more IMPs and fewer CIs than all groups in Situation 1. This difference proved to be statistically significant for both types of strategies (($F(3,136)=21.93$, p<0.05),($F(3,136)=31.15$, p<0.05) respectively).

Although no significant differences were attested among the more advanced learner groups (Ls2 and Ls3) and the NSs, the latter's most preferred strategy in S1 was the Question future act of the speaker, which did not appear at all in the learners' data. Ls1 exhibited equal frequencies of IMPs and CIs. Yet, their IMPs consisted mainly in State future act of speaker and State Willingness, whereas their predominant CI strategy was State ability. Moreover, this group was the one that employed NCIs, i.e. hints, when performing their initial offers (e.g. *εγώ δεν έχω πολλά* 'I don't have much [luggage]'). Ls2 and Ls3 speakers, like NSs, employed mainly CIs in this Situation. However, unlike NSs, they showed a strong preference for the Question desire strategy, although Ls3, unlike Ls2, made some use of the Question need strategy.

In terms of insistence, very few NSs made more than one attempt to insist (M=1.06). Both Ls1 and Ls2 learners made few or no attempts to insist in this Situation (M=0.23 and M=0.17 respectively), whereas Ls3 learners behaved similarly to the NSs (M=0.91).

Examples (1-4) come from the performance of NSs and Ls1, Ls2 and Ls3 learners respectively and are indicative of the aforementioned differences.

(1) NSs

A: Να βοηθήσω λίγο;

Shall I help a bit?

B: Όχι, δεν πειράζει, τα καταφέρνω.

No, it's OK, I can manage.

A: Δεν έχω πολλά εγώ, μπορώ να πάρω κάτι.

I don't have much, I can take something.

B: Ευχαριστώ πολύ είμαι εντάξει, να είστε καλά.

Thanks a lot, I am fine, be well.

A: OK, καλή συνέχεια!

OK, good luck with the rest of it!

(2) Ls1

A: Συγγνώμη. Θέλω βοηθάω εσένα.

Excuse me. I want to help you.

B: Ευχαριστώ αλλά δεν είναι βαριές. Δεν χρειάζεται.

Thanks but they are not heavy. It's not necessary.

A: Καλά εντάξει. Γεια σας.

Fine. Goodbye.

(3) Ls2

A: Θέλετε να βοηθήσω εσάς; Δεν έχω πολλά πράγματα.

Do you want me to help you? I don't have much luggage.

B: Όχι ευχαριστώ είμαι εντάξει.

No, thanks, I am fine.

A: Εντάξει. Καλό ταξίδι!

OK. Have a nice trip!

(4) Ls3

A: Θέλετε να σας βοηθήσω; Φαίνεται ότι είναι πολύ βαριές.

Do you want me to help you? They look heavy.

B: Όχι, όχι τα καταφέρνω. Δεν υπάρχει πρόβλημα, ευχαριστώ.

No, no I can manage. No problem, thanks.

A: Μπορώ να πάρω μία.

I can take one.

B: Σας ευχαριστώ πολύ. Δεν χρειάζεται. Να είστε καλά!

        Thank you very much. It's not necessary. Be well!

The NS's initial offer in (1) is performed via the Question future act of speaker strategy, which as mentioned above, was typical of the NSs' performance in S1. After the addressee's refusal, the offerer makes only one contribution of insistence. Ls1 and Ls2 participants, in (2) and (3) respectively, immediately accept their interlocutor's refusal and make no further attempts to convince her to accept the offer. However, whereas the Ls1 learner makes her offer by means of the State willingness strategy, the Ls2 learner resorts to a CI strategy, i.e. the Question desire. Similarly, the Ls3 participant in (4) employs the Question desire strategy, but unlike Ls1 and Ls2 learners, she does make one contribution in the direction of insistence.

In Situation 2 (S2) (-P, -D), NSs exhibited a strong preference towards IMPs and made very limited use of CIs. Therefore, they differed significantly from the other groups in respect to both types of strategies $((F(3,136)=53.59$, p<0.05), $(F(3,136)=56.75$, p<0.05) respectively). Furthermore, this was the one Situation in which these NSs made frequent use of strategies involving the highest degree of imposition, such as State future act of speaker and State future act of hearer. In Situation 3 (S3) (+P, +D), on the other hand, NSs preferred, once again to express their offers by means of CIs.

In both these Situations (S2 and S3), Ls1 learners' performance displayed similar frequencies of IMPs and CIs to those in S1, with their IMPs consisting mainly in State future act of speaker and State willingness, whereas State ability was their most commonly employed CI strategy. This group, once again, used more hints than the rest of the groups to perform the offer in both these situations, although a few instances of hints also appeared in the Ls2 data in S3. In both the Ls2 and Ls3 data, a preference for CIs was attested in both Situations (S2 and S3), with Ls3 employing the Question need strategy, which, once more, was almost absent from the lower level learners' data.

S2 was the one situation where NSs exhibited an impressive amount of insistence making often more than two contributions in the direction of convincing their interlocutor to accept the offer (M=2.2). Example (5) is typical of this group's performance in S2:

(5) NSs

A: Τι ανησυχείς, παιδάκι μου; Θα σου τα δείξω εγώ. Το έχω περάσει πρόσφατα, τα θυμάμαι.

What do you worry about my child[diminutive]? I'll show them to you. I have passed it recently, I remember everything.

B: Ναι καλά, λες και δεν έχεις δικό σου διάβασμα. Θα το παλέψω μόνη μου, μη σε απασχολεί.

Yeah right, as if you don't have your own studying. I'll work it out on my own, don't bother.

A: Γιατί, ρε παιδί μου, αφού μπορώ! Δεν είναι τίποτα αυτό, δυο τρεις ωρίτσες να σου δείξω μερικά πράγματα.

Why [re] my child, I can do it! It's nothing, two or three hours[diminutive] to show you a couple of things.

B: Δεν είναι μόνο δυο τρεις. Δεν έχω ιδέα. Μπορεί να πάω να κάνω κανένα ιδιαίτερο.

It's not only two or three. I have no idea. I may take some private lessons.

A: Καλά, βλακείες! Έλα στο σπίτι αύριο το πρωί να τα δούμε μαζί. Θα πιούμε καφέ και θα σε κάνω ξεφτέρι.

That's rubbish! Come home tomorrow morning and we will go through them together. We'll have coffee and I'll make you an expert.

B: Δεν χρειάζεται [θα]

It's not necessary [I will]

A: [Σε] περιμένω αύριο.

I will be waiting for you.

As shown in (5), the NS states her initial offer by the highly impositive State future act of speaker strategy (*θα σου τα δείξω εγώ* 'I'll explain'). She proceeds to make two more attempts to convince her addressee to accept the offer. Although the exact realisation of re-offers is beyond the focus of this study, it is worth noting that she not only resorts to an imperative in her pre-final contribution (*έλα αύριο στο σπίτι...* 'come to my place tomorrow'), but she also wraps up the conversation by actually making the decision for the addressee (*σε περιμένω αύριο* 'I'll be waiting for you tomorrow').

As in S1, Ls1 rarely made any attempt to insist (M=0.17) in S2. Ls2 showed some

more insistence than Ls1 in this Situation (M=0.43), yet they lagged far behind NSs in this respect. The advanced learner group's participants (Ls3) insisted more that the other learner groups but much less than NSs in this Situation (M=0.5).

In S3, on the other hand, NSs made usually one contribution of insistence (M=0.94), whereas the learner groups showed minimal or no insistence in this Situation (M=0.06, M=0.11, M=0.23 respectively).

3.2 Verbal reports

Ls1, in their majority, stated that they had many difficulties in realising their offers. They felt that they did not possess all the necessary 'language' and also found that their offers might have sounded rude. They also reported that they would have liked to insist more in S1, but they "did not know how to do it in Greek".

In contrast, both Ls2 and Ls3 learners reported that they found it easier to realise offers than other speech acts in the questionnaire. They stated that they were pretty happy with their answers and that they "probably did not make many mistakes".

In regard to insistence, Ls2 stated that they probably had to insist more in S1, but they did not know: a) how to do it politely and b) if that would be appropriate in Greek. However, they made clear that they were "too busy trying to speak correctly" and, therefore, did not give much thought to insistence in any of the Situations. Ls3, on the other hand, stated that insistence had been a problem for them in S2 and S3. They reported that they did not really know what is done under these circumstances in Greek, especially in S3. Many of them admitted having avoided insistence for fear that this would be inappropriate towards a superior in that context. However, they maintained that insistence "came naturally" for them in S1, since they felt that this situation affords some insisting in any language.

Finally, NSs reported that they could not possibly insist more in S1 and S3 since that would sound 'too pressing to a stranger' and also 'very pressing' or even 'subservient' to a superior. However, they maintained that S2 afforded as much insistence as possible, since it was important that their friend understood that they were really willing to help.

4. Discussion

This section discusses the main findings of the study in regard to the research questions, which involved the differences among the four groups in respect to initiative offer strategies and insistence.

Starting with S2, it appears that when offering help to a friend the NSs of this sample did not seem to feel that they had to question their addressee's desires. Instead, they assumed to know them and, thus, they employed strategies that emphasised this common ground between themselves and the addressee. As already mentioned, certain IMPs, like the Imperative and the State future act of hearer strategy, were attested exclusively in S2 in the NSs' data. Belonging to the highest end of the imposition continuum, these strategies were considered appropriate for this familiarity Situation. Therefore, the behaviour of the NSs in S2 is a typical manifestation of the Greek positive politeness orientation indicating the importance attached to interdependence rather than independence (see Sifianou 1992a). It is obvious that negative face considerations are not an issue for Greeks in this situation and that the speakers' main aim is the enhancement of the addressee's positive face by means of stressing the speaker's commitment to the offer.

In S3, on the other hand, the NSs appeared more inclined to emphasise the conditional nature of their offer by employing significantly more CIs than IMPs. This was probably due to the social nature of this Situation, which involves both distance and hierarchy, making it hard for these speakers to assume any kind of common ground between themselves and a hierarchically superior and unfamiliar addressee.

In S1 (-P, +D), the NSs exclusively employed CI strategies to express their offer. However, their most preferred means of offering has been the Question future act of speaker strategy, which was manifested via the subjunctive in the data (see Table 1). It should be pointed out that the use of the subjunctive without a modal in interrogative constructions like the one realising the Question future act of speaker strategy is rather idiosyncratic in Greek. Both Παυλίδου (1986) and Sifianou (1992b) acknowledge that there is an affinity between the use of the imperative and the use of the subjunctive in such constructions. However, according to Sifianou (1992b: 143), there is "an element of doubt and uncertainty sometimes implicit in subjunctives which is absent from imperatives". Furthermore, in her discussion on the use of the subjunctive in requests, Sifianou (1992b: 143) contends that "requests utilizing subjunctive constructions sound a little more formal than those with imperatives, but

appear less formal than other constructions" (cf. Παυλίδου 1986). I argue that a similar claim can be made for the use of the subjunctive in offers. This probably explains the NSs' preference for this construction in (-P, +D) situations like S1.

Unlike the NSs and the two more advanced learner groups, the Ls1 learners were found to employ equal frequencies of IMPs and CIs in all Situations. However, they exhibited a marked preference for three particular strategies: State future act of speaker, State willingness and State ability. It is characteristic that the State willingness strategy is completely absent from the NSs' data, whereas the State future act of speaker and State ability strategies appear mainly in S2 and S3 respectively in the NSs' data and are, thus, subject to socio-cultural variation. Such a claim cannot be made for their use in the Ls1 data. Against this backdrop, I argue that the use of these particular strategies does not aim to strategically highlight commitment and solidarity. Rather, consisting in simple declarative utterances that are not grammatically demanding, it reflects the limited syntactic means that these early learners have at their disposal for expressing their offers. This view is reinforced by the fact that these strategies seem to be relinquished as proficiency increases. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that the use of such grammatically simple expressions by early learners does not reflect a strategic tendency towards directness, but a developmental stage (see also Takahashi & Beebe 1987) that poses restrictions on these learners' competence for situational variation (Félix-Brasdefer's 2007; cf. Bella 2012, 2014). This claim is also verified by these learners' verbal reports.

A similar claim can be made in regard to the NCIs (hints), which, as shown in the Results section, appeared almost exclusively in the beginner learners' data and were found to decline with proficiency. This finding is in line with previous research on the development of requests (Bella 2012; Hassall 2003; Trosborg 1995), and suggests that these early NCI offers are not employed strategically to serve indirectness, but probably have a compensatory function aiming at balancing these learners' lack of proper pragma-linguistic means (cf. Trosborg 1995).

Both Ls2 and Ls3 learners displayed a marked preference for CIs in all Situations. Therefore, no situational variation was attested in these groups' data. These learners' preference for CIs can be interpreted as a manifestation of the general tendency of more advanced learners to employ indirectness as proficiency increases and learners manage to acquire linguistic means like interrogative constructions (see e.g. Bella 2012, 2014; Félix-Brasdefer 2007; Hassall 2003). This type of development can be

beneficial in the case of other speech acts and situations (see Bella 2012, 2014). However, in the case of offers and of the Situations under examination it renders their performance significantly divergent from the NS norm, especially in S2. It appears that these speakers are eager to use more complex grammatical forms and at the same time take advantage of these forms' more obvious politeness effect. Although Ls3 employed more complex grammatical means, which indicate grammatical and pragma-linguistic development, strategies like Question future act of speaker were completely absent from their data. However, although the subjunctive is rather complex morphologically, it cannot be claimed that its absence from the more advanced learner groups' (Ls2 and Ls3) data is due to inadequate grammatical competence. On the contrary, these learners seem perfectly capable of using the subjunctive in constructions in which it complements modal verbs. Therefore, this finding can only be attributed to the learners' lack of adequate and appropriate socio-pragmatic input, which comes as a consequence of their foreign learner status. Being rather formulaic and employed in everyday conversation, the Question future act of speaker (via the subjunctive) strategy is not the kind of construction that foreign language learners are likely to come across.

The participants' verbal reports were found to be particularly enlightening in regard to their respective behaviour concerning insistence. It turned out that the NSs consider it necessary to insist on offers, but the degree of insistence they employed appeared to be subject to the social parameters of each Situation. They considered insisting more than they did inappropriate in Situations 1 and 3, but deemed heavy insistence to be the optimal behaviour in S2, since they felt that they had to convince their friend for their commitment to the offer.

Ls1, on the other hand, attributed their lack of insistence to lack of adequate linguistic means. Furthermore, very few of them expressed socio-cultural concerns. Ls2 also attributed their lack of insistence to lack of linguistic means, but mainly to not knowing if insistence would be appropriate, especially in Situations 1 and 3. This indicates some socio-pragmatic awareness on their part. Finally, having more linguistic means at their disposal and invoking universal and L1 socio-pragmatic knowledge appeared to help Ls3 learners conform to the NS norm in S1. However, they were found to be uncertain about the appropriate degree of insistence in S2 and, especially, in S3. In the case of the latter, this uncertainty caused the majority of them to opt for not insisting, exhibiting, thus, a significant divergence from the NS norm.

It appears then that, although socio-pragmatic concerns increase with proficiency, namely as the learners feel more comfortable with their linguistic repertoire, socio-pragmatic knowledge in the case of offers and of these particular Situations remains inadequate in most respects.

Against this backdrop, it can be suggested that the findings of this study lend some support to Bialystok's (1993) two-dimensional model of language use and proficiency, according to which, adult learners can rely on a broad basis of universal and L1 pragmatic knowledge when acquiring L2 pragmatics, so that their main task is to achieve control over existing knowledge. It appears that, as proficiency increases, learners acquire most of the pragma-linguistic means necessary to state their offers appropriately. What they lack is the socio-pragmatic knowledge that will aid them to put these means to appropriate use. However, it has been found that the pragma-linguistic function of certain developed grammatical means, such as the subjunctive in the case of the Question future act of speaker strategy, was not noticed by the learners, even those of the advanced level. Therefore, the extent to which the acquisition of new pragma-linguistic means is a "minor task" (Bialystok 1993: 53) in the case of offers' development is an issue that calls for further investigation.

This brings us to the limitations of the present study, which involve mainly the limited number of Situations and participants under examination as well as the semi-authentic nature of the role-play data. These limitations suggest that the evidence drawn from the present study needs to be further confirmed and reinforced by more cross-sectional and longitudinal research.

5. Conclusions

The main conclusion to be drawn from this study involves the disproportionate growth of grammatical competence as compared to socio-pragmatic competence. It appears that for certain speech acts, like offers in Greek, increasing grammatical competence brings with it an increase in pragma-linguistic means that approximates closely to the NSs' repertoire. However, being FL learners, the participants of this study have no opportunities for exposure to the socio-pragmatic input that would allow them to achieve control over the appropriate use of these pragma-linguistic means. In this sense, the prediction that "high levels of grammatical competence do not guarantee concomitantly high levels of pragmatic competence" (Bardovi-Harlig 1999: 686) is verified by the present study.

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