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The importance of Power, Distance, and Imposition on Spanish verb forms in requests

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**THE IMPORTANCE OF POWER, DISTANCE, AND
IMPOSITION IN SPANISH VERB FORMS IN REQUESTS**

by

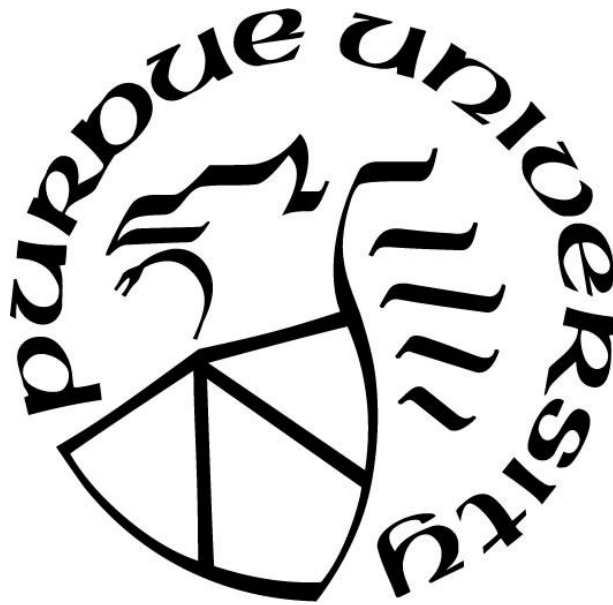
Bruno Staszkievicz García

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

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Title: The Importance of Power, Distance, and Imposition in Spanish Verb Forms in Requests

Major Professor: Lori Czerwionka

This thesis analyzed the production of requests through the framework of Politeness Theory and the variables of power, distance, and imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Research on Spanish has focused on Spanish requests (e.g. Placencia, 1998; Lorenzo Díaz, 2016) or cross-cultural analyses of requests (e.g. Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Márquez-Reiter, 2000). However, the lack of balance in the contexts examined regarding the social variables power, distance, and imposition makes it difficult to compare the effect of these variables on the request norms. Furthermore, requests likely vary according to other contextual factors as well, but this has received little systematic attention in prior literature. The aim of this project is to explore the importance of the three social variables as they impact the verb selection in requests in Peninsular Spanish, considering the orientation of the verb (e.g. speaker- or hearer-oriented) and the verbal continuum proposed by Chodorowska-Pilch (1998) that encodes politeness through the verbal system.

The present research examines the production of requests by a total of 104 native speakers of Peninsular Spanish in 16 different and balanced academic situations. The situations were designed by taking into consideration the three social variables proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987): *power, distance, and imposition*. The instrument used to collect the data was an online Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The DCT was innovative in that the contexts that represented variations

of power or distance referred to specific people known by the individual participants, providing reference to situations and relationships that respondents have experienced.

A total of 1594 requests were analyzed. Mixed effects logistic regression models were used to examine the use of different verb types considering the predictor variables of power, distance, and imposition. The analyses, taken collectively, showed that the variables of power and imposition were more impactful in predicting verb-forms than distance. Overall, there were trends that showed the increased use of more polite verb forms (e.g. conditional, subjunctive) when power differentials between interlocutors and requests of increased imposition were present. Distinctly, when contexts portrayed no power differential (-P), no distance between interlocutors (-D) and little imposition (-I), requests overwhelmingly relied on imperative forms, those that express little mitigation or politeness efforts. While variation in verb form was found depending on context, the analysis of verb orientation showed that Peninsular Spanish speakers rely on hearer-oriented requests in nearly all contexts. This research expands our understanding of contextual variables that shape pragmalinguistic structures, considering the verb, in Peninsular Spanish.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The speech act of requests and, by extension, politeness have long been the subject of a prolific amount of research in the field of pragmatics due to the cultural variation that has been observed with regard to the different linguistic outcomes. The study of politeness has addressed how three contextual variables of power, distance, and imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987) have a linguistic influence on making a request, as part of Politeness Theory. Research on politeness examining Spanish has focused on requests (e.g. Placencia, 1998; Lorenzo Díaz, 2016) or cross-cultural analyses of requests (e.g. Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Márquez-Reiter, 2000; 2002; Márquez-Reiter et al., 2005). In addition, and considering the framework of Politeness Theory, politeness and requests have been examined from different perspectives in the Hispanic world, such as different strategies employed in the mitigation of the impact of the requests (e.g. Placencia, 1998; Márquez-Reiter, 2000; Félix-Brasdefer, 2005) or how politeness is encoding through the verb forms (e.g. Koike, 1992; Haverkate, 1994; Chodorowska-Pilch, 1998).

The framework of Politeness Theory has not been applied in a systematic way in that not all studies consider the three main variables that were highlighted in the theory equally. In some prior studies, the variation in the role-relationship (Spencer-Oatey, 1996), which means the different roles that interlocutors have as they interact with others (e.g. teacher-student, customer-service provider), has not been controlled, and thus, has not thoroughly been considered as a variable that impacts request form. While the effect of the social variables of power, distance, and imposition, the role-relationship, and other variables such as whether the request relates to the request of good or a service have been shown to be important in the ways of address and mitigation, research on requests has not sufficiently relied on a balanced set of situations considering these variables. Thus, this study will analyze the influence of the three variables in balanced situations, while controlling

for role-relationship by limiting them to professor-student or student-student interactions and controlling the request of goods or a service by including the same number of request scenarios involving each. The motivation for this study was to examine the influence of each social variable in order to determine the importance of each in the selection of verb forms in requests.

The influence of the variables power, distance, and imposition will be observed at the verbal level. Two issues regarding the verb will be addressed. The first is how the social variables of power, distance, and imposition impact the use of speaker- and hearer-oriented verbs. Recent research has reported that native speakers of Peninsular Spanish rely most often on hearer-oriented verb forms in requests (Czerwionka & Cuza, 2017b; Shively, 2011), yet it is unclear to what degree contextual variation exists. The orientation of the verb is important since it provides an overarching sense of how speakers orient themselves to others in interaction, and it is a variable that has been shown to vary cross-culturally (e.g. see Czerwionka & Cuza, 2017b). The second issue considers the impact of the social variables on the Spanish verbal system more broadly, considering that it can encode politeness in a more scalar way (Chodorowska-Pilch, 1998). This encoding is achieved through the verb selection of mood, tense, and modal verbs. For example, the use of past tenses or the subjunctive mood, as in, *¿Sería posible que me podieras pasar el PowerPoint que has utilizado en clase?* “Would it be possible that you could send me the PowerPoint you used in class?” mitigates more than the use of present tense. The imperative mood represents the least mitigated verb form when making a request, such as in *Pásame el PowerPoint* “Pass me the PowerPoint”. This perspective of verb politeness relies on the idea of a metaphorically temporal distance to the request, making the request more or less imminent depending on the verb form.

The overarching goal of this study is to explore the influence of the three social variables of power, distance, and imposition on the linguistic structure of requests, by examining to the

orientation of the request (i.e. whether verbs are speaker or listener oriented based on their first-person or third-person reference) and the verb form of the request (i.e. mood, tense, modal verb). This research contributes a balanced design to expand our understanding of how power, distance, and imposition shape pragmalinguistic structures, and specifically the Spanish verb-system when making requests.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to analyze requests, a definition of what speech acts and requests are must be provided, as well as the different theories which deal with both speech acts and their performance (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; 1975; Grice, 1975; Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory and the taxonomy proposed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) to analyze the different linguistic elements when making a request will be of focus in this chapter. Then, the framework proposed by Chodorowska-Pilch (1998) on verbal politeness about what will be presented. Finally, a review of the previous literature on requests in Spanish and cross-culturally, and the distribution of the contextual variables of power, distance, and imposition in previous research, will lead to the current research questions and goals of this study.

2.1. Speech Acts

One of the most relevant theories in the field of pragmatics is the Speech Act Theory, proposed by Austin (1962). Austin introduced the idea that language is employed with a purpose. In other words, what speakers say has an intended function in reality. Austin gave the name of “performatives” to those utterances employed to do an action. Austin distinguished three types of acts:

- a) Locutionary act is the meaning of what has been said, the meaning of the uttered words.
- b) Illocutionary act is the intention of the utterance, such as requesting something.
- c) Perlocutionary act is the effect of the act that has been uttered by an interlocutor.

Thus, Austin indicated that speech acts were formed by the locutionary and illocutionary acts. He also pointed out that speech acts should be analyzed by taking the complete speech situation

into account, not just the words. Speech Act Theory was further developed by Searle (1969). Searle proposed that speech acts are the basic unit of human communication and that they are based on a set of necessary conditions. Searle also distinguished three types of acts within the illocutionary act: first, uttering the words; second, the performing of propositional acts; and third, the illocutionary force in which the speech act is uttered, such as stating, questioning, or suggesting. In addition to the Speech Act Theory, Searle (1969) introduced what he called *felicity conditions*, which are the conditions required to perform the speech acts and these conditions vary according to each speech act. For example, in the case of requesting there are four conditions that have to occur to perform the speech act successfully:

- a) *The propositional content condition*: the request is a future act of the hearer.
- b) *The preparatory condition*: the speaker believes that the hearer can do the action and the speaker assumes that the hearer will do the future action.
- c) *The sincerity condition*: the speaker truly wants the addressee to do the future action. The hearer needs to desire what the speaker is uttering.
- d) *The essential condition*: the utterance of the speaker is an attempt to get the hearer to do a future action.

In order to examine speech acts, Searle (1975) proposed a taxonomy that provided five major categories of illocutionary acts: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. The category of directives includes some of the speech acts such as: requesting, commanding, inviting, or suggesting. Searle also distinguished between two types of speech acts: direct and indirect speech acts. Direct speech acts are those which show the proper illocutionary force of the speech act. Whereas indirect speech acts are performed with another speech act. For example, the speaker can make a request by way of using a question such as “can you open the

window?” instead of a direct request speech act as “open the window”. However, the use of indirect speech acts does not usually break down communication since they normally are conventionalized expressions (Bardovi-Harlig, 2012; Blum-Kulka, 1989, p.37; Reiter, Rainey, & Fulcher, 2005). The indirectness of the speech acts was also catalogued as a *hint* by Blum-Kulka (1989), which will be discussed later.

The current study deals with the speech act of requesting, a directive. The directive illocutionary acts are those in which the speaker aims to make the hearer do something. More specifically, make a request is the speech act in which a speaker asks the hearer to do something. Additionally, requests can be expressed directly, by using command, or indirectly, such as by using a question.

2.2. Politeness Theory

Speech acts have been analyzed from different theories such as the Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969), the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975), or Leech’s Politeness Principle (1983). These theories provided an explanation of how to achieve communication successfully (Grice, 1975), or how to produce and understand language based on politeness (Leech, 1983). However, the most employed theory utilized to analyze speech act has been Politeness Theory, proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Politeness Theory considered Searle, Grice, and Leech’s work, and it presented politeness in a systematic manner, which addressed the repair of an affront as Foley (1997) explained. One of the controversial points when dealing with Politeness Theory and the field of politeness is the definition of politeness itself, which has brought some disagreement among scholars, as Watts (2003) pointed out. On the one hand, Watts (2003) and Meier (1995) indicated that the term politeness is related to a socially “correct, respectful, or appropriate behavior” (Watts, 2003, p. 1) as well as to “the linguistic and non-linguistic behavior on the on-

going social interaction” (Watts, 2003, p. 276). This definition is more based on the interaction between interlocutors and their culture. Whereas, on the other hand, Brown and Levinson (1987) presented the notion of politeness as a way of employing mitigation on the impact of the utterance by considering a range of social factors in a context (Fraser, 1990, p. 228) or as a strategy to persuade the hearer to do something. This second perspective is more related to both the linguistic modifications which the utterance can go through and its social function. Both perspectives are compatible, since Brown and Levinson’s concept of politeness is expressed linguistically and follows social rules or conventions, leading to its interpretation as “correct, respectful, or appropriate behavior” (Watts, 2003, p.1). In addition, the work of Culpeper (2011, p. 14) addressed the notion of impoliteness, providing a view of impoliteness that “involves a clash with expectations, particularly concerning behaviors associated with particular contexts”. Thus, in this project, the term politeness could be defined as both: the linguistic strategies employed to mitigate the impact of the utterance, as well as what is considered as correct, appropriate, or expected in a given situation (in contrast to Culpeper’s definition of impoliteness).

Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed a framework that accounts for the repair of an affront to a person’s face. The notion of face is derived from Goffman (1976) who linked the term of face with the notions of feeling humiliated, embarrassed, or ‘loosing face’. Brown and Levinson (1987) defined face as “the self-image that a person tries to protect” (p. 61). In addition, they included two types of face: positive and negative.

Positive face was defined as the want of every person to be liked as well as to be appreciated by others (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). On the other hand, negative face was seen as a desire of being unimpeded and to be able to act freely. In addition, Brown and Levinson claimed that these two concepts of face were universal to all the cultures. However, they also mentioned that

there exist cultural differences related to the notion of face, and that these cultures “may differ in the degree to which wants other than face wants are allowed to supersede face wants” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 249).

Another concept introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987) is the concept of face-threatening act (FTA). This concept is highly important in their theory in concordance with face. They build their theoretical framework of politeness based on the FTA and how the FTA can damage or threaten the positive or negative faces of both the speaker or the hearer. The threatening or non-threatening nature of the speech act is determined by those acts that run contrary to the face of the addressee and/or the speaker (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 66-67).

They also distinguished between two types of FTA: those acts that threaten the positive face and those acts that threaten the negative face. The first type of FTA are those in which the speaker does not care about the feelings, wants, or the public image of the hearer, such as challenges, disagreements, or critiques. On the other hand, the second type of FTA are those that address the hearer’s negative face. With this kind of threat, “the Speaker does not intend to avoid the impeding hearer’s freedom of action” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 65). These types of speech acts are suggestions, warnings, or requests. In the case of a request, the threatening act is towards the negative face since the Speaker wants the Hearer to do some act or not to do something.

Following their framework, speakers can choose to employ strategies to soften the threat of the FTA. The first distinction that Brown and Levinson make is whether the speaker performs the FTA off-record or on-record. If the speakers opt for performing the FTA off-record, speakers perform the speech act in an ambiguous way, or in a way that is not very clear, for example, by giving hints to the hearer. If they choose the on-record strategy, then they are clear and direct. By going on-record, they can utter the threat without or with a redressive action, such as lexical or

syntactic mitigation, to soften the FTA . When a speaker performs a request baldly or without a redressive action, the speaker does so by being totally direct. This sort of request may seem like a command, such as “Do X” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 69).

When the speaker opts for employing the redressive action, the speaker tries to counteract the potential damage of the FTA towards the addressee. The redressive action is achieved through internal and external modifications that mitigate the FTA, such as by adding linguistic elements to reduce the threat to the listener. These modifications can be carried out by using positive or negative politeness. When using positive politeness, the speaker tries to positively impact the listener’s response to the utterance by showing similar goals or wants to those of the addressee, as if they are of “*the same kind*” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 71). Some of the positive politeness strategies employed include the use of the inclusive “we”, for example, as in expressions as “Let’s...” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.72). In addition, as pointed out by Bernate (2016), the use of humor, slang, or in-group speech are used as well to show solidarity as a positive face strategy.

Finally, negative politeness is employed to attenuate or avoid the threat of the acts, as well as to reduce those possible threats on the listener. Speakers use negative politeness when, to some degree, they pay respect, maintain the social distance, and show deference to the addressee, satisfying the negative face needs of the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.73). This type of strategy can be presented in different ways such as by maintaining the social distance or by giving “outs” to the addressee. The use of indirectness as part of an off-record FTA is also considered a negative politeness strategy as the addressee does not receive a direct request, which would be considered a bald-on-record FTA. For example:

(1) Give me a pen. [Direct request]

Dame un bolígrafo.

(2) Can you give a pen? [Conventional indirect request]

¿Me puedes dar un bolígrafo?

In the case of the direct request (1), the speaker utilizes an imperative form to request the pen. Whereas in the indirect request (2), the speaker employs an interrogative question to make a request. The use of indirectness is the most conventionalized way of requesting (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). The choice of the employed strategy is determined by the speaker, who can consider a FTA to be more or less threatening for the addressee's face.

Apart from the notion of face, and in contrast to the Speech Act Theory, Politeness Theory builds on the context to explain the different social factors involved in interaction (Levinson, 1983). Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed three social variables which make the speaker assess the threaten of an FTA in a given social context. These three social variables are power, social distance, and rank of imposition (henceforth Imposition). Brown and Levinson (1987) pointed out that these variables are universal, but are interpreted differently in every culture (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 274). Furthermore, some cultures give different values to the social variables of power, distance, and imposition. They exemplified the different values by contrasting the Indian culture and the US culture. According to Brown and Levinson, the Indian culture gives more value to the variable of power, whereas US culture gives more value to distance.

In other words, these variables are present in all cultures, but they are measured and valued in different degrees. Also, they mentioned that the social variables are context-dependent, therefore, these variables can be perceived or modified differently depending on the context (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 78). The social variables condition and shape the linguistic strategies that interlocutors include in their speech. Thus, every variable influences the interaction in some way.

The goal of the current study is to examine how these variables impact certain contextualized requests. In the next three sections, each variable will be discussed.

2.2.1. Power

The social variable of power is one of the most studied variables in the field of pragmatics. Power is seen as the different social hierarchies that can be found in a society: Keating (2009) provides a definition of power “as the ability or capacity to exert control over other and have an influence” (either political, social, or economic). Therefore, power accounts for the control or influence that “an individual has relative to all others” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 78). Following this idea of relativity, Keating (2009) also highlighted the relativity of power, indicated that each person can hold several roles, which can vary according to the relationship with other interlocutors. Thus, the power that an individual has in one context may change in a different context (Spencer-Oatey, 1996). In addition, several factors can affect the relative power of the interlocutors, such as age or social status in the community or society.

Therefore, regarding power in the occidental world, Brown and Levinson (1987) illustrated that there are two types of relationships between interlocutors: symmetrical and asymmetrical. Symmetrical relationships are those in which both interlocutors are equals in terms of power; the interlocutors do not project authority over each other. On the other hand, asymmetrical relationships show unbalance in terms of power, when one of the interlocutors – due to their roles – have an influence or authority over the other interlocutor.

Not only does the notion of power vary cross-culturally, but so does the way in which it is linguistically represented. Power can be represented linguistically in different ways, for instance, the use of titles such as “sir” or the social role of the interlocutor in English (e.g. professor), the use of *usted* (the polite form for the pronoun ‘you’) in some Spanish dialects, or the use of

honorifics in Japanese are some cross-cultural examples that demonstrate linguistically-represented concepts of power.

2.2.2. Social Distance

The second social variable proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987) is Social Distance (henceforth distance). Brown and Levinson pointed out that distance is, in contrast to power, symmetrical. This model of measurement allows them to distinguish between two types of relationships based on distance: close and distant. In addition, they indicated that this term is based on frequency of interaction and the closeness of the interlocutors as well as the different material and non-material exchanges between them. Thus, the degree of distance between speakers varies regarding how frequently they interact, and it does not rely on the role relationships as the case of power. Consequently, as Spencer-Oatey (1996) stated, it would probably be imprudent to define distance regarding the role-relationships of the interlocutors due to the function that the frequency of interaction between interlocutors has.

However, distance – as Wierbizcka (1991) and Spencer-Oatey (1996) pointed out – has been labelled differently in cross-cultural research, showing ambiguity in the use of the terminology. Spencer-Oatey (1996) reported that values and terms such as solidarity, familiarity, closeness, relational intimacy were employed in cross-cultural research instead of distance. The use of this variety of terms has led to question whether researchers have examined this variable in relationships with slightly different perspectives.

Consequently, in this project, the notion of distance is addressed from the perspective of Brown and Levinson (1987), which considers distance in terms of closeness by interaction. Thus, as Spencer-Oatey (1996) claimed, this project will separate role-relationships (boss – employer or

student - professor) from the notion of distance as the distance between the interlocutors (close or distant).

2.2.3. Imposition

Imposition, the last of the three variables, accounts for the degree to which impositions are considered to interfere with the hearer's wants or desire of being self-determined or being approved (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 77). The degree of imposition is contextually dependent, and it varies cross-culturally. For instance, the degree of imposition changes whether the speaker asks to borrow a pen (low imposition) or to borrow a laptop (high imposition). In addition, the relationship with the other interlocutor can modify the degree of imposition. Variables such as power, distance, and the role of the relationship have an influence on the imposition. In the case of the role of the relationship, the degree of imposition can be decreased due to the existence of a contract or obligation, such as a job contract (Spencer-Oatey, 1996).

In the case of requests, Brown and Levinson also differentiated two categories that account for imposition when making a request in proportion to the cost or expenditure, which are services and goods. They classified the cost of services as a time-consuming cost; whereas the cost of goods is related to the material and non-material value of the goods. The analysis of whether there exist differences when making a request for one of this type of items, either at the syntactic or the lexical level, has not been addressed in prior literature, to best of the researcher current knowledge.

Finally, by considering the three social variables – in addition to other contextual factors – speakers choose the use of different strategies to mitigate the impact of the FTA during social interaction (Félix-Brasdefer & Koike, 2014). The social variables are constrained by cross-cultural differences; the social variables, thus, differentially impact speech acts or FTAs in different cultures. For example, in the case of Japanese, the variable of power takes precedence when

formulating the utterance from a morphological point of view. Japanese language uses the honorific-system, which employs particles (suffixes) inserted in words and used to save the face of the hearer. As Fukada and Asato (2003), indicated the honorific system, following the social rules, enables Japanese to express different degrees of deference.

2.2.4. Critics Towards Politeness Theory

As Bernate (2016) indicated, Brown and Levinson's framework continues to be used as a main basis for investigation, despite the criticism that they theory received. Critics towards Politeness Theory argued against their idea of universality (e.g. Wierzbicka, 1985; Ide, 1989); their concept of face (e.g. Meier, 1995); the lack of emphasis on the speaker's motives to perform the speech act (Yabuuchi, 2006); or the rigid treatment of conversational turns (Bravo, 2010). This section will principally cover the critics towards the idea of universality and the motives to perform the speech act, which are the critics that concern, in a greater extension, this project which deals with verbal politeness since the analysis of the verb forms are based on universality of the contextual variables and its function.

Yabuuchi (2006) indicated that the performance of a speech act can be triggered by different motives such as, in the case of requests, the aim of getting something. According to Yabuuchi (2006), Politeness Theory does not account for the fact that speakers can lie in order to get something. Thus, the motives underlying the speech act, such as persuading the hearer, can trigger the use of different strategies, which may not be able to be accounted for by the contextual, social factors proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987).

The main argument towards the universalist intention of the Politeness Theory is the critic of Wierzbicka (1985), Ide (1989), and Matsumoto (1988). Wierzbicka (1985) claimed that Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory had a "European Anglo-Saxon" perspective when referring to

its universality. She pointed out that there exist differences between English and Polish terms and their perception of politeness, such as the term *privacy*. Wierzbicka explained that the notion of *privacy* in Polish – as well as Slavic and Romance languages – is different from English when addressing the physical contact in everyday interaction.

Similarly, Ide (1989) and Matsumoto (1988, 1989) have also claimed that Politeness Theory cannot account for a universalist approach since it ignores the impact of the culture in everyday interactions. Both scholars claimed that the Japanese honorifics system places emphasis on the societal- and role- relationships instead of minimizing the impact of an FTA. However, as mentioned above, Brown and Levinson (1987) indicated that the social variables are present cross-culturally and every culture and language differ from one another, as they exemplified contrasting the English and Japanese, Malaysian, or Hindi languages. In addition, these critiques were discarded as well by Fukada and Asato (2003) who argued that Politeness Theory can account for other languages and cultures such as Japanese. They claimed that the use of honorifics did not exclude the notion of face, and that Japanese honorifics are used to mitigate the impact of the FTAs as well.

Despite the fact that Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) has been criticized due to its notion of politeness as universal, Politeness Theory continues to be one of the most employed frameworks in the study of speech acts as well as pragmatics as a whole (Félix-Brasdefer & Koike, 2014). The influence of the contextual social variables of power, distance, and imposition on language and/or representation is one of the most relevant contributions for the field of pragmatics as well as intercultural pragmatics.

In addition, other relevant contributions are notions about politeness such as the fact that what is polite is based on what is normal and expected according to a situation. The wider scope of this

theory, in contrast to the previous models such as those by Leech (1983) or Grice (1975), has made it possible to apply the theory to different speech acts and many cultures (e.g. Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

2.3. Requests: Linguistic Variables Related to Politeness

Politeness Theory shifted the scope of the study of pragmatics toward the linguistic representation of politeness through mitigation strategies (see Fraser, 1990). Certain linguistic and pragmalinguistic aspects such as the verb or the different strategies employed to mitigate the FTAs have gained the attention of researchers. In the same way, cross-cultural differences have been contrasted when examining different speech acts. These cross-cultural differences among languages have been one of the main trends in the research on interlanguage pragmatics (Félix-Brasdefer & Koike, 2014). More specifically, requests have been one of the most prolific areas of research in the last decades in comparison with research on other speech acts (e.g. Márquez-Reiter, 2000, 2002; Félix-Brasdefer, 2007a; Bernate 2016).

2.3.1. Politeness and Requesting

Studies dealing with speech acts have applied a Politeness Theory framework to examine how the contextual differences affect different speech acts such as requests, apologies, or compliments (see Félix-Brasdefer & Koike, 2014; Cohen, 2018). Research on requests have accounted for different aspects of politeness and the process of mitigation that have an influence in intra- and inter-cultural studies.

2.3.2. Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project

The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) is a taxonomy designed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) based on Politeness Theory. Its aim is to analyze different speech acts

and their realization – such as request and apologies – in linguistic communication and cross-culturally. The CCSARP proposed the examination of the speech acts at two levels: internally and externally. The internal level is called the Head Act (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), which is the minimal unit which can realize a speech act and it can function as an independent utterance by its own, and it is the core of the speech act. For instance, they provided a similar utterance:

(3) John, give me a pen, please

John, dame un bolígrafo, por favor.

In (3) “give me a pen” is the head act. Whereas, on the other hand, the external level analyzes the different strategies and mitigators which are employed to soften the FTA. When examining requests, the CCSARP also accounts for the degree of directness in requests, categorizing the request as direct (imperative), conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) categorized the use of indirect requests as an internal negative politeness strategy. Additionally, the CCSARP proposed a set of strategies that were commonly found in apologies and requests cross-culturally such as, for example, alerters, tenses, mood, mitigators, grounders, preparators, query preparatory, or mood derivable strategies. These strategies are further considered as syntactic downgraders (in the case of mood or tenses) and lexical downgraders (in cases as alerters, solidarity markers, grounders, or preparators).

The CCSARP is characterized by the use of Discourse Completion Test (DCT) as the data-collection instrument, utilized initially by Blum-Kulka (1982) with L2 speakers of Hebrew and, later, by other researchers for the study of other languages (Márquez-Reiter, 2000; Pinto, 2005; Kasper, 1992). When using DCT, participants are asked to respond in writing to a set of hypothetical situations as they would do in real life situations. Thus, it is an effective and fast procedure to analyze head acts and the different strategies cross-culturally (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

The different situations found in the DCT showed a balanced variability according to the social variables of power and distance, however, imposition was not shown to be considered in those contexts (Rose, 1992).

2.3.3. Verbal Politeness

Requests, and other speech acts, have been examined considering the verbal level. More specifically, the relationship between the verb tense and mood with mitigation and politeness of the speech act have been analyzed. Although the CCSARP includes mention of tense and mood as mitigating tools (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), most studies of speech acts have not focused on the verb forms. Some exceptions to this are a study by Haverkate (1994) on Spanish politeness and contrastive studies such as those by Chodorowska-Pilch (1998; 2004) that compare Spanish and Polish verb systems. Chodorowska-Pilch's (1998) perspective towards verb forms were that they are "the linguistic forms that contribute to the manifestation of politeness" (Chodorowska-Pilch, 1998, p.22). Politeness is encoded through the different verb tenses and moods. This perspective that Chodorowska-Pilch followed, aligned with the ideas proposed by Koike (1992). Koike (1992) indicated that one of the ways to encode linguistic politeness was through the verb, or the marked features in verb tense and mood. For this project, the perspective of Chodorowska-Pilch (1998) – and by extension of Koike (1992) – will be considered as a framework.

Chodorowska-Pilch (1998; 2004) proposed that the Spanish verbal system is a continuum considering mood and tense. Thus, she established an order considering verb tenses and moods, that is: imperative, present, future, imperfect, conditional, and subjunctive. She divided these tenses/moods among present and non-present forms, considering non-present forms (future, imperfect, conditional, and subjunctive) as polite forms due to their temporal distance from the action (Chodorowska-Pilch, 1998, p. 43). Additionally, relying on semantic understanding of

verbs, she distinguished realis (imperative, present, future and imperfect) and irrealis or non-factual forms¹ (conditional and subjunctive), considering the non-factual forms as more polite. For example, 4 and 5 show the factual and non-factual forms:

(4) ¿Me dejas un folio? [factual form]

Do you lend me a blank paper?

(5) ¿Me dejarías un folio? [Non-factual form]

Would you lend me a blank paper?

Chodorowska-Pilch (2004) also analyzed modal verbs, which can convey meanings of possibility, permission, and willingness related to requests and emphasized the idea that the use of conditional in non-conditional clauses is employed with mitigation purposes as other studies have pointed out (Koike, 1989; Haverkate, 1990).

2.4. Politeness: Requests in Spanish

This section will overview the main findings concerning the research on Spanish requests, and more specifically on Peninsular Spanish requests. A second subsection will examine the different contexts that have analyzed the production of requests on prior literature. The use of Politeness Theory, and by extension the study of politeness, has been one of the most prolific areas of research in the field of pragmatics. Studies analyzing requests on the Spanish language have adopted different analysis approaches, such as a cross-cultural perspective (e.g. Blum-Kulka, 1982; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Ballesteros, 2001; Le Pair, 1996; Chodorowska-Pilch, 1998, 2002; Márquez-Reiter, 2000; Márquez-Reiter, Rayner & Fulcher, 2006; García, 1989), variationist

¹ The mood and verbal forms of conditional and subjunctive have also been treated as irrealis verbs in literature, either regarding certainty (Yelin & Czerwionka, 2017) or to express the likely of occurrence of a proposition (Ojea, 2005).

approaches examining different varieties of Spanish language (e.g. Curcó, 1998; Félix-Brasdefer, 2005; 2007a; 2009; 2010; Placencia, 1998; 2005; Ruzickova, 2007; Méndez Vallejo, 2013; Márquez-Reiter 2002; Márquez et al. 2016), and those focusing on Peninsular Spanish (e.g. Lorenzo Díaz, 2016; Ballesteros, 2001; Márquez-Reiter 2002). However, the degree to which the analysis of contextual variables was included as a focus, and specifically the degree to which prior investigations have examined the impact of power, distance, and imposition on requests, is an issue highlighted in the review of literature in the following sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2.

2.4.1. Spanish Requests

The study of Spanish requests has been addressed from different perspectives. Cross-cultural studies on requests started with studies of the CCSARP (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989). Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) compared Argentinian Spanish in the CCSARP with a variety of languages such as, for example, Hebrew, Norwegian, or Australian English. They found that Argentinian Spanish speakers used requests that were conventionally indirect, and, in contrast to other languages such as English, Argentinean Spanish speakers preferred a hearer orientation when making a request. Following the same line, Ballesteros (2001) contrasted British English speakers with Peninsular Spanish and found, similar to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), the Spanish language employs more conventionally indirect requests and prefers a hearer orientation. The use of conventionally indirect requests was also reported by Le Pair (1996). He compared social interaction between Dutch and Spanish speaker, and he found that native Spanish speakers utilized more conventional indirect requests and imperatives forms for making requests.

Márquez-Reiter (2000) and Márquez-Reiter et al. (2006) conducted a series of studies contrasting British English with different varieties of Spanish: Uruguayan and Peninsular. Márquez-Reiter (2000) claimed that both groups, British and Uruguayans, employed conventional

indirect requests, although Uruguayans showed a preference for hearer-oriented requests. Similarly, Márquez-Reiter et al. (2006) carried out a study contrasting British English speakers with Peninsular Spanish Speakers. She emphasized that Peninsular Spanish speakers employed more direct requests because they relied more on the expectation of the request's compliance based on positive politeness strategies such as language that induces feelings of solidarity. This finding matched with García (1989), who compared Venezuelan and American English speakers. She pointed out that Venezuelan strategies relied more on solidarity.

Consequently, findings in cross-cultural studies have highlighted conventional indirectness and hearer orientation when analyzing requests in Spanish in contrast to other languages. Additionally, differences with English regarding orientation and the different strategies employed in making requests in a variety of dialects and languages have been considered in the cross-cultural literature.

Cross-cultural and variationist research has also addressed linguistic differences even among varieties of the same language. Research on Spanish requests has examined requests from a variationist approach across the Hispanic world and analyzed different varieties of Spanish. Scholars have examined the realization of requests in different varieties of the Spanish language contrastively such as Mexican Spanish (Félix-Brasdefer, 2005; 2007a), Mexican, Costa Rican, and Dominican Spanish (Félix-Brasdefer, 2009; 2010), Mexican with Peninsular Spanish (Curcó, 1998), Peninsular Spanish with Ecuadorian Spanish (Placencia, 1998; 2005), Uruguayans with Peninsular Spanish (Márquez-Reiter, 2002), and Peninsular Spanish (Lorenzo Díaz, 2016).

Félix-Brasdefer (2005; 2007a) examined Mexican native speakers and found that conventionally indirect requests were the most common type of requests, he also indicated that the use of the modal verb *poder* was employed as a downgrader when addressing a distant person, for

instance, *Quería saber si usted me podría aceptar el trabajo aunque sea dos días tarde* “I wanted to see if you could accept the paper even if it’s two days late” (from Félix-Brasdefer, 2005, pg. 69). Subsequently, Félix-Brasdefer (2009, 2010), examined other varieties of Spanish: Mexican, Costa Rican, and Dominican. When comparing these three groups, Félix-Brasdefer (2009) found that both Mexicans and Costa Ricans speakers employed more lexical and syntactic strategies in general than Dominicans. Although Dominicans relied more on the use of conditional and imperfect tenses as syntactic downgraders. However, when comparing Mexican and Costa Rican speakers, Félix-Brasdefer (2010) found that both groups behaved similarly, relying more on lexical (e.g. *por favor*) than on syntactic downgraders such as the use of different tenses (conditional or imperfect), or the subjunctive mood (Félix-Brasdefer, 2010).

Curcó (1998) examined Mexican and Peninsular Spanish requests through a survey. She found that politeness was perceived differently by both groups, for example, bare imperatives with few downgraders was considered less polite for Mexicans than Spanish speakers from Spain. The work of Placencia (1998; 2005) examined contrastive studies among varieties of Spanish, she compared interactions in shops among Ecuadorian and Peninsular Spanish. Placencia (1998) found through natural observation that Ecuadorian speakers included a greater number of lexical and syntactic downgraders in their requests in comparison with Spaniards. Similarly, Placencia (2005) found that Ecuadorians employed both lexical and syntactic downgraders, whereas Spaniards showed a preference for the use of syntactic downgraders. Additionally, Márquez-Reiter (2002) contrasted Uruguayan Spanish speakers with Peninsular Spanish speakers. The results of both groups showed that they behaved in a similar way; however, Spaniards relied more in the internal modification of the requests.

Regarding Peninsular Spanish, Lorenzo Díaz (2016) examined Peninsular Spanish request in high school adolescents. She found that teenagers relied on the use of alerters or vocatives such as *tío/a* as a solidarity marker to preface a request addressing other teenagers. However, teenagers employed more verbal ellipsis and direct requests with imperative forms in the settings of the cafeteria and at home situations, also they used more syntactic mitigation through verbal tenses in contexts that were considered high imposition with teachers and other teenagers. Participants emphasized in interviews that they were aware that politeness changed according to the situation (pp. 244-245).

Studies examining different varieties of Spanish have shown that every variety of Spanish differs from others. Some varieties showed a preference for the lexical downgraders such as Ecuadorians (Placencia, 1998, 2005), Costa Ricans, Mexicans and Dominicans (Félix-Brasdefer, 2009, 2010). However, the use of syntactic downgrader is also present in these varieties as reported by Félix-Brasdefer (2005, 2007a) where he reported the use of the modal verb *poder* as syntactic mitigators when addressing a distant person.

These contrastive studies also showed that there exist differences when perceiving politeness, the findings of Placencia (2005) align with the use of bare infinitives as Curcó (1998) indicated. Curcó (1998) reported the use of imperative forms as more polite for Peninsular Spanish speakers than for Mexicans. Similarly, Márquez-Reiter et al. (2006) found that Peninsular Spanish speakers employed more direct requests. The case of Peninsular Spanish seems to show a preference for syntactic mitigation such as the use of interrogative clauses, or mitigation through verb tense and mood. Peninsular Spanish speakers seem to rely more on the use of syntactic downgraders, such as the use of subjunctive or conditional in cases where its use it is no grammatically required.

2.4.2. Contexts

As Brown and Levinson (1987) indicated, different contexts result in different linguistic outcomes when making a request. It can be observed that the study of requests has not followed a systematic analysis regarding the social variables of power, distance, and imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987), or the role-relationship within specific contexts (Placencia, 2005; Lorenzo Díaz, 2016). In the study of Spanish L1 speakers' requests, an unbalanced distribution of the social variables (power, distance, and imposition) has been common. Some studies have examined contexts considering two of the three social variables of power, distance, and imposition. For example, Le Pair (1996), employing a Discourse Completion Task (DCT), compared the production of requests by considering power and distance as social variables. Similarly, Félix-Brasdefer (2005; 2007a; 2010) examined 4 different scenarios that varied in power (symmetrical/asymmetrical) and distance (close/distant). However, they did not include the variable of imposition in the design of the task. In addition, Félix-Brasdefer (2009) examined three symmetric situations (-power) regarding the different degrees of distance (distant and close).

The CCSARP (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) accounted for power (symmetrical and asymmetrical), distance (close and distant), and imposition (high) as contextual social variables in their general design of their DCT for their different contexts. Similarly, Ballesteros (2001), examining British English speakers with Peninsular Spanish requests and commands, employed the same contexts in his study as the ones provided by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). This design does not allow for the observation of how the category of low imposition impacts the requests.

Placencia (1998; 2005) observed interactions in shops among Ecuadorians and Peninsular Spanish speakers. These studies (Placencia, 1998; 2005) were carried out through observation of naturalistic data. The issue when collecting naturalistic data is the lack of control of the social

variables, which makes difficult to observe certain situations that do not occur with a high frequency in daily situations (Kasper & Rose, 1992, p. 81). Therefore, it is less possible to identify how these variables affect the request linguistically.

Márquez-Reiter (2000) provided 12 different situations, which varied in the three social variables power (symmetrical/asymmetrical), distance (distant/close) and imposition (high/low). Similarly, Márquez-Reiter (2002) examined 6 situations which diverged in terms of power and imposition, but not distance. While the design used by Márquez-Reiter (2000) represents a balanced design, the situations differed in terms of place and role-relationships among the interlocutors, such as in the classroom, at work, or in bus situations, making them difficult to compare. The same contexts and distribution were employed in Márquez-Reiter et al. (2006), where they compared requests of British English speakers with Peninsular Spanish Speakers.

Finally, Lorenzo Díaz (2016) examined 20 different contexts considering the different parameters of the social variables of power (symmetrical/asymmetrical), distance (close/distant), and imposition (high/low) and the formality (formal/informal) among Peninsular Spanish speakers in high school. The degree of formality was considered in terms of institutionalization, such as home (informal) and class (formal).

Despite her balance of the social variables in the experiment, these contexts varied in terms of place (high school, home, a cafeteria in a high school, and in a clothing shop). Also, these contexts involved the use of different role-relationships among the interlocutors, or, as the case of one of the situations, it was required to replicate how their mother asked them to help with the home duties. The comparison of situations that change in terms of register, formality (school and home), or the relationship (family, classmates, waiter) makes difficult to see whether the differences in

the output are related to the change of the contextual variables or to the factors mentioned previously.

The studies on the Spanish requests have shown divergence in the distribution of the contexts when considering the variables of power, distance, and imposition (Le Pair, 1996; Félix-Brasdefer, 2005; 2007a; Ballesteros, 2001; Kulka et al., 1989, Márquez-Reiter, 2002). On the other hand, some studies have included a set of balance situations (Márquez-Reiter, 2000; Lorenzo Díaz, 2016), which presented a difference in the role-relationships. These studies have also included changes of role-relationships in their contexts which, as Spencer-Oatey (1996) indicated, can determine different linguistic outcomes when making requests.

In the same line, studies on the L2 acquisition of requests have considered the impact of the different social variables, although they have presented an unbalanced set of scenarios as well. Following the same distribution as Ballesteros (2001) and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Félix-Brasdefer (2007b) examined in a cross-sectional study the requests of students in contexts varying in power (high/low), distance (close/distant), and high imposition. His contexts showed variability regarding the place where the action takes place such as workplace, home, or the classroom, which modifies the different role-relationships in every context as mentioned above. Pinto (2005) carried out a cross-cultural study among L2 students and native Spanish speakers by examining 4 different situations which varied in the contexts and the role-relationships from each other as well. Shively & Cohen (2008) provided 5 different scenarios considering the three social variables at three different degrees, each high, mid, and low, which could be found in real situations for L2 learners. However, these contexts included variability in the different settings of the scenarios such as the classroom, the plane, or at home with the host family.

Studies on heritage speakers have also focused on different variables when designing the tasks. Pinto and Raschio (2007) examined the strategies employed in requests by heritage speakers of Spanish in three symmetrical scenarios varying in distance. Differently, Bernate (2016) examined the requests of heritage speakers focusing on macro-variable of gender as well as the degree of formality.

Another of the situations that has been examined is service encounters which, as Lorenzo Díaz (2016) showed with different linguistic outcomes, relies on the role-relationship between client and tender. Shively (2011) asked the L2 learners to record themselves during the study abroad when ordering food or doing any transaction. The fact that the data were collected naturally did not allow her to examine the influence of power, distance, and imposition systematically. In addition, Bataller (2010) examined two scenarios in which L2 learners had to ask for a drink and exchange a pair of shoes in a shop in a role play. Finally, Czerwionka and Cuza (2017a; 2017b) examined L2 learners when making requests in service industry, customer service, and family situations, yet their goal was to compare the three situations involving different relationship-roles, not examine requests from these three situations collectively.

As shown in this section, in many cases, the study of requests has not followed a systematic analysis regarding the social variables of power, distance, and imposition. The distribution of the variables across studies shows an unbalanced distribution regarding the social variables of the contexts in some of the studies. This critic was pointed by Czerwionka and Cuza (2017b) who claimed that it is necessary to investigate the impact of the social contexts and use balanced designs in order to understand the request norms in Spanish.

2.2.1. The Influence of Role-Relationships

Despite some of the studies (e.g. Márquez-Reiter, 2000; Lorenzo Díaz, 2016) displayed a set of balance contexts regarding the three social variables. The change of setting, and by extension the influence of role-relationships, plays an important role in the requests. Lorenzo Díaz (2016) pointed that participants employed different strategies to make a request depending on the setting, for instance, the classroom, and the cafeteria of the high school. Spencer-Oatey (1996), as mentioned in section 2.2.2., claimed that the role-relationship among interlocutors can determine different linguistic outcomes when making requests based on a relationship of rights and obligations (Spencer-Oatey, 1996, p. 10). Therefore, the fact that some relationships, such the relationship between a customer and a shop assistant, are based on preconceived notions of the relationship influences the way in which both interlocutors interact culturally. However, the same interlocutors would address each other differently in another given situation that does not imply the same role-relationship.

2.5. Current Research Question

In order to examine the linguistic impact of the variables of power, distance, and imposition in a balanced set of contexts, with no abrupt variation among the role-relationships. The comparison of the variables of power, distance, and imposition will allow comparison of the different effects when making a request. More specifically, how power, distance, and imposition affect the selection of verbal forms encoding different degrees of politeness is the focus. Thus, the main research question that arises in consideration of the previous literature is:

1. How do the variables of power, distance, and imposition influence the verb orientation in Peninsular Spanish requests?

2. How do the variables of power, distance, and imposition influence the verb selection in Peninsular Spanish requests?

Considering the two research question, two hypotheses are presented. The hypothesis for the first research question is that the three contextual variables will have an influence on the choice of the speaker to formulate request with speaker-orientation as mitigator. Prior research on cross-cultural studies has shown that Spanish language produces predominately hearer-oriented requests (e.g. Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Márquez-Reiter, 2000). Thus, the salience of the speaker-oriented requests will be seen as more polite, as in other languages such as English (Ballesteros, 2001).

The hypothesis for the second research question predicts that, based on the theory and on prior research, the irrealis verbal forms will occur more (imperfect, subjunctive, and conditional), which are considered as more temporally distant or polite (Chodorowska-Pilch, 1998), in contexts where there is high power, distance, and high imposition. On the other hand, more factual forms like present indicative and especially the imperative are expected to be more often employed in contexts that do not require a lot of politeness/mitigation, those with symmetrical power, no distance, and low imposition. Finally, the occurrence of the modal verb *poder* in conditional tense is expected to be influenced by distance independently of the other two variables, based on the prior work by Félix-Brasdefer (2005).

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study is to examine the impact of imposition (I), power (P), and distance (D) for Spanish native speakers (NS) from Spain, when making requests. Data were collected using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) in order to examine power, distance, and imposition in request contexts. In this chapter, the description of the norming procedure verifying the presence of the three contextual variables in the DCT task (section 3.1). Then, a description of the participants will be provided (section 3.2), followed by an explanation and justification of the *Discourse Completion Task* employed in this study (section 3.3). Finally, the procedure of the project and the approach to analysis will be outlined in sections 3.4 and 3.5 respectively.

3.1. Norming Procedure

Before the experiment was administered, a norming procedure was conducted among native speakers who assessed the power, distance, and imposition of the request scenarios. The evaluation of the power, distance, and imposition was required due to its variability in terms of culture, experience, and context. To norm the 16 different contexts, eight situations with low imposition and another eight situations with high impositions were presented. The norming task was conducted online, through the survey software *Qualtrics*; which allowed the researcher to gather data in a faster way and reach more participants. This step was essential in order to determine that the context proved true to its intended level of power, distance, and imposition.

A group of native speakers, different from the group that completed the survey, evaluated the weight of imposition of the situation on a 10-point Likert scale (see the example below). They evaluated each request context that was created for the DCT in terms of the degree of imposition. The Likert scale did not contain mid-point to avoid any interference with the participants' choice

(Garland, 1991). The scores on the Likert scale ranged from 1 to 9 – 1 meant that there was no imposition, and 9 meant a very high imposition. The Likert scale contained a sliding scale so that the participants could respond to every context with free variation from 1 to 9. The endpoints of the scale were tagged in the informal language “*pedir poco/undemanding*” or “*pedir mucho/over-demanding*” in order not to cause any misunderstanding. After the assessment of the imposition in the different contexts, they were asked about the different relationships presented, and how they conceived of the relationships in terms of distance and power. Power and distance were measured the relationship in a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 9, 1 meaning the interlocutors had equal levels of power, and a close relationship in regards to the variable of distance; 9 meaning the interlocutors had different levels of power and a distant relationship. The purpose of the norming procedure was to verify that: the high and low imposition contexts were conceived of as different from one another; the student-student relationship was different in terms of power from the student-professor relationship; and the distance related to knowing or not knowing someone was perceived differently. Perception of differences of power, distance, and imposition were tested using paired samples t-tests.

Norming task example

Estás en tu despacho y aparece uno de tus estudiantes. Tiene una fecha de entrega el día siguiente y no está seguro sobre la calidad de su trabajo de 15 páginas. Quiere que lo leas le des comentarios sobre su trabajo. En este contexto, que te pidan que leas el ensayo de 15 páginas en un día y le des comentarios es:

You are in your office and one of your students comes. The student has a deadline for the next day and the student is not sure about the quality of the 15-pages essay. The student wants you to read it and give feedback. In this context, asking for reading the essay and give feedback in a day is:

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| I | I | I | I | I | I | I | I | I |
| (Pedir poco/‘Undemanding’) | | | | | | (Pedir mucho/‘Over-demanding’) | | |

A total of twelve ($N = 12$) participants completed the norming procedure. All of them were university students at the time that they completed the survey. A paired-samples t-test were conducted to compare the degree of imposition in high imposition and low imposition contexts. The results of the paired t-test showed that there was a significant difference in the scores for high imposition ($M = 6.38$, $SD = 2.09$) and low imposition ($M = 1.78$, $SD = 1.57$) conditions; $t(87) = 17.512$, $p = 0.005$. A paired t-test was also conducted to see whether there were significant differences regarding power and distance. The results for power showed that there was a significant difference in the scores for asymmetrical ($M = 7.0436$, $SD = 1.49995$) and symmetrical ($M = 3.4495$, $SD = 2.78885$) relationships; $t(21) = -2.27302$, $p < .001$. The results of paired t-test conducted to compare the distance of the interlocutors indicated that there was a significant difference in the scores for close ($M = 2.8541$, $SD = 1.35967$) and distant ($M = 8.1286$, $SD = 1.15932$) relationships; $t(21) = -14.007$, $p < .001$. These results suggest that Spanish native speakers perceived differently the contexts according to their degree of power, distance, and imposition.

3.2. Participants

A total of 104 participants (68 females and 36 males) completed the survey. The mean age was 26 years old ($SD = 6.78$). All the participants obtained a degree from a university in Spain or were enrolled in a university degree when they completed the survey. Thus, their level of education was controlled. The participants selected for this study were Peninsular Spanish Native Speakers to avoid any dialectal variation in the results.

3.3. Discourse Completion Task

Participants completed a *Discourse Completion Task* (DCT) in which they were required to request the hearer to carry out a service or to provide a material good. DCTs consist of a simulation in which participants are given a description of a situation and they are asked to complete the dialogue with the expected speech act, a request. Employing DCTs as method of data-collection has the advantage over naturalistic data-collection of providing a controlled context as well as allowing the researcher to collect larger amount of data quickly.

All the situations were explained in a preamble where a description of the independent variables was included implicitly in the situation, as in the example of below. The example shows a situation with asymmetrical power (student-professor), distance (not known well), and high imposition (the request of an extension for a final paper submission). The distribution of the variables of power, distance, and imposition were all agreed by using a norming procedure. The norming procedure, described in the previous section (3.1), was conducted to verify that the situations expressing differences on power, distance, and high or low imposition were different ones from the others. All situations are listed in in Appendix A.

Quieres los PowerPoint que ha utilizado [nombre de un profesor al que conoces y con el que tienes confianza] en vuestra clase a lo largo del curso. Vas a su despacho en sus horas de tutoría. ¿Qué le dices?

You want the PowerPoint that [name of the professor that you know and you are close to] has used in class during the semester. You go to his/her office hours. What do you say?

You: _____

For the controlled contexts in this study, 16 different situations were utilized. The situations were balanced considering two levels of the independent variables of *power* (asymmetrical, symmetrical), *distance* (distant, close), and *imposition* (high, low) (Table 1). The contexts were also controlled for the type of request (a good or a service), considering that Brown and Levinson's (1987) conclusion that these represent two types of imposition. The inclusion of this final variable was important in providing a wider range of controlled contexts and a greater number of contexts per respondent to analyze power, distance, and imposition.

Table 1: Distribution of the situations

| Situation | Power | Distance | Imposition | Type of request |
|-----------|--------------|----------|------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Asymmetrical | Distant | High | Service |
| 2 | Asymmetrical | Distant | Low | Service |
| 3 | Asymmetrical | Distant | High | Good |
| 4 | Asymmetrical | Distant | Low | Good |
| 5 | Asymmetrical | Close | High | Service |
| 6 | Asymmetrical | Close | Low | Service |
| 7 | Asymmetrical | Close | High | Good |
| 8 | Asymmetrical | Close | Low | Good |
| 9 | Symmetrical | Distant | High | Service |
| 10 | Symmetrical | Distant | Low | Service |
| 11 | Symmetrical | Distant | High | Good |
| 12 | Symmetrical | Distant | Low | Good |
| 13 | Symmetrical | Close | High | Service |
| 14 | Symmetrical | Close | Low | Service |
| 15 | Symmetrical | Close | High | Good |
| 16 | Symmetrical | Close | Low | Good |

The setting of the situations was academic environments; this setting was selected for two reasons. First, the setting was maintained in all situations, because a change of setting may modify the parameters which speakers use to measure politeness as well as the relationship between interlocutors (Spencer-Oatey, 1996; Brown & Levinson, 1987). For example, comparing situations used in prior speech act research, it is different to ask a local bus passenger to swap seats (Márquez-Reiter, 2000) when the route will end in 20 minutes than to ask a flight's passenger to swap seats for an eight-hour flight (Cohen & Shively, 2008). In addition, the current project does not include any change regarding the role-relationship of the speakers as the respondents always respond in a student-role. Considering the role-relationship of the addressee, it changes from classmate to professor due to the variable of power. This change was not considered as a change on the role-relationship since the speaker plays the same role of student in all situations.

Also, the participants in this study are primarily university-students, thus, all of them are familiar with the academic setting, and they have experience with the academic setting as well as it is a setting where all the contextual variables can be found in their everyday life. In addition, it also controls for their educational level of the participants to avoid the influence of additional external factors.

3.4. Procedure

The participants for this study were contacted by email and social media. They completed the task and the online-background questionnaire through the software *Qualtrics*. Once participants completed the task, they were asked to provide information about the independent variables to use it in further analysis in this study. These variables were: sex, age, their district or Spanish autonomous region, education (high school, university, public or private), and whether they spoke other languages.

Prior to responding to the DCT, participants were asked to provide the names of two professors and two classmates, one known and one unknown to them. This information was automatically added to the DCT contexts to achieve more authentic situations in which the participants interacted with professors and classmates that they knew or were familiar to them.

For each participant, the order of the 16 contexts was computer-randomized in order to avoid any type of influence regarding the order of appearance. Each participant completed the 16 contexts and provided the requested personal information of: sex, age, place of origin (city and country), native language and/or other spoken languages.

3.5. Coding and Analysis

A total of 66 responses were excluded from the analysis: these were excluded because they did not express requests. Some of the respondents expressed that it would not be a plausible scenario either regarding high imposition ($n = 32$) and low imposition ($n = 18$). Also, the elicitation of 16 answers were included since they used reported speech when completing the answer. The responses were coded according to verbal form of the speech act. First, they were coded as being hearer- or speaker-oriented. Secondly, they were coded considering: the tense (e.g. present (6), imperfect and conditional (7)), the mood (indicative, subjunctive (8) and imperative (9)), the use of the modal verb *poder* (can/be able to), and the orientation of the request (hearer (10) or speaker (11)).

(6) ¿Tienes [present] *un folio*?

Do you have a blank paper?

(7) ¿Tendrías [conditional] *un hueco para ayudarme con el ensayo*?

Would you have free time to help me with the essay?

(8) ¿*Sería mucho problema que me ayudaras* [Subjunctive mood] *con un ensayo*?

Would it be a problem that you heled me?

(9) *Préstame la grapadora.* [Imperative mood]

Lend me the stapler.

(10) *¿Te importaría pasarme los apuntes que no los tengo completos?* [hearer-oriented]

Would you mind to lend me your notes that I don't have them complete?

(11) *Me gustaría pedirle una carta de recomendación.* [speaker-oriented]

I would like to ask you a recommendation letter.

For the statistical analysis of data, the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) was employed. A mixed effects logistic regression model was conducted in SAS for each variable of interest related to the verb in order to determine the impact of the three variables power, distance, and imposition in predicting the use of orientation and of each verbal form. The mixed effects logistic regressions were conducted with participant as a random variable. The three contextual variables of power, distance, and imposition were included as fixed factors in the analysis. The results of these statistical models can be seen in the next section (Chapter 4).

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

In this chapter, the descriptive results will be presented first, followed by the statistical tests for each of the two sets of analyses: orientation and verb form. The descriptive analysis will present the response variables (i.e. orientation, verb forms) by context. For statistical analyses, mixed effects logistic regressions were conducted for each response variable considering the predictor variables of power (+/-), distance (+/-), and imposition (+/-).

4.1. Descriptive Results: Orientation

Regarding orientation, and as expected according to the findings of previous literature, Spanish native speakers showed a preference for the use of hearer-oriented requests, with 86.73% of the requests oriented towards the hearer. Orientation toward the speaker was used in only 13.27% of the requests (Table 4). Based on this descriptive data, it seems that speaker-oriented requests were more employed in contexts that were [+power] and [+imposition] in comparison with the [-power] and [-imposition] situations.

Table 2: Total distribution of the orientation of the requests by contexts

| Contexts ² | Hearer | Speaker | Total |
|-----------------------|---------------|--------------|-------|
| P+D+I+ | 143 (73.72%) | 51 (26.28%) | 194 |
| P+D+I- | 163 (82.33%) | 35 (17.67%) | 198 |
| P+D-I+ | 174 (85.71%) | 33 (14.29%) | 203 |
| P+D-I- | 157 (83.51%) | 31(14.49%) | 188 |
| P-D+I+ | 177 (86.34%) | 28 (13.66%) | 205 |
| P-D+I- | 197 (98.5%) | 3 (1.5%) | 200 |
| P-D-I+ | 179 (87.31%) | 26 (12.69%) | 205 |
| P-D-I- | 196 (97.51%) | 5 (2.49%) | 201 |
| Total | 1386 (86.73%) | 212 (13.27%) | 1598 |

² P accounts for power relationship that can be symmetrical (-) or asymmetrical (+); D accounts for the relationship regarding distance that can be close (-) or distant (+); and I accounts for imposition that can be high (+) or low (-).

4.2. Statistical Results: Orientation

In this subsection, the statistical results from the mixed effects logistic regression for speaker orientation will be presented to show the impact of the predictor variables of power, distance, and imposition on the orientation of the requests. For this model, subject was included as random variable and the three contextual variables were included as fixed variables.

The results in Table 5 showed that the selection of speaker orientation was significantly influenced by the contextual variables of power and imposition. Based on the estimates, the marginal change in the log-odds of being speaker oriented when power goes from – to + was 1.0937, meaning that the presence of [+power] positively impacted the use of speaker-oriented requests. Similarly, the contextual variable of [+imposition] positively impacted the use of speaker-oriented request.

Table 3: Significance of the contextual variables on speaker orientation

| Contextual variables | p-value | Estimates |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Power | $F(1, 1451) = 44.89, p < .0001$ | 1.0937 |
| Distance | $F(1, 1451) = 3.11, p = .5757$ | 0.08888 |
| Imposition | $F(1, 1451) = 22.96, p < .0001$ | 0.7513 |

4.3. Descriptive Results: Verb Forms

In terms of the verb selection distribution (Table 6), the most employed tenses in the head acts of the 1,598 requests were the present tense (28.35%, $n = 456$) and the use of modal conditional (27%, $n = 424$). The use of conditional tense (16.12%, $n = 260$) and the modal present (12.84%, $n = 207$) were also employed with high levels of frequency. Imperative mood was less frequently used than the previous verb forms (9.37%, $n = 151$). Finally, subjunctive mood was found to be the least frequent verb type used when making a request (3.63%, $n = 58$). Initial analyses examined

the specific subjunctive structures (imperfect subjunctive (2.00%, $n = 21$), modal imperfect subjunctive (0.99%, $n = 18$), present subjunctive (0.49%, $n = 8$), modal present subjunctive (0.06%, $n = 1$)), yet considering their infrequency, from this point forward subjunctive is analyzed collectively. Also, requests without verbal forms occurred (0.06%, $n = 1$).

The distribution of the verb form by context, also shown in Table 6, provides a broader perspective of how the contexts, and by extension the variables of power, distance, and imposition, influence the verb's selection. In the first two contexts listed in Table 6, both which are [+power] and [+distance], the preferred verbal form is the modal conditional, consisting of the combination of conditional tense with the modal verb *poder*. This was the case in both [+imposition] (88/194) and [-imposition] (94/198) contexts (e.g., *Perdone profesor ¿Podría dejarme el manual durante el fin de semana?* 'Excuse me professor, could you lend the textbook for the weekend?').

In these same contexts, whereas the use of modal conditionals is similar for both [+power] and [+distance] contexts, the context with [+imposition] is associated with greater use of subjunctive forms ([+power, +distance, +imposition] subjunctive = 21/194; [+power, +distance, -imposition] subjunctive = 10/198) Thus, the increased imposition in the context provoked greater dependence on requests with subjunctive, like the following *example Quisiera pedirle una copia de la hoja que usted entrego para poder hacerla y entregarla* 'I would like (SUBJ) to ask you a copy of the sheet you gave to do it and submit it'.

Those contexts that are [-power] show a preference for the use of present tense, in general. Of these, the [-power, +distance, -imposition] context relies most on the present tense (149/200). When [-power] contexts involve [+imposition] present tense along with other verb forms such as conditional and modal conditional are found. Unique from all other contexts, the context with [-

power], [-distance], and [-imposition] shows a strong tendency to use the imperative (110/201) when making a request (e.g. *dame un folio, porfa* 'give me a sheet of paper, please'.

Table 4: Total distribution of verb occurrences by form, and contexts

| <u>Context³</u> | <u>Imperative</u> | <u>Present</u> | <u>Imperfect</u> | <u>Conditional</u> | <u>Modal Present</u> | <u>Modal Conditional</u> | <u>Subjunctive</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| P+D+I+ | 2 (1.03%) | 15 (7.73%) | 7 (3.6%) | 52 (26.8%) | 14 (7.21%) | 84 (43.29%) | 20 (10.3%) | 194 |
| P+D+I- | 3 (1.51%) | 21 (10.6%) | 3 (1.5%) | 45 (22.72%) | 23 (11.61%) | 93 (46.96%) | 10 (5.05%) | 198 |
| P+D-I+ | 1 (0.49%) | 22 (10.83%) | 5 (2.4%) | 55 (27%) | 27 (13.3%) | 79 (38.91%) | 16 (7.88%) | 203 |
| P+D-I- | 7 (3.72%) | 54 (28.72) | 0 (0%) | 21 (11.17%) | 49 (26.06%) | 56 (29.78%) | 1 (0.53%) | 188 |
| P-D+I+ | 2 (0.97%) | 62 (30.2%) | 18 (8.78%) | 42 (20.48%) | 23 (22.21%) | 53 (25.85%) | 5 (2.43%) | 205 |
| P-D+I- | 3 (1.5%) | 149 (74.5%) | 1(0.5%) | 17 (8.5%) | 17 (8.5%) | 13 (6.5%) | 0 (0%) | 200 |
| P-D-I+ | 23 (22%) | 70 (34.1%) | 8 (3.9%) | 24 (11.7%) | 39 (19%) | 37 (18.02%) | 6 (2.9%) | 205 |
| P-D-I- | 110 (54%) | 63 (31.34%) | 0 (0%) | 4 (1.99%) | 15 (7.46%) | 9 (4.47%) | 0 (0%) | 201 |
| Total | 151 (9.4%) | 456 (28.53%) | 42 (2.62%) | 260 (16.27%) | 207 (6.69%) | 424 (26.53%) | 58 (3.62%) | 1598 |

³P accounts for power relationship that can be symmetrical (-) or asymmetrical (+)

D accounts for the relationship regarding distance that can be close (-) or distant (+)

I accounts for imposition that can be high (+) or low (-).

4.4. Statistical Results: Verb Forms

In this subsection, the statistical results from the mixed effects logistical regressions for each of the different verb forms will be presented to show the impact of the predictor variables of power, distance, and imposition on each verb form. Subject was included as a random variable in each model. The solutions for fixed effects will be presented to demonstrate whether power, distance, and imposition are significant variables and what effect [+/-power], [+/-distance], and [+/-imposition] have on verb forms.

To understand whether power, distance, and imposition are significant in predicting the various verb forms, all p-values and relevant information are presented in Table 7. These results indicate that power, distance, and imposition significantly impact verb forms in general. A few exceptions are the variables of power and imposition that do not have a significantly impact on the use of present modals, as well as the variable of distance does not impact the use of the imperfect.

Table 5: Significance of the contextual variables (P, D, I) on verb forms

| Verb form | Power | Distance | Imposition |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Imperative | $F(1, 1452) = 73.08, p < .0001$ | $F(1, 1452) = 77.16, p < .0001$ | $F(1, 1452) = 54.10, p < .0001$ |
| Present | $F(1, 1452) = 162, p < .0001$ | $F(1, 1452) = 7.94, p = .0048$ | $F(1, 1452) = 39.78, p < .0001$ |
| Present Modal | $F(1, 1452) = 3.11, p = .0780$ | $F(1, 1452) = 14.73, p = .0001$ | $F(1, 1452) = 0.50, p = .4775$ |
| Imperfect | $F(1, 1452) = 12.37, p = .0005$ | $F(1, 1452) = 0.16, p = .662$ | $F(1, 1452) = 6.03, p = .0134$ |
| Conditional | $F(1, 1452) = 46.62, p < .0001$ | $F(1, 1452) = 20.65, p < .0001$ | $F(1, 1452) = 44.43, p < .0001$ |
| Conditional Modal | $F(1, 1452) = 144.52, p < .0001$ | $F(1, 1452) = 21.63, p < .0001$ | $F(1, 1452) = 31.85, p < .0001$ |
| Subjunctive | $F(1, 1452) = 26.90, p < .0001$ | $F(1, 1452) = 5.97, p = .0374$ | $F(1, 1452) = 27.93, p < .0001$ |

The estimates of the statistical models (Table 5) also provide information about the verb forms individually with regard to the contextual variables. This table displays the estimates from each model, showing the marginal change in the log-odds of the response variable being the examined when the specific contextual variable changes from + or -, or from - to +.

Table 6: Estimates of the model by contextual variables and verbal form

| Variable ¹ | +Power | -Power | +Distance | -Distance | +Imposition | -Imposition |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| Imperative | | 3.6046 | | 3.9960 | | 2.5577 |
| Present | | 1.627 | 0.3224 | | | 0.7548 |
| Present Modal | | | 0.5940 | | | |
| Imperfect | 12.978 | | | | | 0.8560 |
| Conditional | 0.9477 | | 0.6196 | | 0.9898 | |
| Conditional Modal | 1.6634 | | 0.6077 | | 0.7745 | |
| Subjunctive | 1.7613 | | 0.6307 | | 1.8085 | |

¹Non-significant estimates excluded from Table 8: Present Modal Power + 0.2649, Imposition + 0.8369; Imperfect Distance - 0.14.

The estimates showed that imperative verb form was unique in its selection: the imperative verb form was found to be more probable in contexts that were [-power, -distance, and -imposition]. In its selection, the variables of [-distance] and [-power] were found to have a greater impact based on their larger estimates in comparison with the variable of [-imposition]. This structure was also found to be the only verb form that was predicted by the variable of [-distance].

The selection of the present verb form was also found to be more probable to occur in those contexts that were [-power, +distance, and -imposition]. The marginal change in the log-odds of being present when [-power] goes from - to + was 1.627, when [-imposition] goes from - to + was 0.7548, and [+distance] (0.3224). Both imperative and present showed to be more likely to occur in contexts that were [-power] and [-imposition]. In contrast to the present verb form, present modal had different predictors for its occurrence. This verbal form was found to be the only structure which had been shown a statistically significant effect from only one of the variables, [+distance], which was the main predictor for selecting this structure. Thus, the structure of the

present modal was more likely to be employed when addressing someone who had a distant relationship for the speaker.

In the case of imperfect, this verb form was found to be more likely to occur in contexts that were [+power] and [+imposition]. The contextual variable with the greatest impact was [+power] with an estimate of 12.978. In addition, the variable of [+imposition] showed to have an estimate of 0.8560 in the selection of imperfect. The contextual variable of distance was shown not to be statistically significant for the prediction of imperfect tense.

The estimates for conditional verb forms showed that the main predictors for its use were [+power], [+distance], and [+imposition]. Although its use was broadly spread in the context of [+power] as seen in Table 6. The more impactful contextual variables were [+imposition] and [+power] with estimates of 0.9898 and 0.9477 respectively. Similar to conditional tense, conditional modal was found to occur in the same situations, the three contextual variables were statistically significant. In its selection, the contextual variable of [+power] showed to have more impact (1.6634) than the other two contextual variables. Similarly, the estimates of the last verb form showed that subjunctive verb forms occurred more frequently in [+power, +distance, and +imposition]. The marginal change in the log-odds of being subjunctive when [+power] goes from – to + was 1.7613, [+distance] was 0.6307, and [+imposition] was 1.8085.

Finally, with regard to the three contextual variables, the variable of [+power] had an influence on the use of verb forms that were considered as downgraders or more polite forms: imperfect, conditional, conditional modal, and subjunctive; whereas [-power] was found to have an influence on present and imperative occurrence. In the case of [+distance] showed to be impactful for the selection of many verb forms: present, present modal, conditional, conditional modal, and subjunctive. [-distance] was only found to be a predictor for imperative. The last

contextual variable, imposition, had an influence on the selection of conditional, conditional modal, and subjunctive when [+imposition]; and it was found to be impactful for the selection of the verb forms of imperative, present, and imperfect.

The three contextual variables have been found to be statistically significant in the case of imperative, where they were [-power], [-distance], and [-imposition]. And, on the other hand, all three contextual variables have been found to be statistically significant, when they were [+power], [+distance], and [+imposition] in the case of conditional, conditional modal, and subjunctive. Thus, both conditional and subjunctive, which are non-factual forms, showed to be more likely to occur in contexts that were [+power, +distance, and +imposition].

In addition, and considering the importance of each of the three variables, [+power] was the main predictor for imperfect, and conditional modal verb forms; [-power] for present. The variable of distance was the main predictor for present modal when [+distance], and imperative when [-distance]. In the case of [+imposition], it was found to be the main predictor for conditional and subjunctive verb forms.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

In order to summarize the findings, this section will first address the research questions. Secondly, regarding the results, it will examine how the variables have been utilized in balanced designs in prior literature. Then, differences with the use of the modal verb *poder* in Mexican Spanish, as reported by Félix-Brasdefer (2005) will be addressed. Additionally, the conventionalized request forms found in the results will be discussed. Finally, the limitations and future studies will be presented.

Addressing the first research question, the results of requests' orientation in the previous section have shown that while hearer-oriented requests are by far more common in all contexts, the contextual variables of [+power] and [+imposition] play an important role in the use of speaker-oriented requests in Peninsular Spanish. Therefore, the use of speaker-oriented requests can be seen as a polite element, as it is more frequent in [+power] and [+imposition]. The variables of power and imposition were significant for the use speaker-oriented requests. This finding fulfils partially the hypothesis claiming that a change in orientation should be found in the situations that were [+power, +distance, +imposition]. This change in orientation can be seen as a strategy that involves negative polite strategies in the attempt to make the other interlocutor to do something.

Regarding the second research question, the results of the mixed effect logistic regression model indicated that all three variables were significant for the use of almost all verb forms. The variable of power was found to be the main significant variable in three of the verb forms, whereas distance and imposition were both significant in two verb forms.

The overall findings of the results (Table 4) indicate that the distribution matched with the framework of verbal politeness as proposed by Chodorowska-Pilch (1998), although the verb forms have shown some variation regarding the contexts where these forms are employed. The

current findings indicate that Chodorowska-Pilch's (1998) continuum aligned with the effects of the variables of power, distance, and imposition. The use of imperative verb form (12), seen as the most direct and least polite form, was concentrated and predicted in the contexts that were [-power], [-distance], and [-imposition]. Whereas, on the other extreme of the continuum, the *irrealis* forms of conditional, conditional modal (13), and subjunctive (14) were concentrated and predicted in the contexts that were [+power], [+distance], and [+imposition]. However, the use of the different verb forms is not limited to those contexts, as they showed variation in their distribution of occurrence. The case of the present verb form (15) is perhaps the most representative as it occurs across all contexts and it is not limited to a certain situation, although it is employed more in one situation specifically [-power], [+distance], and [-imposition].

(12) *oye, tira [imperative] este papel.*

“hey, throw this paper”.

(13) *perdona ¿podrías [conditional modal] revisar mi ensayo y darme tu opinión?*

“excuse me, could you review my essay and give me your opinion”

(14) *¿Sería posible que me pudieras [subjunctive] recomendar para la beca?*

Would it be possible that you could recommend me for the grant?

(15) *¿me dejas [present] un bolígrafo?*

“Do you lend me a pen?”

The use of conditional modal was reported by Félix-Brasdefer (2005) to be influenced by the variable of distance as a way to express deferential politeness. However, in this thesis, conditional modal has been found to be influenced by the three contextual variables: power, imposition, and distance. This finding suggests that: 1) there may be dialectal and cross-cultural differences between the verbal politeness systems in Mexican and Peninsular Spanish, as well as with the

perception of the contextual variables; 2) the inclusion of the contextual variables of power and distance that Félix-Brasdefer (2005) examined, rather than considering contexts which also included imposition, led to different results.

Prior literature has not systematically included the three variables of power, distance, and imposition in their design, and when they have been included, there were differences in the role-relationships of the interlocutors. Due to this variability in designs, this study has presented a balanced set of situations with almost no variation in the role-relationships that are framed in the academic world and controlled inclusion of requests for goods and services. The situations have been designed considering the three contextual variables of power, distance, and imposition, finding all three to be statistically significant in the prediction of almost all verb forms. Therefore, considering prior work that at times had only included [+imposition] contexts, these results lead to the claim that the variable of imposition should be considered in studies addressing politeness and requests as [+imposition] and [-imposition] are impactful. Additionally, the balanced design of the situations that included controlled contextual variables and role-relationships can be considered as a baseline data for the study of request in an academic setting.

In sum, the findings are taken to suggest that the verbal system, both verb orientation and verb forms, communicate politeness and that they are used in context-dependent ways considering the social variables of power, distance, and imposition. Politeness theory would claim that speaker-oriented verbs and verb forms like the subjunctive, conditional, and modal function to mitigate the request and communicate negative politeness. While the current data are sufficiently explained via Politeness Theory, other motivations may also serve to explain the use of the verb forms in the examined contexts. Motivations such as being persuasive (Yabuuchi, 2006) or creating rapport (Spencer-Oatey, 1996) may also be considered in alternate analyses.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this project was to present a broader view of the social variables of power, distance, and imposition proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The study included innovative methods to test the importance of each of the contextual variables on the verb selection in the speech act of requests. More specifically, this study examined the influence of these variables on verb orientation and verb form in native Peninsular Spanish speakers.

Through a systematic analysis of this project, the three contextual variables of power, distance, and imposition were found to be statistically significant factors in request's orientation and verb form selection. Important findings confirmed that Peninsular Spanish speakers rely on hearer-oriented requests in almost all contexts; They use speaker-oriented requests in contexts with [+power] and [+imposition]. The use of speaker-oriented requests as studied in this thesis indicates that it is a marked form associated with politeness. The results also confirmed that subjunctive and conditional serve to mitigate requests, particularly in contexts with [+power] and [+imposition], and that imperative is limited to very informal contexts that include [-power], [-distance], [-imposition]. The present tense verb form is a common request form in a range of contexts, indicating that it may be the most conventionalized way of making a request in Peninsular Spanish.

Regarding the methodology employed in this project, this study contributed a balanced design including social variables of power, distance, and imposition, while also controlling the relationships in the contexts and the request of goods or services. A new type of insight and innovation in the instrument of the DCT was introduced to analyzed requests: the situations and relationships referred to in the contexts were made unique for each participant by referring to people with whom participants' had distant or close relationships. Despite the limitations of DCTs,

the fact that participants could choose and provide a name for the other interlocutors makes this tool more realistic than previous versions of DCT.

The systematic study of the three contextual variables of power, distance, and imposition have demonstrated an importance on the verb selection process. The findings of this thesis support the Politeness Theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) which, despite the critiques it has received, is still a valid framework that should be used to investigate the field of pragmatics and speech acts.

6.1. Limitations and Future Studies

While this study has contributed to the understanding of the contextual variables and their influence on verb selection, it contains some limitations as well. For instance, the use of a DCT as a method to collect data has been criticized for the elicitation of conventionalized-responses, in contrast to the use of role-plays and natural-data. However, due to the scarcity of occurrence of some of the contexts, the use of a DCT allows us to examine these contexts that are difficult to find in naturally-occurring data. Furthermore, it allows for the collection of larger amounts of data, as seen in this project.

Future research should rely on balanced designs that incorporate power, distance, imposition, and other contextual variables such as formality, role-relationships, etc. Besides the contextual variables analyzed or controlled in this study, additional social variables may be important to consider as well. In the field of variationist pragmatics, a relatively new approach to pragmatics (e.g. Placencia, 2011; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008), we see the need to examine macrosocial variables, as discussed by Barron (2005). Future research may consider the impact of sex or age as a variable that affects request forms. The analysis of how the sex of the interlocutors (either speaker and hearer) influence the request at different levels is an unexplored area in the field of pragmatics.

Also, the differences when making a request for a good or an action have not been addressed; differences in both internal and external strategies can be found according to these two categories that were distinguished by Brown and Levinson (1987). These future ideas will help to clarify the ideas and conceptions of requests from a sociopragmatic perspective.

This thesis focused on verb forms, but it is clear that verb forms are one way to mitigate or encode politeness of requests in accordance with the individual context. Prior research has clearly shown that other linguistic strategies are also used in request formation, and thus future research may consider not only how those function with respect to context of power, distance and imposition, but also how they interact with the verb. Finally, with these methodological suggestions, cross-cultural and intercultural efforts should also be considered. While many researchers have approached this topic, broader collaborative efforts should be made to obtain and analyze controlled data from across the Spanish-speaking communities and world.

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APPENDIX

Context in which actions are requested

| P | D | R | Situation - Action | Situación - Acciones |
|---|---|------|---|--|
| + | + | High | RA1. You want to apply for a grant. You still need one more letter. There is a professor that you do not know well, Professor Smith, with whom you took a class last year. You know he has office hours now. What do you say? | Quieres solicitar una beca. Hay un profesor que no conoces muy bien, el Profesor Rodríguez, con el que tuviste una clase el año pasado. En ese momento, él tiene horas de tutoría. ¿Qué le dices? |
| + | + | Low | RA2. You are interested in a topic that a professor, that you don't know well, is an expert. You want to know about the topic, so you go to the professor's office hours and get a book recommendation. What do you say? | Estás interesado en un tema del que un profesor, al que no conoces mucho, es un experto. Quieres saber más sobre el tema, así que vas a sus horas de tutoría y le pides que te recomiende un libro. ¿Qué le dices? |
| + | - | High | RA3. You are not sure about the quality of a 15-page paper that you have written. You are going to submit the paper tomorrow. You go to your advisor's office and ask her/him to review the entire paper. What do you say? | No estás seguro sobre la calidad de un ensayo de 15 páginas que has escrito. Mañana es la fecha de entrega y vas al despacho de tu tutor para pedirle que lee el ensayo entero y te dé comentarios. ¿Qué le dices? |
| + | - | Low | RA4. You want to find an article that was mentioned in class, but you do not remember the name of the author. The professor that talked about this article is your advisor. You know | Quieres encontrar un artículo que fue mencionado en clase, pero no recuerdas el nombre del autor. El profesor que habló sobre ese artículo es tu tutor. Ves que está |

| | | | | |
|---|---|------|---|--|
| | | | she/he is in the office and you want to know the reference. What do you say? | en el despacho en horas de tutoría y quieres saber la referencia. ¿Qué le dices? |
| - | + | High | RA5. You are in the library. You are preparing an exam and you are not good at that subject. You see one of your classmates, with whom you have not talked before, preparing the same exam. You want to prepare the exam with him/her. What do you say? | Estás en la biblioteca. Tienes un examen y el tema no se te da muy bien. Ves a uno de tus compañeros, con el que nunca has hablado, estudiando para el mismo examen. Quieres preparar el examen con él. ¿Qué le dices? |
| - | + | Low | RA6. You are in class and you cannot hear what the professor said about the deadline for a paper. You see a classmate who you have never talked to in the class. You want to know when the deadline is. What do you say? | En una clase no escuchaste bien cuando es la fecha límite para la entrega del trabajo final. A tu lado hay un compañero con el que nunca has hablado en clase. Quieres saber cuándo es la fecha de entrega. ¿Qué le dices? |
| - | - | High | RA7. You have a final exam in two days, as well as presentation with a classmate who you know well for tomorrow. You want your classmate to do the presentation by his/her own because you have no time. What do you say? | Tienes un examen final en dos días y una presentación con un compañero que conoces bien. Quieres que tu compañero que se encargue de preparar la presentación por los dos porque no tienes tiempo. ¿Qué le dices? |
| - | - | Low | RA8. You are in class and you want to throw a paper in the trash. Your classmate, who you have known for some years, is sitting beside you. You want him to do it for you. What do you say? | Estás en clase y quieres tirar un trozo de papel a la papelería. Tu compañero, que conoces desde hace unos años, está sentado a tu lado. Quieres que lo haga por ti. ¿Qué le dices? |

Context in which objects are requested

| P | D | R | Situation - Object | Situación - Objetos |
|---|---|------|---|--|
| + | + | High | RO1. You have to do an assignment for next Monday, but you do not have the text book for the class. You see Professor Smith, who you do not know very well, you want to use her* copy of the textbook for the weekend. What do you say? | Tienes una fecha de entrega para el próximo lunes, pero no tienes el libro de texto que se usa en la clase. Ves al Profesor Rodríguez, a quien no conoces muy bien, le quieres usar su libro de texto durante el fin de semana. ¿Qué le dices? |
| + | + | Low | RO2. You missed a class with Professor Smith, who you do not know very well, and she* gave a work sheet. You want that work sheet. What do you say? | Faltaste a una clase con el Profesor Rodríguez, a quien no conoces muy bien, y en la que entregó una hoja de actividades. Quieres la hoja de actividades. ¿Qué le dices? |
| + | - | High | RO3. You want the Powerpoint that your advisor has used in class during the semester. You go to your advisor's office hours. What do you say? | Quieres los PowerPoint que ha utilizado tu tutor en vuestra clase a lo largo del curso. Vas a su despacho en sus horas de tutoría. ¿Qué le dices? |
| + | - | Low | RO4. You need a stapler to staple for the submission of your final paper to your advisor. You know that your advisor has a stapler in the office. What do you say? | Necesitas una grapadora para grapar un trabajo final para tu tutor. Sabes que tu tutor tiene una grapadora en la oficina. ¿Qué le dices? |
| - | + | High | RO5. You have an exam next week. You have missed some classes. Your classmate, who you have never talked to in the class, is sitting beside you. You want to borrow her/his notes for the exam. What do you say? | Tienes un examen la próxima semana. Y has faltado a algunas clases. Tu compañero, con quien nunca has hablado en clase, se encuentra a tu lado. Quieres que te preste sus apuntes. ¿Qué le dices? |

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|---|---|------|--|---|
| - | + | Low | RO6. You are in class and you don't find any pen. Your classmate, who you have never talked to in the class, is sitting beside you. You want to ask her/him for pen. What do you say? | Estás en clase y no encuentras ningún bolígrafo. Tu compañero, con quien nunca has hablado en clase, está a tu lado. Quieres que te preste un bolígrafo. ¿Qué le dices? |
| - | - | High | RO7. You have an exam after the weekend and you lost the textbook. You see that your friend and classmate, Thomas, has the textbook. You want him to lend you the textbook during the weekend, although he also has to study. What do you say? | Tienes un examen después del fin de semana y perdiste tu libro de texto. Ves que tu amigo y compañero de clase tiene un libro de texto. Quieres que te lo preste durante el fin de semana, aunque tu compañero también tiene que estudiar. ¿Qué le dices? |
| - | - | Low | RO8. You are in class and you run out of blank paper. Your classmate, who you have known for some years, is sitting beside you. You want to ask her/him for a blank sheet of paper. What do you say? | Estás en clase y se te acaban los folios. Tu compañero, a quien conoces de hace unos años, está sentado a tu lado. Quieres que te preste un folio. ¿Qué le dices? |