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DEVELOPING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN THE EFL SETTING. THE CASE OF REQUESTS IN TOURISM TEXTS[*]

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In this paper we present an analysis of how the speech act of requesting is offered in several EFL (English as a Foreign Language) materials from the discipline of tourism. Our objective is to examine which is the most common request structure presented in the recorded material in order to see the range of requests presented to students. The request strategies are analysed according to the taxonomy proposed by Trosborg (1995), who divided them into four main categories: indirect requests, conventionally indirect (hearer-oriented conditions), conventionally indirect (speaker-oriented conditions), and direct requests. In a previous study (Salazar and Usó, in press) we analysed the request strategies presented in the written materials and the exercises students had to perform in order to practise this speech act. We found that the second category, conventionally indirect requests (hearer-oriented conditions), is the most common category used by all textbooks under study. Results from the present study corroborate the finding that the second category is the most frequent strategy used in the tapescripts students have to listen to. There seems to be a connection between the request structures students are presented with in the written texts and the recorded

materials. We propose several tasks in order to widen the scope of the requests taught to students so as to incorporate pragmatic aspects.

Key words: pragmatic competence, tourism textbooks, indirect requests, conventionally indirect requests, direct requests, requesting strategies.

1. Introduction

Studies of development of FL (Foreign Language) knowledge have tended to focus more on the acquisition of syntactic, phonological, morphological and semantic forms than on the development of pragmatic ability (Cohen, 1996; Kasper and Schmidt, 1996). Evidence of this fact is that FL learners may master the vocabulary and grammar of the target language without gaining a comparable control over the pragmatic uses of the language. This amounts to saying that FL learners may know several forms of thanking, complaining or apologising without being sure when it is appropriate to use one form or another. As we have just mentioned, studies centred on speech act ability have not dealt with the development of this process, as Kasper and Schmidt (1996) have pointed out. However, pragmatic ability is part of a learner's communicative competence, and it has received attention in the proposed models of communicative competence (Canale, 1983; Bachman, 1990; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell, 1995). In 1983 Canale proposed a model of communicative competence which consisted of four components: grammatical competence (the knowledge of the language code), sociolinguistic competence (the appropriate application of vocabulary, politeness, etc.), discourse competence (the ability to combine language structures into different types of cohesive texts), and strategic competence (the knowledge of communicative strategies to overcome communicative breakdowns). This model has been highly influential, and it has also been used as a starting point for many subsequent studies on the topic.

Bachman (1990) divided language knowledge into two main categories, which in turn were both subdivided into subcategories. The first category was "organisational knowledge", which included grammatical and

textual knowledge. The second category was "pragmatic knowledge", including lexical, functional and sociolinguistic knowledge.

Some time later, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995) developed their own model of communicative competence, and they added the "actional competence" component. The authors defined actional competence as "competence in conveying and understanding communicative intent" (1995:17) and claimed that actional competence was closely related to "interlanguage pragmatics".

As we can see, what these models have in common is that they regard pragmatic competence as an essential component of communicative competence. In this line, Cenoz and Valencia (1994) argue that the mastering of phonetic, semantic and syntactic levels is not enough to acquire a second language, but knowing how to use the language in the appropriate way is also fundamental, as a lack of pragmatic competence can cause both important communicative problems and negative reactions on the part of the hearer. These communicative problems can be clearly seen in Tourism, an area in which some speech acts such as requesting, asking for permission or suggesting are highly used.

In the present paper, we are going to focus our attention on the realisation of the speech act of request in recorded materials. Requests seem essential to us in tourism exchanges, as they appear very frequently and they constitute a speech act that has to be mastered by future workers in the tourism industry. In a previous paper (Salazar and Usó, in press), we set to ascertain how this speech act was presented in the exercises of several EFL tourism course books. Following Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy, we found that the second category (conventionally indirect: hearer-oriented conditions) was the most common category presented, and that pragmatic aspects were not taken into account in tasks learners had to perform. This paper is a follow-up study which aims to analyse whether the requests learners listen to from the tapescripts also fall into the second category. Moreover, we would like to propose several tasks in order to address the lack of pragmatic awareness observed in our previous study.

2. Method

To attain the previous goal, we selected the first ten listening tasks of five textbooks for professionals working in the tourism industry and for students of tourism at intermediate level and above. The only criterion for selection is that these are the most common courses used in Spanish universities that offer a degree in Tourism. The EFL course books were the following: *High Season. English for the Hotel and Tourist Industry* (Harding and Henderson, 1994), *English for International Tourism* (Jacob and Strutt, 1997), *English in Tourism. Checkpoint 2* (Mioduszewska et al., 1997), *Going International. English for Tourism* (Harding, 1998), and *Welcome! English for the Travel and Tourism Industry* (Jones, 1998).

A total of 49 tapescripts (as *English in Tourism. Checkpoint 2* had just 9 listening tasks) were analysed according to Trosborg's (1995: 205) request taxonomy.

Request strategies			
(presented at levels of increasing directness)			
Situation			Speaker requests to borrow Hearer's car
Cat. I	Indirect request		
	Str. 1	Hints (mild)	I have to be at the airport in half an hour.
		(strong)	My car has broken down.
Cat. II	Conventionally indirect		
	(hearer-oriented conditions)		
	Str. 2	Ability	Could you lend me your car?
		Willingness	Would you lend me your car?
		Permission	May I borrow your car?
	Str. 3	Suggestory formulae	How about lending me your car?
Cat. III	Conventionally indirect		
	(speaker-based conditions)		
	Str. 4	Wishes	I would like to borrow your car.
	Str. 5	Desires/needs	I want/need to borrow your car.
Cat. IV	Direct requests		
	Str. 6	Obligation	You must/have to lend me your car.
	Str. 7	Performatives	
		(hedged)	I would like to ask you to lend me your car.
		(unhedged)	I ask/require you to lend me your car.
	Str. 8	Imperatives	Lend me your car.
		Elliptical phrases	Your car (please).

In order to differentiate requests from other exhortative acts, two factors were taken into account. These were:

- The speaker's intention and other pragmatic aspects such as context (Thomas, 1995).

- The maxim of congruence, which addresses the relationship between the speaker's status and the appropriateness of certain realisation strategies to specific context (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1990). This maxim of congruence claims that participants will employ speech acts congruent with their status. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993: 281) provide the following definition:

> Maxim of Congruence: Make your contribution congruent with your status.
>
> Corollary: If congruence is not possible, mitigate noncongruence by employing a status-preserving strategy (SPS).

The status-preserving strategies the authors suggest are as follows:

a.- Appear congruent. Use the form of a congruent speech act where possible.

b.- Mark your contribution linguistically. Use mitigators.

c.- Timing. Do not begin with a noncongruent contribution.

d.- Frequency. Avoid frequent noncongruent turns.

e.- Be brief.

f.- Use appropriate content.

3. Results

A total number of 138 requests were found in the 49 recorded conversations analysed of the five Tourism coursebooks observed. The results with respect to request strategies were classified as belonging to one of the eight sub-categories described in the method section. For each coursebook, the number

of strategies obtained for each subcategory was computed and the scores were compared across books (See Table 1).

Table 1. Classification of requests found in the Tourism coursebooks analysed according to directness levels.

	Coursebooks					TOTAL
Strategy	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	
Cat. I Indirect Request						
Str. 1 Hints	1	0	0	0	0	1
Cat. II Conventionally indirect (hearer-oriented)						
Str. 2 Ability/willingness	33	18	6	25	26	108
Str. 3 Suggestory formulae	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cat. III Conventionally indirect (speaker-based)						
Str. 4 Wishes	2	2	1	0	5	10
Str. 5 Desires/needs	0	4	0	0	2	6
Cat. IV Direct Requests						
Str. 6 Obligation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Str. 7 Performatives	4	0	0	0	0	4
Str. 8 Imperatives	4	1	0	4	0	9
TOTAL	44	25	7	29	33	138

(1) High Season; **(2)** English for International Tourism; **(3)** Checkpoint; **(4)** Going International; **(5)** Welcome!

   The most striking result is the overuse of Cat. II (a total of 108 out of 138 requests were depicted) coupled with an underuse of Cat. I (just 1 occurrence out of 138 requests). These data are a stable preference in all textbooks observed. Regarding the rest of categories, we also observed an underuse of Cat. III (16 cases out of 138) and Cat. IV (13 cases out of 138). The coursebooks *High Season* and *Going International* tended to use more Cat. IV requests whereas the rest of the coursebooks used more Cat. III requests. Figure 1 is the graphic representation of the distribution of the four major categories.
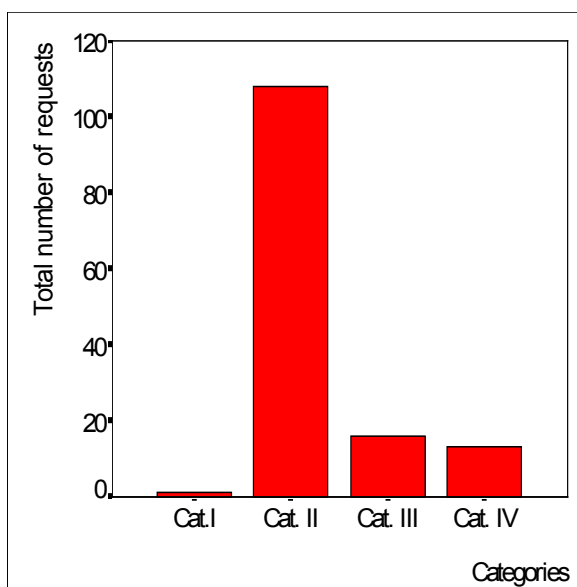

Figure 1. Graphic representation of the four major request

        In the following, the results will be presented in further detail for the four major categories and their sub-strategies. Examples are provided from the corpus in order to support salient points.

- Cat. I: Indirect strategies

Indirect requests, also called hints, in which the speaker's impositive intent is not made explicit, were almost non-existent, just 1 occurrence out of 138 were found. This finding is not surprising due to the fact that the analysed coursebooks, when presenting the speech act of requests, mainly aim at teaching learners a set of formulaic expressions (Cat. II requests) that they should use in order to make polite requests to potential clients. When given the task of making a request, students always leave aside the rest of the categories because they have never been given other possibilities.

- Cat. II: Conventionally indirect (Hearer-oriented conditions)

In general, it appears that in all coursebooks observed most of the request coverage is given to this second category in which the requester questions the requestee's willingness/ability to comply with his/her desires. A total of 108 requests out of 138 fell in this category. As for the sub-categories, all coursebooks used Str. 2 ability/willingness, whereas Str. 3 suggestory formulae, was not used at all.

The preference for this category is not difficult to explain. As Trosborg (1995) suggests, this category involves a more effective way of requesting than any other category, as the desired act is explicitly stated and in most cases the hearer is mentioned as the intended agent. Moreover, a high degree of politeness is expressed. For these reasons, these strategies are very appropriate in the requests situations that tourism students have to face, in which politeness is an essential component. Instances of the most common structures employed are the following:

"Would you like a brochure?"

"Could you check through the details, please?"

"I would be grateful if you could just confirm in writing"

When computing Cat. II request instances, we came across several cases in which the maxim of congruence was a useful tool to differentiate requests from other speech acts. The most striking example was "(How) may I help you?" (4 occurrences) and "(How) can I help you?" (20 occurrences).

Although they were included in Cat. II due to form, if we take into account the role of the speaker and the maxim of congruence, we believe that they are introductory expressions that reflect the expected or established role of participants (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993).

- Cat. III: Conventionally indirect (Speaker-based conditions)

There was an underuse of Cat. III requests, i.e., strategies where the speaker's statement of his/her intention may be expressed politely as a wish or as a demand. All coursebooks with the only exception of *Going International*, employed a few Cat. III requests. They amounted to a total of 16 occurrences out of 138. As for the sub-categories, Str. 4 wishes and Str. 5 desires/needs, the former strategy predominated (10 cases out of 16), and only 6 instances of the later were observed. The 10 instances of Str. 4 all used the expression: "I would like to...", whereas the other instances of Str. 5 used expressions such as: " What I really want is..." and "I need your... ", which are less polite. In general, Cat. III cases, were observed in service encounters, where clients used these strategies as initial requests forms:

> "I would like to book one return ticket"
>
> "I would like a double room"
>
> "I would like some information about trains, please"

They were statements of wishes and desires presented as initial requests, which were preceded, in most cases, by expressions like "How may I help you?"

- Cat. IV: Direct requests

The proportion of direct requests, in which compliance is almost expected and its illocutionary force comes close to an order, was again underused and amounted to 13 instances out of 138. As for the sub-strategies, we observed a tendency to use Str. 8, i.e., direct requests realised as imperatives (9 instances out of 13). However, and in order to soften down the request,

politeness markers as "please" or downtoners such as "just" were added to the request, as we can observe in the following examples:

"Please check with your airline to make sure..."

"Just a coffee for me, please"

4. Discussion

Pragmatic and grammatical competence show a regular imbalance in the sense that grammatical competence exceeds pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei, 1998). This imbalance may be due to the materials FL learners are presented with, both in the form of written tasks (Salazar and Usó, in press), and transcripts they have to listen to, as demonstrated in this paper. Our small sample of texts shows a regularity in the presentation of the speech act of requesting in the EFL course books under study. As we have observed, Cat. II (Conventionally indirect: hearer-oriented conditions) is the most common strategy presented in the transcripts. The rest of the categories are left aside, depriving students from the whole range of categories. Due to the fact that the majority of requests occur in service encounters, we agree with text writers that Cat. II is the most appropriate taking into account politeness reasons and the maxim of congruence. However, politeness may not only be implemented by means of Cat. II, as the inclusion of appropriate downgrading devices could also be effective when other categories are used.

For this reason, we believe, along with Kasper and Schmidt (1996), that pragmatic learning deserves more attention both in materials development and in syllabus design, as the present situation seems to be far from optimal. There is thus a need for instruction of pragmatics, since the foreign language context does not provide varied and frequent input needed for pragmatic development. In this sense, Kasper (1996: 147) states that "explicit teaching may be required to help foreign language learners develop pragmatic competence".

The instruction of pragmatic aspects is therefore necessary when the input is scarce or limited (Kasper and DuFon, 2000). This is the case of the FL environment, where learners are not provided with the diverse and frequent input they need for pragmatic development. Although little research has been carried out on the effects of instruction in pragmatics, the few existing studies (Billmyer, 1990; Bouton, 1994) are encouraging. Their findings suggest that focusing on aspects of pragmatic knowledge through consciousness-raising activities and communicative practice seems highly facilitative. In Kasper's (1996: 148) terms, "many aspects of pragmatic competence can be developed in the classroom through a combination of input, consciousness raising and communicative practice".

The teaching of the speech act of request should be based on the whole range of strategies available in order to widen the input students receive. As Boxer and Pickering (1995) suggested, learners need to know how to realise the request itself, what the speakers' intentions are in their use of the request, and how to answer appropriately. The following sample tasks try to address these issues by including first, the four categories of requests; second, stating the role of participants, and third, incorporating politeness aspects.

5. Sample Tasks

Task 1. Show and discuss a variety of request strategies taken from real situations and presented at levels of increasing directness. In this first task the teacher instructs on the four request categories so that learners are provided with the whole range of categories (indirect, conventionally indirect and direct). The teacher offers a situation and states the four types of requests structures. Students have to rank the requests from the most to the least appropriate for that specific context. It is our aim to widen the scope of request strategies offered to the learners.

Situation 1: You are a regular client in a well-known hotel. You are in a non-smoking area and you see a woman smoking in that area. That annoys you. What do you tell her?

Possible answers (ranging from indirect to direct)

1.- I cannot breathe in here.

2.- Would you be so kind as to refrain from smoking?

3.- I would like you to stop smoking.

4.- Put out your cigarette!

Situation 2: You are a porter in a hotel. The general manager is parking the car in a strictly forbidden area but he did not notice it. What do you tell him?

Possible answers (ranging from indirect to direct)

1.- This is a loading area sir.

2.- Why don't you park over there?

3.- I would like you to park over there.

4.- Leave the place at once!

Situation 3: A couple is about to check out in a hotel. On the till there is a notice which states "no credit cards". This notice is observed by the lady but not the gentleman. He is about to pay when she says to him:

Possible answers (ranging from indirect to direct)

1.- I have cash darling.

2.- Can you pay in cash, please?

3.- You need to pay in cash.

4.- Pay in cash!

Situation 4: You are in your hotel room. You have turned on both taps in the bath and you cannot turn them off. The bath is about to overflow. You call to the receptionist asking for action. What do you tell him?

Possible answers (ranging from indirect to direct)

1.- The bathroom taps are completely stuck.

2.- Can you send a plumber to room 201?

3.- I would like you to send a plumber to room 201.

4.- Send a plumber to room 201 immediately!

Task 2. Present a situation and a request associated with it. If students consider the request appropriate, there is no change. However, if they consider that the request is not suitable for that context, they will have to suggest a better option. With the performance of this task we aim to further enhance pragmatic awareness.

Situation 1: Two female co-workers in a travel agency. One needs some documents that the other has at hand. You say:

Request: Fiona, pass me the documents, will you?

Situation 2: A young lady phones your office but the call is for a male colleague who is not in at the moment. You say:

Request: I wondered if you could call back in half an hour.

Situation 3: In a popular restaurant, an old man sits down in a reserved table, the head waiter addresses him and says:

Request: I want you to move to that other table.

Situation 4: A young woman in a hotel needs to make a note of a number. He addresses a young receptionist and says:

Request: Pen and paper, please!

Task 3. State the context of different situations and make students elicit the most appropriate requests. Students could explain why they are using a particular request category taking into account such factors as politeness, social status, speaker's intention, and setting. It is our main goal to make students aware of the importance of context when selecting a particular request strategy.

Make replies to the following situations:

Situation 1: You have booked a room in a hotel. You phone the hotel because you have forgotten to ask if the room has a balcony and a view over the sea.

Situation 2: You are travelling to Milan in 10 days, but you don't know what the weather will be like, so you phone the international weather forecast hotline.

Situation 3: You are driving a rented car down a country road. You hear a bang and stop to find that you have a flat tyre. You open the boot but there is no spare. In the distance you can see a car approaching. What can you say?

Situation 4: You are the manager of a travel agency. Your secretary has been late for the last four days. Although you do not want to hurt her feelings, you have to stop this situation. What would you tell her?

Alternatively, students could see videotaped vignettes for which they need to supply contextually appropriate requests at given moments (e.g., the tape is stopped and the teacher tries to elicit from the students the most appropriate request, after they compare and contrast their option with the one used on the vignette).

Task 4. Present a list of requests taken from real situations and ask students think about the following three variables: 1) setting, 2) relationship between speaker and hearer and 3) the speaker's intention.

Request 1: I told you red wine!

Sample explanation: The context could be in a luxury restaurant where a bad-tempered middle-aged man ordered red wine, but the waiter brought white wine. He wants to change the wine.

Request 2: I wondered if I could have a day off because I have not been feeling pretty well lately and I need a check-up.

Sample explanation: The context could be in a hotel where the cleaner asked the head house keeper for a day off in order to see the doctor.

Request 3: I want the manuscript ready tomorrow.

Sample explanation: The context could be in a travel agency where the manager is asking for urgent documents to the travel agent. He needs the manuscript for tomorrow meeting.

Request 4: Could I ask you a few questions?

Sample explanation: The context could be at a busy airport where a young man is conducting a passenger survey. He wants to know why people travel and more details about their journey.

Obviously the above requests could have more than one suitable context, because of that we propose group discussion about how the above mentioned factors could affect how people formulate requests.

Task 5. Give students the whole context of a situation and ask them to act out a short role-play in front of the class. Video- or audiotape the role play, play it back and analyse the request appropriateness with reference to linguistic, discourse and pragmatic aspects.

1. A female customer in a well-known restaurant asks a male waiter to bring the bill. The waiter will add up the bill in the presence of the guest and will make two deliberate mistakes.

2. A middle-aged businessman rented a car for four days. On the second day, he had an engine problem and had to take the car to the garage. When he brings back the car he asks the car rental clerk for a refund.

3. A young male tour operator has to attend a meeting tomorrow morning at eight. He phones reception asking for an early morning call.

4. An old woman on a plane has an awful headache. The flight attendant notices it and approaches her offering help.

6. Conclusion

As the results of our analysis suggested, the majority of textbooks limit their analysis to the relationship between a client and an employee; students are asked to sound polite when asking clients to do something, by using a set of formulaic expressions such as: "Would you mind ...-ing?" "Could I ask you to..., please?" This means that the rest of the strategies are not so frequent in the input students receive. It was our main goal to widen the scope of request structures presented to the students by providing a variety of situations which varied from strangers to colleagues with a different social status to intimates as we observed, for example, in task 1. In the rest of the tasks we aimed mainly to develop pragmatic awareness by means of the output students had to produce. With the performance of these tasks learners may focus not only on meaning but also on form and context, therefore increasing their awareness of pragmatic features.

With this paper we have tried to show how we can enhance the awareness and the use of requests in teaching materials that already contain pragmatic information. Moreover, the tasks we have developed may help assure learners that they are using requests in an appropriate context, employing acceptable semantic formulas, and exploiting language forms that are sociolinguistically appropriate.

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