Developmental trends in requests rendered by EFL speakers in Poland

Anna Szczepaniak-Kozak

Adam Mickiewicz University, Institute of Applied Linguistics, Poznań, Poland
szczepaniakkozak@gmail.com

Abstract

The primary concern in this paper is with developmental issues in EFL learners' interlanguage (acquisitional) pragmatics (ILP) in Poland, operationalized as rendering requests. It discusses selected findings of a longitudinal study lasting for three years and relying on data collected among 57 EFL learners by means of a written discourse completion task of an open response format. The data collected in the third year (Y3) of the study indicate that even if these EFL students make correct judgments of sociopragmatic factors involved in a particular scenario, selecting appropriate pragmalinguistic forms remains problematic to them. This is hypothesized to be a result of transfer from their mother tongue and/or lack of corrective instruction. However, positive developments towards the target language pragmatic competence were also observed, that is a greater diversification of the requestive strategies used, fewer grounders and a higher frequency of certain internal mitigation features.

Keywords: interlanguage pragmatic competence; requests; DCT; Polish learners of English as a foreign language

1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence (PC) stands for "a set of internalized rules of how to use language in socio-culturally appropriate ways, taking into account participants in a communicative interaction and features of context within which the interaction

takes place" (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 19). PC is believed to include, *inter alia*, a speaker's awareness of social distance and social status and their conditioning influence on interaction, his or her cultural knowledge of politeness principles, and linguistic knowledge, both of the explicit and the implicit kind (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). Well-developed awareness of this type translates into the speakers' knowledge of the rules of appropriateness and politeness which dictate the way the speaker understands and produces contextually suited language (Grundy, 2008, p. 5; Koike, 1989, p. 279). In other words, PC encompasses the knowledge and skills needed to understand the meanings, assumptions and actions conveyed by language in its particular sociocultural context and to use it correspondingly to these interpretations.

The domain of applied linguistics which studies how PC is learned and developed in a second/foreign language is called interlanguage (or acquisitional) pragmatics (ILP). It adopts a slightly different research perspective from cross-cultural pragmatics, which is predominantly concerned with comparing second/foreign language learners' PC with that represented by native speakers of the target language. In learning a foreign language, PC development stands for increasing one's skillfulness in understanding and producing "sociopragmatic meanings with pragmalinguistic conventions" (Kasper & Röver, 2005, p. 318). Learning of those two components should take place in parallel so that both could be mapped accurately onto one another, because "(...) if a language user has control of pragmalinguistic tools without awareness of sociopragmatic rules of usage, she or he might produce well-formed sentences which are so non-conventional that they are incomprehensible or have disastrous consequences at the relationship level" (Röver, 2009, p. 561). However, in learning foreign languages the acquisition of the target culture, and its sociopragmatic rules, is very slow and seldom complete (cf. Barron, 2003; Rakowicz, 2009; Jodłowiec & Urban, 2010). More often than not, there may be various consequences of such pragmatic inappropriateness: negative social perception, social friction, or contact avoidance (Wyner & Cohen, 2015, p. 526).

However, the above is not to say that all interlanguage forms should be considered a deviant system represented by language learners at "successive stages of proficiency" (Nemser, 1971, p. 116) or one typical of non-native speakers who communicate in faulty English. Currently, interlanguage is considered a fully effective systematic means of communication representing learners' learning and their communication strategies, which is influenced by all the languages the learner knows or is learning, but primarily by his or her cognition, past learning history and identity. Pawlak (2006, p. 127) catches its essence in the following words: "Even though learners' productions can be considered as incorrect when compared with the native-speaker norm, they are grammatical when judged in terms of the rules

learners operate with". Alternatively, there are serious problems with defining whose pragmatics should serve as the benchmark (cf. Wyner & Cohen, 2015).

With reference to studies that could help us understand how Poles learn English as a foreign language, there have been only a few (primarily cross-linguistic) articles concerned with speech act production, such as, for example, compliments (Herbert, 1991; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 1989), invitations (Rakowicz, 2009), and a few investigating requests, such as those by Wierzbicka (1985, 2003), Kalisz (1993), Ogiermann (2009a), and Jodłowiec and Urban (2010). The authors of the most recent cross-sectional study, that is Jodłowiec and Urban (2010, pp. 318-319), were able to show that the level of proficiency which their 120 Polish learners of English represented (B1, B2, C2) was not statistically correlated with their PC. Therefore, they point to a dire need of studies that concentrate on Poles' ILP in English. Furthermore, recent synthesis studies on ILP also underscore the critical role of longitudinal studies in understanding processes that govern the so-oriented learning, such as Taguchi (2010) and Li (2016). Taguchi's (2010, p. 342) meta-analysis clearly shows that "little can be said about developmental patterns and stages in the current state of developmental ILP research, excepting request speech acts in children's acquisition [of mother tongue]". Therefore, the present paper intends to narrow this lamentable gap by offering a study on developmental pragmatics in Poles learning EFL.

There are obvious differences between Polish and English cultural norms,[1] and the characteristics of the communities that speak these languages, which conditions differences in requesting strategies applied by English native speakers and Polish EFL learners. In brief, English native speakers employ requesting strategies depending heavily on the use of the interrogative (conventional indirect strategy), and avoid using the bare imperative or explicit performatives, which "name the action that is being performed by the utterance" (O'Keeffe, Clancy, & Adolphs, 2011, p. 84), as in *I (would like to) ask...* (pol.: *poproszę...*). Polish native speakers, on the other hand, also use the interrogative to convey a request. This has been shown to be valid in studies conducted by Kalisz (1993, pp. 112-113) and Ogiermann (2009a, b), especially where interlocutors do not know one another (Marcjanik, 2009, pp. 64-65). However, Wierzbicka (1985) and Lubecka (2000) emphasize the role of the imperative in performing Polish requests in informal situations while ability questions are the most polite request realizations among all the available interrogative constructions (Marcjanik, 2009). Finally, according to Wierzbicka (1985), requesting by means of an ability question (e.g., *Can you return the books?*) is not conventionalized in Polish.

---

[1] I write on the differences between English and Polish cultures with reference to requests in Szczepaniak-Kozak (2013 and 2014).

2. Methodology of the study

2.1. Aim of the study

The general aim of the present research was to investigate how Polish learners of EFL develop their PC, operationalized as rendering requests, including the means which these nonnative speakers use to make the illocutionary intent of requests evident and to mitigate their impact. Requests were selected as the object of this study because they have been well-studied from a monolingual and cross-pragmatic perspective but not from the interlanguage angle, especially in Poles learning the English language. In order to draw conclusions concerning this under-researched area, linguistic data were collected by means of a discourse completion task (DCT) of an open response format in a longitudinal study spanning over three years[2]. Ten request situations were selected with the primary criterion of their frequency and usefulness for the learners' current and future communicative needs. In this paper, due to limited space, only two situations are studied.

2.2. Participants

The study was conducted among 57 BA students of bilingual philology studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. Their assumed entrance proficiency level in English was B1. The participants were advanced students of English and German who received around 10-12 hours a week of instruction in English as long-term preparation for the professions of translator, teacher, or intercultural mediator. The BA program they were enrolled in included a number of practical classes of English, as well as courses in literature, linguistics and methodology taught in the target language. In other words, apart from studying general English, these learners employed English to communicate in other subjects included in their bachelor degree, including those conducted by native speakers. Due to their intensive language learning, by the end of their studies most of them were to become functionally multilingual: L1 Polish, L2 English, L3 German.

      The sampling procedure was based on cohorting, which is choosing participants that "enter an environment at the same point in time" (Schaie & Caskie, 2005, p. 22). The cohort included 57 students because this number enabled

---

[2] Despite the well-known drawbacks of DCT (discussed, for example, in *Szczepaniak-Kozak, 2013* and *Wojtaszek, 2016*), it is still recognized as a reliable, valid and effective method of data collection in pragmatics studies, e.g., Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Rose and Kasper (2001), Ogiermann (2009a, 2009b). It is especially appreciated for its *discreteness*, which, according to O'Keeffe et al. (2011, p. 22), means that "the researcher has a lot of control over the language which they want to elicit. The focus can be limited to a very specific context of use".

deeper insight into their PC development over the period of three years. Keeping the same group of participants allowed the author to achieve internal validity and reliability of the data, whereas the assumed validity threats were: practice effect, maturation and attrition (Robinson, Schmidt, & Teti, 2005, p. 8). The decision to keep the same group of participants and the same measurement instrument was based on conclusions from the analysis of other studies concerning this pragmatics research area, that is most studies that called themselves acquisition-oriented predominantly used either short-interval between pre- and post-test in a pedagogical intervention design or were single-cohort or cross-sectional designs, and thus were more production than acquisition oriented. As such, they could be classified as what Norris and Ortega (2000, p. 497) call a *single decisive study* in which the instructional treatment was brief, with its effects measured in a single immediate post-test.

2.3. Measurement instrument, analysis matrix and research hypothesis

In order to monitor the students' PC development, they were given the same DCT in the first month of their studies (October, 2011, henceforth Y1), then in the second year (May, 2013; Y2) and at the time of their graduation (April, 2014; Y3). The DCT included 15 different situations that were designed, pilot-tested and selected to elicit requests (10 scenarios) and apologies (5 scenarios, used as distractors). They were adapted from a DCT composed and also pilot-tested by Liu (2007, pp. 395-404) with his permission. The situational descriptions were given in English and the students were asked to provide appropriate request expressions within a limited period of time to heighten real-time language use. Their responses were transcribed verbatim by an independent coder and analyzed. Spelling, lexical and grammatical errors were not corrected in the students' responses.

In what follows, a comparative analysis of the responses provided in Y1, Y2 and Y3 to two power-asymmetrical request situations is presented. In both, the power status of the participants, who know each other (medium social distance), is unequal, but the requestive imposition is low. This is so because in both the service required is ordinary and most interlocutors would judge that the speaker has the right to ask for that favor and that it is the hearer's social obligation to provide the service, especially because it is not burdensome. In the first situation, a student asks a teacher to speak more slowly during their discussion of the student's assignment. The other scenario takes place during a workplace meeting where a manager asks a colleague to lend him some notepaper. The situations were worded as follows (Liu, 2007; see Appendix):

Situation 1 (S1):
You are now discussing your assignment with your teacher. Your teacher speaks very fast. You don't follow what he is saying, so you want to ask your teacher to say it again.

Situation 2 (S2):
You are the manager of a company. You are in a meeting with the other members of your company. You need to write some notes, but realize you do not have any paper. You turn to the person sitting next to you. You know the person very well.

The distribution of the independent variables taken into account in the research analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 The distribution of the independent variables in the analyzed scenarios

Independent variable	Situation 1 (S 1)	Situation 2 (S 2)
Power distance	−	+
Social distance	=	+
Rank of Imposition	−	−
Rights and obligations	+	−

Power distance: = equal status, − speaker has a lower status than the hearer; + the speaker has a higher status than the hearer;
Social distance: − strangers, = familiars, + close;
Imposition: − trivial, = medium, + high;
Rights and obligation: the speaker has the right to render the request and the hearer has the obligation to satisfy the request: low (−), medium (=), high (+).

In order to investigate how Polish speakers of EFL performed requests, a coding table was developed on the basis of the research paradigms proposed by Blum-Kulka (1987), Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Takahashi (2001), Barron (2003), and Rue and Qiao (2008). To be more precise, the analysis concentrated on the directness strategies employed to perform a particular request (cf. Appendix for types and examples), together with internal and external mitigation features used to downgrade or upgrade the requestive imposition. While (in)directness with reference to requests stands for "the relative length of the inferential path needed to arrive at an utterance's illocutionary point" (Blum-Kulka, 1987, p. 133), internal mitigation devices are "elements within a head act which are not essential for its understanding" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, pp. 277-289) and which appear within the head act in order to upgrade or downplay the imposition. External mitigators serve the same function but they are peripheral to the head act. Because the list of possible mitigators is extensive, in case of doubt the reader is referred to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and Barron (2003) for a basic discussion of the terms used in this paper.

On the basis of literature review and the analysis of Y1 requests, the following exploratory and general hypothesis was formulated:

> H0: When juxtaposed with Y1 requests, the data from Y2 and Y3 will show a developmental trend towards: 1) a greater diversity of the request strategies used; 2) a wider diversity of internal modifiers; 3) a more frequent use of internal modification; 4) more frequent occurrence of the discourse marker *please* in the embedded position; and 5) a decrease in the use of external mitigation, especially the grounder.

3. Research findings

The data obtained from some students had to be excluded from the analysis because they gave incomplete answers, or no answers at all due to, for example, their incorrect understanding of the described situation. However, in general, the failure rate in both scenarios was minimal. In S1, there was one excluded response in Y1 and Y2, none excluded in Y3. In S2, there were four failures in Y1, then three in Y2 and none in Y3. The minimal rate of failure is a definite indicator of the students' proficiency in the foreign language from the onset of the research endeavor – they had at their disposal enough linguistic proficiency to express the elicited requests in English.

Another common characteristic of the responses provided to both cues is that throughout the study there is a downright tendency with reference to the length of the responses/verbosity measured as the average word number per request. For example, in S1 there were 13 words per request in Y1, 6 words per request in Y2, and 9.5 in Y3. In S2 there were 11.75 words per request in Y1, 9.75 words per request in Y2 , and 8.41 in Y3. The word count in Y3 (S1) was a little higher than in Y2 because the frequency of internal mitigation rose in comparison to Y2. Examples 1 to 4 illustrate how much the sentence length varies across the research period.

> Ex. 1 (S1, Y1): I'm sorry if I distracted you, but I want to ask you about something, sir. You speak so fast, that I don't follow what you are saying. Can you speak not so fast as right now?
> Ex. 2 (S1, Y3): Can you repeat?
> Ex. 3 (S2, Y1): Hey, Mark, do you have any spare paper, by chance? I didn't take any with me. Could give me a couple of sheets?
> Ex. 4 (S2, Y3): Give me any paper!

3.1. Student requests of a teacher[3] (S1)

3.1.1. External mitigation

In Y1 80% of the requests included mitigating supportive moves. The dominant type was the grounder (75%; Ex. 5), often accompanied by an apology (25%, Ex. 6). In most cases, the students were quite specific about the reason for the request (Ex. 7). The remaining few mitigators were preparators (3.5%; Ex. 8) and expressions of gratitude (5.3%; Ex. 9). In Y2 65% responses included an external move but its repertoire was less varied, i.e., there appeared only grounders (87.5%; Ex. 5) and apologies (12.5%, Ex. 6). The data in Y3 show a similar tendency: 71% of the requests are mitigated by means of two external mitigators only: grounders and apologies (65.6% and 6.2% respectively). Table 2 presents how external mitigation changed throughout the study.

> Ex. 5 (Y3): Could you repeat? *I'm not sure if I follow.*
> Ex. 6 (Y2): *I'm sorry but* I don't understand. Could you repeat?
> Ex. 7 (Y1): *I'm sorry, but you speak very fast.* I would like to ask you to say everything again.
> Ex. 8 (Y1). *May I ask you something?*
> Ex. 9 (Y1). *I would be grateful.*

Table 2 External mitigation in Scenario 1

Type	% in Y1	% in Y2	% in Y3
General frequency of external mitigation	80	65	71
Grounder	75	36.8	65.6
Apology	25	5.2	6.2
Preparator	3.5	0	0
Expression of gratitude	5.3	0	0

The decrease in the total share of external mitigation and its diversity is a positive developmental tendency because, in fact, this request could be mitigated only internally in order to be more conventional. Asking a teacher to repeat something is typical of classroom discourse, both in Polish and English. Thereby, the decrease in the total number of external mitigations, especially the number of apologies, is particularly significant, possibly indicating that the students' PC is developing towards the target language baseline.

---

[3] A more detailed analysis of responses to this scenario collected in Y1 and Y2 can be found in Szczepaniak-Kozak (2016).

3.1.2. Head acts

The request strategies provided to this cue were not varied either. In Y1 there were 80.36% conventionalized non-mitigated preparatory queries with *could* (Ex. 10) and 14.28% head acts with *can*. Hence, the preparatory question dominated at 94.64%. The remaining requests were mood derivables (3.58%; Ex. 11) or mitigated want statements (1.78%; Ex. 12). Y2 data show similar use of the conventional query preparatory: 89.5% were head acts in this form, predominantly with *could* (Ex. 10). *Can* and *would* appeared once each in the entire Y2 corpus. Other categories appeared infrequently: want statements (Ex. 12), mitigated preparatory statements, mitigated preparatory questions, mood derivables (Ex. 11) (plus one in a repetition of a query preparatory), and constituted no more than 2.63% of the total each. In the final year (Y3), all the strategies merged towards the query preparatory (100%; Ex. 10).

Ex. 10 (Y3): *Could you repeat it, please*?
Ex. 11 (Y2): I'm sorry, you lost me. *Come again?*
Ex. 12 (Y1): *I'd be very thankful if you could repeat the following sentence for me.*

Table 3 Directness strategies in Scenario 1

Directness strategy	% in Y1	% in Y2	% in Y3
Query preparatory	94.64	89.5	100
Mood derivable	3.58	2.63	0
Mitigated want statement	1.78	0	0
Mitigated preparatory statement	0	2.63	0
Want statement	0	2.63	0
Mitigated preparatory question	0	2.63	0

Relatedly, Ellis (1992, p. 18) remarks that in the classroom there is no need for elaborate requests. For him even a "propositionally reduced directive", such as *Once again, please*, is equally as possible as *Could you repeat it once again?*. There are very rare examples of the former in the corpus elicited, particularly in Y3. Instead, the students preferred the query preparatory, most probably due to negative sociopragmatic transfer. At Polish schools, a student is expected to show respect to the teacher, similar to that paid by a minor to the elderly, which is regulated by the institution in which they interact (Marcjanik, 2009, pp. 63-64). This is visible in the language forms a student uses when addressing a teacher: more mitigation and less directness than in everyday, colloquial, language use. This might be the reason why, in the samples provided, almost all head acts are conventionally indirect query preparatories – very polite forms in Polish.

3.1.3. Internal modification: lexical/phrasal and syntactic

As far as the lexical and phrasal downgraders in Y1 are concerned, on average almost every head act was mitigated. There were 48 mitigators in 56 requests collected (85.71%). The politeness marker *please* (50%), the syntactic upgrader *can* (14.2%) and the adverbial understater *a little (bit) slower* (10.7%) were the most frequent pragmatic features. Three requests were also upgraded by means of *not so fast/faster* (5.3%). Research into EFL interlanguage requests often analyzes whether *please* is embedded within the head act (Ex. 10) or whether it stands outside it (Ex. 13) because its position indicates whether particular EFL learners' interlanguage is heading in the direction of the target language use (cf. Ogiermann, 2009a). In the data collected, the external/internal ratio was: 78.58% outside head act use and 21.42% inside. Finally, there were also single examples (1.78%) of a repeating or downgrading phrase (offering options to the hearer) (Ex. 13), thereby showing the speaker's care for the hearer's positive face, considered in this context unconventional pragmatic use.

The data in Y2 indicate a downward tendency in internal mitigation. Some head acts were not mitigated at all, as on average there was 0.4 mitigator per response. Zero marking dominated at 39.64%. *Please* was used very frequently (in 42.13% of the requests in total), out of which 81.25% were placed outside the head act. There were very few other pragmalinguistic features used in Y2: adverbial understaters (7.82%), syntactic conditional mitigators *can* (2.61%) and *would* (5.02%), and upgraders in the form of a request for repetition (2.6%). Because in Y3 internal modification became more frequent (93.75% requests were mitigated internally), this sine wave seems to indicate that the students' PC is still not stable in this respect. Additionally, although the frequency of modification was similar to that in Y1, the typification of the modifiers was different. While *please* remained the predominant one (50%), the adverbial understater became the second most frequent pragmatic feature (21.8%). There also appeared a few examples of the downtoner *maybe*, which represents a transfer from the students' mother tongue. In Polish, suggestions often begin with *może* plus a verb. This form's direct translation into English is *maybe.* Although the students are quite advanced users of English, they still do not realize that a functional and more frequent equivalent of *maybe* is *how/what about* plus –ing. The frequency and distribution of internal modifiers is presented in Table 4.

Ex 13 (Y1): Could you *please* say it one more time *or* could you *please* it parafraze?

Table 4 Internal mitigation in Scenario 1

Internal mitigation	% in Y1	% in Y2	% in Y3
General frequency of internal mitigation	85.71	40	93.75
pragmatic marker – *please*	50	42.13	50
external/internal ratio	78.58/21.42	81.25/18.75	68.75/31.25
Understater, e.g., *a bit (slower)*	10.7	7.82	21.8
Upgrader – *can*	14.2	2.61	3.1
Upgrader, e.g., *so fast*	5.3	0	3.1
Downtoner – *maybe*	0	0	3.1
Conditional downgraders (inc. conditional downgrader *would*)	1.78	5.2	0
Repetition (upgrader)	1.78	2.6	0
Option giving with *or*	1.78	0	0
Zero marking	14.46	39.64	18.9

3.2. Manager request of a colleague[4] (S2)

3.2.1. External mitigation

This scenario involves small power asymmetry, but its imposition is very low because this is a conventional workplace request. Despite the fact that in a naturally occurring interaction justification for the request would be redundant or unusual, most students assumed in Y1 that it was necessary, which at that time was considered a point requiring remedial classroom practice. Consequently, in Y2 and Y3 the frequency of its use dropped markedly, cf. Table 5 below. In Y1 external moves appeared in 66.03% responses and represented four types, while in Y2 and Y3 there were two types which appeared at 32.43% and 28.1% respectively. Similarly to the other scenario analyzed in this paper, the grounder (Ex. 14) was the type most often used: Y1 – 56.60%, Y2 – 29.72%, Y3 – 25%. The remaining types were: expressions of gratitude (Ex. 15) Y1 – 3.57%, Y2 – 1.7%, Y3 – 3.1%, and single examples of the preparatory question (1.88%; Ex. 16) and apology (1.88%).

> Ex. 14 (Y2): Hey, can I borrow a couple sheets? *I didn't take any.*
> Ex. 15 (Y1): Excuse me, I forgot paper, so i have any. Could you borrow me some paper? *I'd be thankful.*
> Ex. 16 (Y1): Hey, Mark, *do you have any spare paper, by chance?*

---

[4] A detailed analysis of Y1 and Y2 responses to this scenario can be found in Szczepaniak-Kozak (2014).

Table 5 External mitigation in Scenario 12

Type	% in Y1	% in Y2	% in Y3
General frequency of external mitigation	66.03	32.43	28.1
Grounder	56.60	29.72	25
Expression of gratitude	3.57	2.7	3.1
Apology	1.88	0	0
Preparatory question	1.88	0	0

3.2.2. Head acts

As can be seen in Table 6, in Y1 the students made use of the following requestive strategies, starting from the most direct one: mood derivables (22.64%), query preparatories (49.5%), permission questions (18.86%), strong hints (9.43%). In Y2 the following strategies were observed: mood derivables (27.02%; Ex. 17), want statements (2.70%), query preparatories (43.2%; Ex. 18), permission questions (13.51%; Ex. 19), mitigated permission questions (2.70%; Ex. 20), and strong hints (10.81%; Ex. 21). In the final year, the repertoire of the strategies was even more restricted: mood derivables (35.48%), permission questions (6.45%), query preparatories (41.93%), and strong hints (16.12%; Ex. 22).

> Ex. 17. (Y2): *Give me a piece of paper, please.*
> Ex. 18 (Y2): Hey John, *can you borrow me a sheet of paper*?
> Ex. 19 (Y2): *Can I borrow some paper?* I've forgotten to bring it with me and I have to make some notes.
> Ex. 20 (Y2): Hey! I've forgot to take some noticepapers, would you mind if take piece from you?
> Ex. 21 (Y2): Excuse me, *have you got any paper?* I need to write some notes, but I haven't any paper.
> Ex. 22 (Y3): *Do you have any piece of paper*?

There is one more significant tendency in the data presented in Table 6 that requires a comment. The query preparatory was the most frequently chosen strategy in the situation where an imperative or strong hint could be an unmarked variant. This dominance supports my assumption that at this stage of these EFL students' PC development, they prefer an interrogative sentence with *you*, regardless of the sociocultural context of the situation in which a particular request is performed. However, the continuous upturn in the use of the mood derivable bears out that with time this dominance may be weakened.

Table 6 Directness strategies in Scenario 2

Directness strategy	% in Y1	% in Y2	% in Y3
Query preparatory	49.5	48.64	41.93
Mood derivable	22.64	27.02	35.48
Permission question	18.86	8.10	6.45
Strong hint	9.43	10.81	16.12
Mitigated permission question	0	2.70	0
Want statement	0	2.70	0

3.2.3. Internal mitigation

In this scenario, the cohort exhibited a fairly restricted repertoire of internal modifiers with a simultaneous heightened frequency of upgraders. Zero marking, which would most probably characterize native speech, was infrequent in my interlanguage data, with the general use of internal mitigation in Y1 at almost 1.2 modifier per request. A very similar tendency was visible in Y2 and Y3: internal mitigation was present in around 95% and 75% requests in respective years. Notably, Y3 signals a drop in the frequency of internal mitigation (74.19%) and even more restricted lexico-syntactic variation, which is particularly visible in the use of *please*. In Y1 this politeness marker appeared ten times (only three times internal to the head act; 18.86%). Its use was around 25% in Y2 with the external/internal ratio of 8 to 1. *Please* was even rarer in Y3 at 17.39% and only externally to the head act.

As presented in Table 7, across the research period, the indefinite pronoun *some*, together with two understaters *a few* and *small*, both serving the same function of softening the force of the message, were the most frequent modifiers. In Y1 that was the case in 52.83% samples, 35.13% in Y2, and 30.44% in Y3. The second most frequent internal modifier was the syntactic upgrader *can*: Y1 in 39.62% responses, Y2 in 29.72%, Y3 in 39.14%. When we total the frequencies of all upgraders (*will* and *can*) in Y3 (47.83%), it becomes clear that the students mastered the skill of strengthening the impositive force of the request in a situation where the speakers represent different levels of power. This conclusion is additionally supported by the increase in their use of the mood derivable in Y3 (cf. Table 6).

Finally, the remaining categories of internal mitigation were in Y1: two examples of *would*, jointly with single examples of the appealer *ok?* and giving option (Ex. 22). In Y2 rare examples of downgrading appeared, either of the conditional or tense type at 2.77%. In Y3 the downtoner *maybe* appeared at 4.34%, which most probably marks the students' initial awareness that in English suggestory formulas are conventionalized requestive forms in low imposition situations. However, as explained in Section 3.1.3 on internal mitigation in S1, this is a negative transfer from Polish.

Ex. 22 (Y1): Give me *one or two* sheets of paper, please.

Table 7 Internal mitigation in Scenario 2

Internal mitigation	% in Y1	% in Y2	% in Y3
General frequency of internal mitigation	118.84	94.59	74.19
Some	52.83	35.13	30.44
Syntactic upgrader, e.g., *can + will*	39.62	29.72	39.14 + 8.69 = 47.83
pragmatic marker – *please*	18.86	24.32	17.39
external/internal ratio	70/30	88.88/11.12	100/0
Conditional downgraders, e.g., *would*	3.77	2.77	0
Option giving with *or*	1.88	0	0
Appealer – *ok?*	1.88	0	0
Downgraders – aspect	0	2.77	0
Downtoner – *maybe*	0	0	4.34
Zero marking	0	5.28	25.81

4. Discussion

Generally, despite three years of intensive EFL learning, the study participants' PC in English continued to show features of incompleteness, although some interlanguage gains were traceable. Therefore, my initial hypothesis (H0) that the study participants' PC would feature a greater diversity of request strategies and internal mitigation combined with a decrease in the external mitigation was confirmed only to some extent. Moe precisely, my study indicates that the development of pragmatics in a foreign language is not a straight path to perfection. Firstly, the language users discard marked/contextually inappropriate forms for good, thus homing in on the target language forms. Secondly, their interlanguage shows instances of both merging with the target language forms, such as the disappearance of the mood derivable or option giving in SC 1, and sticking to interlanguage forms, such as positioning of *please*, a frequent use of suggestory formulas with *maybe*. Thirdly and relatedly, at least up till Y3, the study participants did not incorporate into their interlanguage the conventional suggestory formulae in English *how/what about* plus *-ing*, nor did they use strong hints. However, positive developments towards PC in the target language were also observed, in particular a greater diversity of the requestive strategies used, fewer grounders and a higher frequency of certain internal mitigation features. In what follows, a more detailed charactrization of their general interlanguage requests is presented.

First of all, the minimal rate of failure observable from the onset of my study indicates that already at that time the students had at their disposal enough linguistic proficiency to express the elicited requestive content in English. Additionally, throughout the study their precision of linguistic expression increased, which is visible in the downward verbosity tendency. Hence, the initial Y1 impression that the responses were long, apologetic, and unnecessarily

complex gave way to a feeling of lucidity. A definite PC gain is not only the higher frequency of internal moves but also the fact that internal modifiers became more frequent than external ones over the research period. The external/internal ratio fluctuates, but, nevertheless, with time external mitigation becomes less frequent than the internal one (cf. Tables 2, 4, 5 and 7). Less external mitigation is observable, especially in Scenario 2, but the students continue to rely on this tool to a considerable degree when they want to sound more polite. As to the typification of external mitigation, at least for the two requests, it appears that the moves became less varied and merged towards grounders with one accompanying mitigator, depending on the content of the head act. It may be a consequence of the uniform instruction that the study participants underwent and their greater comfort when communicating, and thus lesser eagerness to cushion their requests and please the hearer.

The query preparatory strategy dominated and ousted other strategies, especially the mood derivable. At this stage of these EFL students' PC development, they preferred an interrogative sentence with *you*, regardless of the sociocultural context of the situation in which a particular request is performed. The increase in the use of this conventional strategy and the absence of mood derivables in S1 was a stable and positive feature of their PC. However, it needs to be remarked that the data indicate a trend towards using the mood derivable (imperative) when the power distance between interlocutors is significant (S2) – cross-linguistic transfer from Polish. Because the Polish culture features large power distance (Hofstede, 1980/2001), requests rendered by Poles higher in the workplace hierarchy are not only formed as imperatives but also rarely include internal or external mitigation. The fact that the students start to diversify their linguistic behavior in Y3 constitutes a vital achievement in their PC. However, the continuous upturn in the use of the mood derivable in S2 bears out that with time this dominance may be weakened. Additionally, the analysis of the responses provided to S1 indicates that the students' PC with reference to internal mitigators is not stable because their frequencies follow a sine wave. What is more, even if the frequency of the modification for S1 was similar in Y1 and Y3, the typification of the modifiers was different, which again supports my argument that certain pragmatic features come and go in the students' interlanguage – they use them for some time, then discard them and replace with some others.

On average, the students relied on a small set of formulas and lexical devices to internally modify the requests. This is a definite feature of all EFL learners even at later stages of linguistic proficiency. Throughout the period of my study there are no visible gains in this area of PC, except for the use of the syntactic upgrader (*can, will*) in S2. What is also puzzling is the characteristic absence of *please*, which runs counter to other research findings by, for example,

Faerch and Kasper (1989) or Ogiermann (2009a). In these studies, *please* was found to be particularly attractive because it is a transparent internal mitigator. When this pragmatic marker appeared in the data collected, its position in the utterance was mostly external to the head act. This tendency was observable in S2/Y3 where all instances of *please* are located outside the head act. Therefore, my findings corroborate Ogiermann's (2009a, pp. 203-204) conclusion that Polish speakers of English are prone to place *please* externally due to transfer from their mother tongue. In her view, a lexeme expressing what *please* does in English is present in many languages, but languages differ in positioning it within an utterance. In English *please* is most often classified as an internal modifier, whereas in Polish it is always external. Polish *proszę* cannot occur in the head act because it is a performative verb in itself.

The evident underuse of other pragmatic features in Y1 could be attributed to the students' relative lower proficiency level (some of them at the start of the program were intermediate EFL learners). However, the absence of progress in Y2 and Y3 should be explained on other grounds, for instance relative difficulty of learning internal modification. It has been argued in other studies that "internal mitigation is particularly sensitive to level of proficiency and is part of a late developmental stage" (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009, pp. 100-101).

5. Concluding remarks

The above theoretical and empirical considerations have serious consequences when we want to translate them into classroom practice. First of all, requestive directness, imposition or other pragmatic notions may continue to be adopted in a foreign language with reference to a learner's own cultural sociopragmatic norms. Secondly, the data presented in this study clearly indicate that PC is sensitive to grammar teaching. After learning English grammar for one year, the students started to vary their requestive directness strategies and used more mitigated head acts in Y2. However, this effect died off in Y3, which in this case could be considered a delayed post-test if the aim of my study was to prove the effect of grammar teaching on PC development. This is to say that deductive teaching of grammar and pragmatics is more productive for PC development than the inductive and functional approach characteristic of general English classes. Hence, a definite conclusion of my study is that no considerable gain in PC can be achieved without explicit teaching of pragmatic rules, especially when learning in a foreign language context. This is so because the data collected in Y3 indicate that even if these EFL students make correct judgments of sociopragmatic factors involved in a particular scenario, selecting appropriate pragmalinguistic forms remains problematic to them. This may, in turn, be a result of L1

transfer and/or a lack of corrective instruction. Finally, we cannot expect that future teachers of English will be able to integrate pragmatics into their instruction if their pragmatic ability in EFL is lacking. The prospects are gloomy also because teacher development courses do not mandate classes in pragmatics and instruction in this area (cf. Wyner & Cohen, 2015, pp. 542-543).

Despite the fact that the study relied on a medium sample of 57 students, its strength lies in its attempt to offer insight into the participants' interlanguage PC. Nevertheless, the data collected require further analysis in terms of individual differences in learning of pragmatics, especially their susceptibility to negative pragmatic transfer or learner motivation (cf. Wyner & Cohen, 2015, p. 524). Additionally, the author realizes that in order to investigate ILP more thoroughly, more data, and from delayed stages of interlanguage development, will be necessary. Regardless of these shortcomings, already in Y3, it was possible to arrive at vital conclusions about the development of PC by EFL advanced learners in Poland, and to identify aspects requiring classroom instruction and practice.

References

Barron, A. (2003). *Acquisition in interlanguage pragmatics. Learning how to do things with words in a study abroad context.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Blum-Kulka, S. (1987). Indirectness and politeness in requests: Same or different. *Journal of Pragmatics, 11*, 131-146.

Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (Eds.). (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatic: Requests and apologies.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Celce-Murcia, M., & Olshtain, E. (2000). *Discourse and context in language teaching: A guide for teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Economidou-Kogetsidis, M. (2009). Interlanguage request modification: The use of lexical/phrasal downgraders and mitigating supportive moves. *Multilingua*, *28*, 79-112.

Ellis, R. (1992). Learning to communicate in the classroom: A study of two language learners. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *14*(1), 1-23.

Faerch, C., & Kasper, G. (1989). Internal and external modification in interlanguage request realization. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House, & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies* (pp. 221-247). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Grundy, P. (2008). *Doing pragmatics.* London: Arnold.

Hofstede, G. (1980/2001). *Culture's consequences.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Herbert, R. K. (1991). The sociology of compliment work: The enthocontrastive study of Polish and English complements. *Multilingua, 10*(4), 381-402.

Jodłowiec, M., & Urban, M. (2010). Kompetencja pragmatyczna a poziom zaawansowania w języku angielskim wśród Polaków uczących się języka angielskiego. In W. Chłopicki & M. Jodłowiec (Eds.), *Słowo w dialogu międzykulturowym* (pp. 311-322). Kraków: Tertium.

Kalisz, R. (1993). Different cultures, different languages, and different speech acts revisited. *Papers and Studies in Contrastive Linguistics, XXVII,* 107-118.

Kasper, G., & Röver, C. (2005). Pragmatics and second language learning. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 317-334). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Koike, D. (1989). Pragmatic competence and adult L2 acquisition: Speech acts in interlanguage. *Modern Language Journal,73*, 279-289.

Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, B. (1989). Praising and complimenting. In W. Oleksy (Ed.), *Contrastive pragmatics* (pp. 73-100). Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Li, Q. (2016). Variations in developmental patterns across pragmatic features. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 6*(4), 587-617.

Liu, J. (2007). Development of a pragmatics test for Chinese EFL learners. *Language Testing, 24*(3), 391-415.

Lubecka, A. (2000). *Requests, invitations, apologies and compliments in American English and Polish*. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka.

Marcjanik, M. (2009). *Mówimy uprzejmie: Poradnik językowego savoir-vivre'u*. Warszawa: PWN.

Nemser, W. (1971). Approximative systems of foreign language learners. *IRAL, 9*, 115-23.

Norris, J., & Ortega, L. (2000). Effectiveness of L2 instruction: A research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis. *Language Learning, 50*, 417-528.

Ogiermann, E. (2009a). Politeness and in-directness across cultures: A comparison of English, German, Polish and Russian requests. *Journal of Politeness Research, 5*, 189-216.

Ogiermann, E. (2009b). *On apologizing in negative and positive politeness cultures*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

O'Keeffe, A., Clancy, B., & Adolphs, S. (2011). *Introducing pragmatics in use*. London: Routledge.

Pawlak, M. (2006). *The place of form-focused instruction in the foreign language classroom*. Kalisz – Poznań: Wydział Pedagogiczno-Artystyczny w Kaliszu, Uniwersytet im. A. Mickiewicza w Poznaniu.

Rakowicz, A. (2009). *Ambiguous invitations: The interlanguage pragmatics of Polish English language learners*. Saarbrücken: VDM.

Robinson, K., Schmidt, T., & Teti, D. M. (2005). Issues in the use of longitudinal and cross-sectional designs. In D. M. Teti (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in developmental psychology* (pp. 3-20). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Rose, K. R., & Kasper, G. (Eds.) (2001). *Pragmatics in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Röver, C. (2009). Teaching and testing pragmatics. In M. H. Long & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 560-577). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Rue, Y.-J., & Qiao, G. Z. (2008). *Request strategies: A comparative study in Mandarin Chinese and Korean*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Schaie, W. K., & Caskie, G. L. (2005). Methodological issues in aging research. In D. M. Teti (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in developmental psychology* (pp. 21-39). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Szczepaniak-Kozak, A. (2013). The relation between linguistic proficiency and pragmatic appropriacy: A study of Polish learners of English as a foreign language. In I. Headlandová Kalischová & M. Němec (Eds.), *English as the lingua franca of the modern world: New challenges for academia* (pp. 39-54). Brno: Masaryc University Press.

Szczepaniak-Kozak, A. (2014). Interlanguage pragmatics: A study into the acquisition of pragmatic competence in English as a foreign language context.

In S. Adamczak-Krysztofowicz & A. Szczepaniak-Kozak (Eds.), *Kultur–Kommunikation–Kreativität–Reflexivität. Aktuelle Beiträge zum universitären Fremdsprachenunterricht* (pp. 56-77). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Szczepaniak-Kozak, A. (2016). Interlanguage pragmatics of EFL advanced learners*:* Insights from a longitudinal study into the development of the speech act of request in the Polish context. In M. Pawlak (Ed.), *Classroom-oriented research: Reconciling theory and practice* (pp. 197-212). Heidelberg – New York: Springer.

Taguchi, N. (2010). Longitudinal studies in interlanguage pragmatics. In A. Trosborg (Ed.), *Pragmatics accross languages and cultures* (Voll. 7, pp. 333-361). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Takahashi, S. (2001). Input enhancement in developing pragmatic competence. In K. Rose, & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 171-199). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tarone, E. (1998). Interlanguage. In J. L. Mey (Ed.), *Concise encyclopedia of pragmatics* (pp. 389-395). Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Wierzbicka, A. (1985). Different cultures, different languages, different speech acts: Polish vs. English. *Journal of Pragmatics, 9*(2-3), 145-178.

Wierzbicka, A. (2003). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction.* The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter.

Wojtaszek, A. (2016). Thirty years of discourse completion test in contrastive pragmatics research. *Linguistica Silesiana 37*, 161-171.

Wyner, L., & Cohen, A. D. (2015). Second language pragmatic ability: Individual differences according to environment. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 5*(4), 519-556.

Appendix

Requestive directness strategies used in the present study	Example
Direct strategies	
Mood derivable (imperatives)	*Give me some notepaper!*
Performative (unhedged)	*I am asking you to give me some notepaper.*
Performative (hedged)	*I would like/want to ask you to give me some notepaper.*
Obligation/necessity statement	*You'll have to/must/should give me some notepaper.*
Want statement	*I (really) need/want/could do with some notepaper* (speaker-oriented). *(I really) want/wish you to give me some notepaper.*
Mitigated want statement	*I would like/really wish/would prefer you gave me some notepaper; I would appreciate it if you gave me some notepaper.*
Indirect strategies	
Suggestory formula	*How about giving me some notepaper?* (hearer-oriented)
Availability question	*Do you have any notepaper to spare?/ I don't suppose you can give me some notepaper?* (hearer-oriented).
Preparatory question/query preparatory/ability question	*Could you give me some notepaper (, please)?*
Mitigated preparatory question	*Do you think that you could give me some notepaper? Would you (mind/be so kind to) give me some note paper* (hearer-oriented willingness question)
Mitigated preparatory statement	*I was wondering if it is/would be possible for you to give me some notepaper* (hearer-oriented) *I don't suppose you can give me some notepaper* (hearer-oriented)
Permission question	*May I take some notepaper?*
Hints	
Strong hint	*I have no notepaper on me.*
Mild hint	*Note paper is always missing.*