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Ca' Foscari
Dorsoduro 3246
30123 Venezia

**A comparison of the realization
of requestive speech acts
in Italian and German**

Relatore

Chiar.mo prof. Roland Hinterhölzl

Corelatore

Chiar.mo prof. Nicola Munaro

Laureando

Ilaria Venuti
Matricola 831549

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to answer some questions left open in my Bachelor's thesis "How to do things with words. The philosophy of language of J.L. Austin" and at the same time to expand some of its issues shifting the perspective from that of philosophy of language to the domain of contrastive pragmatics. In particular, I will address the following issues: 1) the conceptual clarification of the phenomenon of indirectness; 2) the cross-cultural comparison of requestive speech act realization patterns between German and Italian and 3) the relationship between indirectness and the perception of politeness in the two aforementioned speech communities.

The methodology used was inspired by the "Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP)", a collective study initiated by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain in 1984 to investigate intra-language and inter-language (cultural) variability in the realization patterns of requests and apologies amongst eight languages, with attention to the comparison between native and non-native speakers.

Empirical data were gathered by means of a "Discourse Completion Test" from 40 Italian students enrolled at the University of Udine and at the University "Ca' Foscari" in Venice, and 40 German students attending the "Bergische Universität Wuppertal" and the "Humboldt Universität zu Berlin". Realizations of requests are analysed according to the CCSARP's "coding manual", reported in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), and interpreted at the light of the main theories concerning verbal politeness.

Results show that both groups of participants are perfectly aware of the differences between the four socio-pragmatic situations proposed and tailor their requests according to the context. It is found that both groups of subjects rely heavily on conventionally indirect strategies. On the whole, German speakers appear to use more indirect request strategies than their Italian counterparts. They also select with a higher frequency syntactic, lexical and phrasal downgraders. Italian speakers tend to select slightly lower levels of indirectness but compensate with a consistently larger use of alerters, supportive moves and upgraders.

My results differ in interesting ways from general expectations in the socio-pragmatic situation in which the face threat is arguably the highest, calling for further investigation of the difference in the perception of the social parameters determining the rated face threat between the two cultures. Deeper insights into the link between indirectness and politeness in the two cultures involved is also needed in order to understand the reasons behind the pragmatic choices observed.

Introduction

As member of an association which provides young Italian, Slovenian and Austrian students with scholarships to attend the Forum Alpbach¹, I happened to examine lots of applications and to go through a number of motivation letters. This activity, together with the attendance at the Forum, gave me the extraordinary chance to become conscious of the fact that, maybe for the first time in history, we are witnessing the development of a generation of young Europeans, who enthusiastically and optimistically look forward to the creation of a tangible European civil society. Nevertheless, especially after the current economic crisis showed its worst consequences, their *Zeitgeist* seems to be increasingly characterized by a sharp consciousness, namely of the fact that if on the one hand the difference of values², perspectives and traditions enshrined in the Continent constitutes a huge richness, on the other it could have also driven the EU into a paralysis.

From the written “cultural credos” of these students, the firm belief emerges that an “open dialogue”, a “genuine debate” and the “sharing of opinions” could pave the way out of the crisis. English is spoken quite fluently by all of them, the World Wide Web and its social platforms offer countless and easy opportunities to meet. In short, no obstacles seem to hinder the process of communication.

Still, when assisting to examples of such international debates and discussions, I cannot help but noticing that, despite the common language we are using, our “ways of speaking” (cf. Hymes 1972, 1974) still differ significantly³ and clashes in communication, with consequences which range from irony to serious misunderstandings, happen much more often than it could be imagined.

¹ The European Forum Alpbach is an annual event that takes place in August in the Tyrolean village of Alpbach, Austria, since 1945. Aim of the Forum is to get together students, academics and experts from different fields in order to create an intellectual platform of discussion where European integration could be promoted.

² The last edition of Forum Alpbach was in fact entitled “Experiences and Values”.

³ On the other hand, the eventuality that all Europeans should end up speaking the same way is to my mind hardly worth wishing for. If, in fact, as I believe, the principle of linguistic relativity (popularly known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) could hold not only as far as the structure of a language is concerned, but also as regards discourse patterns and modalities of realization of specific speech acts (e.g.: when Italian students are writing in English, they are often taught to immediately reveal in the first sentence the topic of the section and then to develop it, even if their instinctive style would be that of approaching gradually the point. But in order to do so, they patently have to face a change in their cognitive processes as well), we could wonder whether a possible consequence of speaking increasingly often just one language and just in one way could end up in the creation of an Orwellian society.

Interestingly enough, despite the shared awareness of Europe's differences of ideas, roots and values, every kind of pragmatic "failure"⁴ is often attributed to the personality of the speaker, who may be judged quickly and lightheartedly uncooperative or impolite. In this way, as Thomas (1983) points out, the failure to appreciate the multiple conventions of politeness in different societies ignites inter-ethnic biases.

These considerations and the persuasion that a sincere attempt to create room for a fruitful debate cannot disregard the attention to the different ways we do things with words have given rise to the present work.

From the wide range of empirical studies on speech act behavior which have been conducted in the last decade, the most serious and comprehensive attempt to compare speech acts' realization patterns under different social constraints and across different languages has been the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project. Initiated by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and realized with the collaboration of an international research team⁵, the project focuses on requests and apologies, two speech acts which are both costly to the Hearer and are therefore deeply connected to politeness.

As the project did not turn the focus of analysis to Italian, and since requests are likely to appear more often in everyday life, I decided to concentrate exclusively on this speech act and to compare Italian modalities of formulation of requests with German ones taking as a model the CCSARP.

Organization of the Thesis

As said before, when non-native speakers violate speech act realization patterns typically used by native speakers of a target language, they run the concrete risk of being judged "impolite". Consequently, chapter 1 opens this dissertation with an introduction to the main theories of verbal politeness which range from Searle's indirect speech acts theory to Gricean conversational maxims, to Lakoff's politeness principle and Leech's Tact maxim. On the grounds that requests have been defined as face-threatening acts par excellence, Goffman's idea of face and Brown and Levinson's development of such notion in terms of positive and negative politeness

⁴ The word failure is here imprecise, since if two people are both using English as *lingua franca*, it is not clear which pragmatic competence they should assume as the target one, but I use this word here to mean any deviation from the pragmatic competence that one feels as his/her own one.

⁵ See p. 27.

are also addressed. Furthermore, a new and more complete vision of the Austinian total speech act is proposed.

Before presenting the research project which is the aim of the present thesis, my undertaking needed some background. The overall goal of chapter 2 is therefore to tackle some issues pertaining to the domain of cross-cultural pragmatics. Possible sources of intercultural miscommunication are outlined; the role language educators and curricula designers can play is examined. A critical review of the state of the art is also offered, with special attention to the genesis and development of the CCSARP.

Premise of any rigorous research is, according to analytical philosophers, a prior analysis of the terms used and a clarification of the concepts investigated. In line with this principle, chapter 3 is entirely devoted to the meticulous definition of the directive speech act, through the examination of its felicity conditions and its face-threatening character. In most of the reviewed studies the greatest cross-cultural variance was always in terms of directness and at the same time politeness and indirectness have often been assumed to represent parallel dimensions. Hence, the chapter closes with some clues concerning the possible reasons there could be behind the choice of formulating a request indirectly or directly.

Having provided the background in the preceding chapters, chapter 4 then turns the focus directly on the empirical study. It begins by presenting the main goals of the research, and discussing the rationale behind the choices in the methodology used. The employment of an improved version of the Discourse Completion Test as the method to gather verbal data is discussed, and the four interactional situations proposed in order to trigger the production of requests are explored. After having presented the research variables, I illustrate the framework adopted for the analysis of requests, with respect to perspective, strategy type, internal modification and external modification of the utterance.

In chapter 5 the data collected through the DCT are presented in detailed graphs and tables and analyzed in terms of frequencies and percentages. Results are discussed at two levels: the cross cultural variation and the situational variation. Within the cross-cultural dimension, differences are highlighted as far as different request strategies are concerned. Within the situational variation, special attention is given to both groups' linguistic response to the changes in the situation proposed, in particular as far as the estimated face threat is concerned.

In chapter 6, the combination of observations from both perspectives allows for some conclusions about how indirectness unfolds in Italian and in German and about

the perception and expression of politeness in the two speech communities at issue. Finally, possible implications of the study are considered and some proposals for further research are given.

It goes without saying that the host of motivations which drove me to approach the line of research of cross-cultural pragmatics could not find an exhaustive fulfillment in the present project. Nevertheless, as Scollon and Scollon (1995, p.15) note, the most successful communicator is not the one who can rely on the full competence of a lot of discourse systems, but rather the person who strives to learn as much as possible about others' speech acts sets, while recognizing that except for his/her own culture, he/she will always remain a novice. I undertook this delimited comparison of a specific speech act chiefly and among all with the spirit of a learner of German, as the first step towards a more systematic characterization of the different interactional styles between my mother tongue and this language.

1. Speech acts: From philosophy of language to contrastive pragmatics.

Preliminary theoretical considerations

In my Bachelor thesis I concluded my analysis of J.L. Austin's argumentation in *How to do things with words* raising some questions that I would like to address in this study. Two points in particular triggered my curiosity, and both were, in a way, investigated by Searle (1969) and (1975). On the one hand, I was interested in investigating all the cases in which an utterance seems to carry an illocutionary force but the real force is another one, or it is *as if* the real force were another one. Austin would have classified them within the "non serious usage of languages", but it seemed to me that those cases are too frequent in everyday communication not to deserve a theory on their own. On the other hand, I asked myself whether the illocutionary force of some utterances could change according to the language/culture from which they are formulated. In this section I will briefly outline these two "reasoning paths" that led me from the philosophy of language of J.L. Austin to the domain of cross-cultural pragmatics, taking also into account important theories of politeness. This will allow me to make some preliminary theoretical considerations that will allow the reader to fully grasp the complexity of the matter, something which will prove particularly useful in reading the empirical part of this dissertation and at the same time will prevent him/her from jumping to misleading conclusions.

1.1 Searle's indirect speech acts and Grice's cooperative principle

Searle (1975) introduces his argumentation putting emphasis on the fact that the simplest situation in which we could find ourselves in the course of an interaction is the case in which the speaker means exactly what he/she says. In more scientific words, the way in which the utterance is constructed is precisely the way it should be, according to the rules governing that language, in order to express the illocutionary force it actually wants to carry. Were all forms of communication of this kind, understanding each other would be a child's play.

On the contrary, the majority of sentences that we utter and hear in everyday conversations do not belong to this category: there are many possible cases in which the "speaker's utterance meaning" and the "sentence meaning" diverge in different ways. Irony, hints, metaphors are just the most obvious examples. The most important utterances pertaining to this class are the ones in which the speaker means what he/she says but also means something else. A common example of this kind of

utterances is “It’s cold in here”, as said by the Duke of Bordello to the butler. As David Gordon and George Lakoff point out in “Conversational postulates”,

“In such a situation, “it’s cold in here” is an expression of discomfort and is said by a person in authority whose job is, in part, to retrieve the discomfort of his employer as far as possible. If, in the context, the most obvious way to relieve the discomfort cited is to close the window, then an order to do that is what is being communicated.” (Gordon and Lakoff 1971, in Cole and Morgan 1975, vol. 9, p.83)

Another very clear example is “I want you to do it”, which is actually a statement, but is obviously meant as a request. This means that the sentence indicators for a type of speech act (in this case, descriptive) are used to perform, in addition, another kind of speech act (directive). According to Searle there are in the end two different types of illocutionary acts in the same sentence.

Nevertheless, Searle's analysis focuses on another type of speech act, namely the one in which the speaker utters a sentence that has its own illocutionary point, but he/she uses it to perform another illocutionary act, which clearly and unequivocally substitutes the “apparent” and “superficial” force of the utterance. The – by now hackneyed – example “Can you reach the salt?” is clearly not intended as a question about the hearer's physical abilities, in fact it is immediately perceived as a request. The point Searle makes is precisely that of how is it possible for a hearer to grasp the “real meaning” of the sentence if what he/she hears and understands “means” something else. Another interesting aspect Searle investigates is why certain utterances of this kind become conventional ways to convey “meanings” and other “purposes” other than the ones that they seem to carry at a first glance. These peculiar speech acts, in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another, are defined by Searle “indirect speech acts”.

Searle (1969) explained the functioning of this type of utterances in the same way they will be explained in section 3.2, p. 35 of this work, and precisely as questions ascertaining the satisfaction of some of the essential conditions (preparatory, propositional content, and sincerity condition) for the performance of the speech act itself. In section 5.2 (p. 94), in fact, conventional indirect requests will be illustrated and codified through the preparatory condition to which they refer.

Nonetheless, in “Indirect speech acts” (1975) Searle wants to bring his analysis to such lengths as to thoroughly take into account all the elements coming into play in the complex and fascinating process of “indirect” communication, or, in other words, to spot the “apparatus” which is necessary to explain it. This apparatus includes mutually shared linguistic and non-linguistic background information, general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer, together with some general principles of cooperative conversation postulated by Grice. In addition to this, in line with Austin, Searle traces back the “engine” of this kind of utterances to the convention, that is to

say to the tacit agreement of the speakers. Furthermore, Searle points out that the failure to fully understand indirect speech acts, as for instance the sentence “You ought to do X”, intended as a directive, has caused a lot of confusion in recent moral philosophy⁶.

In trying to analyze the functioning of indirect speech acts, Searle first of all provides the following examples:

„Student X: - Let’s go to the movies tonight!“

„Student Y: - I have to study for an exam“.

In this particular example, Searle asks himself how it is possible for the hearer to immediately grasp the fact that Y’s consideration about his plans for the evening is to be taken as a rejection of the proposal, even if it actually is nothing more than a statement. In other words, he wonders how the secondary illocutionary act of performing a statement univocally hints at the primary illocutionary act of refusing an invitation.

The inferential path followed by the speaker should be constituted of the following steps:

1. *I have made a proposal to X, and in response he has made a statement about the fact that tonight he must study for an exam.*
2. *I assume that Y is cooperating in the conversation, therefore what he has said must have something to do with my invitation.*
3. *A relevant response should be of acceptance, rejection, counter proposal, further discussion, etc.*
4. *But his response doesn't seem to be one of these.*
5. *So he probably means more than what he says: his secondary illocutionary point must differ from the primary, literal one.*
6. *I know that studying for an exam requires a large amount of time relative to a single evening, and I also know that going to the cinema as well usually takes an entire evening.*
7. *I know that in order to accept an invitation one must be ready and willing to perform the action specified in the propositional content condition.*
8. *Therefore, I know that asserting that he will be doing something else that evening, something which can not be easily combined with going to see the movies, basically counts as a rejection of the invitation.*

⁶ In fact, Searle's aim is that of shedding light on a phenomenon of language which is relevant not only for a theory of meaning and speech acts, but also for philosophy in general.

The careful reader will have noticed at point 2 a reference to the essential contribution Grice gave to conversational studies, on which it is worth spending a couple of words, especially because scholars which later developed theories of politeness often took Grice's work as a touchstone.

According to Grice our talk exchanges normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, whose understanding through a series of inferences is only possible because of a common, unuttered supposition: a mutual cooperation to conversation. The so called "cooperative principle" consists of four maxims which the participants in the communicative acts are expected to observe, namely: make your contribution not more and not less informative than is required (Quantity); try to make your contribution one that is true (Quality); be relevant to the topic of discussion (Relation); avoid obscurity and ambiguity (Manner). Having said this, it will result evident at this point that understanding, in the above mentioned example, "I have to study for an exam", as a refuse to an invitation is only possible because we assume the speaker to talk according to the maxim of relevance.

1.2 Lakoff's "politeness principle" and Leech's "tact maxim"

If Grice unfolds shared suppositions in conversation and thus makes clear how mutual understanding is possible despite frequent violations of the conversation maxims, Lakoff (1973) is more interested in illustrating why the common speaker often infringes those maxims. To Lakoff's mind, in fact, only in official conversations, where the only aim is that of exchanging factual information, Grice's maxims are respected. In all the other cases there is another maxim that in Lakoff's opinion prevails: the maxim of courtesy. Being polite allows us to make a favorable impression of ourselves, on the information given, and to put the hearer at ease. How can one manage to be polite? The three indications given by Lakoff deserve particular attention since they go back to Durkheim's (1915) distinction between positive and negative rites and at the same time anticipate Brown and Levinson's (1987) dichotomy of positive and negative politeness (see below):

R1. Do not impose.

R2. Give options.

R3. Put D at ease – be friendly.

If by following rule 1 or rule 2 we pursue the aim of making the hearer feel free to choose and we convey the will not to impinge on his/her behavior, through rule 3 we convey our friendship, our solidarity, our *camaraderie* towards the interlocutor. Lakoff lays special emphasis – and I believe this is what makes her contribution so relevant for a cross-cultural perspective – on the fact that the best way to be polite can oscillate from R1 to R2, to R3 according to the situation, to the

relationship existing with the hearer, to the society in which the communicative act takes place. To take again the example “It’s cold in here”, it can be considered as polite if the recipient of the message is an equal, since he/she is given the freedom to choose how to interpret the utterance, but it is quite impolite if the recipient is a subordinate, since the supposition is implied “Every one of my wishes is a command for you, as you are inferior to me”.

Similarly, Leech (1977) and (1983) try to account for language usage in which the maxims of Grice’s cooperative principle are flouted for reasons of social interaction, and he does so by introducing the maxim of “tact”. The Tact maxim, to which Leech adds the maxim of generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy, is especially related to my study since it claims a positive correlation between tactfulness (as one, but not the only one, expression of politeness) and indirectness. Leech maintains that the most indirect requests are the most tactful ones, since they leave the hearer free to say “yes” or “no” according to his/her desire to do the requested action.

1.2 Goffman’s “face” and Brown and Levinson’s “principles of politeness”.

“The human personality is a sacred thing; one dare not violate it nor infringe its bounds, while at the same time the greatest good is in communion with others” (Durkheim 1915, p. 299).

Durkheim’s quotation is particularly interesting for two reasons. First of all, it stresses the fact that every form of human interaction is a ritual, not so far from ceremonies and cults towards supernatural entities. Secondly, it stresses how all types of communication imply a potentially paradoxical situation, of the “two-side-of-the-coin” kind. From the one side, we need to maintain some degree of independence (rule 1 and 2 in Lakoff’s framework) and show the other participants that we respect it. From the other, we have the need to be involved with other participants and to show them our involvement (Lakoff’s rule 3). Goffman (1967) fully adopted this idea and developed a theory accounting for all the little rituals that are carried out during conversation, the main purpose of which is to preserve “face”.

The notion of face probably originates from the English folk term of “losing face” (which has its equivalent in many other European and non-European cultures, including the Italian, the Spanish and the Chinese ones, to name only some of them) that means to suddenly feel embarrassed or humiliated as a consequence of someone’s other behaviour. In sociological terms, face is the public image and the personal perception of the self; the positive social value that every member of society – until proven otherwise – has and claims for himself.

Goffman points out that face is an extremely changeable concept: it can be lost, maintained, or enhanced during interaction with others. Exactly as the definition of a relationship⁷, also the face of the participants seems to constantly lie in the background of every social interaction, to such a degree that we could even state that 90% of misunderstandings and arguments stem from a perceived threat or attack to one's own face. People can be expected to constantly defend their faces, and, in doing so, to threaten in turn other's faces if they perceive a threat to their own. Endless discussions that go around in circles could be peacefully soothed or even avoided if the participants in the speech event suspended for a moment their concern for the objective content of their discussion and just think of the implicit, often involuntary, but not therefore less decisive moves (and probably errors) they have made in terms of face. Trying to clarify the possible insults that one has perceived, and become conscious of the offensive messages in terms of face that we could have sent means in most cases almost entirely patching up the quarrel.

People's feelings of attachment to a particular face, coupled with the possibility that face could be disconfirmed by himself or others in the course of the interaction, could easily provide one reason why people feel that every form of contact with others is a commitment which requires some form of effort or even stress. Just as everyone is expected to have self-respect and to protect his/her own face, he/she is also expected to go to such lengths as to safeguard the feelings and the face of the other present, and to do so in virtue of a spontaneous emotional identification with the others. In fact, a person who is able to cause (or assist) to another person's humiliation without feeling sorry is said to be "heartless", just as someone who can witness his/her own face loss unfeelingly is considered to be "shameless". The expected result of these commonly shared feelings of "considerateness for the others" and "self-respect" is that, as in a sort of tacit agreement, everyone will generally cooperate in maintaining each other's face during interaction, and, in so doing, he/she will protect his/her own face as well. A person who is not able to play this "face game" is perceived as socially "unreliable" and is generally not appreciated.

Brown and Levinson (1987) followed up this idea developing the concepts of positive face and negative face (taking inspiration from the positive pole of a magnet, which attracts, and the negative, which repulses) that they consider as "basic wants". Respect and consideration for these two aspects of personality is described respectively "positive politeness" and "negative politeness". Positive politeness (also defined solidarity politeness) satisfies the need everyone has to be recognised, accepted and appreciated by his/her peers. Negative politeness is shown guaranteeing people's right to be free from imposition and to see their own preferences, autonomy and freedom of movement respected.

⁷ See below, Schmidt's argumentation.

Deborah Tannen in “*You just don’t understand: women and men in conversation*” (1992) provides a brilliant and, I would dare say, funny example of these two aspects of face and politeness dealing with the differences in communication between men and women, which, by the way, she considers to fall under the domain of cross-cultural pragmatics. She tries to answer the question women have been asking themselves for ages: “Why don’t men ever stop to ask for directions?” According to Tannen, women see social life as a network of connections, and communication as a way to seek and give confirmation and support. Life for them is a struggle to preserve intimacy and to avoid isolation: in one word, they want to protect their positive face. That is why for them it is quite logic to stop and ask for cooperation in finding the way. Men’s frame of mind, according to Tannen, presents another *scenario*: they see themselves as individuals in a hierarchical order, and communication as a series of negotiations in which people try to achieve and maintain the upper-hand, or simply to protect their negative face. From this perspective, finding the way on their own is an essential part of the independence that men perceive to be a prerequisite for self-respect.

Tannen’s example is clearly a radicalisation in the vision of the separation between negative and positive face. In every culture, in every individual the need is perceived to project involvement and independence simultaneously in any form of communication. Politeness is patently a delicate equilibrium between the two, so that we can say “*There is no faceless communication*”.

1.3 Schmidt’s communicative move and proposal for a new definition of Austin’s total speech act

This chapter deals with the main developments Austin’s formulation of the total speech act had through the work of diverse scholars. Considering Searle’s theory on indirect speech acts, Grice’s cooperation principle, Lakoff’s politeness principle and Leech’s tact maxim, going in depth into the concept of face, in particular in its negative and positive aspects allowed us to observe the speech act in all its facets. To this picture I would like to add Schmidt’s enlightening concept of communicative move.

According to E. Schmidt (1990), and before him, Bateson (1972) every form of human communication can be considered as a sequence of communicative moves (it is evident here the influence of Wittgenstein in considering conversation, and language in general, not as an interplay of meanings, but rather as a game of chess, in which the meaning of each pawn is not given by its shape, but rather by its use in the context of a game, to achieve a certain goal). In this view everything we say carries at least two meanings: one concerns the objective content of the proposition, whereas the other informs the hearer about the definition that the speaker gives of

himself, of the interlocutor and of the relationship existing between them. Schmidt argues that there are basically two kinds of relationships communicative moves can represent or hint at: a complementary and a symmetric relationship. In a complementary relationship one of the two speakers is in an “up” position, has the power to take decisions and to set the rules of the game whereas the other is “down”. Conversely, in a symmetric relation the two persons consider themselves as being on the same level, with equal rights and the same decisional power. Social life requires the ability to quickly shift from a kind of relationship to another, choosing from time to time the best interaction modality.

This theory in my opinion perfectly integrates Austin and Searle’s portrait of the complex phenomenon of language. As a matter of fact, in the course of his lectures Austin had warned his students against the easy identification of the force with the “use” of an utterance, claiming several times that what he puts at the heart of his conception of language is conventionality, or, in other words, the social agreement on the force of an utterance. At the same time, he said he was not going to take into consideration the “uses” of language, mentioning as examples the use of language to do poetry, to make jokes, to be ironic, to insinuate. His argumentation, therefore, seems to ignore the fact that every time we utter a speech act with a certain sense and reference, with a certain force and a certain effect on the hearer, we are also *using* that particular act as a move in the context of a conversation, i.e. to interrupt, to break the ice, to take leave.

In sum, taking the structure Austin gives of a total speech act, as:

- a **locutionary act**, which includes the act of uttering some words that belong to a certain vocabulary and conforms to a certain grammar, with a more-or-less definite sense and reference;
- an **illocutionary act**, whereby, in virtue of the force of the utterance, we perform actions such as asking or answering a question, giving information, advising, ordering, promising, threatening, suggesting;
- and a **perlocutionary act**, which consists in producing (also unintentionally) certain effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, of the speaker, or of other persons...

we should at least add:

- a **para-locutionary act**, which consists in using (almost always unintentionally) a certain intonation and tone of voice, certain gestures, pauses of a certain length, facial expressions, which are often and erroneously thought to cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. This point cannot be neglected, first of all because it has been calculated that in everyday normal interaction 75-80 % of the information comes from what we see and only 20-25 % from what we hear, and secondly because any speech act can radically change the way in which it is to be understood if uttered with a tone of voice or a facial expression which is radically in

contrast with the “apparent” force of the speech act. For instance, an utterance as “I advise you not to do that”, hissed with an angry expression is clearly not to be taken as a piece of advice, but rather as a threat.

- a **move-locutionary act**, whereby the speaker *uses* that particular utterance at a specific point in conversation as a pawn’s move on a chessboard. This dimension of language had already been considered by Jakobson as he spoke of the “phatic function” of language, whereby the speakers do not exchange any particular information but only establishing, prolonging, or discontinuing communication. Typical examples are “Nice day”, “Terrible weather”, “Take care”, “You don’t say”!: in these cases it is rather clear that the primary function of these utterances is not that of commenting on the weather, giving an order or contradicting the interlocutor, but rather ways to get in touch, take leave or expressing surprise;
- and a **relationship-informative act**, whereby, by means of all the other aspects of the act, the speaker is giving information about how he conceives the relationship between himself and the interlocutor(s).

Taking everything into consideration, taking as an example the speech act “I do trust him”, uttered by the boss of a company during a meeting in which the managers are discussing a cut of the staff, realizes following acts (my proposals are marked with a darker colour):

Para-locutionary act*	To utter those words, say, with an imperative tone of voice, perhaps banging one’s fist on the table, with a resolute expression.
Locutionary act	To pronounce the sounds “I do trust him”, meaning by “him” a specific employee and by “I trust” the fact that the speaker holds this person in great esteem.
Illocutionary act (Primary force / Secondary force)	The utterance appears at a first glance as an assertion, a description of a mental status and of a psychological disposition towards the person at issue, but, pronounced when somebody else is questioning the employee’s honesty, it surely carries the secondary force of taking position against a possible dismissal. This could be classified by Searle as an “indirect speech act”, since the speaker expresses, so to say, just the sincerity condition of the true act, and expects, in virtue of what Grice defined the Maxim of Relevance, that other people interpret the true force of the act. In this case, since the speaker has the last word in deciding the personnel, this secondary force can be considered an order to keep that employee.
Perlocutionary act	To convince the board of directors of the reliability of the employee.

Move-locutionary act*	The boss could burst out with this assertion during a heated discussion of the board, interrupting everyone’s talk. The move-locutionary act will be that of imposing one’s own turn take upon the others’ one.
Relationship-informative act*	In this way the boss is also asserting himself as being in an “up” position with respect to all the other members of the board and defining his relation with the board as a complementary one.

Chart 1. Proposal for a new definition of the “total speech act”

All things considered, we could state that Schmidt’s merit is that of having spotted the fact that every speech act can also be considered in terms of the use that the speaker makes of it at that particular point of the conversation. He is also right when asserting that everything we say not only reveals the opinion we have of ourselves, of our interlocutor and of the relationship existing between us, but also moulds the relation itself, for example by confirming and consolidating an already established complementary relation, bringing it to a more symmetric level, or moving towards an “up” position (something which can lead to an escalation towards the “up” position).

Nonetheless, his choice to univocally link the dimension of the “use” with the information about the relationship appears to be slightly simplistic, since, at a closer look, we could state that all the elements of a speech act can be indicative of the degree of familiarity existing with the interlocutor and of the speaker’s opinion about him. In fact, sometimes it can be the locution that seems to carry this “plus” information (for example because the speaker mentions taboo subjects that could be used only with people very close to him/her), sometimes it is the para-locutionary act that reveals the speaker’s attitude towards the hearer (e.g. because she/he speaks imperiously). Then again, it could be the illocution (an illocutionary point as “asking for permission” may for instance hint at a “down” position) or even the force, meant as directness, explicitness, or the level of politeness that are meaningful in this sense. Last but not least, the move-locutionary act (as we have defined it) may as well effectively play a major (and sometimes, leading) role in the characterization of the relationship.

1.5 Politeness in Western linguistic tradition

The aim of this section was to show the reader the research made in order to answer the first question the analysis of *How to do things with words* provoked, namely how indirect formulations of speech acts are to be interpreted and classified. Not surprisingly, this overview brought us to delineate the so called “ethnocentric Anglophone cultural point of view” (Wierzbicka 1985) on

politeness. As a matter of fact, in the Western world politeness is usually associated with indirectness, as application of Lakoff's rule 1 and 2, Leech's tact maxim, and Brown and Levinson's concept of negative face. Deference is expressed, as Brown and Levinson point out, through a voluntary violation of Gricean Maxims, thus inviting conversational implicatures, that allow the sender not to make assumptions about the hearer, not to coerce him/her, and in general, to minimize every kind of "face threat"⁸. As Goffman (1967, p. 30) explains:

"Tact in regard to face-work often relies on its operation on a tacit agreement to do business through the language of innuendo, ambiguities, well placed pauses, carefully worded jokes, and so on. The rule regarding this unofficial kind of communication is that **the sender ought not to act as if he had officially conveyed the message he has hinted at**, while **the recipients have the right and the obligation to act as if they have not officially received the message** contained in the hint. Hinted communication, then, is deniable communication; it need not be faced up to. It provides a means by which the person can be warned that his current line or the current situation is leading to a loss of face, without this warning itself becoming an incident".

As anticipated before, the universality of this framework has been more and more criticized and different studies dealing with speech acts have underlined the culture-specificity of speech acts behaviour. The next chapter will be devoted to an introduction to this new perspective, something which will help the reader to better frame my study in the context of cross-cultural pragmatics.

⁸ For a definition of the term, see below.

2. Different cultures, different languages, different speech acts⁹

2.1 Culture's specificity of speech acts behaviour

Searle 1969 stated that to speak a language means to commit oneself to a form of behaviour which implies the respect of some constitutive rules¹⁰ (as the one, for example, that tells that if I promise, I am obligated), which are manifested, or realised, through conventions. This assumption was the same Austin gave as unquestionable. In fact, even if it is true that certain illocutionary acts can be performed even outside of a language, thus without the need to recur to certain conventions or rules (when sitting at a table, pointing at something can generally function as a request), it is undoubted that illocutionary acts find their reason of being only within the frame of the conventions of a language, and only appealing to those rules they can be performed. But what if not only the way to convey an illocutionary force differed, but also the conventional illocutionary force entailed in a speech act varied across languages and cultures?

Searle was the first to answer, even if indirectly, to this question. Despite the criticism he received for his concept of the universality of constitutive rules of language and of conventional indirectness as a way to express politeness, he is one of the first scholars to point to the existence of different interactional stiles, cross-linguistic differences in the selection, distribution, and realisation of speech acts:

“First, imagine that chess is played in different countries according to different conventions. Imagine, e.g., that in one country the king is represented by a big piece, in another the king is smaller than the rook. In one country the game is played on a board as we do it, in another the board is represented entirely by a sequence of numbers, one of which is assigned to any piece that moves to that number. Of these different countries, we could say that they play the same game of chess according to different conventional forms.” (Searle 1969, p.39)

Despite the fact that “we are all playing the same game of chess”, the extent to which, in an era of steady cross-cultural encounters, we still fail to comprehend the role the cultural background in communication modes is stunning. As Benedict (1947, p. 13) points out: “One of the handicaps of the twentieth century is that we still have the vaguest and most biased notions, not only of what makes Japan a nation of Japanese but of what makes the United States a nation of Americans,

⁹ This title reminds a section of Wierzbicka (1991), as in my opinion she is the researcher that better grasps and explains the influence of cultures on speech acts and on interaction modalities in general.

¹⁰ Constitutive rules, unlike regulative rules, create the reality they rule and become a condition for its existence. The formulation of a constitutive rule sounds as follow: “X counts as Y in the context CT”. Example: kicking a ball to score a goal counts as playing football.

France a nation of Frenchmen, and Russia a nation of Russians. Lacking this knowledge, each country misunderstands the other”.

As following examples show, the appropriate level of indirectness (example 1), discourse patterns and the placing of important points in conversation (example 2), modalities in the realization of specific speech acts (example 3), and expectations about preferences for negative vs. positive politeness can easily become a matter of intercultural dispute.

1. “- I think that showing consideration for the other means to speak directly and sincerely to the people, I think that going round and round shows lack of consideration, I feel hurt and cheated when I feel that somebody close is trying to tell me something but does not say it, I think that to talk sincerely, directly, is much more civilized, more true. For example I’m always slightly annoyed with Diana [his wife] when, as she always does, she asks me whether I would mind picking up Yaniv [the baby].
- But that’s a nice way to ask; I do not force him, I soften the request, I leave him the choice to agree or disagree”. (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989, p. 66)

2. “Mr Wong and Mr Richardson have a conversation. Mr Richardson has enjoyed the conversation and when they are ready to part he says to Mr Wong that they really should get together to have lunch sometime. Mr Wong says that he would enjoy that. After a few weeks Mr Wong begins to feel that Mr Richardson has been rather insincere because he has not followed up his invitation to lunch with a specific time and place”. (Scollon and Scollon 1995, p. 5)

3. «One morning, Mrs G., a native speaker of English now living in Israel, was doing her daily shopping at the local supermarket. As she was pulling her shopping cart she unintentionally bumped into Mr Y., a native Israeli. Her natural reaction was to say “I’m sorry” (in Hebrew). Mr Y turned to her and said, “Lady, you could at least apologise”. On another occasion the very same Mr Y arrived late for a meeting conducted by Mr W (a native speaker of English) in English. As he walked into the room he said “The bus was late”, and sat down. Mr W. obviously annoyed, muttered to himself “These Israelis, why don’t they ever apologize!” ».
(Olshtain – Cohen, 1989 p. 53)

4. “Mr Richardson: - By the way, I’m Andrew Richardson. My friends call me Andy. This is my business card.
Mr Chu: - I’m David Chu. Pleased to meet you, Mr Richardson. This is my card.
Mr Richardson: - No, no. Call me Andy. I think we’ll be doing a lot of business together.
Mr Chu: - Yes, I hope so.
Mr Richardson (reading Mr Chu’s card): “Chu, Hon Fai”. Hon-Fai, I’ll give you a call tomorrow as soon as I get settled at my hotel.
Mr Chu (smiling): Yes, I’ll expect your call”. (Scollon and Scollon 1995, p.122)

In example 1, Dina (brought up in France) and Yoel (a native Israeli) differ in their opinion in regard to social meaning of conventional indirectness. Dina’s conception of “being tactful” reflects Leech’s definition: it means leaving the husband the option to refuse, avoiding coerciveness. Yoel, on the contrary, finds Dina’s indirectness as offensive, as he proceeds from the assumption that “politeness is irrelevant between intimates”. He expects her to come directly to the point; for him, only this type of directness¹¹ would count as showing consideration¹¹. In case 2, Mr Wong will expect Mr Richardson’s appointment to lunch together, since the latter mentioned this possibility at the end

¹¹ See p. 54 for a similar example provided by Lakoff (1973).

of the conversation. In the new definition of a speech act proposed (see p. 17-18) we could say that Mr Richardson interpreted the force of the utterance as that of a real invitation. Mr Richardson, on the other hand, used it as what he thought would have been a nice way to parting, with friendly feelings towards each other. In my framework, he *used* the utterance as a move to take leave gracefully. Case 3 also illustrates how the conventional ways to apologise in a language (stating the sincerity condition for English and just giving the reason for the offence in Israeli) can result, if compared, in cultural stereotypes. Case 4, at last, pertains a substantial difference in the expectations of which face relationship should be used in an initial business meeting. Mr Richardson prefers close, friendly, egalitarian relationships in business meetings; in a word, he wants to create a symmetrical solidarity relationship. That is why he suggests to be called “Andy” and calls Mr Chu by his first name. At the same time, he does not want to use the name “David”, which he judges to be an unnecessary Western imposition: he addresses Mr Chu by “Hon-fai”. Mr Chu, conversely, prefers an initial business relationship of symmetrical deference, and feels quite uncomfortable in being treated with such familiarity by a stranger, that is why he smiles.

Moreover, if we refer to the model of analysis of a speech act presented at p. 17-18, we reach the conclusion that the connection between a locutionary act and an illocutionary act, or between an illocutionary act and a perlocutionary act, or between a move–locutionary act and his interpretation as signalling an “up” or a “down” position is by no means universal and fixed. For instance, the speech move of expressing disagreement is classified by Schmidt among the speech move leading to an “up” position. Nevertheless, as Balboni (1999) notes, this seems to be true only for some cultures, where the act of disagreeing must be concealed as “partial agreement”. In some others, as for instance (as far as I am concerned) the Italian one, the fact of freely expressing disagreement is perfectly normal, or, in better words, it is the expression of a value (freedom of thought and expression) that has to be preserved and sometimes even emphasised¹², as in a sort of “dialectical game”. It also acts as an appreciation of the interlocutor who is judged worthy of debate.

What is more, if an Italian speaker agrees with what the interlocutor said for the 90%, he/she is likely to immediately focus on the 10 % that he/she disapproves and try to clarify it, assuming that it is obvious that the 90% which he/she does not comment on is a shared opinion. Balboni explains this habit with the fact that in the Italian culture there is the idea that “silence gives consent”. For the same reason, during a conversation, the need to show agreement with the hearer’s

¹² As Voltaire said: “I do not agree with what you have to say, but I’ll defend to the death your right to say it.” It could be highlighted here that in this case the Italian culture seems to prefer expression of “negative politeness” (accepting the divergence of opinions), whereas for other aspects it certainly requires forms of “positive politeness” (as for example in the rules of hospitality).

opinion is rarely perceived and, on the contrary, every redundant expression of approval (including repetition of points already made by the interlocutor, which is not so rare in some cultures) is perceived as a superfluous exercise of style. The same observation can be made for the illocutionary act of ordering, which falls within the scope of my analysis. As, again, Balboni (1999) notes, this act is commonly accepted in the Italian and in many other oriental cultures if it comes from a superior; whereas in many other cultures the best (and sometimes, the only) way to express an order is to mask it as a piece of advice or as a suggestion, as in the English expression “I think you should”.

After reading all these considerations about the relativity of speech act behaviour, one could be tempted to think that in the end no deep understanding of the other is possible. As a matter of fact, languages up to now do not have any device that allows their speakers to univocally interpret the force being conveyed, or the type of politeness expressed. The best solution seems to be education. Turning to example number 2, if both Mr Wong and Mr Richardson were informed about what the other’s person’s expectations are, then Mr Richardson will know that Mr Wong pays attention to what comes at the end of a conversation, and Mr Wong will know that Mr Richardson communicates important points at the beginning of the meeting. But have we really fixed things? According to Scollon and Scollon (1995 p. 12), yes, we do, since now they will probably pay closer attention to topics both at the beginning and at the end of a conversation and, most importantly, they will hesitate to draw any negative conclusions about the actions of the other, since they now know how to interpret each other’s moves correctly.

2.2 The importance of cross-cultural pragmatics for language education

“Perhaps the fascination that the study of cross-cultural pragmatics holds for language teachers, researchers, and students of linguistics in general stems from the serious trouble to which pragmatic failure can lead. No “error” of grammar can make a speaker seem so incompetent, so inappropriate, so foreign as the kind of trouble a learner gets into when he or she doesn’t understand or otherwise disregards a language’s rule of use”. (Rintell-Mitchell 1989, p. 248)

This statement perfectly pinpoints one of the reasons why one of the best answer to the question “Which linguistic abilities school-education in a foreign or second language should promote?” seems to be, besides teaching students how to express themselves fully and correctly in the foreign language, to provide them with the tools that make them feel confident in whatever social situation they can come across. These tools are part of a knowledge of cultural-based specific norms underlying communication and interpersonal relationships (in native speakers very often subconscious and not necessarily alike) involving awareness about speech acts, conversational structure, implicatures and management, discourse organization, and sociolinguistic aspects of

language use. These areas of pragmatic use of language have been ignored by the language teaching curricula for a long time, and, even if attention has increasingly been paid to the pragmatic aspects of language (thus not forgetting the role of the place of the utterance within the discourse, the attitude of the speakers, their relationships, their beliefs and intentions), the ways in which students can acquire a native-like confidence in the performance of what Austin defined “illocutionary acts” are still to be explored fully.

In other words, if we refer to the model of communicative competence elaborated by Balboni (2008) we could state that in school programmes great emphasis has been laid on “how to make language” (mastering the linguistic abilities) and on “knowing the language” (the morpho-syntactic, textual, phonological grammars of a language), whereas little space has been given to “knowing how to act with language” (which includes the social, pragmatic and cultural dimension) and to “knowing the extra linguistics codices” (kinesics, proxemics, vestemics and objectemics).

The fact that foreign or second language learners nevertheless feel the need to be instructed in these aspects as well, if not primarily, is perfectly represented by the anecdote, reported by Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig and Rebecca Mahan-Taylor (2003) of a student asking them if they could teach him “the secrets of English”. Even if the expression “secrets” referred to a language system may sound somewhat naïve or exaggerated, the student in question is not wrong in perceiving the existence of a whole set of implicit rules of linguistic behaviour, the disregard of which can have multiple, sometimes not foreseeable, consequences, that range from prevented understanding to making the speaker appear abrupt, brusque, or rude and uncaring. In particular, Scollon and Scollon (1995) report that many language learners come away from an exchange with native speakers certain that they have used the “right words”, but their intentions have been misunderstood. Native speakers, as well, may come away from such exchanges with the impression that the non-natives are “rude” or “slow” or even “impolite”. The fact that violations of speech acts patterns reflect bad on the learner as a person was perfectly single out by Thomas, who wrote:

“If a non-native speaker appears to speak fluently, (i.e. is grammatically competent), a native speaker is likely to attribute his/her apparent impoliteness or unfriendliness, not to any linguistic deficiency, but to boorishness or ill-will. While grammatical error may reveal a speaker to be a less than proficient language-user, pragmatic failure reflects badly on him/her as a person....Pragmatic failure, then, is an important source of cross-cultural communication breakdown” (Thomas, 1983)

On the other hand, contact with the target language and native speakers in and out of the classroom does not prove to be sufficient for learners to acquire the pragmatics of the target language on their own: what is essential is a specific input, that is to say chunks of language available for observation, discussion on the possible interpretations and exercise to make the performance of the required speech act as fluent and automatic as possible.

This is exactly the aim instructional techniques about speech acts pursue: to instill within learners appropriate language behaviour, in particular, speech act behaviour. In this regard, in his paper “Pragmatics – the third linguistic dimension” (1973) Werner Hüllen argued that foreign language teaching must enable students not only to make propositional statements but also to attach to such statements certain communicative values, i.e. to perform through their utterances propositional and illocutionary acts (p. 93). Moreover, it seems to be advisable for teachers to include in the language teaching curricula specific activities concerning the interpretation and the use of politeness in utterances.

Nevertheless, the chief goal of pragmatics instruction must not be that of imposing native norms on the learner. The teacher provides thorough information on the way in which a native speaker expresses certain intentions and performs a speech act, and creates the conditions for enough linguistic practice, but the final decision about whether or not following the target culture rules should be left to students. As Thomas (1983) pointed out: “It is the teacher’s job to equip the student with the tools to express her/him in exactly the way s/he chooses to do so – rudely, tactfully, or in an elaborate polite manner. What we want to prevent is her/his being unintentionally rude or subservient (p. 96)”.

But before teachers and language syllabus designers can devise successful instructional techniques on speech acts, linguists are expected to address the issue of appropriate speech at behaviours more carefully and more systematically. Along this line are to be seen a number of empirical studies on speech act behaviour, the most comprehensive of which, both for its breadth and depth, has been the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (hereafter CCSARP).

2.3 Review of literature

2.3.1 The CCSARP

Originally devised by Shoshana Blum-Kulka and Edite Ohlstein in 1982, the CCSARP was set up in 1984 to investigate cross cultural and intra-lingual variation (situational, individual) in two speech acts: requests and apologies. These two speech acts were chosen because they both constitute face-threatening acts *par excellence*, since they both concern events that are costly to the hearer, even if in markedly different ways. In fact, the request is a pre-event requiring a future effort from the interlocutor while the apology is a post-event (Leech, 1980) whereby the speaker tries to make up for some previous action that interfered with the hearer’s interests. The main goal of the project was to establish patterns of realization of these two speech acts under different social constraints across a number of languages and cultures. The study was designed in order to allow

reliable comparability both along the situational (sociopragmatic), cultural and native/non-native axes. The language and the scholars involved in the project were:

1. Australian English – Eija Ventola;
2. American English – Nessa Wolfson and Ellen Rintell;
3. British English – Jenny Thomas;
4. Canadian French – Elda Weizman;
5. Danish – Claus Faerch and Gabriele Kasper;
6. German – Juliane House-Edmondson and Helmut Vollmer;
7. Hebrew – Shoshana Blum-Kulka and Elite Ohlstein;
8. Russian – Janny Thomas.

The group of respondents varied for each language and comprised an equal number of male and female university students in their second and third years of study in any subject but linguistics. Half of the informants were native speakers and half non-native. Blum-Kulka and his colleagues were perfectly conscious of the fact that the best methodology to do sociolinguistic research is to collect data from “natural” conditions and that their goal should be that of observing “the way that people use language when they are not being observed” (Labov, 1972, p.209). Nevertheless, the CCSARP aimed at getting a large sample of responses and this would have been virtually impossible in those circumstances. For this reason, they prepared a discourse completion test (DCT) in English, and administered it to a group of fifty native English speakers at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. After this pilot test they made some more adjustments and improvements, and finally translated and distributed the final version of the questionnaire among the members of the research group. The test consisted of 16 scripted dialogues that represented socially differentiated situations, half of which were designed to elicit requests, the other half apologies. All dialogues contained a response¹³ to the missing turn which signaled illocutionary uptake. In terms of content, the proposed dialogues reflected everyday pragmatic situations which students might come across. Every dialogue was preceded by a short description of the setting, the role relationship between the participants, and provided the necessary context for the realization of the speech act.

The situations planned to elicit requests were:

- S1. A student asks his roommate to clean up the kitchen the latter had left in a mess the night before;
- S3. A young woman wants to get rid of a man pestering her on the street;
- S5. A student asks another student to lend her some lecture notes;

¹³ As we will see in section 4.2.2, p. 62, this choice quickly revealed its drawbacks, to such an extent that some scholars, in particular Ellen M. Rintell and Candace J. Mitchell, chose to eliminate the line of dialogue given after the blank line, in the – in my opinion – justified fear that it could influence the subject’s response rather than clarify what was expected.

- S7. A student asks people living on the same street for a ride home;
- S9. An applicant calls for information on a job advertised in a paper;
- S11. A policeman asks a driver to move her car;
- S13. A student asks a teacher for an extension on a seminar paper;
- S15. A university professor asks a student to give his lecture a week earlier than scheduled.

All the so collected data were analyzed by native speakers in the respective countries. The process of developing a coding scheme with its major categories and sub-classifications represented the greatest challenge for this research. Originally, the categories were defined on the basis of general theoretical considerations and previous research by members of the team, and further modified and refined so that it could fit the data gathered in the different languages. This joint attempt to systematize the huge amount of utterances elicited resulted in the CCSARP Coding Manual, a guide presenting all the steps to take, the perspectives through which to observe the utterances and the coding categories to apply when handling speech acts realizations. While the main categories are considered as universals, the minor categories can vary in availability and relevance cross-linguistically and cross-culturally. The authors admit that a possible source of confusion in their coding system could be the fact that the definition and establishment of categories was carried out sometimes according to formal (linguistic), sometimes according to functional aspects of language. Nevertheless, they claim that embracing both dimensions in a single analytical framework was more productive.

The scheme of analysis of the CCSARP is exactly the same I applied in my research. Requests are classified into a nine-point scale of mutually exclusive categories ranging from the most direct (almost imperative) to the most indirect (mild hints). Scholars also considered the choice of perspective as an important source of variation in requests as well as the internal and the external modifications.

The results of this study revealed that it is possible to detect distinct cultural codes of requestive behaviour, which in turn indicate the existence of different interactional styles. The findings point to interesting cross-cultural differences in directness levels: from among the five languages examined, Argentinian Spanish speakers were found to be the most direct, followed by speakers of Hebrew. The least direct were Australian English speakers. Speakers of Canadian French and German were placed in the middle of the continuum of directness. Speakers of German, on the other hand, were found to employ more request modifications than all other languages. The results also showed that cultural factors interact strongly with situational ones. For example,

Ohlstein's investigation on apologies indicated that apologies strategies in Hebrew, Australian English, Canadian French and German followed common trends across different situations¹⁴.

The CCSARP also took into consideration interlanguage realizations. From this point of view, the CCSARP confirmed the by now established belief according to which even the communicative acts of advanced learners regularly contain pragmatic errors. Furthermore, they often fail to convey or comprehend the intended illocutionary point or the politeness value. The CCSARP analysis on interlanguage pragmatic phenomena revealed that not only learners' groups deviate systematically from native use, but they also deviate from each other in the pragmatic errors they commit, according to the language they study and their mother tongue. For instance, Blum Kulka and Ohlstein 1984 found out that learners requests are often longer than native speakers' ones. Verbosity characterizes Hebrew learner's oral production since they tend to embed their request in lengthy explanations and justifications. House and Kasper also discovered that non-natives generally opt for major levels of directness and Danish learners use more lexical mitigation than British native speakers.

Over and above the specific results the CCSARP yielded, its huge merit has been that of shedding light on important issues of contrastive pragmatics, above all on the question of universality. In other words, the hamletic doubt underlying this type of research has always been whether it is possible to find basic pragmatic features for given speech acts expected to be manifested in all natural languages. Blum Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) admit that, since their study is a particular ambitious undertaking, a certain degree of caution is to be called for before drawing any type of conclusion. Nevertheless, we can reasonably conclude that the idea of the presence of universal features in all languages is for some aspects validated, since it was possible to create and employ a unique empirical framework, which proved to be valid also in my study.

On the other hand, and this is perhaps the most important outcome, it has become evident that interactional styles form part of a cultural ethos and thus the meanings attached to particular speech acts or communicative moves are attached to culture-specific values. All things considered, the CCSARP demonstrated that notions of politeness are culturally relativized and similar choices on the directness levels may carry differentiated meanings for the eight cultures examined.

2.3.2 Selected review on other contrastive studies concerning requests

The directive speech act constitutes a key "move" in communication not only for its massive use, but also because its intrinsic reason of being (demanding something from the hearer) makes it

¹⁴ The same conclusions could be drawn, as we will see, from the present study.

one of the most (negative) face threatening acts speakers and learners of a language are likely to perform in their everyday life. For this reasons it is not surprising that several research studies have been conducted with the aim of shedding light on this topic. More specifically, scholars' attention has developed towards two areas of concern: interlanguage pragmatics and contrastive pragmatics.

Interlanguage pragmatic studies flourished since the early 80s with the aim of investigating how foreign and second language learners select and realize speech acts in comparison to native speakers. Walters (1981), Fraser and Nolen (1981), Blum-Kulka (1982), (1983), Blum-Kulka and Levenson (1987), Takahashi and Dufon (1989), Eslamirasekh (1993), Takezawa (1995), Cenoz and Valencia (1996), and more recently Majeed Al-Tayib Umar (2004), Takezawa (2005) and Tatton (2008) provided valuable insights into important factors intervening in learners' failures to use or comprehend the speech act of requests, as overgeneralization, simplification and reduction. Thomas (1983) has theorized these phenomena introducing the concept of *sociopragmatic-* (interpretation of the relevant situational factors on the basis of learners' native sociopragmatic norms) and *pragmalinguistic transfer* (in which native procedures and linguistic means of speech act performance are transferred to interlanguage communication). Likewise, the role of the *waffle phenomenon*, according to which students' present pragmatic behaviour which is different from both the L1 and the L2 and seems to be characteristic to interlanguage, has been highlighted.

However, investigating the obstacles that a learner can face in the path from the pragmatic competence of his/her native language to the pragmatic competence of the second/foreign language is possible only after the differences between the two pragmatic systems have been highlighted. It is also for this reason that I decided to carry out my study in this domain, and for this reason I will outline the main works pertaining to this field¹⁵ and focusing on the speech act of requests.

In German, the most important work on requests was carried out by House and Vollmer (1988), in coordination with the CCSARP. They found out that the heterogeneity of pragmatic behaviour observed in their data and the predominant role played by the situational context suggest that simple frequency counts need to be supplemented by an investigation of how situational features such as participants' relationship influence the realization of requests and apologies. House later compared his data with Kasper's (1981) data and found out that social norms in phrasing requests could be different in German with respect to English.

Single results yielded from English, German, French, Hebrew and Spanish within the context of the CCSARP were also compared by Blum-Kulka and House who ascertained that maximal levels of directness are displayed by speakers of Argentinian Spanish and Hebrew, Canadian French and German speakers occupy the mid-points in the scale of indirectness, whereas

¹⁵ A detailed review of the most interesting studies in interlanguage pragmatics can be found in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989). Furthermore, a recent cornerstone of this line of research can be traced in Trosborg (1995).

English speakers figure in the last position. The results concerning German given by House 1979 and House and Kasper (1981), at the same time, confirmed previous findings which have shown German speakers to opt for higher levels of directness in their requestive behaviours than speakers of (British) English.

As far as Italian is concerned, the only investigation concerning requests was provided by Held Gudrun (1995), who compared, by means of a questionnaire, modalities of realization of requests by French and Italian students. By proposing situations which were intentionally differentiated according to their social weightiness, she wanted to pinpoint politeness strategies and their correlation with the imposition involved in the speech act. Her data, though analysed in a different framework as that of the CCSARP, revealed a marked preference for supportive acts (disarmers, grounders), or modality markers (as minimizers, polite past tense, or relativizing adverbs) as elements in the utterance elicited to be responsible for a politeness effect. Moreover, also emphasisers and maximisers (in my study the so called “upgraders”) are often used in order to strengthen personal involvement and credibility of statements that would otherwise sound too “chilling” to the Italian ear. Not surprisingly, in the contribution Held wrote in the volume “Politeness in Western Europe”, entitled “Politeness in Italy: the Art of Self-Representation in Requests”, she goes to such lengths as to state that

“combining *garbo* and *virtuosità*, Italians are absolute artists of the effective verbal *compiacimento*, the character of which constitutes a great deal of the proverbial *dolce vita* and associated forms of happiness and warmth” (Held 1993, in Hickey and Stewart 2005, p. 295).

In the same volume, phenomena of politeness in German are examined by House in the article “Politeness in Germany. Politeness in Germany?”. Even if the scope of her analysis does not coincide primarily with the speech act of requests, but concerns rather a whole set of discourse structures, it could be worth noticing that she observes a widespread tendency towards content oriented strategies, e.g. introducing the topic and expanding it, but a reduced use of interpersonally active strategies, such as anticipatory moves, availability checks, moves seeking pre-commitment or disarming moves¹⁶. In her conclusions she gives precious insights into the historical and cultural roots of German speech community, which appears to prefer directness, explicitness, detailed references, avoidance of “small talk” and routine formulations over “serious” talk and *ad-hoc* utterances as markers of politeness.

Differences in requestive strategies in English and Polish are studied by Wierzbicka (1985). Analysing pragmatic behaviour of the two languages she understood that while English speakers make extensive use of interrogative and conditional forms, Polish ones rather rely on imperatives to convey a request, since the interrogative is often associated with hostility and alienation. The

¹⁶ As we will see below, this finding will be confirmed in my investigation.

researcher realized that features of English, which have been claimed to be due to universal principles of politeness by influential theories of speech acts, are in reality language-specific and culture specific, and they are also shown to be due to aspects of culture rather than mere norms of politeness. On these solid assumptions she developed a strong criticism towards anglo-centric theories of politeness which led her to further develop the topic of the interaction between cultural values and language in the volume “Cross-cultural pragmatics. The semantics of human interaction”¹⁷ (1991), which is also a crucial work for anybody who wants to approach the theme of contrastive pragmatics.

Polish requests have also been investigated by Eva Ogiermann (2009) who, investigating English, German, Polish and Russian requests, discovered that the preference for direct vs. conventionally indirect strategies across languages follows a distributional pattern which seems to be in accordance with the geographical position of the countries where the data were collected. In fact, the use of imperative constructions rises considerably from West to East. This results convinced her of Wierzbicka’s assumption that viewing pragmatic clarity and directness as a lack of concern for the hearer’s face is an interpretation reflecting Anglo-Saxon cultural values.

Other contrastive studies concerning requests are: El-Shazly (1993) for American English and Egyptian Arabic, Kim (1995) for American English and Korean, Fukushima (1996) for British and Japanese, Li-Li (2008) for Chinese and English.

From a survey of the above mentioned literature it is clear how speech acts are essentially governed by a systematic set of community-specific rules. The aforementioned studies demonstrate scholars’ awareness of the fact that violation or ignorance of these rules are bound to create some serious communication problems, which in the end may confirm stereotypes and result in racism, discrimination and hatred between nations. Intercultural and cross-cultural pragmatics represent the first step towards the avoidance of these misunderstandings.

Along this line comes the current study, as an investigation into the request strategies used by Italian compared to German speakers, used under the same social constraints. How such a framework of analysis looks like is described in detail in the following chapter.

¹⁷ For more insights into this work see section 3.7, this paper.

3. The requestive speech act: A definition

3.1 Why investigating requests?

There seem to be many reasons why requests have deserved the attention and the investigation of scholars and researchers in philosophy of language, intercultural communication, cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics. The first reason is the fact that requests are one of the speech acts which are most frequently used in everyday human interaction. The huge role requests play in life is easy to detect just by thinking about the countless needs we are likely to have in the course of a day, the greatest part of which require the intermediation, the support, or even the assumption of whole responsibility of another person. Needless to say, the great impact requests can have in a learner's experience in a foreign country and in conversation with native speakers has aroused the interest of language educators and of devisers of language education curricula, who rely on linguists for the investigation of these matters.

The second reason is that requests are by no means so clearly distinguished from other kinds of directives. The feature "benefit to speaker, cost to hearer" certainly helps in distinguishing requests from other acts in which the speaker tries to exert his/her influence over the hearer. Nevertheless, let us consider following examples (Trosborg 1995, p. 189):

1. Would you mind cutting the grass? (Request).
2. Wouldn't it be a great idea to cut the grass? (Suggestion).
3. I think you'd better cut the grass (before it gets too long) (Advice).
4. If you don't cut the grass it'll get too long. (Warning).
5. If you don't cut the grass you won't get your pocket money. (Threat).

These utterances show that what is considered to be a request may very often be presented as a suggestion, an advice or a warning (thus pretending that the requested act is for the "common good" or in the interest of the hearer).

The third reason is implicit in the situation that can give rise to a request, namely a situation of inequality: the requestee has something that in that particular moment the requester has not, or has the authority/the possibility/the ability to do something that the speaker cannot do. Consequently, natural circumstances put the requestee on a condition which is superior to that of the requester. That is why, if the speaker issues the request in a tactful and polite way (and in a world of complete equality, this would be the only way to achieve something), he/she is simply sticking to the natural scheme of things, and conveys to the hearer a sense of proper deference in virtue of the fact that he/she is *asking* him/her something. In contrast, if he/she issues the request in a way which

seems to be disrespectful and bossy, he/she immediately conveys to the interlocutor the sensation that he/she thinks of himself as superior and therefore worthy of seeing his/her orders executed as soon as they are uttered.

Nonetheless, if we look at requests from “the other side of the coin”, we easily notice that requests may also imply a potential position of superiority on the part of the requester. The dominance may stem from the fact that to ask someone to do something basically means to influence someone’s behaviour so that it fulfils one’s own wishes, to impose, in a certain sense, one’s will upon someone’s other will. This characteristic has led Haverkate (1984) to coin in this regard the definition of “impositive”:

“Impositive speech acts are described as speech acts performed by the speaker to influence the intentional behaviour of the hearer in order to get the latter to perform, primarily for the benefit of the speaker, the action directly specified or indirectly suggested by the proposition” (Haverkate 1984, p. 107, cited in Trosborg, 1995, p. 184).

Consequently, there is strong evidence to claim that, in Brown and Levinson’s terms, requests are likely to threaten the negative face of the interlocutor. The ground is briefly explained: by trying to exercise power or control over the behaviour of the hearer the speaker automatically seems to impinge on the requestee’s freedom of action and freedom from imposition and therefore threatens his negative face. At the same time, also the requester runs the risk of losing face himself/herself, e.g. if the requestee reacts in an unpredictable or embarrassed way, or simply because he/she refuses to comply with the speaker’s wishes (thus leaving the doubt that he judged the request too demanding).

What is more, even if this aspect has not caught scholars’ attention, it seems to me that not only does the speech act “request” represent a possible menace for the “negative” face of speaker or hearer, but also for their “positive” face. In fact, if the requester issues the request in a way which seems to be disrespectful and bossy, she/he not only conveys that he/she does not intend to refrain from impeding the requestee’s freedom of action, but also reveals a low opinion and scarce appreciation of the hearer as a person. At the same time, debasing him/herself at the hearer’s eyes, the careless requester will damage his/her own positive face as well.

All the above mentioned reasons make requests crucial in cross-cultural pragmatics, since it is precisely in this domain that learners and speakers of a foreign language risk to unconsciously and involuntary commit the most serious mistakes.

3.2 What is a request?

Following one of the key principles in Austin's thought, "Words are our tools, and, as a minimum, we should use clean tools"¹⁸, I would like, before going any further into the analysis of the requestive speech act and of its variation in realization patterns between German and Italian, to try and reach a thorough definition of the meaning of the term with which I am going to work.

As a matter of fact, describing the conditions under which we can say that a "felicitous" or "happy" (in Austinian terms) request has been made can be more complicated than it appears at a first glance. A serious attempt has been made by Searle, who in his works "A classification of illocutionary acts" (1976), and "Speech Acts. An Essay in Philosophy of Language" (1969) singles out the criteria that define the speech act "promise" and in so doing identifies the various elements that, together, mould a speech act.

I will now briefly illustrate them, firstly taking into account only the aspects that in my view are relevant for a definition of the directive speech act and secondly specifying their contribution to a clarification of the term. In conclusion, a recapitulatory set of constitutive rules for the speech act "request" is established and consequently, the conditions for the felicity of the speech act at issue are finally formulated.

1. **Point (or purpose) of the (type of) act: ILLOCUTIONARY POINT** The illocutionary point is according to Searle the most important element of force, the essence of the illocutionary act. It should not be confused with the "perlocutionary act"¹⁹ (i.e. the effect/intended effect on the hearer) since not only the perlocutionary effects do not necessarily coincide with the speaker's intention, but also, as Searle notes, the most important illocutionary acts are not associated to a definite perlocutionary intent (e.g. statements, promises). The illocutionary point can be the same for many illocutionary acts and it can be defined as basically the reason why the act is being performed, or, in Austinian words, the action that one is trying to perform when uttering those words.

Directive: To try and **get the hearer to do something.**

2. **DIRECTION OF FIT BETWEEN WORDS AND THE WORLD.** Utterly dependent on the illocutionary point, the direction of fit stands for the way in which the propositional content of the sentence relates with the world. The "word to world" direction of fit (which is

¹⁸ J.L. AUSTIN, *A Plea for Excuses*.

¹⁹ In fact Austin devotes the IX and the X lecture to the full exploration of these concepts.

explicated by Searle through the symbol ↓), is presented by the speech acts that consists in an attempt to describe, with words, an already existent state of affairs. On the contrary, in the “world to word” situation (represented by Searle with the symbol ↑) the purpose of the illocutionary act is to get the world match the words, i.e. to change a state of affairs so that it will fit the words²⁰.

Directive: “World to words”: **to get the world match the words** (what is requested/ordered/suggested).

3. **Expressed psychological state: SINCERITY CONDITION.** This aspect concerns the attitude, the psychological state at the root of the illocutionary act at issue (i.e. an assertion expresses the belief that P and the desire to know the hearer’s opinion about it; a promise or a vow expresses the intention that P; and so on). It is also defined “sincerity condition” since, as Austin (1962 p. 39) pointed out, the person who appeals to the linguistic procedure must have correspondent thoughts, feelings and intentions. If not, the act is none the less performed, but it is referred to by both Austin and Searle as “insincere” or “professed but hollow”²¹.

Directive: desire or want that the hearer does an action.

4. **FORCE OR STRENGTH.** Suggesting and insisting, guessing and swearing, requesting and ordering are all couples of verbs that entail the same illocutionary point, but vary greatly in the level of force with which they are expressed. Even if it is very clear that Searle is not using the term "force" in the broader sense of "illocutionary act that one is trying to perform when uttering those words", it is very difficult to fully grasp this concept. It can be partly identified with the directness of the utterance, but it is more easily and visually detectable as the "intensity" with which the act is performed.

²⁰ A good explanation of this aspect is provided by Miss Anscombe (1957), who writes: “Suppose a man goes to the supermarket with a shopping list given him by his wife on which are written the words ‘beans, butter, bacon, and bread’. Suppose as he goes around with his shopping cart selecting these items, he is followed by a detective who writes down everything he takes. As they emerge from the store both shopper and detective will have identical lists. But the function of the two lists will be quite different. In the case of the shopper’s list, the purpose of the list is, so to speak, to get the world to match the words; the man is supposed to make his actions fit the list. In the case of the detective, the purpose of the list is to make the words match the world; the man is supposed to make the list fit the actions of the shopper”.

²¹ Austin argued that also illocutionary acts are subject to the evaluation in terms of truth/falsity and brings as an example the fact that one can promise to do A but not have any intention to do A, or state that P but not believe that P. He concludes that in these cases a promise and a statement would nevertheless be performed, but they would be, in a way, “false”, that is to say that the speaker’s psychological state would not fit his/her words.

Directive: in the directive category of speech acts **many levels of force are contemplated.** The force is therefore a distinctive character within the directive type and not of the directive type.

5. **STATUS AND POSITION OF SPEAKER AND HEARER.** There are cases in which the position and the role of the speaker seem to play a key role in determining the hearer's interpretation as to which type of illocutionary act has been issued. In other words, the same speech act seems to have a different force or strength depending on the person who utters it. Austin 1962 was utterly conscious of the importance of this aspect, in fact he considered it among the conditions for the felicity of performatives (which he later extended to all types of speech acts): "The particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked" (p. 15). If this rule is not observed the act is a misfire, purported but void (the act does not actually take place). Searle seems to take note only of the need of some kind of "power" held by the person who gives orders or commands, and apparently does not take into account the fact that even to perform a simple speech act as the assertion, one must be, in a sense, "appropriate" (e.g. in order to say "In the other room there are 40 people" I must have had a look at the other room; in the same way, if I say "This music is heavenly" I must not be deaf).

Directives: This aspect is obviously of the utmost importance for directives. As a matter of fact, if the boss asks the cleaning lady to clean up the room, this is likely to be intended as an order or a command rather than a suggestion or a proposal. This deduction cannot be made if the same utterance is issued by a colleague of the lady. In short, the directive "to order, to command", has as a felicity condition the fact that the speaker must be in a position of authority with respect to the hearer²².

6. **RELATION OF THE UTTERANCE WITH THE INTEREST OF THE SPEAKER AND THE HEARER.** Congratulations and condolences, promises and menaces, boasts and laments are all symmetrical acts whose difference is easily perceived as to whether the propositional content, or the state of affairs referred to through the speech act (congratulations: a hearer's success; a promise: something that the hearer wishes to be made, etc.) is or is not in the interest of the speaker or of the hearer.

Directive: Searle includes in the category "directives" both acts that are or would not be at all at cost for the hearer, as "Have a piece of cake" (invite) or "Have a seat" (permission), and acts that imply a "sacrifice" for the hearer. The acts which are the object of my analysis,

²² See also point 9.

requests, are by definition a solicitation of an action that is favourable to the speaker and at cost for the hearer. Requests' interactional characteristics can be schematized as follows:

S wants H to do A	S: Speaker
-----	H: Hearer
A is at cost to H	A: Action

7. **PROPOSITIONAL CONTENT (TEMPORAL SETTING²³) DETERMINED BY THE ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE-INDICATING DEVICE.** The performance of an apology or of a report can only refer to a past action; in a prediction or a menace the action at issue will patently take place in the future. The influence of the illocutionary point to the determination of the temporal reference of the utterance is included by Searle among the "conditions for the propositional content" of utterances.

Directive: The performance of a request implies the fact that the speaker refers to (and wishes) a **future Action** of the hearer.

8. **NEED TO "VERBALIZE" (CORRECTLY) THE ACT.** As Searle notes, some acts must necessarily be speech acts (among these, the most evident ones are Austin's original performatives), others can also be performed silently. Examples of the former type are promising, warning, declaring, apologising whereas estimating, diagnosing, concluding fall under the latter category.

Directive: Even if it is quite obvious that the essential condition for a speech act to come into play is that it must be verbalised, this is particularly true and meaningful for requests. A request **needs to be verbalised**: even if I can silently pray or command someone to do something, in order for my request to be actually performed and to come into effect I need to express it clearly. In fact, from the very moment in which I issue a "felicitous" (in Austin's words, when I execute the procedure both completely and correctly) request, I create a kind of "commitment" for the hearer: he/she now has the full freedom and responsibility to accept, to refuse, to negotiate or simply to ignore my request²⁴.

It goes without saying that when the speaker is not sure about whether nor not to perform the request (due to the potential face-threat) he/she will do it in a way that could be neither correct (e.g. because it is too ambiguous or non-conventionally indirect) nor complete (e.g. because the sentence

²³ It is clear that here Searle refers to the time reference.

²⁴ Nonetheless, it could be argued that non-conventional indirect requests, as hints, do not fully satisfy this condition.

is not completely uttered or what is asked does not fully correspond to what is expected). Austin's perception that these "defects" in the performance of speech acts are so relevant as to invalidate the speech act (defined therefore "purported but void") is confirmed by the common feeling that when responding to such an act, the hearer is less obliged to perform the requested action or to react in any way, since he/she can always justify him/herself by saying "I didn't get it" or by giving the impression of not having interpreted the utterance correctly. As already mentioned in chapter 1, this greater (often apparent) "freedom" on the part of the hearer has led some scholars to think of these kinds of "unfelicitous" acts as a way to redress the potential face-threatening character of requests, that is to say a politeness - strategy.

9. **NEED OF THE EXISTENCE OF AN EXTRA-LINGUISTIC INSTITUTION.** Among illocutionary verbs, there are some acts that need to be uttered by a person in charge of a particular official position: blessing, declaring someone husband and wife, christening, pronouncing guilty, excommunicate, etc. (these illocutionary verbs can be partly identified with Austin's original performatives²⁵). According to Searle (1976, p.6) Austin is responsible for having assumed that this condition is required for whatever utterance. In my opinion, Searle's remark is true only as far as some of the original performatives are concerned: as long as Austin develops the theory of the total speech acts he only considers the necessity for the speaker to retain an appropriate status.

Directive: The speech act of request does not need to be performed by a speaker who is in a particular institutional position, but the situation changes for verbs that express orders, which fall nevertheless under the category of "directive", which are the object of my analysis. An order which will be perceived as actually realized (and thus create a kind of obligation for the hearer) must be issued by a speaker which is endowed either by an institutional position or by a status with the right to give orders, otherwise the "order" will be considered just as a rude request. My analysis aims at taking account of this aspect as well, whereby investigating, in situation 1 and 4, the relationship between directness/force or strength and the difference in institutional position/status²⁶.

Speaking of "extra-linguistic factors" that influence the force of an utterance, Searle (1969, p. 68) draws the reader's attention on a crucial point: most of times it is the context that

²⁵ Olivecrona (1972) as Searle perceives the need to make a clear distinction (which in Austin's theory fades away) between the performatives in a strict sense and the more general illocutionary acts; in his view in fact the former ones give the impression of doing things in a much more deep and notable way than the latter since they were originally thought to provoke not only juridical and psychological effects, but also super-sensible - but not therefore less real - bonds and powers.

²⁶ Note the difference between a status and an institutional position. The faculty to give orders may be held by a police man in virtue of his institutional position, but also by a thief holding a gun, considered his momentary status.

makes clear *what one is doing with words*; it is the context that, satisfying the essential condition²⁷ for the performance of that (and only that) speech act, makes the use of a Illocutionary Force Indicating Device perfectly unnecessary. To put it in another way, if, during an operation, a surgeon says “Bistouries”, it is immediately clear to all the bystanders that he is asking for an instrument, and not, say, naming the objects around him. Searle (1969, p. 69) explains all the “courteous circumlocutions” in the light of this “explicatory function” of the context: indirect formulations of requests as, for instance, questions about the ability of the hearer to perform the actually requested action, are possible and nonetheless effective due to the fact that most of times the context discloses the real force of the utterance.

10. CORRESPONDENCE OF THE ILLOCUTIONARY POINT WITH A PERFORMATIVE VERB. Another aspect considered by Searle as equally important in the characterisation of an illocutionary act is whether the illocutionary force can be made explicit through a performative verb. An act as "I'll be there" can, in fact, be made more explicit with a sentence as "I promise that I'll be there", or "I warn you, I'll be there" but not with the words "I threaten you that I'll be there". In this regard, Austin had made a very perspicuous sociological, or we may even say, ethnological remark whereby connecting the development of language with the development of values and laws within societies. An example of this phenomenon could be: society seems to approve freedom of expression and disagreement, that is why the explicit performative "I contradict you" has developed. But society plainly reproaches insult, that is why the expression "I insult you" does not exist. Austin's vision, that linguistic practices are determined by the customs and the culture of a society, supports the need to investigate the transferability of speech acts among different languages/cultures which the present study tries to meet.

Directive: All the directive verbs seem to correspond to an **explicit performative:** ask, order, command, beg, pray, allow, advice. In attempting to give an explanation in accordance with Austin's theory, we might say that perhaps people have always felt the need to have the linguistic possibility to express as **clearly as possible their needs** in requests, and at the same time to give the hearer the chance to immediately perceive the "way in which their utterance should have been taken".

To summarize briefly the features of a “directive” illocutionary act this scheme could be useful (the symbolism used is the one proposed by Searle):

²⁷ As we will see below, Searle names “essential condition” the fact that the issuing the act B (for instance, the statement “The bull is charging”) counts as C (a warning).

1. ILLOCUTIONARY POINT	Attempt by the speaker to get the hearer do something [(H does A)]
2. DIRECTION OF FIT	World to words (↑)
3. SINCERITY CONDITION	Desire or want [W(H does A)]
4. FORCE OR STRENGTH	Different, from modest to fierce
5. STATUS AND POSITION OF SPEAKER AND HEARER / 6. NEED OF AN EXTRA-LINGUISTIC INSTITUTION	For orders: S has a status or a institutional position that endow him with the faculty to give orders. For invites: S has the faculty to invite H to do H in that particular context. For permissions: S has the power to allow H to do A.
7. RELATION OF THE UTTERANCE WITH THE INTEREST OF THE SPEAKER AND THE HEARER	The action is favourable to the speaker and at cost for the hearer.
8. TEMPORAL SETTING / PROPOSITIONAL CONTENT	The hearer does some future action A.
9. NEED TO "VERBALIZE"	A request must be verbalised or at least expressed through gestures: the point is that it cannot remain unexpressed.
10. CORRESPONDENCE OF THE ILLOCUTIONARY POINT WITH A PERFORMATIVE VERB	All directives seem to correspond to a performative verb, that is to say that it seems to be possible to turn all directive acts into explicit performative acts.

Chart 2. Directive acts: Constativ rules

Using again the symbolism proposed by Searle, we should have the following symbolism:

! ↑ W (H does A)

Some of the features Searle pinpoints as constative of directive acts, together with some of Austin's most interesting remarks on illocutionary verbs in general, can be taken in order to define the "**felicity conditions**" of an act that can be considered a "pure" request²⁸, at least in the sense in which I am considering it for the scope of my analysis.

²⁸ I adopt here sometimes Searle's (1976 p.104), sometimes Austin's (1962) terminology.

1.	Austin	There is an accepted conventional procedure that includes the utterance of certain words by certain persons in those particular circumstances in order to get a particular result
2.	Austin	The particular persons and circumstances must be appropriate for the invocation of that particular procedure.
3.	Austin	There are normal conditions of emission and reception . The act is performed correctly and completely.
4.	Searle	Propositional content condition. The speaker's request concerns a future act of the hearer.
5.a	Searle	Preparatory condition. The hearer has not already done the requested act nor is he/she doing it , or the speaker believes so ²⁹ .
5.b	Searle	Preparatory condition. The speaker believes the hearer is able to perform the requested act .
5.c	My proposal	Preparatory condition. The speaker truly believes that the hearer has the possibility to perform the requested act , that is to say that external circumstances give him/her the power or the free choice to do it.
5.d	Searle	Preparatory condition. It is not obvious that the hearer would perform the requested act without being asked , in the normal course of events.
5.e	Searle	Preparatory condition. The speaker genuinely thinks that the hearer is willing to perform the requested act.
5.f	Searle	Preparatory condition. The speaker thinks that the requested action is at cost for the hearer and favourable to him/herself.
6.a	Searle/Austin	Sincerity condition. The speaker genuinely hopes that the hearer will perform the requested act .
6.b.	My proposal	Sincerity condition. The speaker does not believe that the hearer should have already done the requested act (in this case in fact we could consider the request an indirect (or partial) telling-off). ³⁰

²⁹ As Searle (1976, p. 92) notes, this rule can be interpreted as an example of the least action principle: language, as many other activities, aims at having the maximum result with the least effort; that is why it would be non-sense to tell someone to do something that he/she is already doing.

³⁰ In the choice of the situations to contemplate in the Discourse Completion questionnaire, I chose not to include some of the original situations devised by Blum-Kulka in her CCSARP, 1984, precisely because they were in my opinion partial reproaches.

7.	Searle	Essential condition. The utterance counts as an attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to do the requested action.
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Chart 3. The requestive speech act: Felicity conditions

3.3 The face threat in requests

In the previous section I have outlined the speech act “request” as being an illocutionary act whereby a speaker (requester) communicates to a hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the latter to perform an action A. In order for a directive to be considered a request, and not, say, a permission or an offer, the expected act should also be at cost for the hearer and for the benefit of the speaker. The expected action A is to take place as a post-event with respect to the utterance, either in the immediate future (“requests-now”) or at some later point (“requests-then”). This aspect distinguishes requests, for example, from complaints or apologies, which on the contrary refer to an action that took place before the verbal act of complaining or apologising. What is more, requests may concern material goods, services or favours, as well as verbal answers, as information. It has also been highlighted how, according to Searle, the performance of a sincere request depends on the presence of some beliefs and intentions on the part of the speaker, namely the genuine hope that the hearer will do the requested action, the assumption that the hearer is able to comply with the request, the belief that the hearer will not do the action in absence of a request, or that he/she should already have done it³¹.

In the following sections an attempt will be made to further investigate the phenomenon of requests in particular as far as their potential “face threatening” character is concerned, therefore examining all the possible strategies commonly employed in order to soften the level of imposition on the addressee, the outstanding one being indirectness.

The speech event “request” is such a fascinatingly complex and deeply intricate phenomenon that it is by no means easy to unravel the manifold elements and variables that have a direct influence on the eventuality and on the seriousness of a face threat. Nevertheless, in this section I will try and single out some of – or, at least, in my opinion the more relevant – factors that have an impact in the determination of the risk of a face loss, since it is according to this perception that the speaker will adopt a correspondent strategy to minimize the threat.

If Hymes had pinpointed eight variables of the speech event, namely setting, participants, ends, acts, psychological keys, instruments, (cultural, social) norms and genre, only some of them appear to be involved in the phenomenon “face-threat”. In particular, Brown and Levinson 1987 (p. 74), single out three factors, which they claim to be the most relevant in estimating the seriousness of a face threat, in many and perhaps all cultures.

1. The **rate of imposition** (this can be ascribed to the “ends”): it is the effort the requestee would have to make to comply with the speaker’s request. For instance, when someone asks

³¹ This last condition was added by the Author to those proposed by Searle to clearly distinguish requests from veiled complaints.

someone else the way to the railway-station, the requested act is not likely to threaten the interlocutor's face very much; this is obviously not the case when the solicited action is to lend some money.

2. The **social distance** (in Hymes' words, "participants"): in other words, the degree of familiarity existing between the speaker and the hearer. It goes without saying that the closer the relationship is, the slightest is the possibility of a face-threat taking place. This is given by the fact that the more acquainted with a person one gets, the more ready he/she will be to interpret the other's words favourably, perhaps seeing an apparently rude turn of phrase as justified by rush or by some psychological state of the interlocutor and not as a personal affront.
3. The **power (or status) difference between speaker and hearer** (meant in terms of both "setting" and participants), or, in better words, the (institutional) **additional power the requestee holds** with respect to the speaker. The reason why I choose to focus on the additional power of the requestee is that the likelihood of a face-threat grows as long as the person to whom the face threatening act (hereafter FTA) is addressed is in an "upper" position. As a matter of fact, if we receive an order by a person which we rate to be, due to external circumstances, in a "down" position, we hardly accept it and, even if we do, we will surely feel depreciated and offended. We perceive a face-threat and certainly the requester has, at least for the moment and at our eyes – lost his/her face. This is not the case if the person imparting an order is a superior: in this case we would ascribe his/her "explicitness" to reasonable grounds: rush, need of clarity, the will to give an "aura" of familiarity to the relation.

According to the two authors the weight of a face threatening act can be computed simply adding these three variables, as explicated in the formula:

$$W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$$

Weight of the FTA x = Distance (between speaker and hearer) + Power (that the hearer has over the speaker) + Rate of the imposition (of the act x)

Brown and Levinson admit that probably some more composition of values may be involved in contributing to the seriousness of the FTA, and that the assessment of the various factors may vary across cultures. Nonetheless, these three parameters are claimed to be essential in rating the face threat and therefore the level of politeness with which, other things being equal, an FTA will be communicated.

3.4 Face – work: strategies for requests

As Goffman notes, the maintenance of face is usually a condition of interaction, not its objective. Nevertheless, when some “incidents” occurs and therefore someone’s face is threatened, face-savings practices become the heart of conversation. Interestingly enough, these practices become extremely ritualised and standardised in a society and in its language; in fact they are compared by Goffman to traditional steps in a dance. Every person, every culture seems to have a preference for some face-saving strategies in spite of others, to such an extent that, according to Goffman, knowing this specific repertoire would mean to know how a person or a culture “is really like”.

Goffman uses the term “face work” to designate not only the whole range of practices that are used to counteract “face losses”, but also those used to prevent “face threats”. All members of a social circle are supposed to master at least the basics of face work, which is commonly referred to as “tact”, “savoir-faire”, “diplomacy”, or “social skill”. Problems may arise as long as other people do not attribute to these terms the same meaning we do and at the same time we do not give to other’s acts or strategies the same interpretation they have placed upon them. For this reason, as Goffman suggests, everyone should exercise “perceptiveness”, and in particular, I would dare say, “intercultural perceptiveness”.

When it comes to requests, as perfect examples of FTAs, there is a wide range of possible choices as far as face-work is concerned. In particular, Brown and Levinson set up a model that describes all the options a speaker has when dealing with potential FTAs, reported in Fig. 1.

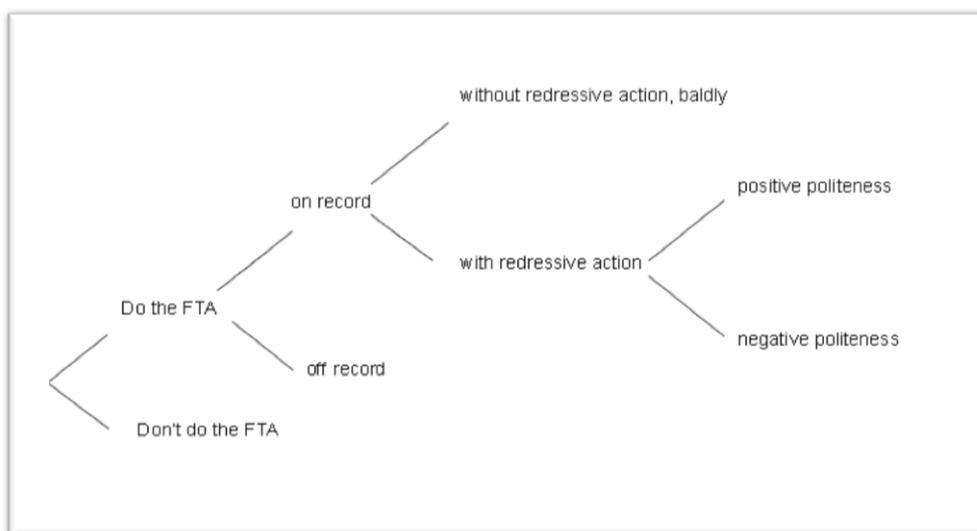


Fig.1 Possible strategies for doing FTAs (Brown and Levinson 1987, p. 69).

To better explain this schema we could take as an example the following scenario: a student is waiting at the bus stop, when he notices that he has no tickets and no money with him. He sees that there is a friend of him who is waiting for the bus stop as well. He would like to ask his friend to lend him a ticket (FTA). He can choose:

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not to do the FTA (avoid the performance of the FTA); • to do the FTA and: 	<p>Walk home.</p> <p>Decide to ask for a ticket or money.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to go off record, that is to say to vaguely hint at the question but without making clear the purpose of his speech act; 	<p>Say “Damn, I have no tickets and I am out of cash, and I absolutely need to catch this bus”.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to go on record: to express his intent openly and unambiguously; and in particular: 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not using any particular strategy to minimize the FTA; i.e. without redressive action, very directly; 	<p>Say “Hey John, hand me a ticket!”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using some kind of redressive action, i.e. any strategy that counteracts the threat to the face. Within this frame, the speaker can employ two types of practices, that refer respectively to: • <u>Positive Politeness</u>, i.e. by emphasising the hearer’s solidarity and validating his self-image; 	<p>Say “Hey John, be a pal and lend me a ticket ‘till tomorrow”.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Negative Politeness</u>; i.e. the speaker demonstrates that he does not mean to invade the addressee’s personal territory and freedom of action. 	<p>Say “I’m sorry to bother you, but could I possibly borrow a ticket until tomorrow”?³²</p>

Chart 4. Strategies for doing a FTA: an example

³² These examples are freely adapted from the ones proposed at http://www.elanguages.ac.uk/los/ma/social_interaction_and_face.html

An immediate clarification is in order. On the basis of empirical work on the performance of requests in different languages (House and Kasper 1981; Blum Kulka, Danet and Gerson 1983, Blum Kulka and Ohlstein 1984, Cenoz and Valencia 1996, etc.) and taking as methodological framework the model for linguistic politeness suggested by Brown and Levinson, scholars working within the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project have reached a common classification of requests that displays three major levels of directness³³. These may help us to better define the three strategies which are most frequently used in order to minimize the face threat.

1. The **direct strategies** (corresponding, in the Brown and Levinson classification, to the “on record, without redressive action” type) are typical of requests that are syntactically marked as, for example, imperatives, or marked by other means, as for instance, performatives (Austin 1962) and hedged performatives (Fraser 1975). The advantage of these forms is that the illocutionary point of the utterance is immediately and easily recognisable; therefore they are usually very effective.
2. The **conventionally indirect strategies** (corresponding to the “on record, with redressive action – negative politeness category”) realize the speech act by ascertaining the existence of preparatory conditions³⁴ necessary for its performance (it should be noted that these strategies are conventionalised in any language; in fact experts do not agree on whether indirect requests should be considered, in Clark’s (1979) terms, “conventions of meaning” or “conventions of forms”. This kind of utterances is the most often relied upon thanks to the politeness and tact it immediately conveys. By questioning the hearer’s ability or willingness to comply with the act, in fact, the requester tells the hearer that he/she does not take compliance for granted, leaves him enough freedom to refuse and even the illusion that it was him/her self who volunteered to do the requested act.
3. The **non-conventionally indirect strategies** (corresponding to the “off record” group) according to which the speaker opaquely hints at the requested acts or give some clues that make the request inferable thanks to the context and basically thanks to the Maxim of Relevance indicated by Grice³⁵. Non-conventionally indirect requests are sometimes thought not to threaten neither the requester nor the requestee’s face, thanks to the possibility they give to simply ignore the request and refrain from compliance. Nevertheless, this mode of realization can also be extremely risky, since they can also be understood as an attempt to make the hearer “volunteer” to do something without even taking the responsibility to ask it. This danger could only be avoided if the relationship presents a strong level of intimacy, if

³³ We will analyse the pros and cons of directness and indirectness in requests in the next section.

³⁴ See chart 17, p. 94.

³⁵ See chapter 1, p. 9.

daily routine or other shared context are available to disambiguate the content, or again, in situations in which non-compliance is likely or the requester needs to be particularly careful and unpretentious.

The fact that the variety of direct and indirect ways for making requests, although in different proportions, seems to be available to speakers of all languages could demonstrate the fact that the need to minimize the imposition involved in the speech act itself is a necessity commonly perceived. As highlighted in the previous sections, one way in which the speaker can redress the invasion into the scope of action of the other is to prefer an indirect formulation to a direct one. Hence, next section will be devoted to an in-depth illustration of how indirectness unfolds in requests, according to Searle (1975).

3.4 How indirectness unfolds in requests

After a brief introduction on the general functioning of indirect speech acts, Searle (1975) focuses his attention on indirect speech acts used with a directive illocutionary point. These, in fact, constitute the most interesting and the most useful area of studying since the normal requirements of politeness make their use necessary in situations in which issuing a flat imperative or an explicit performative would sound awkward or impolite.

After having outlined a classification of all the sentence structures that can indirectly imply a directive illocutionary force, Searle proceeds his analysis in noting or ascertaining eight “facts” about them, sometimes contradicting the opinions which are commonly shared among scholars. The first fact Searle highlights is that these utterances (i.e. sentences like “I would like you to do...”, “Can you...” or “Would you mind if...”) do not entail any imperative intent, the evidence of this being the fact that you can combine them with sentences that deny an imperative intent without inconsistency (e.g. “I’d like you to do X, but I’m not requesting that you do it or ordering you to do it”). Secondly, Searle is rather convinced of the fact that these utterances are by no means ambiguous as far as their illocutionary force is concerned, which is not, at least, literally, imperative or impositive.

Nevertheless and interestingly enough, these sentences are “standardly, ordinarily, normally, indeed – as I shall argue – conventionally” (Searle 1975) used to issue directives, or, in simpler words, to ask someone to do something. The relation existing between this kind of utterances and the directive intent seems to be much more relevant and systematic than the one linking sentences as “I have to study for an exam” and a refusal. This incontrovertible fact is further demonstrated by the

fact that it is not rare to find a “please” at the end of these sentences or preceding the verb, something that unequivocally marks the sentence as having the illocutionary point of a directive.

Having concluded that convention is the reason beyond these utterances, one may be tempted to believe that they are idioms. Nevertheless, as Searle points out, they are not idioms, at least not in the same way idioms as “John kicked the bucket” are; but they are idiomatic expressions. They are idiomatic expressions in the sense that they are idiomatically used as requests and, even if literally they mean something else, they are immediately recognized as requests.

Still, they sometimes also admit literal responses that presuppose that they are uttered literally (e.g. “Why don't you just be quiet?” “Well, there are several reasons for not being quiet”). In fact, there can be cases, even if they are not so common, in which conventionally indirect requests can be pronounced in the literal sense, as for example in the question “Can you reach the salt?”, uttered by an orthopedist wishing to know the medical progress of your arm.

To this end, Searle pinpoints also the fact that the intonation plays a major role in the interpretation of the sentence as having a directive scope or just its literal illocutionary force. The secondary force is only added to the primary illocutionary force, the sentence still “means” what it actually means. The primary illocutionary act is still performed, in all these cases the speaker issues a directive by way of performing a statement, or a question. In fact, a request as “I want you to do X” can be reported both as “He asked me to do X” and “He told me that he wanted me to do X”.

After having outlined all the possible indirect ways in which a request can be performed (thus all the references to preparatory conditions that count as conventional ways to perform requests) the Author wants to reconstruct, step by step, the (mostly unconscious) inferential path through which an interactant, having heard the sentence “Can you pass the salt?” normally and pretty spontaneously reacts passing the salt and not, say, answering “Yes, I think so”, exactly in the same way he had proceeded for the rejection of a proposal. In looking for a possible explanation of this phenomenon, nevertheless, he carefully avoids the temptation of assuming that these utterances carry an imperative force as part of their meaning. The inferential process should therefore, according to Searle, go roughly as follows:

1. *Y has asked me whether I am able to pass the salt.*
2. *I assume that he is cooperating in the conversation and that his question must have some point.*
3. *The context of conversation is not such as to make an interest in my salt-passing ability probable or likely. What is more, the speaker sees whether I am close to the salt or not, so he probably knows that the answer to the question is “yes”.*
4. *Consequently, he probably wants to do something by uttering those words.*

5. *He is trying to ascertain if I am able to do something, a condition which is prior to the performance of any directive illocutionary acts.*
6. *We are at dinner, and people usually use salt at dinner, passing it back and forth (factual background information).*
7. *Hence, he has hinted at the satisfaction of a condition for the performance of a request which is quite likely and sensible in this context.*
8. *From all the above mentioned premises it can be concluded that he is asking me to pass the salt.*

In Searle's way of thinking, the chief motivation for using such indirect formulations is politeness. A sentence in the "Can you..." form can be said to be polite in at least two senses: firstly, it demonstrates that the speaker has not the presumption of knowing Y's abilities, and secondly, this formulation appears to give Y more freedom to refuse. If Y wants to refuse, in fact, he can simply state that it is impossible for him to perform the action.

The last part of Searle's analysis is devoted to the discussion of some problems and some questions left unsolved. The first point that is discussed is how it is possible that, having excluded the possibility of indirect formulations to be imperative idioms, some of them quite easily admit a "please" (like for example "Can you do X, please?") whereas others, that have the same meaning (like "Are you able to do X?") don't. The philosopher solves the question by making a distinction between "conventions of usage" and the "meaning conventions". In his view, this kind of sentences represents an example of "convention of usage" (they are in fact commonly used to make requests), but not of "meaning conventions": they do not carry in fact an imperative meaning. A possible confirmation of this hypothesis would be the fact that literal translations of these utterance from a language to the other do not work always.

The second part of Searle's explanation is that we normally assume that people will speak idiomatically, and, if they don't, we think there must be a reason. That is why, if someone says "Are you able to do X" and not the conventional form "Can you do X", we somehow are lead to believe that there must be something more beyond the surface of words.

After some other remarks on some peculiar aspects and forms of indirect speech acts Searle concludes his analysis with some interesting observations that show that the approach he suggested for the indirect directive speech act would work for other types of indirect speech acts as well. In particular, he notes that a reference to a preparatory condition, for instance that of sincerity, can be used in the performance of any illocutionary act. For instance, "I'm sorry I did it" counts more or less as an apology (even if many scholars and sometimes also common sense would not totally agree), "I believe X" counts as an assertion, "Do you want me to X?" as an offer and so on.

At the end of his exposition, Searle stresses the fact the topic needs further investigation and consideration, since asking ourselves why we assume with a certain certainty that a request has been made if we hear the “Can you...” request is pretty similar to wondering how we know that we have crossed a car if we see a flash light going past us on a highway³⁶.

In my opinion, the foundation of our assumptions, as epistemology would suggest, can be in both cases simply the fact that we have a set of pre-conceptions and pre-experiences of the world according to which a flashing light on a highway is a car and a “Can you...” question is a request.

3.6 Reasons for being indirect

In the previous section it has been argued that in Searle’s view indirect speech acts are almost the only and surely the best choice in dealing with FTAs, since the indirectness serves as a signal of the speaker’s awareness of the intrusion in the private sphere of the addressee, thus forestalling criticism or some other kind of resistance on his/her part.

Similarly, also Brown and Levinson refer to indirect formulations as ways to leave the addressee more freedom to refuse to accomplish with the requester’s needs without sounding uncooperative or unfriendly. Furthermore, they point out that off-record strategies (non-conventionally indirect strategies) could give the addressee the opportunity to seem caring towards the speaker, or to get the credit for being generous and cooperative.

To this position, that basically sees indirectness as a way to increase the addressee’s freedom to refuse, and thus to an increased politeness, concurs Leech’s opinion (1983), according to which indirect illocutions seem to be more polite firstly because the degree of optionality is enhanced, and secondly because the force of an indirect request tends to be diminished and tentative.

In this scenario, as portrayed in graphic 1, indirectness works as a counter-force, which reduces the risk of a face-threat.

³⁶ In epistemologic terms, "how a perceiver recognises an object on the base of an imperfect sensorial input".

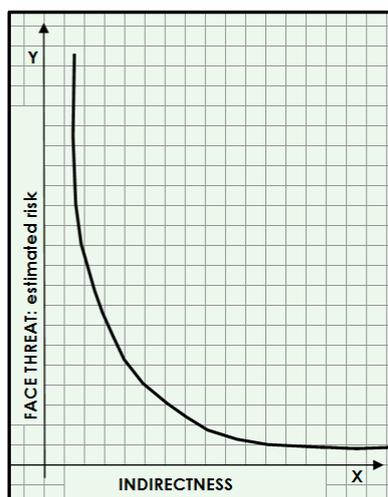


Figure 2 Face-threat and indirectness

In short, as we can grasp from Fig. 2, politeness is considered as the ability to safeguard the interlocutor's face and goes hand in hand with indirectness.

If we take Brown and Levinson's formula for computing the weightiness of a face threat, once conventional indirectness has been applied we could calculate the actual face threat in this way:

$$FT = WA - I$$

Face threat = Weight of the act – (minus) Indirectness

In other words, if in the performance of a request in which the weight of the act is rated ten (taking into consideration the social distance between speaker and hearer, the effort required by the requested action and the possible power difference) if the speaker softens his/her request with a rather indirect formulation, rated, say, nine³⁷, the risk of a face threat should be reduced to one³⁸.

More specifically, Brown and Levinson state that conventionally indirect requests (the ones investigated by Searle) represent the perfect compromise between two tensions: the desire to go on record, thus fulfilling Grice's Maxim of Manner, and the desire to go off-record to avoid imposing. Likewise, Blum-Kulka (1987) investigates the relationship between indirectness and perception of politeness with native speakers of Hebrew and English and takes issue with Leech's idea that indirectness always enhances politeness. In particular, he underlines the fact that lengthening the

³⁷ As we will see, indirectness has been classified into nine categories.

³⁸ This formula obviously simplifies the richness and the variety of a communicative event but is useful to grasp this position and to prepare the ground for the exposition of alternative views which will be illustrated in the next section.

inferential path for the hearer actually increases the imposition on the hearer and therefore decreases the level of politeness. This belief is confirmed by her experiments, where the highest ratings for politeness of both English and Hebrew speakers were granted to conventional indirect strategies and not to hints. According to Blum-Kulka this – and only this – type of requests is seen as polite, since in this way the speaker appears to be indirect (thus conveying the message “Look, I’m violating the Maxim of Manner but just because I rate the Maxim of Tact as more important in this moment”) but at the same time he/she does not burden the hearer with the actual cost of “real” indirectness (something that would happen using off-record strategies). The necessity not to obscure the illocutionary point beyond reasonable limits through face-saving devices was also stressed by Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983), who asserted pragmatic clarity to be an essential element of politeness.

3.7 Reasons for being direct (overcoming Anglo-centrism in the perception of politeness)

Notwithstanding the neat dominance that the perception of politeness as deeply connected with indirectness has in most of scholars’ views, an increasing amount of researchers has pointed out that in some cultures directness is positively associated with honesty and frankness. Furthermore, face wants may not be universally the most valued interactional elements, and other parameters as sincerity or clarity in expression may be preferred over non-imposition. Wierzbicka (1991 p. 90), for instance, draws the reader’s attention on the fact that in the Israeli society people are expected to express freely and bluntly what they want (thus saying, for example “I want you to do x”), what they don’t want (refusals are often expressed by a curt “No”), what they think and what they do not think (thus saying simply “I disagree!”). This open, blunt confrontation is encouraged and cherished as reflection of spontaneity, closeness and mutual trust, all values which indicate an interactional style that we could define “solidarity politeness oriented”.

As far as requests are concerned, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 71) had already highlighted the possible advantages of using on record strategies: getting credit for honesty, thus indicating that one trusts the addressee, getting credit for outspokenness and not giving the impression to be a manipulator, avoiding the danger of being misunderstood.

In addition to this, as Lakoff (1973) notes, if two people have reached a level of acquaintance and close friendship which make superfluous the need to mitigate face threatening speech acts, the sudden use of indirect formulas by one of the two would immediately arouse suspicion on the good faith of his/her courtesy, and the indirectness would be most probably interpreted as a mark of distance or of a break of the relationship:

“Si supponga che P e D siano intimi amici da anni, che abbiano rapporti di estrema familiarità e non adoperino quindi da un certo tempo le forme di cortesia³⁹ tra di loro. A un certo momento il potenziale parlante (...) scopre che il destinatario gli ha a sua insaputa giocato un brutto tiro (non ci occorre sapere quale) e s’indigna profondamente; per quanto lo riguarda l’amicizia è finita. Ora egli e il suo ex-amico (che forse è ancora all’oscuro della situazione creatasi) si ritrovano e il parlante pronuncia (10). “Per favore, chiudi la finestra”, in tono più o meno gelido, a seconda della sua sensibilità. In tal caso, se D ha un minimo di perspicacia, gli sarà facile rilevare dal semplice uso di per favore che P non è ben disposto nei suoi confronti, che c’è stato un mutamento in peggio nel loro rapporto. Ed egli può rispondere: “ehi, che cosa c’è che non va?”, riferendosi non al contenuto semantico di (10), ma alle sue implicazioni pragmatiche. Di conseguenza l’uso di (10) può essere di volta in volta indice di almeno tre tipi diversi di rapporto tra P e D, e D risponderà in maniera del tutto diversa in ciascun caso.”⁴⁰

Even if Lakoff’s words do not refer directly to indirectness, she brings to light the fact that in certain circumstances or in certain cultures the sense of coldness and formality carried by deference politeness formulas or by indirectness could lead to another kind of “face threat”: the interlocutor may feel refused and rejected as a person and as a friend. Hence, it is as if other factors, as for instance the familiarity existing between the people involved in the speech act, played an equally vital role in the perception of politeness. In particular, the level of indirectness should be proportionate to the weight of the imposition. This could be explained through the fact that when a relationship reaches a certain level of familiarity, certain strategies belonging to negative politeness seem not to work anymore, whereas strategies which fall under the label of positive politeness may be more successful.

Similarly, Wierzbicka (1985) and Ogiermann (2005) stress the possible negative effects indirectness can have in Polish and in Russian. From Ogiermann’s (2005) viewpoint, the reluctance to clearly formulate one’s own wishes may be interpreted as an attempt to save one’s own face while putting the hearer in the position where he/she has to take the initiative for the speaker’s wishes to be fulfilled. The supposed increased level of optionality in her opinion is in the end illusive since once the hint is dropped, the hearer feels obliged to take it up and do what the speaker fears to ask for.

Wierzbicka (1985) argues that the association of politeness with indirectness stems from an ethnocentric Anglophone cultural point of view, which is perfectly summarized in Clark and Shunk’s (1980, p. 111) assertion:

“When people make requests, they tend to make them indirectly. They generally avoid imperatives like *Tell me the time*, which are direct requests, in preference for questions like *Can you tell me the time?* or assertions like *I’m trying to find out what time it is*, which are indirect requests”.

³⁹ Note that here Lakoff uses the terms “politeness formulas” in the sense of “indirect formulas”, as if the coincidence between the two should be given for granted.

⁴⁰ Sbisà (1973), p. 225.

Wierzbicka claims that the roots of this “astonishing ethnocentrism” lie in the fact that the early philosophers dealing with speech acts based their assumptions on English alone, taking for granted that what they observed in speakers of English could hold for “people generally”.

First of all, she harshly criticizes Searle’s conclusion that a form of the “Can you” type (see par. 3.5) is not ambiguous and is easily interpreted by the hearers in virtue of their “general powers of rationality and inference” (Searle, 1979, p. 176), on the grounds that this is not necessarily true for speakers of all languages. If we stuck to Searle’s assumption, Wierzbicka continues, we would conclude that Polish people sadly lack those powers of rationality and inference.

Secondly, she points out that none of the formulations which are typically used in English to phrase a request could be literally translated in Polish without sounding like genuine questions (e.g. “Why aren’t you quiet?”⁴¹), criticism (“Won’t you close the window?”⁴²), or implying unreasonable and stubborn behaviour on the part of the addressee (e.g. “Why don’t you close the window?”⁴³). In particular, these pseudo-questions which ostensibly inquire about the addressee’s desires but are in fact to be interpreted as requests give to Polish the impression of naïve hypocrisy.

Thirdly, she casts further doubts on the connection between indirectness and politeness when she reports examples of interrogative directives used together with swearwords, thus obviously without the intent to be polite: “Will you bloody well hurry up?” (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 35).

All things considered, in order to better compare speech acts across cultures it appears to be essential to broaden the perspective beyond the Western linguistic tradition and to achieve a theory of politeness which can be claimed to be truly universal. Some researchers are working on this issue, which is not the aim of my study. Still, I will try to apply this “enlarged” perspective when investigating and assessing the requestive speech acts realization patterns of the two speech communities at issue.

⁴¹ We would obtain the same effect if we translated the question in Italian.

⁴² As above.

⁴³ As above.

4. The present study

4.1 Questions of the study

The purpose of this study is to compare request realization patterns between Italian and German speakers. More specifically, five research questions are posited:

1. Can we detect culture-specific interactional styles in the requestive behaviour of speakers in the two languages examined?
2. To what extent do members of the Italian and German language communities agree on the level of directness with which to formulate requests according to different socio-pragmatic situations?
3. Does Italian and German speakers' pragmatic behaviour vary in the selection of other elements used to support a request, namely in terms of internal modification (downgraders and upgraders) and external modification (alerters, supportive moves)?
4. Can we detect similar patterns in the requestive behaviour of the two groups of respondents' as far as the situational variation is concerned? In other words, do their choices concerning request strategies and the internal and external modification follow a common trend across the four situations proposed?
5. Finally, considering the two main positions regarding the perception of indirectness (the "Western tradition" on the one side, the "Wierzbicka viewpoint" on the other, see section 3.6 and 3.7) with which perspective is Italian and German speakers' perception of politeness more connected to?

As specified in the introduction, the study arises as a partial replication of the "Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (see section 2.3.1) to which the methodology fully adheres. Nevertheless, the analysis focuses here only on the cross-cultural (and not on the interlinguistic) aspect and concentrates on four sociopragmatic situations. Furthermore, the sample is limited to a certain age- (19-25 approximately) and social group (students). Therefore the study could be considered as a pilot test from which further research could be developed.

4.2 Methodology. Data collection

4.2.1 Some theoretical considerations. Strengths and weaknesses of DCT

When a scholar faces the challenge of a pragmatic research, the first decision he is confronted with is how to collect linguistic data which he would like to be authentic and accurate enough to represent as truly as possible the natural performance of linguistic action. In short, he must find a reliable data collection instrument. In this section I will introduce the main arguments which have been presented by scholars trying to sustain their being in favour or against the technique of data collection known as Discourse Completion Test.

Among all the linguistic data elicitation methods (interviews, field notes, audio and video recording, role plays, stimulated recall, direct observation), the majority of scholars reckons that the most suitable way to collect a large sample of data in a relatively short time and in controlled and stable circumstances is the Discourse Completion Test. Indeed, starting from Blum Kulka (1982), DCT has been extensively used as a way to gather linguistic data in a lot of speech act studies, including: Olshtein and Cohen (1983), Kasper (1989), House (1989), Linnel et al. (1992), Bergman and Kasper (1993) for apologies; Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) for expressions of gratitude; Bardovi-Harlig and Hartfold (1991) for refusals, Hinkel (1997) for advice; House and Kasper (1987), Blum-Kulka and House (1989), Faerch and Kasper (1989), De Kadt (1992) for requests.

DCT can be defined as a written questionnaire containing a set of briefly described situations designed to elicit a particular speech act. Subjects are supposed to read the situation and to answer to a prompt. A typical example would be:

“You missed class and need to borrow a friend’s note. What would you say?” (Rose 1992).

According to the purposes and the theoretical background of the different speech act research projects, at least five types of DCT have been designed up to now.

- The **classic format** (used in Blum Kulka, House and Kasper 1989): after a short description of the situation, participants are asked to fill in a hypothetical dialogue where the rejoinder of the interlocutor is already given.
- The **dialogue construction type** is very similar to the first type, with the only difference that the dialogue is already initiated by the interlocutor and the rejoinder is not provided.
- In the **open item verbal response format**, participants are left free to respond without any limitation or influence given by a possible answer of an interlocutor. However, they are asked to provide verbal response (they are explicitly asked “what would you say?”).

- The **open item free response construction** is very similar to the previous one, the only difference being the fact that in this type participants are left free to indicate if they would give a verbal response, a non-verbal response or if they would not do nothing at all.
- The last type of DCT, which we could define “**improved open item verbal response**” and is the one my research takes inspiration from, was developed by Billmyer and Varghese (2000)⁴⁴, on the base of the open item verbal response. The new version is characterized by a new way to present situational background, with much more information and details.

Nurani (2009) illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of using such a method of eliciting data. The manifold benefits that DCT brings are almost intuitively grasped and fully justify its big popularity among researchers. DCT allows the collection of large amount of data in a limited amount of time; it reveals a society’s stereotypical response for a specific situation. Still, it can be administered to a large number of people at the same time, and it can be applied to many participants coming from different cultural background.

Notwithstanding its appeal, DCT’s reliability in gathering appropriate data has been increasingly questioned and tested through validation studies, and the drawbacks of its use have also gradually been highlighted. In particular, scholars have concentrated their criticism on two aspects: the authenticity of responses and the possibility for DCT to faithfully depict the complexity of human interactions.

As far as the truthfulness of responses is concerned, it has been suggested that the “hypothetical nature” of the situation in which a person carries out the speech acts in a DCT may interfere with the authenticity of the response. What is more, it has also been hypothesized that the simple description of the situations in a DCT cannot fully represent the complexity of interactions in everyday conversation: in fact, the extended negotiations which commonly occur in a real discourse are almost completely missing in the dialogue contraction of a DCT. Finally, what people claim they would say in a particular situation does not necessarily correspond to what they really say in that particular circumstance.

The main advocators of the theory according to which natural data (data elicited from spontaneous speeches) and data collected by DCT differ significantly base their argumentation on the fact that the hypothetical situation of a DCT has no real consequences for both speaker and hearer (the most important of them being the risk of negatively affecting the relationship), therefore it would not bring out the same psychological dynamics that are at play in an interaction between members of a group. In particular, Beebe and Cummings (1996) maintain that what is outstandingly missing in a typical DCT (or, at least, in the DCT as it had until then been conceived) is the

⁴⁴ See below.

situational and social contextualization, that is to say, detailed information on the on-going event, on the psychological state of the speaker, and on the role relationship of speaker and hearer⁴⁵.

On the other hand, Beebe and Cummings' investigation, which compared refusals gathered through DCTs and formulas elicited from spontaneous discourse, found out that they were not so different, thus confirming the hypothesis according to which both methods could give almost similar results. The only difference they found was in the length of talk and in the range of formula used to perform the speech act, including avoidance strategies and frequency of repetition typical of human interaction.

Furthermore, if on the one hand we cannot ignore that the "round" situation of a real conversation would doubtlessly be more authentic, Beebe and Cummings themselves stress the fact that natural data collection methods have a lot of disadvantages as well, their time-consuming nature being just the most outstanding one. Other two important drawbacks of natural data are the fact that they are not systematic (age, ethnic group, socioeconomic status are not known) and the possibility that, in spite of all the solicitations of the researcher, participants do not perform the requested speech act.

Finally, the use of recording devices such as video or tape recorder, which natural data collection methods require, may also jeopardize the authenticity of data since participants could feel uncomfortable and not at ease, knowing that they are observed.

Another advocator of DCT as a privileged way to collect data is Kwon (2004). He notes that the main difference between natural data collection and DCT is that DCT is likely to trigger mental prototype of that particular response in the given situation, thus revealing which strategic and linguistic choice would fit pragmatic norms in a specific situation according to a linguistic community. On the contrary, in natural data collection procedures people surely give more original and personal responses, but, because of embarrassment, they are also bound to give unpredictable or uncommon formulas.

Another point in favor of DCT that Kwon makes is the fact that this data elicitation method is controlled and controllable, that is to say that it can be tailored as to comprise situations in which the difference of status between speaker and hearer varies accordingly. In this way the researcher is able to spot which strategy is used by the group of participants when they have to do with an interlocutor of lower, equal or higher status.

By considering Chomsky's theory about competence and performance it could be argued that DCT sheds lights on speakers' competence, but not on their actual performance. However, if by "competence" we mean the awareness of which linguistic choices would fit pragmatic norms,

⁴⁵ These drawbacks of the use of DCT, which have been highlighted by Beebe and Cummings, are to be paid particular attention since my model of DCT was created precisely taking into consideration, and trying to find a "remedy", to these weaknesses.

regardless of whether the same participants use them or not in normal speech, then DCT seems to be most proper choice because in a speech acts comparison study it would be better to focus on what an entire community would perceive as “appropriate” in some circumstances (also because cross-cultural pragmatic research does not only concentrate on the emission of the speech act, but also on its perception) rather than on what the single speakers happen to say.

All things considered, it can be concluded that, after having carefully weighed up the pros and cons of DCT, a researcher must first and foremost consider the purpose of his/her study. Being the goal of my study that of comparing the construction of requests between two speech communities, I needed to collect a large amount of data and to be able to draw generalizations on the base of the comparison. For this reason, DCT was confidently adopted as a reliable tool of collection of linguistic data.

4.2.2 Discourse Completion Test: Its structure in my research project

As we have seen in the previous section, one of the most relevant critics DCT received, and at the same time one of the weaknesses that in my opinion might most probably influence the quality of my study, was the fact that however much respondents could try to place themselves in the situations of the questionnaire, the traditional DCT could never arouse the same dynamics that a real situation (especially a situation in which a request is needed) provokes. As already mentioned, this problem was pointed out by Beebe and Cummings (1996), who stressed the fact that in a DCT situation the “speaker” lacks that whole set of detailed and comprehensive information on the background of the communicative event, on the level of familiarity between speakers and hearers, on their role relationship, and last but not least, on the psychological state in which the speaker finds him/herself at that particular moment. This means that, missing the “scene” in a Hymesian sense (Hymes 1972) respondents are left to their own choice, either to invent their own background to the DCT situations, which could vary considerably from respondent to respondent, or, more probably, not to invent one at all. On the contrary, in natural conversation interactants are fully and continuously aware of this powerful combination of interpersonal and contextual details, the consciousness of which is inevitably bound to influence the tone of their utterances.

The solution to this problem was inspired by Billmyer and Varghese (2000). The purpose of their study was to find out if enriching the contextual content of situations in DCT, so to make them as similar as possible to the one available during normal face-to-face conversations, could enhance participants’ likeliness to give more elaborated and “realistic” answers. They administered two different versions of DCT, one which we could define “basic” and another which can be defined

“improved”, to two different groups of students, comprising both native and non-native speakers.

The “basic” version consisted in Rose (1992) situations that in turn had re-formulated Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) situations. This version was redesigned first of all by adding more space for the response, and secondly by specifying the components of a speech event in Hymesian terms (1972 p. 59-65). These new elements included a description of the physical setting (time of the day and space), the gender and name of the interlocutor, the role relationship, and, by implication, the social distance and social dominance, the length of acquaintanceship, the frequency of interaction, whether or not the relationship was optional, and the purpose of the interaction (in this case, the requestive goal). The psychological state is not clearly stated but it can be easily imagined reading the situation and trying to put oneself in it.

Following examples of a “basic” situation and the correspondent “enhanced” one will illustrate clearly the extent to which the situations were re-designed and improved with details.

Example 1. Version A – Music Situation

“You are trying to study in your room and you hear loud music coming from another student’s room. You don’t know the student, but you decide to ask him/her to turn the music down. What would you say?”

Example 2. Version B – Music Situation

“It is 10.30 p.m. and you have a paper due the next day. You are trying to finish the paper and you can’t concentrate because you hear loud music coming from another student’s room down the hall. You decide to ask her to turn the music down. The music has been on at this volume for half an hour. You have occasionally seen the student, Lucy Row, in the same dorm during the past six months. She is a student like you, but you have never spoken to her. You have heard other people in the dorm complain about the volume of her music on several occasions although you never have because you study in the library. However, today the library closed early. You are only halfway through and you know the professor for this class is very strict and does not give extensions. What would you say?”

This significant change in the phrasing of prompts seems to have been quite relevant for some aspects and quite irrelevant for others. No relevant difference was found in the level of directness of the head act, or on the frequency of lexical and syntactic mitigation internal to the request head act. Nevertheless, a significant effect of adding material to the prompt for both native and non-native speakers was perceived on two measures: the mean length of the entire request act and on the amount of external modification. In particular, they found out that for most situations,

the medium length of the request acts elicited by the elaborated questionnaire was from two to three times greater than the mean length of the requests obtained from Version 1 of the situations. Likewise, in the category of external modification, also the number of supportive moves was two to three times greater in the new version than in the original one.

In the light of these important findings I've asked myself if this kind of more elaborated and complex requests were more or less correspondent to reality, and my opinion was that they are, since it seems to be pretty probable that in everyday conversation we do not perform a face-threatening speech act like that of a request out of the blue, but we tend to preface or follow it up with some moves which could support our communicative goals.

Consequently, I proceeded in the designing of the DCT, choosing, as far as the situations are concerned, three of the situations of the original DCT test devised by Blum-Kulka et al. (in this way some of the results could be compared) and one that I devised because it fitted the purposes of my analysis. In choosing which situations were to include in my DCT, the objective that I pursued was that of combining and tailoring the variables that, according to House and Kasper (1981), determine the seriousness or weightiness of a face threatening act and that we have outlined in section 3.3:

- Power (or status) difference between speaker and hearer (asking a favour to a friend is more easily done than asking the same favour to the boss);
- Social distance between the speaker and the addressee (it is obviously easier to perform a threatening speech act with an acquaintance rather than with a stranger);
- Rate of imposition (showing the way to the hospital, for example, is not as demanding as giving a lift to the hospital).

Furthermore, I always tried to make explicit the ends of the speech acts, the setting of the situations, the time of the day (when necessary), and, last but not least, the psychological status of the speaker. The following charts will provide an immediate insight into the structure of my DCT and into the reasons beyond the specific choices that have been made.

<p>SITUATION 1 <u>Superior → Inferior</u> (Italian version)</p>	<p>Sei un Medico di uno studio privato, dove lavori da diversi anni. Sta per finire quella che per te è stata una giornata molto stressante e faticosa. Ti accingi a visitare gli ultimi due malati quando arriva, senza preavviso, un paziente noto che chiede una visita urgente. Lo fai accomodare in un ambulatorio, facendolo passare davanti agli altri due pazienti (a questo punto visibilmente seccati); con te entra l'infermiera Gigliola, la tua assistente. D'un tratto senti che stai morendo di caldo e ti accorgi che le finestre sono chiuse e l'aria condizionata è spenta: cosa dici all'infermiera?</p>
<p>Power relationship:</p>	<p>Asymmetric Superior → Inferior. The speaker is in this particular context, because of social prestige (police man – driver), professional hierarchy (boss – employee) or age (older – younger brother) in a position of advantage with respect to the hearer.</p>
<p>Social distance</p>	<p>Minimal. People having this type of relationship may even know each other since a long time but they will tend to maintain a certain distance precisely because of the power difference existing between them. Nevertheless, as for the speaker point of view (upper position) this situation can be compared to very close relationships where the fear of “loosing face” almost does not exist.</p>
<p>Rate of imposition</p>	<p>Minimal, the action of opening a window is not so demanding.</p>
<p>Hypothesis on the indirect character of the request</p>	<p>Minimal. The power relationship existing between the two persons, the minimal rate of imposition and the psychological state of the speaker (nervous and tired) makes us assume that the Speaker will not perceive the need to be very indirect.</p>
<p>Hypothesis on the linguistic register of the utterance</p>	<p>We could suppose the linguistic register to be switching between middle or standard and confidential, intimate, which is the style that we use in familiar settings, in conversation with friends or with people we are quite familiar with.</p>
<p>Estimated level of politeness required by the request</p>	<p>Minimal.</p>

Chart 5. Situation 1 (window situation).

<p>SITUATION 2</p> <p><u>Equal</u></p> <p>(Italian version)</p>	<p>Sei uno/a studente/essa, si è appena conclusa l'ultima lezione della giornata e tutti stanno riordinando le proprie cose per uscire dall'aula. Sei seduta/o accanto a Laura, una studentessa con cui hai già frequentato altri corsi e con la quale si può dire si sia instaurata una certa amicizia, anche se per ora legata solo all'ambiente universitario. La scorsa lezione sei dovuto/a mancare e ti sei accorto/a dalla spiegazione di oggi che il Docente dev'essere andato molto avanti col programma. Avresti proprio bisogno di prendere in prestito degli appunti; avevi già notato che Laura li prende in maniera impeccabile... Cosa le dici?</p>
<p>Power relationship</p>	<p>Equal. The speaker is in this particular context (i.g. students, work colleagues, football team mates) at the same level of the interlocutor.</p> <p>This type of relationship implies that the two interlocutors are more or less of the same age or that they have established a relationship in which the age does not play any role anymore.</p>
<p>Social distance</p>	<p>Quite small. The two people have a certain familiarity even if we cannot say that they are close friends.</p>
<p>Rate of imposition</p>	<p>Quite small. Giving the notes of a lecture can be considered a favour, even if not a considerable one.</p>
<p>Hypothesis on the indirect character of the request</p>	<p>Middle. The parity relationship between the interlocutors, the good level of familiarity, and the mood of the speaker (relaxed but quite motivated in having the notes) makes us think that the speaker will use a low, but still perceivable, level of indirectness.</p>
<p>Hypothesis on the linguistic register of the utterance</p>	<p>Simple, informal. It is the style that we use when talking with friends, or however with people with which we feel quite close to, because of some connection.</p>
<p>Estimated level of politeness required by the request</p>	<p>Middle.</p>

Chart 6. Situation 2 (notes situation)

<p>SITUATION 3 <u>“Public”</u> (Italian version)</p>	<p>Sei da poco impiegato/a nella Segreteria Studenti di un Ateneo e ti sei appena recato/o all'Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico, che si è tenuta in una sede abbastanza distante dalla Sede Centrale dell'Università. Sono le ore 13 e devi tornare in ufficio per completare la tua giornata lavorativa. Quando ti avvicini alla fermata dell'autobus ti accorgi però che vi è stato affisso un cartello che segnala uno sciopero degli autobus per l'intera giornata. Ti guardi attorno sconsolato/a: a piedi sarebbe proprio lunga e ti dispiacerebbe perdere ore di lavoro così inutilmente. Proprio in quel momento vedi Michele, un collega dell'Ufficio Stampa che conosci solo di vista, avvicinarsi alla sua macchina insieme ad un altro collega. Lui ti saluta e accenna un sorriso: cosa dici per chiedergli un passaggio?</p>
<p>Power relationship</p>	<p>Equal / Not relevant. This is the type of relationship people create every day in the countless chances of exchange because of professional, social, bureaucratic reasons, whose reason of being is however connected to the public sphere. This category as well presupposes the fact that the social distance is not so relevant, otherwise we should fall into the first or the third category.</p>
<p>Social distance</p>	<p>Considerable. This category embraces both a situation in which the interlocutors do not really know each other but there is not any power difference that could allow more freedom on one part of the speakers, or a situation in which even if two people know each other quite well they have to keep a certain distance because of a “Public”, “slightly formal” communicative situation. In this situation the speakers are “equal” but still don’t really know each other.</p>
<p>Rate of imposition</p>	<p>Considerable. The rate of imposition is in this case remarkable, since a lift is always seen as quite a favour to ask, not particularly for the effort required to the hearer (which is null if the way is the same) but for the invasion of “privacy” that such a favour implies⁴⁶.</p>

⁴⁶ I wasn’t sure whether to include this situation in my study because asking for a lift is not really something that belongs to the Italian culture. It is perceived as something almost “intrusive”. In order to soften this aspect I modified the “lift” situation present in Blum-Kulka (1984) turning the lift home into a lift back to the work office after an event connected to work.

Hypothesis on the indirect character of the request	Marked. The absence of a familiar relationship between the interactants, the considerable rate of imposition of the requests, and the slight power difference between the two persons makes us assume that respondents will formulate significantly indirect requests.
Hypothesis on the linguistic register of the utterance	Decent, correct. This is the middle or “standard” register, which we use in social and professional relationships and interpersonal relationships which are not confidential.
Estimated level of politeness required by the request	Remarkable.

Chart 7. Situation 3 (ride situation)

SITUATION 4 “Inferior → Superior” (Italian version)	Sei uno/a studente/essa che ha appena concluso il corso di Storia della Lingua Italiana. L'esame consiste nella valutazione di una tesina che dovresti consegnare tra una settimana. Purtroppo però non sei che alla metà del lavoro: hai avuto molti problemi con la ricerca di materiale perché hai scelto un argomento che esula un po' dagli argomenti trattati nel corso ma che ti interessava molto. Decidi quindi di chiedere al Professore una proroga per poterla consegnare tra 2 settimane, pur sapendo che di solito non fa questo tipo di eccezioni. Sei al suo orario di ricevimento, nel suo studio: cosa gli dici?
Power relationship	Asymmetric Inferior → Superior. The speaker is in this particular context, because of social prestige (patient - doctor), professional hierarchy (student – professor) or age (boy – old man) in a position of disadvantage with respect to the hearer.
Social distance	High. As already mentioned in Situation 1, in this kind of relationships speakers may know each other since a very long time but the power difference existing between them is likely to inhibit the development of further “confidence”. As far as the linguistic register is concerned, this situation can be compared to the one in which the speakers may also be close friends but the context is extremely formal and solemn.

Rate of imposition	High. Asking for an extension of the deadline to present a paper, to a teacher that is known for being strict and not willing to make exceptions, makes the rate of imposition pretty significant.
Hypothesis on the indirect character of the request	The elevated social distance between speaker and hearer and the considerable rate of imposition of the request could make us assume that respondents are going to use a high level of indirectness. Nevertheless, precisely because of the high “esteem” that the speaker might want to display, my hypothesis is that they will try to express rather clearly their purpose, avoiding too indirect formulations.
Hypothesis on the linguistic register of the utterance	Erudite, cultured. It is the style that we use when we speak either with people we do not know at all or, more probably, in professional - official exchanges dealing with complex, specific themes.
Estimated level of politeness required by the request	Quite high.

Chart 8. Situation 4 (extension situation)

4.2.3 The sample

The group of informants totals 80, and comprises 40 German and 40 Italian speakers. They are students within the age of 20 to 26 approximately.

The German speakers group is composed of 7 males and 33 females. 27 of them are pursuing graduate courses in humanities (for the most part linguistics studies) at the University of Wuppertal, whereas 13 of them are attending the Humboldt University of Berlin. Of this group of informants, 33 students are native speakers, 6 present a mother tongue which is different from German⁴⁷, whereas 1 is bilingual (Polish - German).

The second group is composed of students attending graduate (scientific and humanistic studies) and post-graduate courses (Linguistics) at the University of Udine (29) and at the University of Venice (11) respectively. 20 of them are males, 20 are females. Italian is the mother tongue of 39 of them, whereas German is the L1 of 1 of them.

⁴⁷ Their mother tongues are: English (2), Russian, Slovakian, Norwegian. 1 student does not indicate her mother tongue.

4.3. Research variables

Taking everything into consideration, if we should try and schematize the variables that are usually considered in a research, and precisely independent variables, dependent variables, controlled variables and external variables, the following chart should sum up the methodological structure of my work.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	DEPENDENT VARIABLES	CONTROLLED VARIABLES	EXTERNAL VARIABLES
Elements manipulated by the experimenter.	Elements that change according to the manipulation of independent variables.	Elements that are kept under control by the researcher.	Elements that cannot be controlled by the researcher or that for some reasons have escaped his/her control. They should be taken into consideration when analyzing the data.
Language	Perspective	Age	Sex
Within the questionnaire: context of emission of the speech act. In particular:	Directness (strategy adopted)	Context of submission of the questionnaire	Mother tongue
Social distance (degree of familiarity between requester and requestee)	Other "Politeness" devices, in particular:	Level of education	Individual variation
Dominance (power difference)	1.Syntactic and lexical downgraders	Proposed Situations	
Rate of imposition (entity of the requested act)	2.Mitigating supportive moves		

Chart 9. Research variables

4.4 Data analysis. A model for the analysis of requests

In this chapter I will illustrate a framework for the analysis of requests, or, in better words, the features which are generally taken into consideration when comparing this kind of speech act across cultures, namely:

- the perspective;
- the strategy type of the head act;
- the presence and typology of internal modification (downgraders and upgraders);
- the presence and typology of external modification (alerters and supportive moves).

4.4.1 The perspective

The perspective from which the speaker issues the request is an extremely important choice, since it plays an equally vital role in the perception of coerciveness and politeness of the request itself. A request can emphasise the role of the requester, and be “**speaker oriented**” (as in the request “Can I borrow your notes?” or “**hearer oriented**” (as in the request “Can you do me a favour?”). Another possibility is to formulate the request in an “**inclusive**” way (“What do you think, shall we clean the kitchen?”), or in an “**impersonal**” way (“Washing up needs to be done”). As requests are inherently imposing, avoiding the explicit mention of the requestee as an actor reduces the level of coerciveness of the request: this is for instance the advantage of the speaker oriented formulation. The same result can be obtained with the “inclusive perspective”, which may sound even more polite and tactful thanks to the implicit suggestion to perform the required action together, thus sharing the effort and the responsibility.

4.4.2 The strategy type of the head act

In the following lines three major categories of request strategies, included nine sub-categories, are outlined and exemplified. The categories build on previous research, in particular on the theories of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), (1976) as interpreted by Brown and Levinson (1987), House and Kasper (1981), and Blum Kulka – Ohlstein (1984) and represent the coding scheme for the analysis of the data collected in my study.

Requests strategies			
	Type	Description	Example
DIRECT STRATEGIES	0. ELLIPTICAL PHRASES	The fact that just the mention of the object(s) is to be considered a request is usually clear thanks to the context: established rules already noted to the interlocutor, objects for sale, on distribution, tools required to carry out a task, etc.	0.a. Bisturi! 0.b. Two coffee, please. 0.c. Zweimal nach Wien bitte.
	1. MOOD DERIVABLE	The illocutionary point of the utterance is inferable from the grammatical mood of the verb.	1.a. Pulisci la cucina! 1.b. Mach die Küche sauber! 1.c. Clean up the kitchen!
	2. EXPLICIT PERFORMATIVE	The illocutionary force of the utterance is explicitly named in the utterance itself. The request is what Austin defined a “performative”.	2.a. La prego di spostare la Sua macchina. 2.b. Ich bitte Sie woanders zu parken. 2.c. I am asking you to move your car
	3. HEDGED PERFORMATIVE	The illocutionary force of the utterance is named but it is at the same time softened through syntactical or grammatical devices.	3.a. Ti posso chiedere di pulire la cucina? 3.b. Ich muss dich bitten, die Küche sauber zu machen. 3.c I have to ask you to clean up the kitchen.
	4. LOCUTION DERIVABLE	The fact that the utterance is a request is clearly inferable by the semantic meaning of the locution and more specifically of the verb.	4.a. Dovrebbe lasciare libero questo posto. 4.b. Sie sollten diesen Platz freihalten. 4.c You’ll have to move your car.
	5. SCOPE STATING	The speaker verbalises his/her request expressing his/her intentions, desire, or feelings towards the eventuality that the hearer does X.	5.a. Speravo che tu potessi prestarmi i tuoi appunti. 5.b. Ich würde gern deine Mitschrift leihen. 5.c. I’d like to borrow your notes.

CONVENTIONALLY INDIRECT STRATEGIES	6. LANGUAGE SPECIFIC SUGGESTORY FORMULA	The sentence contains a more or less explicit suggestion to do X.	6.a. Che ne dici di pulire la cucina? ⁴⁸ 6.b. Wie wär's wenn du mal die Küche aufräumen würdest? 6.c. How about cleaning up the kitchen?
	7. REFERENCE TO PREPARATORY CONDITIONS	The utterance includes a reference to preparatory conditions (e.g. ability, willingness, etc.) for the performance of the speech act itself, as conventionalised in any specific language.	7.a. Non è che potrebbe darmi un passaggio? 7.b. Ich wollte mal hören, wenn ich mit Ihnen nach Hause fahren kann. 7.c. I was wondering if you could give me a lift.

NON CONVENTIONALLY INDIRECT STRATEGIES	8. STRONG HINTS	The speaker drops a hint that can be easily disambiguated since it directly refers to a condition, an element or an object that is needed for the performance of the act.	8.a. Sta andando a casa? 8.b. Fahren Sie jetzt nach Hause? 8.c. Will you be going home now?
	9. MILD HINTS	This formulation does not refer to the proper request nor to any of its elements but is usually interpretable through the context as a request.	9.a. Ma che bell'ordine abbiamo qui! 9.b. Sieht ja toll aus hier. 9.c. You have been busy here, haven't you?

Chart 10. Request strategies

I will now outline the main features of the categories, starting from the most direct to the most indirect one.

⁴⁸ This formulation sounds in Italian slightly ironic, at least if the requested task requires a certain level of effort as the fact of cleaning the kitchen. For this reason it would be generally combined with a “speaker and hearer oriented” perspective, as in the example “Che (ne) dici, puliamo la cucina?”.

4.4.2.1 On record strategies: Direct requests.

0. Ellyptical phrases

1. Mood derivable

Imperatives directly signal that the utterance is an order. In fact, if not modified, it can appear as rather authoritative and even offending. This may stem from the fact that in most cultures orders are usually issued by people who have an authority over the hearer, in virtue of their social prestige, chronological age and professional hierarchy. If we agree on this point, we could state that in Schmidt's terms (see p. 15), this kind of formulation is one of the most revealing of the speaker's definition of the relationship existing with the hearer, namely the complementary one. For these reasons, imperatives are often softened by tags or politeness markers as "please", "bitte" or "per favore" (they are pretty equivalent in the three languages).

Still, imperatives could be motivated by external reasons other than the relationship, as for instance the situation (rush, danger), the particular state of mind of the speaker, his/her linguistic habits, but the degree to which this formulation is "justified" or even normally accepted varies greatly according to the culture.

2. Explicit Performative

3. Hedged Performative

Even if syntactically performatives are more complex than imperatives and pertain for this reason to a second level of directness, it should be noted that the use of a performative construction may in some cases make the request even more explicit than the previous category. In fact, an utterance as "Close the door!", even if direct, may be also interpreted as an (involuntarily) brusque request, whereas the inclusion of a performative verb as in "I order you to close the door" explicitly and unequivocally marks the sentence as an order.

To clearly name the requestive intent with the use of performative verbs as for instance ask, request, order, demand, command is usually a delicate move during conversation. If we stick to the Gricean Maxim of quantity, in fact, it should not be necessary to specify what we are doing with words while we are doing it. We don't say "I am walking" while we are walking, in the same way it should not be necessary to declare "I am asking you to leave", when we are doing it. Logically speaking, it should be necessary only when we doubt on the inference ability of the hearer or on when we have already ascertained a misunderstanding.

For these reasons, performatives are rather authoritative requests and can sound, at least in Italian and outside formal contexts where an authoritative element is involved, rather impolite. Nevertheless, there are some choices available to the speaker who wants to soften the demanding effect of these utterances, the so-called “hedged performative”: “I must ask you to leave”, “Ti chiederei se puoi prestarmi gli appunti della scorsa volta” or “Ich würde dich gern bitten, dein Referat eine Woche eher zu halten”. These consist in a modification, with the use of a conditional clause or a modal verb, of the performative verb, which results in a softened illocutionary force and in a much more tactful request.

4. Locution derivable

Requests realized in this way are also called “obligation statements”, since they express the necessity or, in better words, the obligation, for the hearer, to perform the required act. The “authority imposing” entity could be either the speaker himself who has the right to do so according to an institutional power or his status and position or an external entity (laws, rules, morality, religion) to which the speaker simply appeals. The difference is sometimes marked by the single languages, sometimes not. For example, in English, structures with *should* and *ought to* generally involve moral obligation, *have to* may involve an obligation stemming from a source outside the speaker, while *must* often expresses obligation imposed by the speaker. In German, this difference is also marked by the opposition between “*sollen*” and “*müssen*”: *sollen* expresses a duty imposed by an external entity other than the person who is asked to perform the action, whereas “*müssen*” refers to a “moral” internal duty, or by a necessity given by the state of things. In Italian these differences are not visible in the verb “*dovere*”.

5. Scope stating

As we have seen in the previous chapter, one of the conditions for the issuing of a request, exactly as for the issuing of whatever speech act, is sincerity. When it comes after requests, the sincerity condition (condition n° 6.a in chart 3, p. 43) prescribes that the requester truly hopes that the speaker will do what he/she is asked to. That is why it should not be surprising that one of the ways to realize a request is that of expressing one’s own wish, hope or expectation about the requested action taking place. The peculiar trait of this mode of realisation of requests is the perspective, which is necessarily speaker-oriented: the speaker’s desires are assumed as the focal point of the interaction. For this reason, the request becomes automatically more direct in its demand. There are basically two types of scope stating requests. One is represented by the so called

“want statements”, which are basically statements that start with “I need” or “I want”, often softened by mitigating devices as “please” that give them at the same time the character of pleading. The other way is to express politely a wish, using for example conditional forms of the verb or another circumlocution, as in the following examples:

- I would like to have some more coffee.
- I would rather you gave up tennis.
- I think it is better if you leave now.

It should be noted that the formulation “I want you to do X” or “I’d like you to do X” is perceived as rather abrupt by an Italian hearer, and seems to be possible only in contexts in which compliance is a forgone conclusion (because of a power relationship). If this is not the case, this formulation, even if grammatically and syntactically less direct than formulation 1 (imperatives), sounds in my opinion much more pretentious and inconsiderate, since the implied fact seems to be: “I want X” → “You have to do X, even without me asking for it”. The alert reader will spot in this observation a clear example of the possible critics to the universality of Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness; which we have considered in section 3.7.

4.4.2.2 On record strategies: Conventionally indirect requests

The most peculiar trait of conventionally indirect requests is that they realise the request by questioning the subsistence of those premises that Searle had indicated as the “preparatory conditions” for the issuing of a speech act, and that I indicated in section 3.2, chart 3, in the points n° 4, 5 a, b, c, d, e.

6. Language specific suggestory formulas

This particular type of formulation does not test any specific condition on the part of the hearer, but it is rather aimed at inquiring the requester’s cooperativeness in general, and in particular by finding out if there is any obstacle or any condition that may prevent the hearer's compliance of the action specified in the proposition or that may prevent his being “willing” to carry out the action specified in the proposition. By and large, we could state that this kind of formulation of requests is aimed at sounding out the hearer towards the eventuality of performing the action suggested.

Suggestory formulas are realised through various structures, the majority of which are very language-specific.

7. Reference to preparatory conditions

Utterances in which the requester investigates into the existence of what Searle identified as “preparatory conditions” for the performance of a speech act are by far the most widely used strategies for the issuing of a request. In fact, expressions questioning the hearer's ability or willingness have become so ritualised in everyday conversations that some scholars, as J.L. Morgan⁴⁹ (1977) underlines, have questioned their very nature of “indirect” speech acts and suggested that they are rather to be considered pure formulaic expressions which directly carry the meaning and the force of a request, without the need for the hearer to take any inferential path.

If we try and single out the reasons why conventionally indirect formulations seem to be the most appreciated strategies, not only within the borders of some linguistic communities but also cross-linguistically, we should first of all highlight the fact that this kind of requests are by their very nature hearer-oriented. In fact, by questioning the hearer's intent to do something, by inquiring into his ability to do it, or by simply asking if he has just done it we are putting the hearer at the centre of our utterance, implying that *he/she* is in a position of control that allows him/her to decide whether or not to comply with the request. Therefore, as also the theory of personal deixis advocates, hearer-oriented sentences are most of times perceived as more polite than requests formulated on speaker-based conditions. Politeness, in turns, lowers the risk of a face threat which is implicit in requests and at the same time decreases the probabilities for the requester to lose face him/herself.

Among Searle's five “preparatory conditions” that have been outlined in the previous chapter, only three of them, and more precisely the 5.b, the 5.c and the 5.d, are involved in the issuing of a conventionally indirect request.

- Condition 5.b: question concerning the hearer's **ability** to carry out the task (e.g. “Can you reach the salt?”). This yes/no question is literally to be taken as the intent of the speaker to ascertain whether the hearer is able to perform the action that he/she wants him/her to do, and it is interesting to notice that the greater impression of politeness this kind of requests conveys is given precisely by the displayed delicacy of not wanting to ask something that would be impossible or difficult to perform for the hearer. The natural, implicit second step expected from the speaker would be that of actually ask the

⁴⁹ See note 70, p. 96.

requestee to perform the action; nevertheless, this is usually not necessary since the hearer has normally already inferred the intent by the speaker to issue a request⁵⁰.

There are two conditions of ability which are relevant for the performance of the desired act: 1. the mental and physical capacities of the requestee and 2. the external circumstances related to time, space, etc. of the action. For example, a question as “Could you close the window for me, please?” clearly concerns the hearer's physical possibility to close the window, whereas a question as “Could you lend me some money?” more probably relates to the external circumstances, and more specifically the financial circumstances that in that particular moment characterize the speaker. The fact that questions involving the ability conditions are used most of times when actually minor or trivial importance can be attached to this factor demonstrates that this kind of questions have simply become highly conventionalised requests forms.

- Condition 5.c: utterances as “Will you do the shopping today?” or “Won't you give me a hand?”, which are represented in Italian and in German respectively by sentences as “Mi fai un favore?” or “Nehmen Sie mich mit?” have been classified by scholars among the following category, implying therefore that they are simply ways to ask if the hearer is favourably disposed towards the eventuality of doing the expected action. Nevertheless, at a closer analysis, it seems to me that these utterances are rather to be understood, at least in their literal, “first” meaning, as requests of information about the **immediate future acts** of the hearer, as the English future construction “will you” may demonstrate. According to this view, for instance, in a question as “Will you give me a lift?” it is as if the speaker is asking “Are you going to give me a lift, since I've asked you”? Furthermore, at least in Italian, a question as “Prepari la tavola?” can be interpreted, according to the situation and a slightly different tone of voice, as an actual request, a question concerning the immediate future plan of the hearer, or even as a question about the current activities of the hearer⁵¹ (i.e. if he/she is setting the table now).
- Condition 5.d: questions concerning the hearer's **willingness** to perform the desired act (e.g. Would you lend me a copy of your book?). Also in this case, by investigating into the hearer's readiness to perform the requested act, the speaker shows great concern for the hearer whereby not giving compliance for granted. This category embraces also the expressions of appreciation on behalf of the hearer in the eventuality that he performed the requested act (e.g. “I'd appreciate if you'd help me just this once”, “It would be a big

⁵⁰ The mechanisms of functioning, and in particular the psychological mechanisms on which indirect requests rely on have been illustrated at p. 11.

⁵¹ Wierzbicka noticed the same possibility in Polish, as we saw in chapter 3.7, p. 54.

help if you passed me the keys”), or expressions of hope that the hearer will perform the requested act (“I hope you wouldn't mind giving me a hand”). The pre-condition of willingness could be further clarified or explicated by lexical devices, as for example in the questions “*Would you like to make a contribution to our charity?*” and “*Would you mind helping me to move this table?*”). Another indirect way to inquire about the hearer's willingness to do something for us is to ask for a permission, even if in this way the focus must shift from the requestee as the agent of the action to the requester as the beneficiary or recipient of the activity (e.g. “May I interrupt you for a moment?” or “Can I have the butter, please?”). Permission-requests tend to be directed upward in rank (Ervin-Tripp 1976; Trosborg 1995).

Another point it could be worth mentioning is that, again, convention plays a vital role in the determination of what seems to be a “proper” and accepted way to make a request and what not. For example, checking the existence of condition n° 5.a (therefore asking, taking the previous example, “Hai preparato la tavola?”/ “Did you set the table?”) is not considered a conventionally indirect way to make a request, but would rather be numbered among the non-conventionally indirect strategies⁵², the evidence being the fact that this formulation may also sound as a partial reproach and be perceived as slightly impolite.

4.4.2.3 Off record strategies: Non conventionally indirect requests

8. Strong hints

9. Mild hints

Sometimes the speaker may not want to state clearly his/her intent, maybe because he/she fears not to have the right to ask what he/she wants to ask, or because he/she is afraid of the hearer's reaction, or because he/she wants to save the hearer the embarrassment of possibly having to refuse. The requester has generally two options: he/she can choose to omit the desired action altogether and give therefore a “mild hint”, or to partially mention his/her wishes (strong hints), even if the reference will never be plain and direct but still easy to detect.

Examples of the first type of requests are sentences as “It's so cold in here”, “I'm so thirsty”, or “The kitchen is in a total mess”, in which the speaker cannot be said to be asking something to someone, but simply to be making an observation about his/herself, his/her needs or the context of

⁵² See below.

the conversation. Consequently, this kind of utterances is opaque not only as far as the illocutionary force is concerned, but also as regards the propositional content.

On the other hand, sentences as “The dishes need to be done” or “I’m to be at the airport in half an hour, and my car has just broken down” more clearly hint at the desired action to be performed, but the hearer still has to infer that the speaker would like him/her to take on the role of agent.

Interpreting hints, and in particular mild hints, can be extremely difficult. It is often necessary to possess intimate knowledge of the other person, to share a daily routine or to be thoroughly informed about the context of emission of the utterance in order to correctly disambiguate the content and the force of the utterance.

Nevertheless, thanks to the principle governing conversation that Grice defined as the “maxim of relevance”, the hearer (if willing to help) assumes that there must be a reason why the speaker has uttered those words, and goes therefore beyond the transparent surface meaning to look for another, deeper meaning (which, most of times, suggests an intervention of the hearer him/herself to sort the problem out). In this inference process, the requestee can follow at least three paths, or, in better words, he/she can spot three different possible connections between the hint given and the action hinted at.

The first one, **reasonableness**, is typical of those hints which consists in the motivation or a justification of the request, as in the example “I’m so thirsty” which implies “Get me a drink, will you?”. By expressing only the reason why he/she is doing the request, the speaker anticipates potential questions of the hearer and at the same time checks whether his/her grounds for asking are acceptable.

Secondly, checking the **availability** of the person or of the thing we “need” (broadly speaking) in that particular moment could also constitute an effective way to give a hint. Examples of this category are “Are you ready” (= “Shall we be going?”) or “Is there any coffee left?” (= “Could I have another cup of coffee?”). This type of structure has become heavily routinized in service encounters, where a question as *Have you got X* is immediately followed by the assistant's supply of the desired good.

Finally, the **obviousness** of asking whether the desired state of affairs already exists (thus checking condition n° 5.a) when it is evident that it does not exist conveys to the hearer the speaker's desire for the act in question to be performed, as in the example “Have the dishes already been done?”.

Despite their lack of transparency (illocutionary and/or propositional) and the possible misunderstandings or negative reactions they can give rise to, hints are frequently used in everyday conversations and the work of interpretation they necessitate can also be considered part of that cooperative effort which is essential in everyday human interaction.

4.4.3 Internal modification: Downgraders and up-graders

As we have seen so far, it is generally believed that the more explicit the impositive force of an utterance is, the higher is the likelihood of the request for being perceived as pretentious, brusque or even rude. On the contrary, a slightly indirect request is usually perceived as polite⁵³. The choice of the directness level is therefore a choice of the utmost importance when issuing a request, but it is not the only one. Other tools are available to “refine” the tone of the request and therefore also its impact on the hearer. The so-called “modality markers” (cf. House-Kasper 1981) are devices which modify the head act internally so that the request will be either softened in its force (downgraders) or on the contrary sharpened and strengthened in its demanding tone (upgraders).

A speaker who wants to show lower expectations towards the fulfillment of his/her request has access to two types of downgraders: syntactic (which modify the structure of the utterance) or lexical/phrasal (single vocabulary choices). Since downgraders internally mitigate the impositive force of the request, they are commonly thought to add politeness to the request.

If downgraders are employed to soften the impact the utterance is likely to have on the hearer, upgraders have the opposite effect, namely that of increasing it. Upgraders can make the utterance more or less polite according to the element which is intensified (if the stressed element is a phrase expressing the requester's positive attitude towards the possible fulfillment of the request it is obviously more polite). Nonetheless, in order to allow a more immediate comparison, I chose to take into consideration only the upgraders that accentuate the imposition on the hearer and therefore somehow decrease politeness.

Both downgraders and upgraders are presented in the following tables. The subcategories and most of the English and German examples have been taken from Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper (1989) and Trosborg (1995). Since these devices are rather specific for the individual language, I have selected from time to time the categories that could be considered valid across the three languages, for instance choosing a category suggested by Trosborg but not by Blum-Kulka et al. and vice versa, always in the attempt of creating as meaningful and “universal” categories as possible⁵⁴.

⁵³ At least in the Western tradition, see section 3.6.

⁵⁴ For instance, the syntactic downgrader “subjective” was not included because in Italian it is a question of grammar correctness whether or not to use it after the conditional clause (e.g. “Sarebbe meglio che te ne *andassi*” would be the best grammatical choice). In the same way, tag questions were not included since it is a typical English construction which is not present in Italian or in German. The impersonal construction, which is not considered in Blum-Kulka (1989) but suggested in Trosborg (1995), has been included on the grounds that it is very common in Italian.

Syntactic downgraders	Effect	Example
QUESTION	Asking someone if he/she is willing or able, or planning to do something works as a great disarming device.	- "Can I borrow your notes"? - "Mi presti gli appunti?" - "Kann ich deine Notizen haben?"
PAST TENSE	The past tense further downtones the expectations for the outcome of the request, thus making it easier for the requestee to refuse.	- "I wanted to ask you to present your paper a week earlier". - "Volevo chiederti se potresti consegnare la tua tesina una settimana prima". - "Ich wollte dich bitten, dein Referat eine Woche vorzuverlegen".
NEGATION of a PREPARATORY CONDITION	The preparatory conditions which are most often negated are that of willingness and the of ability.	- "Shoudn't you perhaps tidy up the kitchen?" - "Non è che potresti pulire la cucina?" - "Solltest du nicht vielleicht mal die Küche in Ordnung bringen?"
CONDITIONAL CLAUSE	The conditional clause further distances the request from reality.	- "Might be better if you leave now". - "Sarebbe meglio se Lei andasse ora". - "Es wäre besser wenn Sie jetzt gingen".
IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTION	The impersonal construction patently works to avoid the mentioning of the hearer as the performer of the requested action and lessens theore the pressure on him/her.	- "Would it be possible for me to scrounge a lift home?" - "Le sarebbe possibile darmi un passaggio a casa?" - "Wäre es wohl möglich, dass Sie mich gleich mitnehmen könnten?"
EMBEDDING	The requester pre-faces his/her request with a clause that conveys his/her attitude towards the request, e.g. tentativeness, or hope, delight, thanks in the eventuality that the hearer carries out the request.	- "I was wondering if I couldn't get a lift home with you". - "Mi chiedevo se non potesse darmi un passaggio". - "Ich wollte mal fragen ob Sie mich mitnehmen können"

Chart 11. Syntactic downgraders

Lexical / phrasal downgraders	Definition	Example
POLITENESS MARKER	Markers that show deference to the requestee and plead for cooperative behaviour.	- "Hand me the paper, <i>please</i> ". - "Pulisci la cucina <i>per favore</i> ?" - "Räum <i>bitte</i> die Küche auf".
UNDERSTATER	Adverbs through which the speaker minimizes the effort required by the request.	- "Could you tidy up <i>a bit</i> ?" - "Potresti pulire <i>un po'</i> la cucina?" - "Kannst du mal <i>ein bisschen</i> aufräumen?"
HEDGE	Particle, word or phrase whereby the requester avoids a precise propositional specification of the act to be carried out, thereby giving the requestee the option of specifying it him/herself.	- "I'd <i>kind of</i> like to get a lift if that's all right". - "Le sarebbe possibile <i>tipo</i> darmi un passaggio?" - Ich würde <i>irgendwie</i> gern mitfahren wenn es geht".
SUBJECTIVIZER	Elements by which the requester expresses his/her subjective opinion towards the state of affairs referred to in the proposition.	- " <i>I suppose</i> you're going my way" - " <i>Credo</i> che tu vada nella stessa mia direzione". - " <i>Ich glaube</i> , du willst in die gleiche Richtung wie ich".
DOWNTONER	Modal sentence adverbials and modal particles that are used to downtone the impositive force of the request.	- "Could you <i>possibly</i> lend me your notes?" - "Potresti <i>per caso</i> prestarmi gli appunti?" - "Kann ich <i>vielleicht</i> deine Aufzeichnungen leihen?"
CAJOLER	Conventionalised speech items which have the function of establish, increase or restore harmony between the interlocutors, which may be damaged by the request.	- " <i>You know</i> , I really like you to present your paper next week". - " <i>Sai</i> , mi farebbe molto piacere se presentassi la tua tesina la prossima settimana". - <i>Weisst du</i> , dein Referat würde echt besser in de Nächste Sitzung passen".
APPEALER	Elements used by a speaker when he/she wants to appeal to his/her Hearer's benevolent understanding.	- "Clean up the kitchen, <i>will you</i> ?" - "Pulisci la cucina, <i>ok</i> ?" - "Mach die Küche sauber, <i>ok</i> ?"
HESITATOR	Signals that convey to the Hearer a certain doubt about the appropriateness of the request.	- "I er, erm, er - I wonder if you'd.." - "Io ehm - mi chiedevo se.." - "Ich, ähm – fragte mich ob..."

Chart 12. Lexical and phrasal downgraders

Upgraders	Definition	Example
ADVERBIAL INTENSIFIER	Adverbial modifiers which increase the impact on the hearer of certain elements of the proposition .	- "The kitchen is in a <i>terrible</i> mess". - "La cucina è <i>terribilmente</i> in disordine". - "Die Küche ist in einem <i>schrecklichen</i> Zustand".
COMMITMENT UPGRADER	Adverbial modifiers which increase the speaker's expectation towards the fulfillment of the request.	- " <i>I'm certain</i> you won't mind giving me a lift". - " <i>Sono sicura</i> che non è un problema per te darmi un passaggio". - " <i>Ich bin sicher</i> du hast nichts dagegen, mich mitzunehmen".
TIME INTENSIFIER	Time adverbials which underline the urgency with which the request is to be carried out.	- "You'd better move your car <i>right now!</i> " - "Sposti <i>subito</i> la Sua macchina!" - "Am besten fahren Sie <i>sofort</i> weiter!"
LEXICAL UPTONER	Marked lexical choices that reveal the Requester's negative attitude towards an element of the proposition.	- "Clean up that <i>mess!</i> " - "Pulisci questo <i>letamaio!</i> " - "Räum den <i>Dreck</i> da weg!"
DETERMINATION MARKER	Elements indicating a high level of determination on the part of the speaker.	- "I've explained myself and <i>that's that!</i> " - "Mi sono spiegata, <i>punto!</i> " - "Ich habe meine Meinung gesagt <i>und damit basta!</i> "
REPETITION OF A REQUEST	The request is repeated.	- "Get lost" Leave me alone!" - "Vai via! Lasciami solo!" - "Geh weg! Lass mich in Ruhe!"
EMPHATIC ADDITION	Lexical collocations used to provide additional emphasis to the request.	- " <i>Go and</i> clean that kitchen!" - " <i>Vai e</i> pulisci quella cucina!" - " <i>Geh jetzt und</i> mach die Küche sauber!"

Chart 13. Upgraders

4.4.4 External modification: Alerters, mitigating supportive moves and aggravating supportive moves

If there is something we can take for granted at this point of our exposition, it certainly is the fact that a request is an act with which a speaker potentially imposes his/her will upon the freedom of the hearer. As a matter of fact, only in case of little favours, when it is obvious that the request will be satisfied, or with friends, who the requester knows will be pleased to help him/her, can

requests be presented right away. In all the other cases, speakers feel the need either to “prepare the ground” so that the request appears plausible and justifiable to the hearer, or to support the request with other communicative moves. This is the main objective alerters, elements which alert the hearer's attention to the ensuing speech act, and supportive moves pursue, that is to say utterances external to the head act occurring either before or after it.

Alerters are vocative elements referring to the hearer as the title, the surname, the first name, the nickname, an endearment or an offensive term, a pronoun, or simply an attention getter as “Hey!/ Hi! / Excuse me!”.

Like internal modifiers, supportive moves can also be mitigating or aggravating, according to whether they try to make the request more “acceptable” for the hearer or, on the other hand, to convince/force him/her, thus adding impositive force. The two types of supportive moves, for the selection of which I followed the same method as for internal modifiers, will be presented in the following tables.

Mitigating supportive moves	Definition	Example
PREPARATOR	The speaker prepares the hearer for the ensuing request by introducing the topic, letting the requestee know that she/he is about to ask him/her something, checking his/her availability (in terms of time to listen to the requester).	- "May I ask you a question?" - "Posso chiederLe una cosa?" - "Kann ich Sie etwas fragen?"
GETTING A PRECOMMITMENT	Even if sometimes this category is not easy to distinguish from the previous one, in this case the speaker tries to commit his/her hearer before telling him/her the content of the request.	- " Could you do me a favour?" - "Potresti farmi un favore?" - "Kannst du mir einen Gefallen tun?"
GROUNDER	The speaker tries to help the hearer understand why he/she is asking. He/she either gives reasons, explanations, justifications for his/her request, or adds more specific information that may make the requestee more willing to comply with the request.	- "Judith, <i>I missed class yesterday</i> . Could I borrow your notes?" - "Laura, <i>ieri non c'ero a lezione</i> . Mi potresti prestare gli appunti?" - "Mareike, <i>ich war gestern nicht in der Vorlesung</i> . Könnte ich mir deine Notizen ausleihen?"
DISARMER	The requester names the possible negative effects of his/her request, stating the he/she hopes not to provoke them. In this way the hearer is "disarmed" and can not appeal to those potential objections any more.	- "I hate bothering you but..." - "Scusa se ti disturbo ma..." - "Ich will dich nicht stören, aber..."
SWEETENER	The requester more or less explicitly flatters the requestee in order to make him/her favourably disposed towards the compliance of his/her own wishes.	- "Your collection of books is very interesting..." - "Ma sai che hai dei libri fantastici in questa libreria?" - "Deine Bücher sind wirklich interessant..."
PROMISE OF A REWARD	The requestee is offered a reward due on fulfillment of the request. In this way the request should appear more attractive and the likelihood of compliance should be increased.	- "Could you give me a lift home? <i>I'll pitch in on some gas</i> ". - "Mi daresti un passaggio? <i>Metto io la benzina</i> ". - "Kannst du mich mitnehmen? <i>Ich geb dir auch was fürs Benzin</i> ".
COST MINIMIZER	The speaker sets some conditions that minimize any possible costs to the requestee.	- "Would you give me a lift, <i>but only if you're going my way</i> ". - "Mi daresti un passaggio, <i>ma solo se fai la mia stessa strada</i> ". - "Kannst du mich mitnehmen? Aber natürlich <i>nur wenn du in meine Richtung fährst</i> ."
APPRECIATION CLAUSE	Expression of appreciation towards the hearer can be found both embedded in the sentence and as independent clause. The communicative move is basically that of showing gratitude, appreciation or happiness in the eventuality / hope that the hearer carries out the request.	- <i>I'd really appreciate</i> if I could borrow your notes". - " <i>Sarebbe fantastico</i> se potessi prendere in prestito i tuoi appunti". - " <i>Es wäre toll</i> wenn ich deine Notizen leihen könnte".
NEGATIVE APPRECIATION CLAUSE	Even if this category was not present in previous research on this topic, I decided to add it as it seems to be pretty often used as a supportive move. Through an utterance of this kind the speaker prospects some bad consequences for him or for both him and the hearer in case the request is not fulfilled.	- "Could you please open the window, or we'll soffocate". - "Potresti aprire la finestra, si muore di caldo qui". - "Öffnen Sie doch bitte ein Fenster, sonst kollapsieren wir hier noch".

Chart 14. Mitigating supportive moves

Aggravating supportive moves	Definition	Example
INSULT	To increase the pressure on the hearer, the speaker prefaces or postpones an insult to his/her request.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "You've always been a dirty pig, so clean up!" - "Hai sempre vissuto come un maiale! Pulisci!" - "Du warst schon immer eine Schlampe, also los räum auf!"
THREAT	The speaker threatens the hearer mentioning potential bad consequences that he/she could be forced to face in case of non-compliance with the request.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Move your car if you don't want a ticket!" - "Sposti il Suo veicolo altrimenti dovrò farLe la multa" - "Parken Sie Ihren Wagen woanders, wenn Sie keinen Strafzettel bekommen wollen!"
MORALIZING	In order to sustain the request with additional credence, the requester invokes general moral maxims.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "If one shares a flat one should be prepared to pull one's weight in cleaning it, so get on with the washing up!" - "Quando si condivide un appartamento tutti dovrebbero contribuire a tenerlo pulito, per cui avanti, lava i piatti!" - Wenn man schon zusammenwohnt, muss man seinen Teil zum Sauberhalten der Wohnung beitragen, also fang an mit dem Abwaschen!"

Chart 15. Aggravating supportive moves

5. Results analysis and discussion

This chapter is the heart of my study, since it is expected to provide an account for two main phenomena at issue. First, having an insight into the cross-cultural variation of request strategies between Italian and German (particularly as far as the element of indirectness is concerned) could allow us to establish patterns of transferability from one language to the other, something which could prove to be particularly useful for teachers and learners of both languages. Secondly, it was my firm interest to call into question the quite established theory according to which indirectness is a way to increase politeness, especially in a face threatening act as request. This will be pursued by measuring the level of indirectness in utterances of both groups throughout the four situations, i.e. looking at the situational variation.

As we have seen in the previous chapter (4.2.2), the questionnaire is a modified and adapted version of the “Discourse Completion Test” (hereafter DCT) used in CCSARP (Blum Kulka 1982, 1983). The DCT contains four situations, some of which correspond to three of the eight “requests” situations of the original questionnaire (Blum Kulka, House, Kasper 1989, p. 14-15), and are therefore comparable. In particular, the situations taken from the DCT devised by Blum Kulka and his colleagues are:

- S5 (in my study situation 2): “A young woman asks another student to lend her some lecture notes”⁵⁵;
- S7 (in my study situation 3): “A student asks people living on the same street for a ride home”⁵⁶;
- S13 (in my study situation 4): “A student asks a teacher for an extension on a seminar paper”⁵⁷.

As already mentioned, I designed the questionnaire in order to manage to probe the possible major number of combinations of variables, the most important of which have been identified in:

- **Social Power**, defined by Brown and Levinson as “an attribute allowing one of the two interactants to impose his plans and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of the hearer’s plans and self-evaluation”⁵⁸;
- **Social Distance**, in Brown and Levinson theory, “the frequency of interaction and the kinds of material or non-material goods exchanged between S and H”⁵⁹;
- Finally, the **Rate of Imposition**, which, in Brown and Levinson model, refers to “the degree to which an act infringes on face wants (negative or positive wants)”⁶⁰.

⁵⁵ Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper (1989), p. 14.

⁵⁶ As note 55.

⁵⁷ As note 55.

⁵⁸ Brown and Levinson (1987), quot. in Yaghoobi (2002), p. 45.

⁵⁹ See above, p.44.

⁶⁰ Yaghoobi (2002), p. 45.

The combination of these variables allows us to identify four role constellations which we have thoroughly analysed in the previous chapter, but of which I shall now give a recapitulatory table⁶¹. adding the variable of the dominance of the speaker upon the hearer, exactly as presented in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), p.15.

	Dominance (x: speaker; y: hearer)	Description	Hypothesis on degree of indirectness
S1 Window	$x > y$	Higher ranking to lower ranking, minimal imposition rate, long acquaintance.	Minimal
S2 Notes	$x = y$	Equal to equal, middle imposition rate, middle acquaintance.	Middle
S3 Ride	$x = y$	Equal to equal, considerable imposition rate, high social distance.	Remarkable
S4 Extension	$x < y$	Lower ranking to higher ranking, high imposition rate, high social distance.	High

Chart 16. The four situations: Hypotheses on the degree of indirectness

Let us now turn to the analysis of the findings of my study, following the “Model for the analysis of requests” illustrated at p. 70, which will include, therefore,

- perspective;
- strategy type of the head act;
- presence and typology of internal modification (downgraders and upgraders);
- presence and typology of external modification (alerters and supportive moves).

5.1 Perspective

5.1.1 Results analysis

Before having an insight look into the findings depicted by following tables, we should probably shortly take note of which elements come into play in and which consequences may derive from the choice of phrasing a request from one perspective or the other.

The speaker perspective emphasizes the agent, whereas the hearer oriented perspective focuses on the recipient of the message. The issue of agency or recipient may also be avoided by

⁶¹ This presentation of the situations may be simplistic considering the detailed view of the matter given at p. 64., but it could help the reader to formulate hypothesis concerning the degree of indirectness displayed by the respondents.

using an inclusive “we” (speaker and hearer perspective, never recorded in my study) or an impersonal perspective (for example, “Would it be possible to ...”) (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989, p. 58) Examples of requests formulated from the different viewpoints are given below:

- “Do you think I could borrow your notes from yesterday?” (speaker perspective).
- -“Could you tidy up the kitchen soon?” (hearer perspective).
- “Could we begin now?” (speaker and hearer perspective).
- “Can one ask for a little quiet?” (Impersonal perspective)⁶²

It is difficult to claim with an absolute certainty which perspective sounds the more polite. Brown and Levinson’s (1987, p. 190-191) indicates as strategy number 7 of “negative politeness” avoiding to refer explicitly to the addressee as a way to communicate the speaker’s intention not to impinge on the Hearer’s freedom of action. The same reason could be at the root of the impersonal perspective (agent deletion) in favour of modals of necessity or obligation, together with the desire not to take full responsibility for the issuing of the act (thus saving one’s own face). On the other hand, issuing a request which involves both speaker and hearer as agents of the request may signal the desire to give the hearer the impression of committing voluntarily in a shared task rather than to be merely obeying orders (positive politeness). Nevertheless, the examples below may fully contradict these beliefs, at least in the Italian culture:

- o “I want a pen” → Avoids direct mentioning of the hearer but is very impolite, since it presupposes that for the hearer it is enough having the speaker’s wishes uttered in order to fulfil them.
- o “Is it possible to have a pen?” → If we translate this sentence in Italian, it sounds as if the speaker had taken for granted the fact to be given a pen.
- o “Should we find a way to let me have a pen?” → Again, in Italian this formulation would sound ironic and quite offensive. On the other hand, if the rate of imposition increases, this formulation would become appropriate.
- o “Would you lend me a pen, please?” → Even if here the hearer is directly addressed, the request sounds very polite.

Hence, politeness appears to be the result of the interplay of several factors, perspective being only one of them and altering its value and effect on the hearer according to the three variables of a request illustrated above.

Nonetheless, if we assume as axiom the fact that students must have tried to phrase their requests in the most polite (but at the same time effective) way, the results may give us a better insight into

⁶² Examples provided by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), p. 278.

which linguistic form is considered the verbal embodiment of politeness by members of the Italian and German linguistic communities. The results are as follows.

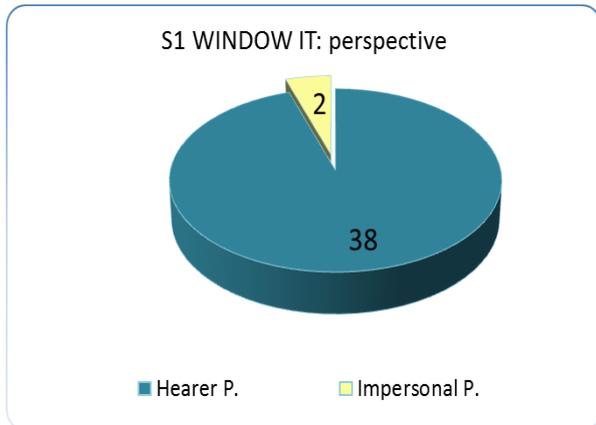


Figure 3.a

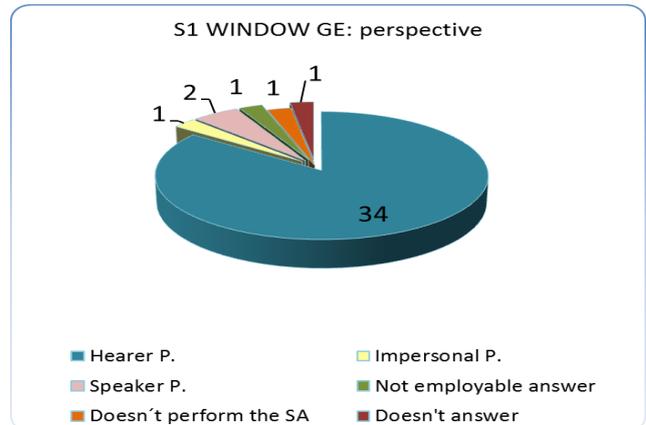


Figure 3.b

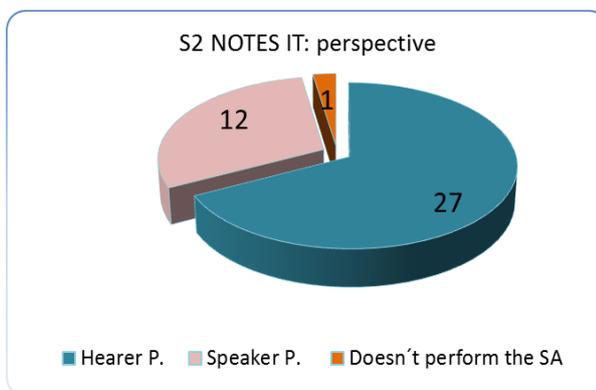


Figure 4.a

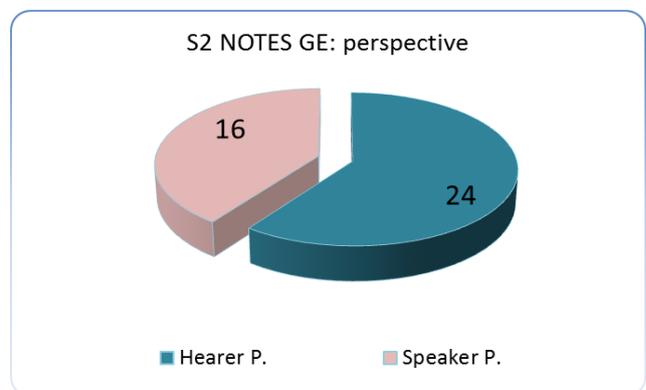


Figure 4.b

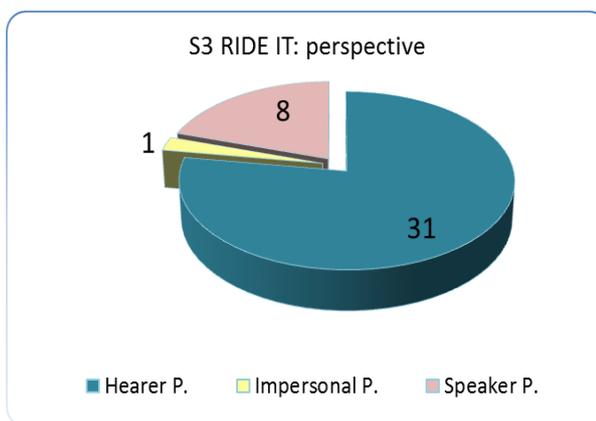


Figure 5.a

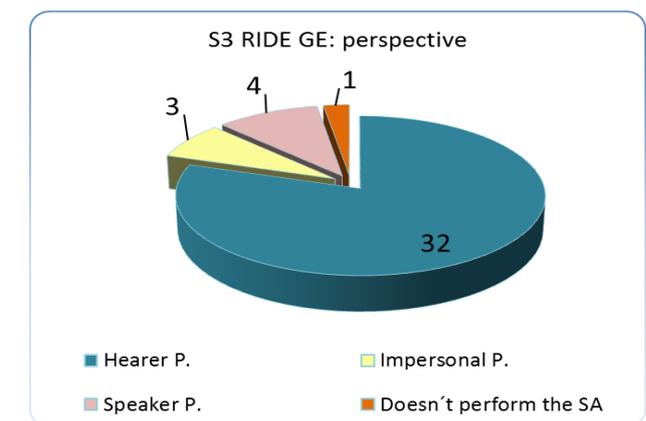


Figure 5.b

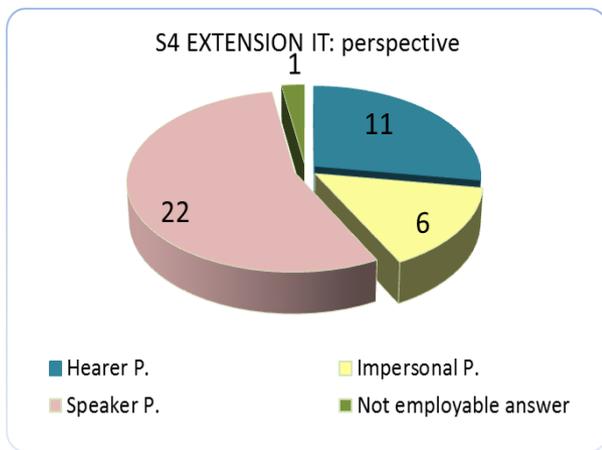


Figure 6.a

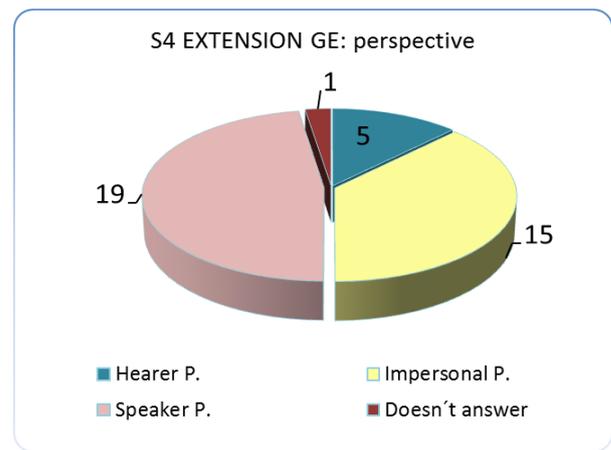


Figure 6.b

TOTAL PERSPECTIVE USE IT - GE													
	Hearer P.		Impersonal P.		Speaker P.		Not employable answer		Doesn't perform the SA		Doesn't answer		TOTAL
	N° students	Percentage	N° students	Percentage	N° students	Percentage	N° students	Percentage	N° students	Percentage	N° students	Percentage	
IT	107	66,88%	9	5,63%	42	26,25%	1	0,63%	1	0,63%	0	0%	160
GE	95	59,38%	19	11,88%	41	25,63%	1	0,63%	2	1,25%	2	1,25%	160

Table 0. Recapitulatory table. Perspective Italian-German

If we compare the graphs of the first and of the second column and at the same time have a look at the sequence of rows, two remarks spring to mind: first, there does not seem to be any outstanding difference of perspective between the two groups but there is a remarkable increase in the use of the speaker and impersonal perspective to the detriment of the hearer perspective.

In the **Window situation** the great majority of speakers of both languages chose to phrase the request from the hearer's point of view. Unlike Italians, who realize their requests exclusively from the point of view of Speaker and Hearer, German students show a slightly minor agreement in their choices, whereby phrasing 2 requests from the point of view of the speaker, 1 from an impersonal perspective, and 1 choosing not to perform the FTA at all. A similar trend is also displayed in the **Notes situation**, in which Germans show again a slightly higher preference for the speaker perspective. This finding can be easily explained considering that among the Italian group we often find formulations as "Apriresti la finestra?" ("Would you open the window?") for the first situation and "Potresti prestarmi gli appunti?" ("Could you lend me your notes?") for the second, whereas German respondents slightly more often give responses as "Könnten Sie das Fenster öffnen?" ("Could you open the window") for the first situation and "Könnte ich mir deine Notizen ausleihen?" ("Could I borrow your notes?") for the second.

A relative cross-cultural agreement is also to be found in the **Ride situation**, since both languages select again for their most part hearer-based formulations. Nevertheless, request

behaviour appears to be again more routinized in Italian than in German, since in the former language the totality of requests present the speaker or the hearer as subjects of the request, and being the only impersonal perspective utterance formulated by a German mother tongue student (speaking perfect Italian). It should also be specified that exactly as in the German group, 1 Italian student before giving his answer, specified that he would never perform this act in real life.

Turning to the last situation, the one in which students should indicate how they would ask a Professor an **extension** on the delivery of a paper, a sudden increase is immediately recognizable in the number of requests phrased from the speaker's point of view, which in Italian raise up to 22 of respondents, and in German to 19. German participants confirm their predilection for impersonal perspective⁶³, in fact this type of utterance appears more than two times as often as in the Italian counterpart (6 IT – 15 GE).

5.1.2 Discussion

In sum, there are three points that should be given particular attention. First of all, if we observe graphs vertically, thus comparing both groups' responses to the different interactional situations, we immediately see how there has been a considerable variation in the selection of the appropriate perspective with which to phrase the request. This means that the combinations of the different variables and their depiction was appropriate, since the aim of my work was precisely that of exploring linguistic behaviour in four "extreme" socio-pragmatic situations, thus gaining a range of data as different as possible. Secondly, it should also be noted that the two groups of respondents reacted more or less in the same way, that is to say that, for example, the fact that from the window to the notes situation we have a drop in the use of hearer perspective, in the third situation again a predominance of this point of view and in the fourth a marked drop in favour of the speaker perspective is true for both languages.

Thirdly, if we try to find patterns of linguistic behaviour, also in the light of Table 2 we should first of all underline the fact that, generally speaking, the preferred perspective from which to formulate requests seems to be for both groups the hearer perspective (66,88% for the Italians and 58,38% for Germans). This result is not surprising considering the fact that, as we will see in the following pages, the request strategy that will occur more often throughout the four situations

⁶³ An important choice in the categorization of data should here be explained. An utterance as "Wäre es möglich, eine Fristverlängerung zu erhalten" (Would it be possible to receive an extension on the date of presentation of this paper?) was counted as impersonal perspective, whereas a request as "Wäre es möglich, dass **Sie** für mich eine Ausnahme machen?" (Would it be possible that you make an exception for me?) was included in the speaker perspective category, since a subject is expressed. The fact that the request is actually an infinitive phrase dependent on an impersonal construction will result in the syntactic downgraders' table, under the label "Impersonal construction" and "Embedding".

was be the n° 7 of the chart at page 72, the so called “Query preparatory”⁶⁴. Being the typical formulation of the “Query preparatory” request “Can **you** do x”, the utterances presenting “you” as the subject of the sentence naturally occur with a considerable frequency.

At the second place we find the speaker perspective (26,25% IT, 25,63% GE), which is preferred by Italians in the third and in the fourth interactional situation and by Germans in the first and in the second situation. The fact that an increase in the “weight” of the FTA corresponds to a raise in the amount of the speaker-focused requests could actually confirm the hypothesis according to which avoiding a direct mentioning of the complier of an act sounds more polite than explicitly designating it.

If so, it must be concluded that for the same reasons, to the Italian ear it sounds more polite to explicitly mention either the hearer or the speaker rather than alluding to the role played by external circumstances, whereas for the German speaker it is also a good solution to openly give the requestee a way out of the task mentioning the “Possibility” to perform the desired action⁶⁵.

But before going any further into the analysis of the reasons for these choices, let’s now have a look at the distribution of request strategies in the two languages of the study.

5.2 Strategy type of the head act

As we have seen in the section concerning the methodology I followed to analyse these speech acts, the request strategy is the element which tells us more about the degree of directness which is typical for a language and at the same time also the most “dangerous” feature of a sentence, that is to say the feature of an utterance that could give rise to more misunderstandings, when it comes to cross-cultural⁶⁶ encounters.

As seen in chart 10, request strategies consist basically in three categories: direct, conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect. Previous studies have revealed that in the category “conventionally indirect” strategy, category 7, “reference to preparatory conditions”, is usually the most widely used strategy across different languages. Also in the present study the majority of respondents used this type of strategy, therefore it has been decided to further distinguish in this category some sub-classes according to the “preparatory condition” that is questioned (compare p. 42: “felicity conditions” of a request act).

⁶⁴ In this type of utterance the speaker’s question concerning the hearer’s ability/willingness to carry out a specific task counts as a clear attempt to induce the latter to perform the mentioned act.

⁶⁵ This hypothesis will be confirmed by the analysis of head act strategies.

⁶⁶ But not only, just think about misunderstandings between men and women due to different directness levels, a topic investigated by Tannen (1992).

UNDERCATEGORIES REQUEST TYPE 7 (Query preparatory)				
QUESTIONED PREPARATORY CONDITION	NAME CATEGORY	EXAMPLES ITALIAN	EXAMPLES GERMAN	ABBREVIATION
5.a/d. The speaker asks if the hearer has already done the requested act nor is he/she doing it.	FUTURE ACTS	"Mi porti...?" "Mi porteresti..."	"Nimmst du...?" "Würdest du mir..."	7FU
5.b: The speaker asks if the hearer is able to perform the requested act.	ABILITY HEARER	"Puoi portarmi...?" "Potresti portarmi...?" "Riesci a portarmi...?"	"Kannst du...?" "Könntest du...?" "Würdest du...können?"	7AB
5.c: The speaker asks if he/she has the permission to do or to have something, of course this counts as an attempt to make the hearer do the requested action. The perspective is from the speaker point of view.	PERMISSION	"Posso avere..." "Potrei avere..."	"Darf ich..." "Dürfte ich..."	7PE
5.c. See above, but the point of view is rather external, impersonal.	POSSIBILITY	"Hai la possibilità...?" "Sarebbe possibile...?"	"Wäre es möglich...?" "Besteht die Möglichkeit...?"	7PO
5.e: The speaker asks if the hearer is willing to perform the requested act.	CONDITIONED REQUEST	"Saresti così gentile da...?" "Ti dispiace...?" "Ci sarebbero problemi se...?"	"Wären Sie so nett und...?" "Würden Sie so nett sein und...?" "Würden Sie so freundlich sein und...?" "Würde es dir etwas ausmachen...?"	7CO

Chart 17. Subcategories request type 7

Let us now turn to the analysis of the findings concerning request strategy type, again referring to the categories illustrated in the chart n° 10, which were the same that Blum-Kulka and Ohlstein adopted for their pilot-study about Requests and Apologies in 1984 and the same that Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper coded in 1989 in the "CCSARP Coding Manual"⁶⁷.

5.2.1 Results analysis. Cross cultural variation

S1 Window

S1 WINDOW IT: REQUEST STRATEGY						
CATEGORY NUMBER	1	7FU	7AB	7CO	8	TOT
STUDENTS' NUMBER	12	3	22	2	1	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	30,0%	7,5%	55,0%	5,0%	2,5%	100,0%

Table n°1.a

⁶⁷ To be found in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), p. 273.

S1 WINDOW GE: REQUEST STRATEGY											
CATEGORY NUMBER	1	6	7FU	7AB	7CO	8	9	DA*	NEA*	DPA*	TOT
STUDENTS' NUMBER	8	1	5	19	2	1	1	1	1	1	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	20,0%	2,5%	12,5%	47,5%	5,0%	2,5%	2,5%	2,5%	2,5%	2,5%	100,0%

* Doesn't answer *Not employable answer *Doesn't perform the speech act

Table 1.b

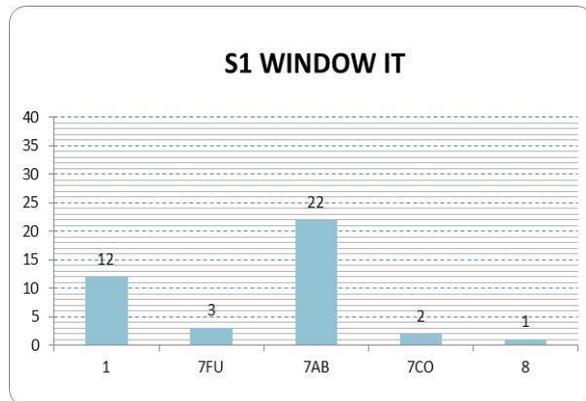


Figure 7.a

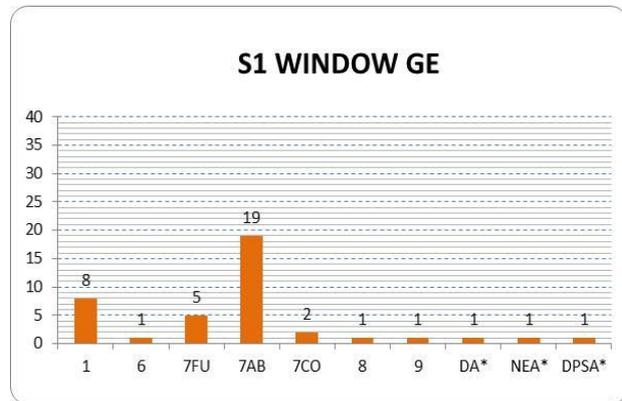


Figure 7.b

The first situation, the one in which students were invited to imagine how a stressed doctor in a rush would ask a nurse to close the window⁶⁸, is the only situation in which level 1, i.e. the most direct request level, is to be found⁶⁹. 12 Italian students and 8 German students choose this category to formulate their request to close the window, as in the example:

- “Gigliola, per cortesia, apra la finestra” (IT)
- “Öffnen Sie bitte das Fenster” (GE)

(“Open the window, please”)

Level 7 is the most frequently selected level of directness, with sub-categories “future acts”, “ability” and “conditioned request” being the three strategies selected by both languages. The majority of both Italian (22) and German (19) students use level 7AB to phrase their utterances, the second in the level of indirectness within category 7 and the level which could be defined as the “standard” request strategy of my study (and the standard conventional indirect request, in short, the “Can you..” type). This class of utterances is so established in everyday conversations that they are immediately recognisable as a request, and in the end they do not sound as if they were indirect at all⁷⁰. The need for the request to be clear and immediately detectable by the nurse and at the same

⁶⁸ See Appendix, Questionnaire, for the complete transcription of the four situations or for their translation in English.

⁶⁹ But, surprisingly, not the situation presenting a higher incidence of direct requests, see below.

⁷⁰ As mentioned at p. 76, J.L.Morgan (1977) distinguishes between two ways of interpreting speech acts of the “Can you” type: as convention of usage of language (the same type of convention at the base of idiomatic expressions as “Break a leg”) or as indirect speech acts. The Author does not consider these expressions to be idioms, but as effective questions about the hearer’s abilities, which, thanks to Grice maxims underlying human communication, are easily

time the desire to maintain a minimum of politeness may have directed respondents towards this strategy (this explanation is probably true for its massive use in the other situations as well).

Comparing figures 7.a and 7.b we immediately see that Italian responses display more agreement in their choices in comparison to their German colleagues: among other categories they also make use of level 6 (suggestory formula, never recorded in Italian data), and level 9 (mild hint, never occurred in Italian data). In this way, German answers differ so much for level of indirectness that we can find formulation as:

- (1) “Therese, öffne bitte die beiden Fenster da hinten, damit Frau/Herr... und ich während der Behandlung keinen Hitzschlag bekommen.“

(tr.: „Therese, please open both windows there at the back, so that Ms/Mr ... and I don’t get a heat shock during the examination”)

but also as:

- (9) “Ganz schon heiß hier“

(tr.: „It’s really hot here”)

In sum, three are the observations that are worth doing here:

- All in all, Italian speakers opt for more direct strategies than German speakers (30 % IT, 21,62 % GE);
- The window situation is the one presenting the highest level of cross-cultural agreement as far as the choice between direct or indirect strategy is concerned (the difference is 8,38%). Cross cultural agreement is also visible in the choice of request strategies and in the order of preference: 7AB-1-7FU-7CO;
- German displays a wider range of indirectness levels actually used by respondents, 7 for German (8 if we include the choice of one student to go off-record without performing the speech act), 5 for Italian).

S2 Notes

S2 NOTES IT: REQUEST STRATEGY								
CATEGORY NUMBER	3	5	7FU	7AB	7PE	7CO	DPA*	TOT
STUDENTS' NUMBER	6	1	12	13	1	6	1	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	15,0%	2,5%	30,0%	32,5%	2,5%	15,0%	2,5%	100,0%
* Doesn't perform the act								

Table n° 2.a

understood as requests. Nonetheless, Morgan stresses the fact that the request implicature is conveyed immediately, without the feeling of an inference taking place.

S2 NOTES GE: REQUEST STRATEGY				
CATEGORY NUMBER	7AB	7PE	7PO	TOT
STUDENTS' NUMBER	35	4	1	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	87,5%	10,0%	2,5%	100,0%

Table n° 2.b

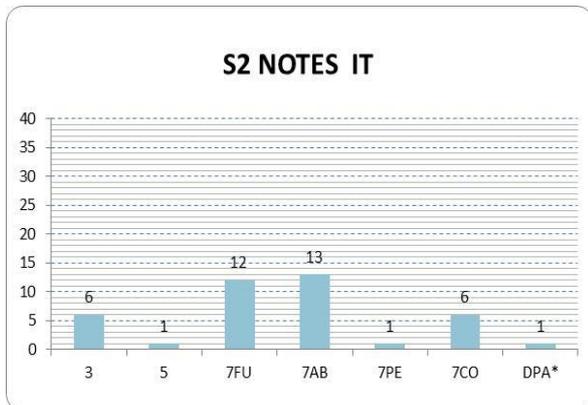


Figure 8.a

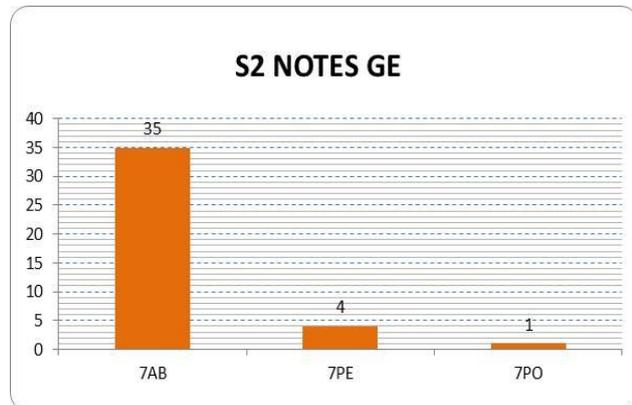


Figure 8.b

As regards the note situation (tables 2.a and 2.b and figures 8.a and 8.b), probably the situation which students felt as the closest to their everyday experiences, it can be observed how intercultural variation becomes considerably bigger. In fact, while Italians formulate as much as 17,95% of their requests with a direct strategy (choosing level 3, hedged performative, and level 5, scope stating), their German counterpart are pretty unanimous in adopting entirely level 7, i.e. reference to preparatory condition. Furthermore, within the Italian group, besides level 7AB (32%), a key role is played by level 7FU (30%), which is not even testified in the German data. A typical formulation of this type is:

- (7FU) “Scusa, mi presteresti gli appunti della scorsa volta?”

(tr. “Excuse me, would you lend me last lecture’s notes?”)

Note that students almost always adopted this construction adding the syntactic downtoner “conditional”, possibly in order to soften the tone of their request. The simple “Mi presti gli appunti dell’ultima volta?” (Will you lend me last lecture’s notes?) would have probably sounded too direct and abrupt. Another interesting phenomenon in the Italian data is the discrete amount (15%) of level 7CO (conditioned requests), the most indirect among conventionally indirect strategies. Two examples of this sort of requests are given below.

- (7CO) “Ti dispiace se faccio le fotocopie dei tuoi appunti?”

(Tr. “Would you mind if I make photocopies of your notes?”)

This gap between two levels of indirectness, and above all the fact that two so different strategies are conspicuously and even distributed, are a proof of the fact that it is Italian, this time, displaying a richer and more variegated set of solutions to perform this speech act.

This is absolutely not the case for German requests, who select only conventionally indirect strategies whose difference, in terms of indirectness, is minimal: the only 3 used categories are one successive to the other, as shown in chart 10.

Interestingly enough, this result is the same that 194 German participants gave in Blum Kulka and House's study "Cross-Cultural and Situational Variation in Requesting Behavior", in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), in which Hebrew, Canadian French, Argentinian Spanish, Australian English and German were examined: in the note situation German is the only language in which 0% of requests were realised through a direct strategy⁷¹ (99,5% constituted conventionally indirect requests). The same result was reported by House and Vollmer (1988): out of eight situations, including $X < Y$, this was the only circumstance in which none of the requests was phrased directly. The impression that the formulation of the 7AB type comes as a immediate answer in this situation is confirmed by the answer a Russian student provides, demonstrating that she already coped with intercultural differences and was skilled enough to learn to master the peculiar pragmatic features of the German language:

- „Von Russisch übertragen: „Gib mir Notizen, um abzuschreiben“. Ich weiss aber, wie ich das auf Deutsch sagen würde: „Könntest du mir bitte deine Notizen ausleihen?“.

In sum, always keeping an eye on Figure 9 (see below) we could observe that also in this case German speakers favoured more indirect formulations than their Italian colleagues, and demonstrated a rather established pattern of request to a requestee felt as peer: 7AB.

S3 Ride

S3 RIDE IT: REQUEST STRATEGY							
CATEGORY NUMBER	3	7FU	7AB	7PO	7CO	8	TOT
STUDENTS' NUMBER	5	13	14	2	2	4	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	12,5%	32,5%	35,0%	5,0%	5,0%	10,0%	100,0%

Table 3.a

⁷¹ Italian, with 82,5% of conventionally indirect requests in the notes situation, would have been at the last place for indirectness in the CCSARP, after German, Australian English, Canadian French, Argentinian Spanish and Hebrew.

S3 RIDE GE: REQUEST STRATEGY								
CATEGORY NUMBER	4	7FU	7AB	7PO	7CO	8	DPA*	TOT
STUDENTS' NUMBER	1	5	23	3	3	4	1	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	2,5%	12,5%	57,5%	7,5%	7,5%	10,0%	2,5%	100,0%

* Doesn't perform the act

Table n° 3.b

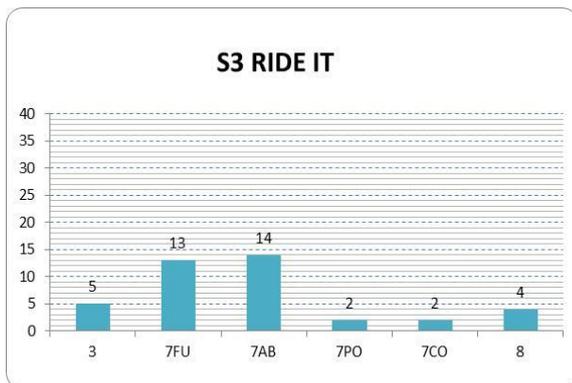


Figure 9.a

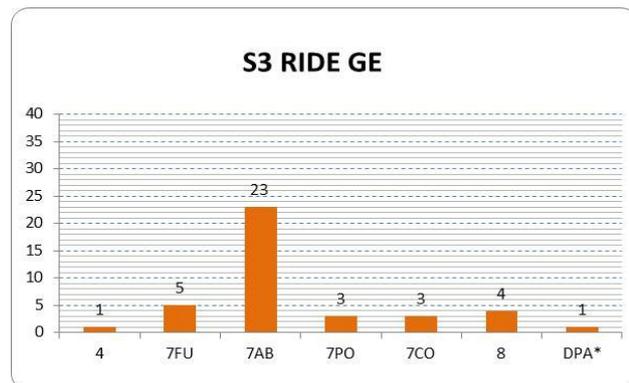


Figure 9.b

This situation is supposed to shed light on the interactional style the two linguistic communities adopt publicly, that is to say with people that they do not really know or with people they are acquainted with but in a formal occasion. For these reasons these results are particularly fascinating, first of all because the first impact a learner is likely to have with a foreign country and culture will probably arise from contact with people he/she still does not know, so students of Italian and German should learn with absolute priority this style, and secondly because we are first of all social beings and the way people talk to foreigners of the same social level.

The first information figures 9.a and 9.b immediately give us is that between Italian and German linguistic communities there is not such a great difference in the strategies with which a request is made. It is found that common patterns are 7FU, 7AB, 7PO, 7CO, 8. The favoured strategy type is once again 7AB. What diverges between Italian and German is once again the general level of directness: Italian questionnaires account for 12,5% of requests formulated in level 3 (hedged performative), and as much as 32% in level 7FU (the most direct within category 7), as in the example:

- (7FU) “Michele, scusa, mi daresti un passaggio? Ti dispiace? Perché c’è sciopero, sennò arrivo in ritardo al lavoro!”

(tr. “Excuse me, Michele, would you give me a ride? Do you mind? Because there is a strike, otherwise I’m going to be late at work!”)

German respondents confirm their predilection for category 7AB, with 57,5% of requests being phrased as in the example:

- (7AB) “Fährst du zum Hauptgebäude? Könntest du mich vielleicht mitnehmen?”

(tr. Are you driving to the head office? Could you possibly take me there?)

It could be worth noticing that as for category 2 (explicit performative), 6 (suggestory formula) and 9 (mild hint) German participants are the only ones using level 4 (locution derivable), never recorded in the Italian data:

- (strategy 4) “Du musst mich unbedingt mitnehmen!”

(tr. “You really have to take me there!”)

In conclusion, it can be observed that both groups of respondents grasped the sensitivity of the issue: on the one hand, the need to have a lift urgently (expressed in the above mentioned example), on the other, the risk of appearing awkward or intrusive. Italian students seem to have found a solution whereby selecting a slightly higher level of directness than their German colleagues, yet making frequent use of downtoners as for example, the conditional form. Germans instead, prefer, with some interesting exceptions, a slightly higher level of indirectness. Finally, a discrete percentage (10%) of both languages select level 8 (mild hint), probably in order to leave the addressee completely free to choose whether to pick up the signal or to drop it. If we quickly compare results of the ride situation with outcomes of similar studies⁷² we find out that for example the request strategies House and Vollmer’s 1988 elicited were slightly more indirect than the ones realised in my research: if in the former conventional indirect requests constitute 97,5 % of total requests⁷³ in the latter they amount to 87,17 %.

S4 Extension

S4 EXTENSION IT: REQUEST STRATEGY										
CATEGORY NUMBER	3	5	7FU	7AB	7PE	7PO	7CO	8	NEA*	TOT
STUDENTS' NUMBER	6	3	2	13	1	9	3	2	1	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	15,0%	7,5%	5,0%	32,5%	2,5%	22,5%	7,5%	5,0%	2,5%	100,0%
*Not employable answer										

Table n° 4.a

⁷² This operation is possible just for the German language since a study in the CCSARP’s model had never been realised.

⁷³ German rates at the second place after Argentinian Spanish and before Hebrew, Canadian French, and Australian English in the CCSARP (House and Vollmer 1988) for level of indirectness in this situation. Italian would have ranked at the fifth place with 77,5%.

S4 EXTENSION GE: REQUEST STRATEGY										
CATEGORY NUMBER	2	3	5	7FU	7AB	7PO	7CO	8	DA	TOT
STUDENTS' NUMBER	3	10	3	1	5	14	2	1	1	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	7,5%	25,0%	7,5%	2,5%	12,5%	35,0%	5,0%	2,5%	2,5%	100,0%

Table n° 4.b

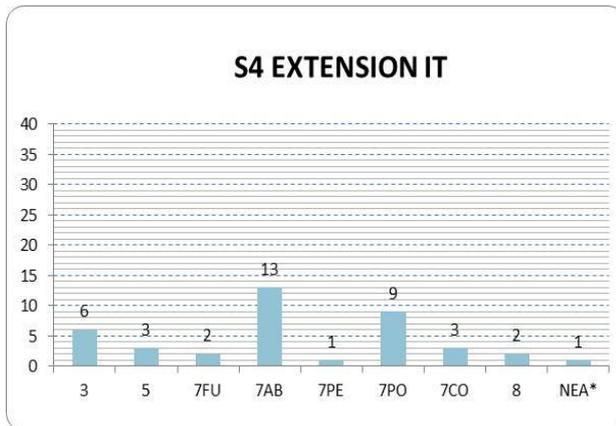


Figure 10.a

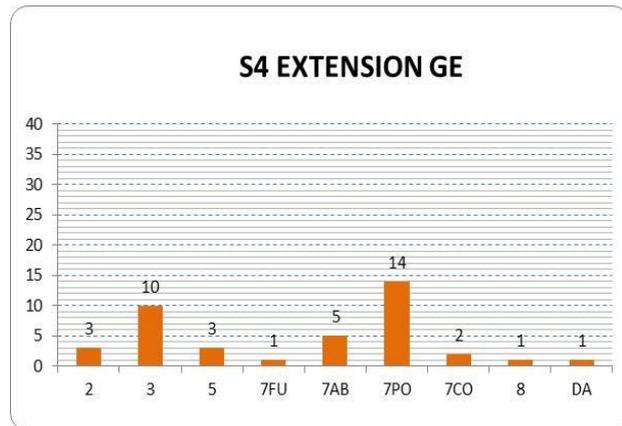


Figure 10.b

If we look at figures 10.a and 10.b, we are immediately struck by the rich amount of formulations with which German and Italian students would ask a university lecturer an extension on a term paper. The most often used formulation remains in both cases once again the “conventionally indirect”. As regards direct requests level 3 (hedged performative) and 5 (scope stating) are recorded in Italian whereas level 2 (never occurred in Italian), 3 and 5 are the level of indirectness chosen by Germans. The careful reader will certainly notice here an interesting anomaly (clearly visible in figure 11, below): if up to now the number of German speakers employing indirect strategies had always been bigger than the number of the Italian ones, here the situation is reversed (and, to be precise, exactly mirror-like to situation n° 2). In fact, German speakers choosing an indirect strategy are 17,95% less than Italian ones.

Another interesting observation is that in Italian strategy 7AB (32,5%) and strategy 7PO (22,5%) are by far the most frequently used strategies. On the contrary, German data reveal that if strategy 7AB had been the preferred indirectness level in all the three other situations, in this one 7PO occurs most often (35%)⁷⁴. The reasons behind this phenomenon might be easily comprehended if we think that this situation was rated in my hypothesis (see chart 16) as the weightiest in terms of risk of a face threat, being the rate of imposition, social distance and power

⁷⁴ In this case my results differ significantly with the ones gathered by House and Vollmeier (1988): the two linguists had recorded 98% on indirect strategies and only 2% of direct ones.

difference rather marked. As a consequence, students may have felt the need to “externalize” the root of the matter referring to elusive “circumstances” that would allow the lecturer to accord the extension, phrasing their requests as in the example:

- 7PO “Ich weiß zwar, dass Sie in der Regel keine Fristverlängerung erteilen, wäre es aber vielleicht dennoch möglich, dass Sie für mich eine Ausnahme machen? [...]“

(Tr. “I perfectly know that you do not normally grant any extension, but would perhaps be still possible that you do an exception for me?”)

The advantage of such a formulation clearly is that the requester does not impinge on the requestee’s needs or wants, letting him/her completely free to refuse to comply with the his/her wishes just by saying that “it is unfortunately not possible”. In this way the face of both speaker and hearer is saved. This is precisely the logic at the root of what in the first part of this work has been defined as “negative politeness”.

To conclude, as far as the general level of indirectness is concerned, even if a certain level of cross-cultural agreement on the situational appropriateness of conventional indirectness is to be appreciated, especially in the window and in the ride situation, Italian and German do not agree on the rank of the different situations by the degree of directness. In fact, if in Italian we have, by degree of directness, the order S1 Window - S4 Extension – S2 Notes – S3 Ride, in German we have S4 Extension – S1 Window – S3 Ride – S4 Notes.

	CATEGORY NUMBER	STUDENTS' NUMBER		STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE		STUDENTS' NUMBER		STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	
		IT	GE	IT	GE	IT	GE	IT	GE
DIRECT STRATEGIES	1	12	8	7,59%	5,16%	33	25	20,89%	16,13%
	2	0	3	0,00%	1,94%				
	3	17	10	10,76%	6,45%				
	4	0	1	0,00%	0,65%				
	5	4	3	2,53%	1,94%				
CONVENTIONALLY INDIRECT STRATEGIES	6	0	1	0,00%	0,65%	118	123	74,68%	79,35%
	7FU	30	11	18,99%	7,10%				
	7AB	62	82	39,24%	52,90%				
	7PE	2	4	1,27%	2,58%				
	7PO	11	18	6,96%	11,61%				
	7CO	13	7	8,23%	4,52%				
NON-CONVENTIONALLY INDIRECT STRATEGIES	8	7	6	4,43%	3,87%	7	7	4,43%	4,52%
	9	0	1	0,00%	0,65%				
Total employable answers		158	155	100%	100%	158	155	100%	100%

Table n° 5

5.2.2 Results analysis. Situational variation

Table and figure 9 display situational variation of direct and indirect strategies for the two languages of the research.

INDIRECTNESS SITUATIONAL VARIATION IT-GE										
	DIRECT STRATEGIES				(CONVENTIONALLY AND NON-CONVENTIONALLY) INDIRECT STRATEGIES				TOTAL EMPLOYABLE ANSWERS	
	STUDENTS' NUMBER		STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE		STUDENTS' NUMBER		STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE		IT	GE
	IT	GE	IT	GE	IT	GE	IT	GE	IT	GE
S1 WINDOW	12	8	30,00%	21,62%	28	29	70,00%	78,38%	40	37
S2 NOTES	7	0	17,95%	0,00%	32	40	82,05%	100,00%	39	40
S3 RIDE	5	1	12,50%	2,56%	35	38	87,50%	97,44%	40	39
S4 EXTENSION	9	16	23,08%	41,03%	30	23	76,92%	58,97%	39	39

Table 6. Indirectness. Situational variation Italian-German

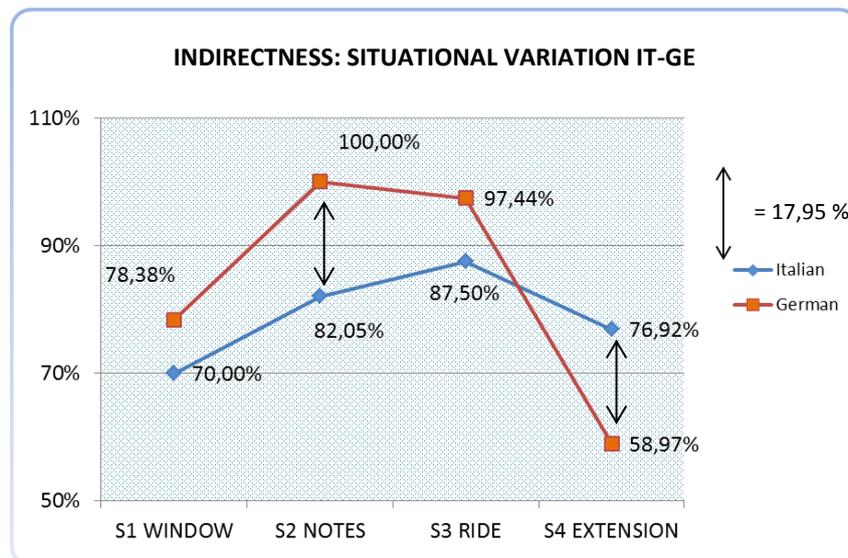


Figure 11 Indirectness. Situational variation Italian-German

There are basically two questions we can try to find an answer to by analysing them. First, do German and Italian speakers react in the same way as long as the face threat of the act increases (provided that they rate the face threat in the same way)?

Secondly, is our working hypothesis schematized in chart 16, which is grounded on most of the literature on the matter⁷⁵, as well as previous studies (with other languages), confirmed? In other words, does the level of indirectness exhibited by Italian and German requests grow as long as the face threat becomes bigger⁷⁶? If so, the idea would be confirmed that, for example, given the same propositional content it is possible

“to increase the degree of politeness by using a more and more indirect kind of illocution. Illocutions tend to be more polite because they increase the degree of optionality and because the more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tend to be”. (Leech 1983, p. 108)

The answer to this question is yes, but, most interestingly, up to a certain point. This point is not the same for Italians and Germans. As we saw in section 4.2.2, in the first situation students were asked to put themselves in the shoes of a doctor in a stressful and slightly chaotic situation, at the end of a tiring work-day, asking his assistant-nurse to open the window. It could be interesting to notice that

⁷⁵ See section 3.6 at p. 51.

⁷⁶ In fact, in table 1 we see just the evolution of the relationship between speaker and hearer throughout the four situations but we must bear in mind that the situations were designed so that social power, social distance and rate of imposition increased. See section 4.2.2 for a more thorough explanation of the connection between face-threat and the four situations proposed in my DCT.

this is the situation in Italian presenting the highest degree of impositives⁷⁷, whereas this is not the case for German, where the higher percentage of this strategy is to be found in the extension situation. The face-threat is rated, at least by the researcher, to be minimal, since the supposed interlocutors have known each other for a very long time, the relative power that the hearer has over the speaker is also pretty low, and the favour asked for is quite small. Informants replied as predicted: both Italians and Germans used here a considerable amount of imperatives (even if always inferior to the amount of indirect requests). Such a high amount of imperatives could be seen at the light of Brown and Levinson's explanation of the possible reasons for doing an act baldly, without redress, i.e. in the most direct, clear, unambiguous way as possible.

“Normally, a FTA will be done in this way only if the speaker does not fear retribution from the addressee, for example in circumstances where (a.) S and H both tacitly agree that relevance of face demands may be suspended in the interests of urgency and efficiency” (Brown and Levinson 1987, p. 69).

The situation of a doctor working since many years in harness with a nurse seems to me to fall perfectly under the case illustrated by the two linguists; hence the decision to use such a potentially face threatening level of directness. The amount of strategies used is also very limited, and the middle length of utterances is quite reduced.

In the second situation, there is a sudden increase in the amount of conventionally indirect requests. As visible from figure 11, cross cultural agreement on the situational appropriateness of indirectness is less marked in S2 than in S1. In fact the German group reaches a peak of 100% and the Italian one raises “only” for 12,05%, reaching a peak of 82,05% of indirect requests.

However, both groups register an increase in the amount of speaker-based utterances, which in turn imply apparent requests for permission as in “Can I have?”. As noted by Gordon and Ervin-Tripp, these kind of utterances constitute a strategy of politeness since

“true permission requests imply that the addressee has control over the speaker, and that the speaker's wishes are subject to the hearer's approval. This is precisely the opposite of the status relations in a command. As a result, borrowing the social implications of a permission request in asking for something is a very marked way of avoiding the appearance of trying to control or impose on another” (Gordon and Ervin-Tripp 1984, p. 308).

Scholars have underlined the importance of factors as the hearer's obligation to carry out the act, the speakers' right to demand compliance and the likelihood of compliance in determining the level of indirectness in a request. The enhanced perception of the need of politeness may be due to the

⁷⁷ “Impositives” is the name of a new category yielded by Blum-Kulka and House in “Cross-Cultural and Situational Variation in requesting Behavior”, in Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper (1989), collapsing the first five direct request strategies, p. 123.

fact that in this situation the friend's degree of obligation of giving the notes, the speaker's right to claim the notes, and also the likelihood of seeing the request immediately satisfied is not so marked and obvious as it was in the first situation.

Until this moment our results confirm our working hypothesis, that is to say, that the higher the degree of obligation for compliance built into the situation and the higher the requester's degree of right for demanding compliance grew, the more indirectness emerged in the request.

In the ride situation, surprisingly, this expectation seems to be fulfilled, but only for Italians, who further heighten the general level of indirectness up to the 87,50 %, while German respondents slightly reduce it. As a matter of fact, if we have a closer look at the strategies employed by Germans, we easily notice that if on the one hand the level of directness slightly increases, with a student using strategy number 4 and five students using level 7FU, other 10 students (25%) use actually a more indirect strategy than in the previous situation. Furthermore, in this situation both groups choose to go off record resorting to hinting strategies, whereby producing an intentionally vague statement that can be disambiguated by the hearer (if he wants to) as well as overlooked by a non-compliant listener. This result is not striking since in this situation students had to put themselves in a situation in which the pre-existing rights and obligations on the part of the hearer to give a ride was quite low, given the social distance, and the potential intrusiveness entailed in the favour asked.

The most interesting outcome, as anticipated in the previous section, concerns the last situation: both groups selected a lower level of indirectness when having to phrase a request that, as explained in section 4.2.2, in terms of potential face threat ($D(S,H)+P(H,S)+R_x$) was surely challenging and demanding, and that could also be considered problematic as far as the likelihood of compliance, the pre-existing rights and obligations (in the case of an exception on the date of delivery of a paper is almost null) is concerned. Particularly outstanding are German results: if on the one hand, formulations of requests became longer and richer of supportive moves (see below), on the other hand, 40 % of respondents seems to go much more "straight to the point" using levels of directness never occurred before, as number 2 (explicit performative), 3 (hedged performative) and 5 (scope stating). If we have a look at graphs 4.a and 4.b, p. 5, we notice that in this situation requests formulated as speaker-based conditions are predominant. These requests are statements, and as such they do not carry immediate elicitive force. However, the request is phrased as an explicit wish on behalf of the requester, as in

(3) – "Ich würde Sie bitten, mir ein bisschen mehr Zeit zur Fertigstellung zur Verfügung zu stellen"

(tr. "I would ask you to grant me some more time to complete my work")

or as in:

(3) – "Volevo chiederLe una proroga di due settimane per la consegna della tesina [...]"

(tr. “I wanted to ask you an extension on the presentation of the paper”)

the hearer is not offered any already formulated option for refusing, by stating for example that the condition in question is not fulfilled (as would happen in strategy 7). In contrast, such an assertive structure seems to take compliance for granted, or, better said, their only possible response seems to be that of compliance. As Lakoff (1973) states:

“That is, in making requests, imperatives are less polite than declaratives, which are in turn less polite than questions” (p. 100).

“A question requires a response (verbal), a declarative requires the addressee’s act of compliance” (p. 110).

If we stick to this way of reasoning we should conclude that Italian and German students do not feel the need to be as polite in this situation as in situation 3.

The reader will have noticed at this point that the concept of politeness advocated by most of literature on the matter (see chapter 1) has fully unveiled its weaknesses, and, even if its validity is not questionable, the need to integrate it into a more comprehensive theory of politeness that accounts for intercultural differences and situational variation appears to be unavoidable. The next section will be dedicated to giving some possible interpretations and explanations of the crosscultural and situational variation observed until now. This will lead us to the formulation of a new framework in which to inscribe the delicate phenomenon of crosscultural pragmatics.

5.2.3 Issues in the interpretation of the observed behaviour

It has often been proposed that linguistic variation universally depends on dimensions of social reality, such as power and solidarity (e.g. Brown and Gilman 1960, Ervin-Tripp 1976), combined, for requests in particular, by the degree of imposition involved (Brown and Levinson 1987, this paper, p. 13). Scollon and Scollon 1995, for instance, expects indirectness to increase with social distance, or to decrease with social power. In short, we should expect to find greater indirectness between strangers and in upward speech from people in positions of relatively low power to their superior.

Empirical research in requestive behaviour (Ervin-Tripp 1976, Blum-Kulka et al. 1985) partly confirmed these expectations. For example, it has been demonstrated that Hebrew requests tend to be much more direct when the requester is in a position of power. At the same time, requests in American English vary considerably with relative distance: Those within family and friends are less indirect than those between strangers.

But when we evaluate the way in which these modifications influence the degree of directness in the two speech communities at issue, we assume that the way in which these variables are perceived is the same across different cultures. In other words, we are assuming, in our case,

that course mates at University are as close in Italy as they are in Germany. On the contrary, we should take into consideration the fact that members of different cultures might differ in their perception of the social parameters mentioned, and that any difference in their perception could result in a difference in behaviour. For example, if the social status of a lecturer in one culture is perceived as higher or lower than in another, this may lead to a difference in the level of directness in which the student would phrase a request to a lecturer. If asking strangers for a ride is considered more an imposition by Italians than by Germans, then we might expect the former to hedge in this case more than the latter.

Furthermore, each of the dimensions interacts in everyday communication with a series of other factors, as the already mentioned rights and obligations of the parties involved (“legitimacy” in Herman’s 1982 terms), the goal of the request, the age and sex of the speaker, not to mention the variables of the communicative event pinpointed by Hymes (settings, participants, ends, act sequence, psychological keys, instrumentalities, norms, genre). As a consequence, it might also be the case that, as suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987), cultures differ in the relative weight attributed to social factors in determining variation in behaviour. Relative distance may be a dominant factor in one culture but not in another, while relative power could be more decisive in the latter than in the former⁷⁸.

If so, we should conclude, for example, that German respondents considered social distance existing between students at University to be bigger than what was felt by Italian participants. In the same way, we could suppose that asking a lecturer for an extension in the date of presentation of a paper in Italy is perceived as much more an imposition as it is in Germany. What is more, the conclusion could be drawn that the level of acquaintance might be a dominant factor in the Italian culture, where S3 (in which the two parts hardly know each other) was the situation in which a larger number of indirect strategies was used, but not in the German one.

Nevertheless, other parameters as the general length of the utterances and the number of supportive moves (see below) used in both groups confirm the impression that the four situations were correctly placed so that potential face threat, or, better said, the “need of politeness” became bigger and bigger from S1 to S4.

A second possible explanation of the singular results obtained could be offered by Wolfson (1986, 1988), who, analysing data obtained through an ethnographic approach, observed that there

⁷⁸ As becomes clear from the last examples, a painstaking research would have required a pre-study whereby, through an assessment questionnaire, informants would have been asked to rate each situation in terms of some dimensions, as for example relative distance between the interlocutors, the hearer’s degree of obligation in carrying out the request, the speaker’s degree of right in issuing the request, etc. In this way a precise and more reliable interpretation of the findings would have been possible, and the level of directness could have been evaluated not only in terms of differences in the perception of its link with politeness but also in terms of the importance given to the specific parameters determining a face-threat. Due to time reasons this was unfortunately not possible, but we should take this into consideration when drawing our conclusions.

is a consistent difference in the speech behaviour that middle class Americans use with intimates, status unequals and strangers, on the one hand, and with non-intimates, status equal friends, co-workers and acquaintances on the other. Wolfson labelled this phenomenon “the bulge”, because of the way the frequencies of certain types of speech behaviour look on a table. When the speech acts are compared in terms of social relationship of the speakers, the two extremes of social distance – minimum and maximum – seem to call for very similar behaviour, while relationships which are more towards the centre present specific differences.

The phenomenon of the “bulge” described by Wolfson is to be noticed also in my study (see figure 9), where situations 1 and 4 present in both studies more direct strategies than in situations 2 and 3. According to Wolfson, the explanation for this pattern is that the social relationships at the two extremes (for example intimates on the one side and status unequals on the other) have one extremely important factor in common: they are certain. In other words, the more the relationship is seen as fixed, the more likely it is that people will know what to expect from one another and the less will they be afraid of doing themselves social damage to each other. It is in relationships which are not so defined, Wolfson continues, that the potential exists, for example, for a friendship to emerge, and it is in these “still open” relationships, therefore, which the greatest need for care and negotiation in interaction will be perceived. In her work for refusals, Beebe et al. (1985, p. 4) had elicited similar findings:

“Our ethnographically collected data appears to follow Wolfson’s hypothesis. Strangers are brief. If they want to say “no”, they do so. Real intimates are also brief. It is friends and other acquaintances who are most likely to get involved in long negotiations with multiple repetitions, extensive elaborations, and a wide variety of semantic formulas”.

The fact that the second and the third situations, in which the two interactants were supposed to be at the beginning of a friendship (S2) and newly colleagues (S3) accounts for a greater level of indirectness could then perfectly be explained in the light of Wolfson and Beebe’s considerations.

The third possible reason that we can trace to the increased use of direct strategies in situations 1 and 4 can be seen in the light of the themes dealt in section 1.1, p. 9. We have seen how Grice 1975 isolated four Maxims to which every speaker should conform in order to achieve a maximally efficient communication: speak the truth, do not say more or less than is required, be relevant and be clear. Nevertheless, the whole thrust of this paper is that people commonly and conventionally deviate from these maxims in order to give attention to face and be polite. Consequently, we can conclude that whenever the speaker wants or needs to do the FTA with maximum efficiency more than he wants to satisfy the hearer’s face, he will chose the bald-on-record strategy. In the first situation the considerable use of direct strategies is pretty evident: the urgency of having a bit of fresh air in order to carry out the last medical examination in the best way

and at the same time the task-orientation of both interactants makes the face-redress unnecessary. If we stick to this way of thinking, we could reasonably presume that in the fourth situation the need to be clear and the importance of the matter could have played an important role in determining the directness of the request, leaving to the internal and external modifications the task to “give face” and convey politeness.

The fourth key for the interpretation of my results which I would like here to offer to the reader is also the one that convinces me the most and constitutes the reason for which I decided to investigate this topic, namely a critic to the idea that the use of indirect strategies always increases the degree of politeness, and that indirect illocutions tend to be more polite because a) they increase the degree of optionality and b) the more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be (Leech 1983, p. 108).

In dealing with expressions of negative politeness Brown and Levinson (1987) had already highlighted that every time we have to do a FTA we experience a clash between two natural wants (see p. 52-53, this volume): the desire to go on-record, thus being direct, and the need to communicate that we do not want to coerce the hearer, something which is achieved through indirectness. The tension towards directness comes into play when we want to avoid further imposition of prolixity (resulting in a waste of time) or obscurity (waste of time and extra work of interpretation of our needs by the hearer), for example when bothering important persons for favours. In these cases politeness may be expressed by not making the hearer waste time and may lead us to come rapidly to the point. In other words, doing the FTA precisely baldly on record minimizes – by implication – the face threat itself. Lakoff (1973) went to such lengths as to state that this was the most important feature of politeness.

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 132), conversely, state that conventionally indirectness is so to say, the “linguistic embodiment” of politeness, since it is a sort of compromise between the two mentioned tensions. In fact, it prescribes the use of phrases and sentences which have contextually unambiguous meanings (different from their literal meaning, therefore they have been compared to idioms) and at the same time it allows the hearer “a way out” of the undesired task.

What the results of my study demonstrate, in my view, is different both from Lakoff and Brown and Levinson’s conception. What my findings reveal is that what is considered a “polite request” is the fruit of a steady, often unconscious, evaluation of all the factors involved that brings the speakers to use each time a different strategy: directness, conventional indirectness, non-conventional indirectness. This choice is first of all subject to cultural perception of social situations, of directness and of politeness itself, and may vary also within a linguistic community.

5.3 Internal and external modification

So far, discussion has focused on the relationship between levels of directness and levels of politeness. But to complicate matters further, indirectness is certainly not the only dimension of requesting behaviour which affects politeness. After the hearer has decided on the level of directness for performing the act, s/he still has a variety of verbal means available with which to manipulate the degree of imposition involved. In sum, the presence or absence of various internal and external modifiers also plays a role in creating a perception of “Politeness”. In the following, results concerning both types of manipulations will be presented. Charts concerning the abbreviations used for the several categories are also provided.

5.3.1 Internal modification. Syntactic downgraders

ABBREVIATIONS SYNTACTIC DOWNGRADERS					
QUESTION	PAST TENSE	NEGATION of a PREPARATORY CONDITION	CONDITIONAL CLAUSE	IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTION	EMBEDDING
Q.	P.T.	N.P.C.	C.C.	I.C.	E.

Chart 18

S1 WINDOW IT. SYNTACTIC DOWNGRADERS					
CATEGORY	Q.	C.C.	I.C.	TOTAL SYNTACTIC DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	26	17	2	45	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	65,0%	42,5%	5,0%	112,5%	100,0%

S1 WINDOW GE. SYNTACTIC DOWNGRADERS						
CATEGORY	Q.	C.C.	I.C.	E.	TOTAL SYNTACTIC DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	16	20	3	2	41	37
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	43,2%	54,1%	8,1%	5,4%	110,8%	100,0%

Table 7.a

Table 7.b

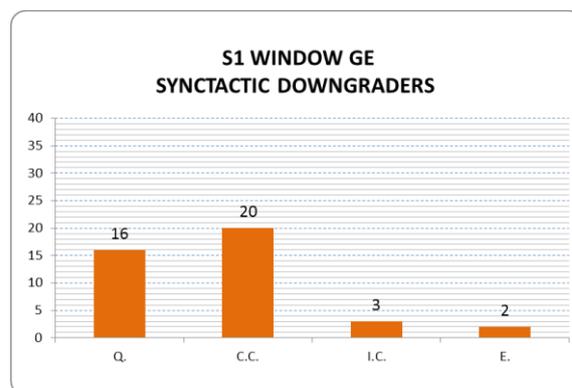
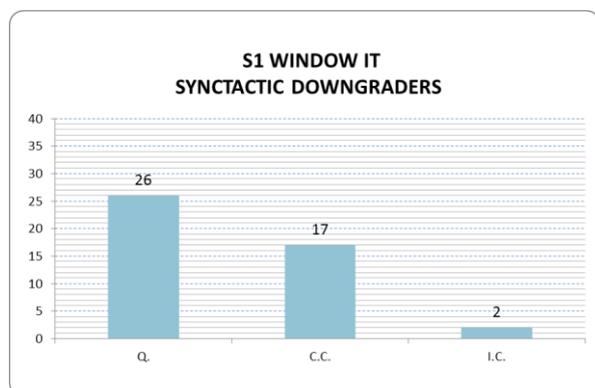


Figure 12.a

Figure 12.b

S2 NOTES IT. SYNCTACTIC DOWNGRADERS							
CATEGORY	Q.	P.T.	N.	C.C.	E.	TOTAL SYNCTACTIC DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	35	1	2	25	3	66	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	89,7%	2,6%	5,1%	64,1%	7,7%	169,2%	100,0%

Table 8.a

S2 NOTES GE. SYNCTACTIC DOWNGRADERS							
CATEGORY	Q.	P.T.	C.C.	I.C.	E.	TOTAL SYNCTACTIC DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	33	1	23	1	6	64	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	82,5%	2,5%	57,5%	2,5%	15,0%	160,0%	100,0%

Table 8.b

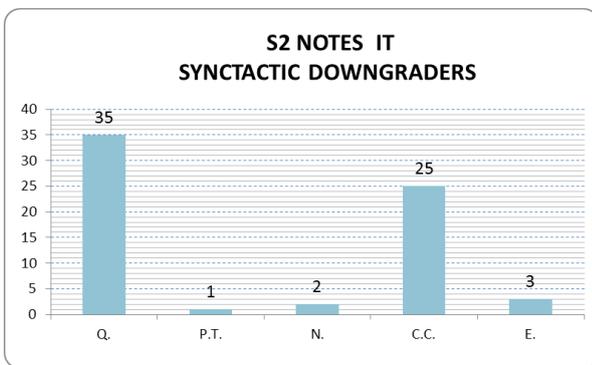


Figure 13.a

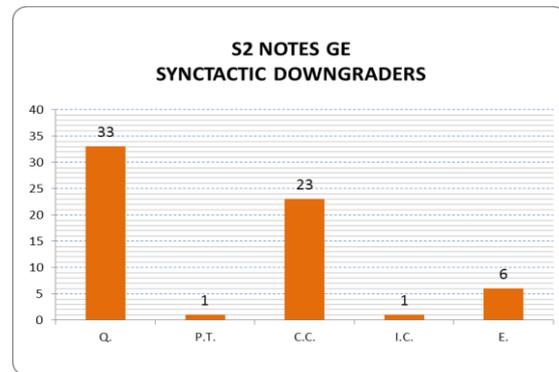


Figure 13.b

S3 RIDE IT. SYNCTACTIC DOWNGRADERS							
CATEGORY	Q.	P.T.	N.	C.C.	E.	TOTAL SYNCTACTIC DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	38	1	5	30	2	74	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	95,0%	2,5%	12,5%	75,0%	5,0%	185,0%	100,0%

Table 9.a

S3 RIDE GE. SYNCTACTIC DOWNGRADERS						
CATEGORY	Q.	C.C.	I.C.	E.	TOTAL SYNCTACTIC DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	32	34	4	12	82	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	82,1%	87,2%	10,3%	30,8%	210,3%	100,0%

Table 9.b

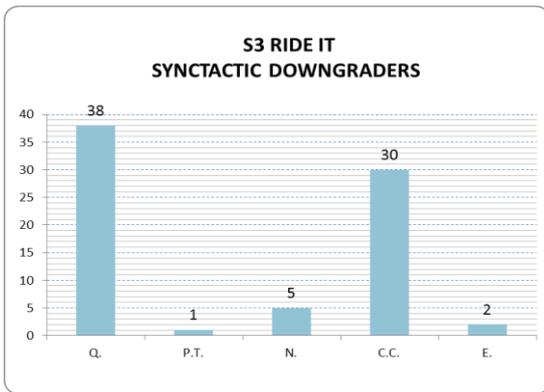


Figure 14.a

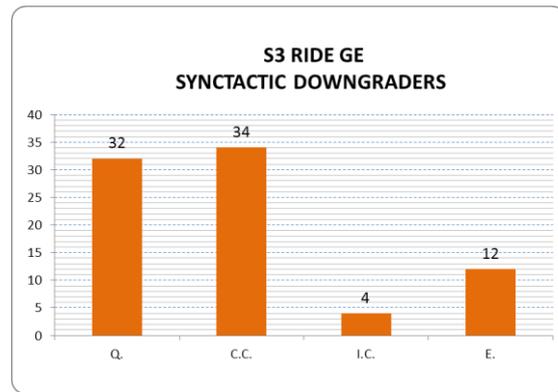


Figure 14.b

S4 EXTENSION IT. SYNCTACTIC DOWNGRADERS							
CATEGORY	Q.	P.T.	C.C.	I.C.	E.	TOTAL SYNCTACTIC DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	20	2	27	9	17	75	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	51,3%	5,1%	69,2%	23,1%	43,6%	192,3%	100,0%

Table 10.a

S4 EXTENSION GE. SYNCTACTIC DOWNGRADERS							
CATEGORY	Q.	N.	C.C.	I.C.	E.	TOTAL SYNCTACTIC DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	22	2	27	14	12	77	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	56,4%	5,1%	69,2%	35,9%	30,8%	197,4%	100,0%

Table 10.b

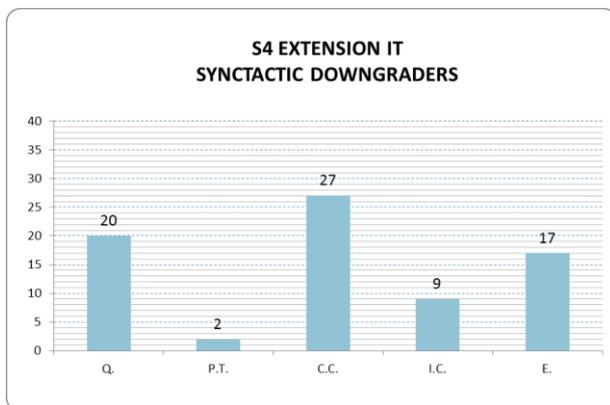


Figure 15.a

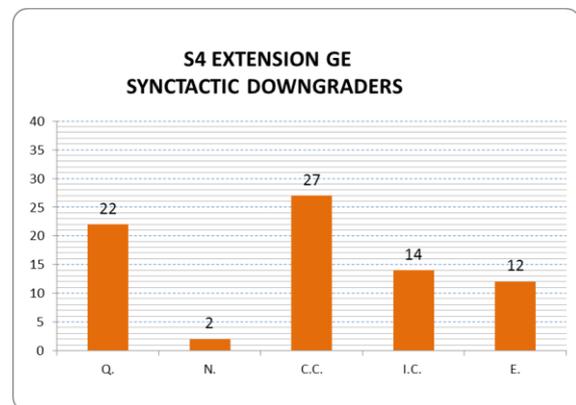


Figure 15.b

- As table 28 shows, more than the totality of both Italian and German respondents use at least one syntactic device in all situations in order to soften the impact their request was likely to have on the receiver. The two groups are in considerable agreement about how to mitigate their request syntactically: this means that all registered categories have been used at least one time by speakers of both languages. Across language groups and situations, the most frequently used syntactic downgrader is the question, either on its own or in combination with another syntactic mitigator, the conditional. The use of two forms seems to be more conspicuous in the Italian group: the

negation of a preparatory condition, as in the utterance “Non è che mi daresti uno strappo?” (tr. “Won’t you give me a lift?”), and the past tense, as in the example: “Volevo chiederti: ti dispiacerebbe prestarmi gli appunti della scorsa lezione?” (“I wanted to ask you: would you mind lending me last lecture’s notes?”).

- As regards the general amount of syntactic mitigators and their variation across the four situations we can note that the only case in which the use of these devices diverges significantly in the two languages is the ride situation. In fact German respondents display a marked use of embedded formulations (30,8 %), often dependent by an appreciation clause, as in “Wären Sie so freundlich, mich mitzunehmen?“ (tr. “Would you be so nice as to take me as well?“). The impersonal construction also prevails among German results, as foreseeable by the higher amount of impersonal perspective and request strategy 7PO.

The general trend of syntactic downgraders follows a steady rise in the Italian results whereas in German it reaches a peak in the ride situation in order to drop again in the extension situation.

5.3.2 Internal modification. Lexical and phrasal downgraders

ABBREVIATIONS LEXICAL / PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS							
POLITENESS MARKER	UNDERSTATER	HEDGE	SUBJECTIVIZER	DOWNTONER	CAJOLER	APPEALER	HESITATOR
P.M.	U.	H.	S.	D.	C.	A.	H.

Chart 19

S1 WINDOW IT. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS					
CATEGORY	P.M.	U.	C.	TOTAL LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	28	3	1	32	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	70,0%	7,5%	2,5%	80,0%	100,0%

Table 11.a

S1 WINDOW GE. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS							
CATEGORY	P.M.	U.	S.	D.	C.	TOTAL LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	28	1	1	3	1	34	37
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	75,7%	2,7%	2,7%	8,1%	2,7%	91,9%	100,0%

Table 11.b

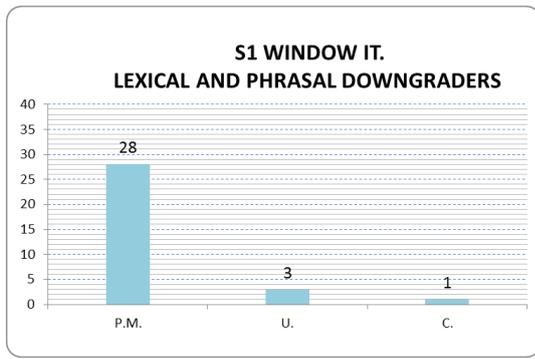


Figure 16.a

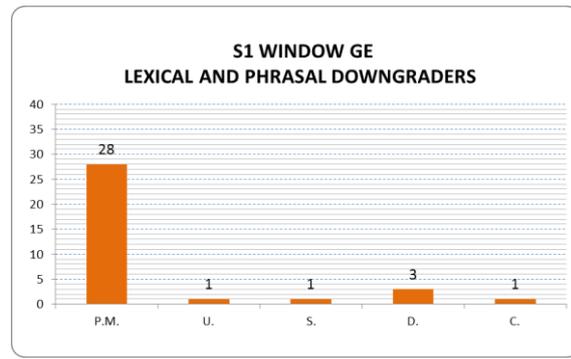


Figure 16.b

S2 NOTES IT. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS					
CATEGORY	P.M.	U.	S.	TOTAL LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	7	8	1	16	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	17,9%	20,5%	2,6%	41,0%	100,0%

Table 12.a

S2 NOTES GE. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS							
CATEGORY	P.M.	U.	S.	D.	C.	TOTAL LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	9	2	4	17	2	34	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	22,5%	5,0%	10,0%	42,5%	5,0%	85,0%	100,0%

Table 12.b

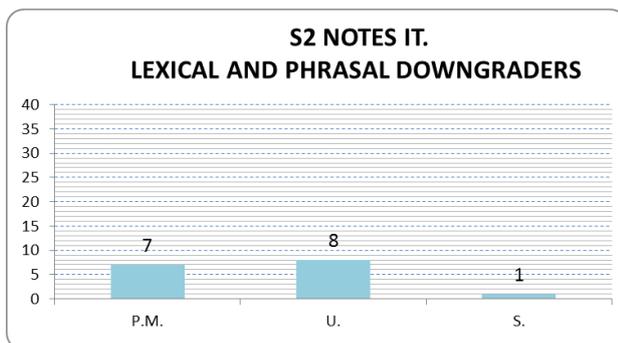


Figure 17.a

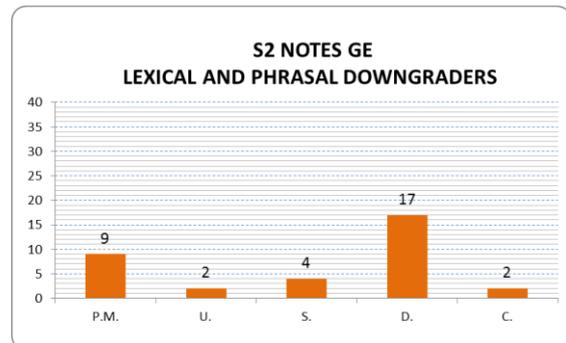


Figure 17.b

S3 RIDE IT. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS					
CATEGORY	P.M.	U.	D.	TOTAL LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	11	6	9	26	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	27,5%	15,0%	22,5%	65,0%	100,0%

Table 13.a

S3 RIDE GE. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS								
CATEGORY	P.M.	U.	S.	D.	C.	A.	TOTAL LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	4	5	1	20	2	3	35	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	10,3%	12,8%	2,6%	51,3%	5,1%	7,7%	89,7%	100,0%

Table 13.b

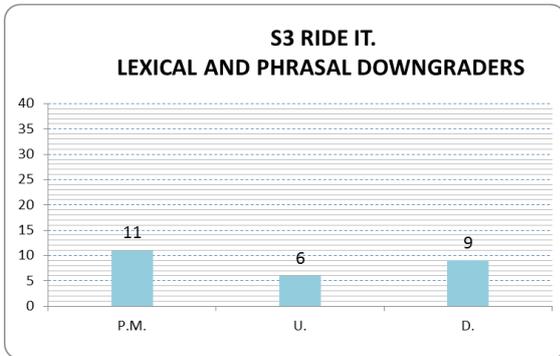


Figure 18.a

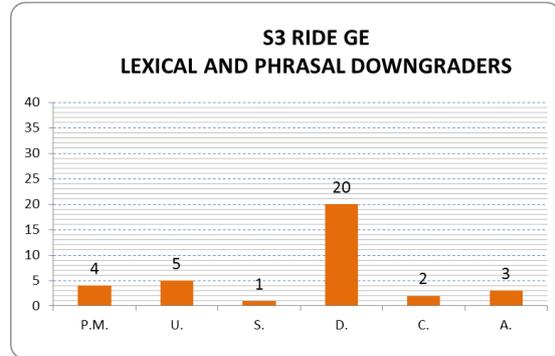


Figure 18.b

S4 EXTENSION IT. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS						
CATEGORY	P.M.	U.	H.	S.	TOTAL LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	6	1	6	8	21	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	15,4%	2,6%	15,4%	20,5%	53,8%	100,0%

Table 14.a

S4 EXTENSION GE. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS							
CATEGORY	P.M.	U.	H.	D.	C.	TOTAL LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	4	1	10	8	3	26	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	10,3%	2,6%	25,6%	20,5%	7,7%	66,7%	100,0%

Table 14.b

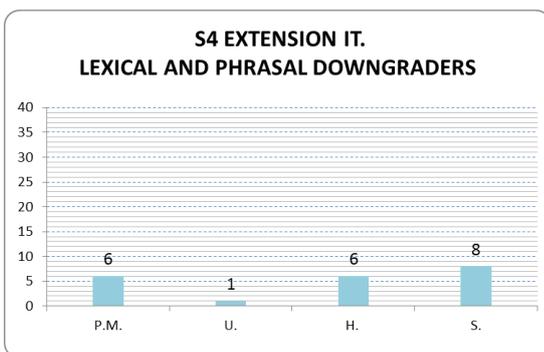


Figure 19.a

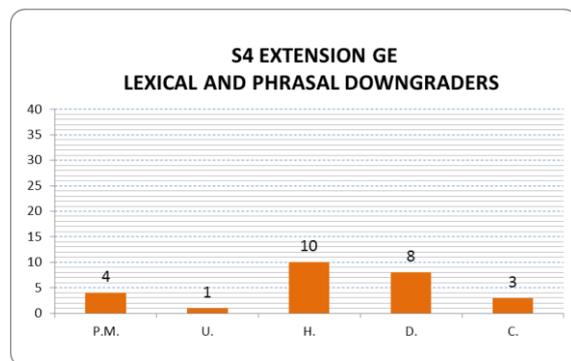


Figure 19.b

- At the lexical and phrasal level, a considerable variety of devices⁷⁹ has also been employed. The most frequently used lexical downgrader in the corpus of both languages under study is the politeness marker⁸⁰ (52 IT, 45 GE). Examples of this class is the classic “bitte” for German and “gentilmente”, “cortesemente” for Italian. Understaters (which could be either adverbs as “einmal”, “un po’”, or nouns, as “ein Stück“ or „uno strappo“) are also fairly evenly spread. The most interesting difference between Germans and Italians lies in the use of downtoners, which occurs 48 times throughout the four situations in the former’s data and only 9 times in the latter’s ones. In particular, the massive use of „vielleicht“, together with other downgrading devices as „gerne“, „einmal“ or „wohl“ could motivate this high outcome.

- If we look at the recapitulatory table (see below, p. 127.) we easily see that a striking result of German language is the almost unaltered amount of lexical and phrasal downgraders across the four situations. This finding is evidence of a minimal sensitivity to situational constraints for this type of mitigators in German. A different trend is displayed in the Italian data, where this type of mitigators seem to compensate for the lower level of indirectness in the first situation, than decreases in the second as long as the level of indirectness rises, to increase again together with indirectness level in the ride situation. In the extension situation it drops again, as if the function to mitigate the force of the request was assigned to the supportive moves.

5.3.3 Alerters

ALERTERS IT			
	"Scusa"/"Scusi"	Other alerters	Total alerters
1.	12	18	30
2.	6	26	32
3.	11	22	33
4.	4	25	29
TOT	33	91	124

Table 15.a

ALERTERS GE			
	"Entschuldigung"/"Entschuldigen Sie"	Other alerters	Total alerters
1.	1	19	20
2.	1	12	13
3.	6	24	30
4.	0	14	14
TOT	8	69	77

Table 15.b

⁷⁹ A challenging step in the analysis of data was the categorization of lexical and phrasal downgraders for the German language, which display a rich and various corpus of this kind of devices, examples of which are “gerne”, “eben”, “ja”, “doch”, “mal”, “wohl”, usw. The choice whether to include these elements in one category or the other has been made after confronting with native speakers and was sometimes different according to the context of the request and its relation with other elements of the utterance.

⁸⁰ Two other typical politeness markers that could spring to mind for Italian speakers are “Scusa!” (with an attention-getter function) and “Grazie!”, which is very often postponed to the request. The former has been included in the “alerters” category, whereas the latter has been counted as a supportive move, within the class “appreciation clause”, since the speaker shows appreciation for the compliance of the request which is somehow given for granted.

- A special remark should be made about alerters. A phenomenon which drove my attention was the consistent use of alerters within the Italian group of respondents. In particular, besides the use of names and other attention getters, the presence of “Scusa” or “Scusi”, as table 28 reports, appeared with a neatly greater frequency in Italian than in German (124 IT, 77 GE).

5.3.4 External modification. Supportive moves

ABBREVIATIONS MITIGATING SUPPORTIVE MOVES									
PREPARATOR	GETTING A PRECOMMITMENT	GROUNDER	DISARMER	SWEETENER	PROMISE OF A REWARD	COST MINIMIZER	APPRECIATION CLAUSE	NEGATIVE APPRECIATION CLAUSE	OVERCATEGORY
P.	G.P.	G.	D.	S.	P.R.	C.M.	A.C.	N.A.C.	O.

Chart 20

S1 WINDOW IT. SUPPORTIVE MOVES						
CATEGORY	G.	C.M.	A.C.	N.A.C.	TOTAL SUPPORTIVE MOVES	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	29	3	6	1	39	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	72,5%	7,5%	15,0%	2,5%	97,5%	100,0%

Table 16.a

S1 WINDOW GE. SUPPORTIVE MOVES								
CATEGORY	P.	G.P.	G.	C.M.	A.C.	N.A.C.	TOTAL SUPPORTIVE MOVES	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	1	1	14	1	6	1	24	37
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	2,7%	2,7%	37,8%	2,7%	16,2%	2,7%	64,9%	100,0%

Table 16.b

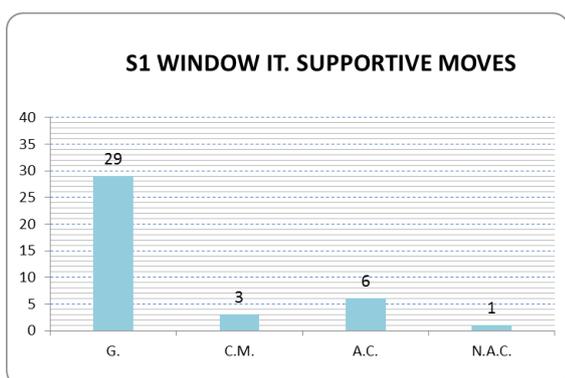


Figure 20.a

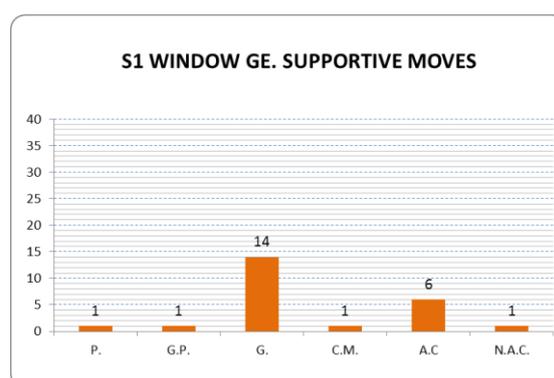


Figure 20.b

S2 NOTES IT. SUPPORTIVE MOVES												
CATEGORY	P.	G.P.	G.	D.	S.	P.R.	C.M.	A.C.	N.A.C.	O.	TOTAL SUPPORTIVE MOVES	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	6	2	23	4	5	5	10	4	5	4	62	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	15,4%	5,1%	59,0%	10,3%	12,8%	12,8%	25,6%	10,3%	12,8%	10,3%	159,0%	100,0%

Table 17.a

S2 NOTES GE. SUPPORTIVE MOVES									
CATEGORY	P.	G.P.	G.	S.	P.R.	C.M.	A.C.	TOTAL SUPPORTIVE MOVES	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	1	4	27	7	1	4	8	52	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	2,5%	10,0%	67,5%	17,5%	2,5%	10,0%	20,0%	130,0%	100,0%

Table 17.b

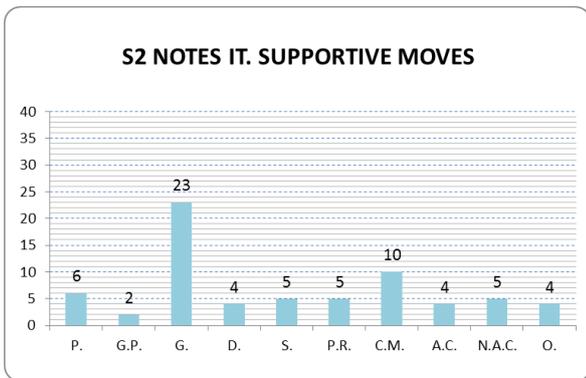


Figure 21.a

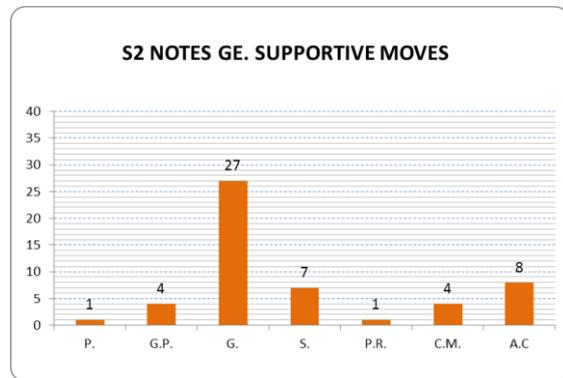


Figure 21.b

S3 RIDE IT. SUPPORTIVE MOVES												
CATEGORY	P.	G.P.	G.	D.	S.	P.R.	C.M.	A.C.	N.A.C.	O.	TOTAL SUPPORTIVE MOVES	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	5	1	35	4	3	1	3	4	4	13	73	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	12,5%	2,5%	87,5%	10,0%	7,5%	2,5%	7,5%	10,0%	10,0%	32,5%	182,5%	100,0%

Table 18.a

S3 RIDE GE. SUPPORTIVE MOVES							
CATEGORY	G.	C.M.	A.C.	O.	N.A.C.	TOTAL SUPPORTIVE MOVES	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	25	2	6	15	1	49	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	64,1%	5,1%	15,4%	38,5%	2,6%	125,6%	100,0%

Table 18.b

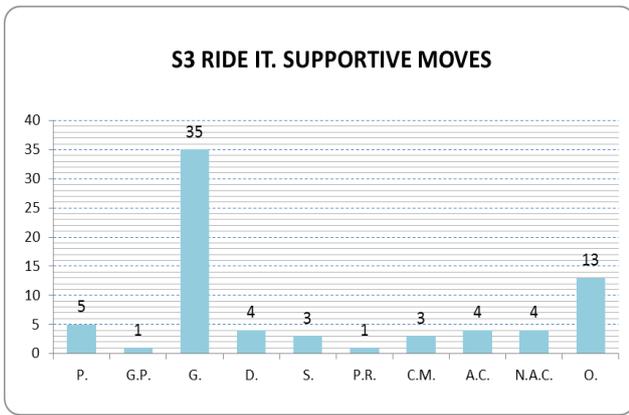


Figure 22.a

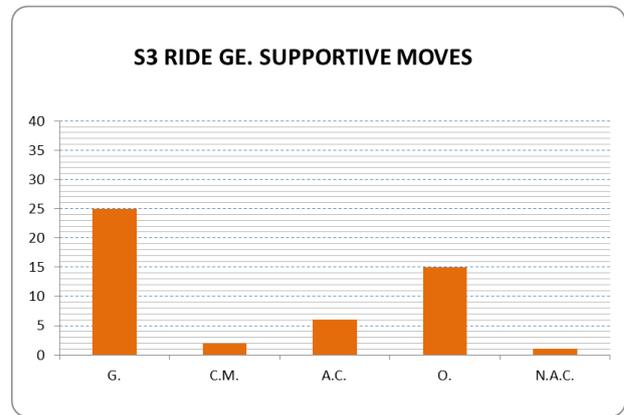


Figure 22.b

S4 EXTENSION IT. SUPPORTIVE MOVES									
CATEGORY	P.	G.	D.	P.R.	C.M.	A.C.	N.A.C.	TOTAL SUPPORTIVE MOVES	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	12	37	14	3	3	3	2	74	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	30,8%	94,9%	35,9%	7,7%	7,7%	7,7%	5,1%	189,7%	100,0%

Table 19.a

S4 EXTENSION GE. SUPPORTIVE MOVES									
CATEGORY	P.	G.	D.	P.R.	A.C.	N.A.C.	TOTAL SUPPORTIVE MOVES	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES	
STUDENTS' NUMBER	10	39	17	1	7	3	77	39	
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	25,6%	100,0%	43,6%	2,6%	17,9%	7,7%	197,4%	100,0%	

Table 19.b

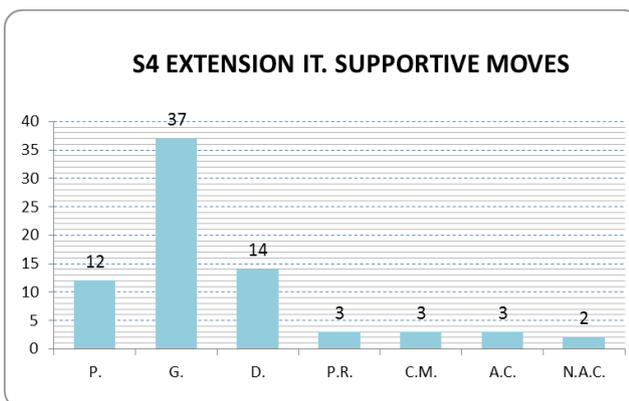


Figure 23.a

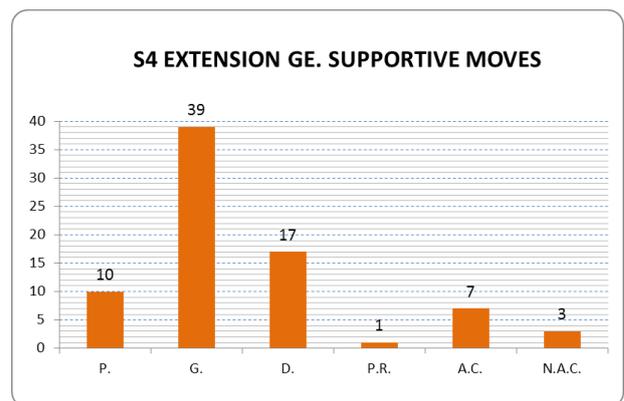


Figure 23.b

- Conversational analysts (Merrit 1976; Schegloff 1980) noted that proper requests are often preceded by pre-requests which check feasibility of compliance, thereby overcoming possible grounds for refusals, or followed by post-requests, which show appreciation in the eventuality of

the compliance of the request or try to diminish the effort the requestee is asked to make. Also in my study I found out that both groups of respondents employed a large number of supportive moves⁸¹ (IT employed an average of 1,55 supportive move per respondent, GE 1,26). Nonetheless, if in the two previous categories it was German which accounted for a greater use of internal modifiers, in this case Italian is the language that displays an overwhelming advantage in the use of external mitigators.

As concerns the distribution of particular types of supportive moves⁸², the encouraging results for Italian students of German and viceversa is that all sorts of supportive moves are used by both groups of respondents at least once, in other words, there is not a type of supportive move which is used only by Italians or only by Germans. The grounder is the most frequently used in all data sets, occurring either by itself or in combination with other types of supportive moves. The reason for this overriding frequency may be the fact that it is psychologically most plausible to make the addressee understand the reason of a request. Establishing „common ground“ through a grounder counts as an attempt to ensure the addressee’s empathy, thus increasing the likelihood of his compliance.

Other favoured supportive moves are the appreciation clause (used totally 17 times in Italian 27 times in German), the disarmer (22 IT, 17 GE) and the cost minimizer (10 IT, 7 GE). An interesting difference is the linguistic adaptation of the appreciation clause is that German speakers seem to use a large variety of formulas, which are perfectly translatable in Italian but are for some reasons not employed. As a matter of fact, if in German we find expressions as „Das wäre total lieb“, „Wärst du so nett“, „Wärst du so freundlich“, in Italian we find almost exclusively expressions which emphasize gratitude, namely „Mille grazie“, or „Grazie infinitamente“ or „Le sarei molto grato“. Italians in turn display a more marked preference for the cost minimizer, often expressed in a hypothetical sentence: e.g. „Se per te non è un problema“, „Se la cosa non ti disturba“, „Se non hai fretta“.

The disarmer (22 IT, 17 Ge) has also been extensively used by both groups, in particular in the last situation, where the need was felt to name possible objections that the hearer could make and show understanding for them. Very often disarmers referred to the „exceptional“ character of the request, as in „Das is mir jetzt sehr unangenehm und ich weiß auch, dass Sie sonst eine

⁸¹ All types of supportive moves have been counted once. If for example in a request I found 3 grounders, I counted just one.

⁸² As reported in chart 14, two categories have been created and added to the ones Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) indicate in the CCSARP’s coding manual: the Negative appreciation clause and the Overcategory. The former stands for all types of utterances expressing disappointment or possible negative consequences if the requestee does not perform the requested act. The latter has been created expressly for the ride situation, in which I noticed that a lot of students, both Italian and German, preceded their request with questions that are to be considered an hybrid of preparator, getting a precommitment and cost minimizer. Examples of this new category are “Michele! Aspetta! Per caso stai tornando in ufficio? [...]” and “Hallo, Michael, richtig? Sag mal, fährst du Richtung Hauptgebäude? [...]”.

Ausnahme machen, aber [...]” (tr. “This is really unpleasant for me and I know that you do not normally make any exceptions, but [...]) or in „So che può sembrarLe scorretto nei confronti degli altri studenti ma [...]” (tr. „I know that this may sound unfair towards the other students but [...]). All in all, we could state that Italian respondents used considerably more supportive moves than their German colleagues, not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of quality (they chose very often a combination of different types of supportive moves). This marked difference is to be appreciated in the first three situations, and becomes almost inexistent in the fourth, extension situation.

- As for the situational variation, table 28 reveals that Italians seem to have tailored the amount of supportive moves according to the level of „face threat“ that was supposed to characterize the four situations. In other words, the Italian trend is a steady rise from situation 1 to situation 4. German speakers instead display an oscillating trend in their use of this device which reaches its peak in the notes and in the extension situation.

5.3.5 Upgraders

ABBREVIATIONS UPGRADERS						
ADVERBIAL INTENSIFIER	COMMITMENT UPGRADER	TIME INTENSIFIER	LEXICAL UPTONER	DETERMINATION MARKER	REPETITION OF A REQUEST	EMPHATIC ADDITION
A.I.	C.U.	T.I.	L.U.	D.M.	R.R.	E.A.

Chart 21

S1 WINDOW IT. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL UPGRADERS				
CATEGORY	A.I.	L.U.	TOTAL UPGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	3	16	19	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	7,5%	40,0%	47,5%	100,0%

Table 20.a

S1 WINDOW GE. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL UPGRADERS				
CATEGORY	A.I.	L.U.	TOTAL UPGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	5	6	11	37
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	13,5%	16,2%	29,7%	100,0%

Table 20.b

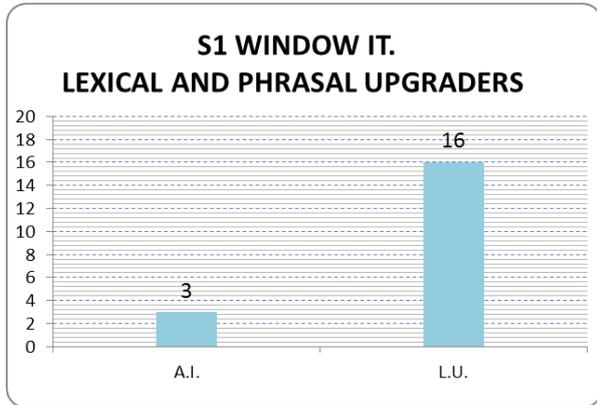


Figure 24.a

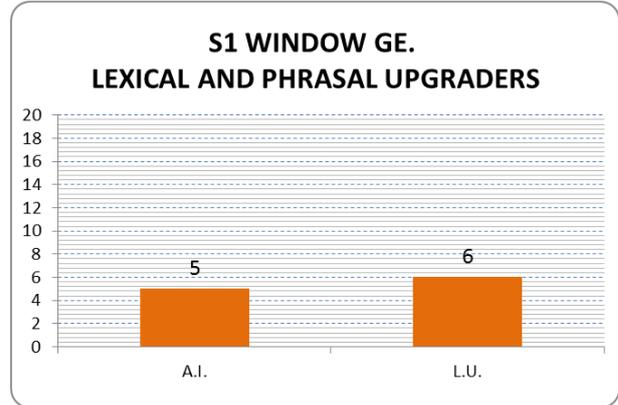


Figure 24.b

S2 NOTES IT. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL UPGRADERS					
CATEGORY	A.I.	L.U.	R.R.	TOTAL UPGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	7	2	4	13	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	17,9%	5,1%	10,3%	33,3%	100,0%

Table 21.a

S2 NOTES GE. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL UPGRADERS				
CATEGORY	A.I.	L.U.	TOTAL UPGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	7	1	8	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	17,5%	2,5%	20,0%	100,0%

Table 21.b

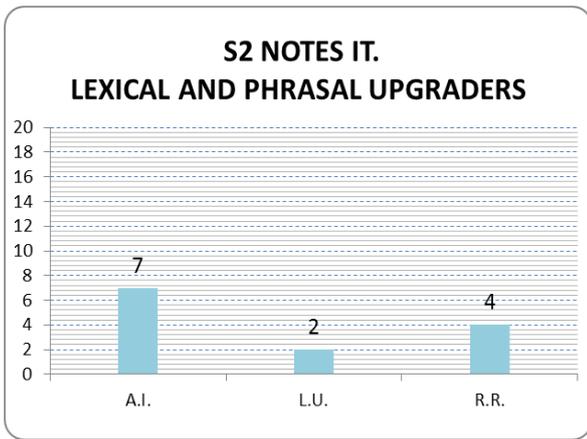


Figure 25.a

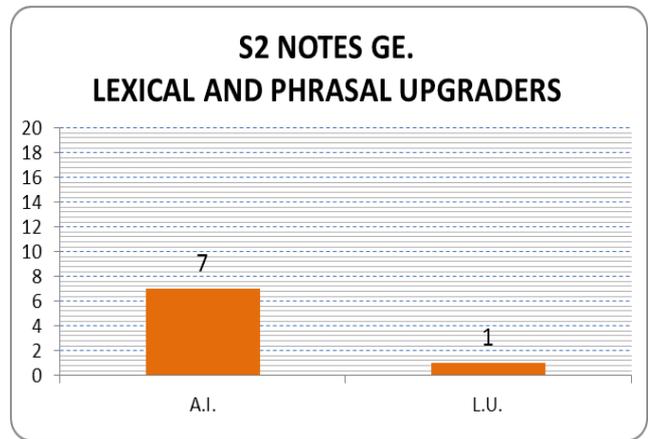


Figure 25.b

S3 RIDE IT. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL UPGRADERS					
CATEGORY	A.I.	T.I.	L.U.	TOTAL UPGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	13	2	3	18	40
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	32,5%	5,0%	7,5%	45,0%	100,0%

Table 22.a

S3 RIDE GE. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL UPGRADERS				
CATEGORY	A.I.	T.I.	TOTAL UPGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	6	4	10	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	15,4%	10,3%	25,6%	100,0%

Table 22.b

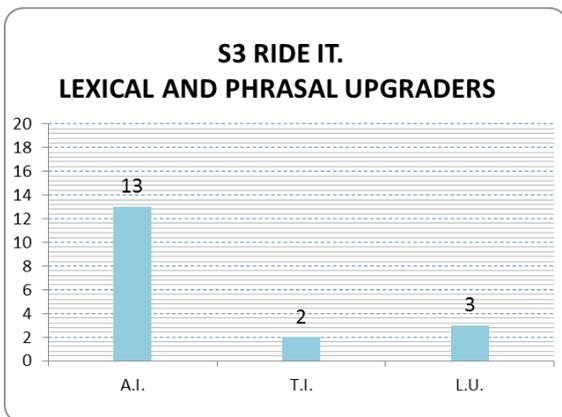


Figure 26.a

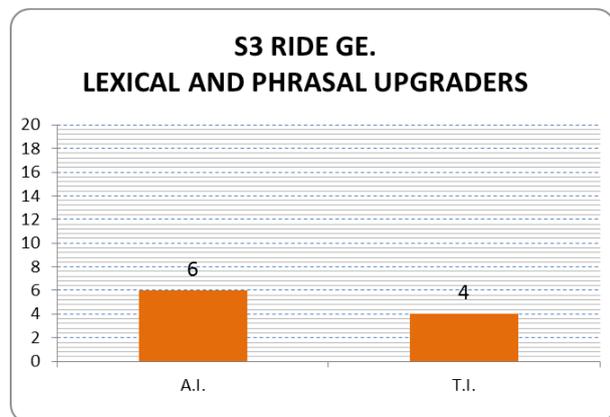


Figure 26.b

S4 EXTENSION IT. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL UPGRADERS				
CATEGORY	A.I.	R.R.	TOTAL UPGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	7	7	14	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	17,5%	17,5%	35,9%	100,0%

Table 23.a

S4 EXTENSION GE. LEXICAL AND PHRASAL UPGRADERS				
CATEGORY	A.I.	R.R.	TOTAL UPGRADERS	TOTAL EMPLOYABLE UTTERANCES
STUDENTS' NUMBER	20	2	22	39
STUDENTS' PERCENTAGE	51,3%	5,1%	56,4%	100,0%

Table 23.b

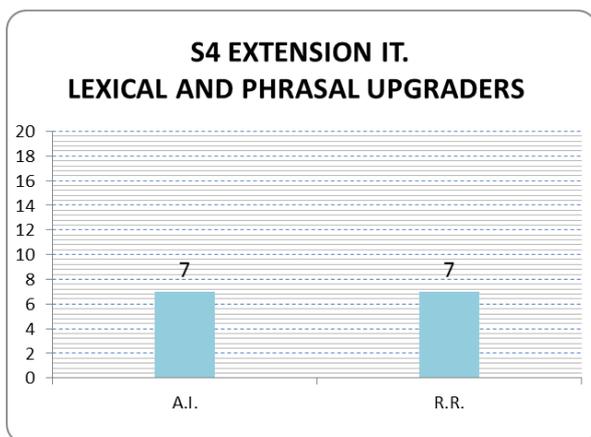


Figure 27.a

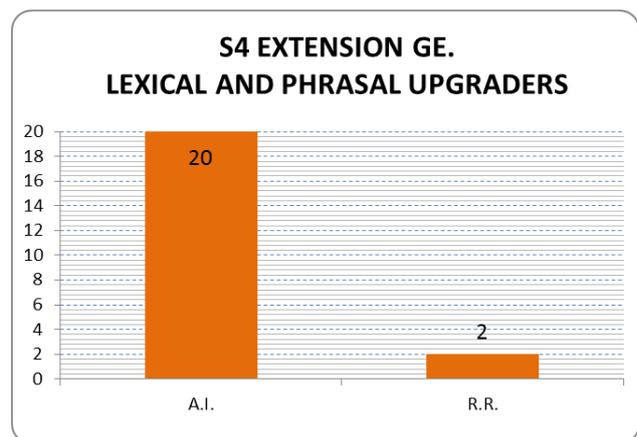


Figure 27.b

- In connection with requests, upgraders can make the request realization more/less polite according to which element is upgraded. If the requester chooses to intensify an embedding phrase expressing positive attitude towards the fulfilment of the request, the upgrader adds politeness to the request. If, on the other hand, the requester intensifies the illocutionary force of the request itself, the imposition forced on the requestee increases, hence decreasing politeness. Apart from the “repetition of a request” (which not necessarily decrease politeness), only the former type of upgraders was found in the collected questionnaires. In other words, students used this type of modifiers in order to express gratitude or positive feelings in case of compliance, or to over-represent reality denoted in the grounders, so that the request could seem more justified. Also in this case, as for the last three categories, it is Italian data who account for a more extensive use (64 IT, 51 GE).

	RECAPITULATORY CHART. SITUATIONAL AND CULTURAL VARIATION									
	SYNTACTIC DOWNGRADERS		LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS		ALERTERS		SUPPORTIVE MOVES		UPGRADERS	
	IT	GE	IT	GE	IT	GE	IT	GE	IT	GE
S1 WINDOW	45	41	32	34	30	20	39	24	19	11
S2 NOTES	66	64	16	34	32	13	62	52	13	8
S3 RIDE	74	82	26	35	33	30	73	49	18	10
S4 EXTENSION	75	77	21	35	29	14	74	77	14	22
TOT	260	264	95	138	124	77	248	202	64	51

Table 28. Internal and external modification. Cross cultural and situational variation

6. Conclusions

6.1 Conclusions of the study

In the light of the findings obtained I will now try to answer the questions of the study (see section 4.1). Hence, I will outline the extent to which my cross-cultural comparison reveals differences between the Italian and the German culture in their “way of speaking” (cf. Hymes, 1972, 1974). In particular, I will try to detect culturally – specific interactional styles in the requestive behaviour of speakers in the two languages examined. What is more, the results of this study gave me the impression of a certain “regularity” or “constant” in the general level of politeness achieved or pursued by both groups of speakers. This unexpected outcome and its possible implications for general theories of politeness in language will be also illustrated at the end of the chapter.

The main outcomes of my comparison of German and Italian speakers’ realization of requests can be summarized as follows.

6.1.1 Summary of the results

- Both groups proved to be perfectly aware of the difference between the four sociopragmatic situations that were proposed; in fact they modulated the perspective, the degree of directness, and the level of internal and external modification according to the context in which the request was embedded.
- Italian participants favoured constructions in which either the hearer or the speaker was mentioned, whereas for the German respondents it proved to be a good solution alluding to the role played by external circumstances.
- Germans selected higher levels of indirectness in comparison to Italians. Nevertheless, if we look at table n°8 we realize that the difference, on the whole, is not so big. As a matter of fact, conventionally indirect strategies in German findings occurred “only” 5% more often than in the Italian data. The divergence is minimal in the window situation and is maximal in the notes and in the extension situation. In the latter situation the scenario is reversed and we notice that German requests suddenly become much more direct than the Italian ones.

- Both Italian and German speakers tended to realize the majority of their requests in all four situations at the level “Preparatory” (7), although with some differences in the selection of the particular preparatory condition which is referred to.

On the whole, 7AB was considered by both languages the most appropriate strategy.

Skimming through German data it emerges that more than the half of the total 155 elicited requests was formulated in this way (52,90%). Reference to the ability of the hearer to perform the requested act occurred as the main strategy in three of the four situations, precisely the window, the notes and the ride situation; whereas in the extension situation German respondents thought 7PO was the best level to use.

Therefore it can be argued that the formula “Kannst du”, or rather “Könntest du....“ is heavily routinized in German request behaviour and is perceived as appropriate also in very different contexts.

- Parallely to a higher level of indirectness, German speakers selected with an higher frequency also syntactic downgraders and lexical and phrasal downgraders. This is an interesting outcome which, if it were confirmed by a larger sample, could be interpreted as an indication of this group’s tendency to „play it doubly safe“, particularly in the situations in which the face threat was rated bigger (S3 and S4).
- Italian data point to a less stable preference for category 7AB⁸³, selected in 39,24% of the total requests. An significant preference is also manifested for category 7FU, employed in 18,99% of cases. This category appeared to play a key role in the note and in the ride situation, where it probably seemed a clear, spontaneous but at the same time polite way of expressing the directive force of the utterance, in particular thanks to the conditional downtowner (used in high percentages in all 4 situations).

⁸³ I think we should open here a short parenthesis. In Italian, the formulation of the “Can you...” type (“Puoi...”) does not entail the meaning of “ability” it carries in English or in German. In Italian a request as “Puoi passarmi il sale?” does not seem to question the speaker’s physical ability to pass the salt, but rather his/her having the possibility to do it or not, because the circumstances allow him/her to choose. As a matter of fact, in Italian the verb that expresses ability is “sapere” (“I can swim” → “So nuotare”; “Ich kann Englisch” → “So l’inglese”). This substantial diversity in the literal meaning of the “Can you..” formulation could validate Morgan’s hypothesis that this type of utterances is so routinized in every day’s speech that they became almost idiomatic expressions, whose illocutionary force is immediately perceived.

- If Italian speakers preferred slightly lower level of indirectness, they evidently compensated with consistently larger use of alerters (in particular in the form of „scusa“), supportive moves and upgraders.
- It could be intriguing to notice that if on the one hand German speakers tended to be pretty unanimous in using the same request strategies in a lot of different circumstances, on the other they are also the ones who explore all the 13 strategies which were taken as categories, whereas Italians use just 9 of them. This could stem from the fact that German may present some constructions which are similar to the English ones, on the basis of which the CCSARP coding model was constructed. Some of these ways of issuing a request could be very rare in Italian, or perhaps marked with a peculiar connotation. For example, level 2, which occurred in German data 3 times in the extension situation, could sound too „straight to the point“, almost abrupt in a lot of situations. A formulation as: „Le chiedo una proroga di due settimane“ (tr. „I ask you an extension of two weeks“) seems to lack that dimension of tentativeness which sometimes belongs to the Italian perception of politeness⁸⁴, whereas it seems to work in German. At the same time, Italians explored a larger variety of supportive moves.

6.1.2 Possible interpretations of the findings and closing remarks

In analysing the relation between internal modification and external modification, scholars (Faerch and Kasper, in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989, p. 241) have suggested two theories, the compensation hypothesis and the combination hypothesis. The first one claims that if modification is absent on the one dimension, it is employed in the other dimension, in agreement with the conversational principle of achieving maximal efficiency with a minimum amount of effort. The second one states that modification on the one dimension triggers modification on the other level, in line with the principle of consistency, according to which a certain redundancy is necessary, given the evanescent character of oral input.

To my mind, the same considerations can be applied also to the connection between indirectness and internal modifiers on the one hand, and external modifiers on the other, and the outcomes of my study provide evidence for both. The following figures may help the reader to see the point suggested here.

⁸⁴ The dimension of tentativeness would be pursued, in this case, by saying rather “Le chiederei, se fosse possibile, di concedermi altre due settimane” (tr. “I would ask you, if it’s possible, to grant me other two weeks”).

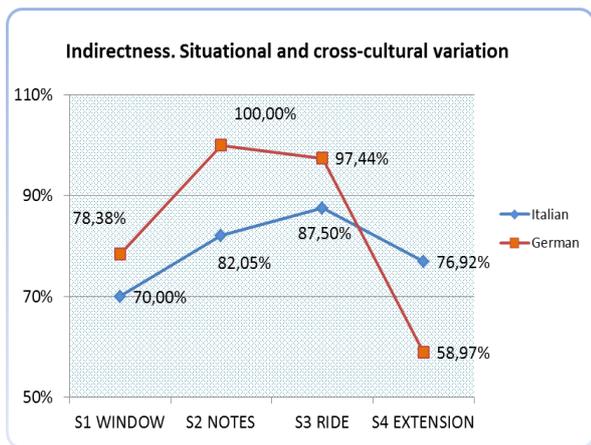


Figure 28.a

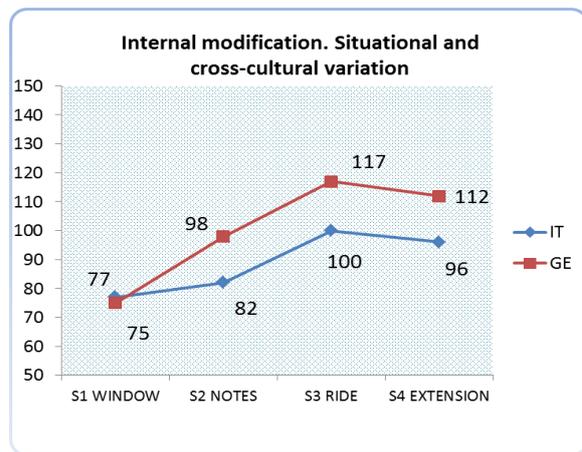


Figure 28.b

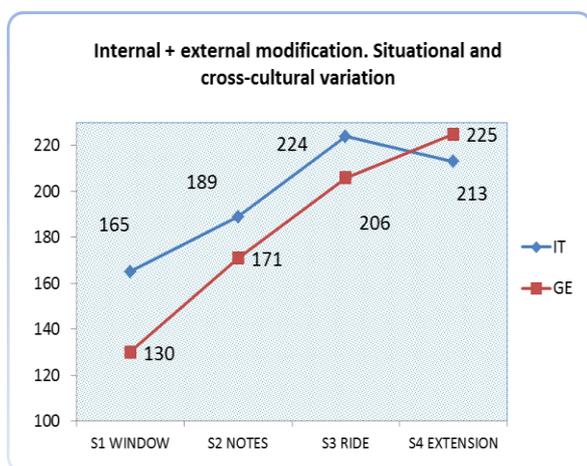


Figure 28.c

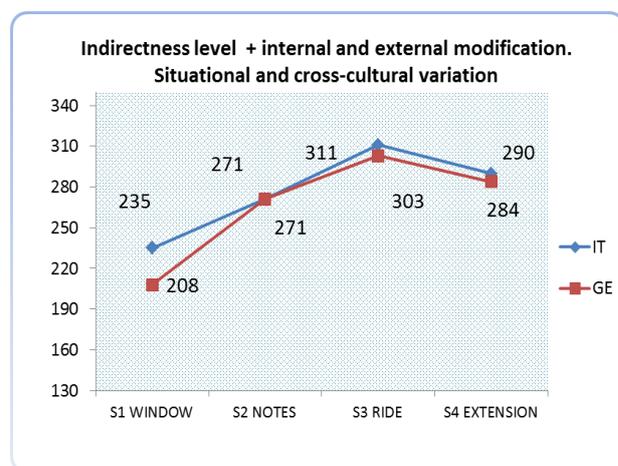


Figure 28.d

Graph b. shows the trend of the total number of internal modifiers, which undoubtedly mitigated (otherwise we should have included also some of the upgraders) the force of the request, obtained from the sum of data contained in the first two columns in the „recapitulatory table“ (see p. 126). The comparison between image 28.a and 28.b makes clear how an evidence for the combination hypothesis is offered by German speakers‘ higher level of indirectness and frequency of syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders. At the same time, their requestive behaviour seem to be governed also by the compensation rule in the extension situation (compare graphs 28.a and 28.c.), when they decrease the level of indirectness and the percentage of syntactic downgraders but enhance the number of alerters and supportive moves.

Italian behaviour apparently works in accordance with the compensation hypothesis, since it displays a slightly lower directness level but a higher general amount of supportive moves, alerters (see graph 28.c), and of internal-external modification in general. Nevertheless, also the combination hypothesis seems to be confirmed since both the general indirect level and the amount of external and internal modification drops together from S3 to S4.

Having all the elements of a request quantified in tables, I tried to find an ultimate, personal answer to the question which has often been discussed throughout this paper, namely „Does indirectness increase politeness?“. I added therefore the total number of internal and external modifiers per situation with the numerical values obtained from the percentages of indirect strategies used by Italian and German speakers per situation (e.g. S1 IT: 165 + 70). In this way I treated indirectness as a politeness increaser. The fact that in this way results follow an upward trend and the outcomes of both languages almost coincide could make us opt for a positive answer to the question.

Nonetheless, the fact that the assumed „general level of politeness“ drops in situation 4 constitutes in my opinion the mathematical evidence that summing indirectness to other politeness modifiers is sometimes wrong since clarity and sincerity in expressing intentions represents an equally important expression of politeness both in the Italian and in the German culture, particularly when the risk of a face threat is considered high.

In conclusion, we could state that even if Italian and German requests realizations diverge significantly in some aspects, one still gets the impression that some dynamics are into play which induce speakers to compensate their choices so that in the end their utterances somehow converge to some extent (see graph 28.d). The convergence to this elusive, ungraspable point is most probably the evidence of a draw towards politeness, which is extraordinarily shared by the two cultures at issue.

6.2 Limits of the study and suggestions for further research

As Blum-Kulka and House point out, implicit rules of social etiquette that advise members on what to wear, what to say and not to say, and what to do in specific situations, determine also the amount and type of elaboration expected in a request, as in a tacit agreement that, in Goffman's words, “determine a framework of appearance that must be maintained” (Goffman 1959, p. 230).

The above discussion has illustrated the variety of levels at which this „framework of appearance“ concerning the formulation of requests in the German and the Italian linguistic community coincide or diverge.

In sum, there are two phenomena which caught my attention and on which further research is needed, particularly because they point at potentially controversial factors.

In the first place, it has been found that Italian speakers perform the speech act request in a general more direct way than their German counterparts, but they also seem to “compensate” with a generally larger use of internal and external modification. This could support the theory (thoroughly

examined in the exposition, see chapter 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 3.6) according to which indirectness is a way to increase politeness, for both the Italian and the German culture. The fact that both groups' general level of indirectness drops in the fourth situation, where in contrast it was expected to raise, can be explained in two ways.

The first possible explanation is that indirectness in the formulation of requests is not always considered the best strategy in order to achieve politeness. In this regard, a deeper knowledge of the way in which Italian and German speakers perceive indirectness in requests and of the extent to which they relate it with politeness should be pursued.

The second possible interpretation concerns my assumptions about the face-threatening character of the situations proposed (illustrated in section 4.2.2 and in chart 16), which may be wrong. In particular, if we stick to Wolfson's "bulge theory" (see p. 109), the extension situation could in fact be less risky in terms of face-threat than it has been supposed to, since the relationship with the interlocutor is perceived as more fixed and established than in the ride situation. The second direction of research should then focus on the perception of the different social parameters (social distance, rate of imposition, relative power difference) that constitute the face threat of a request for Italian and German speakers.

Finally, it has been observed that both groups of respondents used a lot of the forms that Brown and Levinson (1987) had identified as positive and negative politeness strategies, as, for instance, in creating common ground or in avoiding coerciveness. Still, it could be interesting to further investigate the two cultures' preference for the one or the other type of politeness. A sociologic or ethnographic approach could then account for the cultural reasons and values beyond the preference of some expressions of verbal politeness in spite of others, as the organisation of the society in an egalitarian or in a hierarchical structure, the conception of relationships or the way in which the self in relation with the community is perceived (see Scollon and Scollon 1995).

What is more, any conclusion drawn from this study should be considered tentative as the sample size was limited. Further testing of a larger and more diverse (in terms of age and level of education) sample of speakers would be necessary in order to confirm the findings of the present study.

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Appendix. DISCOURSE COMPLETION TEST (Italian)

Gentile studente/essa,

innanzitutto grazie per la tua disponibilità a donarmi 15 minuti del tuo tempo! Le risposte che darai mi aiuteranno a condurre uno studio comparativo su alcune abitudini linguistiche di studenti italiani e tedeschi. Il modo migliore per fornire il tuo contributo è questo: una volta letta e compresa la situazione, scrivi negli spazi appositi la risposta che ti viene in mente al momento, senza pensarci troppo! Ti garantisco che i dati raccolti saranno trattati nel pieno rispetto dell'anonimato e della privacy e solamente ai fini accademici legati alla mia ricerca.

Sesso:

- Maschio
- Femmina

Madrelingua:

- Italiano
- Altra:

1. Sei uno/a studente/essa, si è appena conclusa l'ultima lezione della giornata e tutti stanno riordinando le proprie cose per uscire dall'aula. Sei seduto/a accanto a Laura, una studentessa con cui hai già frequentato altri corsi e con la quale si può dire si sia instaurata una certa amicizia, anche se per ora legata solo all'ambiente universitario. La scorsa lezione sei dovuto/a mancare e ti sei accorto/a dalla spiegazione di oggi che il Docente deve essere andato molto avanti col programma. Avresti proprio bisogno di prendere in prestito degli appunti; avevi già notato che Laura li prende in maniera impeccabile... Cosa le dici?

2. Sei un Medico di uno studio privato, dove lavori da diversi anni. Sta per finire quella che per te è stata una giornata molto stressante e faticosa. Ti accingi a visitare gli ultimi due malati quando arriva, senza preavviso, un paziente noto che chiede una visita urgente. Lo fai accomodare in un ambulatorio, facendolo passare davanti agli altri due pazienti (a questo punto visibilmente seccati); con te entra l'infermiera Gigliola, la tua assistente. D'un tratto senti che stai morendo di caldo e ti accorgi che le finestre sono tutte chiuse: cosa dici all'infermiera?

3. Sei da poco impiegato/a nella Segreteria Studenti di un Ateneo e ti sei appena recato/a all'Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico, che si è tenuta in una sede abbastanza distante dalla Sede Centrale dell'Università. Sono le ore 13 e devi tornare in ufficio per completare la tua giornata lavorativa. Quando ti avvicini alla fermata dell'autobus ti accorgi però che vi è stato affisso un cartello che segnala uno sciopero per l'intera giornata. Ti guardi attorno sconcolato/a: a piedi sarebbe proprio lunga e ti dispiacerebbe perdere ore di lavoro così inutilmente. Proprio in quel momento vedi Michele, un collega dell'Ufficio Stampa che conosci solo di vista, avvicinarsi alla sua macchina insieme ad un altro collega. Lui ti saluta e accenna un sorriso: cosa dici per chiedergli un passaggio?

4. Sei uno/a studente/essa che ha appena concluso il corso di Storia della Lingua Italiana. L'esame consiste nella valutazione di una tesina che dovresti consegnare tra una settimana. Purtroppo però non sei che alla metà del lavoro: hai avuto molti problemi con la ricerca di materiale perché hai scelto un argomento che esula un po' dagli argomenti trattati nel corso ma che ti interessava molto. Decidi quindi di chiedere al Professore una proroga per poterla consegnare tra 2 settimane, pur sapendo che di solito non fa questo tipo di eccezioni. Sei al suo orario di ricevimento, nel suo studio: cosa gli dici?

Grazie ancora per la tua collaborazione! ☺

DISCOURSE COMPLETION TEST (German)

Liebe Studentin, lieber Student,

vielen Dank, dass Du Dir 15 Minuten Deiner Zeit genommen hast, um bei dieser Umfrage mitzuwirken. Mit diesem Fragebogen möchte ich für meine Masterarbeit herausfinden, wie italienische und deutsche Studenten diverse Sprechhandlungen realisieren. Daher werden hier 4 Situationen beschrieben, in denen Du Dich im realen Alltagsleben wiederfinden könntest. Sobald Du die Frage gelesen und verstanden hast, schreib einfach die erste Antwort, die Dir einfällt, auf. Du würdest damit einen wichtigen Beitrag leisten und mir von großer Hilfe sein!

Der Fragebogen ist selbstverständlich völlig ANONYM und die Ergebnisse dienen nur wissenschaftlichen Zwecken.

Geschlecht:

- Männlich
- Weiblich

Muttersprache:

- Deutsch
- Andere:

1. Du bist Student/in. Der letzte Kurs des Tages ist gerade zu Ende: Alle räumen ihre Sachen zusammen und gehen zur Ausgangstür. Du sitzt noch neben Laura, mit der du schon andere Kurse besucht hast und mit der eine gewisse Freundschaft entstanden ist, obwohl ihr euch nur an der Universität seht. Du konntest letztes Mal leider nicht zur Uni kommen und hast aus der heutigen Erklärung bemerkt, dass die Vorlesung, die du versäumt hast, sehr wichtig war. Du musst dir dringend von einem/er Kollegen/in Notizen ausleihen; du hast schon bemerkt, dass Laura immer gut mitschreibt. Was sagst du, um sie um ihre Mitschrift zu bitten?

2. Du bist Arzt und arbeitest seit vielen Jahren in einer Privatpraxis. Ein mühsamer, stressvoller Tag ist fast zu Ende. Du musst nur noch zwei Patienten untersuchen und kannst dann endlich nach Hause gehen. Plötzlich kommt ein langjähriger Patient herein und bittet dich um eine rasche Untersuchung. Während du ihn aufforderst, gleich im Behandlungszimmer Platz zu nehmen,

blicken dich die anderen zwei Patienten ziemlich kritisch an. Als du mit Krankenschwester Therese, deiner Assistentin, ins Behandlungszimmer kommst, bemerkst du, dass die Hitze unerträglich ist. Die Fenster sind alle geschlossen: Was sagst du zu deiner Assistentin?

3. Es ist nicht lange her, seitdem du im Studentensekretariat der Universität angestellt wurdest. Du kommst gerade von der Eröffnung des Akademischen Jahres, die in einem Haus ziemlich weit entfernt vom Hauptgebäude stattfand. Es ist 13 Uhr und du musst wieder in dein Büro, im Hauptgebäude. Als du zu der Bushaltestelle kommst, siehst du ein Plakat, das auf einen Streik der Busfahrer für den Rest des Tages hinweist. Du blickst dich trostlos um: Zu Fuß wäre es sehr weit und dir wäre es wirklich lieber, keine Arbeitszeit auf diese Weise zu verschwenden. Genau zu diesem Zeitpunkt siehst du Michael, einen Kollegen des Presseamtes, den du nur vom Sehen kennst. Er redet gerade mit einem anderen Kollegen, als er in sein Auto steigt und dich grüßt. Was sagst du zu ihm, um ihn um eine Mitfahrgelegenheit zu bitten?

4. Du bist Student/in und hast vor Kurzem den Kurs „Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache“ vollendet. Die Prüfung besteht aus der Abfassung einer Seminararbeit, die du binnen einer Woche abgeben solltest. Nichtsdestoweniger ist nur die Hälfte deiner Arbeit fertig: Du hast Schwierigkeiten mit der Sammlung des Materials gehabt, da du dich auf ein Thema konzentriert, das im Seminar nicht behandelt wurde, das dich aber sehr interessierte. Daher willst du den Professor um eine Verlängerung von einer Woche der Abgabefrist des Referates bitten, obwohl du weißt, dass er normalerweise keine Ausnahmen macht. Du bist jetzt in seiner Sprechstunde. Was sagst du, um ihn um eine Fristverlängerung zu bitten?

Nochmals vielen Dank für deine Unterstützung und liebe Grüße! ☺

DISCOURSE COMPLETION TEST (English)

Dear student,

thank you for taking 15 minutes of your time to fill in this questionnaire. I am currently undertaking a research project to try and understand more about the realization of some speech acts by Italian and German students. That is why you will find here 4 situations in which you could find yourself in real everyday life. As soon as you have read and understood the situation, please write down the first utterance that comes to your mind: there is no right or wrong answer! In this way you will maximize the usefulness of your response allowing me to gather more realistic data.

Your answers will be kept entirely anonymous and will be used for academic purposes only.

Sex:

- Male
- Female

Mother tongue:

- American English
- Other:

1. You are a student; the last lesson of the day has just ended. Everybody is putting their stuff away and slowly getting out of the classroom. You are still sitting next to Laura, with whom you already attended other courses and with which you are slowly becoming friend, even if you are currently seeing each other only at university. You were not able to attend class last time and from today's lecture you have noticed that the lesson you missed must have been a very important one. You really need to borrow someone's notes; you already noticed that Laura is great at it: what would you say to her?

2. You are a doctor. You are about to finish a stressful and hard work day in the private clinic where you have been working for many years. There are only two people you still have to visit and then you can go home. Unexpectedly, one of your patients comes to the clinic, unannounced, asking for an urgent examination. You let him in, before the other two patients, who now cast annoyed glances at you. Your assistant, the nurse Lily, follows you in the room. Once inside, you suddenly realize you are boiling hot and all the windows are closed... what would you say to Lily?

3. You started working at a University's Student Service Office only few weeks ago and you have just assisted to the opening ceremony of the Academic year, which took place in a venue quite far from the head offices. It's 1.00 p.m. and you have to go back to work. Nevertheless, when you reach the bus stop you see a sign that informs that the bus drivers are on strike for the whole day. You look around, pretty disappointed: it would take you a long time to go to your office on foot and you don't like to waste working hours in such a way. At this very moment you see Michael, a colleague of the Press Agency that you know by sight, who is walking towards his car chatting with another colleague. He gives you a wave and raises a smile: what would you tell him to ask for a lift?

4. You are a student and you have just concluded the course of History of the English Language. To pass the exam you need to present a term paper within a week. Unfortunately you are only half-way through it: you had a lot of difficulty collecting data for the paper since you chose a topic which was not explored in the lectures but you were very interested in. You decide therefore to ask the Professor for a one week extension, even if you are pretty sure that he rarely makes exceptions. You have an appointment and are in his office now. What would you say?

Thank you again for your cooperation! ☺