**SLA** Second Language Acquisition

# Studies in Second Language Acquisition of Chinese

Edited by ZhaoHong Han

# 2  Pragmatic Development: An Exploratory Study of Requests by Learners of Chinese

## Xiaohong Wen

Requests have been one of the most frequently examined speech acts in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) research (Schauer, 2009). Early studies on the ILP of requests tended to focus on first language transfer, comparison between native speakers (NSs) and nonnative speakers (NNSs), and cross-cultural contrastive analysis (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Blum-Kulka & Levenston, 1987; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987). This tradition has continued to the present day (e.g. Puetz & Neff van Aertselaer, 2008) and, as a result, only marginal attention has thus far been given to pragmatic development of the speech act of request in second language (L2) learners. Kasper and Schmidt (1996) underscored the need to investigate the pragmatic development of L2 learners and to strengthen connections between ILP and L2 acquisition research. Although recent years have seen more research on the acquisition of speech acts (e.g. Barron, 2003; Rose, 2000, 2009; Schauer, 2004), pragmatic development, as opposed to pragmatic performance and contrastive analysis, has in general remained under-researched, especially with Chinese as the target language (Hong, 1997; Sun & Zhang, 2008). The study reported in this chapter represents an attempt to fill the gap. We begin by briefly reviewing politeness theory in relation to the speech act of request and ILP development studies. We then present the study which aims at exploring developmental features and contextual variations in the written requests produced by English-speaking learners of Chinese at two proficiency levels, and the learners' use of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic strategies.

## Background

According to Searle (1975) and House and Kasper (1987), requests are defined as directives: Speaker (S) wants Hearer (H) to do x at the expense of H. Therefore, S attempts to persuade H to do x. Several variables may potentially make this speech act easy, with a low degree of imposition, or difficult, with a high degree of imposition. If S and H share equal social status, the request is considered socially small, and S is able to decide which linguistic forms to use in the context. This type of request is likely to be successful. However, if any of these conditions are not met, the request is likely to be a frustrating endeavor. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), requests are face-threatening by definition because hearers can interpret requests as intrusive impingements on freedom of action, or even as an exercise of power.

Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the present study examined Chinese-as-a-foreign-language (CFL) learners' requests in various sociopragmatic situations. Politeness is a basic notion of pragmatic function and a fundamental principle that people abide by in social communication. Although this notion is shared across cultures, each culture may adopt its own politeness principles. Diverse politeness strategies in making requests can be observed in various languages. For example, imperatives and Want Statements are perceived to be direct and often impolite in English (Blum-Kulka, 1987). In Chinese, however, imperatives with a polite word such as 请 *Qǐng* 'please' and Want Statement + a soft tag question such as 想 *Xiǎng* 'thinking of', 行吗? *Xíngma?* 'OK' convey politeness and soft tones. Brown and Levinson (1987) categorize communication strategies based on their politeness theory, among which avoidance of face-threatening acts (FTAs) is one of the most frequently used. Social distance and power relations between interlocutors as well as the degree of imposition that the request represents may strongly affect the requester's choice of strategies and pragmalinguistic expressions. Sociopragmatics is, therefore, the basis for expressing politeness.

## Research on ILP development of requests

Studies of pragmatic development include longitudinal studies (Achiba, 2003; Ellis, 1992; Schmidt, 1983) and cross-sectional studies (e.g. Hendriks, 2008; Hill, 1997; Rose, 2000, 2009; Scarcella, 1979; Trosborg, 1995).

The longitudinal studies of Ellis (1992) and Achiba (2003) focused on the acquisition of ILP by younger learners. Participants in the Ellis (1992) study were two immigrant boys in England, aged 10 and 11. The study found a clear progression from direct to conventionally indirect request strategies over time. At the early stage, the learners used verbless requests, which were followed by imperatives with verbs. The two young learners were then observed to use formulaic permission such as 'Can I have ...?', the ability question 'Can you ...?', and the permission strategy with other verbs, such as 'Can I take ...?' Both learners showed infrequent use of internal or external modifiers,[1] although they frequently employed the politeness marker *please*.

Achiba (2003) observed a seven-year-old girl who was visiting Australia from another country with her family. Achiba's findings were consistent with those of Ellis (1992): the learner started with direct strategies, such as imperatives, moved to the suggestory formula 'Let's ...', and continued with conventionally indirect permission and ability questions. At a later stage, the learner further expanded her repertoire to include other strategies such as willingness: 'Will you ...?' and past tense modals as in 'Could you ...?' or 'Would you ...?'

Rose (2000, 2009) conducted cross-sectional studies with Chinese-speaking learners of English in Hong Kong. In his first study, Rose found a number of developmental patterns in the choice of request strategy, with conventional indirectness the most frequent strategy overall. Participants in the study were classified into three proficiency levels. The two higher proficiency groups showed the most frequent use of conventional indirectness (96.8% and 85.7% with the P-6 and P-4 groups, respectively). The lowest proficiency group also used conventional indirectness, although less frequently (35.4% with the P-2 group). The findings of Rose's (2009) study are consistent with the previous and later studies (Achiba, 2003; Ellis, 1992; Hendriks, 2008; Hill, 1997; Rose, 2009; Trosborg, 1995). It should be noted, however, that the low proficiency group in Hill's (1997) study relied heavily on direct strategies. Hill speculated that these learners were still struggling with the complexities of producing grammatically correct sentences. The use of direct strategies decreased as the learners' proficiency level increased (see also Achiba, 2003; Ellis, 1992; Hendriks, 2008; Rose, 2009; Trosborg, 1995).

Rose (2000, 2009) elicited data respectively through a cartoon oral production task (COPT) and a discourse completion test (DCT). In addition to yielding results consistent with those of his (2000) study, Rose (2009) revealed: (1) that the mean frequency of alerters[2] increased with proficiency level; (2) that the occurrence of *please* decreased slightly with the increasing level of proficiency; and (3) that the frequency of external modifications more than doubled at each advancing level. In terms of sociopragmatics, learners exhibited some variation in their requests to reflect changes in dominance relations. For example, all learners evidenced some awareness of dominance relations in their use of alerters, with learners at the highest level of proficiency supplying more supportive moves in hearer-dominant situations.

In summary, previous studies of ILP development of requests share some findings. First, the request strategies of NNSs gradually approximate those of the NSs. Second, as the requesters' proficiency level advances, the frequency of their use of direct strategies decreases, while that of conventional indirectness increases (Achiba, 2003; Ellis, 1992; Hill, 1997; Rose, 2000, 2009; Schauer, 2004; Trosborg, 1995). Third, the frequency of using external modifications positively correlates with the proficiency level

(Hendriks, 2008; Hill, 1997; Rose, 2000, 2009; Trosborg, 1995). Fourth, the developmental patterns of internal modification seem to be more varied than those of supportive moves. Fifth, the occurrence of politeness markers (e.g. *please*) decreases as the requesters' proficiency level increases (Hendriks, 2008; Hill, 1997; Rose, 2009). Last but not least, individual variations exist in the use of internal modification (Hill, 1997; Schauer, 2009; Trosborg, 1995).

## Request strategies and modifications

Drawing on the work of Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983), Blum-Kulka *et al.* (1989a) categorized request strategies in terms of degrees of directness from *mood derivable* (imperative) to *mild hint* (non-conventional indirectness). They concluded that requests in English usually adopt conventionally indirect strategies such as *suggestory formulae* and *query preparatories*, both of which are in question form. Blum-Kulka *et al.* (1989b) also developed schemes for requests in the Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) that contain internal and external modifications. Internal modification refers to a set of linguistic devices that modify the illocutionary force of the *head act*, the request itself. Internal modifiers consist of upgraders and downgraders that increase or decrease the illocutionary force of requests. These modifiers are realized through syntactic and lexical/phrasal means. External modification (or *supportive move*) appears before or after the *head act* and helps minimize the face-threatening effect. Whether or not to include alerters and supportive moves depends on the desired imposition, and the social/psychological relationships of the interlocutors.

The classification scheme used in the present study was based on Blum-Kulka *et al.*'s (1989b) CCSARP Coding Manual and on Zhang (1995), who used the same manual. Zhang's data comprised requests produced by Chinese NSs. Her classification was adapted for use in the present data analysis. This study additionally drew on Thomas' (1983) two types of judgment of a pragmatically successful utterance to determine the accessibility and acceptability of participants' requests. Type 1, the pragmalinguistic assessment, means that the illocutionary intent should be clear and the sentence should be grammatical; type 2, the sociopragmatic judgment, refers to language use that should be acceptable in the context. The study focused on CFL learners' pragmatic development in relation to requests, guided by the following questions:

(1) Is there evidence of pragmalinguistic development in lower level versus advanced learners?
(2) Is there evidence of sociopragmatic development in lower level versus advanced learners?

## Method

### Participants

Eighty-nine CFL students enrolled in Chinese classes at a university in the US participated in the study. However, 41 of them, who were Chinese heritage learners, were excluded from data analysis on the assumption that their language background would influence their pragmatic performance. The remaining 48 participants, who were non-heritage language learners and whose data were analyzed and reported below, came from four classes at two levels, lower and advanced. Among them, 24 students (15 females, 9 males, average age 21.5) were at the lower level and 24 (13 females, 11 males, average age 23) at the advanced level. At the time of data collection, the lower level group had studied Chinese for 19 months, and the advanced group 31 months. Nine of the advanced students had been to China and stayed for varying lengths of time, from one month to 12 months. Their proficiency levels were based on their performance on an oral and a written Chinese proficiency test conducted by course instructors at the beginning of the semester. Twenty-four Chinese NSs (13 females, 11 males, average age 31), all from the People's Republic of China, were recruited. Their data served as the baseline for the comparison of learners' Chinese language use. Most of them were undergraduate and graduate students from the same university as the CFL learners.

### Instrument

A two-part questionnaire was used. The first part focused on biographic details such as age, gender, ethnic background, first language and exposure to the L2 in the home environment. The second part was a DCT. As Rose (2009: 2347) posits, the DCT provides researchers with information on respondents' knowledge and attitudes, and 'as such can be used as a measure of changes in knowledge and attitudes across groups that might be indicative of development'. Considering the likelihood, relevance and context variables of the participants' requests (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Rose, 2009), the present study selected five scenarios: (1) borrowing a pen from a classmate, (2) asking to postpone an essay submission, (3) asking a professor for an appointment, (4) asking a roommate to return a library book and (5) asking a stranger for directions – four of them adapted from previous studies (Hong, 1997; Shauer, 2009). Each scenario came with a detailed description, explaining the relationship between the interlocutors. The interlocutors were assigned Chinese names such as 张明 Zhāng míng, 李小友 Li xiǎoyou, 李小京 Li xiǎojīng, 王老师 Wáng lǎoshī, 李老师 Li lǎoshī, so that participants would use contextual information to avoid imagining their own contexts while completing the task. The questionnaire was written in English.

The five scenarios were subsequently presented to 10 CFL learners, who were not participants in the study, for their metapragmatic assessment focusing on estimating: (1) how often the requests would occur (very frequently, relatively frequently, not frequently); (2) how sociopragmatically difficult the request would be (easy, moderately difficult, difficult); and (3) justifying the ratings. The results showed that the raters agreed on all scenarios in terms of the degree of imposition, with scenarios 2 and 3 considered 'difficult' and 'moderately difficult', respectively, and scenarios 1, 4 and 5 'easy'. All scenarios were deemed 'very frequent' or 'relatively frequent' except for scenario 5 (asking a stranger for directions), which was rated as 'not frequent' by five student raters, 'relatively frequent' by four raters, and 'very frequent' by one rater. Due to the lack of consistency, scenario 5 was dropped.

The DCT questionnaire was then piloted on five CFL learners and five NSs who were not otherwise involved in the study. Based on their responses, the wording of the questionnaire was adjusted. Table 2.1 shows the categorization of the four request scenarios according to two variables: social status and request imposition. The final questionnaire is presented in the Appendix.

### Procedure

The data were collected in two consecutive spring semesters. In spring 2010 students from two lower-level and one advanced Chinese classes participated in the data collection. However, after sorting students by heritage background, only a limited number of questionnaires were usable for the study. In spring 2011 data were again collected from participants in one lower-level and one advanced Chinese class. In both instances of data collection, copies of the questionnaire were handed out to the instructors, who asked their students to complete it in class. The instructors told students that this survey was a study on language use and that they could write their responses in characters or Pinyin. Copies of the questionnaire for NSs were sent via email to the Chinese Students Association at the same university where the CFL data were collected. Due to the limited number of responses from NSs, 10 additional copies were sent out to NSs originally from Mainland China who were similar in age to the NS participants.

Table 2.1 Four scenarios with two levels of social status and request imposition

| Equal status (student to student) Low imposition | Higher status (student to professor) Relatively high imposition |
|---|---|
| Scenario 1: Borrowing a pen from a classmate | Scenario 2: Asking a professor to postpone an essay submission |
| Scenario 4: Asking a roommate to return a book since he/she is going to the library | Scenario 3: Asking a professor for an appointment because you have lots of questions |

## Coding

First, six questionnaires, three from each level, were independently coded by the researcher and a colleague, with the interrater agreement 0.81. Then another six questionnaires, three from each level, were coded independently, with the interrater agreement 0.92. Any disagreements were resolved item by item through consensus coding. The remaining portions of the data were coded by the researcher alone.

The requests were coded for the level of directness (direct, conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect) for the *head act* (e.g. the request of 能借一支笔吗? *Néng jiè yīzhībǐ ma* 'Can (I) borrow a pen?' was coded as conventionally indirect), for internal modification at the syntactic and lexical/phrasal levels (e.g. 要是你去图书馆，顺便把我的书也还了吧. *Yàoshi nǐ qù túshūguǎn, shùnbiàn bǎ wǒdeshū yě huánle ba.* 'If you go to the library, (what about) returning my book while you are there?'), for use of alerters (e.g. 李小京 *Lǐ xiǎojīng* 'a person's name') and supportive moves (e.g. '这个星期的作业太多了，中文作文我交不了了. *Zhège xīngqíde zuòyè tàiduōle, zhōngwén zuòwén wǒ jiāo bùliǎole* 'I have too much homework this week. I am not able to submit the Chinese composition').

# Analysis and Results

## Request perspectives

A request can be hearer or speaker dominant, or can assume an implicit perspective, as when the subject of the sentence is omitted in the context (Zhang, 1995). Examples 1–3 illustrate the hearer, speaker and implicit perspective, respectively. Table 2.2 shows that the request perspectives changed

**Table 2.2** Frequency of request perspectives by group (number and percentage)

| Perspectives | Scenarios 1 and 4 S–S: low imposition | | | Scenarios 2 and 3 S–P: high imposition | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Hearer Domin | Speaker Domin | Implicit | Hearer Domin | Speaker Domin | Implicit |
| Lower level | 31 | 12 | 5 | 17 | 26 | 5 |
| | 64.6 | 25 | 17.9 | 35.4 | 54.2 | 17.9 |
| Adv | 27 | 6 | 15 | 24 | 17 | 7 |
| | 56.3 | 12.5 | 31.3 | 50.0 | 35.4 | 14.6 |
| NSs | 10 | 6 | 32 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| | 20.8 | 12.5 | 66.7 | 31.3 | 33.3 | 35.4 |

*Notes*: S, Student; P, Professor; Domin, Dominant; Adv, Advanced.

along with the sociopragmatic situation, and that the use of zero pronouns in the subject position increased with advancing proficiency level, aligning more with the usage of the NSs.

Example 1
小友, 你可以借给我一只笔吗? (Adv #36, S1)
*Xiǎoyou, nǐ kěyǐ jiègěi wǒ yīzhǐ bǐ ma?*
'Xiaoyou, you may lend to me a pen QM³?'

Example 2
星期四我再给您, 好吧? (Adv #35, S3)
*Xīngqísì wǒ zài gěinín, hǎoba?*
'Thursday I again give you, OK?'

Example 3
小友, 可以借一下你的笔吗? (NS #4, S1)
*Xiǎoyou, kěyǐ jièyīxià nǐde bǐ ma?*
'Xiaoyou, may borrow a little bit your pen QM?'

## Request strategies

The requests produced by the participants were classified into two major categories: the direct and the conventionally indirect. The direct category included 'imperative/plain statements', 'hedged performatives' and 'want statements'. The most direct forms in the data were imperatives (Example 4) and plain statements (Example 5). The plain statement, as shown in Example 5, presented no requestive intent but called the interlocutor's attention, in which case it appeared that the speaker did not have to persuade the professor.

Example 4
小友, 请 (借) 给我一支/个bi/笔. (Lower level #74, 78, Adv #45, S1)
*Xiǎoyou, qǐng (jiè) gěi wǒ yīzhǐ/gè bǐ.*
'Xiaoyou, please (lend) give me a pen.'

Example 5
星期二我不可能交作文, 因为别的课都有大大的功课. (Lower level #68, S2)
*Xīngqíèr wǒ bùkěnéng jiāozuòwén, yīnwèi biédekè dōuyǒu dàdàde gōngkè.*
'Tuesday I not possible submit composition, because other classes all have lots of homework.'

The data showed frequent occurrences of *hedged performatives*; that is, 'the illocutionary verb denoting the requestive intent is modified, e.g. by modal verbs or verbs expressing intention' (Blum-Kulka *et al.*, 1989b: 279). This is illustrated in Example 6, where the illocutionary intent is explicitly stated and the illocutionary force softened by hedging expressions. Examples 7–9

show that the illocutionary force is modified by downgraders. In Example 9, the learner used a *promise statement*.

**Example 6**

李小京, 你可以(也)把我的书还给图书馆. (Adv #36, 45, S4)
*Lǐ xiǎojīng, nǐ kěyǐ (yě) bǎ wǒdeshū huángěi túshūguǎn.*
'Li Xiaojing, you may (also) BA my book return to library.'

**Example 7**

即然你要到图书馆去还书, 请你也拿我借的书还给他们, 好吗? (Adv #33, S4)
*Jírán nǐ yào dàotúshūguǎn qù háishū, qǐngnǐ yě ná wǒjièdeshū huángě tāmen, hǎoma?*
'Since you will go library return book, please you also take I borrowed book return to them, OK?'

**Example 8**

小友, 给我jie 一 zhibi吧. (Adv #35, S1)
*Xiǎoyou, gěi wǒ jiè yīzhibǐ ba.*
'Xiaoyou, give me lend a pen SM[4].'

**Example 9**

老师, 我有另一作业在别课, 我能不能星期四我一定得交给你. (Lower level #56, S2)
*Lǎoshī, wǒ yǒu lìng yī zuòyè zài biékè, wǒ néngbùnéng xīngqísì wǒ yīdìng dei jiāogěi nǐ.*
'Teacher, I have other homework in other course. I can not can Thursday I definitely must submit to you.'

Yet another category at the level of directness is the *want statement*, which was mainly found in the NSs' data for scenario 3 involving requesting an appointment with a professor. Although such a statement is perceived to be direct and impolite in English, it is quite downtoned in Chinese with a soft intonation, as illustrated in Example 10. On the other hand, a 'want statement' in Chinese can be impolite if a particular verb, such as 要 *Yào* 'want' instead of 想 *Xiǎng* 'want/intend', is used with little modification. The two want statements produced by the lower level group both used a statement form, as seen in Example 11.

**Example 10**

李老师, 我想看看你什么时候有空? 我想问问您书本里的几个问题。(NS #12, S3)
*Li lǎoshī, wǒ xiǎng kànkàn nǐ shénme shíhou yǒukòng? Wǒ xiǎng wènwènnín shūběnlǐde jǐgè wèntí.*
'Teacher Li, I intend find out a bit you what time have free time? I intend ask a bit you (honorary *you*) book a few questions.'

**Example 11**

老师, 我有课文的问题所以我要和你定时间。(Lower level #62, S3)
*Lǎoshī, wǒ yǒu kèwénde wèntí suǒyǐ wǒ yào hé nǐ dìng shíjiān.*
'Teacher, I have lessons question therefore I want with you make appointment.'

A number of utterances contained grammatical errors that interfered with communication (cf. Thomas, 1983), and were therefore pragmalinguistically inaccessible. As discussed previously, a basic condition for an utterance to be communicatively effective is that it is semantically clear and grammatically correct. Utterances such as Example 12 were not amenable to categorization. They were treated as *uninterruptable* in this study. They frequently had an interrogatory form. Table 2.3 shows the distribution of the request strategies in all four scenarios.

**Example 12**

小友, 请问, 你有一zhi bi我借吗? (Lower level #55)
*Xiǎoyou, qǐngwèn, nǐ yǒu yīzhibi wǒ jiè ma?*
'Xiaoyou, please ask, you have a pen I borrow QM?'

Conventionally indirect requests in the data were classified into two categories: (1) query preparatory with modal auxiliaries such as 能 *Néng* indicating ability/possibility, or 可以 *Kěyǐ* indicating possibility/permission; and (2) time availability, as used in scenario 3: 您下星期什么时候有时间? *Nín xiàxīngqí shénme shíhou yǒushíjiān?* 'When will you have time next week?'. To the extent that a reason (i.e. lack of time) was given here for rejecting the request, this strategy shows consideration towards the hearer (Schauer, 2009).

Although the conventionally indirect strategy is a polite means of realizing a request in English, it may not necessarily be so in Chinese unless downgraders are used. Conventional indirectness in Chinese does not have as many syntactic modifications as in English (e.g. a variety of tenses and modalities). In the present study, conventional indirectness was predominantly used by both groups of NSs and CFL learners (Table 2.3) although the degree of politeness varied to a large extent due to the different use of internal and external modifications. Examples 13–15 illustrate utterances containing few internal and external downgraders, thereby sounding direct and impolite.

**Example 13**

现在我那么忙, 没有时间做作业。星期四可以给你我的作文吗? (Adv #32, S2)
*Xiànzài wǒ nàmemáng, méiyǒu shíjiān zuòzuoyè. Xīngqísì kěyǐ gěinǐ wǒde zuòwén ma?*
'Now I that busy, not have time do homework. Thursday may give you my composition QM?'

**Table 2.3** Frequency of request strategy by group (number and percentage)

| Strategies | Direct Strategies | | Convent. Indirect | Uninterruptable |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Examples | Imper/Plain S. Want S. | Hedged perform. Want S. | Query preparatory | |
| Lower level | 12 | 18 | 50 | 16 |
| | 12.5 | 18.8 | 52.1 | 16.7 |
| Adv | 6 | 19 | 69 | 2 |
| | 6.3 | 19.8 | 71.9 | 2.1 |
| NSs | 2 | 23 | 71 | 0 |
| | 2.1 | 24.0 | 74.0 | |

*Notes*: Convent., Conventionally; Imper., Imperative; S., Statement; Perform., Performative; Adv, Advanced.

Example 14

我有一些问题。你有没有时间帮助我跟我学习说中文? (Adv# 32, S3)

*Wǒ yǒu yīxiē wèntí. Nǐ yǒuméiyǒu shíjiān bāngzhù wǒ gēnwǒ xuéxí shuō zhōngwén?*

'I have some questions. You have not have time help me with me learn speak Chinese?'

Example 15

老师, 你什么时候有时间（见面）? (Lower level #73, 70, S3)

*Lǎoshī, nǐ shénme shíhou yǒu shíjiān (jiànmiàn)?*

'Teacher, you when have time (meet)?'

The distribution of the strategies as shown in Table 2.3 indicates that conventional indirectness was most preferred among participants, both the NSs and the CFL learners. The advanced and native groups used conventional indirectness with approximately the same frequency. The second most frequently used strategy across the proficiency levels was the *hedged performative*. Such requests employed hedging expressions such as the sentence-final particle for suggestion 吧 *ba*, adverbial downgrader 一定 *Yídìng*, and/or a tag-question form which mitigated the illocutionary force by asking for permission 行吗 *Xíngma*, possibility 可以吗 *Kěyǐ ma*, and opinion 好吗 *Hǎoma*. An independent-samples *t*-test was used to determine if the lower level group differed significantly from the advanced group in terms of the conventionally indirect strategies they produced. The results revealed that $t(45) = -2.28$, $p = 0.014$ (lower level group, $M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.65$; advanced group, $M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.25$). Therefore, a clear pattern of development was observed, with use of the request strategies approximating the NSs' norms as learners' level of proficiency increases.

It should be noted that the lower level group produced two *want statements*, whereas the advanced group produced none. A close examination revealed that the NSs' group exclusively used the verb 想 *Xiǎng* 'want/intend', whereas the lower level group used 要 *Yào* 'want' in one instance that made the request impolite, and 想 *Xiǎng* in another. It is possible that the production data used in this study may not adequately reflect what the learners at a given level were capable of, and that the advanced group may have used the avoidance strategy, since the advanced group did use 想 *Xiǎng* and 要 *Yào* in their supportive moves. It may be that the advanced learners were aware that the *want statement* in Chinese could be polite if a correct verb was used. For them, choosing the correct form was not easy due to the fact that both verbs, 想 *Xiǎng* and 要 *Yào*, often share similar meanings, but function differently depending on the sociopragmatic context.

## Internal modification

Internal modification is classified at the syntactic and lexical/phrasal levels. The syntactic modifiers produced by the participants included (1) adverbial clauses for condition, time and reason, (2) tag questions and (3) modal auxiliaries. An adverbial clause provides an opt-out option for the hearer, thus allowing him or her to keep a distance from the speaker. In this way, both interlocutors can comfortably avoid FTAs, as in Example 16.

Example 16

你去图书馆的时候可不可以也拿我的书还去? (Adv #50, S4)

*Nǐ qù túshūguǎnde shíhou kěbùkěyǐ yě ná wǒdeshū huán qù?*

'You go library time may not may also take my book return?'

When a question-tag is added to a declarative sentence, the tone of the utterance is softened and encodes politeness. As Zhang (1995) pointed out, if request intention is specified in the main clause, maximum clarity and a degree of politeness are achieved all at once in a tag-question. The choice of appealer, however, can mitigate or aggravate the illocutionary force. For example, … 好不好 *Hǎobù hǎo?* '… OK?' would be appropriate if used by an interlocutor of a higher social status addressing someone of a lower social status, but would otherwise be impolite if it were the reverse (Examples 17–18). None of the NSs used it in their utterances (Table 2.4). The data revealed that three CFL learners at the advanced level and five at the lower level used the tag-question appealer 好不好 *Hǎobù hǎo?* 'OK?', although five of them also used alternative forms such as 可以吗 *Kěyǐma?* 'OK?' or 好吗 *Hǎoma?* 'OK?'. The data therefore suggested that the participants may have treated appealers as interchangeable across different contexts, without realizing that the question-tag appealers in Chinese may perform different functions, and thus are sociopragmatically sensitive. For example, in the

**Table 2.4** Frequency of syntactic modification by group (number and percentage)

| Levels | Adverbial clause | Tag question ok? | | Modal auxiliary | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Examples | 要是..., If...; ... 的时侯, when ...,.... | ..., 行吗/行不 行? ..., 好/可以 吗? Possibility | ..., 好不好? Suggestion | 可以 May | 能 Can | 会 Would |
| Lower level | 3 | 9 | 5 | 39 | 3 | 2 |
| | 3.1 | 9.4 | 5.2 | 40.6 | 3.1 | 2.1 |
| Adv. | 8 | 7 | 6 | 46 | 7 | 0 |
| | 8.3 | 7.3 | 6.3 | 47.9 | 7.3 | |
| NSs | 9 | 10 | 0 | 28 | 25 | 0 |
| | 9.4 | 10.5 | | 29.2 | 26.0 | |

*Notes*: Synt., Syntactic; Modif., Modification; Adv, Advanced.

situation where a request was proposed from a student to a teacher (Examples 17 and 18), the tag-question appealer that entails approval 行吗 *Xíng ma?* 'OK?' or possibility 可以吗 *Kěyǐ ma?* 'OK?' is more appropriate than 好不好 *Hǎobùhǎo?* 'OK?'.

**Example 17**

王老师，这个星期我忙极了。我给您我的功课这个星期四，好不好？(Adv #40, S2)

*Wáng lǎoshī, zhège xīngqí wǒ máng jíle. Wǒ gěi nín wǒde gōngkè zhège xīngqísì, hǎobùhǎo?*

'Wang teacher, this week I busy extremely. I give you (honorary *you*) my homework this Thursday, OK?'

**Example 18**

王老师，现在我有非常多的功课，所以我不能交我的作文。在星期四交，好不好? (Adv #44, S2)

*Wáng lǎoshī, xiànzài wǒ yǒu fēichángduōde gōngkè, suǒyǐ wǒ bùnéng jiāo wǒde zuòwén. Zài xīngqísì jiāo, hǎobùhǎo?*

'Wang teacher, now I have a lot of homework. Therefore I cannot submit my composition. On Thursday submit, OK?'

It is interesting to note that both the lower level and advanced groups mostly used the modal auxiliary 可以 *Kěyǐ* 'may' instead of 能 *Néng* 'can', although both were acceptable in the context. The NSs' group used approximately 50% of each in their conventionally indirect requests (see Table 2.4). A close examination of the data revealed that 87.5% of the CFL learners relied almost exclusively on 可以 *Kěyǐ*. Only six learners used 能 *Néng*, one of whom

at the advanced level consistently used 能 *Néng* in the formula 麻烦你能不能 V *Máfanni néng bùnéng V...* 'bother you if you can V ...'. This student reported having studied in China for a year, which may explain his formulaic usage. In a study abroad context (see Chapters 4 and 5, this volume), learners tend to receive large amounts of target language input, including formulaic expressions, and have opportunities to use their L2 in a variety of contexts involving different interlocutors. This can have an impact on their communicative and cross-cultural competence (Barron, 2003; Schauer, 2009; Taguchi *et al.*, 2013).

In addition to syntactic modifiers, lexical/phrasal expressions can also modify the *head act*. Participants produced three types of lexical/phrasal modifiers: (1) *politeness markers* that included downgraders such as 麻烦帮我 *Máfan bāngwǒ* 'bother you to help me' or upgraders such as 给我/为我 *Gěiwǒ/ wèiwǒ* 'for me'; (2) *downtoners*, i.e. sentential adverbials used to mitigate the request; and (3) *understaters*, i.e. adverbial modifiers used to decrease the imposition by under-representing the proposition of the request.

Moreover, participants' use of the honorific form of the second person pronoun 您 *Nín* increased with proficiency. In contrast, their use of the politeness marker 请 *Qǐng* 'please' decreased with proficiency. In general, 请 *Qǐng* 'please' is not a preferred marker of politeness in Chinese. If a request is pragmalinguistically or sociopragmatically inappropriate, 请 *Qǐng* helps little, as illustrated in Examples 19 and 20.

**Example 19**

你去图书馆吗? 请把我的书拿去。(Lower level #57, S4)

*Nǐ qù túshūguǎn ma? Qǐng bǎ wǒde shū ná qù.*

'You go library QM? Please BA my book take to (there).'

**Example 20**

请你让我星期四交作文。 (Lower level #60, S2)

*Qǐng nǐ ràng wǒ xīngqísì jiāo zuòwén.*

'Please you let me Thursday turn in composition.'

The formulaic expression with a politeness marker and a downtoner 麻 烦/帮我顺便VO[5] *Máfan/bāngwǒ shùnbiàn VO* 'bother you/help me VO' was absent in the learners' data, but most of the NSs (87.5%) used it in scenario 4 when asking a roommate to return a book. The learners mostly used 给我 *Gěiwǒ* 'for me' or 为我 *Wèiwǒ* 'for me' to realize the request (see Examples 21–22), when 帮我 *Bāngwǒ* 'help me' should have been the pragmatically appropriate expression. Although semantically it was true that the hearer was the sole agent who would return the book, pragmatically 给我 *Gěiwǒ* 'for me' or 为我 *Wèiwǒ* 'for me' sounded aggressive and impolite (Example 21). The previously mentioned advanced learner consistently used the polite formulaic expression 麻烦你能不能... *Máfan nǐ néngbùnéng...* 'to bother you if

you can. . .' (Example 22), although the sentence still sounded slightly impolite because of the use of 为我 *Wèiwǒ* 'for me'.

Example 21

你可不可以huan这本书给我ma? (Lower level #59, S4)

*Nǐ kěbùkěyǐ huán zhèběnshū gěiwǒ ma?*

'You can not can return this book for me QM?'

Example 22

小京, mafan你能不能为我把这本书还给图书馆? (Adv II #48, S4)

*Xiǎojīng, máfán nǐ néngbùnéng wèiwǒ bǎ zhèběnshū huángěi túshū guǎn?*

'Xiaojing, bother you can not can for me BA this book return to library?'

Table 2.5 shows a small discrepancy in the production of the upgraders 给我 *Gěiwǒ*, 为我 *Wèiwǒ* 'for me'. The lower level group produced one fewer upgrader than the advanced group, while the NSs group produced none. Yet, the advanced group's overuse of the upgrader may not necessarily be interpreted as their acquisition of polite expressions being behind that of the lower level group, because it is possible that the advanced group may have attempted to elaborate on their meaning more than the lower level group, and that the lower level group may have resorted to avoidance upon finding the expressions difficult. Notice also that none of the learners used the downtoner 顺便 *Shùnbiàn* 'simultaneously'. A number of them instead used the adverb 也 *Yě* 'also' (Example 23). 也 *Yě* has a similar meaning to 顺便 *Shùnbiàn* 'simultaneously', but the latter makes the utterance more polite and face-saving for both interlocutors (Example 24).

Example 23

你可以也还我的书/这个书吗? (Lower level #64, Adv #41, S4)

*Nǐ kěyǐ yě huán wǒdeshū/zhègeshū ma?*

'You can also return my book/this book QM?'

Example 24

你可以顺便帮我把这本书还了么? (NS #2, S4)

*Nǐ kěyǐ shùnbiàn bāngwǒ bǎ zhèběnshū huánle me?*

'You can simultaneously help me BA this book return QM?'

The downtoners used by learners were limited. In comparison, the NSs used a large variety of them, as shown in Table 2.5.

The advanced group produced a total of three utterances containing the understaters 用一用 *Yòngyīyòng* 'use a bit' and 说一说 *Shuōyīshuō* 'speak a bit', while the lower level group used none. In comparison, the NSs' group predominantly used the phrase V一下 such as 用一下 *Yòngyīxia* 'use a bit', 还一下 *Huányīxia* 'return (the book) a bit', or 请教一下 *Qǐngjiào yīxia* 'consult a bit' (Example 3).

**Table 2.5** Frequency of lexical/phrasal modification by group (number and percentage)

| Lexic. Modif. Examples | Politeness marker | | Upgrader | | | Downtoner | | | Understater | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 您 Honorary you | 请 Please | 麻烦 To bother | 帮我/忙 To help me | 给我/为我 For me | 顺便、一起、也 With no effort Together/Also | 一定 Definitely | 再 Again | 吧 Ptcl | V→下 V→V V. a bit |
| Lower level | 6 / 6.3 | 8 / 8.3 | 0 | 0 | 2 / 2.1 | 3也 / 3.1 | 1一定 / 1.0 | | 0 | 0 |
| Adv | 23 / 24.1 | 2 / 2.1 | 3 / 3.1 | 2 / 2.1 | 3 / 3.1 | 9也 / 9.4 | | 1再 / 1.0 | 1 / 1.0 | 3 / 3.1 |
| NSs | 34 / 35.4 | 1 / 1.0 | 3 / 3.1 | 19 / 19.8 | 0 | 21 / 21.9 | | 11 / 11.5 | 5 / 5.2 | 22 / 22.9 |

*Notes:* Lexic, Lexical/phrasal; Modif., Modification; Adv, Advanced; Ptcl, Particle.

These downgraders used by the NSs' group share at least one distinctive feature. The relationships between the downgraders' form and function are opaque, and their meaning is frequently lost in translation. Additional downgraders include the particle 吧 *ba* as a suggestion marker, the VP 帮我 *bāngwǒ* 'help me' meaning 'for me', and the adverb 顺便 *shùnbiàn* 'simultaneously'. Semantically, these expressions are not transparent, and pragmatically they are highly functional, making utterances less coercive and consequently more polite. The only modifier used by both learner groups is the downtoner 也 *yě* 'also', whose meaning is concrete and whose form and meaning mapping is straightforward.

Tables 2.4 and 2.5 display internal modifications at the syntactic and lexical/phrasal levels, respectively. The data provided evidence of the CFL learners' pragmalinguistic development. First, as the proficiency level increased, they produced more syntactic modifiers, such as adverbial clauses and the modal auxiliary 能 *Néng* 'can', and lexical/phrasal modifiers, such as *politeness markers* and the *downtoner* 也 *yě* 'also'. Second, as the proficiency level increased, the use of 请 *Qǐng* 'please' decreased. Nonetheless, there was a persistent underuse of a number of highly functional phrases. This may have to do with the fact that the meaning of these phrases is not literal. For instance, the formulaic expression 顺便帮我V *shùnbiàn bāngwǒ V* 'help me simultaneously V' is merely a polite way of saying 'do it for me'. Thus, the complexity of meaning and function may pose mapping difficulties for CFL learners.

Tables 2.6 and 2.7 compare internal modifications across two different sociopragmatic scenarios. Both lower level and advanced groups used more lexical downgraders such as the politeness marker 您 *Nín* in scenarios 2 and 3, suggesting that they were aware that politeness markers could be strategically used to help make a successful request.

**Table 2.6** Internal modifications by group in scenarios 1 and 4 (number and percentage)

| Internal modifier | Syntactic DG | Syntactic UPG | Lexical/phrasal DG | | Phrasal UPG |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Examples | Adv C Tag Q | Tag 好不好? OK? | PM DT US | PM 请 Please | 给我 为我 For me |
| Lower level | 7 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 1 |
| | 14.6 | 8.3 | 6.3 | 14.6 | 2.1 |
| Adv | 8 | 3 | 16 | 1 | 3 |
| | 16.7 | 6.3 | 33.3 | 2.1 | 6.3 |
| NSs | 11 | 0 | 65 | 1 | 0 |
| | 22.9 | | 135.4 | 2.1 | |

*Notes*: DG, Downgrader; UPG, Upgrader; Adv C, Adverbial clause; Tag Q, Tag-question; PM, Politeness marker; DT, Downtoner; US, Understater; Adv, Advanced.

**Table 2.7** Internal modifications by group in scenarios 2 and 3 (number and percentage)

| Internal modifier | Syntactic DG | Syntactic UPG | Lexical/phrasal DG | | Phrasal UPG |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Examples | Adv C Tag Q | Tag 好不好 OK? | PM DT US | PM 请 Please | 给我 为我 For me |
| Lower level | 5 | 1 | 7 | 1 | 1 |
| | 10.4 | 2.1 | 14.6 | 2.1 | 2.1 |
| Adv | 7 | 3 | 26 | 1 | 0 |
| | 14.6 | 6.3 | 54.2 | 2.1 | |
| NSs | 8 | 0 | 50 | 0 | 0 |
| | 16.7 | | 104.2 | | |

*Notes*: DG, Downgrader; UPG, Upgrader; Adv C, Adverbial clause; Tag Q, Tag-question; PM, Politeness marker; DT, Downtoner; US, Understater; Adv, Advanced.

## Alerter

Alerters precede the *head act* to attract the interlocutor's attention. Alerters produced by the participants were categorized into two types. The first type addresses the interlocutor by name, or generally as 朋友 *Péngyǒu* 'friend' or 兄弟 *Xiōngdì* 'brother'. The second type involves the use of 请问 *Qǐngwèn* 'may I ask/excuse me'. The frequency of the first type steadily increased with proficiency. In addition, there was greater use of alerters in scenarios 2 and 3 than in 1 and 4, suggesting that learners at both the lower level and advanced level of proficiency were aware of the sociopragmatic differences between the situations (Table 2.8). A paired samples *t*-test was conducted to analyze if there were significant differences between low imposition (in scenarios 1 and 4) and relatively high imposition (in scenarios

**Table 2.8** Comparison of frequency of alerters across scenarios (number and percentage)

| Scenarios | Scenarios 1, 4 | | Scenarios 2, 3 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Examples | 名字/朋友/兄弟 Name/friend/brother | 请问 May I ask | 老师姓 + 老师 Teacher Last N + T | 请问 May I ask |
| Lower level | 8 | 3 | 19 | 0 |
| | 16.7 | 6.3 | 39.6 | |
| Adv | 19 | 1 | 35 | 2 |
| | 39.6 | 2.1 | 72.9 | 4.2 |
| NSs | 40 | 0 | 47 | 7 |
| | 83.3 | | 97.9 | 14.6 |

*Notes*: Adv, Advanced; N, Name; T, teacher.

2 and 3) across proficiency levels. The lower level group did not show a significant difference between the two sociopragmatic situations, $t(23) = -1.86$, $p = 0.076$. In contrast, the advanced group revealed a significant difference between the two sociopragmatic situations, $t(23) = -3.24$, $p = 0.00$ (Scenarios 1 and 4, $M = 0.79$, $SD = 0.833$; Scenarios 2 and 3, $M = 1.46$, $SD = 0.833$). Therefore, sociopragmatic development in terms of interlocutor addresses was observed with increasing proficiency level.

Although the function of the phrase 请问 *Qǐngwèn* 'may I ask/excuse me' is to convey politeness, learners' usage did not seem to be sociopragmatically appropriate in four out of six occurrences produced by both groups. For example, they used the phrase in a context between friends, making their requests over-polite and thus inappropriate (Example 25). Although the utterance shown in Example 26 happened between a student and a professor, it still sounded unnatural due to a lack of supportive moves in the discourse. Example 27 illustrates the use by an advanced learner and several NSs of 请问 *Qǐngwèn* 'may I ask' in the middle of the discourse after giving reasons or explanations for the request and before the *head act* to politely highlight the request. Such strategies make the illocutionary intent clear and the utterances sufficiently polite. As Examples 25–27 show, language forms such as 'may I ask/excuse me' function differently according to their discourse context.

Example 25
请问, 你可以给我一个bizi? (Lower level #63, S1)
*Qǐngwèn, nǐ kěyǐ gěiwǒ yīgè bǐzi?*
'Please ask, you may give me a pen?'

Example 26
请问, 可以不可以给你我的作文星期四? (Adv #53, S2)
*Qǐngwèn, kěyǐ bùkěyǐ gěinǐ wǒde zuòwén xīngqísì?*
'Please ask, may not may give you my composition Thursday?'

Example 27
王老师, 这个星期我有很多的功课, 考试。请问我可以星期四给你我的作文吗? (Adv #41, S2)
*Wáng lǎoshī, zhège xīngqí wǒ yǒu hěnduōde gōngkè, kǎoshì. Qǐngwèn wǒ kěyǐ xīngqísì gěinǐ wǒde zuòwén ma?*
'Wang teacher, this week I have lots of homework, tests. Please ask I may Thursday give you my composition?'

## Supportive moves

Supportive moves are used by a speaker to persuade a hearer to perform a desired act. The supportive moves produced by the participants included *grounders*, which provide explanations or justifications for the request,

**Table 2.9** Frequency of supportive moves by group (number and percentage)

| Category | Supportive moves | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Grounder | Preparatory | Apology | Promise | Thanking | Effort |
| Lower level | 36 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | 37.5 | 4.2 | 1.0 | | | |
| Adv | 62 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| | 64.6 | 8.3 | 3.1 | 1.0 | 1.0 | |
| NSs | 71 | 17 | 8 | 3 | 6 | 1 |
| | 74.0 | 17.7 | 8.3 | 3.1 | 6.3 | 1.0 |

*Notes:* Adv, Advanced.

*preparatories*, which prepare the hearer for a request, *apologizing*, *promises* and *thanking*. Table 2.9 shows the frequency of supportive moves by group. An independent-samples *t*-test was used to detect if the lower level group differed significantly from the advanced group in terms of the supportive moves they produced. The results revealed that $t(46) = 3.381$, $p = 0.001$ (lower level group, $M = 1.67$, $SD = 1.31$; advanced group, $M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.74$). Therefore, a significant difference was observed with the advanced group more approximating the NSs' norms.

Among the six identified supportive moves, the *grounder* was the most used strategy by all participants, suggesting that in human communication, reasons and justifications for a request are cognitively primary. The preparatory supportive move is the second most frequently used strategy. A close examination of the data revealed that 66.7% of the learners used both *grounder* and *preparatory* strategies, and 33.3% used the *preparatory* move only.

Some supportive moves are sociopragmatically specific, closely tied to certain scenarios. Two sets of data are presented in Tables 2.10 and 2.11 to

**Table 2.10** Frequency of supportive moves in scenarios 2 and 3 (number and percentage)

| Supportive moves | Grounder | Preparatory | Apology | Promise | Thanks | Effort |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Lower level | 29 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | 60.4 | 2.1 | 2.1 | | | |
| Adv | 49 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | 102.1 | 4.2 | 6.3 | | | |
| NSs | 59 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| | 122.9 | 14.6 | 16.7 | 6.3 | 4.2 | 2.1 |

*Notes:* Adv, Advanced.

**Table 2.11** Frequency of supportive moves in scenarios 1 and 4 (number and percentage)

| Levels | Grounder | Preparatory | Promise | Thanking |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lower level | 7 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| | 14.6 | 6.3 | | |
| Adv | 13 | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| | 27.1 | 12.5 | 2.1 | 2.1 |
| NSs | 12 | 10 | 0 | 4 |
| | 25.0 | 20.8 | | 8.3 |

Notes: Adv, Advanced.

illustrate differences between two types of sociopragmatic scenarios. As shown, both learner groups produced more and varied supportive moves in the situations where the degree of imposition was high than when the situation was otherwise. Moreover, their production of supportive moves and alerters showed that, as their proficiency increased, they were more aware of various sociopragmatic situations, and were generally able to alter their means of external modification accordingly, such as providing more reasons and apologies for requests of high imposition.

## Discussion

With regard to the first research question, 'Is there evidence of pragmalinguistic development in lower level versus advanced learners?', the present study consistently found evidence of pragmalinguistic development in the CFL learners (see Tables 2.2–2.7 and the independent-samples $t$-tests). Like the NSs, the learners at both proficiency levels predominantly relied on the *query preparatory* form. Their use of the conventionally indirect and hedged performative strategies increased, and their use of the bare imperative with little modification decreased with increasing proficiency. It is important to point out, however, that the use of a query preparatory form such as 'Can you/I …?' in Chinese does not guarantee that the request will come across as polite. Internal downgraders and supportive moves are still essential to softening the illocutionary force. Although limited, learners' use of downgraders increased; these included adverbial clauses, politeness markers such as 您 *Nín* 'honorific *you*' and 想 *Xiǎng* 'want/intend', and the downtoner 也 *Yě* 'also'. The overuse of the politeness marker 请 *Qǐng* 'please' decreased with the advanced group. This result is consistent with previous findings (Barron, 2003; Hendriks, 2008; Hill, 1997; Rose, 2009).

With regard to the second research question, 'Is there evidence of sociopragmatic development in lower level versus advanced learners?', we also found consistent evidence of sociopragmatic development throughout the data (see Tables 2.2, 2.6–2.8, 2.10–2.11, and the paired-samples $t$-tests). First, the use of *request perspectives* increasingly varied with the sociopragmatic situation. The learners' use of an implicit perspective generally progressed toward that of the NSs. Second, the advanced group outperformed the lower level group, using more lexical/phrasal downgraders in scenarios 2 and 3 than in 1 and 4. Third, the advanced group employed more alerters and supportive moves than the lower level group in scenarios 2 and 3 than in 1 and 4, exhibiting increasing variation corresponding to differing sociopragmatic situations.

In summary, the data revealed that the CFL learners seemed to be not only increasingly aware of the sociopragmatic differences embodied in various request situations, but also able to use a progressively greater variety of strategies appropriate to the context. The ample evidence of learners' pragmalinguistic development included increasing use of conventionally indirect strategies, internal modifications at syntactic and lexical/phrasal levels, alerters, supportive moves, and zero pronouns in the subject position. The findings also provided evidence of learners' sociopragmatic development across different proficiency levels. This development was seen in particular in their use of a variety of downgraders, alerters and supportive moves to accommodate the degree of imposition and the social status between the interlocutors. The overextension of 请 *Qǐng* 'please' and upgraders decreased in different contexts as the proficiency level increased. The findings suggest that the increase in proficiency from lower level to advanced correlates with more accurate use of NS-like strategies.

This study, however, revealed a large discrepancy between the CFL learners and the NSs, particularly in the use of pragmatically functional particles and phrases such as: 吧 *ba*, a sentential particle for suggestion; 行吗 *Xíngma*, a tag-question appealer for permission; a downtoner, 顺便 *Shùnbiàn*; a politeness marker, 麻烦 *Máfan*; a polite expression for acknowledging help, 帮我/忙V *Bāng wǒ/máng V*; an understater for softening an imposition, V一下/V *V yīxià/V*; and a polite expression for requestive intention, 想 *Xiǎng* (Tables 2.4–2.7). It is unlikely that these modifiers were lacking in the learners' instructional input, since all the expressions appeared in their lower level course materials and had been practiced both in class and in their home assignments. Interestingly (but not surprisingly), the learners' underuse of the expressions seems to have been selectively confined to those that do not provide clear form-meaning/function connections. The meanings of some of the expressions are opaque. For example, 吧 *ba* is devoid of referential meaning, but pragmatically has a suggestive function. Similarly, V一下 *yīxià/VV* is a mild pragmatic understater, and 顺便 *Shùnbiàn* has no concrete meaning, but can function as a pragmatic downtoner. Furthermore, the meanings of some expressions are non-literal. For example, 帮我/忙 *Bāng wǒ/máng* literally translates as 'help

me' but figuratively means 'for me'. Similarly, the literal translation of 麻烦 *Máfan* is 'to bother', but the expression serves as a politeness marker. Still other expressions, such as 行吗 *Xíngma?* 'OK?' and 想 *Xiǎng* 'want/intend', are not always interchangeable with 好不好 *Hǎobù hǎo?* 'OK?' and 要 *Yào* 'want', respectively, each conveying a different level of politeness. The use of these expressions is context-sensitive, depending on socio-pragmatic factors. They may be optional or necessary in a particular situation. For example, 一下 *yīxià* 'a bit' in V一下 *V yīxià* can be optional. The verb itself has inherent semantic value, but the complement 一下 *yīxià* is semantically redundant, though pragmatically preferred sometimes (cf. VanPatten, 2002). The learners may not have realized that these opaque and non-literal expressions were not just 'regular words' needed for correct grammar usage, but could be essential and functional devices for producing polite requests. DeKeyser (2005) posits that the redundancy and optionality of a form-meaning relation may result in its lack of transparency and pose learning difficulties. Findings from the present study lend support to this claim. Among other things, the learners appear to have acquired the expressions that convey concrete meanings and are transparent in their form-meaning mapping, e.g. 也 *Yě* 'also', while the more abstract expressions such as 用一用 *Yòngyīyòng* 'use a bit', 说一说 *Shuōyīshuō* 'speak a bit', 麻烦 *Máfan* 'bother', and 帮我 *Bāngwǒ* 'help me' or 替我 *Tìwǒ* (polite form of) 'for me' remained a persistent challenge.

## Further Inquiry

The results of this study should be regarded as tentative due to the small number of scenarios and participants employed. These limitations may affect conclusions to a certain extent. In addition, since the focus of the study was on the pragmatic development of CFL learners, it would have been desirable that a longitudinal perspective be incorporated in its design, which would have led to a more complete picture of CFL ILP. In spite of these limitations, the study did yield several important findings as reported and discussed in the previous sections.

The few extant studies of requests in CFL learners (Hong, 1997; Sun & Zhang, 2008) have focused almost exclusively on analyzing request strategies and supportive moves, with little attention paid to the internal modification and pragmatic function of particles, such as syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders. However, it is in this latter area that the present study revealed large discrepancies across the learner groups and between the CFL learners and the NSs. Further research is warranted on these discrepancies, particularly in relation to those linguistic elements that are inherently low in semantic value (see VanPatten, 2002) but high in socio-pragmatic value.

## Appendix: Discourse Completion Test

Thank you for participating in this 'test'! The questionnaire is designed to identify your Chinese language ability to communicate properly in pre-designed contexts. Proper communication means that you are able to use linguistically and pragmatically appropriate language and devices in various social situations. Please respond to the four items in the second part of the questionnaire in the manner of natural conversation.

Your name:_____
(1)  Your gender:_____ M; _____ F
(2)  Your age: _____
(3)  Check your ethnic background:
_____ Caucasian; _____ African-American; _____ Hispanic; _____ Chinese; _____ Asian (please specify your nationality); Other (Specify)
(4)  What is your first language? _____
(5)  Are you somewhat bilingual with Chinese as one of the languages?_____ Yes; _____ No
(6)  What is/are the languages that you speak or hear from your parents or relatives? (You may check more than one)_____ English; _____ Chinese; _____ Asian language; _____ Spanish; _____ Others, specify
(7)  Your birth place: _____
(8)  At what age did you move to the US if you were not born in the US? _____
(9)  The Chinese language course you are currently enrolled on: _____ First year; _____ Second year; _____ Third year; _____ Fourth year
(10) Number of years of Chinese language study in high school: _____ 0; ____ 1; _____ 2; _____ 3; _____ 3 +
(11) Number of years of Chinese language study in Chinese School: _____ 0; ____ 1; _____ 2; _____ 3. _____ 3 +
(12) Have you studied in Chinese-speaking countries after high school? ___ Yes; ____ No. If 'yes', how long _____?

## I. Complete the dialogue in Chinese characters or Pinyin

(1)  (Between two classmates, 张明 and 李小友.) 张明 was about to write a Chinese dictation and realized that he forgot to bring pens. 张明 wants to borrow a pen from 李小友, his classmate sitting next to him.
张明: _____

李小友: 好啊, 在这儿, 你拿去用吧。

(2) (Between 张明 and his Chinese literature professor, 王老师.) 张明 was supposed to turn in his composition on Tuesday. But he cannot do so because of massive assignments from other classes. 张明 explains the situation and makes a request to 王老师 to see if he can turn it in on Thursday.

张明: _____

王老师: 好吧, 星期四你一定得交啊!

(3) (Between 张明 and his Chinese language teacher, 李老师.) 张明 wants to make an appointment with 李老师 to consult with her about a few questions in the textbook. He also wants to speak Chinese with 李老师. He wonders when 李老师 has time for the appointment.

张明: _____

李老师: 下星期四一天我都有时间。

(4) (Between 张明 and his roommate, 李小京.) 李小京 is going to the school library to return a book. 张明 also has a book that needs to be returned. 张明 wants to ask 李小京 to return the book for him, too.

张明: _____

李小京: 好, 没问题。

## Notes

(1) Internal modifiers consist of linguistic devices within the request itself that modify the illocutionary force, whereas external modifiers are external to the request, occurring either before or after it.
(2) Alerters are used to get the interlocutor's attention.
(3) QM, question marker.
(4) SM, suggestion marker.
(5) VO, verb and object.

## References

Achiba, M. (2003) *Learning to Request in a Second Language: Child Interlanguage Pragmatics*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1999) Researching method. In L.F. Bouton (ed.) *Pragmatics and Language Learning*, Vol. 8 (pp. 237–264). Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Division of English as an International Language.

Barron, A. (2003) *Acquisition in Interlanguage Pragmatics: Learning How to Do Things with Words in a Study Abroad Context*. Pragmatics & Beyond Series No. 108. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Blum-Kulka, S. (1982) Learning how to say what you mean in a second language: A study of the speech act performance of learners of Hebrew as a second language. *Applied Linguistics* 3, 29–59.

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

Blum-Kulka, S. and Levenston, W.A. (1987) Lexical-grammatical pragmatic indicators. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 9 (2), 155–170.

Blum-Kulka, S. and Olshtain, E. (1984) Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics* 5 (3), 196–213.

Blum-Kulka, S., House, J. and Kasper, G. (1989a) Investigating cross-cultural pragmatics: An introductory overview. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House and G. Kasper (eds) *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies* (pp. 1–36). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Blum-Kulka, S., House, J. and Kasper, G. (1989b) The CCSARP coding manual. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House and G. Kasper (eds) *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies* (pp. 273–294). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Brown, P. and Levinson, S.D. (1987) *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

DeKeyser, R.M. (2005) What makes learning second language grammar difficult? A review of issues. *Language Learning* 55 (1), 1–25.

Ellis, R. (1992) Learning to communicate in the classroom. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 14, 1–23.

Faerch, C. and Kasper, G. (1989) Internal and external modification in interlanguage request realization. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House and G. Kasper (eds) *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies* (pp. 221–247). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Hendriks, B. (2008) Dutch English requests: A study of request performance by Dutch learners of English. In M. Puetz and J. Neff van Aertselaer (eds) *Developing Contrastive Pragmatics: Interlanguage and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (pp. 335–354). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Hill, T. (1997) The development of pragmatic competence in an EFL context. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Temple University, Tokyo.

Hong, W. (1997) Socio-pragmatics in language teaching: With examples of Chinese request. *Journal of Chinese Language Teachers Association* 32 (1), 95–107.

House, J. (1989) Politeness in English and German: The functions of please and bitte. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House and G. Kasper (eds) *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies* (pp. 96–122). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

House, J. and Kasper, G. (1987) Interlanguage pragmatics: Requesting in a foreign language. In W. Lörscher and R. Schultze (eds) *Perspectives on Language in Performance. Festschrift für Werner Hüllen* (pp. 1250–1288). Tübingen: Narr.

Kasper, G. and Schmidt, R. (1996) Developmental issues in interlanguage pragmatics. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 18, 149–169.

Leech, G.N. (1983) *Principles of Pragmatics*. New York: Longman.

Puetz, M. and Neff van Aertselaer, J. (eds) (2008) *Developing Contrastive Pragmatics: Interlanguage and Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Rose, K.R. (2000) An exploratory cross-sectional study of interlanguage pragmatic development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 22, 27–67.

Rose, K.R. (2009) Interlanguage pragmatic development in Hong Kong, phase 2. *Journal of Pragmatics* 41, 2345–2364.

Scarcella, R. (1979) On speaking politely in a second language. In C.A. Yorio, K. Peters and J. Schachter (eds) *On TESOL '79: The Learner in Focus* (pp. 275–287). Washington, DC: TESOL.

Schauer, G.A. (2004) May you speak louder maybe? Interlanguage pragmatic development in requests. In S.H. Foster-Cohen, M. Sharwood Smith, A. Sorace and M. Ota (eds) *Interlanguage Pragmatic Development in Requests*. EUROSLA Yearbook, Vol. 4 (pp. 253–273). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Schauer, G.A. (2009) *Interlanguage Pragmatic Development: The Study Abroad Context*. London: Continuum.

Schmidt, R. (1983) Interaction, acculturation and the acquisition of communicative competence: A case study of an adult. In E. Judd and N. Wolfson (eds) *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition* (pp. 137–174). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Searle, J.R. (1975) Indirect speech acts. In P. Cole and J.L. Morgan (eds) *Syntax and Semantics: Vol. 3. Speech Acts* (pp. 59–82). New York: Academic Press.

Sun, X. and Zhang, D. (2008) American college students' requesting competence in Chinese as a foreign language. *Chinese Teaching in the World* 3, 105–113.

Taguchi, N., Li, S. and Xiao, F. (2013) Production of formulaic expressions in L2 Chinese: A developmental investigation in a study abroad context. *Chinese as a Second Language Research* 2 (1), 23–58.

Thomas, J. (1983) Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics* 4 (2), 91–112.

Trosborg, A. (1995) *Interlanguage Pragmatics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

VanPatten, B. (2002) Processing instruction: An update. *Language Learning* 52, 755–803.

Zhang, Y. (1995) Strategies in Chinese requesting. In G. Kasper (ed.) *Pragmatics of Chinese as Native and Target Language*. Technical Report No. 5 (pp. 23–68). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Second Language Teaching & Curriculum Center.

# 3  Peer/Group Interaction in a Mandarin Chinese Study Abroad Context

## Li Jin

It has been assumed that study abroad provides an ideal environment for foreign language learners to receive various types of language input, which leads to effortless and osmotic linguistic and cultural development. Many educators and researchers believe students should be completely immersed in the target language context, interacting with native speakers in the target language as much as possible from the moment they set foot in the host country, regardless of their prior language learning experience (Lafford, 1995; Lapkin *et al.*, 1995). However, there are serious inconsistencies among research studies as to what results in students' successful linguistic and cultural development in study abroad. One line of research that has gained much attention in recent years focuses on the formal and informal social interaction students have within local communities (e.g. Isabelli-Garcia, 2006; Levin, 2001; Magnan & Back, 2007; Wilkinson, 1998). Some second language (L2) researchers (e.g. Kinginger, 2008, 2009; Ochs, 2002) propose viewing L2 development in study abroad as a language socialization process, similar to how children engage in their first language (L1) environment. In other words, students in study abroad contexts are assumed to strive to be socialized into the target culture by learning the socially acceptable language behaviors through interactions with local residents. Questions such as whether these students are ready to be socialized into the target culture and whether native speakers of the target language are willing to provide appropriate linguistic and cultural assistance to help socialize the learners remain open to debate.

In recent years, a growing number of American students have been studying abroad in China. Many of them go with the assumption that their language proficiency will inevitably improve once they live in China and are surrounded by Chinese-speaking people. On the other hand, it is still unclear whether the historically monocultural Chinese people, particularly those with whom American study abroad students interact on a daily basis, are