

L1 Interference in Interlanguage Pragmatics A Study on Requesting in Russian L2 and Italian L2

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Abstract Within the field of Second Language Acquisition, a growing interest has been devoted to interlanguage pragmatics, in particular how L2 speakers use the linguistic means by which a given language conveys politeness. Being the speech act of 'request' one of the most frequent and salient Face Threatening Acts, the current study investigates whether and to what extent L2 learners of Russian and Italian transfer their L1 pragmatic strategies into their L2 when required to perform a request. Qualitative and quantitative analysis has been conducted on data collected among (i) N=9 Russian L1 learners of Italian L2 via role plays and (ii) N=38 Italian L1 learners of Russian L2 via discourse completion tasks. In particular, we will compare L1 and L2 production of head acts, modification, and orientedness.

Keywords Russian L2. Italian L2. Interlanguage Pragmatics. Speech act. Request.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Frameworks. – 2.1 Speech Act Theory. – 2.2 Politeness Theory. – 2.3 Interlanguage Pragmatics. – 2.4 The Speech Act or Request. – 3 A Twofold Study. – 3.1 Methodology. – 3.2 Informants and Data Collection. – 3.3 Data Analysis and Results. – 4 Discussion and Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

Present-day multilingual and multicultural societies have somehow affected the goals of language learning, in that the discipline is no longer aiming to turn learners into native-like speakers, but to make them fit into the role of intercultural speakers who are linguistically and intercultural competent – people who are sensitive to other cultures and aware of their own cultural position to mediate across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Byram 2012; Wilkinson 2012, quoted in Barron, Gu, Steen 2017). Unlike grammar mistakes, communicative errors can cause cultural shock, conflicts, disorder and failures in interpersonal communication and in international interaction. More specifically, even minor differences in interpretive strategies carried over from a first language (L1) to a second language (L2) can lead to misunderstandings (Brown, Levinson 1978). In the process of communication, people perceive and evaluate each other from the standpoint of their own culture and internal standards inherent in it. Trying to predict the communicative behaviour of the interlocutor, they consciously or unconsciously rely on their previous communication experience. However, if the interlocutors belong to different cultures, their communicative backgrounds are likely to display a variety of differences that might significantly affect the whole communication process. Therefore, especially in a world where contacts among people of different cultures tends to expand, a particularly important task is to understand different cultures and know how to deal with their similarities and differences.

For this reasons, within the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), a growing interest has been devoted to studies on interlanguage pragmatics, i.e., how L2 speakers acquire and use the linguistic means by which a given language conveys politeness when performing ‘sensitive’ utterances.

Our study aims at contributing to this area of research by analysing how L1 Russian learners of Italian L2 and, conversely, L1 Italian learners of Russian L2 perform the speech act of ‘request’ in their L1 and L2. After sketching out briefly the main theories – i.e., Speech Act Theory (§ 2.1), Politeness Theory (§ 2.2), Interlanguage Pragmatics (§ 2.3) – and how the speech act of requesting is realised in the two target languages, namely Italian and Russian (§ 2.4), we will introduce a twofold study (§ 3) conducted on data collected among 9

The authors worked together throughout the essay. Daniele Artoni wrote the sections 2.4, 3.1.2, 3.2.2, 3.3, and 4. Anastasiia Rylova wrote the sections 1, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1.1, 3.2.1. Experiment 1 was administered by Daniele Artoni, Experiment 2 was designed and administered by Anastasiia Rylova.

Russian L1 learners of Italian L2 via role plays (§§ 3.1.1, 3.2.1) and 38 Italian L1 learners of Russian L2 via discourse completion tasks (§§ 3.1.2, 3.2.2). In particular, we will show to what extent L1 pragmatic features are transferred into one's L2 by comparing both L1 and L2 production of head acts (§ 3.3.1), modifiers (§ 3.3.2), and orientedness (§ 3.3.3).

2 Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 Speech Act Theory

Born within the field of philosophy of language, the first studies on how a particular utterance may be linked to a given social action date back to Austin's seminal work "How to do things with words" (1955), where the notion of 'speech act' is defined in its performative nature, i.e., by considering to what extent a statement corresponds to an action. Austin considered the 'speech act' as a three-level formation: locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary. The locutionary act consists in saying something with a certain meaning and aims to convey or express a given denotation; the illocutionary act includes utterances which have a certain conventional force. The perlocutionary act normally creates a sense of consequential effects on the audiences, so that it deals with what is achieved by uttering something. It should be noted that all three levels might be simultaneously present in one statement.

This so-called Speech Act Theory was further developed by Searle (1969) - who distinguished five major classes of speech acts: assertives (or representatives), directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations - and by Finegan (2014) - who identified six main categories and numerous subcategories: representatives (assertions, statements, claims, hypotheses, descriptions, suggestions), commissives (promises, pledges, threats, vows), directives (commands, requests, challenges, invitations, entreaties, dares), declarations (blessings, hirings, firings, baptisms, arrests, marryings, declaring mistrials), expressives (greetings, apologies, congratulations, condolences, thanksgivings), and verdictives (ranking, assessing, appraising, condoning).

As the current study focuses on directives, their illocutionary force "consists in the fact that they are attempts [...] by the speaker to get the hearer to do something" (Searle 1969, 66). The propositional content always implies that the hearer does some future action. Directives are an important family of actions common in everyday life which perform important social functions. Therefore, directives are especially relevant for studies interested in how people participate

in practical actions and, because of that, a large number of studies were devoted specifically to them (e.g., Searle 1969; Ervin-Tripp 1976; Fitch 1994; Goodwin 2006). Overall, the choice of directive speech acts as an object of study is also due to the fact that they are characterised by a significant variety of means of expressing politeness; as a matter of fact, directives are intrinsically impolite, in that they restrict the freedom of action of the hearer (Leech 1983; Brown, Levinson 1987), and this is to be managed ‘linguistically’ by the speaker.

2.2 Politeness Theory

With respect to such inherent impoliteness of some speech acts, on the one hand, and the need to communicate in a socially adequate way, on the other, Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987) developed their Politeness Theory, which investigates how interactants use particular linguistic strategies in order to create the most comfortable communicative conditions and achieve successful communication.

Central to the authors’ model is the notion of ‘face’, which is generally understood as the social representation of the self. The concept of ‘face’ was borrowed from the American sociologist Erving Goffman, who argues that personality is a social phenomenon and “humans try to maintain their faces; a loss of them would result in emotional pain” (Goffman 1967, 13). Brown and Levinson (1987) implemented this notion and further distinguished two aspects of face: a positive face, which expresses one’s desire to be approved of, and a negative face, which stands for one’s desire to be unimpeded in their actions. As an ideal communication preserves its participants’ faces, an extra job needs to be done by interlocutors when they perform speech acts that might ‘threaten’ (hence they are referred to as Face Threatening Acts) other people’s faces.

Face Threatening Acts (henceforth, FTA) do not constitute any deviation from the rules of communication; they are a natural and important part of conversational dialogue: people often disagree with other people’s opinions, ask for something, give advice, etc. Therefore, it is necessary to use a variety of strategies to minimize the communicative harm caused to the interlocutor.

With this respect, the notion of language ‘politeness’ is understood as the ability to correctly use interactive strategies based on communicative situations. With their help, the speaker is able to make a good impression on the interlocutor and create a positive image or, conversely, expand their personal space (Holmes 2006). The level of politeness which a speaker will use in relation to an addressee is influenced by three sociological factors: (i) relative power of hearer over speaker, (ii) the social distance between the interactants, and (iii) the ranking of imposition involved in doing a FTA (Brown, Levinson 1987).

With regards to the approaches the interlocutors can use to maintain each other's face, Brown and Levinson (1987) identified four strategies: (i) bald on-record, (ii) negative politeness, (iii) positive politeness, and (iv) off-record (indirect), where all types involve maintaining – or redressing threats to – positive and negative face. Hence, linguistic strategies can address either positive politeness, connected to solidarity and the inclusion of the interlocutor(s), or negative politeness, which is avoidance-based and associated with the desire to escape conflict.

2.3 Interlanguage Pragmatics

Whereas Politeness Theory aims at establishing universal strategies used to save one's face during communication, studies on cross-cultural pragmatics (see, for instance, Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper 1989; Márquez-Reiter 2000; Ogiermann 2009; Rue, Zhang 2008) have demonstrated that different cultures perceive and realise FTA according to culture specific preferences across different language contexts. It goes without saying, when people interact in their L2(s) such differences should be taken into account. Research in this field, called Interlanguage Pragmatics, aims “at understanding how non-native speakers of a language acquire and develop socio-cultural skills in order to communicate their meanings in the second language appropriately and adequately” (Naiditch 2006, 6). A key to effective communication in L2 is pragmatic competence. According to Taguchi (2006, 514-15), pragmatic competence means the ability to deal with a complex interplay of language, language users, and context of interaction. L2 learners need linguistic forms and skills to perform day-to-day social functions in the target language, as well as to know which forms are appropriate to use in what situations.

Despite the increasing number of studies within the field of interlanguage pragmatics, it is somehow hard to grasp common trends among L2 learners (Nuzzo 2007); a proposal by Rose and Kasper (2001) suggests that L2 pragmatics is acquired in a five-staged path, from (i) pre-basic to (ii) formulaic, (iii) unpacking, (iv) pragmatic expansion, up to the eventual (v) fine-tuning. However, this developmental sequence is constrained by numerous variables and, given the cultural constraints on which pragmatic competences are based, a crucial aspect to be considered is the role of pragmatic transfer from one's L1 to their L2(s), i.e., when L2 learners use the strategies of their L1 to perform a linguistic function which is performed differently in the L2 (Taguchi 2009).

2.4 The Speech Act or Request

In order to examine to what extent pragmatic interference is evident in L2 learners of Russian and Italian, we have decided to investigate the FTA of request, one of the most salient and recurrent speech acts performed in everyday life. It is thus not surprising that requests are the most frequently studied speech act in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics (Ogiermann 2009). Request belongs to directives and can be defined as the act performed by a speaker who wants the hearer to do or refraining from doing some action (Searle 1969, 66). According to pragmatic taxonomy, making a request is considered a threat both to the hearer's negative face – in that it restricts the hearer's freedom of action (Brown, Levinson 1987) – and to the speaker's positive face, as the speaker may sound demanding. In terms of strategies used to compensate the threat to the hearer's negative face, it is common to assume that indirectness correlates with negative politeness, because a more indirect illocution would imply optionality for the hearer (Leech 1983; Brown, Levinson 1987). However, the universality of this implication has been challenged by Ogiermann (2009), who noticed the Anglo-centric bias in such assumption and proposed to investigate politeness in contexts, such as the Russian one, where frankness is valued more than the avoidance of face-loss because indirectness is likely to be perceived as a waste of the hearer's time (Rathmayr 1994; Zemskaja 1997).

In order to account for cross-linguistic variation in pragmatics, the CCSARP (*Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project*), developed by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), created a comprehensive model according to which each speech act can be parsed into three elements: (i) head act, (ii) internal modifiers, and (iii) supportive moves or external modifiers. In particular, in line with the objectives of the present study, we will introduce how requests tend to be expressed in Russian and Italian.

2.4.1 Request in Italian

The speech act of requesting in Italian has been analysed by various studies (cf. Rossi 2012; 2015), in particular within the field of Interlanguage pragmatics (cf. Nuzzo 2007; Vedder 2008; Nuzzo, Gaudi 2012; 2014).

Aiming at investigating request directness in informal contexts among native speakers of Italian, Rossi (2012) noted that the most frequent head acts in his corpus are imperatives (e.g., *passami il piatto* 'pass me the plate') and a particular form of interrogatives called *Mi X?*, where *mi* 'to me' expresses the beneficiary of the presupposed fulfilled request (e.g., *mi passi il piatto?* 'will you pass me the plate?').

Rossi (2012) claims that the imperative in Italian is used only in informal bilateral contexts and is often mitigated by internal modifiers, such as particles (*dai, valà, c'mon*) and phrasal minimisers (*un attimo* 'a moment'). Interrogative forms of request are constructed with the modal *potere* 'can', as in *puoi X?* 'can you X?'

Tendencies on how requests are performed in Italian can be found also in studies on Italian L2, such as Nuzzo (2007), who states that the most frequent head acts are interrogatives, modified by negation and the modal *potere* 'can', and declaratives in conditional mood or imperfective past tense. Another study on L2 learners of Italian by Vedder (2008) shed light on the use of internal and external modifiers in requests. In particular, internal modifiers include: politeness markers (*per favore* 'please'), subjectivisers (*penso* 'I think', *secondo me* 'in my opinion'), diminutives (*un po'* 'a little'), hedge (*in qualche modo* 'somehow'), conditional forms (*mi daresti...?* 'could you give me...?'), lexical downtoners (*forse* 'perhaps', *possibilmente* 'possibly', *per caso* 'by chance'), request for agreement (*vero?* 'true?', *no?* 'no?'); whereas external modifiers could be classified into: addressing terms (*sentì* 'listen'), guarantee (*domani te la riporto* 'I'll return it tomorrow'), minimizer (*Basta un'oretta, poi me la cavo da solo* 'A [little] hour is enough, then I can manage it by myself') and justifier (*l'avrò dimenticato a casa sul tavolo* 'I must have forgotten it on the table at home'). Less frequent are reinforcers, where the speaker increases the illocutionary strength, as in *davvero* 'indeed'.

With regards to orientedness, Italian requests can be addressed both to the speaker and to the hearer, with a preference for the latter, especially in contexts with a short social distance between the interlocutors; Italian requests can also be expressed by impersonal constructions – prototypically an impersonal deontic declarative like *bisogna* 'it is necessary' – which do not restrict the response space either to the speaker or the listener (Rossi 2015).

2.4.2 Request in Russian

As mentioned before, requesting in Russian seems to challenge the basic assumption that indirectness is an effective strategy to save the negative face of the hearer when threatened by the request. It follows that a large number of studies (see, among others, Mills 1992; Rathmayr 1994; Owen 2002; Hacking 2008; Larina 2003; Ogiermann 2009; Scherbakova 2010) have investigated this topic. A particular attention has been given to the imperative construction, claimed to be more frequent in Russian than in other Western European contexts (Ogiermann 2009), if not the most frequent strategy used to perform requests among natives of Russian (Wierzbicka 1991; Rathmayr 1994; Berger 1997; Larina 2003). Politeness is considered as

the main criterion according to which speakers choose between imperfective and perfective aspects in imperative requests, as argued by Benacchio (2002), in that perfective imperatives address negative politeness, whereas imperfective ones shorten the distance between the actors, and address their positive face.

As mentioned before, scholars do not agree whether imperative is the most common head act in Russian requests; Ogiermann (2009), for instance, claims that interrogatives outnumber imperatives, whereas Mills (1992) describes interrogative constructions as hyper-polite and unlikely to be used in informal contexts, where imperatives are preferred.

The relative directness of head acts in Russian is often mitigated by means of internal modification, such as: negative particle *ne* 'not'; modal *moč* 'can', interrogative particle *li*; conditional particle *by*, politeness markers (*požalujsta* 'please', *bud' dobr* 'be good'), diminutives (*nemnožko* 'a little', *na minutočku* 'for a [little] minute'), often used in combination (cf. Mills 1992; Ogiermann 2009; Dubinina 2010; Podgorniy 2016). Amongst the most prominent supportive moves in requesting are: alerters, grounders, preparators, disarmers, and imposition minimizers.

Another noticeable aspect of Russian requesting unfolds in its tendency towards hearer-orientedness. Dubinina (2010) shows how Russian prefers hearer-oriented requests (e.g., *ty ne daš' mne konspekt?* 'don't you give me the notes?'), a formulation unlikely to be expressed in English, where requests tend to be speaker-oriented (e.g., *Could I borrow your notes?*). Conversely, in Russian a speaker-oriented request is used to acknowledge the role of the hearer, i.e., in formal contexts (Nikolaeva 2000). Russian allows also the impersonal formulation *možno* 'can/is possible to' followed by infinitive, which is neutral to the speaker's (Ogiermann 2009).

3 A Twofold Study

As the speech act of request triggers different politeness values and strategies in Italian and Russian, our research aims at finding whether and to what extent L2 learners rely on their L1's pragmatic habits when performing requests. To achieve this aim, two juxtaposed experiments have been set: the first experiment (henceforth EXP1) involved 9 L1 Russian learners of Italian L2, whereas the second experiment (henceforth EXP2) was conducted among 38 L1 Italian learners of Russian L2.

3.1 Methodology

The two studies presented here used different techniques to collect fresh data. On the one hand, L1 Russian learners of Italian (EXP1) were required to perform role plays, whereas L1 Italian learners of Russian (EXP2) have filled in a discourse completion task. Despite their different nature, both methods are extensively used in cross-linguistic pragmatics (Kasper 1999), allowing the two data sets to be – to a certain extent – comparable.

3.1.1 Role Plays

The methodology used to collect data among Russophone learners of Italian (EXP1) consisted in role plays, i.e., (semi)spontaneous interactions between interlocutors based on situational scenarios. Role plays allow to collect data that closely reflect L2 learners' language use in social contexts, because of the socially grounded nature of pragmatic competence.

The participants were offered four situations and roles they needed to play by interacting with the researcher (Anastasiia Rylova). They were also told to act out the dialogues as naturally as possible and in the way they wanted. First, the action took place in Italian, the informants' L2, and then in Russian, their L1.

The *stimuli* situations were taken from Naiditch (2006), who investigated requests in English performed by Brazilian ESL learners and L1 American English speakers, and in Portuguese performed by Brazilian Portuguese speakers. All the situations accounted for different variables (power, social distance and degree of imposition) and were culturally understandable to the Russian informants. The four *stimuli* were given to participants in Italian and Russian, and are here translated into English as follows:

(S1) boss – employee (asking for permission to leave earlier)

You need to go to the doctor and the only available time for an appointment was during your working hours. You need to leave the office earlier than usual, but you are in the middle of an important task your boss asked you to perform. You go to your boss' office to talk about it.

(S2) professor – student (asking to take a test on another day)

Your professor had established a specific day for the final exam from the beginning of the semester. It turns out that you won't be able to take the test on that day and need to take it some other time. You go to your professor's office to talk about it.

(S3) friend - friend (asking to borrow the camera for a trip)

You are going on vacation tomorrow and, while packing, you find out that your camera is broken. There is no time for you to go get a new camera and you're afraid you won't be able to buy one at your destination. You remember a friend who has a nice camera. You talk to your friend about it.

(S4) costumer - sales person (asking to use the restroom in a store)

While doing some shopping in a clothing store, you feel the need to use the restroom. You can't wait until you leave the store and there is nowhere else you could go to use the restroom anyway. You talk to the sales person about it.

3.1.2 Discourse Completion Tasks

In order to collect data among Italoophone learners of Russian L2 (EXP2), a set of discourse completion tasks (henceforth DCT) was created and distributed among our informants. Unlike role plays, which can account for online competences but are highly costly in terms of time, DCT allow the collection of a large quantity of data with a neat control on variables in a short period. Despite the arising of issues on its reliability (see, for instance, Cyruk 2003), DCT is the most frequent method used in interlanguage pragmatics research.

The informants were given a printed copy with 3 situations involving a request in Russian, their L2, and Italian, their L1; they were required to write down the exact words they would have used to respond to each situation. In order to elicit authentic-like utterances, informants were given only six minutes to fill in the whole DCT.

The *stimuli*, provided in Russian and Italian, and here translated into English, account for different degrees of power, social distance, and imposition.

(R1) friend - friend (asking to borrow a pen)

You are at the university and need to take notes but you forgot your pen home. You notice that your friend sitting next to you has two pens in his pencil case. What would you say?

(R2) costumer - waiter (asking for a drink)

You are at the restaurant with friends. You are thirsty and would like to drink some orange juice. What would you say to the waiter?

(R3) student - professor (asking for a reference letter)

You are attending a competition for young translators. In order to participate, you need to have a reference letter signed by a professor of your university. What would you say to your professor?

3.2 Informants and Data Collection

3.2.1 L2 Learners of Italian

As far as EXP1 is concerned, data were collected among 9 L1 Russian learners of Italian L2. Each participant was asked to answer a questionnaire about their sociolinguistic background and was given a consent form.

With respect to language proficiency, all informants reported to have a good command of the English language, whereas their level of Italian ranges from basic (N=4) to intermediate (N=2) and advanced (N=3).

The informants are 19-25 years old, and one participant is 48 years old. All participants, except one, have graduated or are currently studying at language departments, and thus have a good command of several foreign languages – i.e., German, Portuguese, French, Spanish, Croatian, and Spanish. Only 2 out of 9 participants do not know any foreign languages besides Italian and English.

Data collection via role plays resulted in 72 dialogues (36 in Italian and 36 in Russian).

3.2.2 L2 Learners of Russian

As DCT allows for quick collections, data in EXP2 were gathered among 38 L1 Italian learners of Russian L2. Similarly, they were required to fill in a questionnaire on their sociolinguistic background and were required to agree on a written consent form.

All the informants are university students, aged 22-25, with a good to excellent command of the English language. With respect to their knowledge of other L2s, the most frequent ones are French, German and Spanish. Their level of Russian is quite homogeneous, as all the informants were attending a B2/C1 course of Russian. Furthermore, 11 out of 38 learners reported to have studied the Russian language in an immersive context, having spent from one month to one full year in a Russian speaking environment.

Collection via DCT produced 228 recordings (114 in Italian and 114 in Russian).

3.3 Data Analysis and Results

The starting point of data analysis considers head acts, the core of requests, in that they contain the primary formulation of the speech act. The level of directedness performed in the head act clearly states whether the politeness strategy is more indirect, thus aiming

at avoidance, or direct, targeting the clarity of the statement. First, we will analyse the types of head acts used by our informants, then we will investigate how and to what extent head acts are modified to mitigate the illocutionary force of the FTA; finally, we will consider whether there is a tendency to perform speaker-oriented or hearer-oriented requests.

3.3.1 Head Acts

Relying on the model proposed by the CCSARP (Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper 1989), table 1 summarises the types of head acts produced by our informants in both EXP1 and EXP2. Head acts are divided into interrogatives (e.g., Can you give me a pen?), performatives (e.g., I want to ask you...), declaratives (e.g., I want to use your pen), and imperatives (e.g., Give me your pen). Table 1 shows the tokens and their percentage for each type of head act according to the language of performance (Italian or Russian) and the type of test (EXP1 or EXP2).

Table 1 Head Acts in EXP1 and EXP2

	ITA-EXP1		RUS-EXP1		ITA-EXP2		RUS-EXP2	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Interrogative	17	47.2	31	86.1	93	81.6	78	68.4
Performative	10	27.8	1	2.8	12	10.5	5	4.4
Declarative	6	16.7	2	5.6	6	5.3	11	9.6
Imperative	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	14.0
No act	3	8.3	2	5.6	3	2.6	4	3.5
TOT	36	100	36	100	114	100	114	100

Table 1 shows some unexpected results. The most common strategy used to formulate requests is interrogative, preferred 31 (86.1%) and 93 (81.6%) times in the informants' L1, Russian and Italian respectively. Albeit percentages are lower, interrogatives are the most frequent head act in L2 production as well - i.e., N=17 (47.2%) in Italian L2 and N=78 (68.4%) in Russian L2.

Performatives are more common in Italian than Russian, both among L1 speakers, with 12 occurrences (10.5%), and L2 learners, with 10 occurrences (27.8%). Russian learners of Italian always rely on the formula *volevo chiedere se* '(I) wanted to ask if' with the verb *volere* 'want' in the imperfective past, as in example (1); Italian L1 speakers' performatives embrace *volere* 'want' both in the imperfective past (2a) and in the conditional mood (2b), the latter often calqued in their L2, as in (3).

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- (1) *volevo chiedere se puoi darmi in prestito la tua camera fotografica*
'(I) wanted.IMP to ask if you can lend me your camera' [RUS2, S3, ITA]
- (2a) *Le volevo chiedere se gentilmente era disponibile...*
'(I) wanted.IMP to ask if you are kindly available...' [ITA6, R3, ITA]
- (2b) *Vorrei chiederle se gentilmente potrebbe firmare...*
'(I) wanted.COND to ask if you could kindly sign...' [ITA9, R3, ITA]
- (3) *ja chotela by poprosit' Vas napisat'...*
'I wanted COND to ask you to write...' [ITA13, R3, RUS]

Declaratives are likely to be expressed by *want*-statements, as in (4). Interestingly, they are more common in L2 than L1 production and their directedness is often mitigated by politeness markers, such as *per favore / požalujsta* 'please'.

- (4) *ja choču apel'sinovyj sok, požalujsta*
'I want orange juice, please' [ITA15, R2, RUS]

However, the most striking result in our data is the total absence of imperative constructions in L1 Russian requests. Even in S3, the situation with the lowest degree of imposition and the shortest social distance, all the informants avoided imperatives and opted for interrogatives; sometimes interrogatives are even modified by the modal *moč'* 'can' and the conditional particle *by* – as in (5) – which are described in the literature as hyper-polite solutions (Mills 1992).

- (5) *ja mogla by u tebjja eë porposit'?*
'Can COND I ask it to you?' [RUS8, S3, RUS]

The only occurrences of imperatives are thus found among Italian learners of Russian in EXP2, where 8 out of 16 imperatives are even used in formal contexts, i.e., addressing the speaker in the formal 2nd person plural, as in (6).

- (6) *dajte mne ručku, požalujsta*
'give.2PL me a pen, please' [ITA19, R1, RUS]

Finally, the cases in which the act was avoided are often declaratives in which the informants stated their incapability of formulating a proper request in the provided situation (e.g., *ne znaju* 'I don't know').

In sum, analysis on the head acts performed by our informants in EXP1 and EXP2 shows that interrogatives are by far the most common strategy used to perform requests, both in Italian and Russian, slightly more often in their L1 than in their L2. Performatives are common in L2 production and, unexpectedly, imperatives are never used in Russian L1.

3.3.2 Modifiers

In order to understand to what extent politeness is conveyed, it is crucial to investigate what kinds of modifiers are used to mitigate the abovementioned head acts. Table 2 shows the number of occurrences of different modifiers in EXP1 and EXP2; percentages here are in relation to the number of utterances collected, i.e., N=36 in EXP1 and N=114 in EXP2 [tab. 1]. The modifiers are listed as follows: can, i.e., the modal *potere* in Italian and *moč'* in Russian; conditional, expressed by a proper mood in Italian and by the particle *by* in Russian; negation, marked by the particles *non* in Italian and *ne* in Russian; interrogative, i.e., the question tag *o no?* 'or not?' in Italian and the binary interrogative particle *li* in Russian; please, as the Italian politeness marker *per favore* and the Russian one *požalujsta*.

Table 2 Modifiers in EXP1 and EXP2

	ITA-EXP1		RUS-EXP1		ITA-EXP2		RUS-EXP2	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Can	28	77.8	29	80.6	76	66.7	74	64.9
Conditional	4	11.1	15	41.7	83	72.8	20	17.5
Negation	1	2.8	11	30.6	0	0	10	8.8
Interrogative	1	2.8	12	33.3	0	0	6	5.3
Please	2	5.6	3	8.3	39	34.2	57	50.0
TOT	36	100	70	194.4	198	173.7	167	146.5

The possibility of having more than one modifier in one utterance allows such variability in the total occurrences across the same test. It is worth noticing that modifiers are used by both groups more in their L1 than in their L2; in particular, Russian learners of Italian introduced about half modifiers when they acted in Italian (N=36, i.e., one per utterance on average) compared to their production in their L1 (N=70, i.e., about two modifiers per utterance).

In EXP1, native speakers of Russian demonstrated that a frequent modifier used in their L1 is *moč'* 'can' (N=29, 80.6%), followed by - and often combined with - conditional (N=15, 41.7%), interrogative (N=12, 33.3%), and negative (N=11, 30.6%) particles. The example in (7), for instance, shows how the interrogative request is modified by the verb *moč'* 'can', the negative particle *ne*, and the conditional particle *by*.

- (7) *ne mogla by ty ego mne odolžit', bukval'no na nedelju?*
 'NEG can COND you lend me it, literally for a week?' [RUS2, S3, RUS]

Interestingly, in Russian L1 data, *požalujsta* ‘please’ is used only 3 times. With regards to Russian L2, Italian learners tend to rely more on *moč’* ‘can’ (N=74, 64.9%) and less on conditional, negative, and interrogative particles. Especially the latter modifiers are often used in hyper-polite contexts, as in (8).

- (8) *Prostite, sër, ne mogli by Vy prinesti mne apel’sinovyj sok, požalujsta?*
 ‘excuse me, sir, NEG can COND you bring me orange juice, please?’
 [ITA33, R2, RUS]

Unlike native speakers, Italian informants have frequently introduced the politeness marker *požalujsta* ‘please’ in Russian; this is partially due to the fact that Italian informants did produce imperative constructions, where the politeness marker *požalujsta* ‘please’ is required as the only element capable to mitigate the directness of the imperative, as shown in (9).

- (9) *daj mne tvoju ručku, požalujsta!*
 ‘give me your pen, please!’ [ITA31, R1, RUS]

In EXP2, the most recurrent modifiers used by native speakers of Italian in their L1 are the modal *potere* ‘can’ (N=76, 66.7%) and the conditional mood (N=83, 72.8%); sometimes the combination of the two modifiers results in the forms *potrei/potresti/potrebbe*, i.e., conditional forms of *potere* ‘can’, as in (10).

- (10) *mi scusi, potrebbe portarmi del succo all’arancia, per favore?*
 ‘excuse me, could you bring me some orange juice, please?’ [ITA8, R2, ITA]

Whereas negation and question tags are never uttered, Italian speakers quite frequently add the politeness formula *per favore* ‘please’ (N=39, 34.2%), as already exemplified in (10).

Italian sentences performed by Russian learners are very often modified by the modal *potere* ‘can’ (N=28, 77.8%), but only 4 times also by the conditional mood, as in (11).

- (11) *magari tu potresti prestarmi la tua?*
 ‘maybe you could lend me yours?’ [RUS4, S3, ITA]

The only case of interrogative formula performed in Italian by a Russian learner is shown in (12) and is clearly a calque of the Russian Y/N question.

- (12) *posso andare o no?*
 ‘can I leave or not?’ [RUS3, S1, ITA]

The only occurrence of negation in Italian L2, shown in (13), displays an ambiguous case, in that it is not clear whether the negative interrogative is an ability question or an indirect request.

- (13) *Non posso essere... essere... passare questo esame nel questa data*
 ‘NEG can (I) be... be... pass the exam on that date?’ [RUS3, S2, ITA]

A final remark on the Italian production by Russian learners concerns the rare use of the politeness marker *per favore* ‘please’ (N=2, 5.6%), which mirrors its infrequent usage also in the informants’ L1.

In sum, modifiers are more numerous in one’s L1 production than in their L2. Whereas the modal ‘can’ and the conditional are the most common modifiers in L1, L2 learners tend to rely more on the modal ‘can’ than on conditional forms; furthermore, the politeness marker ‘please’ is significantly more frequent among Italians, both in their L1 and L2, than among Russian informants.

3.3.3 Orientedness

Finally, table 3 accounts for the perspective taken by the informants when they addressed their requests, namely towards themselves (speaker-oriented), towards their interlocutor (hearer-oriented), or without addressing the request to any of the interlocutors, i.e., by using an impersonal construction. The reader should note that the total number of structure produced does not include the utterances where the head act was not performed.

Table 3 Orientedness in EXP1 and EXP2

	ITA-EXP1		RUS-EXP1		ITA-EXP2		RUS-EXP2	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hearer-oriented	7	21.2	16	47.1	86	76.1	75	67.0
Speaker-oriented	23	69.7	11	32.4	24	21.2	18	16.1
Other	3	9.1	7	20.6	3	2.7	19	17.1
TOT	33	100	34	100	113	100	112	100

In EXP1, about half of the requests by L1 Russian speakers was hearer-oriented (N=16, 47.1%). However, also speaker-oriented requests (N=11, 32.4%) and impersonal constructions (N=7, 20.6%) are quite common. In particular, impersonal constructions are almost always represented by *možno* ‘can/is possible to’, as in (14).

- (14) *možno li vospol'zovat'sja ubornoj Vašego magazine?*
 ‘can.IMPERS LI use the restroom in your shop?’ [RUS1, S4, RUS]

When performing requests in Italian, Russian learners adopt a completely different strategy. The vast majority of utterances are speaker-oriented (N=23, 69.7%), as in (15a). Hearer-oriented requests are less frequent (N=7, 21.2%), and only 3 occurrences of impersonal orientation are expressed by the formula *è possibile* 'is it possible', as in (15b).

(15a) *posso io prendere la tua fotocamera per due settimane?*
'can I take your camera for two weeks?' [RUS3, S3, ITA]

(15b) *forse è possibile fare qualcosa?*
'maybe is it possible to do something?' [RUS4, S1, ITA]

On the other hand, in EXP2, Italian informants revealed a strong preference for hearer-oriented requests in their L1 (N=86, 76.1%), followed by speaker-oriented ones (N=24, 21.2%). The only 3 cases of impersonal constructions are occurrences of the already mentioned formula *è possibile* 'is it possible'. Similarly, Italian learners of Russian showed a tendency to prefer hearer-oriented requests in their L2 (N=75, 67.0%). A similar number of tokens is found among speaker-oriented requests (N=18, 16.1%) and impersonal constructions (N=19, 17.1%), the latter being always characterised by the use of *možno* 'can/is possible to' - as in (16) - which happens to be indeclinable, and thus less cognitively costly to the L2 speakers.

(16) *možno prinesit' nas nemnogo apel'sinogo soka, požalujsta?*
'can.IMPERS bring us some orange juice, please?' [ITA29, R2, RUS]

In sum, both Russian and Italian informants displayed a preference for hearer-oriented over speaker-oriented requests in their L1; however, unlike Italian learners, who showed the same tendency in their L2, Russian learners of Italian preferred speaker-oriented solutions in their L2. Despite impersonal address is plausible in both languages, a significant use of them is found only in Russian, both L1 and L2.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Analysis of data collected among Russian learners of Italian via role plays (EXP1) and Italian learners of Russian via DCT (EXP2) allows for a variety of considerations. First and foremost, the validity of the results should be confronted with some limits of the present twofold study, such as the heterogeneous practices used to collect data, the fictitious experimental settings, and the paucity of informants that took part in our tests. However, irrespectively of these methodological issues, some results provide fruitful insights into our learners' in-

terlanguage pragmatic competence and the role played by L1 transfer into their L2.

The analysis on head acts confirmed what stated by literature on requests in Italian and Russian, as long as interrogatives are the most common strategy. Such tendency is mirrored also in our informants' interlanguage. Unlike previous studies, Russian native speakers never used imperative constructions, often relying on hyper-polite strategies even in informal contexts. To our knowledge, a similar phenomenon was noticed in written DCT by Edmondson and House (1991), who claimed that such over-suppliance of polite strategies is triggered by the instrument of DCT itself; however, our Russian L1 data were collected via role plays. Another plausible explanation of the lack of imperative among native speakers of Russian might be connected to the intrinsic features of our population, i.e., young students enrolled in foreign language courses; on the one hand, their multicultural education and the multilingual experimental setting might have affected their production towards more 'cross-cultural', i.e., indirect, politeness routines; on the other hand, our data might reflect a possible shift among youngsters towards more 'Western-like' pragmatic values and strategies.

With regards to modifiers, whereas the modal 'can' is common in L1 and L2, the conditional forms are frequent in L1 and rare in L2 production. In line with Nuzzo's (2007) findings, this scarcity suggests that the morphological complexity of conditional prevents L2 learners from using it as frequently as in their L1. Furthermore, Italian informants use the politeness marker 'please' in their L1 and L2 more than Russian informants; this can be related to the fact that Russians, in general, rely on more indirect head acts, which thus require less politeness modifiers to compensate the illocutionary force of the request. Conversely, an overall directedness in Italians' head act production is mitigated by morphosyntactic modifiers, like the modal 'can' and the conditional, and lexical elements, like the politeness marker 'please'.

Results on orientedness support the preference for hearer-oriented formulations, with the only exception of Italian requests performed by Russian learners, who used a significant number of speaker-oriented expressions, thus confirming their tendency towards indirectness.

In sum, data on Russian L1/L2, Italian L1/L2, and their comparison show that phenomena in interlanguage pragmatics are the result of a bundle of causes, ranging from morpho-syntactic competence (as the scarce command of the conditional morphology) to bias caused by the experimental setting, ultimately demonstrating how L1 transfer *per se* cannot account for the full range of interlanguage pragmatic variation found in our data.

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