

“Can I Make a Party, Mum?”
The Development of Requests from Childhood to Adolescence

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This study presents how requests are acquired and developed over an eight-year period by an EFL learner in a foreign language setting, where target language pragmatics is not an issue dealt with in the classroom. In order to assess pragmatic development, a role-play requiring requests was used. This study has been triggered by the fact that longitudinal studies have commonly been considered very valuable, since development of the same participants can be traced over a long period of time. The development of requests has been followed by, first, examining what types of requests were produced by the learner at the different stages of pragmatic development; second, by analyzing the use of request modification; and, finally, by placing the learner's requests at different stages of development. The results seem to show that little development can be traced at very early stages of acquisition, and that it is not until Grade 11 that a development toward more pragmatically appropriate productions can be found.

Keywords: interlanguage pragmatics; requests; pragmatic development; longitudinal study; EFL

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“Mamá, ¿puedo hacer una fiesta?”
El desarrollo del acto de habla de pedir permiso desde
la niñez hasta la adolescencia

Este estudio presenta cómo se adquieren los actos de habla de petición de permiso mediante el seguimiento de un mismo aprendiz de inglés como lengua extranjera durante ocho años, en cuyo contexto de aprendizaje —la clase de lengua extranjera— los aspectos pragmáticos no parecen ser relevantes. Para medir el desarrollo de este componente pragmático se utilizó

una tarea de *role-play* en la que se requería el uso del acto de habla de pedir permiso. La motivación para realizar este estudio deriva de la consideración de los estudios longitudinales como muy valiosos, en tanto en cuanto se puede trazar un proceso de aprendizaje en los mismos participantes durante un largo periodo de tiempo. El desarrollo de este acto de habla se analizó, primero, examinando las diferentes modalidades de petición de permiso en distintos estadios de desarrollo pragmático; segundo, mediante el análisis de la modificación de este mismo acto de habla; y finalmente, clasificando las producciones del aprendiz en distintos estadios de desarrollo. Los resultados parecen mostrar poca evolución pragmática en las primeras etapas de adquisición, y no es hasta primero de bachillerato cuando aparece una producción pragmática más apropiada.

Palabras clave: interlenguaje; pragmática; acto de habla; petición de permiso; desarrollo pragmático; estudio longitudinal; aprendizaje de inglés como lengua extranjera

1. INTRODUCTION

This study examines longitudinally how the act of requesting is developed in an English as a foreign language context (EFL). In the study of speech acts, requests have been widely analyzed within the field of pragmatics; however, longitudinal research has been commonly considered of valuable interest since development can be traced among the same participants over time (Ortega and Iberri-Shea 2005). However, most of the developmental research related to requests has been cross-sectional and, in some cases, more than one speech act has been included (Scarcella 1979; Takahashi and Dufón 1989; Trosborg 1995; Rose 2000; Hassall 2003; Félix-Brasdefer 2007; Barón and Celaya 2010). Even though there exist a number of studies which have used longitudinal data, the vast majority have focused on naturalistic settings and stay-abroad (SA) experiences (Schmidt 1983; Schmidt and Frota 1986; Ellis 1992; Alcón 2002; Achiba 2003; Barron 2003; Schauer 2006 and 2007; Alcón 2013a).

This study, on the contrary, shows pragmatic development in the use of requests by the same participant over eight years in a formal context. The aim is to analyze the types of requests performed, the modification devices used and the stages of development the learner might go through. The objective, though, is twofold: tracing development (from low proficiency child to intermediate proficiency adolescent), but also focusing on EFL contexts where students are not commonly exposed to explicit instruction on the pragmatics of the target language (TL), especially in a school context.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Development in interlanguage pragmatics

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) is the field within pragmatics which examines how learners of a second language (L2) acquire the pragmatics of the TL, a mixture of interlanguage and pragmatics according to Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993). The aim of ILP is to study the learners' knowledge, perception and acquisition of the L2 pragmatics, as well as their use and production (Tran 2004; Alcón et al. 2005).

In the last decades, there has been an increasing interest not only in analyzing how learners acquire and produce L2 pragmatics, but also in studying how learners develop TL pragmatics (see, among others, Kasper and Schmidt 1996; Kasper and Rose 2002; Félix-Brasdefer 2007). As a response to such interest, the number of developmental studies within ILP has increased in recent years.

Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have aimed at analyzing the acquisition of different pragmatic features of the L2. As regards cross-sectional studies, aspects such as the development of politeness were first discussed by Scarcella (1979) in a very early study where it was found that learners acquired the politeness forms before they had acquired the rules to use such forms appropriately. However, one of the most researched areas in ILP is speech acts, and especially the development of requests. Both early and recent studies have shown that learners with low

proficiency tend to produce more direct requests, and as they become more proficient, the requests become more indirect (Trosborg 1995; Hill 1997; Félix-Brasdefer 2007; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011; González-Cruz 2014). However, the opposite, that is producing indirect requests at early stages of development, was found by Takahashi and Dufon (1989) probably due to the influence of the first language (L1), which in this case was Japanese.

Other cross-sectional studies have also looked at the relationship that may exist between grammatical and pragmatic competence, such as in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998), who found that learners with higher grammatical competence considered pragmatic errors as the most serious type of errors. Other studies in this vein have also found that even if the findings suggest that grammar and pragmatics develop in tandem, some previous grammatical competence seems to be required (Celaya and Barón, 2015).

As mentioned, longitudinal studies have a similar aim to cross-sectional studies, looking at the different stages of pragmatic development learners go through, although with the same participants. While longitudinal studies are fewer in number, they are considered of great value.

2.2. Studying ILP longitudinally

Most studies which have analyzed pragmatic development from a longitudinal perspective have mainly focused on learners who are living in the target community for a long period of time, such as the well-known Wes study by Schmidt (1983) and the later study by Schmidt and Frota (1986), where the development of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competences was examined. More recently, studies such as Ellis (1992) and Achiba (2003) have analyzed pragmatic development in children, more specifically children's development of requests in the L2.

In the last decades, there has been an increasing interest in comparing groups of learners who go on an study-abroad (SA) experience and those who stay at home (AH). The aim of such studies is to see whether an SA experience benefits learners as regards their acquisition of pragmatic competence. Such studies have analyzed a variety of speech acts (requests, apologies, complaints, giving advice and compliments, among them) and the most common finding has been that those who go abroad do in fact tend to outperform those who stay in the AH country (Matsamura 2000 and 2003; Barron 2003; Schauer, 2006, 2007 and 2010). In line with this, Alcón (2013a and 2013b) analyzed the development of request types and mitigation in international students using English as the TL, and compared them to British native speakers' performance. As in other recent studies, the requests used by non-native speakers were more direct and with a wide variety of external modifiers to soften the request (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2009; Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis 2010).

However, there are few longitudinal studies which have focused on foreign language (FL) settings. The few studies which are set in FL contexts tend to analyze the effects of

comparing groups which have been instructed in a specific pragmatic feature explicitly, groups which have been instructed implicitly and finally groups with no pragmatic instruction. The results of such studies tend to show that instruction does play a role, and that learners who are instructed explicitly or implicitly develop their pragmatic competence (Alcón 2002 and 2012; Martínez-Flor 2004; Koike and Pearson 2005; Martínez-Flor and Fukuya 2005; Alcón and Martínez-Flor 2008; Eslami-Rasekh and Mardani 2010; Bardovi-Harlig and Vellenga 2012).

It should be stated, then, that there is a need to carry out longitudinal research in ILP in FL contexts where the teaching of pragmatics is not dealt with in class, especially in school contexts. It would also be of interest in the field of ILP to see what actually happens from a developmental perspective, since learners in an L2 learning context (such as SA experiences) have more opportunities for input than those who are in an FL context (Kasper and Schmidt 1996).

2.3. The development of requests

As already mentioned, the act of requesting has been widely researched in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. The main aim of such studies being to analyze how learners develop their ability to get the addressee to do something (Searle 1969) in three main aspects: type of request, modification and stages of development. With regards the first of these, type of request has been classified into direct requests, which present literal meaning, and indirect requests, where the meaning is implied (Clark 1979). Taking into account this classification, studies carried out in the Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) provided a detailed classification of requests from the most direct to the most indirect, such as the study by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1989). That classification includes very direct requests where the objective is clearly presented, such as "leave me alone" or "I am asking you to dress up the mess," and requests where the goal is implicit, such as "you've left the kitchen in a right mess" (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1989, 202).

The second aspect analyzed, modification, is of interest in ILP studies in order to investigate how learners mitigate the request. On the basis that requests are divided into two parts, the *head act* and the *peripheral elements*, the study of modification of requests focuses on the second part of the request, the peripheral elements. Sifianou (1999) divided the peripheral elements into internal modification, i.e., those linguistic devices which are in the head act, and external modifications which surround the head act. Alcón et al. (2005) proposed a classification of modification based on Sifianou's peripheral elements where internal modifiers included all those linguistic devices which are used to open and soften the request, together with lexical items which are used in interaction to mitigate the speech act. External modifiers are characterized by structures which may prepare the interlocutor for the upcoming request, as well as those aiming to prevent a refusal from the addressee.

Finally, as regards the stages of development that learners may go through, Kasper and Rose (2002) proposed five stages of development of requests based on studies by Ellis (1992) and Achiba (2003). These stages go from the most basic stages of acquisition in which learners perform very simple requests, without syntax and mainly by means of formulaic language, mirroring L1 acquisition (Wootton 1997), to more complex structures and more pragmatic elaborate requests in the highest stages (see below). Therefore, in line with the studies mentioned above, the objective of this paper is to examine how an EFL learner will develop the act of requesting over an eight-year period.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participant

The learner participating in this study comes from the BAF Project (Barcelona Age Factor Project) carried out by the GRAL Research Group (Grup de Recerca en Adquisició de Llengües—Language Acquisition Research Group). The original aim of study of the BAF Project was to examine whether the age of starting to learning a FL played a role in an EFL context. The large corpus of data, then, consists of learners who started learning English at two different ages: eight and twelve (see Muñoz 2006). The present study, though, only includes one participant, to whom we will refer as “Mary” in the study. Mary started learning the FL at the age of eight and was able to be followed-up from the age of ten to the age of sixteen: specifically at Grade 5 (age ten), Grade 7 (age twelve) and Grade 11 (age sixteen).

As Alcón (2013b) points out, case studies and qualitative analysis of data can provide a better understanding of the learner’s pragmatic choices and of learner variability. Even if we cannot present generalizable results, the findings of this study can provide an in-depth analysis of pragmatic development over a period of eight years. This paper may thus contribute to interlanguage pragmatics research, since longitudinal studies, following the same participant over a long period of time, tend to be scarce in the field.

3.2. Instruments

The participants in the BAF Project completed a battery of tasks both written and oral: a background questionnaire, a cloze, a listening comprehension task, a grammar test, a phonetic task and three oral tasks (an interview, a story-telling task and an open role-play). All of the tasks used were first piloted to test their reliability. An important aspect to consider at this point is that only those learners who only had exposure to English at school were considered valid for both the BAF Project and for the present study (learners who were taking extra English classes, or who had had an SA experience were excluded). For the present study both the background questionnaire and the role-play have been used for data. As regards the background

questionnaire, it provided personal information about the learner and, importantly, whether she was taking extra English classes outside the school or had been abroad to learn English. Mary had done neither.

In order to assess pragmatic development, the open role-play was used. The task was carried out in pairs, and the learners had to play the roles of child and parent. The learner playing the child had to ask the other participant for permission to give a birthday party at home, and the learner playing the parent role had to either accept or reject such a request. During the task they had to discuss different topics related to the party, where, commonly, other requests were made. The participant of the present study was playing the child role, and is why this study focuses on the development of requests.

3.3. Measures

The following measures were used in this study: the request types (following Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1989), the use of modification (following Alcón et al. 2005), and the stages of development of requests (following Kasper and Rose 2002).

As pointed out in section 2.3, request types have been commonly classified into the most direct type of requests (*mood derivable* or *explicit performative*) and the most indirect requests (*strong hints* or *mild hints*) following English pragmatic norms (see Table 1 below):

Table 1. Request types (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1989, 202)

| Type | Example |
|--|---|
| 1. Mood derivable | Leave me alone |
| 2. Explicit performative | I am asking you to dress up the mess |
| 3. Hedge performative | I would like to ask you to give ... |
| 4. Locution derivable | Madam, you'll have to move your car |
| 5. Scope stating | I wish you'd stop bothering me |
| 6. Suggestory formulae | So, why don't you clean ... |
| 7. Reference to preparatory conditions | Could you clean up the kitchen, please? |
| 8. Strong hints | You've left the kitchen in a right mess |
| 9. Mild hints | I am a nun |

The division of modification into internal and external modifiers has been used in the present study, as mentioned above. According to this classification, internal modifiers include *openers*, *softeners*, *intensifiers* and *filters*, which are usually realized by means of patterns such as *could you*, *would you*, *do you think you could*, *I wonder if*, and routines or chunks, as for instance *excuse me*, *OK*, *right*, *hello* and even *proper names* which work as attention getters. External modifiers, which prepare the upcoming request, involve *preparators*, *grounders*, *disarmers*, *expanders*, *promise of reward* and *please*. The linguistic repertoire used to modify the request externally is wider and more complex than that found in internal modification: with structures such as *may I ask you a favor*, *if-clauses*, or *subordinate clauses* tending to be used to mitigate the request before it is made.

Finally, the stages of development proposed by Kasper and Rose (2002) have been followed. As mentioned in section 2.3., the first stages are characterized by very simple requests, both pragmatically and grammatically. In contrast, the higher stages show requests which conform to the most indirect type of request, and which also present more complex grammar (see Table 2):

Table 2. Stages of development of requests (Kasper and Rose 2002, 140)

| Stage | Characteristics | Examples |
|------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Pre-basic | context-dependent and no syntax | Me no blue |
| 2. Formulaic | unanalyzed formulas and imperatives | Let's play the game |
| 3. Unpacking | formulas incorporated into productive language use and conventional indirectness | Can you pass the pencil please? |
| 4. Pragmatic expansion | wider pragmalinguistic repertoire, increased use of mitigation, more complex syntax | Could/Can I have another chocolate because my children—I have five children. |
| 5. Fine-tuning | goals and context are implied | Is there any more white? |

4. FINDINGS

In this section the development that the participant went through as regards the use of requests is exemplified by means of extracts from the data. This section not only shows how the participant produced the initial request (asking for permission to give a birthday party) but also how other requests related to the party were made. As presented in the previous section, special attention will be paid to the type of request made, the use and modification, as well as placing the participant's production according to the different stages of development proposed by Kasper and Rose (2002).

Grade 5

The participant at Grade 5 shows a clear lack of linguistic means to provide an elaborate request, both in terms of grammatical competence and pragmatic appropriateness. The role-play is opened by the initial request followed by turns produced by the researcher and the student playing the role of the father:

- (1) MARY: This and and a birthday in a house uh and convidation and and peoples and uh.
 RESEARCHER: OK, so what what do you say father?
 STUDENT: *Says nothing.*

RESEARCHER: Yes or no?

STUDENT: Yes.

MARY: Uh, thank you.

Example 1 shows a very direct request. In fact, Mary is not asking for permission, she is rather providing a kind of explicit performative, by saying where she wants the party to take place, as well as her wish to invite people to the party. She is not using any type of request modification, not even *attention getters* (internal modification) which are commonly found in children and at very early stages of development (Achiba 2003).

As can be seen in the example above, the researcher participates in the task asking the other student to reply to the request. He only replies by means of a minimal turn. Mary's response to the acceptance is 'thank you,' a politeness strategy which is the one learnt earliest by children in EFL contexts.

The following turns show how another request is produced with the help of the researcher:

(2) RESEARCHER: It's ok how many people are you going to invite? Ask him.

MARY: Uh, *a qui a qui invitaré?* [who am I going to invite?]

RESEARCHER: OK.

MARY: *A Ester* [I will invite Ester].

RESEARCHER: *Però demana-li* [but ask him].

MARY: Uh.

RESEARCHER: *Quants amics puc convidar?* [how many friends can I invite?].

MARY: Uh, how many peoples uh and the convidation and and and uh birthday?

In example 2 then, the researcher asks Mary, in Catalan, the number of people that she is going to invite to the party, but with the intention of getting her to produce such a request on her own. However, Mary's response is a clarification request in Catalan in order to know whether she has understood what the researcher has asked her. Mary then, instead of making the request, names a friend of hers, answering the researcher's question. That leads to a turn by the researcher, telling her that she has to ask her classmate's father. The request that Mary produces comes only after the researcher has provided a request model in Catalan. Mary's subsequent request is very similar to her initial one in (1), although she repeats 'how many,' which had been used by the researcher in the question addressed to Mary at the beginning of (2). No modification is found in this request either, and it is mainly characterized by no syntax, typical of a pre-basic stage. The main difference with the first request is that the second one has the intonation of a question. That is probably due to the fact that the researcher has already provided that intonation in the previous turn.

Grade 7

At Grade 7, the participant produces very similar requests to those from Grade 5. She still uses her L1 when she has linguistic problems. Some instances of request modification can be found in the request, as can be seen in the examples below:

- (3) MARY: Hello father.
 STUDENT: Hello.
 MARY: Vull fer una festa i [I want to have a party and] I am, tomorrow is my birthday and vull convidar [I want to invite] the my, my friends.
 MARY: Do you leave please *em deixes fer una festa?* [do you let me have a party?]
 STUDENTS: Yes, is very good *no sé com dir-ho* [I don't know how to say that].

In example 3 above the participant opens the task with a 'hello' and an *attention getter* (internal modification) which, as mentioned before, is the most common type of internal modification acquired at the earliest stages of development. The student playing the role of the father also responds with a 'hello' in the following turn. The upcoming request is made in her L1, a very direct request, made by means of a *want-statement*, then she switches to English to justify why she wants a party: 'tomorrow is my birthday.' Then, due to problems with the L2, she uses her L1 again. In the following turn, the request continues with an expression transferred from her L1, and again due to her lack of linguistic means she switches to Catalan. In her next turn, the use of 'please' appears, a very common politeness strategy used by children. However, she does not overuse this strategy in the rest of the task. The initial request is again an *explicit performative*, even if part of it is in Catalan. Mary's requests seem to be at this point between the *pre-basic* and *formulaic stages*.

Mary then moves on to other issues related to the party, such as the time the party should start and finish and the number of friends she would like to invite. When the researcher had initially presented the task, these other aspects related to the party were expressly mentioned as points to include. However, as in Grade 5, the way Mary makes these requests is by means of imperatives, as in the example below:

- (4) MARY: Her is the, uh, the six o'clock *fins a les* [until] eight o'clock and, uh, the friends is *per la Mercè tinc que dir els noms* [do I have to say the names?]
 STUDENT: *És igual* [it doesn't matter].
 MARY: *Molts amics* [lots of friends] very very friends. Yes?
 STUDENT: Yes.

The request in example 4 is very similar to the requests found in the examples from Grade 5. It has the form of an *imperative*, but she is not using any linguistic devices to modify the request in order to soften its impositive force. It could even be argued that this type of request (typical of the *pre-basic stage*) does not have the form of a request.

However, the participant makes it clear that she is requesting when she says 'yes?' in order to ask whether or not the other student accepts her inviting a lot of friends to the party. By means of that minimal turn, the whole sequence can thus be understood as a request/response exchange, even if the requests are very poor in terms of grammatical and pragmatic competence.

Grade 11

As has been seen in the examples from Grades 5 and 7, little development can be traced in the use of requests. It is not until Grade 11 when more elaborate structures can be found.

- (5) MARY: Can I make a party in the house, hmm, Monday evening?
 STUDENT: No.
 MARY: No?
 STUDENT: Because you are to, hmm, you only have (*they laugh*) fourteen years old and I don't want to to come with house to your bad friends.
 MARY: But, hmm, I don't make *bueno* [well] we don't make anything bad.

Unlike Grade 7, the participant does not open the task with a routine. Instead, she produces the request directly by using first an *attention getter* followed by a *can x request*, similar to a *reference to preparatory condition* and clearly a request typical of the *unpacking stage*. The learner here does not rely on her L1: she produces some ungrammatical structures, but she never switches to Catalan. Some of the strategies which were seen in previous stages, such as politeness strategies (e.g., 'please,' 'thank you') also do not appear at this stage. In contrast to the role-plays carried out in the previous years, she found herself in a different situation: the other student rejects her request. Her response is a minimal turn 'no?,' showing surprise. The other learner gives reasons for not letting her give the party at home. Those reasons are followed by promises from the participant in order to convince the teenager playing the parent. Most of the other requests that appear during the tasks, though, take a different form:

- (6) MARY: And, and less and I yes and I: come back *bueno* [well] some friends.
 STUDENT: And what friends you want to...
 MARY: My close friends; four or six friends.
 STUDENT: I don't know because you want to I stay in home or no.
 MARY: No.
 STUDENT: No?
 MARY: You can't.
 MARY: And if you stay in the house can I make the party?

Mary's next request has to do with the friends she is going to invite, and she does not ask for permission but rather says 'some friends' as an *imperative*. Seven turns later, the participant makes a request in a similar way to the initial request at the beginning of the role-play. When the other student asks her if she can stay at home during the party, Mary responds by means of a refusal, and then, she moves on to another request together with a condition. Mary again makes a *can I x request* after an *if-clause*, with the objective of getting an acceptance from the teenager playing the role of the mother. However, as can be seen below, she does not use these *unpacking stage* requests when she negotiates other aspects related to the party, as was also seen in relation to the friends.

- (7) RESEARCHER: And what about the the sandwiches.
 MARY: Ah!
 RESEARCHER: And the drinks who is going to buy prepare that?
 STUDENT: You, you.
 MARY: You can prepare, no?
 STUDENT: No, no, I can't you prepare and buy your things I...
 MARY: And you borrow money?
 STUDENT: No.

The researcher here gives the participants another topic to discuss: the food and drinks for the party. When she asks who is going to prepare everything, the learner playing the role of the mother answers that it will be Mary. However, Mary replies to this by means of a request similar to a *can you x request*, but which is very direct and could also be seen not as a request but as a refusal of what the mother-character has said. Once the participant playing the mother says that it will be the daughter who prepares and buys everything, Mary makes the same response as before: 'and you borrow money?', which again is an imperative and leads to another refusal.

The data seem to show some pragmatic development from Grade 5 to Grade 11, although no development can be seen from Grade 5 to 7. The requests produced by the learner at these two stages are basically *imperative* requests and it is not until Grade 11 when Mary is capable of producing requests similar to *reference to preparatory conditions*, by means of using the modal verb *can* rather than *could*. In terms of modification, as has been seen, only instances of internal modification were found (basically *attention-getters*). The fact that no examples of external modification can be found in the data may suggest that the participant has not yet reached the pragmatic competence required to use external modification in the request. Finally, regarding the stages of development, the participant's requests at Grades 5 and 7 are typical of the *pre-basic* and *formulaic stages*. But at Grade 11 Mary's requests take the form of the *unpacking stage*. No higher stages, though, are found in the data.

5. DISCUSSION

As pointed out in the literature review, many studies in Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) have focused on the development of requests in different contexts such as second language (SL), study abroad (SA) and also English as a foreign language (EFL). The main aim of these studies has been to see, on the one hand, how learners develop their use of requests as regards the types of requests and the use of internal and external modification, and on the other, to trace developmental stages in the acquisition of requests.

The present study, then, provides similar results to those found in previous studies. Some studies have shown that learners tend to use more direct requests in low proficiency levels and more indirect requests as their proficiency increases, and that learners tend to use internal modification at early stages, whereas external modification is not common until higher stages are reached (Ellis 1992; Trosborg 1995; Hill 1997; Rose 2000; Hassall 2003; Achiba 2003; Félix-Brasdefer 2007; Schauer, 2006 and 2007).

The present study yields findings in this vein: the participant tends to use more direct requests at Grades 5 and 7, and movement toward an increase of indirect requests starts to appear at Grade 11. Regarding the use of internal and external modification, the findings of the present study also support the fact that internal modification is acquired before external modification—as in Ellis (1992) and Achiba (2003). However, no instances of external modification are found in the data. That may mean that the participant had not yet reached the stage when this type of modification is produced.

The types of requests used in the earliest stages are mainly imperative verbless requests as in the first request found in the data “this and uh a birthday in a house uh and convidation and peoples.” This same type of request was also found in the first stages of development in Ellis’ study, where learners produced requests such as “big circle” (Ellis 1992, 11). Requests in these stages are also characterized by the fact that they tend to be formulaic, mainly routines; the participant may also repeat structures that she has heard or that she has been told to say. For example, the subject Yao in Achiba’s SA study (2003) also presented use of formulaic language in her requests and imperatives in her first phase in Australia; in the second phase she still used formulaic language but if compared to the requests produced by the participant of the present study, Yao’s requests were more elaborate.

It is interesting to compare Ellis’ and Achiba’s studies with the present one as all are case studies and the participants are young. The main difference, and an important one to take into account, is that in both Ellis and Achiba the participants were living in the TL country (longitudinal studies: seventeen months in the case of Yao, and three years in the case of Ellis’ subjects), whereas the participant of the present study is in an EFL context. That might be why in Yao’s second phase (from the thirteenth to the thirty-first week) she was already able to produce requests with the form of, e.g., *can you x* and had started to use more indirect requests. Therefore, the only type of request used by the participant of the present study in the early stages (Grades 5 and 7) is *mood*

derivable; some request strategies performed by the learner are similar to *performatives*, but Mary's lack of linguistic means does not allow her to finish request strategies such as *performatives* in English and she tends to finish the request by means of a *mood derivable* request. In Ellis (1992), *mood derivable* was also the most commonly used strategy in the first stage, but they were followed by the use of *performatives* and *hedged performatives*. As Ellis (1992) pointed out, *obligation* and *want statements* were not commonly used, and conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect requests (*hints*) were not frequently used either. In the case of Yao (Achiba 2003), she went through different request strategies during her stay abroad experience, from *mood derivable* in the first phase to *query preparatory* and *stating preparatory*. Achiba's findings also show that even if *hints* are used, they are not the most commonly used strategy during the stay.

Many studies, and also the present study, support the fact that the use of *hints* (the most indirect request) is rare and not very common at early stages. Ellis (1992) and Achiba (2003) found examples of *hints* in their data, but they argued that they were the least commonly used strategy. *Hints* were not common either in Hill (1997), where the most indirect strategy used by the advanced subjects was the *reference to preparatory conditions*, e.g., "If you don't mind could I borrow your book?" A different result was found in Rose (2000), where *hints* were found in the first stage, which is very uncommon. Hassall (2003) and Félix-Brasdefer (2007) also found that *hints* were used by their subjects, but in both cases it was probably due to the fact that the subjects' L1 was English, where *hints* are more common than in the TLs they were learning, Indonesian and Spanish.

In the studies by Ellis (1992) and Achiba (2003), development from direct toward the use of indirect requests can be seen, and a development in the use of internal modification and in the use of external modification traced. As has been highlighted here, at Grades 5 and 7 the learner in the present study behaves in the same way, and there seems to be no development from ten years old (Grade 5) to twelve years old (Grade 7). She makes use of direct requests and internal modification alone.

The studies by Ellis and by Achiba both show that the learners used internal modification first. In Achiba (2003), development can be traced from the use of internal modification (especially the use of *attention getters*) toward the use of external modification by means of *preparators* and a broader repertoire than the results found in Ellis (1992), where it was mainly internal modification that was used throughout the study. It should be considered that in both studies the use of "please" is very common, and it is also used in the present study in the earliest stages. Although "please" is considered as a type of external modification (Alcón et al. 2005), it seems that learners at early stages tend to overuse this type of modification. It could be argued that in some cases the overuse of "please" may be used to soften the request, but in children learning an L2 it seems that they use "please" as a way of pleading. At very early stages, in the present study, the participant uses "please" not to soften the imposing force of the request, but rather to insist and try to make the other learner accept the request, albeit that she does not overuse such a strategy in the role-play.

In contrast, in more recent studies, the most common finding has been that it is in fact external modification which is usually produced first, and internal modification appears as proficiency increases (as in Economidou-Kogetsidis 2009, Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis 2010 or Alcón 2013a, 2013b). In the present study, though, it could be argued that Mary does not commonly mitigate her requests; instead she usually requests directly without preparing the interlocutor for the upcoming speech act. The only means of mitigation are *attention getters* and *openers*, which are both internal modifiers. This finding could be explained, first, by the participant's young age which might have somehow influenced her production. Her possible lack of even the L1 pragmatic competence could have influenced the findings, explaining why more direct requests with no mitigation were used. Second, L1 pragmatics could have had an effect on L2 production, leading then to pragmatic transfer. Finally, it should be stated that grammatical competence might be playing a role. Even though pragmatic development can be traced over the years, the learner's direct requests and lack of mitigation may be due to her low level of grammatical competence, as has also been found in Celaya and Barón (2015). Thus explaining why there is no development from Grades 5 to 7, and little development from Grade 7 to 11. This is also probably why the participant overuses internal modifiers, since *openers* and *attention getters* are used at very early stages, meaning that she does not need to have wide pragmalinguistic repertoire to soften the request.

As regards the stages of development of requests, it can be seen that the data of the present study fit the model proposed by Kasper and Rose (2002), except for stage five (as mentioned above). The participant, in Grades 5 and 7, produces requests typical of stages one (*pre-basic*) and two (*formulaic*). At Grade 11, Mary produces requests of the *unpacking* stage, but no examples of later stages can be found in her productions.

Similar development over time was found in Félix-Brasdefer (2007) with adult learners of Spanish, where the first four stages of development based on Kasper and Rose (2002) were also found and subjects used both internal and external modification as well as conditionals and the imperfect aspect to express politeness. The fact that the participant of the present study makes no use of *hints* (stage five) could be due to the situation presented to them in the role-play. She was required to ask the participant playing the opposite role for permission, so she always tried to make a request, even when she did not have the linguistic means to achieve this perfectly. However, the results of this study cannot provide information on whether the participant doesn't know how to produce *hints* because she has not reached that pragmatic level or whether it is due to a limitation of context of the role-play.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study has followed the development of requests in the same participant over eight years of EFL instruction. The data have shown that there is actually some

development, which can be clearly traced between Grades 7 and 11, although there is no clear development between Grades 5 and 7 where the participant produces very similar requests at similar stages of development (*pre-basic* and *formulaic*) in both tests. It is not until Grade 11 where more elaborate requests (stage 3—*pragmatic expansion*) are found. In terms of request modification, the learner does not mitigate the request, not even at Grade 11. The only type of modification found is internal, basically the use of *attention-getters*. However, a limitation of the present study is that the role-play was the only task employed to elicit pragmatic performance. The use of other tasks could have provided more information about the development of internal and external modification. As recent research has claimed—such as the study by Roever (2011) and Takahashi (2012)—triangulation of data leads to more reliable results.

As mentioned in the discussion, it should be considered whether the lack of linguistic means available to the participant may affect the way she requests, especially at Grades 5 and 7. Basically, her low proficiency probably does not allow her to produce complex grammatical structures. It could be argued that if her L2 grammatical competence were higher, her performances would probably contain more appropriate pragmatic structures, as found at Grade 11. At Grades 5 and 7 however, Mary sometimes switches to Catalan, and some of her productions are very direct. It should also be taken into account that age and maturity could also have had an effect on the level of directness of the requests. The same task carried out by the same learner in the L1 would have shown how the participant would make requests in her L1, and how direct or indirect they were. Future research should also include base-line data from the same participant over the same period of time.

As mentioned in previous sections, it is interesting to compare the present study with the studies by Ellis (1992) and Achiba (2003), since they were also longitudinal case studies which included children. The present paper has shown a development of requests in line with the findings of these studies, especially at early stages of development. However, the big difference between the present paper and these two studies is that they were set in a naturalistic context whereas this one is set in a FL context. The amount of exposure to the TL in a FL context is very limited: the participant had been exposed to English for 726 hours at school when she was at Grade 11 (200 hours at Grade 5 and 416 by Grade 7). In contrast, the participants in Ellis or in Achiba were living in English speaking countries, so were not only exposed to English at school but also outside. That might have been the reason why Yao, for instance, was producing much more elaborate utterances than Mary, not only grammatically but also pragmatically, after her seven-month stay.

It should also be mentioned here that no emphasis is put on TL pragmatics in the language class in FL contexts, at least in Spain. Learners might be exposed to some pragmatic input when the teacher requests in class or when they learn the use of modal verbs, which tend to be taught from Grade 7 onwards in Spain. In further research,

it would be interesting to have longitudinal studies comparing FL settings with and without pragmatic instruction. In line with this idea, the role and the amount of input learners are exposed to would be an area worth considering in interlanguage pragmatics from a developmental perspective.

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