

# ANALYSIS OF REQUESTS FROM ITALIAN-SPEAKING STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AND SPANISH: REFLECTION ON PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES IN MULTILINGUAL COMPETENCE

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**Abstract** – The objective of this study is to provide empirical data that allows for reflection on the benefits of multilingual competence through the pragmatic analysis of the request strategies used by plurilingual speakers in three languages: Italian L1, Spanish L2 and English L2. Moreover, the present research also attempts to detect whether pragmatic transfer of L1 is found in L2 productions. This is a descriptive study conducted by triangulation of empirical data using qualitative and quantitative methodologies of research from a corpus of e-mails written by Italian university students. The requests formulated in the corpus of e-mails written in L1 and in L2 were studied in order to analyse the types of requests (direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect) and the perspective (sender oriented, receiver oriented, sender and receiver oriented and impersonal) in academic contexts with different social distances. The results of the analysis showed similarities and divergences in the informants' strategies and the presence of pragmatic transfer from L1 in the samples in L2 of both languages.

**Keywords:** Speech act of request; intercultural pragmatics; multilingual competence; Discourse Analysis; emails.

## 1. Introduction

Multilingual competence fosters the development of awareness of language and communication, and even of metacognitive strategies. Moreover, it takes advantage of pre-existing sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills, which in turn develop further with contact with other languages (Council of Europe, 2001).

This aspect is important, since many of the failures that interfere in communicative effectiveness are produced by an ignorance of the conventions of the culture of the interlocutor. In some cultures, these conventions may coincide, but it is possible that they differ in others.

This study presents an exploratory and descriptive research aimed at observing the benefits of multilingual and pluricultural competence through the analysis of the demand-pragmatic strategies used by multilingual speakers in an academic context of written interaction. A mixed methodological approach was used, involving the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data. The research questions initially formulated were aimed at finding out the divergences or similarities in the informants' request strategies in order to check whether pragmatic transfer was manifested in the L2 productions of the Italian learners of Spanish and English.

As will be seen later, the results reveal that the social distance between the interlocutors affects the selection of the request strategies used by them. Regarding the type of request and perspective, some analogies and divergences were noticed in the samples in L1 and the presence of pragmatic transfer was observed in the productions in L2.

## 2. Multilingual and multicultural competence

According to the definition provided by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL), plurilingual and pluricultural competence is the ability to use languages for communicative purposes and to participate in an intercultural relationship in which a person, as a social agent, dominates – to a different degree – several languages and has experience of several cultures (Council of Europe, 2001).

The CEFRL document presents plurilingualism as a variable and transitory competence that exhibits frequent imbalances, since students generally demonstrate differences in their mastery of one language in relation to the others and in their competences in the different communicative skills. However, the latest update of the CEFRL, which revises and completes the initial version, underlines that the fundamental point of this competence is that multilinguals possess a unique, interrelated repertoire, which they combine with their general competences and various strategies for performing tasks (Council of Europe, 2018: 28).

In the field of academic communication, Räsänen, Natri & Foster Vosicki (2013: 6) define multilingual and multicultural academic communication competence as an individual's communicative and interactive repertoire, made up of several languages and language varieties including first language(s) at different levels of proficiency, and various types of competence, which are all interrelated. According to the authors, the repertoire in its entirety represents a resource enabling action in diverse use situations and includes growth in intercultural awareness and ability to cope with, and participate in, multicultural contexts of academic study and working life.

Despite the wide variety of strategies that comprise the networks of the communicative framework in different languages, plurilingual and pluricultural competence entails a process in which interconnections are produced between the knowledge acquired of the languages themselves that are useful in the acquisition of new ones.

From the outset it is interlinguistic distance that determines whether it is more or less likely that multilingual competence will be activated (Bailini, 2013). With respect to learners of related languages, the strategies that make it possible to detect the potential of multilingual competence are the strategic use of the positive transfer of their first language (L1) or other languages, the control of the negative interferences of the L1 thanks to the ability to infer mechanisms of lexical derivation or morphosyntactic construction from other languages, and the search for analogies between the second language (L2), the L1, and other previously learned languages (Bailini, 2013).

## 3. Pragmatic transfer of request and intercultural communication strategies

There is a wide diversity of request strategies that vary from culture to culture. However, there are strategies relating to the act of shared speech that enable positive transfer between two languages, i.e. reproduction of the structure of the L1 in the L2 without any change of meaning. In such a case, linguistic knowledge about one's own language is useful for constructing statements in L2. For example, in Spanish, Italian, or English it is common to formulate requests by means of an interrogative sentence with the present tense of the verb “*poder*” (.sp) or “*potere*”(.it) or ‘can’/’to be able’ (.en) in the indicative

or conditional. It is therefore possible to transfer this strategy from one language to another across these three languages without pragmatic variations. However, the transfer of this same syntactic construction could provoke communication problems in languages of greater linguistic distance, whose communicative function has nothing to do with the act of speaking in request – for example Polish or Russian – in which it would be interpreted as a question to establish whether the interlocutor really has the physical capacity to perform the action. Moreover, in certain languages, such as Thai, the same sentence would be interpreted as discourteous.

Cultures differ greatly in relation to the degree to which their speakers choose to express their intentions clearly or transparently when they speak, and socio-pragmatic constraints will therefore determine the level of directness of speech expected of a culture (Blum-Kulka, 1996: 156). In Spain, for example, when the social distance is short – and in certain contexts such as ordering in a bar or buying in a grocery store – constructions with an imperative are frequent: *Póngame un kilo de tomates* (Give me a kilo of tomatoes). However, the same strategy of request would be regarded as excessively direct and abrupt in other cultures, even in many of those cultures that share Spanish as a language of communication but differ in their pragmatic conventions. In this sense, Steele (2006: 36) demonstrates the consequences of the differences of perception of the same strategy in two varieties of the same language: peninsular Spanish and Mexican. The author points out that the imperatives without attenuation in the requests are regarded as quite discourteous by Mexicans but not by Spaniards. Moreover, Mexicans think that the diminutive lowers the level of the imposition of the request and perceive it as more polite; by contrast, Spaniards believe that the diminutive has ironic connotations and is related to negative interpretations.

In the same way, this type of imperative construction, common in Spain in this context, would also be perceived as discourteous in Italy, despite the linguistic affinity between Spanish and Italian and the fact that Spain and Italy share many cultural traits as Mediterranean countries. Indeed, the request for an object in similar contexts in Italian is usually closer to the type of syntactic construction of the request in English (*Can I have...? / Posso avere...?*), in which the request is not oriented towards the receiver of the request, but towards the sender of the request: *Posso avere un caffè, per favore?* In Spanish, on the other hand, it would not be possible to formulate a syntactically equivalent construction, and the transfer of this strategy would therefore be artificial.

As we can see, a mastery of pragmatic competence is essential for effective communication between partners, whether they are native speakers or L2 students. In this regard, several researches that have contrasted results of natives with productions of L2 learners reveal shortcomings of pragmatic competences reflected in the presence of statements not appropriate to the context in which they are developed (Zarei and Mohammadi, 2012; Krulatz, 2012; Lazarescu, 2013; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2015; Abboodi Ali and Pandian, 2016; Burgucu, Han and Engin, 2016; among others). These results highlight the need to provide students with resources and tools to help them identify the pragmatic characteristics inherent in the request in the environment in which they make it, so that they are able to reproduce them appropriately.

#### 4. Request strategies in written interaction: a brief empirical approach

The large majority of studies on pragmatic strategies in requests refer to interaction during spontaneous oral conversation, especially in English or comparing this language with others. However, studies on requests in written interaction are gaining ground, the most abundant being those that analyse pragmatic request strategies in L1 or L2 English.

The most recent research includes studies by Zarei & Mohammadi (2012), Merrison et al. (2012), Zhu (2012), Lazarescu (2013), Shim (2013), Alcón Soler (2013), Alcón, Codina and Martín (2014), Chen et al. (2015), Economidou-Kogetsidis (2015), Tseng (2016), Burgucu, Han and Engin (2016) or Abboodi Ali and Pandian (2016), all in English. There are still a few studies that analyse emails of petition in Spanish (Nicholls, 2009; Félix-Brasdefer, 2012; Contreras Fernández, 2012; Jimeno Patrón, 2012; César Vera, 2013; Betti, 2013; Suárez Lasierra, 2015; Escalante 2017; Robles Garrote 2017), and the figure is even lower in other languages such as Italian (Betti, 2013; Bitonti 2016; Robles Garrote, 2017), German (Suárez Lasierra, 2015; Jimeno Patrón, 2012; Contreras Fernández, 2012) or Russian (Krulatz, 2012).

One of the most widespread models of analysis in the study of requests is that of the *Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns* (CCSARP)<sup>1</sup>, which categorizes the types of requests by establishing three levels according to the *directivity* of the statement: *direct* (requests made with syntactic marks of imperative, performative character or with expressions of desire or need), *conventionally indirect* (requests made through references to contextual preconditions necessary for the execution of the request, suggestions or preparatory questions) and *unconventional indirect* (requests made through partial references to the request object or contextual clues). In addition, this request encoding manual adds as an analysis dimension the *perspective*, which covers the following categories: *listener-oriented* requests, *speaker-oriented* requests, *speaker and listener-oriented* requests, and *impersonal* requests.

From this taxonomy of the request, several contrastive studies have emerged that have made modifications to the CCSARP analysis model which, in turn, have been taken as a reference for subsequent studies with a similar methodological cut (Trosborg, 1995; Barron (2003); Tello Rueda, 2006; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). Others have simply adapted this model to adjust its particularities to a given communicative context, as is the case with this study and many others that analyze email interaction (Nicholls, 2009; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Zarei & Mohammadi, 2012; Merrison et al., 2012; Lazarescu, 2013; 2015, Chen et al., 2015; Suárez Lasierra, 2015; Tseng, 2016; Abboodi Ali and Pandian, 2016).

<sup>1</sup> Renowned sociolinguistic research project, known for the publication of its results in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), which studies the divergences in the use of pragmatic request and apology strategies in different cultures and provides new methodological resources of great value for the analysis of these speech acts.

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1. Research questions

This is a qualitative empirical study aimed at observing the multilingual competence of informants through the analysis of pragmatic strategies used in e-mails in Italian L1, Spanish L2 and English L2. For this reason, a pragmatic analysis of a corpus of e-mails in Spanish and Italian, which revolves around the following research questions, is presented:

- What request strategies are exhibited in the Italian L1 emails to a teacher (asymmetric hierarchy)? Are they like those used in Spanish L2? And in English L2?
- What request strategies are exhibited in the Italian L1 emails to a classmate (symmetric hierarchy)? Are they like those used in Spanish L2? And in English L2?
- Do the pragmatic strategies in L2 resemble those used by native speakers? Is there pragmatic transfer of L1 in the L2 productions analysed?

### 5.2. Characteristics of the study

The research was carried out following a mixed methodological approach involving the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative aspect was used to identify and analyse the petition strategies used in a corpus of productions written in Italian, Spanish and English (L1 and L2) and the quantitative perspective is implicit in the classification and quantification of the empirical data obtained for subsequent comparison. The analysis also tries to detect whether there is any pragmatic transfer of L1 in L2 productions.

The empirical data come from a corpus of sixty request emails created by Italian-speaking university students studying Spanish and English as foreign languages at a B2-C1 level, both in Spanish and in English L2. The e-mails analysed in the present study contain two requests from the academic context and different social distances. The participants created two e-mails in each of the languages analysed on the basis of two request situations with different social distance<sup>2</sup> between the interlocutors defined by the hierarchical relationship between them; in other words, the difference of relative power between interlocutors: asymmetrical relationship of greater power of the recipient (student-teacher) and symmetrical relationship (student-classmate).

The next step was to carry out a analysis of the written productions of the informants in order to identify the pragmatic strategies of request found in the corpus. The strategies were classified by means of an adaptation to the codification of Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), presented in Robles Garrote (2013: 59). The analysis model used addresses two dimensions in the request speaking act: the types of requests in terms of the degree of *directness* (from most direct to least direct) and the *perspective* dimension (request orientation), and classifies them as follows in the Figure 1:

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<sup>2</sup> According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the selection of politeness strategies depends on three factors: social distance or familiarity of interaction, relative power between interlocutors and the level of imposition of the speech act.

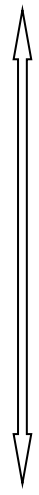
	Directness	Perception
+  -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Direct</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Imperative</li> <li>- Declaration of a wish</li> <li>- Declaration of need</li> <li>- Declaration of request</li> <li>- Evasive Declaration</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>Conventional Indirect</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Suggestions</li> <li>- Consultant question</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>Non-conventional Indirect</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Insinuation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Oriented to the receiver</li> <li>▪ Transmitter oriented</li> <li>▪ Transmitter and receiver oriented</li> <li>▪ Impersonal</li> </ul>

Figure 1  
Analysis model of pragmatic strategies of Request.

After the analysis of all variables related to the request in the academic interaction via e-mail, the results in L1 and L2 were collated in order to check whether there was transfer of L1 in the productions of the students, thus enhancing the effectiveness of their multilingual competence.

## 6. Results

For reasons of space, in this article we concentrate on the competences of multilingual students, and therefore only the strategies used in their own L1 and in the two L2s learned are presented graphically. For the comparison of our results with analogous samples of native informants in Spanish and English, the data presented in Robles Garrote (2013), relating to a corpus of e-mails with analogous characteristics, were taken as a reference.

### 6.1. Asymmetric hierarchy requests (student-teacher)

In the L2 English-language productions, Italian-speaking learners used a greater number of indirect strategies (70%) and at a higher frequency than in their L1 productions and in native English-language productions (50% in both cases). In L2 Spanish, on the other hand, the opposite was found. They reproduced exactly the same number of direct (50%) and indirect (50%) strategies as in their own L1 Italian productions, while native Spanish speakers used a greater number of standardized direct strategies. This demonstrates a transfer, possibly induced by the perception of linguistic proximity between Italian and Spanish. Authors such as Calvi (1995: 74), Ainciburu (2008) and Bailini (2013) point out that this perception of linguistic proximity favors both positive transfer and interference, as we will demonstrate later. Figure 2 below presents the strategies used by Italian-speaking students in more detail.

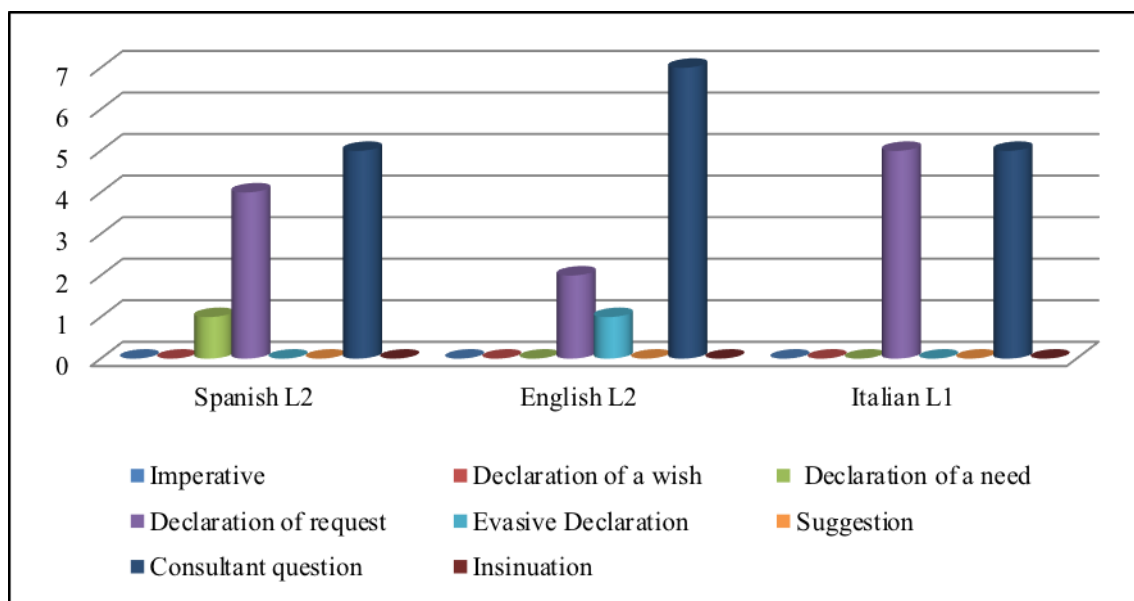


Figure 2  
Pragmatic strategies in requests to the professor

Of the productions presented, 50% are *Direct declarations* and 50% *Consulting questions*, all of them formulated indirectly. This is in line with Bitonti's study (2016), which identifies a high frequency of explicit interrogative constructions, formulated primarily indirectly, as showed in examples 1 and 2.

- [1] “*Le chiederei pertanto, di voler gentilmente posticipare la suddetta data di almeno una settimana*”  
[**Declaration of Request**]  
 (“I would therefore ask you to kindly postpone this date by at least one week”.)
- [2] “[...] *volevo chiederle qualora fosse possibile posticipare la data di consegna alla prossima settimana*”. [**Consultant question**]  
 (“[...] I wanted to ask you if it would be possible to postpone the deadline for submission until next week”.)

The most frequently used strategies in Spanish L2 were the *Consulting question* (50%) – coinciding with data relating to Spanish natives and the studies of Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) and Félix-Brasdefer (2012) – and the *Declaration of request* (40%). The least used strategy was *Declaration of need* (10%). The use of interrogative statements with different attenuation resources is a generalized use strategy also identified in the Spanish results of Contreras (2012), Jimeno (2012), and Robles Garrote (2017).

- [3] “*querría preguntarle si fuera posible posponer la fecha de entrega para la semana que viene*”.  
[**Consultant question**]  
 (“I'd like to ask you if it's possible to postpone the deadline for next week”)
- [4] “*le pediría una<sup>3</sup> aplazamiento de la fecha antedicha al menos de una semana*” [**Declaration of Request**]  
 (“I ask you for a postponement of the above date by at least one week”)

<sup>3</sup> In order to maintain the original samples in a reliable manner, any grammatical, orthographic or typographical errors in the corpus have not been corrected. Therefore, these have also been maintained in the examples provided and have been marked with an asterisk (\*).

In the L2 English samples, the most commonly used strategy was also the *Consultant question*, but at a higher percentage (70%), followed, at a much lower frequency, by the *Declaration of Request* (20%) and the *Evasive declaration* (10%). This is illustrated by the following examples.

- [5] “I was wondering if it is possible to change the thesis deadline in a week”. [**Consultant Question**]  
 [6] “I’d ask you the permission to postpone the deadline for the the next week”. [**Declaration of Request**]

A comparison of the strategies used in L1 and L2 as a whole reveal that the strategies most frequently used by learners are the *Declaration of Request* and the *Consultant question* in all languages, the latter with a greater frequency in English L2. The results for Spanish L2 are similar to those obtained in productions in the learners’ native language. By contrast, the results for English L2 differ from the above, and are not similar to those obtained in productions in the learners’ native language.

It is particularly striking the total absence in the Italian L1 of the *Imperative* and of the *Declaration of necessity* as direct strategies, and of the *Insinuation* as unconventional indirect strategy; an absence that is coherent with the adequacy of the register when facing a higher-ranking academic interlocutor.

As for the perspective of the request, in Italian L1 there is an equal use of *Requests oriented to the receiver* (50%) and *Impersonal requests* (50%), which is close to what is used in L2 in both languages, as can be seen in Figure 3.

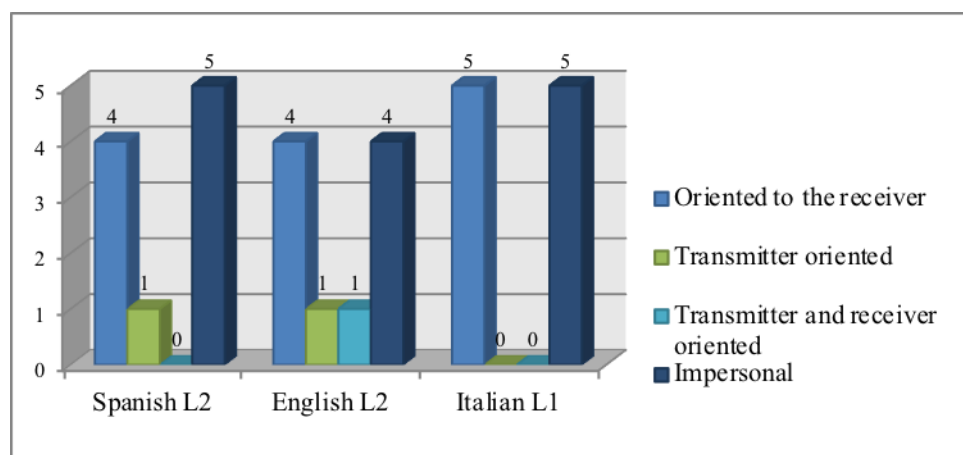


Figure 3  
 Perspective of requests to the professor.

This preference of L2 requests for *receiver-oriented* and *impersonal* strategies coincides with those used by English native speakers, but differs from those of Spanish native speakers, who demonstrate a greater use of *Receiver-oriented requests* (70%) than L2 productions (40%).

- [7] “*Le chiedo gentilmente di concedermi un’altra settimana per completare il mio lavoro*”. [**Receiver-oriented request**]  
 (“I ask you kindly to give me another week to complete my work.”)  
 [8] “[...] *mi chiedo se sarebbe possibile posticipare la scadenza di una settimana*”. [**Impersonal request**]  
 (“I was asking myself if it would be possible to postpone the deadline by one week.”)



Several cases have been detected where participants methodically reproduce the same, or a very similar, statement in their productions in all three languages. The following examples are brief fragments from two Italophone participants in which the transfer of their L1 are demonstrated, where the same type of request is maintained and, on occasions, the type of perspective also coincides.

<b>Declaration of request:</b>		
<b>ITALIAN L1</b> <i>Le chiedo gentilmente di concedermi un'altra settimana per completare il mio lavoro.</i> <b>[to the receiver]</b> (Please allow me another week to complete my work.)	<b>SPANISH L2</b> <i>Le pido por favor otra semana para completar todo mi trabajo.</i> <b>[to the receiver]</b> (I ask you please another week to complete all my work.)	<b>ENGLISH L2</b> I ask you to give me another week to finish my job. <b>[to the receiver]</b>
<b>Request by consulting question formulated in an indirect manner:</b>		
<b>ITALIAN L1</b> <i>Volevo chiederle qualora fosse possibile posticipare la data di consegna alla prossima settimana.</i> <b>[impersonal]</b> (I wanted to ask you if it would be possible to postpone the delivery date until next week.)	<b>SPANISH L2</b> <i>Quería preguntarle <u>si fuera posible</u> entregarle mi trabajo durante la proxima semana.</i> <b>[impersonal]</b> (I wanted to ask you if it would be possible to deliver my work to you within the next week.)	<b>ENGLISH L2</b> I wondered if I could bring you the complete work during next week. <b>[to the emitter]</b>

Figure 4  
Examples of transfer of pragmatic strategies of request

However, the perception of a short linguistic distance in the linguistic affinity between Spanish and Italian sometimes leads to errors due to pragmatic or grammatical divergences in request structures of the same type, as indicated by underlining in Figure 4.

## 6.2. Symmetrical hierarchy requests (student-classmate)

With regard to the requests between students, in the Spanish and English L1 samples there was a considerable increase in indirect request strategies in both groups (100% in English L1 and 80% in Spanish L1) (Robles Garrote, 2013: 59). This is line with the Spanish results of Nicholls (2009), in which the frequency of this strategy also increased in this type of request (82.8%). In contrast, the samples in Italian L1 indicate an equal use of both types (50%), signifying an important difference with respect to the other two languages analysed.

Likewise, a comparison of the samples in L1 with those of L2 reveals that the direct strategies used in Spanish L2 increase slightly (from 50% to 60%), but when it comes to English L2 exactly the same strategies are maintained as in Italian (50% direct and indirect), producing a transfer of L1 that differs from the strategies of native speakers.

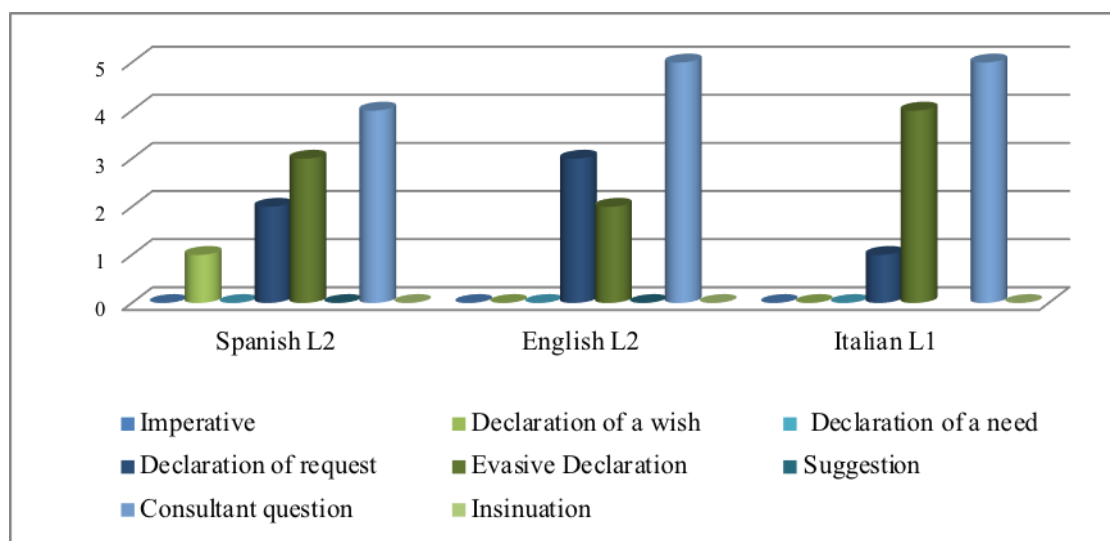


Figure 5  
Directness in requests to a student

As Figure 5 shows, in Italian L1, the most frequently used strategy was the Consulting question (50%), followed by the Evasive declaration (40%). The least used strategy was the Declaration of request (10%).

- [9] “[...] *ti scrivo per chiederti informazioni sulla lezione che ho perso oggi, e sui compiti a casa assegnati, che avete fatto*”. [**Declaration of Request**]  
 (“[...] I am writing to ask you about the lesson I missed today and the homework you have done.”)
- [10] “[...] *non è che potresti passarmi gli appunti e dirmi quali sono i compiti che il professore ci ha dato da fare?*” [**Consultant Question**]  
 (“[...] is it not that you could pass me the notes and tell me what are the tasks that the professor has given us to do?”)
- [11] “[...] *volevo chiederti informazioni sulla lezione di inglese di oggi, se possibile*” [**Evasive Declaration**]  
 (“[...] I wanted to ask you about today's English class, if possible.”)

The most frequently used strategy in L2 in both languages was the *Consulting question* (40% in Spanish L2; 50% in English L2). These percentages correspond to the samples in Italian, demonstrating a transfer of L1, while the frequency in English and Spanish L1 was much higher.

- [12] “*Quería preguntarte si puedes decirme de que argumento ha hablado el profesor durante la lección de hoy.*” [**Consultant question**]  
 (“I wanted to ask you if you could tell me what argument the professor talked about during today's lesson.”)

The following strategies are direct: *Evasive declaration* (30% Spanish L2; 20% English L2), and *Declaration of request* (20% Spanish L2; 30% English L2).

- [13] “*Querría saber si la profesora nos ha dado ejercicios y ha explicado algo nuevo con respecto a la semana pasada.*” [**Evasive statement**]  
 (“I'd like to know if the teacher has given us exercises and explained anything new about last week.”)
- [14] “*Che\* habéis\* hecho a\* clase, hay algo por hacer?*” [**Declaration of Request**]  
 (“What have you done in class, is there anything to do?”)

- [15] “Could you tell me everything about what you have done during the lesson and the homeworks for the next time?” **[Consultant question]**
- [16] “I want to ask you some news about the lesson”. **[Declaration of Request]**

With regard to perspective, marked divergences are observed when the hierarchical relationship between the interlocutors is symmetrical.

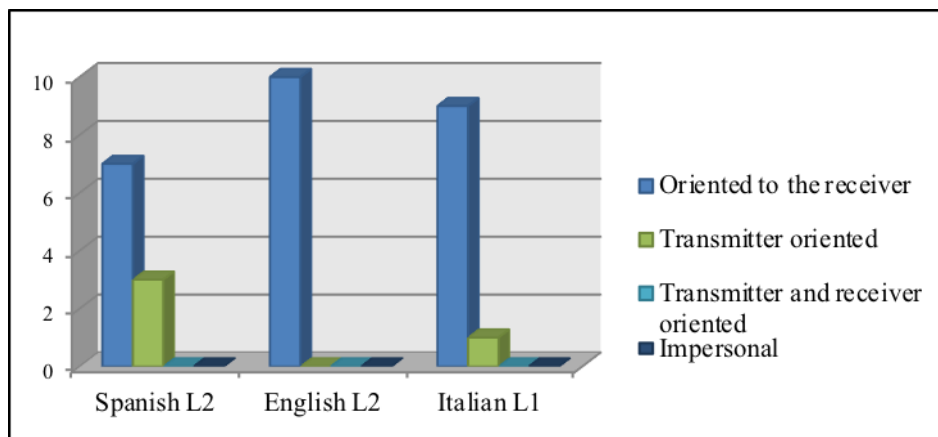


Figure 6  
Perspective of classmate requests

As can be seen from Figure 6, in classmate requests there is a clear predominance of receiver-oriented requests in all three languages.

- [17] “*Me gustaria\* pedirte un favor: ¿me podrías decir qué se ha dado en clase y si han mandado deberes para casa?*” **[Receiver-oriented request]**  
("I'd like to ask you a favor\*: could you tell me what has been taught in class and if they have sent homework home?")
- [18] “If you could possibly pass on notes that were taken during the class or any work that we need to prepare for tomorrow's class?” **[Receiver-oriented request]**
- [19] “*Volevo gentilmente sapere quali argomenti erano stati trattati ed i compiti assegnati per casa.*” **[Receiver-oriented request]**  
("I kindly wanted to know what topics had been covered and the homework assigned.")

Thus, in requests to a classmate the preferred perspective in L2 is one that is *oriented to the receiver*, reflecting very high percentages (100% English L2 and 70% Spanish L2), which is similar to the samples of the native speakers and to those of their L1 (90%). As in the case of requests to the teacher, in classmate requests there is frequently a transfer from one language to another, as indicated below.

<b>Request by consulting question:</b>		
<p><b>ITALIAN L1</b>  <i>Cosa avete fatto in classe?            Che compiti ci sono da fare?</i>  <b>[Receiver-oriented]</b>            (What did you do in class?            What tasks are there to do?)</p>	<p><b>SPANISH L2</b>  <i>Podrías decirme qué habéis hecho? Hay algo que hacer para la próxima clase?</i>  <b>[Receiver-oriented]</b>            (Could you tell me what you've done? Is there anything to do for the next class?)</p>	<p><b>ENGLISH L2</b>            What did you do at class? Are there any homeworks? <b>[Receiver-oriented]</b></p>
<b>Request by consulting question:</b>		
<p><b>ITALIAN L1</b>  <i>Potresti gentilmente dirmi che cosa ha spiegato la prof, e se ha assegnato dei compiti per la prossima lezione?</i> <b>[Receiver-oriented]</b>            (Could you please tell me what the teacher explained, and if she assigned homework for the next lesson?)</p>	<p><b>SPANISH L2</b>  <i>*Podrías decirme qué ha explicado la profesora y si hay algunos deberes para casa?</i>  <b>[Receiver-oriented]</b>            (Could you tell me what the teacher explained and if there's any homework?)</p>	<p><b>ENGLISH L2</b>            Would you please tell me which was the subject of the class? Did she give you any homeworks? <b>[Receiver-oriented]</b></p>

Figure 7  
 Examples of transfer of request strategies

The examples presented in Figure 7 show the transfer in the emails of two Italian-speaking informants. As can be seen in the samples, both participants use the same type of request (*Consulting question*) and perspective (*Receiver-oriented*) and even mitigators are kept as the verb “*poder*” in conditional in the three languages used: Italian L1, Spanish L2 and English L2.

As can be seen, in general the results show the transfer of L1 in the requests of L2 students, as well as other previous research that has also analysed L2 learner productions (Shim, 2013; Tseng, 2016; Robles Garrote 2016, 2017). However, social distance seems to be an influential variable in this sense, since while pragmatic transfer is similar in emails between partners of the same hierarchical level, when emails are addressed to a partner of a higher hierarchy this phenomenon increases considerably in the two L2s studied by the participants. This could be due to the fact that the more formal nature of the e-mails to the teacher allows students to use standardized formulas of formal registration learned in the foreign language class and assimilated to a significant extent at an advanced level, such as that of the informants.

## 7. Conclusions

This exploratory study has undertaken a contrastive analysis of the pragmatic request strategies used in a corpus of university student e-mails in Italian L1, English L2, and Spanish L2.

The pragmatic transfer of the L1 in the analysed L2 productions differs according to the social distance because of a different relative power between the interlocutors: a similar level of transfer is observed when both interlocutors belong to the same academic scale, and a higher level of transfer when the interlocutor presents a higher hierarchical level, associated with the use of a formality register appropriate to this context.

The results of the study indicate that the transfer of L1 is frequent in L2 productions, since the same pragmatic strategies were used in the three languages analysed. As previously discussed, in those languages it is possible to formulate successfully and without pragmatic variations, many transferred structures, such as “*can + infinitive*” or mitigators, such as conditional tense. In other words, the multilingual competence of the informants was helpful because pragmatic transfer could be positive in those structures. However, the perception of a short linguistic distance sometimes leads to errors due to pragmatic or grammatical divergences in request structures of the same type, causing negative transfer or interference, as we saw in the examples in Spanish and Italian. Thereby, in order to make the most of their usefulness, it could be necessary to clearly identify the transferable aspects from one language to another and to focus attention on those that can produce negative transfer.

As future research topic, it could be interesting to study how some strategies allow connections to be established with the students’ previous knowledge and facilitate the construction of analogous statements in other languages, reflecting multilingual competence.

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