



The role of gender on awareness of requests

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect that the variable of gender may have on awareness of requests by undergraduate students in a secondary school. Although much research has been conducted on awareness of requests (e.g. Schmidt, 1993, 1995; Al-Hejin, 2005) and production of requests (e.g. Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2010; Usó-Juan, 2010), the present study attempts to fill the gap as to whether or not gender can have an impact on awareness of requests.

In order to carry out this piece of research, a pre-test/post-test design has been created which is addressed at 11 teenage students with the same level of proficiency (i.e., beginner). Instruction was implemented between the tests so as to check if there existed any effect on awareness. Hence, the participants had to state the appropriateness of the requests, as well as to justify their answers. The results show both quantitative and qualitative differences between males and females, a fact which would imply that gender is a factor to be taken into account when dealing with awareness of requests in the English-as-a-foreign-language classroom.

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Introduction

As some authors have stated (e.g. Mey, 1998) language is an inseparable feature of our daily lives, due to the fact that humans are constantly interacting, transmitting messages and communicating not only through lexis or grammar, but also through non-verbal gestures (Koike, 1989). This is because humans live in society. As a result, they should learn how to behave appropriately both from a cultural and grammatical perspective taking into account the fact that each language has its own conventions, values and assumptions. This is especially relevant for language learners, whose experience in the foreign language may be reduced to books and teachers' discourse in the classroom with little exposure to real interaction.

Therefore, it is essential to instruct students in the English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) context how they can perform actions by means of speech. In other words, the EFL classroom should be a forum in which they are instructed on how speech acts work in the target language to make sure that they can express themselves without threatening their interlocutor's face or sounding rude. A specific area of research has developed around speech acts since the early 60s till nowadays (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975), with a particular focus upon requests.

As claimed by Brown and Levinson (1987), requests are considered the most face-threatening speech act, because in a more direct or indirect way the speaker asks the interlocutor to do something for him or her. In order to make learners become communicatively appropriate in the foreign language (FL henceforth), instructors need to offer students the maximum exposure to authentic materials and situations not only with textbooks, as Gilmore (2004) and Usó-Juan (2008) recommended. Regarding the high impositive speech act of requests, a lot of research has been conducted on this topic aiming at its implementation in the FL classroom (e.g. Trosborg, 1995).

On the other hand, speech act production and awareness may be affected by some factors. As Shams and Afhgari (2011) show, gender does have a role on awareness of requests. Overall, it has

been stated (Mckelvie, 2000) that gender affects the perception of directness and indirectness. However, it is also true that there are other authors that state that not only can gender be considered as a variable, but also culture can affect gender perception on requests and politeness (Holmes, 1995; Mills, 2003).

In order to provide some theoretical foundations on which the study reported is based, in Chapter 1 we focus on the notion of pragmatics since it is the umbrella term for some sub-disciplines, that is, pragmalinguistics, sociopragmatics, speech act theory and politeness theory.

Chapter 2 deals with the definition and taxonomies of requests, including the two subcomponents involved in requests: the head act and the mitigators or softeners (Safont-Jordà, 2008). The former refers to the main clause of the request, while the latter refer to all the modification devices used to soften the request so as to make it more polite with a view of getting the requester's goal accomplished. In this chapter, findings from previous research on the role of gender in the awareness of requests are presented as it is the variable under analysis in the study conducted.

The study is presented in Chapter 3, in which the description of participants, the materials and procedure employed and the analysis of quantitative and qualitative results are reported. Finally, we provide the conclusion of the main findings and the bibliographical section, followed by the Appendices.

Chapter 1: Pragmatics in the EFL classroom

Linguistics has approached many different perspectives from almost its origin. For instance, from a structuralist approach originally until a more generative perspective recently. However, the field of Applied Linguistics was enriched by diverse authors such as Hymes (1972), Levinson (1983) and Leech (1983) since they took different aspects from different sciences and altogether gave birth to that new approach. Over 50 years ago the term pragmatics started to be defined by philosophers as Austin (1962), Searle (1975) and Grice (1975) referring to language philosophy concerning the function and use of language.

Nevertheless, it is also true that the first time that pragmatics was named was by Pierce (1905) in his work *Pragmatism*. Some time later, the first author attempting to define pragmatics was Morris (1938) who gave the following definition: “the study of the relation of signs to interpreters” (1938: 6). Subsequent authors widened this early attempt at a definition, for example Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983). Crystal (1997) pointed out that pragmatics was the study that took in consideration the users of the language and that language was a meaningful vehicle to communicate and interact in a sociocultural encounter with particular participant or participants. This is due to the fact that he focused on language use and the coding and decoding of utterances.

On the other hand, more recent linguists such as Bublitz (2001), Mey (2001) and LoCastro (2003) stated that pragmatics also studies the actions, strategies and reactions that interaction had on participants because when talking about language not only do linguistic aspects have to be taken into account, but also some behavioural and sociocultural aspects because, as mentioned earlier, human communication takes places in society.

According to Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983), pragmatics can be divided into two components: sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics. The former refers to the contextual and social factors that may affect the selection of a pragmalinguistic utterance. In turn, the latter refers to

linguistic resources and conventions to perform a communicative message. In this line, speakers may avoid that their interlocutors feel uncomfortable and they may achieve conveying appropriate speech acts and successful conversation.

However, in an EFL classroom this is limited to the curriculum, but according to Alcón-Soler (2008) a pedagogical perspective should be included in the instruction. Hence, her proposal is to introduce the methodological approach of *communicative competence*, in such a way that the five skills are implemented, i.e. speaking, listening, interaction, writing and reading. This is due to the fact that since participants interact with each other, they need to know some strategies regarding linguistic and social parameters.

Regarding speech acts, the fathers of this theory were Austin (1962) and Searle (1975). On the one hand, Austin (1962) based his theory on the notion that speakers do not utter just words, but they do things with them. Thus, he stated that all speech acts were composed by three elements: the *locutionary* act (i.e., the actual words), the *illocutionary* act (i.e., the intention behind the words) and the *perlocutionary* act (i.e., the effect of the utterance on the hearer). However, within the field of pragmatics only the illocutionary act is taken into account, since the important aspect is how the speaker codes his/her message and how the hearer decodes or infers it.

Turning to taxonomies on speech acts, Searle (1975) provided one of the first classifications of speech acts, classifying them into *representatives*, *directives* (which are the basis for the direct speech acts such as requests), *commissives* (such as promises), *expressives* (such as apologies) and *declarations*. Trosborg (1995) widened the taxonomy into requests, apologies, complaints, refusals, disagreements and suggestions. No matter what classification is considered, what is generally accepted in the literature is the fact that speech acts are divided into direct and indirect, going back to Labov and Fanshel (1977).

Very much related to the concepts of pragmatics and speech acts we find the notion of *politeness*. Due to the fact that requests are considered the most threatening speech acts, as we have previously mentioned, the *politeness principle* (Leech, 1983) is at stake. Besides cooperation, politeness requires a certain social behaviour, so Leech proposed a series of maxims so that the conversational exchanges take place in an atmosphere of harmony. Therefore, Leech presents six maxims: *tact*, *generosity*, *approbation*, *modesty*, *agreement* and *sympathy*. They all support the idea that negative politeness (avoidance of disagreement) is more important than positive politeness (seeking agreement). Not all of the maxims are equally important.

For instance, *tact* influences what we say more powerfully than does *generosity*, while *approbation* is more important than *modesty*. Additionally, we may also say that obviously, speakers may adhere to more than one maxim of politeness at the same time. Often one maxim is on the forefront of the utterance, while a second maxim is implied.

On the other hand, it is argued that the basis of politeness was implemented by Lakoff (1977) who established three main rules: *formality*, *hesitancy* and *equality*, which were sustained by two maxims: to be clear and to be polite. The first rule of formality implies not to impose; the second one means to allow the addressee some options; and the third one consists of treating the requestee as equal to the requester so that the requestee does not feel uncomfortable. Therefore, it can be noticed that these rules will always be based on the contextual conditions, i.e. status, familiarity and culture.

In the 80s, new proposals were offered by Brown and Levinson (1987) in which importance was given to the power of speaker and hearer. Therefore, they proposed the term *negative face*, when the speech act affected hearer's freedom of action, and *positive face* when hearer's desires are considered. As a result, this is the reason why requests are considered face-threatening acts (FTAs) because they may affect the hearer's negative face.

In this first chapter we have revised some key concepts regarding the literature on pragmatics and speech acts, thus providing a wide framework for the study in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Requests

As reviewed previously, requests are the most face-threatening speech acts since when a speaker utters them is because he/she intends that the hearer does something for him/her. As a result, politeness is required not only to make the request the most indirect possible, but also to achieve the speaker's goal. This is the reason why in this section we are going to review the diverse and most well-known definitions of requests. Additionally, we will present taxonomies for requests and mitigators, on which we have based to develop the study in the classroom. Finally, we are going to give a review of the current studies on gender and awareness of requests.

2.1: Requests: Definition and Taxonomies

Requesting involves two components, the head act and the mitigation devices. Requests are, according to Austin's (1962) classification of speech acts, illocutionary acts that belong to the category of directives, and have been described as an attempt that the speaker makes to get the hearer to do something which can be in benefit, or not, for the speaker (Trosborg, 1995). Therefore, a request can be considered as an act to engage the hearer or requestee in an action that may coincide with the speaker or requester's goal. In this way, as Safont-Jordà (2008) and Usó-Juan (2010) specify, a request implies a cost to the hearer. This is the reason why requests are considered impositive and face-threatening acts, in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, as the speaker or requester is intrinsically threatening the hearer's negative face. In other words, the speaker is stepping in the hearer's territory and in the hearer's freedom of action.

On the contrary, as argued by Sifianou (1999) and Safont-Jordà (2008), requests do not always have to mean an imposition for the hearer, even though most of the time we use requests to make the hearer perform an action for us. Thus, the term directive coined by Searle (1975) is preferred rather than impositive. However, this has also to do with politeness, due to the fact that

speakers can raise the degree of politeness of the request by means of making it more indirect. In this sense, the speaker shows that he/she is considering hearer's face needs (e.g. Trosborg, 1995; LoCastro, 2003; Safont-Jordà, 2008; Usó-Juan, 2010).

As many researchers have argued (Trosborg, 1995; Sifianou, 1999; Safont-Jordà, 2008; Usó-Juan, 2010), requests consist of two components: the head act and the modification devices. In fact, as we mentioned above, in order to soften the request or imposition speakers can use those peripheral modification devices which will be dealt with later.

The head act is the main utterance which performs the action of requesting. Authors such as Safont-Jordà (2008) and Sifianou (1999) call this head act *core of the request*. Therefore, focusing on the head act or core of the request, there are many different taxonomies of requests. For instance, Sifianou (1999) distinguished between interrogatives, imperatives, declaratives, negatives and elliptical. Thus, we can notice that this author focuses on the structure or form of the head act.

On the other hand, Trosborg (1995) made a more exhaustive taxonomy. In fact, his classification is based on research carried out by Austin's (1962), and Searle's (1969) theories on speech acts, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1986) adaptations. As a result, we can notice that Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy comprises the most

Table 1. Taxonomy of request realisation strategies (Trosborg, 1995: 205)

REQUEST STRATEGIES	
CATEGORIES	EXAMPLES
(1) <i>Direct</i> :	
–Obligation:	<i>You must/have to lend me your car</i>
–Performatives:	<i>I would like to ask you to lend me your car</i>
–Imperatives:	<i>Lend me your car/Your car (please)</i>
(2) <i>Conventionally indirect (hearer-based)</i> :	
–Ability:	<i>Can/Could you lend me your car?</i>
–Willingness:	<i>Would you lend me your car?</i>
–Permission:	<i>May I borrow your car?</i>
–Suggestory formulae:	<i>How about lending me your car?</i>
(3) <i>Conventionally indirect (speaker-based)</i> :	
–Wishes:	<i>I would like to borrow your car</i>
–Desires/needs:	<i>I want/need to borrow your car</i>
(4) <i>Indirect</i> :	
–Hints:	<i>I have to be at the airport in half an hour</i>

Table 1: Taxonomy of request realisation strategies (Trosborg, 1995: 205)

important theories, and despite criticisms, it is considered most relevant by many authors (e.g. Safont-Jordà, 2008; Usó-Juan, 2010). As can be seen in Table 1, Trosborg distinguished between direct, conventionally indirect (either based on the hearer or based on the speaker) and indirect.

Direct requests refer to those illocutionary acts in which the speaker says explicitly what he/she intends the hearer to do. Thus, they can use obligation, performative or imperative forms. The following type is conventionally indirect requests which are the most used forms in our daily lives with our relatives and can be either hearer-oriented or speaker-oriented. Finally, the last category is indirect requests, which are also called hints, because of the use of opaque expressions. As a result, they require more effort from the hearer since he/she has to decode completely the message.

Studies dealing with the use of request head acts show that speakers tend to use more direct strategies (Blum-Kulka, 1983). In her study with L2 learners whose mother tongue was German, Trosborg (1995) concluded that request strategies could also depend on learners' cultural background or L1. In contrast, a study carried out by Hill (1997) with Japanese learners of English showed that they were more eager to use conventionally indirect strategies. Yet, the difference with those and with the ones analysed by Blum-Kulka was the level of proficiency, since as Ellis (1994) also found out, as students' proficiency level increases, they move from using direct and imperative strategies towards using the conventionally indirect ones. This means that as learners increase their knowledge and level, they approximate to the target language conventions.

As a result, we may say that requests are impositive and face-threatening speech acts which have two components. However, as stated by Safont-Jordà (2008) most research focuses on the head act part whereas the modification devices are paid less attention even though they are essential for request production.

2.2: Mitigators

Mitigators are also called softeners since their main role is to soften the imposition of the requests. This is the reason why we have previously called them modification devices too. According to Safont-Jordà (2008), these modification devices accompany the request head act since their purpose is to vary the degree of politeness and decreasing the threatening conditions. Therefore, as claimed by Trosborg (1995), Sifianou (1999) and Safont-Jordà (2005, 2008), requests consist of two components, one the head act or core of the request (as mentioned above), and the second component is the peripheral elements. These elements are the ones treated in this section.

Peripheral elements, i.e. the modification devices or mitigators, can be classified into two major groups: internal and external. On the one hand, internal modifiers may appear within the same request head act (Usó-Juan, 2010). On the other hand, external modifiers appear surrounding the request head act, so they may precede or follow the head act of the request. Additionally, mitigators do not alter the meaning of the request, but rather are used to mitigate and soften the force of the request. As we have just mentioned, there are two major groups of mitigators but this distinction has come out after a lot of previous research such as Trosborg (1995), Sifianou (1999) and Alcón-Soler et al. (2005). These last authors present the most helpful and complete taxonomy of modification devices.

MODIFICATION DEVICES			
TYPE	SUB-TYPE	EXAMPLES	
<i>Internal Modification</i>	Openers	– <i>Do you think you could open the window?</i> – <i>Would you mind opening the window?</i>	
	Softeners	Understatement	– <i>Could you open the window for a moment?</i>
		Downtoner	– <i>Could you possibly open the window?</i>
	Intensifiers	Hedge	– <i>Could you kind of open the window?</i> – <i>You really must open the window.</i>
		Fillers	– <i>I'm sure you wouldn't mind opening the window.</i>
	Fillers	Hesitators	– <i>I er, erm, er – I wonder if you could open the window</i>
		Cajolers	– <i>You know, you see, I mean</i>
		Appealers	– <i>OK?, Right?, yeah</i>
		Attention-getters	– <i>Excuse me...; Hello...; Look...; Tom ...; Mr. Edwards...; father... ..</i>

(Continued)

Table 2: Taxonomy of internal modification devices in request realisation strategies (Alcón-Soler et al., 2005: 17)

Regarding internal modification devices, there are four main subtypes: openers, which are opening words or expressions looking for catching hearer's cooperation; softeners, which are words or expressions used to soften the imposition of the request; intensifiers, which are those that serve to intensify the goal of the request so that it is accomplished; and fillers, which are the typical expressions used to fill the gaps in interactions to avoid uncomfortable silent moments.

<i>External Modification</i>	
Preparators	– <i>May I ask you a favour? ...</i> Could you open the window?
Grounders	– <i>It seems it is quite hot here.</i> Could you open the window?
Disarmers	– <i>I hate bothering you but</i> could you open the window?
Expanders	– Would you mind opening the window? ... <i>Once again, could you open the window?</i>
Promise of reward	– Could you open the window? <i>If you open it, I promise to bring you to the cinema.</i>
Please	– Would you mind opening the window, <i>please?</i>

Table 3: Taxonomy of external modification devices in request realisation strategies (Alcón-Soler et al., 2005: 17)

As far as external modifiers are concerned, six sub-types can be found: preparators, since they prepare the hearer for the subsequent request; the second ones are grounders, which are a sort of explanation to introduce the following request; the third ones are disarmers, which are employed to avoid the refusal of the addressee; the fourth type are expanders, which are used as a sort of repetition of the request so that it is accomplished; the fifth type are the devices that refer to promise of reward, that means that if the request is accomplished the addresser will compensate the addressee for doing so; the last type is the word *please*, which is separated from the other devices due to its frequency in the English language, as in Sifianou's (1999) taxonomy .

The analysis of modification devices needs more research and above all, interlanguage and cross-cultural research (Safont-Jordà, 2008). For instance, the table above by Alcón-Soler et al. (2005) was designed concerning Spanish EFL learners' oral production. Therefore, we can observe

that even though in the last three decades the speech act of requesting has obtained much attention by researchers, still more studies are required, as claimed by Safont-Jordà (2008) and Usó-Juan (2010).

2.3: Gender and Awareness

During the last decades cross-cultural and linguistic studies have paid considerable attention to the speech act of requesting (e.g. Cameron, 1995). However, as Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch (2003) claim, there are not so many studies regarding gender differences, even though, historically, there has been diversity of approach within language and gender study (Sunderland and Litosseliti, 2002). On the contrary we can also notice, as Ishikawa (2013) says, that gender differences do have been analysed from different perspectives for the last four decades, paying attention to, for instance, the use of different linguistic aspects (e.g. Labov, 2001), styles (e.g. Trudgill, 1972), directness (Ishikawa, 2013), interruptions (Zimmerman and West, 1975), or politeness aspects (e.g. Holmes, 1995; Mills, 2003).

These studies conclude that women are more likely to express positive politeness and to mitigate more often in order to minimise the effect of face-threatening acts and take into account their hearers' face. In fact, Holmes (1995) and Cameron (2000) report that women tend to use those resources because they are more attentive and they are more concerned and aim at building and ensuring their relationships, since there are speech acts where women show more sensitivity than men, who are more direct.

In contrast, Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch (2003) claim that those studies are more in line of the stereotypical approach, so they pursue to identify differences in gender on situational contexts, power relationships, social distance and age and identities, i.e., on sociopragmatic factors. Similarly, Mills (2003) states that those studies are focused on women's language, i.e., they follow a feminist approach, which is necessarily different from men's one. Therefore, she follows a similar approach

to Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch (2003), as her study is based on the complexity of gender taking into account other variables.

Therefore, we can state that studies concerning gender differences can be either focused on different cultures or countries (e.g. Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch, 2003) or on status (e.g. Mills, 2003) or they bear in mind politeness factors (e.g. Holmes, 1995; Mills, 2003; Ishikawa, 2013).

Regarding awareness, students must be aware of the correct use of requests according to the situation. Thus, it seems essential to implement instruction on requests so that students can communicate appropriately cross-culturally in EFL classrooms. However, as we have mentioned in the introduction on pragmatics, in order for learners to communicate efficiently they should first be aware of pragmatics (Rahimi, Hashemian and Mansoori, 2014). Secondly, they should be instructed on speech acts and, as Brown and Levinson (1987) stated, above all on requests due to their face-threatening nature because they threaten the hearers' negative face as they impose the requester's or speaker's interests on the hearer.

Therefore, in such a face-threatening context, the speakers should "present a rich variety of strategies and modifiers necessary to mitigate their imposition effect" (Cenoz, 1996: 42). This is what EFL learners need to acquire. Additionally to reinforce Cenoz's (1996) words, Schmidt (2010) claims in his *Noticing Hypothesis* that second language learning cannot occur unless it is consciously noticed. Even though this study does not follow such a strict line of thought, it is true that our Research Question lays on the basis that awareness of requests will make students answer properly to the proposed requests. On the other hand, we bear in mind, as Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan (2010) hold, that in order for our students to acquire requests, their strategies and modification devices, they need to produce utterances or speech and to get feedback. However, this is one of the limitations of this study.

As far as awareness of requests is concerned, Schmidt (2010) found out differences on students regarding both individual and external factors, but, unfortunately, he did not pay attention to gender differences. Other authors that do pay attention to gender differences are Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch (2003), who eventually found some little differences both in the way males and females identify requests and in the way they use politeness devices. Greater results were obtained by Shams and Afghari (2011) who discovered that both males and females, independently from their culture, appreciate the difference between indirect and direct requests; however, females were eager to use more polite requests and tended to use more frequently indirect requests. Contrary to males, who in spite of being aware of the difference between direct and indirect requests, were more direct, imperative and impolite. These findings are also corroborated by previous linguists such as Mulac, Bradac and Gibbons (2010) or Macaulay (2001).

This literature review shows that more studies on awareness of requests, independently of participants' culture, are also needed so that comparing more results. Yet, we can observe that gender is an important field which has been studied in depth from many perspectives, stereotypically and following a feminist view (e.g. Mills, 2003). Besides gender, requesting, as we have seen, has also been paid much attention since it is one of the speech acts which varies the most due to not only individual factors but also to external ones (Schmidt, 2010).

Chapter 3: The study

This study aimed to find out if there was any difference in awareness regarding requests in EFL teenagers taking into account the variable of gender. Thus, it followed a traditional methodology consisting of delivering some questionnaires to a group of students, going on with instruction and finally testing again their knowledge to check improvements and differences between the two genders, as Shams and Afghari (2011) pointed out.

3.1: Participants

At the beginning of the study, we expected it to be developed in different groups of ESO and Bachillerato during my internship at IES Álvaro Falomir in Almassora. However, I was told that it was impossible and I could not carry out the study in all the courses we wanted. Therefore, only one possibility was awarded, which was to develop my study in the group they had previously chosen. This group was a 3rd of ESO class with 15 students of about 16 years old, but only 11 took part in the study due to the following reasons: first of all, there was an English native speaker, actually she was from Nigeria, and even though she had been living here for 4 years, her mother tongue was English so she had to be left out so that her answers did not interfere with the results of this study. Despite this fact, she was allowed to take the tests so that she did not feel separated or discriminated.

Secondly, there were two students who took one test, but they did not do the other; hence, their answers on the first test were not taken into account since they did not do the second test. Time proved to be another limitation: as we only had one week and a half to carry out the study these two students missed the last two lessons, and we were not able to contact them anymore.

Thirdly, there was one student who filled out the level test and the participants' information test, but he quitted school. The fact was that he was 16 and he wanted to become a police officer,

then he decided to get out from the secondary school and to study for the exams to enter in the module. Therefore, this student attended the first lesson, but not the rest of the process.

Regarding the 11 students who, in the end, were analysed and took the tests, 7 were girls and 4 were boys. They were in a remedial course, this means that they should be studying 4th of ESO, but they came from 2nd of ESO following a programme called 'Compensatory Education'. This consists of having adapted materials according to their knowledge. Actually, they did not follow the normal textbook for the English subject in the secondary school, which is *Oxford Spotlight*, they had another one called *Let's Go!2*.

On analysing the participants more in depth, it is essential to mention that one girl was at the onset of anorexia and another one was hospitalized for anorexia too. As a consequence, both had problems when paying attention, even though the former attended lessons regularly, the latter only attended lessons on Fridays and only three hours to avoid anxiety.

3.2: Materials

The materials for this study consisted of four questionnaires. The first one was a questionnaire about personal information (see Appendix 1) such as their mother tongue, their second or third language and their nationality. The second questionnaire delivered to participants in the study was the *Quick Placement Test* by Cambridge University Press (see Appendix 2) in order to know their level of proficiency in English.

The third test was a pre-test which aimed at testing students' awareness of requests, as can be seen in Appendix 3. Therefore, some situations were suggested and the students' role was to rate them as appropriate or inappropriate depending on the context and degree of imposition and then they had to justify their answer either in their mother tongue to get a better understanding of their justification.

Finally, the post-test was the same as the pre-test, but changing the order of the situations (see Appendix 4). Between the pre-test and the post-test the participants were instructed on the use and type of requests, including mitigation as well. The taxonomy used was the one proposed by Trosborg in 1995 (see section 2.1), which has been widely used in the literature on requests (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2010).

3.3: Procedure

In order to gather some personal information about the participants, a first questionnaire asking for personal information was delivered. By filling it out, we were able to learn about learners' background such as their linguistic preferences, age, gender, nationality and if they had ever been to any English speaking country. After that, subjects were asked to take a placement test so as to know their level of proficiency in English as a foreign language.

The next step was to test students' knowledge on requests. Therefore, an awareness pre-test was distributed, which consisted of 9 situations in which a request was provided and students had to rate it as appropriate or inappropriate. Due to the low level of participants, both the situations and the requests were explained if required into Spanish or Valencian.

The following day, participants were instructed by means of two tables what requests were and types of mitigators. They were asked to produce some requests for some specific situations proposed at that precise moment. For instance, while explaining requests, the researcher suddenly left the class and re-entered saying: "Hello!". Then it was elaborated as "Hello! Can I come in?" and the last time as "Hello? May I come in?". Finally, another situation was suggested in which the researcher needed a red pen, so she asked the student, "The red pen, please!", then they were required to say how they would say it, and some of them told me that they would say, "Can you give me the red pen, please?", but others reported, "Could you lend me a red pen, please teacher?".

Finally, the post-test was delivered with the same situations and the same requests as in the pre-test. The reason for using the same test was to check students' improvements, as we wondered if after the instruction and having the same test, there would be any differences regarding gender.

Chapter 3.4: Results and Discussion

Taking into account the literature on requests reviewed in Chapter 2, we formulated the following research question:

RQ: Does gender play a role on awareness of requests?

In order to provide an answer to this question, the results in the awareness test and then the ones in the post-test were taken into consideration for comparison, due to the fact that previous studies (e.g. Shams and Afghari, 2011) report that females tend to be more sensitive to appropriateness of requests and to have better results after instruction. In order to corroborate or not this finding, we are going to focus first on quantitative results of the pre-test and the post-test, and then we will focus on the qualitative results taking into account the differences between males and females of the pre-test and post-test.

3.4.1: Quantitative Results

In this section we will show which have been the quantitative results got by males and females students summarised in three main charts: two for the pre-test and one for the post-test. Thus, we will be able to compare males and females responses.

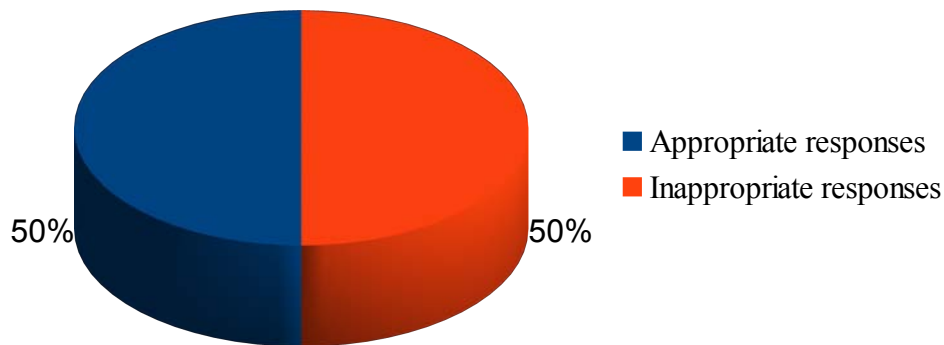
Pre-test results

Figure 1: Distribution of appropriate and inappropriate responses by male students in the pre-test

As can be seen in Figure 1, the analysis of the data for the pre-test shows that out of the 9 proposed situations, 50% per cent of male responses were appropriate and 50% of their responses were inappropriate.

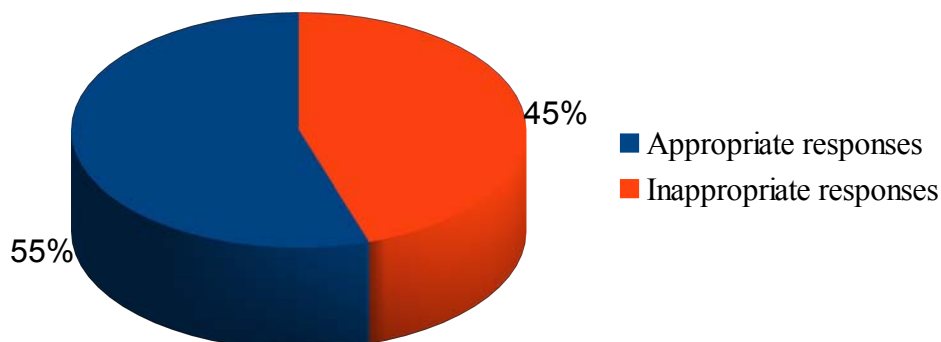


Figure 2: Distribution of appropriate and inappropriate responses by female students in the pre-test

As far as results for female students are concerned, our analysis shows that they did a bit better than males. Females scored 55% of the questions appropriately, whereas only the 45% of the questions were inappropriate. However, it is also to point out that even though percentages (males:

45% and females: 50%) are relatively similar, females already in the pre-test had better results. Therefore, these results are more in line with Shams and Afghari's (2011) study than to Ishikawa's (2013) research, in which this author reports that females tend to use more direct strategies in every situation they were faced to. This author also found out that females could not clearly identify and use polite requests, which is in direct contrast to our findings. We are aware of this fact because females wrote on their tests about politeness and the use of *excuse me* and *please*, or the treatment with unknown people or older than them. Consider Example 1 in which the student was supposed to read the situation and according to that she should rate if it was appropriate or inappropriate and why.

Example 1

Situation: You want to go to the school trip at the end of the semester, but you need to pay the travel expenses tomorrow and your parents haven't given you the money yet. You arrive home and you tell your parents:

Give me the €200 for the school trip now!

Female: *inappropriate*

Why?: *porque es una falta de educación hablar así a tus padres*

Male: *appropriate- without reasoning his answer.*

Still, we have to bear in mind that these are the results from the pre-test which are based on students' previous knowledge on requests. Taking into account the percentages of the pre-test, we can state that female students, at that level and age, understood more appropriately the situations and the requests, being able to differentiate between being impolite and polite.

Post-test results

As explained in 3.3, the post-test took place after instruction. Some previous research (Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch, 2003) have used this pre- post-test design and have stated that both females and males improved their results after instruction with similar results. Yet, this was not the case in this study as Figure 3 shows.

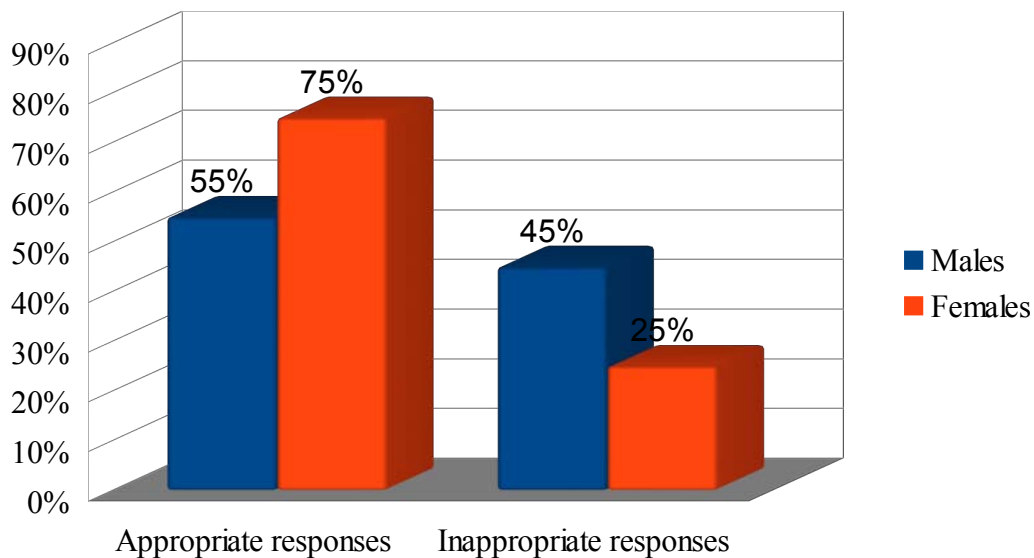


Figure 3: Distribution of appropriate and inappropriate responses by male and female students in the post-test

According to these results, we may state that female students obtained better results, with a 75% percentage of appropriate answers and 25% of inappropriate responses, whereas male students only reached a 55% of appropriate responses. This means that even with instruction, male students were not able to have their awareness of requests enhanced. Since in the pre-test they got 50% of appropriate responses, they have only improved a 5% after being instructed on requests. On the contrary, female students have shown a 20% of improvement in the post-test.

As these results show, there has been a wider gap among males and females and this difference reaches 20% of dissimilarity. That means that we have got higher differences, with fewer participants and tokens, than studies such as Shams and Afghari (2011), even though we have not

taken into account aspects as culture.

All in all, we can say that this study is in line with Holmes (1992, 1995) since it has proved again that females tend to be more indirect, cooperative and facilitative while males use more aggressive and direct language (see Example 2 below). However, it is also true that, as Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch (2003) report, both reach the same point of politeness and both genders present politeness knowledge, as Examples 3 and 4 show:

Example 2

Situation: It's summer, you haven't passed all the subjects, only 5 out of 10, so your parents are considering not going on holidays, but you want to go on holidays despite your bad marks. You say:

I want to go to London.

Female: *inappropriate*

Why?: *porque no lo pide con por favor (o educación)*

Male: *appropriate*

Why?: *está bien por quedarse en casa*

Example 3

Situation: You're a new student in the class and you need to ask another student who you don't know for the name of the English book so you can buy it. You say:

Can you tell me the name of the English book?

Female: *appropriate*

Why?: *porque se lo está pidiendo como un favor...*

Male: *appropriate*

Why?: *se habla bien a una persona, son compañeros*

Example 4

Situation: You're a student in a 3rd of ESO class and yesterday you were ill, so you couldn't attend the lessons. Today you phone a classmate to ask for the homework. You say:

I was wondering if you have time, will you please let me know what the homework for tomorrow is?

Female: *appropriate*

Why?: *porque lo pregunta con educación*

Male: *appropriate*

Why?: *lo pide con educación para que le devuelva algo*

3.4.2: Qualitative Results

As explained at the beginning of Chapter 3.4, in this study we have not only focused on the quantitative results, but also on the qualitative results. Hence, in this section we can read about the qualitative differences that can be appreciated in males and females responses to the pre-test and the post-test.

Pre-test results

Taking into account that students took this test without instruction, even though being explained the situations one by one in their L1, as has been previously explained in the procedure chapter 3.3, we are going to describe the main differences between males and females answers in the pre-test.

Considering males responses we can see, as shown in example 1, that they either avoid writing any justification for their responses or tend to write vague ones, such as “*le pides tu bici*” or “*porque es hora de clase*”. Those answers seem vague due to the fact that in some cases they do not

match with the objective of the request and others they rate the request appropriately but their answer is incoherent to what they have chosen.

On the contrary, females, as can be observed in example 1, point to politeness aspects and most of them try to justify all their answers. For instance, they write “*es de mala educación, lo correcto sería [...]*” that means that apart from stating if the requests are appropriate or inappropriate, they even give a possible request to the inappropriate one. We must say that the vast majority of the females wrote justifications, even though there was one who did not write any of them, but this was due to the peculiarities explained in the participants section. Since this student was special, she was the one who was anorexic and was hospitalized.

All in all, we may notice that in both quantitative and qualitative results, we can perceive some differences between both genders. As Shams and Afghari’s study (2011) and as Mills (2003) claims, from the beginning without instruction and only with their background knowledge, females and males appreciate differently politeness aspects, which in this case affects to distinguish the appropriateness or inappropriateness of requests. Actually, qualitatively speaking in this pre-test females have given more elaborate and suitable justifications for their responses, contrary to males. In this way, females have found to get better results in the pre-test both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Post-test results

After having analysed students' quantitative results, if we take into account examples 2, 3 and 4, we can also recognise some qualitative differences among genders. The reason is that females tend to recognise politeness aspects more frequently, while males in some cases, as in example 2, cannot give the most suitable justification for their answer.

Therefore, even after instruction, we can see that females improve their quantitative results, but our findings say that they do also get better qualitative results. For instance, as Lorenzo-Dus and

Bou-Franch (2003) state, we can observe that females are more collaborative and work hard in order not to break their relationships. This can be clearly seen in example 4 where most of females have answered appropriately this situation and justifying that the person has to say that politely so that the other person gives him/her the homework and does not get angry.

In contrast, males in this example, for instance, most of them have not written anything or we can see incoherent responses, such as for the same situation as in example 4, one student answered “*es un estudiante*”; or others just basically say that “*es educado*”. As a result, we can observe that it is still hard for males to point out politeness, but there are some that after instruction, have realised that they have to take into consideration politeness in order to get what they want. This is the reason why for many situations, some male students write things like “*no lo pide con por favor*”, “*no está bien dicho*”, “*no se lo pide amablemente*”. In other words, males have improved also qualitatively speaking.

In short, as pointed out in the conclusion of the quantitative results, this study has corroborated that gender affects awareness of requests. The reason relies on the fact that females tend to use polite expressions and try not to threaten their interlocutor's face, whereas males, even after instruction, showed that they are more direct, although they are able to recognise polite aspects. As a result after considering both quantitative and qualitative results, we can claim that this study is totally in line with studies such as Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch's (2003) and Shams and Afghari's (2011).

Chapter 4: Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

Considering all the explained definitions referred to pragmatics and requests, including the modification devices, we can state that requests are one of the most face-threatening speech acts which take into account many internal and external factors, such as politeness or the interlocutor's identity. Therefore, as Shams and Afghari (2011) reported in their study, culture does also affect awareness of request. As a result, awareness of requests should be emphasised in EFL classrooms so that students can communicate efficiently and effectively without threatening other's negative face (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

In this paper we have reviewed the role of gender on awareness of requests and it has been proved that gender affects how requests are understood. In this line, we have revised recent literature and as many studies conclude (e.g. Loenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch, 2003; Shams and Afghari, 2011), females are more aware of politeness factors. Actually, they recognise quicker polite expressions and realise that the use of indirect requests is more polite than direct ones if they want to reach their goal that the hearer does something for them, as some examples from our study report.

Finally, this study attempted to find out any variation on gender awareness of requests in EFL learners by means of two tests: a pre-test without any instruction on the topic and a post-test after instruction. Our results have finally pointed out, in line with Loenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch (2003) and Shams and Afghari (2011), that females notice more polite requests whereas males, even after instruction, need more time and explanation to guess the answer. Therefore in line to what Lakoff (1975), Holmes (1995) and Mills (2003) investigated, we can claim that females are more cooperative, polite and attentive in order not to hurt their interlocutor or threaten him/her so that they can reach their aim behind the request.

Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that we do not have to fall into stereotypical or feminist

approaches, as Mills (2003) claims, but this study, with its limitations, has brought to light these results. In short, we have provided a brief perspective of how gender may affect the awareness of requests since the results of the study have been qualitative and quantitative quite diverse among females and males.

Chapter 5: Limitations and Further research

The study reported was subject to a number of limitations: firstly, we have to mention time limitations in the internship, which restricted severely the initial plan of research as we could not focus on production of requests. If there had been more time to do so, our research would have been more complete and fruitful. Secondly, level of proficiency could not be taken for analysis as our participants were all beginner students. Moreover, the small sample under analysis makes the results of this study not amenable to extrapolation or generalization to other contexts or participants.

Despite the limitations of the present study referred to above, it has tried to shed light on request awareness of adolescent male and female students, thus attempting to fill the gap in this area of investigation. In spite of several studies on gender differences when becoming aware and producing requests, it would be rewarding to look into this field more deeply because there are controversies among the different studies carried out up to now.

As a result, for further studies it could be interesting to carry out research on the role of gender on the production of requests, since if there have been differences in these participants regarding gender, there should be considering production. Although studies like Ishikawa (2013) proved all the contrary, he showed that females were less polite and appropriate using more direct strategies in order to utter their requests.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

NAME and SURNAMES:

Complete the following sections with information about yourself:

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Nationality: _____
4. Years studying English: _____
5. Have you ever been to an English-speaking country? _____
If yes, how long have you been there? _____
6. Mother tongue, choose one of the following:
 - Spanish only
 - Catalan/Valenian only
 - Spanish + Catalan/Valencian
 - Rumanian
7. Second language or other languages, choose one or two options of the following:
 - Spanish
 - Catalan/Valenian
 - English
 - French

Appendix 2



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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Name:

Date:

quick placement test

Version 1

The test is divided into two parts:

Part 1 (Questions 1 – 40) – All students.

Part 2 (Questions 41 – 60) – Do not start this part unless told to do so by your test supervisor.

Time: 30 minutes



Part 1

Questions 1 – 5

- Where can you see these notices?
- For questions 1 to 5, mark **one** letter **A**, **B** or **C** on your Answer Sheet.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | Please leave your
room key at
Reception. | A in a shop
B in a hotel
C in a taxi |
| 2 | Foreign money
changed here | A in a library
B in a bank
C in a police station |
| 3 | AFTERNOON
SHOW BEGINS
AT 2PM | A outside a theatre
B outside a supermarket
C outside a restaurant |
| 4 | CLOSED FOR HOLIDAYS
Lessons start <i>again</i> on
8th January | A at a travel agent's
B at a music school
C at a restaurant |
| 5 | Price per night:
£10 a tent
£5 a person | A at a cinema
B in a hotel
C at a camp-site |

Questions 6 – 10

- In this section you must choose the word which best fits each space in the text below.
- For questions 6 to 10, mark **one** letter **A**, **B**, or **C** on your Answer Sheet.

Scotland

Scotland is the north part of the island of Great Britain. The Atlantic Ocean is on the west and the North Sea on the east. Some people (6) Scotland speak a different language called Gaelic.

There are (7) five million people in Scotland, and Edinburgh is (8) most famous city.

Scotland has many mountains; the highest one is called 'Ben Nevis'. In the south of Scotland, there are a lot of sheep. A long time ago, there (9) many forests, but now there are only a (10)

Scotland is only a small country, but it is quite beautiful.

- | | | | |
|----|---------|-----------|---------|
| 6 | A on | B in | C at |
| 7 | A about | B between | C among |
| 8 | A his | B your | C its |
| 9 | A is | B were | C was |
| 10 | A few | B little | C lot |

Questions 11 – 20

- In this section you must choose the word which best fits each space in the texts.
- For questions 11 to 20, mark **one** letter **A, B, C** or **D** on your Answer Sheet.

Alice Guy Blaché

Alice Guy Blaché was the first female film director. She first became involved in cinema whilst working for the Gaumont Film Company in the late 1890s. This was a period of great change in the cinema and Alice was the first to use many new inventions, (11) sound and colour.

In 1907 Alice (12) to New York where she started her own film company. She was (13) successful, but, when Hollywood became the centre of the film world, the best days of the independent New York film companies were (14) When Alice died in 1968, hardly anybody (15) her name.

- | | | | | |
|----|--------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| 11 | A bringing | B including | C containing | D supporting |
| 12 | A moved | B ran | C entered | D transported |
| 13 | A next | B once | C immediately | D recently |
| 14 | A after | B down | C behind | D over |
| 15 | A remembered | B realised | C reminded | D repeated |

UFOs – do they exist?

UFO is short for 'unidentified flying object'. UFOs are popularly known as flying saucers, (16) that is often the (17) they are reported to be.

The (18) 'flying saucers' were seen in 1947 by an American pilot, but experts who studied his claim decided it had been a trick of the light.

Even people experienced at watching the sky, (19) as pilots, report seeing UFOs.

In 1978 a pilot reported a collection of UFOs off the coast of New Zealand. A television (20) went up with the pilot and filmed the UFOs. Scientists studying this phenomenon later discovered that in this case they were simply lights on boats out fishing.

- | | | | | |
|----|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| 16 | A because | B therefore | C although | D so |
| 17 | A look | B shape | C size | D type |
| 18 | A last | B next | C first | D oldest |
| 19 | A like | B that | C so | D such |
| 20 | A cameraman | B director | C actor | D announcer |

Questions 21 – 40

In this section you must choose the word or phrase which best completes each sentence. For questions 21 to 40, mark **one** letter **A, B, C** or **D** on your Answer Sheet.

- 21 The teacher encouraged her students to an English pen-friend.
A should write B write C wrote D to write
- 22 They spent a lot of time at the pictures in the museum.
A looking B for looking C to look D to looking
- 23 Shirley enjoys science lessons, but all her experiments seem to wrong.
A turn B come C end D go
- 24 from Michael, all the group arrived on time.
A Except B Other C Besides D Apart
- 25 She her neighbour's children for the broken window.
A accused B complained C blamed D denied
- 26 As I had missed the history lesson, my friend went the homework with me.
A by B after C over D on
- 27 Whether she's a good actress or not is a of opinion.
A matter B subject C point D case
- 28 The decorated roof of the ancient palace was up by four thin columns.
A built B carried C held D supported
- 29 Would it you if we came on Thursday?
A agree B suit C like D fit
- 30 This form be handed in until the end of the week.
A doesn't need B doesn't have C needn't D hasn't got

Appendix 3

Pre-test

Please, specify if these requests are appropriate or inappropriate according to the situation, and say why (in Catalan or Spanish):

1. One month ago you lent your bicycle to a friend of yours, and now you need it back for tomorrow, because you are going on an excursion with the PE teacher. You say:

Excuse me, would you be so kind to give me back my bicycle?

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

2. You go to the town library to look for some information for your science project. You don't know where to find the science books and tell the librarian at the desk:

The science section!

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

3. You're some minutes late for school, but the teacher is already in class, so you knock at the door and say:

Hello! Can I come in?

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

4. You're a new student in the class and you need to ask another student who you don't know for the name of the English book so you can buy it. You say:

Can you tell me the name of the English book?

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

5. It's summer, you haven't passed all the subjects, only 5 out of 10, so your parents are considering not going on holidays, but you want to go on holidays despite your bad marks. You say:

I want to go to London.

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

6. Some days ago you did an English exam which consisted of two parts. You want to know if the teacher has got the marks of the first part to start preparing the second one. You go to his office and you say:

Teacher, have you got the marks already?

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

7. You're at home, but you are going shopping this afternoon with your friends and need some money, so you tell your mother:

Give me €50.

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

8. You're a student in a 3rd of ESO class and yesterday you were ill, so you couldn't attend the lessons. Today you phone a classmate to ask for the homework. You say:

I was wondering if you have time, will you please let me know what the homework for tomorrow is?

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

9. You want to go to the school trip at the end of the semester, but you need to pay the travel expenses tomorrow and your parents haven't given you the money yet. You arrive home and you tell your parents:

Give me the €200 for the school trip now!

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

Appendix 4

Post-test

Please, specify if these requests are appropriate or inappropriate according to the situation, and say why (in Catalan or Spanish):

- You're a new student in the class and you need to ask another student who you don't know for the name of the English book so you can buy it. You say:
Can you tell me the name of the English book?

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

- It's summer, you haven't passed all the subjects, only 5 out of 10, so your parents are considering not going on holidays, but you want to go on holidays despite your bad marks. You say:
I want to go to London.

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

- You're some minutes late for school, but the teacher is already in class, so you knock at the door and say:
Hello! Can I come in?

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

- You're at home, but you are going shopping this afternoon with your friends and need some money, so you tell your mother:
Give me €50.

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

- One month ago you lent your bicycle to a friend of yours, and now you need it back for tomorrow, because you are going on an excursion with the PE teacher. You say:
Excuse me, would you be so kind to give me back my bicycle?

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

- You want to go to the school trip at the end of the semester, but you need to pay the travel expenses tomorrow and your parents haven't given you the money yet. You arrive home and

you tell your parents:

Give me the €200 for the school trip now!

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

- Some days ago you did an English exam which consisted of two parts. You want to know if the teacher has got the marks of the first part to start preparing the second one. You go to his office and you say:

Teacher, have you got the marks already?

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

- You're a student in a 3rd of ESO class and yesterday you were ill, so you couldn't attend the lessons. Today you phone a classmate to ask for the homework. You say:

I was wondering if you have time, will you please let me know what the homework for tomorrow is?

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

- You go to the town library to look for some information for your science project. You don't know where to find the science books and tell the librarian at the desk:

The science section!

Appropriate or inappropriate:

Why?:

Appendix 5

REQUESTS *

1. Direct:
 - Obligation : must, have to.....
You must/have to give me €50.
 - Performative: would like to
I would like to ask you for some money.
 - Imperatives: orders
Give me €50.
2. Conventionally indirect (based on the hearer):
 - Ability: can, could
Can/could you give me €50?
 - Willingness: deseo
Would you give me €50?
 - Permission: may
May I borrow €50?
 - Suggestion: how about, what about...
How about giving me €50?
3. Conventionally indirect (based on the speaker):
 - Wishes:
I would like to borrow €50.
 - Needs: want, need...
I want/need €50.
4. Indirect:
 - Hints: dar a entender
I have to buy a present for my best friend.

MITIGATORS OR SOFTENERS IN REQUESTS *

1. Internal:
 - a) To start: Do you think....
Do you think you could lend me €50?
 - b) To soften: for a moment, possibly, maybe, kind of....

Could you possibly lend me €50?

c) Fillers: as onomatopoeias, er...em...I mean, yeah, or attention getters: Excuse me

Excuse me, eeem.....could you lend me €50?

2. External:

a) Preparators:

May I ask you a favour? Could you possibly lend me €50?

b) Promise:

If you lend me €50, I promise I will give you them back soon.

c) Please:

Would you mind lending me €50, please?

*According to Trosborg, 1995: 205, in Martínez-Flor, A. and Usó-Juan, E. (2010) *Speech Act Performance. Theoretical, empirical and methodological issues*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam.