

Examining authentic and elicited data from a multilingual perspective. The real picture of child requestive behaviour in the L3 classroom

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Abstract

While child requestive behavior has received some attention in SLA research, very few studies have considered requests production and comprehension in young learners from a multilingual perspective (Author & Author (Should we replace the label Author and enter our last names?), 2015; 2016; Author, 2015a, b). However, data in previous studies were obtained either from completion tests or from natural classroom discourse. To the best of our knowledge, no studies have explored young learners' requests in three languages by combining both authentic and elicited data.

For that reason, the aim of the present study is to provide a comprehensive picture of child requestive behavior in the multilingual classroom setting. We examine 127 young learners' requests comprehension and production in three languages by combining elicited and authentic data. Additionally, we investigate the effect of the language program adopted by the schools. Our results show that the combination of methods offers new evidence on the dynamism and complexity of L3 pragmatics. Findings further confirm the idea that we may best describe multilingual speakers' requestive behaviour by including all learners' languages and by resorting to authentic and elicited data. As a conclusion, we suggest that a monolingual approach in the study of pragmatics may provide us with a partial portrait of L3 learners' pragmatic development.

Keywords: Child requestive behaviour; Requests; Multilingual proficiency; Young L3 language learners; Elicited data; Naturally-occurring classroom discourse

1 Introduction

The growth of multilingualism has increased the interest of multilingual acquisition over the last few decades; however, the investigation in the area of pragmatics has been traditionally done through a monolingual lens. Interlanguage Pragmatics (henceforth ILP) research with a focus on child requestive behaviour in the language classroom has provided significant insights into L2 child pragmatic acquisition (Rose, 2000; Cromdal, 1996; Solé & Soler, 2005; Lee, 2010); however, a Second Language Acquisition (henceforth SLA) approach may not provide a full picture of child multilingual pragmatics since the linguistic background of L3 learners has not been taken into consideration.

Existing studies on L3 pragmatics adopting a multilingual viewpoint have focused either on the production or on the comprehension of requests (Author, 2015a, b; (Please, I am unable to modify the in-text references according to query number 3. Thus, all the in-text references to author 2015 a, b correspond to author 2015, with the exception of the in-text reference that appears in the following sentence: Current research (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; Author, 2017 (instead of Author 2015a, b).) Author & Author, 2015; 2016). Data in these studies were obtained from discourse completion tests or from natural classroom discourse. To the best of our knowledge, no previous studies have explored young learners' requests in three languages by combining both authentic and elicited data.

The emergence of the mixed-methods approach in the past decade has been regarded as significant in ILP studies. This new approach involves that both naturally occurring data and language elicited in experimental conditions are addressed so that each type of data complement and reinforce the other. In this vein, a mixed-methods research allows for a combination of data collection methods and secures triangulation of data which may provide a deeper understanding of findings. Some studies in ILP have already used a mixed-methods approach in their analysis of L2 speech acts in adults (Alcón-Soler, 2015, 2013; Flöck, 2016) and the findings have provided us with valuable insights.

This paper explores how very young learners of English as a L3 produce and comprehend requests in the classroom setting. The novelty of this study lies in the fact that (i) the three languages of the students' linguistic repertoire are taken into account and that (ii) data for the present study derive from a combination of pragmatic comprehension tests and naturally occurring discourse. Additionally, the impact of the language program adopted by the schools on the production and comprehension of requests will be examined.

2 Literature review

2.1 Towards a working definition of requests

Requests have been widely investigated across languages and contexts (see Flöck for a revision, 2016). Two main theories that study requestive behavior are those of Speech Act and Politeness Theory. Within the framework of speech act theory, Searle (1975, p.13) defines requests as “attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. They may be very modest attempts as when I invite you to do it, or they may be very fierce attempts as when I insist that you do it”. The speech act of requesting may include the head act and the modification devices (Trosborg, 1995). The head or the core unit is the main utterance and performs the act of requesting whereas the modification devices include all the optional items, which accompany the request head act, and mitigate or aggravate the force of the imposition of the request (Author, 2008). Speech act theory has also been widely criticized for its theoretical nature. As argued by Walker (2013:461), “it is more concerned with competence than performance”. Due to this fact, the intention underlying requestive behavior may be best examined within the politeness framework.

Several authors (Flöck, 2016; Walker, 2013) report on the convenience of using politeness theory for the study of requests as these forms are a clear example of face threatening acts and the strategies employed to perform requests may be implicit (off-record) or explicit (on-record). Brown and Levinson (1987) reported in their politeness theory that there are three main levels of directness in the realization of a request head act: direct, conventionally indirect, or non-conventional indirect forms. Directness refers to the degree to which the speaker's intention is consistent and apparent from the locutionary act. A request head act is direct when the words uttered by the speaker coincide with the speakers' intention, as in “Lend me your computer”. In the case of indirect strategies, the locutionary act is not consistent with the illocutionary act. Indirect forms can be conventional, as in “Could you lend me your computer?”, and non-conventional, also known as hints, as in “My computer just died”.

Directness levels are linked to the protection of the interlocutors face. Face refers to “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.61). These authors distinguished between two kinds of face: positive and negative. Positive face is defined as the individual desire that “one's wants be desirable to at least some others” while one's negative face is the desire that one's “actions be unimpeded by others” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.62). Taking into account this concept, there are some request strategies which are more positive-oriented while others are more negative-oriented. Positive politeness strategies are intended to avoid giving offense by highlighting friendliness between the speaker and the hearer, as in “I need your computer”. In contrast, negative-oriented strategies are intended to avoid giving offense by showing freedom of action and imposition, as in “Would you mind lending me your computer?”. Therefore, directness is associated with friendship, connectedness, and solidarity whereas indirectness relates to avoiding direct imposition.

This politeness to directness continuum has been widely criticized as it considers face and politeness as universal (Fraser, 1990; Mao, 1994) and it ignores the dynamic nature of face work (Locher & Watts, 2005) in languages other than English or other widely quoted European languages (i.e. Spanish). Nevertheless, as the languages we are dealing with do fit into the politeness strategies presented by Brown & Levinson (1987), this theory still serves the purposes of our study.

Spanish and Catalan, both Romanic languages share the property of being positive-politeness-oriented systems. Speakers of these languages generally tend to use more direct request strategies and unmodified forms since connectedness is more valued than separateness (Payrató & Cots, 2011). In contrast, English, which is a Germanic language, is a more negative-politeness-oriented language, as maintaining own's territory unimpeded is key. Therefore, English forms are less direct and a considerable number of modification devices accompanying the request head act are used to mitigate the threatening nature of the requests.

In this sense, appropriate requestive behavior requires knowledge of the politeness orientation of the languages involved. A learner of Spanish should know about the preferred use of direct requests, while learners of a negative-politeness-oriented language like English would rather employ more indirect request forms. Otherwise, the interlocutors' face may be threatened according to politeness rules. Yet, we agree with the view that face may also be negotiated and co-constructed in discourse. In order to account for that, we need to include natural discourse in our analyses of language learners' requests. We believe that such need is in line with the call for an integrative approach to the study of speech acts that combines illocutionary and interactional significance (Edmondson & House, 1981; Schneider & Barron, 2014). On that account, we have adopted Flöck's (2016, p.80) definition of request which includes “speakers' desire for a hearer to perform verbal or non-verbal action, it is a potential face threatening act and can be realized by various strategies that may be mitigated, and it relies on the interactants' interpretation and both interlocutors have equal rights”. This is the definition used in our analysis of child requestive behavior in the classroom setting.

2.2 Requests and early language learners

Studies focusing on child requestive behaviour in the language classroom have put forward that children from a very early age have the ability to make themselves understood adjusting their linguistic choices pragmatically. The classroom is an excellent laboratory for children to acquire pragmatic competence. Question-and-answer exchanges with teachers and peers provide students with valuable pragmatic input. Traditionally, ILP research has examined the EFL classroom and learners' requestive behaviour has been compared with that of an idealised monolingual native speaker. These studies have focused on the production (Cromdal, 1996; Ellis, 1992; Rose, 2000; Solé & Soler, 2005) and the comprehension of requests (Lee, 2010; Takakuwa, 2000).

Ellis (1992) analysed the English L2 requests produced by two primary school learners over a one-year period in the classroom context. The findings showed that direct requests came first while conventionally indirect requests

appeared later. The analysis of the naturally occurring data also revealed that the use of indirect requests was very limited in the corpus. The subjects hardly used any modification items to soften their requests. The author pointed out that the decrease of direct strategies and the increase of conventionally indirect strategies over time was determined by the L2 learners' proficiency level. Nevertheless, learners' pragmatic development over time was kept to a minimum although they slightly extended their productive repertoire of requests.

Similarly, [Cromdal \(1996\)](#) analysed the L2 production of English requests of Swedish children. Data came from natural classroom discourse which were transcribed and analyzed quantitatively. The results showed that the most frequent L2 requests employed by the participants were direct request strategies in the imperative form, almost twice as frequent as the direct strategies accompanied by modifiers, such as "please". In his study, modification devices accompanied 15% of all requests produced by the children.

By means of an oral production test, [Rose \(2000\)](#) examined the L2 production of English requests of Cantonese primary school students. In line with [Ellis \(1992\)](#) and [Cromdal \(1996\)](#), the results reported evidence of the pragmatic development from direct to more conventionally indirect strategies as well as an increase of the use of external modification items with increasing proficiency. Regardless of the data collection method, those authors found similar results.

[Solé & Soler \(2005\)](#) examined 48 primary school learners' L2 production of requests in Spanish by means of pragmatic completion tests. The findings derived from the quantitative analysis showed that both direct strategies and conventionally indirect strategies were frequently employed, and there were no statistically significant differences between these two categories. Non-conventional indirect strategies (known as hints) were hardly used at all. [Solé & Soler \(2005\)](#) considered that the educational setting favoured the use of conventional indirect strategies in their cross-sectional study. The use of different modification devices was very limited, although the use of the particle "please" was widely employed.

The results above on the production of L2 requests have suggested that direct request forms are more frequently employed than conventional and non-conventional indirect forms. Indirect forms and modifications devices are limited and their presence in the classroom increase in line with the proficiency level. Thus, L2 pragmatics shows a linear and homogenous development. However, those studies have adopted a monolingual analytical perspective since the language repertoire of the participants has not been taken into consideration. Similarly, some studies ([Lee, 2010](#); [Takakuwa, 2000](#)) on L2 comprehension of requests have also been conducted from a monolingual viewpoint.

[Lee \(2010\)](#) examined 176 primary school children's L2 English comprehension by means of a multiple-choice task which included direct and indirect speech acts. The sample was divided into three main groups (seven-year-old, nine-year-old and twelve-year-old). The author revealed that the 12-year-old did the task better than the 9-year-old. The latter group also complied with more appropriateness than the younger group. In this vein, the L2 pragmatic comprehension ability increased with age, although the majority of participants had no difficulty in understanding both type of direct and indirect speech acts since the age of 7.

[Takakuwa \(2000\)](#) analysed the comprehension of requests by 78 bilingual school learners. The instrument to check request comprehension was an oral completion test that included different types of request strategies. Unexpectedly, the results confirmed that conventionally indirect requests and indirect requests were comprehended better than direct requests. The author suggested that the participants relied on those requests which were more pragmatically appropriate. In this vein, politeness was the main effect in their comprehension of requests. To our view, Takakuwa's participants were at the end of primary school and they were aware of the importance of being polite at school.

Research on requests in instructional contexts shows that the linear development observed might be conditioned by the proficiency level in the target language. With increasing proficiency, the learners increase the use of conventionally indirect strategies and modification devices ([Cromdal, 1996](#); [Ellis, 1992](#); [Rose, 2000](#); [Solé & Soler, 2005](#)) as well as their understanding ([Lee, 2010](#); [Takakuwa, 2000](#)). These studies above have used completion tests as a data collection method, with the exception of [Cromdal \(1996\)](#) and [Ellis \(1992\)](#) that employed naturally occurring data between teachers and students. Nevertheless, none of the studies mentioned above has adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining data from the laboratory and the field. Furthermore, L2 studies have adopted a SLA perspective in their analyses and the language background of the participants has not been taken into account. Thus, the picture that we may obtain from these studies may be partial.

Multilingual learners should be examined from a multilingual approach that considers all their languages. Current research ([Cenoz & Gorter, 2015](#); [Author, 2015a, b](#); [Author, 2017](#); [Author & Martí, 2017](#)) suggests that multilingual proficiency cannot be analysed from a monolingual perspective where each language is conceived as a bound system and examined in isolation. According to [García \(2009\)](#), multilingual speakers use their language systems in their linguistic repertoire as a continuum and not as entities detached from each other. Such conception differs from the monolingual view in which bilinguals are seen as two deficient monolinguals in one person ([Weisgerber, 1966](#)). From a multilingual perspective, the present study examines a multilingual instructional context. In so doing, we have considered previous findings from the analysis of young multilingual requestive behavior.

[Author & Author \(2016\)](#) investigated the pragmatic formulas produced by 184 primary and infant school learners from two different bilingual language programs where English is learnt as a L3. On the one hand, Catalan-based programs where Catalan is the main language of instruction and, on the other hand, Spanish-based program in which most of the subjects are taught in Spanish. Data were collected from observation and natural classroom discourse.

Although the pragmatic item under investigation was not specifically that of the requests, the authors found that pragmatic formulas were mainly performed by request forms. The results showed that young learners made requests in the three languages to the teacher and to other peers in order to perform different pragmatic functions. In addition to that, the differences regarding the use of pragmatic formulas in each the language program were statistically significant. The authors found that students enrolled in Catalan-based programs produced more pragmatic formulas in the three languages than students that followed the Spanish-based model. Their study has suggested that the English classroom is not monolingual since other languages are present in the learning environment and, thus, a multilingual perspective is needed in order to show a complete account of the students' pragmatic behaviour.

Author (2015a, b) (Author (2015)) analysed the pragmatic comprehension of 402 very young learners of English as a L3. The sample consisted of a group of 206 pre-school students (4-5 years old) and a group of 196 primary school students (8-9 years old). Requests were elicited by means of an audio-visual pragmatic comprehension test that included direct and indirect requests in Spanish, Catalan, and English. According to the author, young learners' pragmatic awareness was not determined by their proficiency level in each language but by their multilingual proficiency as a whole. Students were able to identify request strategies in the three languages as well as modifiers, such as grounders and the particle please. Likewise, this study also showed that the linguistic model had an effect on the L3 pragmatic awareness of the students. The findings showed that the group of learners in the Catalan program outperformed students enrolled in the Spanish program as it occurred in Author & Author's (2016) study.

Similarly, Author & Author (2015) examined the comprehension of requests by a group of 45 preliterate multilingual learners of English. The data collection instrument was the one used in the study by Author (2015a, b) (Author (2015)). The results showed that the learners portrayed a high level of pragmatic awareness in the three languages even though their L1 and L2 languages were still developing. The interaction among the three language systems allowed for transfer phenomena in spite of the low proficiency level of the learners. In line with Author & Author (2016) and Author (2015a, b) (Author (2015)), the students in Catalan-immersion programs reported L3 pragmatic facilities in comparison to the programs in which Spanish was the main language of instruction.

Although a multilingual perspective has been adopted in the previous studies, their focus has been either on the production (Author & Author, 2016) or on the comprehension (Author, 2015a, b (Author, 2015); Author & Author, 2015) of requests. None of the studies above has depicted a complete picture of requests performance by exploring both young learners' production and comprehension of requests in a multilingual instructional setting. The multilingual requestive behaviour of young learners deserves further attention in the field of pragmatics since few studies have accounted for that age period and those studies have already pointed out the peculiarities of early L3 learners. Additionally, these studies have used either written completion tests to elicit pragmatics (Author, 2015a, b (Author, 2015); Author & Author, 2015) or others have employed natural classroom discourse (Author & Author, 2016). As far as we know, no previous research has investigated child requestive behaviour through a mixed-methods approach.

From a multilingual perspective, the present study attempts to cover the above mentioned research gaps by examining early multilingual requestive behavior through the combination of authentic and elicited data. We wonder to what extent young learners are aware of the politeness orientation of their languages. Some languages, such as Catalan and Spanish, have been pragmatically defined as positive-face oriented languages, while English has a tendency towards negative politeness.

Taking into account the main goals stated above and findings from previous research, the following research questions have been formulated.

RQ1 Which request forms are more often produced by young learners? Are these forms in line with the politeness orientation of each language?

RQ2 What is the students' level of pragmatic comprehension regarding appropriateness of request forms?

RQ3 Does the language program play a role in the learners' use and comprehension of requestive behavior?

3 The study: early multilingual requestive behavior

3.1 Participants

The sample consisted of 127 primary schoolchildren aged 8 and 9. In terms of gender, 52% ($n=66$) of the students were female while 48% ($n=61$) of them were male. As illustrated in Fig. 1, the majority of the participants reported their L1 to be Spanish ($n=65$, 51,2%), followed by Catalan ($n=33$, 26%), Spanish and Catalan ($n=14$, 11%), Romanian ($n=8$, 6,3%) and Arabic ($n=7$, 5,5%). Their L2 was either Catalan or Spanish, except for those with Catalan and Spanish as L1s. Common to all the students is that English is part of their obligatory schooling and they were taking English classes for four years. Thus, they were learning English as an L3 or L4 in their third year of primary education in the Valencian educational system (Spain). None of the participants had ever been to an English-speaking country before.

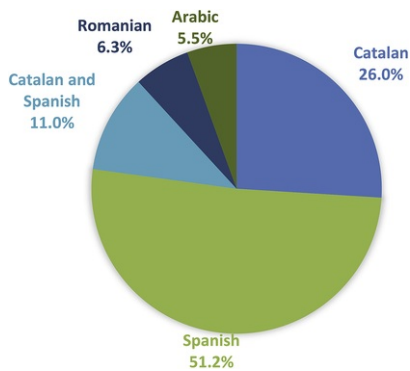


Fig. 1 Participants' L1.

alt-text: Fig. 1

The Valencian educational system offers multilingual programs where pupils study through the majority language (i.e. Spanish), the minority language (i.e. Catalan) and the international foreign language (i.e. English). The participants were selected from six different schools from the province of Castelló (Spain) which have different language programs depending on the amount of exposure to Catalan and Spanish. Taking into consideration the linguistic model variable, the sample was comprised of four public schools which followed the Catalan-based model (*i.e.* Catalan is the medium of instruction in most of the subjects) and two semi-private schools which implemented the Spanish-based model (*i.e.* Spanish is the main language of tuition). On the whole, 60% ($n=77$) of the sample were enrolled in Catalan-based linguistic programs while 40% of them ($n=50$) were from Spanish-based models. All participants understand both languages since they are living in a bilingual context, although language instruction through Catalan may increase the optimal acquisition of the minority language and the development of multilingual proficiency. We may argue that learners in Catalan-based programs may be classified as balanced bilinguals since they understand and produce both Catalan and Spanish whereas students in the Spanish-based model could be considered as bilinguals dominant in Spanish. Their proficiency in English could be considered low as compared to the official languages (Catalan and Spanish) in this region.

3.2 Data collection procedure

As the current study takes a mixed-methods approach, laboratory and field data methods were employed. The first method included a pragmatic comprehension test designed to elicit laboratory data, whereas the second method consisted of naturally occurring classroom discourse that was digitally recorded for later transcription and codification.

Elicited data were collected and examined in order to investigate our participants' multilingual comprehension of requests. The instrument to elicit pragmatic awareness was originally designed by the authors for the purpose of a wider research project (see Author, 2015a, b (Author, 2015); Author & Author, 2015; for a complete description). It consisted of an audio-visual pragmatic comprehension test that included direct (e.g. Open the window right now) and conventionally indirect requests (Can you open the window please?). The students were distributed a folder with pictures of puppets and they watched a video on a laptop in which puppets acted out two situations that involved an appropriate and an inappropriate request move. Each situation was performed in Spanish, Catalan and English. Children were asked to identify the appropriate request using a green sticker and the inappropriate one using a red sticker.

The answers obtained from the data collection instrument were codified for analysis with the SPSS programme. In analysing our elicited data, we took into account the extent to which children noticed the appropriateness of direct and conventionally indirect request forms in their three languages. As the values for request forms were not normally distributed, statistical analyses of our data were carried out by means of non-parametrical tests, such as Friedman test, Kruskal-Wallis Test and Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks test. Those tests assess whether the means were statistically different from each other. Significance was always considered at the level of 0.05.

Naturally occurring data were used to analyze the production of requests. The study took place when the participants were learning English as a foreign language, and, although the use of other languages is not allowed, translanguaging practices occur in the language classroom. The teachers were required to carry out their daily English lessons, which included grammar activities, drills, songs, and stories. The researchers observed and recorded the multilingual educational context where three languages interacted: Catalan, Spanish and English. The data for the participants' production of requests were collected through spontaneous teacher-student interactions from six 40-minute sessions. After data collection, audio-recordings and audiovisual data were transcribed using an adapted transcription code from Author & Martí (2017). Recordings were transcribed comprising a total amount of 20,217 words. While a wide range of requests were performed by teachers, we have only taken into consideration those requests produced by young learners. The production of requests was classified according to their directness level. We focused on three main categories: direct request strategies, conventionally indirect request strategies and indirect request strategies.

This mixed-methods approach, which gathered elicited and non-elicited data, provided us with more information on the participants' requestive behavior and allowed us for an in-depth interpretation of findings.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Results and discussion related to RQ1

We first aimed at identifying the request forms produced by primary school learners in the classroom. We examined the global scores regarding the production of requests by multilingual learners. Fig. 2 below shows the overall distribution of request strategy types in the corpus analysed, presenting the percentages for each type of request strategy.

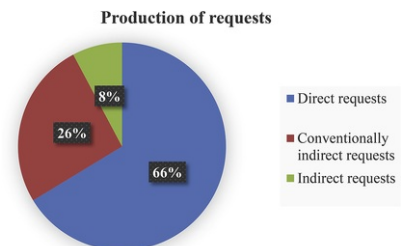


Fig. 2 Learners' distribution of request strategy types.

alt-text: Fig. 2

As depicted in Fig. 2, and 66% ($M=21.83$, $SD=8.86$) of the request forms were direct strategies, 26% ($M=8.33$, $SD=12.176$) were conventionally indirect strategies and 8% of them ($M=2.50$, $SD=2.168$) were indirect strategies. Thus, over half of the identified request forms produced by the sample were direct strategies, followed by conventionally indirect forms, and finally, indirect strategies. In order to determine whether differences among types of strategies were statistically significant or not, we employed a Friedman Test. According to the results from the Friedman Test, statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 31.466$, $p = 0.001$) were observed among the request strategies used by our young participants.

Our global results show that learners produced direct forms more frequently than other formulas. These findings suggest that our participants were able to produce a wide amount of request strategies that go from most direct to least direct, providing evidence of their multilingual proficiency. The outcomes are not consistent with those reported previously by Cromdal (1996), Rose (2000) and Ellis (1992) in their studies on L2 requests production which followed a monolingual orientation and pointed to the almost exclusive use of direct forms. While our participants produced a higher number of direct forms, they were also able to modify their requests and use a considerable number of indirect forms, both conventional and non-conventional. In fact, results from the Wilcoxon signed ranks test highlight the fact that the difference between the modified and unmodified forms ($Z = 2.214$; $p = 0.027$) is statistically significant. These results are remarkable since previous studies have reported that the use of indirect strategies and modification items is very limited in young learners.

In addition to the global requestive behaviour, we examined our participants' pragmatic production in each language system. Fig. 3 below shows the distribution of each request form produced in Catalan, Spanish and English. With reference to direct request forms, our analysis shows that there is a predominance of English direct request strategies in the classroom ($M=8.33$, $SD=4.926$), followed by Spanish ($M=7.83$, $SD=5.742$) and, finally, Catalan ($M=5.33$, $SD=7.554$). In terms of conventionally indirect request strategies, the majority of them were uttered in English ($M=8.00$, $SD=12.140$) and Catalan ($M=0.33$, $SD=0.816$). As far as indirect strategies are concerned, students used more indirect strategies in Spanish ($M=1.67$, $SD=1.366$), followed by Catalan ($M=1.33$, $SD=2.338$) and, to a lesser extent, in English ($M=0.17$, $SD=0.408$).

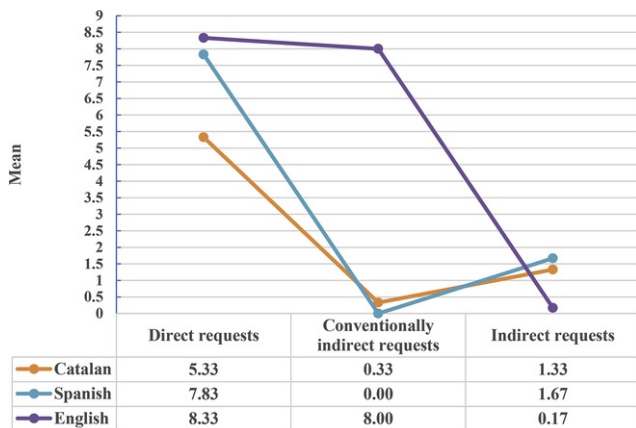


Fig. 3 Learners' distribution of request strategy types for each language system.

alt-text: Fig. 3

In order to check whether differences were statistically significant, we conducted a Kruskal-Wallis Test. Regarding the use of the direct forms, the differences among languages were not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.000$, $p = 0.607$). Nevertheless, differences were significant regarding the use of conventionally indirect ($\chi^2 = 5.429$, $p = 0.066$) and indirect request strategies ($\chi^2 = 6.333$, $p = 0.042$). Therefore, we may state that our participants' production of requests was in line with the politeness orientation of their languages. In the case of Spanish and Catalan, both positive politeness-oriented languages, our participants preferred the use of direct requests. Romance languages are characterised by including more explicit (i.e. on record) strategies when making requests in order to show acceptance and inclusion, as in the following examples:

Example 1

S1: here you are
 S2: *cuánto es?*
 S3: mm 5 pounds
 S2: *qué?*
 S3: 10 pounds

Example 2

T: (...)Pablo what is amonth?
 S10: *oratge?*
 T: nooo what is month?
 S10: *el mes .. es el mes no?*

alt-text: Image 1

As seen in the examples above, the level of directness when making a request in Catalan and Spanish is high. In contrast, our learners made use of a considerable number of negative-oriented strategies in English in order to soften the face-threatening nature of requests, as in the following examples:

Example 3

S8: Can you swim?
 S9: Can Sam Swim?
 S8: *Can you say it? Marina?*
 S9: Yes, I can.

Example 4

T: you're welcome! Now this one
 S3: *Can I have orange juice?*
 S7: Orange juice
 T: Can I?
 S7: Can I have orange juice?

alt-text: Image 2

In this vein, the request strategies used in English were in line with the negative-face politeness orientation characteristic of the English language while Catalan and Spanish convey positive politeness.

To sum up, data derived from natural classroom discourse illustrate that multilingual learners mostly produce direct requests, although a significant number of conventionally indirect requests have also been accounted for, especially in the case of English. Even though conventionally indirect strategies are more syntactically complex than direct strategies, our young multilingual learners did use these forms and they also modified their requests. Contrary

to previous L2 research (Cromdal, 1996; Ellis, 1992; Rose, 2000), our results are significant because they do not illustrate the characteristic developmental pragmatic patterns of children in which direct request come first and, indirect requests come over time associated with higher language proficiency. Our learners were able to produce any type of request strategy.

Besides, we believe that these findings are in line with the idea of a unified pragmatic system. Our results suggest that multilinguals develop their pragmatic competence in line with their whole linguistic repertoire. As suggested by Garcia (2009:14), multilinguals linguistic competence is conceived of as a unique and complex system. Our multilingual learners did not activate three different pragmatic systems, but a complex and dynamic one in which phenomena like transfer of certain pragmatic characteristics from one language to another could take place (Cenoz, 2017; Author, 2015a, b). This would explain our learners' use of direct strategies in English or indirect ones in Spanish and Catalan.

Our results are significant to the extent that they are in line with previous research (Author & Author, 2015, 2016; Author, 2015:6) on children's pragmatic performance that have accounted for the peculiarities and facilities of L3 school learners. Additionally, our results shed light on the multilingual proficiency of our young learners since they were able to use appropriate request strategies in each language. Thus, we may confirm that the request forms are in line with the politeness orientation of each language as more direct request forms were used in Catalan and Spanish, while English requests forms tended to be less direct and involved more modification items. These results could relate to the learners' pragmatic awareness. Yet, in order to confirm this finding we also need to acknowledge their pragmatic comprehension which is tackled as follows.

4.2 Results and discussion related to RQ 2

The second research question of the present study refers to the learners' ability to select pragmatically appropriate request strategies. Our young participants identified the appropriate choice of request forms in different contexts and various languages. We examined the degree of pragmatic awareness displayed by the participants ($N=127$), presenting the mean scores for each language system, as depicted in Fig. 4.

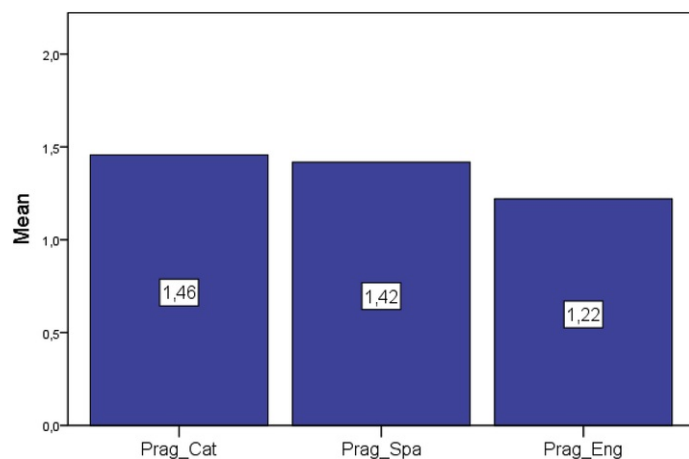


Fig. 4 Mean scores of pragmatic awareness degree for each language. Friedman Test results of pragmatic awareness.

alt-text: Fig. 4

As shown in Fig. 4 above, participants showed a higher level of pragmatic comprehension in Catalan ($M=1.46$, $SD=0.601$) than in the other language systems, that is, Spanish ($M=1.42$, $SD=0.684$) and English ($M=1.22$, $SD=0.654$). In order to determine whether there were differences among the three languages involved, we applied a Friedman test to our data. Results derived from this test showed that the differences across languages regarding the pragmatic comprehension were statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 12.007$, $p = 0.002$).

As occurred in earlier studies (Author, 2015a, b; Author, 2015; Author & Author, 2015), the children differentiated their pragmatic systems and showed different degrees of pragmatic awareness in each language. We found that request comprehension in Catalan was higher than in the other two languages, followed by Spanish and finally English. In line with the results derived from the production of requests, our participants showed a high degree of pragmatic comprehension in their L3 (English), even though they were not able to communicate as fluently as they would in their L1 and L2. We suggest that their previous language learning experience in Spanish and Catalan might have fostered their pragmatic understanding in L3 English. Thus, our young learners' pragmatic comprehension could have been determined by their multilingual proficiency as a whole.

However, we were especially interested in exploring where those differences among languages actually lied. To that end, further Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were applied to our data. The results derived from this test reported

statistically significant differences between the degree of pragmatic comprehension in Spanish and English ($Z = -2.698, p = 0.007$) as well as between Catalan and English ($Z = -3.165, p = 0.002$). However, there were no significant differences between Spanish and Catalan ($Z = 0.599, p = 0.549$). The results are displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test results of pragmatic awareness across language systems.

	Prag. Catalan & Prag. Spanish	Prag. Catalan & Prag. English	Prag. Spanish & Prag. English
Z	-.599	-3.165	-2.698
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.549	.002	.007

We believe that the lack of significant differences between Catalan and Spanish may be due to their typological proximity and identical politeness orientation.

To sum up the findings reported above in relation to RQ2, we acknowledge that their level of understanding of requests is high because of their condition as experienced multilingual learners. Our respondents differentiated their pragmatic systems, as occurred in the findings related to the production of requests. Their pragmatic understanding in Catalan and Spanish revealed a similar pattern since no significant differences between languages were found. In contrast, changes were found with reference to English. These results may support the fact that learners are aware of the politeness-orientation of each linguistic system.

4.3 Results and discussion related to RQ3

The third research question guiding the present investigation referred to the effect of the linguistic model on the learners' use and comprehension of requestive behaviour. As previously mentioned in the method section, the sample was divided into two main groups in terms of the language program: 77 students from the Catalan-based model and 50 students from the Spanish-based model. First, we explored the influence of the linguistic program implemented at school. Then, we examined whether the level of pragmatic comprehension in each language differed significantly.

To start the analysis, we examined the global scores regarding the production of requests by multilingual learners with a focus on the three languages. Fig. 5 below presents the overall distribution of request forms in the corpus analysed, presenting the mean scores for each language system in the educational models examined.

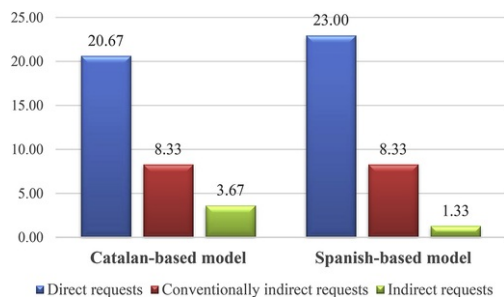


Fig. 5 Comparison of request strategies between linguistic models.

alt-text: Fig. 5

As depicted in Fig. 5, primary school learners in both models revealed a similar pattern of requestive behaviour. As illustrated, the students in Catalan-based schools produced more direct requests ($M = 20.67, SD = 10.066$), followed by conventionally indirect forms ($M = 8.33, SD = 12.741$) and finally, indirect requests ($M = 3.67, SD = 2.517$). A similar pattern was found in the Spanish-based model regarding the production of direct ($M = 23.00, SD = 9.539$), conventionally indirect ($M = 8.33, SD = 12.741$), and indirect request forms ($M = 3.67, SD = 2.517$). In fact, the difference in the use of direct requests ($\chi^2 = 0.48, p = 0.827$), conventionally indirect requests ($\chi^2 = 1.344, p = 0.246$), and indirect requests ($\chi^2 = 1.344, p = 0.246$) between groups was not statistically significant.

Our analysis suggests that there were no significant changes between groups although students in the Catalan-based model used more indirect strategies than those in the Spanish-based school. Indirect request strategies present more difficulty since the intention is not clearly stated and the hearer has to infer the request. Although we cannot confirm that the linguistic model had an effect on the production of requests, we may argue that students in

Catalan-based models displayed more L3 pragmatic variation.

Additionally, we were also interested in investigating the use of different request forms in the three languages. Fig. 6 below shows the distribution of each request form produced by learners enrolled in Catalan-based schools and Spanish-based schools. In terms of direct request forms, those learners in Catalan dominant schools produced more direct requests in Catalan ($M=10.00$, $SD=8.718$) than in English ($M=5.67$, $SD=4.509$) and Spanish ($M=5.00$, $SD=4.583$), while learners in Spanish dominant schools used more direct request forms in English ($M=11.00$, $SD=4.359$), followed by Spanish ($M=10.67$, $SD=6.110$) and, to a lesser extent, in Catalan ($M=0.67$, $SD=1.155$). Regarding conventionally indirect strategies, the participants enrolled in the Spanish program only produced this type of forms in Catalan ($M=10.67$, $SD=6.110$), whereas those enrolled in Catalan programs performed English ($M=10.67$, $SD=6.110$) and Catalan forms ($M=10.67$, $SD=6.110$). No instances of Spanish requests were found in any of the groups. As far as indirect strategies are concerned, students in the Catalan-based schools used indirect strategies in Catalan ($M=2.33$, $SD=3.215$), Spanish ($M=1.00$, $SD=1.00$) and English ($M=0.33$, $SD=0.577$) while learners in the Spanish dominant school only produced in Spanish ($M=2.33$, $SD=1.528$) and Catalan ($M=0.33$, $SD=0.577$).

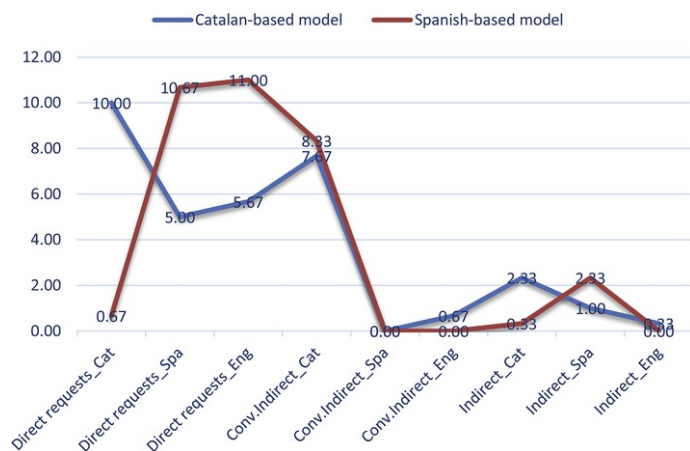


Fig. 6 Distribution of request strategies produced in each linguistic model.

alt-text: Fig. 6

We carried out a Kruskal-Wallis Test in order to find out statistically significant differences. According to the results derived from direct request forms, the differences between both groups were not statistically significant in any of the languages, that is, Catalan ($\chi^2 = 1.344$, $p = 0.246$), Spanish ($\chi^2 = 1.190$, $p = 0.275$) and English ($\chi^2 = 1.765$, $p = 0.184$). Similar results were found regarding conventionally indirect strategies (Catalan $\chi^2 = 1.000$, $p = 0.317$; Spanish $\chi^2 = 0.000$, $p = 1.000$, and English $\chi^2 = 0.067$, $p = 0.796$). Finally, no significant changes were found in the use of indirect strategies in Catalan ($\chi^2 = 0.889$, $p = 0.346$), Spanish ($\chi^2 = 1.263$, $p = 0.261$) and English ($\chi^2 = 1.000$, $p = 0.317$). Thus, the overall results showed no language programme effects.

In the light of our findings, we may confirm that the language program did not influence learners' use of direct request forms, conventionally indirect forms and indirect forms. Contrary to existing research on the comprehension of requests (Author, 2015a, b (Author, 2015); Author & Author, 2015; 2016), the language program did not have an effect on children's production of requests.

As regards the comprehension of requests, we examined the mean scores pertaining to the global degree of pragmatic awareness with reference to the linguistic model. Fig. 7 below shows that the degree of pragmatic comprehension by the participants that followed the Catalan-based model ($M=4.16$; $SD=1.225$) is higher than the degree of those students enrolled in the Spanish-based program ($M=4.00$, $SD=1.498$). In order to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between Catalan and Spanish models, we applied a Kruskal-Wallis Test. As illustrated in Fig. 7, we did not find a statistically significant difference ($H=0.149$, $p=0.699$) between the students from each model with respect to pragmatic comprehension of requests.

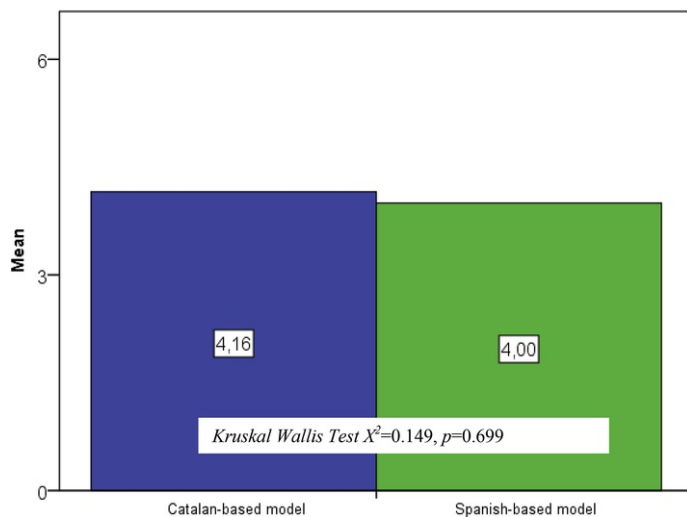


Fig. 7 Global scores for pragmatic comprehension with respect to the language program.

alt-text: Fig. 7

Although the students in Catalan dominant schools performed slightly better, these results contradict existing research on child pragmatics in which significant differences were found between the two linguistic models. Previous studies in the context of our study (Author, 2015a, b (Author, 2015); (Author, 2015) Author & Author, 2015; 2016) have reported that learners enrolled in Catalan-based schools performed better in the pragmatic comprehension test than those enrolled in programs where the dominant language of teaching is Spanish. It was suggested that those students enrolled in schools where the main language of instruction is the minority language demonstrated more solid and balanced competence in the two official languages of the context as well as in the L3.

On the whole, the language program does not seem to play a role in child requestive behaviour as seen in the results derived from the production and comprehension of requests, although L3 pragmatic advantages are found in the Catalan-based school group. We wonder whether other variables, such as the L1 or the age of the participants, may account for the lack of differences between both linguistic models. Further research is needed at this point to gain insights into the possible interaction among various individual variables.

5 Conclusions and further research

The present study focused on early multilingual requestive behavior. Existing studies on child requestive behavior have traditionally adopted a monolingual viewpoint (Rose, 2000; Cromdal, 1996; Solé & Soler, 2005; Lee, 2010), ignoring the linguistic background of learners and providing a partial portrait of their pragmatic abilities. Current studies that have accounted for multilingual child requestive behaviour from a multilingual approach have either focused on the production (Author & Author, 2016) or on the comprehension (Author & Author, 2015; Author, 2015a, b (Author, 2015)) of requests. Data in these studies were obtained from discourse completion tests or from natural classroom discourse. To the best of our knowledge, no previous studies have examined the production and comprehension of requests of early multilingual learners through a mixed-methods approach. In order to cover those research gaps, the aim of the study was to provide a comprehensive picture of 127 child requestive behaviour in the multilingual classroom setting by combining elicited and natural data and taking into account all their languages.

Unlike previous research grounded in monolingual tenets (Cromdal, 1996; Ellis, 1992; Rose, 2000), our data suggests that young learners were able to produce any type of request strategy. In fact, they were able to use request strategies in all their languages in line with their politeness orientation since more direct request forms were used in Catalan and Spanish, and more conventionally indirect requests were employed in English. Similarly, the findings derived from the pragmatic comprehension tests further confirmed their awareness of such politeness orientation.

We may state that our learners' knowledge of the politeness-orientation for each language may be due to their multilingual proficiency as multilingual learners. In line with previous findings (Cenoz, 2017; Author & Author, 2015; 2016; Author, 2015a, b (Author, 2015)), it may be argued that the multilingual background of our participants and their learning experience as language learners have provided them with increased abilities and skills in pragmatics. Those findings point to the phenomenon of pragmatic transfer and suggest that learners develop a unique pragmatic system for their whole linguistic repertoire.

To sum up, our results have confirmed the idea that we may best describe multilingual speakers' requestive behaviour by including all learners' languages and by resorting to authentic and elicited data. The combination of

data collection methods have provided us with fruitful and authentic descriptions of early learners' requestive behaviour in the classroom setting. The adoption of a multilingual perspective has enabled us to present a more realistic portrait of early multilingual learners' requestive behavior than that deriving from the adoption of a monolingual approach in IL pragmatics research.

Finally, we are aware that a number of issues deserve further attention. First, we have not taken into account other languages, such as Romanian and Arabic, in our analyses. This issue deserves further attention since the L1s of our participants were, to some extent, varied and the effect of the language background on multilingual pragmatics should be further examined. Second, we would like to include more situations involving other types of request forms in the pragmatic comprehension test in order to provide a more exhaustive account of the comprehension of requests by primary school learners. Third, we are especially interested in examining the requests produced by the same group of students in each linguistic model from a longitudinal perspective. The language program had no effects here contradicting previous findings. The analyses of authentic data over time may help us provide a better interpretation of the results as well as a valuable source of rich contextual information. Last but not least, it would be interesting to include different educational settings, such as CLIL programs.

~~Lee, 2010; Garcia (2014); Author, 2016.~~

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