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Author(s): Minh Thị Thùy Nguyên and Helen Basturkmen
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1 Requesting in Vietnamese as a Second Language

Minh thị Thủy Nguyễn
National Institute of Education
Nanyang Technological University

Helen Basturkmen
The University of Auckland

The study reported in this chapter examines requests by 18 adult learners of Vietnamese as a second language (L2). In particular, it investigates the pragmatic strategies that the learners employ when making requests in Vietnamese and how their proficiency levels and lengths of residence in the target language (TL) environment affect their choice of these strategies. This study lies within the broad domain of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) research (i.e., “the study of nonnative speakers’ use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge”; Kasper, 1996, p. 145). The rationale for the present study lies in the relative shortage of ILP studies on requests in an Asian language as an L2 (e.g., Byon, 2004; Hassall, 2001, 2003; Ishihara & Tarone, 2009) as opposed to the substantial body of research on requests in an Asian language as a native language (e.g., Byon, 2006; Hassall, 1999; Lee-Wong, 1994; Rue & Zhang, 2008; Upadhyay, 2003; Vu, 1997, 1999; Zhang, 1995a, 1995b) and requests in a Western language as an L2 (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012; Cohen & Shively, 2007; Felix-Brasdefer, 2007; Hendriks, 2008; Otcu & Zeyrek, 2006, 2008; Schauer, 2007, 2008, 2009; Shively, 2011; Taleghani-Nikazm & Huth, 2010; Warga, 2004; Woodfield,
Particularly, requests in Vietnamese as an L2 have not yet been reported in any previous studies. This chapter aims to fill this gap in the literature.

Following Searle (1969), a request is defined as a directive act which is performed to get the hearer (H) to do an act which the speaker (S) wants H to do for S’s benefit and which is at a cost to H. From S’s point of view, H is able to do this act, but it is not obvious that H will do it in the normal course of events or of H’s own accord. A request can be linguistically realized by means of various strategy types and levels of directness (described in further detail below). A strategy is a semantic formula by which the request is expressed (see Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Takahashi, 1996). The level of directness refers to the extent to which S’s intent is made transparent (see Blum-Kulka, 1987). That is, the more direct a request is, the less effort is needed to interpret it, and vice versa. A request may also be mitigated by means of different external and internal modifiers. External modifiers are supportive moves that occur before or after the head act, whereas internal modifiers occur within the head act and form an integral part of it (Kasper, 1981). Our study is informed by previous research on the acquisition of requests as speech acts in a second or foreign language, which we will review in the next sections.

Acquisition of requests in a second or foreign language

Previous studies of L2 requests typically address such issues as how L2 learners perform and learn to perform this speech act over time and what factors might affect their use and acquisition of the speech act. Findings regarding the first issue generally suggest that although learners seem to have access to the same range of requesting strategy types as native speakers (NSs), they tend to show different preferences for particular strategies, mostly due to the influence of their L1 pragmatics. For example, the uninstructed American learners of Spanish in Shively’s (2011) study tended to use conventionally indirect strategies in service encounters more frequently and relied on direct strategies less frequently than is expected by the NS norms. This behavior is due to a transfer of pragmatic norms governing their native language use. In other studies, L2 learners were repeatedly found to differ from NSs in their choice of the overall level of directness for their requests. For example, although many English learners were reported to be more direct than their NS counterparts (Beal, 1990, 1994; Chen, 2006; Færch & Kasper, 1989; Fukushima, 1990; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2003; Tanaka, 1988; Warga 2003, 2004; Woodfield, 2008), learners of other languages such as Hebrew, Spanish, or Japanese were found to be more indirect (Blum-Kulka, 1982, 1983; Kubota, 1996; le Pair, 1996, 2005; Nakahama, 1998; Shively, 2011).
L2 learners, especially those with a low proficiency level, have also been found to be less attentive to contextual factors than NSs when choosing their realization strategies (Ervin-Tripp, Lampert, & Bell, 1987; Felix-Brasdefer, 2007; Fukushima, 1990; Tanaka, 1988; Tanaka & Kawade, 1982). The low-level American learners of Spanish in Felix-Brasdefer’s (2007) study, for instance, employed the same direct strategies in all requesting situations, regardless of the relative social status and social distance between themselves and their interlocutors. Similarly, studies on student-to-professor email communication show that as L2 learners failed to recognize the different status between them and their professors, their emails tended to contain inappropriate requests for help from the latter (Blotch, 2002; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005; Chen, 2006).

Finally, learners in many studies were also observed both to mitigate their requests, especially by means of internal modifiers, to a considerably lesser extent than NSs, and to draw on a narrower range of linguistic resources for doing so (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Færch & Kasper, 1989; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Hendriks, 2008; Hill, 1997; House & Kasper, 1987; Kasper, 1981; Otcu & Zeyrek, 2006; Woodfield, 2008). This pragmatic behavior is often attributed to learners’ limited L2 linguistic competence, their incomplete L2 pragmatic knowledge, and especially their reliance on a synergism of both L1 and L2 pragmatic competence in performing the given speech act (see Blitvich, 2006; V. Cook, 2001; Kecskés & Papp, 2000, for a discussion of intercultural competence).

As far as developmental issues are concerned, a great number of cross-sectional studies comparing learners of different proficiency levels have reported a proficiency effect on learners’ use of request realization strategies and mitigating devices (Kasper, 1996). Generally, it has been consistently shown that as learners become more proficient in the TL, they tend to demonstrate more targetlike pragmatic behavior (Felix-Brasdefer, 2007; Hendriks, 2008; Hill, 1997; Otcu & Zeyrek, 2008; Rose, 2000; Scarcella, 1979). Felix-Brasdefer (2007), for example, found that as their proficiency increased, American learners of Spanish drew less on speaker-oriented requests and more on hearer-oriented requests, which was more consistent with NS pragmatic norms. With increasing proficiency levels, the learners also tended to decrease their use of direct strategies and increase their use of conventionally indirect strategies. In a similar vein, Rose (2000) reported a greater use of conventionally indirect requests by higher proficiency Chinese learners of English, thus approximating a targetlike use. As learners improve their levels of proficiency in the L2, they also seem to expand their pragmatic routines and other linguistic means to express their sensitivity to contextual variations. In Scarcella (1979), for instance, the advanced learners were able to vary the syntactic forms of their requests according to context and used imperatives only for equal familiars and subordinates, while their less proficient peers invariably relied on imperatives. In Otcu & Zeyrek (2008), the learners
became less likely to rely on formulaic utterances to realize their requests with increasing proficiency levels.

Higher proficiency learners have also been reported to mitigate their requests to a considerably greater extent than their lower proficiency peers thanks to a greater degree of control over the L2 (Felix-Brasdefer, 2007; Hill, 1997; Otcu & Zeyrek, 2006; Rose, 2000; Warga, 2004). For example, Felix-Brasdefer (2007) reported an increasing use of the conditional form to internally modify requests among advanced learners of Spanish, while this form was infrequently used by the intermediate learners and almost absent in the beginners’ data. Similarly, Otcu & Zeyrek (2006) found that higher proficiency Turkish learners of English employed internal modifiers more frequently than the lower proficiency group. Warga (2004) found a steady increase in the use of external modifiers by her higher proficiency Austrian learners of French as compared to the less proficient learners, mirroring the findings of Hill (1997) and Rose (2000).

These findings are supported by recent studies on L2 requests from a Conversation Analysis perspective which show that advanced learners were generally able to effectively project an upcoming dispreferred first pair part by making use of prerequest sequences (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012; Taleghani-Nikazm & Huth, 2010). Al-Gahtani & Roever (2012) investigated how 26 male Saudi learners of Australian English made requests in three role-play situations. They found that while higher level learners overwhelmingly provided preexpansions, laying the groundwork for the upcoming requests by checking the interlocutor’s availability and providing accounts, lower level learners rarely did so. Instead, they tended to produce the requests earlier on, relying on the interlocutor to elicit further information. Similarly, Taleghani-Nikazm & Huth (2010), examining requests in L2 German by 24 advanced American learners, found that although all the participants were able to employ presequences to mediate and negotiate their requests, the weaker ones among them were less successful in doing so.

Findings from longitudinal studies of L2 requests also suggest evidence of pragmatic improvement as learners move along their developmental stages (Achiba, 2003; Barron, 2003; Bataller, 2010; Chen, 2006; Cohen & Shively, 2007; Ellis, 1992; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Owen, 2001; Schauer, 2007, 2008, 2009; Schmidt, 1983; Shively, 2011). Overall, the findings of these studies are congruent with those from the cross-sectional studies discussed above, suggesting a greater use of targetlike routines and fine-tuning through more mitigation and complex lexico-syntactic features with increasing grammatical competence (see Kasper & Rose, 2002).

Chen (2006), for example, observing a Taiwanese graduate student’s email practice during her studies in the US for two and a half years, found that her email communication with professors improved over time. Initially, she relied predominantly on displaying both a needy and coercive tone and failing to show
status-appropriate politeness. However, gradually she learned how to employ query preparatory strategies and expressed greater sensitivity to speaker-hearer role relationships via effective use of supportive moves and lexico-syntactic modification. Chen attributed these changes to the student’s developing knowledge of the email medium, changing conception of identity, evolving pragmalinguistic competence, and importantly, her developing conception of politeness in student-professor interaction and realization of culture-specific politeness as a result of being socialized into the target culture. Similarly, Schauer (2008), observing L2 German learners of English in the UK for one academic year, found that over time the learners increased their use of indirect requests while decreasing their use of direct requests. They also developed a broader repertoire of request strategies, which allowed them to vary their requests according to the context of the interaction.

A number of studies on requests by learners of languages other than English in the study-abroad context have also revealed that learners gradually acquire the pragmatic norms of the TL community. Shively (2011), studying seven American learners of Spanish over one semester of sojourn in Spain, found a shift from speaker- to hearer-oriented requests among the learners when interacting in service encounters, demonstrating a closer approximation to the NS norms. This finding is consistent with earlier findings regarding learners of Spanish (e.g., Felix-Brasdefer, 2007; Pinto, 2002). Shively also found a shift towards more directness among the learners as they learned to adopt the NS requestive behavior in the context of the service encounter. Similarly, Owen (2001) reported a closer approximation to the NS strategy use by American study-abroad learners of Russian compared to those who did not have the same experience. Although some aspects of the learners’ requests still remained different from the NS use, Owen concluded that the study-abroad program had a positive impact on the learners’ pragmatic abilities.

In addition to the increased use of targetlike strategies, research has also shown an increase in the use of targetlike modification by L2 learners over the course of their sojourn abroad (Barron, 2003; Bataller, 2010; Cohen & Shively, 2007; Schauer, 2007, 2009). Barron (2003), following the pragmatic development of 33 Irish learners of German in a one-year study-abroad program in Germany, found that the learners increased their use of lexico-phrasal modifiers over time, towards the NS norms. However, there was little evidence of development in their use of syntactic modifiers, suggesting that these types of modifiers may be acquired later than the former. Cohen & Shively (2007) found that after staying for one semester in a Spanish- or in a French-speaking country and receiving intervention on language and culture strategies, the learners became more aware of mitigating their requests, although their frequency of use of verbal downgrading still fell short of the NS norms. Similar findings were reported in Schauer (2007, 2009), who found that study-abroad German learners of English
developed a much broader range of both internal and external modifiers as compared to at-home learners.

As with studies that suggest a superiority of second language (SL) settings to foreign language (FL) settings (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Kitao, 1990; Koike, 1989), the advantages of study-abroad learners in the above reviewed studies might be attributed to a number of factors. First, residency in the TL environment can provide them not only opportunities for noticing and obtaining pragmatic input, but also opportunities for engaging in interaction with NSs and practicing the input, thus developing control over it (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; see also Bialystok, 1993, 1994; Schmidt 1993, 1995, 2001, for a discussion of the role of input in L2 pragmatic development). Learning a language outside the context where it is spoken, on the other hand, does not seem to facilitate both contextual familiarity and exposure to the TL patterns (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987), nor does it give learners sufficient opportunities for sustained, meaningful language use. Besides, as Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) pointed out, SL learners who experience successful communication with NSs might be even more motivated to use the language. FL learners, in contrast, are often set back by grammar-based instruction and tests and thus attend more to grammar than language use.

It should be noted, however, that not all studies supported the claim that L2 pragmatic development is less successful in FL settings. Niezgoda and Roever (2001), replicating Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei’s (1998) study with two other groups of ESL and EFL learners, found that their highly motivated EFL learners indeed demonstrated a fairly high level of pragmatic awareness. In a follow-up to his earlier study (1996), Roever (2001) also found that the most proficient learners who had not stayed in the TL environment reached a high level of comprehension of TL pragmatic routines. The findings of these studies indicate that although FL settings may offer more limited opportunities for L2 learning, pragmatic development is possible if learners are highly motivated (see H. M. Cook, 2001; DuFon, 1999; Kasper, 2009; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Ushioda, 2007) and supported by appropriate instruction (see Alcon-Soler, 2008; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Taguchi, 2011).

Overall, the growing body of research on L2 requests in the last few decades has contributed greatly to our understanding of how this speech act is performed and acquired by learners in different learning contexts. However, this body of research is not without limitations. First, many earlier studies are based on discourse completion task (DCT) data (see Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012), which are often criticized for their shortcomings in representing authentic speech and studying interaction (see Kasper, 2008). Interactional data such as natural discourse or role plays are therefore required in future research in order to support a more interactive approach to the study of
L2 pragmatic development. Second, because earlier studies focused on a fairly limited range of TLs, such as English, French, German, or Spanish as an L2, it is not clear how speakers develop pragmatic competence in a wider range of TLs. Future research should therefore aim to expand the range of the TLs under inquiry, thus contributing further to the field of L2 pragmatics acquisition. Finally, although a great number of recent studies have investigated the impact of study abroad on L2 request development, few studies have actually addressed the effects of different lengths of stay (e.g., Schauer, 2008). This question offers important implications for the teaching and learning of L2 pragmatics and certainly deserves future research attention.

Study

Research questions

Informed by the literature on the acquisition of L2 requests above, this study addresses the following three research questions:

1. How do learners of Vietnamese as an L2 make requests in Vietnamese?
2. To what extent do low- and high-proficiency learners vary in the way they make requests in Vietnamese?
3. To what extent does length of residency in the TL environment affect the way the learners make requests?

Methodology

Participants

Eighteen learners of L2 Vietnamese at low- and high-proficiency levels participated in this study. At the time of data collection, the learners were taking Vietnamese courses in language schools in Hanoi. They were selected from a larger pool of 29 learners who responded to the researchers' advertisement for recruitment of research participants. The learners were first grouped according to their proficiency levels. The low-proficiency group (hereafter referred to as “Low Group”) comprised 13 learners who were learning Vietnamese at the preintermediate and intermediate levels. The high-proficiency group (hereafter referred to as “High Group”) included 16 learners who were enrolled in the upper-intermediate and advanced courses of Vietnamese. Since there were no standardized tests of Vietnamese as L2, the learners' proficiency levels were determined on the basis of the levels of the courses of Vietnamese they were undertaking and by their self-ratings. Each of the learners was then assigned a unique number. Finally, a sample of eight low-proficiency and 10 high-proficiency learners, representing 60% of their respective groups, was randomly
drawn and included in the study. Table 1 presents the background information on these learners.

Table 1. Background information on the learner participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>High proficiency</th>
<th>Low proficiency</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19–25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months–1 year</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 3 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of stay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short stay (under 1 year)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long stay (over 1 year)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eleven of the learners were female and seven were male. Their ages ranged from 19 to 44. The learners came from various first language (L1) backgrounds, with five Polish NSs, three Russian NSs, one French NS, one Laotian NS, four NSs of different dialects of Chinese, and four NSs of different varieties of English. The learners also varied greatly in their lengths of study of Vietnamese. Two had been learning Vietnamese for less than one year; 11 had been learning the language between one and three years; and 5 had been learning it from three years onward. The learners’ lengths of residency in Vietnam also varied greatly between 6 months and 11 years. Eight learners who had been staying for less than one year were streamed into the ‘Short-stay’ group, and 10 who had been staying for more than one year were placed into the ‘Long-stay’ group. The learners’ bio-data revealed that many of them had had substantial exposure to Vietnamese use outside the classroom, mostly via interaction with Vietnamese NS friends and mass media such as Vietnamese TV programs and newspapers. Informal communication with the learners revealed that many of them were not explicitly taught how Vietnamese NSs make requests in different scenarios.

Data collection

In this study, six role-play (RP) scenarios were designed to elicit learners’ requests (Appendices A and B), and the learners’ performances were audio recorded. The RP was selected because on the one hand, it allows for impromptu speech production in conversational sequences, thus sharing a number of similarities with natural speech production (Kasper, 2008). On the other hand, unlike naturally occurring discourse, it allows
us to observe how context factors such as power, distance, and imposition (see Brown & Levinson, 1987) affect the speaker’s choice of pragmatic strategies. Its other strength is that it can yield a large corpus of data in a relatively short time. We acknowledge, however, that RPs are fundamentally different activities from natural interaction because RPs are pretence without consequences for the participants. However, Okada (2010) argues that in RPs participants draw on their interactional competencies by default. This justifies the use of RPs in teaching/training and testing, and cautious use in research.

The scenarios, some of which were adapted from Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and Hassall (2003), varied in the relative power between S and H but not in the social distance between them. They included (1) borrowing a computer from a friend, (2) borrowing lecture notes from a classmate, (3) asking a roommate to return a book to the library, (4) asking a teacher to write a letter of recommendation, (5) asking a teacher for a deadline extension, and (6) asking a supervisor to change the date of an upcoming meeting. Situations 1 through 3 described an equal power relationship (friend-friend), and the relationship described in Situations 4 through 6 is characteristic of an unequal power (request directed at a lecturer/supervisor). The social distance, however, was kept constant: All the situations described a close relationship between S and H. In order to avoid the researcher’s subjectivity as much as possible, before the role play took place, the scenarios were given to the learner participants to rate the degree of imposition exerted on H, using a Likert 5-point scale. Results showed that the degree of imposition was rated ‘low’ in Situations 1 (Computer) and 2 (Lecture Notes; means falling below 3.0); ‘medium’ in Situations 3 (Library), 5 (Assignment), and 6 (Meeting; means between 3.0 and 3.5); and ‘high’ in Situation 4 (Letter of Reference; mean over 3.5). Table 2 summarizes the information about these six role-play scenarios.

All the scenarios contained a complicating factor that prompted the participants to produce more requests (see Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012). This factor was known only to the interlocutor and was kept confidential from the participants. In Scenario 1 (Computer), the participant wanted to use the interlocutor’s computer, but the complication was that the interlocutor was chatting with her boyfriend who was celebrating his birthday alone in another town. In Scenario 2 (Lecture Notes), the participant wanted to borrow the interlocutor’s lecture notes, but the interlocutor was working on assignments at the moment and needed the notes at hand. In Scenario 3 (Book), the participant asked the interlocutor to return a book to the library on the way to school. However, the interlocutor had other commitments. In Scenario 4 (Letter of reference), the participant urgently needed a letter of reference from the interlocutor, but the interlocutor would not be able to write the letter
immediately. In Scenario 5 (Extension), the interlocutor was going away soon and would prefer the participant to submit her or his draft before the interlocutor left. Finally, in Scenario 6 (Appointment) the interlocutor was fully booked and would not be able to see the participant another day unless she or he could come after office hours.

All scenarios were written in simple Vietnamese and translated into English to facilitate the participants’ comprehension (Appendix B). Before being used for the present study, the role plays were piloted with a group of NSs of Vietnamese. Adjustments were then made to the instruction and scenario descriptions to enhance their comprehensibility. Also, because participants may find it difficult to perform in a role play if the tasks are not realistic (see Bonikowska, 1988; Kasper, 2008), before the role play took place, the participants were asked to rate the extent to which they felt they were able to imagine themselves in each scenario, using a Likert 5-point scale. Results indicated that the learners scored quite highly on all scenarios (means varying from 3.9 to 4.6), suggesting that they were familiar enough with the situations. Based on this result, all scenarios were kept for data collection. Each learner then role-played all six scenarios in Vietnamese in a random order for approximately one hour with the Vietnamese researcher or a Vietnamese research assistant, who was carefully trained in the procedure. We collected 108 role-play conversations, which contained 312 requests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>situation</th>
<th>social distance</th>
<th>relative power</th>
<th>degree of imposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>asking a friend to lend you her computer</td>
<td>close</td>
<td>equal</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asking a classmate to lend you her lecture notes</td>
<td>close</td>
<td>equal</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asking a roommate to return a book to the library for you</td>
<td>close</td>
<td>equal</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asking a lecturer to write you a letter of reference</td>
<td>close</td>
<td>low to high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asking a lecturer to extend the deadline for submitting your assignment</td>
<td>close</td>
<td>low to high</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of procedure

The role-play conversations were transcribed and data were then coded, using Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper’s (1989) taxonomy with slight adaptations to cater for the specific features of politeness in Vietnamese (see details below). According to Vũ (1997), politeness in modern Vietnamese incorporates what she terms lịch sự lể độ [respectful politeness] and lịch sự chiến lược [strategic politeness]. Respectful politeness indexes social relationship and is characteristic of, in Vũ’s terms, lễ phép [respectfulness] and đúng mực [propriety]. Respectfulness involves showing respect to people of higher power, whereas propriety involves showing proper respect to people of equal and lower power and keeping distance vs. solidarity in conformity with the nature of the given speaker-hearer relationship. Thus, ‘respectfulness’ politeness is necessarily normative. Linguistic devices that help to convey this kind of politeness, according to Vũ, include address terms, honorifics, or lexical means with similar function. Interlocutors make these linguistic choices depending on the relative power and social distance between themselves. For example, when addressing an older person (i.e., having higher power in Vietnamese culture), a younger person is not expected to use a ‘no-naming’ style but needs to choose appropriate address terms to indicate his or her lower status and acknowledge the other person's higher status (e.g., em – anh/chị [younger sibling – elder sister/brother], cháu – chú/cô/bác [niece/nephew – uncle/aunt], cháu – ông/bà [grandson/granddaughter – grandfather/grandmother]). Choices outside of these expected pairs will most likely invoke other participation frameworks.

The other dimension, strategic politeness, on the other hand, is bound to specific communicative intents, though still constrained by social relationships. This type of politeness involves what Vũ terms khéo léo [delicacy] and tê nhị [tact] and functions as a means of minimizing the disadvantages and maximizing the advantages of the situation so that participants can achieve their communicative goals. Linguistic means that help to achieve ‘strategic’ politeness include indirectness and lexical items with mitigation functions such as làm ơn [doing a favor], xin lỗi [excuse me], hổ/giúp/giúm [help], có thể [maybe/may], and so on (Vũ, 1997).

Using the above frameworks, requests were coded according to their (1) levels of directness, (2) strategy types, and (3) modifiers. The Vietnamese researcher and the Vietnamese research assistant coded the data independently and achieved an agreement rate of 90%. The coding categories of request
perspectives, strategy types, and modifiers are presented in the lists below. They are illustrated with examples from the NS pilot data (symbol “NS”) and the learner data (symbol “L”). Modifications were counted each time they occurred in the requests.

Categories of direct, conventionally indirect, and nonconventionally indirect requests

1. Direct
   1.1. Imperative: Mood derivable structures in full or elliptical form.

   Example 1
   (NS) Thì cho tôi muốn, cuối giờ
   DisM give me (casual) borrow end lesson
   So let me borrow, after class
   cho tôi muốn và nhé
   give me (casual) borrow notebook AlignM
   let me borrow your notes, OK?

   Example 2
   (L) Làm ơn, cô giáo cho thêm thời gian
   do favor teacher (female) give more time
   Please, give me more time
   để viết xong
   for write complete
   to finish writing

   1.2. Performative: Containing performative verbs that denote the request such as đề nghị [request], bảo [tell], nhờ [ask for help], xin [beg], etc., with or without hedges (e.g., muốn [would like/want]).

   Example 3
   (NS) Thì thì em muốn nhờ
   So then younger sibling want ask for help
   So I’d like to ask you to help me
   chỉ là chị đi đến
   older sister that older sister go arrive
   when you get to
   trường thì chị tạt qua thư viện
   school then older sister drop by library
   school, please stop by the library
   trả sách hỡ em với
   return book help younger sibling AlignM
   and return a book for me.
Example 4

(L)  Em          nhơ  cô giáo
I (student) ask for help teacher (female)
I’d like to ask you to help
chuyen nôp luân văn
move my thesis submission (deadline)

Example 5

(L) Cô               phả  ỉ  viế  t  thư  này
Teacher (female) must  write letter this
You have to write this letter
cho  em  để  em  được nôp thư  này
for me so I can include it in my application
và  được học bổng(L)
and PosM scholarship
and get scholarship

1.3. Obligation  & necessity:  Containing verbs that denote obligation and necessity such as nến [should], cần (phải) [need to], and phải [have to].

Example 6

(NS) Em          chỉ cần thà  yıllarda
I (student) only need  teacher
I just need you
cho  em  nửa tiếng
give me half hour
to give me half an hour

Example 7

(L) Em          muốn  chỉ
Younger sibling want older sister
I want you
trả   quyền sách của em
return book of younger sibling
to return my book
vào thư viện
into library
to the library

1.4. Want statement: Containing verbs that denote S’s needs, wishes, and desires such as muốn [want], cần [need], and phải [have to].
2. Conventionally indirect

2.1. Suggestory formula: Utterances beginning with Thế thì [so], Không thì [if not then], or Hay là [or] and pronounced in a rising intonation. Suggestions often come after an initial failure to get H to perform the act.

Example 8

(NS) Không thì chine nói chuyện
No then older sister speak story
How about you talk

với anh ấy một lát nữa
with him a bit more
to him a bit more

rồi chị nói xong thì
then older sister speak finish then
and then when you’re done

cho em muốn
give younger sibling borrow
you can lend it to me

một tý được không?
one bit possible no?
for a moment?

Example 9

(L) Thế thì em sẽ copy bài này
So then younger brother will copy lesson this
How about I copy the notes

và trả vô cho chị?
and return notebook to older sister?
and then give them back to you?

2.2. Query preparatory: S refers to the preparatory condition for the realization of a request. For example, S checks H’s ability/willingness to perform the act, or asks for permission to perform the act. Very often, the utterance takes the form of a question.³
Example 10

(NS) Em muốn hỏi chị xem
Younger brother want ask older sister see
I’d like to ask if

chị có thể cho em muốn
older sister can give younger brother borrow
you can lend me

máy tính một lát được không?
computer one bit possible no?
your computer for a moment?

Example 11

(L) Nếu em gặp cô
If I (student) see teacher (female)
Is it possible if I see you

lúc 9 giờ được không?
at 9 hour possible no?
at 9 o’clock?

3. Nonconventionally indirect

3.1. Hints: S’s intent can be inferred thanks to his or her reference to the precondition for the realization of the request (e.g., H’s availability) or to the reason for the request. Unlike a query preparatory, a hint is not conventionalized.4

Example 12

(NS) Em xin lỗi em chưa
I (student) apologize I (student) not yet
I’m sorry I did not

làm bài tập về nhà.
do homework

Tuần trước em bị ốm.
Week last I (student) NegM sick
I was sick last week.

Em có giấy chứng nhận
I (student) have certificate
I have a doctor’s note

của bác sĩ đây có a
of doctor here teacher (female) PolM
here with me
Categories of request modifiers

1. **External modifiers**: Supportive moves that occur before or after the head act.

   1.1. **Steers**: Phrases that S uses to prepare H for the request. S may do so by checking if H is available to perform the request. Steers are used to avoid being abrupt and inconsiderate.

   **Example 13**

   (NS) Chị ơi
   Older sister vocative
   Sister,
   đang làm gì đây?
   Prog do what there?
   what are you doing

   **Example 14**

   (L) Bạn ơi hôm nay
   Friend vocative today
   My friend,
   bạn có bạn không?
   friend yes busy no
   are you busy today?

1.2. **Presequences**: S announces that she or he is going to make a request or checks if H is willing to hear the request.

   **Example 15**

   (NS) Cô ơi em có việc
   Teacher (female) vocative I (student) have matter
   Teacher, there’s something
   muốn nhờ có
   want ask for help teacher (female)
   I need your help with
   một tý được không a?
   a bit possible no PolM?
   is it OK?

   **Example 16**

   (L) Cô ơi em có
   Teacher (female) vocative I (student) have
   Teacher, I have to ask you
   việc một chút a
   matter a bit PolM
   about something
1.3. **Grounders:** Excuses, reasons, or explanations that S uses to justify the request and thus appear reasonable.

*Example 17*

(L) Chị ơi em có thể
Older sister vocative younger sibling can
Sister, could I

sử dụng máy tính chị máy tiếng không?
use computer older sister few hours no?
use your computer for some hours?

Máy tính em bị hỏng
Computer me NegM broke down.
Mine broke down.

1.4. **Disarmers:** Utterances that S uses to show awareness of the pressure that the request may place on H. S might want to acknowledge the pressure and/or apologize.

*Example 18*

(NS) Chị ơi em có việc
Older sister vocative younger sibling have matter
Sister, I have to ask you about something

này phiền chị quá nhưng mà
this bother older sister much but
I know it is very inconvenient for you but

buộc phải hỏi chị
forced must ask older sister
I have no other choice

*Example 19*

(L) Vâng em biết cô giáo rất bận
PolM I (student) know teacher (female) very busy
I know you are very busy

nhưng em muốn cô giáo
but I (student) want teacher (female)
but I want you to

viết hồ em
write help I (student)
write the letter for me
1.5. **Imposition minimizers:** Utterances that S uses to free H from the imposition of the request.

**Example 20**

(L) Nếu bạn đi học
If friend go study
If you go to school,

tớ có thể nhờ bạn
I (casual) can ask for help friend
can I ask you to help

trả hộ tớ không?
return help me no?
return the book?

1.6. **Committers:** S may want to minimize the cost for H by expressing compromise with H’s conditions or offering to make it easier for H to perform the act.

**Example 21**

(NS) Thật ra nếu em có gang
Truth out if I (student) try
Actually, if I try hard

sắp xếp thời gian để đưa cho thầy
arrange time in order to give to teacher
to arrange my time to give it to you

thứ năm này có được không?
Thursday this yes possible no?
this Thursday, is it possible?

Sớm một ngày so với hẹn
Early one day compare with deadline
It’s a day earlier than the due date,

hối vất vả cho em
a bit hard for me (student)
which is a bit hard for me

nhưng em sẽ có gang
but I (student) will try
but I will try
1.7. **Understatement:** S may want to understate the request so as to convince H of the minimal cost of the act. Understatements normally occur when H shows hesitation to help.

*Example 22*

(NS) Cái này chỉ mười phút thôi mà cô
This just ten minutes only StaM teacher (female)
It should take just only ten minutes

1.8. **Offer of compensation:** S may also reduce the cost for H by offering H compensation or a reward.

*Example 23*

(NS) Thôi em trả hỗ chỉ
DisM younger sibling return help older sister
Alright, you return

quyền sách chiều chỉ naïu cóm cho
book afternoon older sister cook for
the book for me, I will cook for you this afternoon

1.9. **Sympathy seekers:** S may want to appeal for H’s sympathy so as to increase the chance of success of the request. This category is absent in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) but has been added to fit our data.

*Example 24*

(NS) Thôi cô thông cảm
DisM teacher (female) sympathize
Please understand.

*Example 25*

(L) Nếu em không gửi
If I (student) not send
If I don’t submit it now

thì ngày mai em sẽ có
then tomorrow I (student) will have
I will have

rất nhiều vấn đề
very many problem
a lot of problems tomorrow
1.10. **Smoothers:** S may want to appeal for H’s willingness to perform the act by offering H a compliment/appreciation or by emphasizing H’s role.

**Example 25**

(L)  Bạn tốt bụng làm mà  
Friend kind-hearted very EmM 
You’re such a kind person, aren’t you

1.11. **Thanking:** S may want to increase the benefit for H by expressing gratitude to H for the act.

2. **Internal modifiers:** Occur within and form part of the head act.

2.1. **Address terms:** Address terms help to express the speaker-hearer relationship (i.e., respectful politeness). The wrong choice of address term may threaten H’s face and thus might be associated with a lack of politeness. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) do not categorize address terms as request modifiers but because these linguistic features function as markers of respectful politeness in Vietnamese, we classify them as a type of internal modifier.

2.2. **Politeness markers:** Particles, honorifics, and verbs that express respect to H (e.g., vâng, dạ, ạ [honorifics], làm ơn [do favor], xin [beg], cho [give], nhờ [help]). This category is absent in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) but has been added to fit our data.

2.3. **Downgraders:** Adverbial modifiers that help S to downgrade the act (e.g., một chút, một tý [one bit]).

2.4. **Downtoners:** Verbs and sentence modifiers that S uses to reduce the pressure the request may place on H such as có lẽ, có thể, chắc là [perhaps, possibly, maybe/may, probably], etc.

2.5. **Appealers:** Particles or phrases S uses to call for H’s understanding and sympathy (e.g., nhé, với, dĩ, cái [alignment markers], được không? [possible no?]). This category is absent in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) but has been added to fit our data.

**Results and discussion**

*How do learners of Vietnamese as an L2 make requests in Vietnamese?*

The majority of learners’ requests were made up of both direct and conventionally indirect strategies (41% and 50%, respectively), suggesting that they did not have a clear preference for either level of directness. However, the learners tended to opt for nonconventionally indirect requests with a relatively low frequency (9% of the time), probably because they perceived the levels of imposition in most role-play situations as being relatively low and medium (Figure 1).
A close look at the learners’ uses of individual strategy types also indicated that they did not prefer one single strategy. Rather, they tended to spread their choices over different types, quite unlike NSs of Vietnamese, who show far less variety in their choice of request strategy (cf. Vũ, 1997, 1999 – discussed below). For example, 29% of the learners’ requests were made up of query preparatory formulas, 21% of suggestory formulas, 20% of want statements, and 14% of imperatives. The other formulas were also employed from time to time. What is more, Table 3 shows that the standard deviation computed for each strategy type was quite large, suggesting that the learners seemed to vary largely among themselves in their choice of a particular strategy type.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for individual strategy types used by learners in all six situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>strategy types</th>
<th>minimum</th>
<th>maximum</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>std. deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>imperative</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performative</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>want statement</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obligation</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suggestory</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued...
Table 3. Descriptive statistics for individual strategy types used by learners in all six situations (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>strategy types</th>
<th>minimum</th>
<th>maximum</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>std. deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>query preparatory</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hints</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above findings were not surprising, as in many previous ILP studies, L2 learners were found to be less consistent performers than NSs. House and Kasper (1987), for example, found that while NSs of British English consistently chose query preparatory in all situations, German and Danish learners of English showed a more varied preference. Similar results were reported in Blum-Kulka (1982), Færch and Kasper (1989), Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993), and Niki and Tajika (1994). Nguyễn (2008b), finding a large variability among Vietnamese learners of English in their choice of realization strategies for criticizing and responding to criticism, argued that because the learners were uncertain of the appropriate norms of “doing things with words” in the TL, there seemed to be no common rule of choice within the group. The same argument could be made concerning the lack of homogeneity within the present group of learners. The learners’ variability could also be explained by the fact that they came from different L1 backgrounds, which might have different pragmatic norms.

Figure 2. Distribution of learners’ external and internal modifiers.
Figure 2 shows that the learners tended to draw more heavily on external modifiers \((M=2.02, \ SD=.51)\) than on internal modifiers \((M=.88, \ SD=.50)\) when softening their requests in Vietnamese. Again, this finding supported previous studies (mentioned above) showing that high-intermediate and advanced learners tended to prefer supportive moves mostly for their explicit politeness function and their easy accessibility. Internal modifiers, on the other hand, might have caused learners greater difficulty because their pragmatic meanings were less noticeable and because they added more structural complexity to the speech act, thus requiring more processing effort (Hassall, 2001).

The findings of the present study suggest that internal modifiers might be challenging not only for learners of inflected languages such as English and German (as reported in Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hendriks, 2008; House & Kasper, 1987; Nguyễn, 2008a; Woodfield, 2008), but also for learners of an isolating language like Vietnamese, in which the addition of internal modifiers does not result in morphological changes to the structure. The difficulty in the latter case might stem from the fact that internal modifiers perhaps do not operate, both formally and functionally, in the same way in the learners’ L1s and the TL (see Hassall, 2001, for further discussion).

For example, verb tenses (e.g., past tense with present time reference) typically function as internal modifiers in English (Nguyễn, 2008a). However, this is not the case for Vietnamese, in which verb tenses only indicate or emphasize the time factor. As Vũ (1997, 1999) pointed out, Vietnamese NS requests are more typically ‘internally’ modified by means of address terms, politeness markers (including such verbs as làm ơn [do a favor], xin [beg], cho [give], hô [help], and the honorific ạ), and appealers that are alignment markers (e.g., nhé, với, cái, đi), which might not be the case for English requests. Another example is the case of the politeness expression làm ơn [doing a favor], which is more or less functionally equivalent to the English please. However, while please can occur literally anywhere in the head act (e.g., Can you please pass the salt? Please, can you pass the salt? Can you pass the salt, please?), làm ơn can occur only between the subject and the verb in the head act.

As competent L1 users, adult learners enjoy knowledge of pragmatic universals (Kasper, 1992), and thus might already be very well aware that a speech act can be ‘internally’ modified. However, the different formal and functional operations of internal modifiers and the different form-function mappings in learners’ L1s and the L2s might present certain challenges. Therefore, as Nguyễn (2008a) argued, learners might be driven to rely on external modifiers for expressing politeness in an attempt to compensate for their difficulty with internal modifiers.
Concerning the effects of situational variation on learners’ requests, the results of chi-square tests showed that learners generally did not opt for differential levels of directness in situations varying in relative power \( \chi^2(1, N=312) = .56, p > .05, \text{n.s.} \) and degrees of imposition \( \chi^2(2, N=162) = 2.41, p > .05, \text{n.s.} \). However, looking at individual strategy types, it seemed that learners employed more imperatives in equal power situations but more hints in unequal power situations \( \chi^2(5, N=329) = 34.5, p < .001 \). The other strategies (i.e., want statements, suggestory formulas, and query preparatory), on the other hand, were used more or less invariably in all situations. Although there is no easy explanation for this behavior, we might assume that perhaps learners’ decisions were influenced by their perceptions of the pragmatic properties of the given strategies. Put differently, because imperatives are mood derivable, they tend to express the most direct type of requests. Hints, on the other hand, represent the act the most subtly due to a complete absence of transparency in S’s intent. The learners might rely on this knowledge to discriminate their contexts of use. For the other strategies, because they are not found at the two extreme ends of the directness continuum like imperatives and hints, but rather in between the ends (see Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), learners might have more difficulty mapping them onto the appropriate contexts of use in the L2.

Finally, the learners did not vary their requesting strategies in situations varying in degrees of imposition \( \chi^2(6, 171) = 6.0, p > .05, \text{n.s.} \). This was probably because from the learners’ points of view, the situations did not differ greatly in this aspect. Indeed, their scores on the degrees of imposition in the six situations did not show much discrimination (ranging between 2.7 and 3.7).

**To what extent do low- and high-proficiency learners vary in the way they make requests in Vietnamese?**

The High and Low Groups did not differ in their frequencies of use of direct \( t(16) = 1.74, p > .05, \text{n.s.} \) and nonconventionally indirect requests \( t(16) = .86, p > .05, \text{n.s.} \). However, the High Group opted for conventionally indirect requests considerably more often than their less proficient peers \( t(16) = 2.44, p < .05 \) (Table 4). Looking at individual strategy types, the two groups differed only in their use of imperatives \( t(16) = 2.51, p < .05 \) and want statements \( t(16) = 3.60, p < .05 \). Specifically, the Low Group employed a greater number of want statements, whereas the High Group relied significantly on imperatives (Figure 3).

### Table 4. Distribution of direct, conventionally indirect, and nonconventionally indirect requests by proficiency levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>low proficiency</th>
<th>high proficiency</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>direct requests</td>
<td>66/130</td>
<td>63/182</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean .51</td>
<td>Mean .35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD .21</td>
<td>SD .19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The High Group's preference for conventionally indirect requests confirms the findings of many earlier ILP studies reviewed above. However, what is striking is these learners' over-use of imperatives. Indeed, this group employed imperatives almost as frequently as suggestory formulas and query preparatory strategies, and even more frequently than hints (Figure 4). We would expect learners at this proficiency level to rely no longer on such direct, formulaic requests, which, in fact, are characteristic of a much earlier stage of development (Achiba, 2003; Ellis, 1992; Felix-Brasdefer, 2007; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Schauer, 2008; Schmidt, 1983).

Figure 3. Distribution of imperatives and want statements by proficiency levels.
Nonetheless, looking at Vietnamese NS requests, it becomes clear that the High Group’s choice of imperatives might reflect targetlike behavior. Vũ (1997, 1999) collected naturally occurring requests by a group of Vietnamese NSs of Hanoi dialect as they were communicating in various social contexts. She found a striking preference for directness by her participants. For example, more than 90% of the requests she gathered were imperatives. Also, 76.7% of the Vietnamese NS respondents in her study did not consider barely mitigated imperatives inappropriate while 64% deemed mitigated imperatives to be polite. When comparing her own data with Blum-Kulka’s (1989) data on requests in a number of L1s, Vũ concluded that Vietnamese NSs tended to prefer direct requests to a considerably greater extent than NSs of many languages. Therefore, the frequent use of ‘imperative requests’ by the High Group in the present study, though still far behind the NS level of use (20%, as opposed to 90.5% as reported in Vu, 1999), seemed to display a closer approximation to the NS tendency, in comparison to the Low Group.

This NS approximation becomes more evident when we consider the politeness strategies that the High Group employed in realizing imperative requests. The analysis of their imperative samples shows that the learners tended to take into account both respectful and strategic politeness, just like any NS of Vietnamese, and in fact successfully achieved both types of politeness. For example, they correctly added address terms and honorifics in conformity
to the speaker-hearer relationship. They effectively added supportive moves that help minimize the imposition of the requests such as disarmers, imposition minimizers, sympathy seekers, and those that help maximize the benefits to H such as offers of compensation and smoothers (see examples of the categories in the section on analytical procedures). They also successfully employed politeness markers and appealers with similar mitigation functions. Indeed, their imperatives show strikingly similar features to the NS sample (taken from the pilot data). Examples 27–28 compare how a High learner and a NS used external modifiers to support their imperatives, and examples 3–13 illustrate how High learners and NSs used internal modifiers.

*Example 27*: High learner sample, request to borrow class notes

(L: learner; I: interlocutor):

01 L: hôm qua bạn có đi học không?  
  yesterday friend yes go study no?  
  did you go to class yesterday?  

02 I: ừ ý  
  yes yes  
  yes, I did  

03 L: thầy cô giáo có cho nhiều à cho  
  DisM teacher (female) yes give much ah give  
  did the teacher assign  
  về nhà nhiều bài tập không?  
  return home much homework no?  
  a lot of homework?  

04 I: nhiều, làm bò ra  
  much, do on all legs  
  heaps, we have heaps to do  

05 L: thầy à cho tới muốn với cái!  
  really, give me (casual) borrow notebook AlignM  
  really? let me borrow your notes, then!  

06 I: nhưng mà cần dùng cần làm vì  
  but need use need much because  
  but I really need to use them now  

  xem mới làm được bài  
  look CondM do possible homework  
  because I can only do my homework with the notes  

07 L: thì tôi muốn một kỳ thôi  
  EmM I (casual) borrow a bit only  
  wWell, I’ll just borrow them for a short time,  

  chỉ chép nhanh thôi xong giả luôn mà  
  just copy quickly only then return right away StanM  
  I’ll just copy them and return them right away
I'll just copy them and return them right away.

Well, I'll just borrow them for a short time, because I can only do my homework with the notes. But I really need to use them now.

I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual). I'll make very quick notes and I'll try very quickly finish I (casual).
Example 28: NS, request to return a book

(P: participant; I: interlocutor)

01 P: hôm nay ấy đến trường lúc mấy giờ đây?
   today you(casual) go school at what time EmM?
   what time are you going to school today?

02 I: tí nữa đi bây giờ, sao?
   a bit more go now why?
   very soon, why?

03 P: tí nữa đi bây giờ.
   a bit more go now
   very soon.

   ừ the cho tôi gửi quyền sách
   yes so give me (casual) send book
   uh so let me ask you to take a book

   gửi trả thư viện.
   send return library
   to return to the library.

   hôm nay đến hẹn trả rồi
   today arrive due return already
   it’s due today

04 I: thế sao câu không lên?
   DisM why you not go up?
   but why don’t you go to the library yourself?

05 P: ưu hôm nay đang mê, không đi được
   yes today prog. tired not go possible
   I’m so tired today, I can’t go

06 I: thế nhưng mà tớ, nhưng mà
   DisM but I (casual) but
   but I, but

   phải trả lúc mấy giờ?
   must return what time?
   what time is it due?
07 P: chỉ đi qua thư viện bỏ vào,
just go pass library drop enter
just go by the library and drop it

bỏ vào thư viện thời mà, có gì đâu
drop in library only StaM nothing StaM
drop it off at the library, that’s it

08 I: nhưng mà trả lúc mấy giờ
but return what time
but what time is it due,
vì tôi học đến 3 giờ cơ,
because I (casual) study until 3 hour EmM
because I have a class until 3
lớp tôi đến 3 giờ cơ
class me (casual) until 3 hour EmM
my class goes until 3

09 P: thì lúc nào qua cũng được,
EmM anytime pass EmM possible
any time would do
lúc nào cũng được
anytime EmM possible
any time

10 I: thôi rồi, thế thì đi học sớm
DisM ok already so then go study early
ok then, so I’ll go to school early
dưa qua cũng được
pass by EmM ok
and return it

11 P: ừ tôi cảm ơn
yes I (casual) thank you
yes thank you

Example 27 shows that the learner did not convey her intentions abruptly. Instead, she opened the conversation with ‘steers’ (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) in turns 1 and 3, leading H into the topic naturally. This was similar to the way the NS in Example 28 approached his interlocutor (turn 1). When initially refused, the learner employed strategies such as understating the trouble involved in the request (i.e., understatement, turns 7, 9, 11, 17, 21), justifying her action (i.e., grounder, turn 13), complimenting her interlocutor (i.e., smoother, turns 13, 15), and immediately agreeing to this person’s suggestion (i.e., committer, turn 19), so as to get this person to agree to her request. These were similar to the way the NS led the conversation to achieve his intention in Example 28 (e.g., grounder in turn 5, understatement in turn 7, and imposition minimizer in turn 9).

Examples 29–39 show that the High learners were able to substantially reduce the threat of their imperative requests by employing targetlike internal modifiers.
High learner samples:

Example 29

Em muốn máy tính của chị một chút!
Young sister borrow computer of elder sister a bit!
Please let me borrow your computer for just a moment!

Example 30

Bạn ơi cho tôi muốn
Friend vocative give me (casual) borrow
My friend, please let me borrow
máy bạn cái!
computer friend AlignM
your computer!

Example 31

Chị giúp em đi!
Elder sister help younger sibling AlignM
Sister, please help me!

Example 32

Anh xin muốn nhé!
Elder brother beg borrow AlignM
Please let me borrow it!

Example 33

Cô viết giúp cho em nhé!
Teacher (female) write help for I (student) AlignM
Teacher, please write it for me!

Example 34

Cô chỉ viết em sinh viên
Teacher (female) just write I (student) student
You only need to write that I’m
giỏi nhất trong lớp thôi có à!
best in class only teacher (female) PolM
the best student in the class!
NS samples:

Example 35

Mày ơi may cho
You (intimate) vocative you (intimate) give
Hey buddy, let
tao muốn cái máy tính cái
me (intimate) borrow computer AlignM!
me borrow your computer!

Example 36

Vâng cho em dùng một tiếng nhé!
PolM give younger sibling use one hour AlignM
Yes, please let me use it for just one hour!

Example 37

Bạn ơi tôi muốn với cái!
Friend vocative I (casual) borrow notebook AlignM!
My friend, please let me borrow your notebook!

Example 38

Thôi, em trả hồ oh please return
DisM younger sibling return help
chì cuốn sách!
elder sister book
the book for me!

Example 39

Cô cho em
Teacher (female) give me (student)
Please let me have
xin một tuần đi!
beg one week AlignM!
one week!

The High learners addressed higher status interlocutors respectfully (Examples 29, 31, 33, 34) and equal and lower status interlocutors properly (Examples 30, 32), just like the NSs in Examples 35–39 addressed their partners in corresponding relationships. In particular, they were able to put more weight on solidarity and power factors to tailor the degree of their
respectful politeness to different higher status people. For example, they used honorifics for their teacher (Example 34), but not for an older friend (Examples 29, 31). Generally speaking, honorifics would be desirable when a lower status person addresses a higher status person; however, in cases where the status difference is not too large (e.g., a younger friend to an older friend, a junior colleague to a senior colleague) and especially if the relationship is close, their use would be considered unnecessarily ceremonious (khách sáo) and distant (xa cách). The High learners, while showing sufficient respect to their older friends by using appropriate address terms, successfully saved themselves from going unnecessarily formal in a close relationship. What is more, like the NSs in Examples 35–39, they were able to appeal for H’s cooperation and support by using appealers in the form of alignment markers such as cái, đi, nhē, and politeness markers such as giúp, xin, thus avoiding giving H the impression that they were imposing their will on H. As Vũ (1997) pointed out, address forms and appealers (termed modal particles in her study) constitute a majority of Vietnamese politeness devices (65% and 12%, respectively) and are ranked higher by NSs on the politeness continuum as compared to other devices. The High learners employment of these modifier types therefore represented a NS approximation. Therefore, what we can assume from the High Group’s successful use of imperatives is a higher level of pragmatic development as compared to their less proficient peers.

In contrast, the Low Group’s under-use of imperatives as compared to strategies such as want statements, suggestory formulas, query preparatory, and hints (Figure 5) appeared to be consistent with their current stage of development, which was no longer characterized by a reliance on unanalyzed formulas. However, this behavior suggested a deviation from the NS distribution. Most likely, the learners’ linguistic competence allowed them to have full access to this strategy type, but due to their incomplete knowledge of Vietnamese sociopragmatics, they did not use it as appropriately as did their more proficient peers, who had more advanced knowledge of the TL norms.

Overall, the learners’ differential levels of use of imperatives at different stages of development seemed to suggest that like grammar learning, L2 pragmatics learning also involves much constructing and reconstructing of IL knowledge. In this study, the high-proficiency learners had long passed the stage of development where imperatives are predominant. However, in light of the newly acquired L2 pragmatics knowledge, they did not seem to hesitate to use this strategy, although they had acquired sufficient means to express their communicative intentions in a more indirect manner and thus did not seem to hesitate to ‘fall back’ on it.
The Low Group’s heavy reliance on want statements is also consistent with previous studies (e.g., Felix-Brasdefer, 2007; Hassall, 2003; Koike, 1989; Rintell, 1981; Schauer, 2008). Low-proficiency learners have been repeatedly found to make use of statements of personal desire and needs to a greater extent than their more advanced fellow learners and NSs (Hassall, 2003). Koike (1989) attributed this behavior to learners’ strong concern for clarity. In other words, learners tend to prefer formulas that can help to clearly convey their messages. This explanation seemed plausible for the Low Group in the present study, especially when we considered the instances where the learners repeated the strategy a few times to make their intentions explicit (examples 40, 41) or where their initial, more subtle requests were not noticed by H (Examples 42, 43).

Example 40: Low learner, request for a letter of recommendation

01 L: chào cô giáo
greetings, teacher (female)
hello, teacher

02 I: chào em
greetings, you (student)
hello

03 L: em muốn cô giáo viết thư
I (student) want teacher (female) write letter
I want you to write me a letter

giới thiệu của em
introduction of me
of recommendation
04 I: gì hà em?
What is it?

05 L: vì em muốn học bổng,
because I want scholarship
em phải à ba ngày nữa
I must ah three days more
là hết hạn nộp đơn
the application deadline is in three days

06 I: viết thư giới thiệu á?
write a letter of recommendation?

07 L: vâng em biết cô giáo rất bận
yes I know you are very busy
nhưng em muốn cô giáo viết hồ
but I want you to help me and write
ém em à em đã
I uh I (student) Past. that I was
là sinh viên nhất lớp
the best student in the class

Example 41: Low learner, request for a letter of recommendation

01 L: em chào cô à
I (student) greet teacher (female) PolM
hello, teacher

02 I: ừ chào em
yes greetings you (student)
hello

03 L: hôm nay em muốn à nhờ
today I want uh to ask
cô giúp em một việc
teacher (female) help me (student) one matter
for your help with something

04 I: ừ? việc gì?
yes, matter what?
ok, what is that?

05 L: em muốn xin học bổng
I (student) want ask scholarship
I want to apply for a scholarship
Minh Thị Thủy Nguyễn & Helen Basturkmen

Example 41: Low learner, request for a letter of recommendation

01 I: chào cô

02 I: chào em

03 L: hôm nay em muốn hỏi

04 I: vậy việcm là?

05 L: vì em cảm thấy mình tốt

06 I: học bổng à? thê à? sao mình lại xin được scholarship QuesM really Why I ask possible a scholarship? how come I can

07 L: vì em cảm thấy học giỏi because I (student) feel I (student) study well

08 I: nhưng mà sao em lại bảo mình but why you (student) say I but how come you’re saying that

09 L: = em muốn cô cho ah I (student) want teacher (female) ah give uh I want you uh to give

em một cái chứng minh thư là à me (student) uh one Class. proof card be ah me uh an identity card uh

10 I: chứng minh thư á?

11 L: chứng minh à chứng minh em prove ah prove I (student) ah proof that I’m là học sinh giỏi be student excellent a good student

12 I: à chứng minh bằng cách nào bây giờ? ah prove how now? ah how can I do that?

13 L: à bằng điểm ah form grade ah academic transcript

14 I: ý bằng điểm ý yes form grade EmM yes, your academic transcript

15 L: bằng điểm form grade academic transcript

16 I: ý, thế sao lại liên quan gì đến mình yes so why related what to me yes, but why does this have to do with me?
Những mà có điểm có thì ask scholarship will easy more it will be easier to get a scholarship

18 I: có cái gì có Nhi? have what EmM AlignM? with exactly what, dear?

19 L: có điểm có have grade teacher (female) your grade

20 I: có điểm rồi, những mà have grade already but the grade are already there but

sao có chuyển gì Nhi why have matter what AlignM? what is happening?

mình chưa hiểu ý em I not yet understand idea you (student) I don’t get your point

21 L: chưa hiểu ý à not yet understand idea PolM? you didn’t get my point?

22 I: ừ yes no I didn’t

23 L: em muốn có chứng minh cho ah I (student) want uh teacher (female) prove for ah I want ah you to prove ah

24 I: chứng minh à? tức là làm cái gì? prove QuesM meaning do what? prove? what does that mean?

chứng minh bằng cách nào? prove by way which? and how can I prove it?

25 L: viết một giấy một to giấy write one paper ah one paper write a paper ah a sheet of paper

26 I: một tờ giấy? one sheet paper a paper?

27 L: một tờ giấy chứng mình one paper prove a certification

28 I: à ah ah
29 L: dè giới thiệu à
for introduce ah
to introduce ah

30 I: tức là giới thiệu
meaning introduce?
so you mean to introduce

31 L: giới thiệu em là à một sinh viên giỏi
introduce I (student) am ah one student excellent
introduce me as a good student

32 I: à tức là thư giới thiệu
ah meaning letter recommendation
ah you mean a letter of recommendation

Example 42: Low learner, request for a letter of recommendation

01 L: xin chào cô, xin lỗi cô
greetings teacher (female) apology teacher (female)
hello teacher, excuse me

02 I: chuyện gì hà em?
matter what QuesM you (student)
yes, what’s up?

03 L: em mới biết thông tin
I (student) just know information
I just learned some information

về một học bổng
about one scholarship
about a scholarship

và muốn à muốn nộp đơn xin học bổng đó
and want ah want submit form ask scholarship that
and I want to apply for it

04 I: à thế à tốt quá
ah really ah good very
ah that’s very good,

em học giới thiệu thì xin di
you (student) study well so then ask AlignM
you are a good student, so go for it

05 L: à nhưng em cần gấp à
ah but I (student) need urgently ah
ah but I urgently need uh

em cần gấp
I (student) need urgently
I urgently need

thư giới thiệu của cô à
letter recommendation of teacher (female) ah
your letter of recommendation ah

vì vài ngày nữa là
because some days more be
because the application deadline
hết hạn nộp đơn và closes in a few days and
em không biết là em không biết I (student) not know that I (student) not know
viết thư giới thiệu này thế nào how to write this letter of recommendation

Example 43: Low Learner, request to borrow a computer

01 L: chí dì older sister vocative
hey sister

02 I: ừ có chuyện gì đã em? yes have matter what QuesM younger sibling?
hey, what’s up?

03 L: máy tính của em bị hỏng computer of me NegM broken
my computer broke down

04 I: ừ thế à thế em sửa chưa? yes so QuesM so younger sibling repair yet?
oh really? did you get it repaired?

05 L: em muốn mượn máy tính để à younger sibling want borrow computer for ah
I want to borrow your computer for uh
vì em phải viết because I (younger sibling) must write
because I have to write
ba trang bài luận three page essay
a three-page essay

In Example 40, the learner requested a letter of reference from his
teacher by explicitly stating his needs (turn 3) but the teacher did not seem
to understand at first (turn 4). Therefore, the learner stated his needs again
in turn 5 (I want a scholarship) and turn 7 (I want you to help me and write
that I was the best student), obviously in hope of expressing his message
more clearly to the teacher. Example 41 presents the same scenario. The
learner had some difficulty explaining her request to the teacher due to
limited linguistic competence (turns 5 through 31). She repeatedly resorted
to want statements (turns 9, 23) perhaps because she found the formula
easy to express while still having clarity. In both Examples 42 and 43,
the learners first approached their interlocutors with an indirect, subtle
request (turn 3 in both conversations). However, because their request was not noticed by H (evidenced by H’s responding only to the propositional meaning of the utterances), they probably decided to announce their needs more explicitly.

In contrast to the Low Group, the High Group did not make frequent use of want statements (37% vs. 8% of the time, respectively). While every learner in the Low Group selected this strategy for at least one scenario, only five out of ten learners in the High Group did so. Presumably, they had acquired a wider range of linguistic means to express their meanings in a less face-threatening manner, and perhaps also developed better control over the processing of these means, which enabled them to attend to both message and politeness at the same time (see Nguyễn, 2008b, for further discussion). The Low Group, due to their lower level of fluency in the TL, might have had more restricted access to complex, mitigated requests, and thus had to rely on explicit formulas at the expense of politeness (see Nguyễn, 2008b, for a discussion of reduction of modality by low-proficiency learners). This finding seemed to suggest some interplay between grammatical competence and pragmatic competence. In other words, better control over language processing seemed to enable the highly proficient learners to achieve their propositional and pragmatic meanings more efficiently, but a lack of fluency in the TL seemed to inhibit the low-proficiency learners from doing both successfully at the same time.

Regarding the learners’ choices of other major strategies such as suggestory formula and query preparatory, hardly any evidence of pragmatic development was found. In fact, both learner groups tended to show a deviation from the NS norms. As indicated earlier, Vietnamese NSs tend to prefer a high level of directness in making requests (evidenced in their exclusive reliance on imperative formulas) and rely more considerably on supportive elements with politeness effects such as alignment markers, emphasis markers, and stance markers rather than on indirectness for expressing politeness (Vũ, 1997). Indirectness is also considered a politeness device; however, it does not rank as high as mitigated directness on the politeness continuum, and in fact, indirect requests only account for a fairly small percentage in Vietnamese NS request samples (9.5% as opposed to 90.5%; Vũ, 1997). Vũ’s study also indicated that over 60% of her NS respondents rated the use of query preparatory formulas (e.g., Can/could H tell S what time is it, please?) as ‘rarely found’ in unfamiliarity contexts (e.g., between strangers), and over 70% rated the use of this strategy as ‘unapplicable’ for family members.

The learners’ use of conventional indirectness suggested an opposite tendency to the NSs. Both High and Low Groups tended to use suggestory formulas and query preparatory with relatively high frequencies (see Figures 4 and 5). For the High Group, suggestory formulas accounted for
23.6% of the total number of requests made, and query formulas accounted for 34%. For the Low Group, 18% of their requests were suggestory formulas, and 21% were query preparatory. No significant differences were found for the two groups in their frequencies of use of these strategies although the High Group was found to opt for a significantly higher level of conventional indirectness ($t=.000$, $p<.05$, see Table 6). The learners’ employment of conventionally indirect strategies in Vietnamese, although seemingly consistent with their current stages of IL development (see Kasper & Rose, 2002), was in fact not consistent with the NS use. Their choice of these strategies might therefore be attributed to incomplete knowledge of Vietnamese sociopragmatics and perhaps a reliance on their L1 pragmatic rules, at least in the case of English-speaking background (ESB) learners. Indeed, a close examination into these learners’ query preparatory suggested that they might have transferred the structure from English. In Vietnamese, the presence of the modal verb có thể (more or less equivalent to English modal verbs can/could/may/might) is optional in ability/permission requests, and the main carrier of the structure’s propositional meaning is the final interrogative expression được không? [possible no?]. However, due to the influence of English grammar, the ESB learners tended to add có thể to many of their ability/permission requests. For example, a High learner produced (44) and a Low learner produced (45).

Example 44: High learner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vietnamese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Em muốn hỏi cô</td>
<td>I (student) want ask teacher (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Có thể giúp em được không?</td>
<td>can help me possible no if you can help me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 45: Low learner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vietnamese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sau đó làm bài tập chị</td>
<td>After that do homework elder sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Có thể cho mình vở được không?</td>
<td>can give borrow notes possible no? can you lend me your notes?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An important finding is that the frequent use of targetlike modifiers by the learners offered evidence of pragmatic development (Table 5). Specifically, the number of politeness devices used overall by the High Group significantly exceeded the number used by the Low Group.
The High Group employed a significantly greater number of targetlike internal modifiers than their less proficient peers \( t(16)=2.35, p<.05 \). They did not, however, employ more external modifiers than the latter. This finding seemed to support the claim made in previous ILP studies that internal modifiers might present more problems to L2 learners as they carry less noticeable pragmatic meanings and tend to increase the structural complexity of the utterance, thus requiring more processing attention (see Hassall, 2001; Nguyễn, 2008a). In the present study, as the learners reached a higher level of proficiency, they also developed better control over internal modifiers and perhaps became more aware of their pragmatic meanings as used by NSs. Therefore, they began to draw more on this type of modifier. On the other hand, this study found no difference in the use of external modifiers by the High and Low Groups. Perhaps this was because external modifiers were generally more easily added to the speech act, and at the preintermediate and intermediate levels, the Low learners had sufficient linguistic resources to express supportive moves as much as did their higher proficiency fellow learners.

### Table 5. Distribution of modifiers by proficiency levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>low proficiency</th>
<th>high proficiency</th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>( P ) value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>external modifiers</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internal modifiers</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total number</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concerning the situational variation effects, it was found that the High Group preferred directness in equal power situations and indirectness in lower-to-higher power situations \( \chi^2(1, N=182)=3.97, p<.05 \), whereas the Low Group did not show any discrimination \( \chi^2(1, N=130)=1.11, p>.05, n.s. \). The High Group also tended to employ more ‘imperatives’ in equal power situations \( \chi^2(4, N=182)=30.1, p<.05 \), but their contextual distribution of other strategies was less clearly evident. The Low Group, on the other hand, used all strategies with variation, regardless of the differential representation of the power factor in each situation. This finding is consistent with previous studies (see Kasper & Rose, 2002), adding further evidence of the higher level of sensitivity to sociocultural cues by higher proficiency learners when making speech acts in the TL. Finally, both the learner groups were not found to vary their strategies according to the levels of imposition \( \chi^2(2, N=94)=2.11, p>.05, n.s. \) for the High Group; \( \chi^2(2, N=69)=1.59, p>.05, n.s. \) for
the Low Group]. This was, again, because the situations in fact did not vary greatly in terms of the degree of imposition.

**To what extent do the learners’ lengths of residency in the TL environment affect the way they make requests?**

The learners were also compared in terms of the length of time they had spent in the TL community, in an attempt to examine the effects of this learning context on their pragmatic development. Results showed the Long-stay and Short-stay groups tended to differ significantly only in their frequencies of use of imperatives and want statements and their distributions of imperatives in situations varying in the power factor.

![Figure 6. Distributions of imperatives and want statements by lengths of residence.](image)

First, the Long-stay group was found to employ a significantly greater number of imperative requests than their Short-stay peers \( M=.20, SD=.16 \) as opposed to \( M=.07, SD=.06, t(16)=2.17, p<.05, \) see Figure 6. This finding seemed to reflect a similar tendency to the High Group and the NSs, who also made frequent use of the given strategy. The Short-stay group, on the other hand, employed significantly more want statements \( M=.33, SD=.26 \) vs. \( M=.12, SD=.14, t(16)=2.21, p<.05 \), suggesting a similar tendency to the Low Group.\(^7\)

Second, there were differences between the two groups in terms of use of request realization strategies in relation to contextual variables. The Long-stay group used more imperative requests in equal power scenarios than in scenarios where S had a lower status than H \( \chi^2(4, N=176)=20.7, p<.05 \). However, the
Short-stay group did not seem to be affected by this contextual variation \[\chi^2(2, N=95)=2.44, p>.05, n.s.\]. Again, the Long-stay group was found to behave in a similar way to the native speakers (see Vu, 1997, 1999).

Overall, the above results might suggest a positive impact of length of residency in the TL culture on pragmatic development. Specifically, as the learners spent more time in the context where the language is spoken, they began to come closer to the NSs in their use of imperative requests. The learners who had spent less time in the TL community, on the other hand, seemed to use different pragmatic strategies from the NSs and appeared to be less responsive to contextual variables when expressing their meanings. This finding is not surprising since the SL learning context has been documented to facilitate both the contextual familiarity and the acquisition of TL pragmalinguistics (see Kasper & Rose, 2002; Schauer, 2009). The reasons are obvious: In addition to formal language learning, learners in the SL context also benefit from numerous opportunities for using the language outside the classroom. Thus, if they take full advantage of the opportunities presented to them, perhaps they can achieve a near-native level over time. This finding is also congruent with findings from the few available studies on the effects of different lengths of residency on pragmatic development in the study-abroad context (see Schauer, 2008 for a review). In these studies, nine months may be a critical period for achieving near-native pragmatic competence. Similarly, the present study suggests that a long stay of at least one year in the TL environment produces more impact on learners’ pragmatic abilities than a shorter stay. This finding offers important implications regarding the planning of study-abroad programs to maximize learning opportunities for L2 learners.

Conclusion

This chapter has reported the results of a cross-sectional study of requests in Vietnamese as an L2 with a view to understanding how this speech act is learned and used by an under-researched population of learners. First, the findings show that the types of requests produced by the learners are successfully captured by the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) taxonomy although slight modifications are needed to cater for the specific features of politeness in Vietnamese. The findings also support the claim of previous studies that learning L2 pragmatics is a challenging task for many learners, especially those with a lower proficiency level in the L2. For example, the low-proficiency learners tended to employ nontargetlike request strategies and were unable to vary their strategies according to different contextual cues. The learners’ difficulty most likely resulted from their limited L2 linguistic competence, their incomplete L2 pragmatic knowledge,
and especially their reliance on a combination of some sort of both L1 and L2 pragmatic competence in performing the given speech act.

The findings also provided some evidence of pragmatic development for both groups of learners who achieved a higher level of proficiency in Vietnamese and who stayed in the TL culture for a longer period of time, although they still experienced certain difficulties in making requests in the TL. Particularly, as the learners became more proficient in the TL and their length of residency increased, they tended to follow the NSs more closely in their use of imperative requests, a predominant strategy type in Vietnamese NS request data. They also showed more sensitivity to contextual variations and were more likely to vary their strategies accordingly. The high-proficiency learners were also able to modify their requests to a greater extent than their less proficient peers, perhaps because of both a more advanced knowledge of L2 pragmatics and a better control over attention to language processing. This latter finding has led to an argument that learning L2 pragmatics necessarily involves both the learning of new pragmatic knowledge and the development of control over this knowledge (see Bialystock, 1993).

Traditionally, L2 classrooms have placed a great emphasis on developing linguistic rather than pragmatic competence. Pragmatic components are also treated inadequately in L2 textbooks and course materials (see Nguyễn, 2011; Vellenga, 2004). Research has shown that pragmatic features, when not deliberately taught, are learned slowly (see Kasper & Rose, 2002; Rose, 2005). Therefore, pragmatic instruction is both necessary and desirable. In this chapter we have shown that learning internal modifiers for expressing respectful politeness is a daunting task for learners of Vietnamese, especially those with a lower level of proficiency and a short period of residence in the TL country. Unlike English NSs, Vietnamese NSs tend to prefer a high level of directness in making requests and rely more considerably on supportive elements with politeness effects such as alignment markers, emphasis markers, and stance markers rather than on indirectness for expressing politeness. Learners should be made aware of these politeness strategies so that they can make informed pragmatic decisions that do not break down communication and that allow learners to maintain their cultural identities.

Notes
1. We acknowledge that this rating task might prompt learners to tap into their metapragmatic knowledge when selecting pragmatic strategies; however, this choice making is not different from what people do in real-life communication.
2. Although this sentence contains both muốn and nhờ, nhờ is the main verb. Mơ in this case only functions as a politeness device, making this phrase equivalent to the English “I would like/want to ask,” which Blum-Kulka & Olshtain categorized as “hedged performative.”
Note that the Vietnamese language has the modal verb có thể, which denotes ability, possibility, and permission (equivalent to can, could, may, might in English) but this verb is only optional in ability/permission requests. Vietnamese ability/permission requests are more often expressed via the structure “S+V … được không?” [is it ok ...?]. Có thể in this case only functions as a modifier.

Note that an utterance can be coded as a ‘hint’ only when it occurs alone in an exchange (not together with another strategy type). Otherwise, it would be more suitably coded as a supportive move rather than the head act.

Consider the following example produced by native speakers:

(I=interlocutor, P=Participant)

01 I: Mời vào
Come in, please

02 P: Em chào cô a.
I (student) greet teacher (female) PolM
Hello, teacher.

03 I: Nhưng mà hôm nay là thứ Ba rồi
But today be Tuesday already
But today is already Tuesday.

04 P: Vâng a nhưng mà em ốm đột xuất
Yes PolM but I (student) sick suddenly
Yes, but I was sick all of a sudden

05 I: Nhưng mà Như thế là phải bì trừ 20% điểm
But so be must NegM reduce 20% mark
But then there’ll be a 20% deduction from your grad

07 P: Thế thì cũng được a
So then EmM okay PolM
That’ll be ok.
In this conversation S did not make an explicit request but only referred to her condition and the reason she did not complete her assignment. H interpreted S’s utterance as a request for an extension and S did not correct H. This means H’s interpretation was accurate. Thus, in this case, S’s utterance is coded as a request rather than a prerequisite supportive move.

Note that được không is coded as an appealer only when it is not part of the syntactic structure of the request but is an independent element that functions as an agreement seeker, such as in the example below:

(I=Interlocutor, L: Learner)

01 L: Chị sẽ giúp tôi nhiều khi phải trả
   Elder sister will help I much when must return
   You will help me a lot if you return

   cuốn sách và có thể em giúp chị
   book and maybe younger sibling help elder sister
   this book and maybe I will help you

   cuối tuần này làm sạch sẽ phòng ngủ
   weekend this make clean bedroom
   tidy up your bedroom this weekend

   hay là làm nhà mòn ăn
   or make cook food
   or do the cooking

02 I: ((giggles))

03 L: Được không?
   possible no
   is that OK?

Here we are using proportions to investigate whether there are differences in the relative strategy preferences between the groups, corrected for total number of strategies.

Length of stay overlaps to some extent with proficiency. Therefore, the results reported in this section should be treated with caution.

References


Chi Dẫn Cho Người Tham Gia


Điều quan trọng là Anh/Chị phải hiểu các tình huống. Vì vậy trước khi hội thoại, Anh/Chị hãy đặt câu hỏi cho nghiên cứu viên nếu như có vấn đề gì chưa hiểu.

Hội thoại đóng vai của Anh/Chị sẽ được thu âm với sự đồng thuận của Anh/Chị. Cảm ơn Anh/Chị đã giúp đỡ.

Tình huống 1:


Câu hỏi 1: Anh/Chị có hình dung được ra tình huống này không?
Hãy khoanh tròn con số phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của Anh/Chị.

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<tr>
<td>Hoàn toàn KHÔNG</td>
<td>Hoàn toàn CÓ</td>
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Câu hỏi 2: Anh/Chị nghĩ lời đề nghị của mình có gây áp lực cho người nghe không?
Hãy khoanh tròn con số phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của Anh/Chị.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hoàn toàn không</td>
<td>Rất gây áp lực</td>
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Tình huống 2:


Câu hỏi 1: Anh/Chị có hình dung được ra tình huống này không?
Hãy khoanh tròn con số phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của Anh/Chị.

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Câu hỏi 2: Anh/Chị nghĩ lời đề nghị của mình có gây áp lực cho người nghe không?
Hãy khoanh tròn số phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của Anh/Chị.

1 2 3 4 5
Hoàn toàn không Rất gây áp lực


Tình huống 3:

Câu hỏi 1: Anh/Chị có hình dung được ra tình huống này không?
Hãy khoanh tròn số phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của Anh/Chị.

1 2 3 4 5
Hoàn toàn KHÔNG Hoàn toàn CÓ

Câu hỏi 2: Anh/Chị nghĩ lời đề nghị của mình có gây áp lực cho người nghe không?
Hãy khoanh tròn số phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của Anh/Chị.

1 2 3 4 5
Hoàn toàn không Rất gây áp lực


Tình huống 4:

Câu hỏi 1: Anh/Chị có hình dung được ra tình huống này không?
Hãy khoanh tròn số phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của Anh/Chị.

1 2 3 4 5
Hoàn toàn KHÔNG Hoàn toàn CÓ

Câu hỏi 2: Anh/Chị nghĩ lời đề nghị của mình có gây áp lực cho người nghe không?
Hãy khoanh tròn số phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của Anh/Chị.

1 2 3 4 5
Hoàn toàn không Rất gây áp lực

Tình huống 5:


Câu hỏi 1: Anh/Chị có hình dung được ra tình huống này không?
Hãy khoanh tròn con số phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của Anh/Chị.

1 2 3 4 5
Hoàn toàn KHÔNG  Hoàn toàn CÓ

Câu hỏi 2: Anh/Chị nghĩ lời đề nghị của mình có gây áp lực cho người nghe không?
Hãy khoanh tròn con số phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của Anh/Chị.

1 2 3 4 5
Hoàn toàn không  Rất gây áp lực


Tình huống 6:


Câu hỏi 1: Anh/Chị có hình dung được ra tình huống này không?
Hãy khoanh tròn con số phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của Anh/Chị.

1 2 3 4 5
Hoàn toàn KHÔNG  Hoàn toàn CÓ

Câu hỏi 2: Anh/Chị nghĩ lời đề nghị của mình có gây áp lực cho người nghe không?
Hãy khoanh tròn con số phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của Anh/Chị.

1 2 3 4 5
Hoàn toàn không  Rất gây áp lực

Chi Dẫn Cho Người Dẫn Đặt Vai


Hội thoại động vai của Anh/Chị sẽ được thu âm với sự đồng thuận của Anh/Chị.

Cảm ơn Anh/Chị đã giúp đỡ.

Tình huống 1:


Tình huống 2:


Tình huống 3:


Tình huống 4:


Tình huống 5:

Anh/Chị là giảng viên đại học và đang hướng dẫn luận văn cho một sinh viên. Anh/Chị hẹn em ấy nộp một chương hôm nay. Tuy nhiên em ấy bị ốm và không thể hoàn thành được chương phải nộp. Em ấy muốn xin gehen ngày nộp. Anh/Chị có thể cho...

Tình huống 6:
Appendix B: Role-play cards, English translation

Instruction Sheet For Participants
You will talk with the researcher in the following role-play situations. **Use Vietnamese when you talk.** Take some minutes to read the descriptions of the situations. There are two questions for each situation that you need to answer before role-playing. Try to imagine yourself in the situations and respond to them as you would do in real life. It is important that you understand these situations completely, so before you start you are encouraged to ask questions if you find something you do not understand. Your role-play conversations will be tape-recorded with your consent. Thank you for your cooperation.

**Situation 1:**
You are typing up a three-page essay for your lecturer. It is due today. You have just finished the first paragraph when suddenly, your computer stops working. You see your flatmate chatting online at the moment. You two are good friends. So you ask her to lend you her computer so that you can finish your work. **It is important that you get her to agree to lend you the computer.**

**Question 1:** Can you imagine yourself in this situation?
Circle the score that best fits you.

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<tr>
<td>Definitely NO</td>
<td>Definitely YES</td>
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**Question 2:** How much pressure do you think your request might exert on your friend to say “Yes”?  
Circle the score that best fits you.

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<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Very much</td>
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Now start your role play in Vietnamese. The researcher will be your flatmate.

**Situation 2:**
You were sick and missed an important class last week. Now you are reading the class materials but it is difficult to understand them by yourself. Luckily, your friend attended the class and took careful notes. You two are good friends so you believe she would not mind lending you her notes. You approach your friend and ask for the favour. **It is important that you get her to agree to lend you the notes.**

**Question 1:** Can you imagine yourself in this situation?
Circle the score that best fits you.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely NO</td>
<td>Definitely YES</td>
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Situation 3:
You have to return a book to the library by today. You were still using it until last night. You go to school only on the day you have a class because you live quite far. Today you do not have a class. Your flatmate is having a class this morning, so you ask her to drop the book for you. It is important that you get her to agree to help you. You two are good friends.

**Question 1: Can you imagine yourself in this situation?**
Circle the score that best fits you.

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<td></td>
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**Question 2: How much pressure do you think your request might exert on your friend to say “Yes”?**
Circle the score that best fits you.

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<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Very much</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Now start your role play in Vietnamese. The researcher will be your friend.

Situation 4:
You have just learned about a scholarship, which you would like to apply for. You need a reference letter from your lecturer urgently because the application closes in a few days’ time. There is a lecturer who has been teaching you for quite a few semesters and you have always been one of the best students in her class. You know she is very busy but believe she would be supportive enough to write you a reference letter. So after class you approach her and ask for the favour. You really want the scholarship so it is important that you get her to agree to help you.

**Question 1: Can you imagine yourself in this situation?**
Circle the score that best fits you.

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<td>Definitely NO</td>
<td>Definitely YES</td>
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**Question 2: How much pressure do you think your request might exert on the lecturer to say “Yes”?**
Circle the score that best fits you.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Very much</td>
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Now start your role play in Vietnamese. The researcher will be the lecturer.
Situation 5:
You are writing your thesis. You are having a meeting with your supervisor today and you are supposed to give her a chapter draft. However, last week you were sick and not able to complete the chapter. You would need some more time. At the meeting you ask your supervisor for an extension. You want to have her feedback as soon as possible so you will try to finish the chapter in the soonest time possible. **It is important that you get her to agree to give you the extension.**

*Question 1: Can you imagine yourself in this situation?*
Circle the score that best fits you.

1 2 3 4 5

Definitely NO Definitely YES

*Question 2: How much pressure do you think your request might exert on your supervisor to say “Yes”?*
Circle the score that best fits you.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

Now start your role play in Vietnamese. The researcher will be your supervisor.

Situation 6:
Today is Monday. You have an appointment with your supervisor at 10:30 a.m. Friday this week. You want to show her your revised thesis. However, another lecturer wants to make up for his missed class last week and unluckily, 10–12 a.m. this Friday is the only time slot that is suited to most students in the class. You do not want to miss this class because it is going to cover a difficult and important topic. So you drop in your supervisor’s office and ask if she can move the appointment to another date or time. **It is important that you get your supervisor to agree to see you as soon as she can because the deadline for submission of your thesis is coming in a few weeks’ time.**

*Question 1: Can you imagine yourself in this situation?*
Circle the score that best fits you.

1 2 3 4 5

Definitely NO Definitely YES

*Question 2: How much pressure do you think your request might exert on your supervisor to say “Yes”?*
Circle the score that best fits you.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

Now start your role play in Vietnamese. The researcher will be your supervisor.

**Instruction Sheet For Interlocutor**
You will converse in Vietnamese with each student in six role-play situations, which are described in each card. Read the descriptions of the situations carefully and act accordingly.
It is important that you understand the situations completely; therefore, you are encouraged to ask questions if you find something you do not understand.
Your conversations with the students will be tape-recorded with your consent for the purpose of the study.
Thank you for your cooperation.

Situation 1:
Your flatmate is typing a three-page essay for her/his lecturer. Suddenly her/his computer stops working and s/he asks you to lend her/him your computer. You are chatting online with your boyfriend, who is in another town at the moment. Today is your boyfriend’s birthday. But if it is urgent and your friend is not going to use the computer for an hour, you are willing to lend it to her/him. You two are good friends.

Situation 2:
Your friend was sick and missed an important class last week. You attended the class and took careful notes. So s/he approaches you and asks if you mind lending her/him your notes. You are working on your assignments right now and need the notes at hand. However, if s/he can make a quick photocopy and give you back within an hour, you are willing to lend her/him the notes. You two are good friends.

Situation 3:
Your flatmate has a book to return to the library. You are going to school today. So your flatmate asks you to drop the book for her. You are having a class from 9am to 12pm in a building quite far from the library. After that you have a part-time job on another campus. Your job starts at 12:30pm, so you will be in a hurry. But if the book is due today, you can go to school some minutes earlier and drop off the book for your flatmate first thing in the morning.

Situation 4:
You are a university lecturer. A student in your class is applying for a scholarship and wants you to write her/him a reference letter. You have been teaching this student for quite a few semesters and know s/he is one of your best students. You would be happy to write her/him a reference letter but you have some deadlines at the moment. So if it is not urgent, you will write it next week.

Situation 5:
You are a university lecturer and supervising a student’s thesis. The student that you are supervising is supposed to submit a chapter draft to you when you two have a meeting today. However, s/he was sick and not able to complete it. At the meeting s/he asks for an extension. You can give her/him as much time as s/he needs. However, you are taking a sabbatical leave in two weeks’ time. If s/he can give you the chapter within
the next week, you can read it and give your comments before you go. If not, it may take a longer while for you to get back to her/him because you have other commitments.

**Situation 6:**

You are a university lecturer. You have an appointment with your student at 10:30 a.m. Friday this week. S/he wants to show you her/his revised thesis. You are her/his supervisor. However, today s/he drops in your office and asks if you can move the appointment to another date or time because s/he has an urgent class. You are fully booked until two weeks after but if the student can come after your office hour tomorrow, you are willing to see her/him then.