VARIATION IN INTERLANGUAGE SPEECH ACT REALIZATION

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COMpared to other AREAS of second language research, interlanguage (IL) pragmatics is still a young discipline. The first studies into nonnative speakers’ (NNS) perception and performance of speech acts appeared ten years ago, both in North America (e.g. Borkin and Reinhart 1978) and Europe (Hackmann 1977). Since then, a number of investigations into IL speech act realization have been conducted, examining how different types of speech acts are performed by NNSs with a variety of language backgrounds and target languages (cf. the overview in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, in press a). While the information collected by these empirical studies contributes significantly to our understanding of speech act realization across cultures and languages, it seems timely to take a more theoretical view of IL pragmatics, in order to re-examine some central notions and to suggest some directions for future research. This paper, then, has the following goals:

(1) To provide some conceptual clarification of the notions ‘pragmatics’ and ‘speech act’, and to determine the type of variability that is most interesting in the context of IL pragmatics.

(2) To identify NNSs’ learning tasks in their acquisition of pragmatic knowledge, as a prerequisite for outlining some of the central research tasks for IL pragmaticists.

(3) Based on some results from a descriptive study into IL speech act realization, to discuss what further research questions such results suggest with regard to explaining variability in IL pragmatics.
1. Defining 'pragmatics', 'speech act', and 'variability'

As linguistic pragmatics has its roots in a number of quite different philosophical, sociological, linguistic and psychological traditions, it is not surprising that the area has been defined in many different ways (see Wunderlich 1972, Schlieben-Lange 1975, Levinson 1983 for historical and systematic overviews). According to the currently most influential citation authorities, Geoffrey Leech and Stephen S. Levinson, pragmatics concerns "the study of meaning in relation to speech situations", dealing with "utterance meaning" (rather than sentence meaning, which is the domain of semantics) (Leech 1983:6, 14); it comprises "the study of language usage" (Levinson 1983:5).

In their respective books on pragmatics, both authors explicate these very general definitions, partly discussing the relative merits of alternative explications (Levinson 1983:5ff), partly delimiting pragmatics from neighbouring disciplines (Leech 1983:5ff). A still broader concept of pragmatics is suggested by Verschueren (1987), who argues that rather than regarding pragmatics as defined by a specific research object, it should more appropriately be viewed as a perspective on language. In recent Chomskyan theory, "pragmatic competence" has been opposed to "grammatical competence", the latter referring to "the knowledge of form and meaning" and the former to "knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use, in conformity with various purposes" (Chomsky 1980:224). Since a large number of grammatical structures, notably pronouns, determiners, tense, aspect, modality, expressions of location, and topicalization devices, cannot be adequately described without reference to their deictic properties (the speaker's ego-hic-nunc origo, in Karl Bühler's (1934) terms), it has been argued that 'pragmalinguistics' (also: performance linguistics) ought to function as some sort of a linguistic superscience, comprising formal linguistics as one of its specialized areas (e.g. Maas 1972).

Even though it is true that descriptive adequacy often requires including contextual and deictic constraints into the analysis of syntactic structures and the lexicon, this does not invalidate the distinction between otherwise dissimilarly structured types of linguistic knowledge. Rather than perpetuating the fashionable concept of pragmatics as anything related to context and use (or, as one alternative, invoking a semiotic approach along the lines of Peirce and Morris), my suggestion is to revert to the philosophical notion of pragmatics, as developed in the late Wittgenstein's concept of 'Sprachspiel' (language play), in
speech act theory as proposed by Austin and Searle, and in Habermas’ universal pragmatics. The common ground for these otherwise different traditions is the view of language as action (Greek pragma = acting, action, activity). Pragmatics is thus the study of acting by means of language, of doing things with words. In this view, linguistic pragmatics constitutes a subset of a more comprehensive theory of human action (e.g. v. Wright 1965). Its research object is language users’ pragmatic knowledge, its use and development, as studied, for example, in the philosophy of language, linguistics, developmental psychology, and second language research.

I propose to conceive of pragmatic knowledge as a component of language users’ communicative competence in the sense of Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980). Pragmatic knowledge is distinct from other types of declarative communicative knowledge, such as discourse knowledge, semantic, grammatical, and phonological knowledge, and also from types of declarative knowledge that are not in themselves ‘communicative’, but clearly communicatively relevant, such as sociocultural and world knowledge (Færch and Kasper 1986). Pragmatic knowledge interacts with these other knowledge types, and the language user’s task in performing verbal action is to select and combine elements from these areas in accordance with her illocutionary, propositional, and modal (or ‘social’, ‘politeness’) goals (Leech 1983, Færch and Kasper 1984).

Given this rough definition, or demarcation, of pragmatics, it follows that the notion of speech act (SA) is central to pragmatic theory. Recently, the adequacy of SA as a theoretical and analytical category in linguistic pragmatics has been disputed, e.g. by Levinson (1981), Thomas (forthcoming), and Candlin (1987); cf. also the excellent summary of the speech act controversy in Verschueren (1985). The main objection is that speaker meaning often cannot be unambiguously identified. Discussing multiple illocutionary force, Thomas (forthcoming) distinguishes 4 such types:
(1) Ambiguity, where speaker A intends force X, while the addressee B computes force Y, e.g.

A: you’re drinking a beer there
B: yes
A: erm er well er I might er if you were kind enough to offer me one
     I probably wouldn’t say no
(from Kasper 1981:187)

As obvious from A’s second (metacommunicative) utterance, the illocutionary goal of his first utterance was a request, whereas B construed it as a statement.

(2) Ambivalence, where the illocutionary force is deliberately indeterminate—i.e. it is up to the addressee to pick and choose the illocution she likes. Thus, the utterance

A: I’m sorry but I’m afraid you’re in my seat
(from Kasper 1981:162)

is ambivalent between a reproach and a request.

(3) Bivalence or plurivalence, where two or more non-related forces are co-present, all of which have to be decoded. Thomas’ example is the back-handed compliment, as in

A: your hair looks so nice when you wash it

where the overt compliment carries a covert insult.

(4) Multivalence, where the utterance has two (or more) different receivers, for instance a direct addressee and another receiver (hearer, audience, overhearer, bystander; Thomas 1985), a different illocutionary force being addressed to each of them through the same utterance. Thus a showmaster’s utterance
A: and now, ladies and gentlemen: Mr Bruce Springsteen

has the force of an announcement for the (directly addressed) audience, while at the same time functioning as a cue (a specific form of instruction) to the artist to appear on stage.

Since these instances of multiple illocutionary force are both interesting descriptive and explanatory problems for pragmatic theory, and likely sources of misunderstanding in crosscultural communication, they clearly deserve closer study in IL pragmatics. However, I cannot see how they should oblige us to abandon the notion of SA. The co-presence of different illocutionary forces suggests that individual illocutions, as in the examples of pragmatic multifunctionality, will have to be computed. This, however, is no evidence against the identifiability of distinct illocutions: just as illocutionary *multifunctionality* is a fact of linguistic communication, so is the unambiguously *monofunctional* occurrence of SAs. Indeed, the risk of communication breakdowns would be dramatically enhanced, were it not for the fact that a great number of standardized speech events allow for unambiguous assignment of illocutionary value. Unlike the types of speech event favouring multifunctionality, which are characterized by a predominantly *interpersonal* orientation, speech events with a strong *task* orientation and a fixed distribution of social roles and actional goals, such as service encounters, highly rule-governed work contexts, or bureaucratic institutions, favour illocutions which speaker, addressee and possible third parties immediately agree upon. Thus in a legal trial, an exchange such as *Objection, your honour — Objection sustained*, uttered by participants endowed with the relevant institutionalized rights, is just as little open to illocutionary negotiation as exchanges by mechanics during a car repair task (cf. the exchanges reported in Holmqvist and Andersen 1987 for illustration). An analogy to the identification of lexical meaning suggests itself: the occurrence of semantic ambiguity is not a valid argument against the notion of word, or lexical item. In fact, as Verschueren (1985) convincingly argues, the psychological reality demonstrated for prototypical instances of a variety of lexical items also applies to illocutionary verbs ("linguistic action verbials"), in that they express, in the codes of individual languages, the conceptual space of verbal action. It is by no means compelling to allege incompatibility of the
prototypical COGNITIVE representation of illocutionary acts, as reflected in linguistic action verbials, with the fuzzy, multifunctional COMMUNICATIVE illocutionary values emphasized by Thomas (1985) and others. Metapragmatic statements, performed by participants on the occurrence of co-present illocutionary forces, testify to the contrary, as in exchanges such as Mark is bringing his bongos to the party — Is that a promise or a threat?. However, I agree that the term 'speech act' has certain infelicitous connotations, suggesting static, clear-cut entities without interrelations and context-embedding. The German term Sprechhandlung more appropriately emphasizes the dynamic, process character of the notion, as Verschueren successfully captures in his expression 'linguistic action'. Yet, in order not to contribute to an unnecessary terminological inflation, I prefer to retain the received term 'speech act', but use it with the proposed dynamic reading.

The third theoretical issue that deserves comment is the one of variability in IL pragmatics. The variation in learners' performance observed in early IL studies was taken by some researchers as counterevidence of the systematicity claimed for ILs, and thus as an embarrassment for IL theory and its fundamental tenet that IL is natural language (e.g. Bertkau 1974, Ickenroth 1975; but see for different views Adjemian 1976, Tarone, Frauenfelder and Selinker 1976; and the discussion of the latter in Brown 1976). That variation at the time was considered more of an oddity than a regular fact of human language appears to be a direct consequence of the prevalent theoretical orientation of second language research towards Chomskyan linguistics and studies into first language acquisition. Since the object of linguistics was defined as a homogeneous system stripped of any social and psychological relations, variation deriving from precisely those relations could not be accommodated within the theory. In his influential elaboration of the IL hypothesis, Corder (1978) makes the observation that linguistic variability along sociological and situational parameters (systematic variability) constitutes no deviation from natural languages but rather one of their most prominent features—a point that is, and was then, obvious enough from a sociolinguistic perspective, but was news to mainstream IL research. A linguistic theory based on the assumption of heterogeneity, as developed, for instance, in sociolinguistics and stylistics, and epitomized in models of COMMUNICATIVE rather than LINGUISTIC competence, therefore provides a more adequate framework to account for variability in IL data. Understandably, what
was regarded as a problem for IL grammar and phonology was never considered embarrassing for IL pragmatics. Rather than struggling with an alleged opposition between systematicity and variability, IL pragmatics, from its very outset, was firmly based on the sociolinguistic assumption that in order to carry out verbal action, NNSs make systematic choices from their repertoire of realization procedures and linguistic means, and that these choices vary according to relevant factors in the speech event. Uncovering the principles of contextual variability, in Ellis' (1986) terms, of SA selection and realization, is thus the core issue of IL pragmatics. Extending the notion of IL to refer to language learners' developing communicative rather than formal-linguistic competence provided a fundamental prerequisite for investigating NNSs' development and use of pragmatic knowledge within the same theoretical framework as other types of IL knowledge.

2. Research tasks in IL pragmatics

Next, I wish to outline what I consider the most pertinent research tasks in IL pragmatics. In the tradition of IL research generally, we have said that IL pragmatics seeks to describe and explain learners' development and use of pragmatic knowledge. The learner's task is not very different from that of the pragmaticist: She has to discover the contextual (situational) and co-textual (linguistic) constraints governing SA selection and modes of realization in the target language and culture. In Hymes' (1971) terms, she has to discover what is possible, feasible, appropriate, and done in carrying out SAs in L2.

In principle, acquiring pragmatic knowledge in L2 comprises the following subtasks:

(1) Learning new SA categories, e.g. in communication domains with highly culture-specific content and organization, as in games, religious and profane ceremonies, legal trials, and other institutionalized events. These subtasks interact with the acquisition of sociocultural knowledge about the target society.

(2) Learning new contextual and co-textual distributions of SAs, such as when to thank whom for what. In Danish culture, for instance, guests are required to offer their hosts ritualized thanks for the meal and 'for the last time' (on the first encounter after having received hospitality). As an immigrant to Denmark, I still have a hard time remembering these rituals. However, immigrants and refugees
to the Scandinavian countries with culturally more distant backgrounds are obviously faced with considerably more demanding learning tasks. To give but one example from an important type of gatekeeping encounter, they have to learn that in Scandinavian classrooms, making suggestions, contradicting the teacher, asking for clarification, etc. is not considered as lack of respect, and therefore to be avoided, but rather evaluated as active participation and as thus appreciated by the teacher. In Scollon and Scollon's (1983) terms, the precondition for 'leakage' in Scandinavian educational contexts is for the non-member to adopt a solidarity politeness strategy rather than a deference strategy, as may be in accordance with the NNS's native cultural norms. As was the case with the first subtask, learning distributional constraints of SA performance thus requires an understanding of target social structure and values.

(3) Learning new procedures and means for SA realization. This task is largely dependent on the learner's linguistic L2 knowledge, as it requires availability of and access to at least two types of linguistic knowledge:

(a) 'Productive' grammatical, lexical and prosodic structures, which for the purpose of realizing illocutionary intent can attain 'acquired meanings'. For instance, the past perfect of the modal shall can be used to express a reproach, given the pragmatic conditions for this illocution are satisfied (i.e. H did event \( p \) is at a cost to S): *You should have switched off the printer before going to bed.*

(b) 'Frozen' routines functioning as conventionalized realizations of specific speech acts, such as (in English) routines for greeting, thanking, apologizing, interrupting.

(4) Learning how these realization procedures and means are contextually and co-textually distributed. This involves knowledge of how principles of politeness operate in the target culture, and what politeness values pertain to the alternative realization procedures—in other words, how face-work is carried out in accordance with target sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic norms.

Which of these tasks require new learning for the NNS depends to a large extent on the distance between the culture(s) familiar to the learner, and the target culture. However, it would be naive to assume automatic similarity—
facilitation and difference—difficulty effects, as in the heyday of the contrastive analysis hypothesis. Rather, transferability constraints have been shown to operate on pragmatic knowledge in a similar fashion as on linguistic knowledge (e.g. Kasper 1981, Olshtain 1983). Still, the first tasks—SA categories and their distribution—may be of no or little importance in the case of related languages and cultures. By contrast, realization procedures and means will have to be newly learned by any NNS. It may be due to the prevalence of SA realization as a learning task in L2 acquisition that IL pragmatics has concentrated on this area, which is also what the empirical part of this paper will be concerned with.

Based on the outline of NNSs’ learning task in pragmatics, we can now delineate research tasks for IL pragmaticists. Currently, empirical IL pragmatics is focusing on two activities:

(1) Collecting and systematizing observational facts about variation in NNSs’ use of procedures and means for SA realization.

(2) Determining the factors and principles underlying the observed systematic variation. Such factors and principles are:

(a) the configuration of factors in the communicative events, as detailed in the ethnography of communication;
(b) the properties of the SA in question;
(c) the Cooperative Principle à la Grice;
(d) principles, maxims, and strategies of politeness, as suggested in the different models of Brown and Levinson (1987), Leech (1983), and others.

Theories formulated within this second area are claimed to have explanatory function for the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic variation described in the first area. Unlike studies into the pragmatics of individual languages or contrastive pragmatics, however, matters in IL pragmatics are complicated by the fact that the factors and principles comprised by the second area have to be analysed in relevant cultural manifestations which are unlikely to coincide completely with either the NNSs’ L1 or L2.
3. A study into IL request realization: Some results and research questions

I shall now present some results from a descriptive study into IL SA realization, with the purpose of discussing two questions: What information about NNSs' systematic variation of their requestive behaviour do such results from cross-cultural and IL pragmatic data provide? What further research questions do they suggest with regard to EXPLAINING variability in IL SA realization?

The data comprise request realizations under 5 different contextual conditions, collected in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project by means of a written Discourse Completion task (cf. Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, in press b). They are from speakers of 6 closely related languages and language varieties:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three groups of NSs</th>
<th>Three groups of NNSs</th>
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<tr>
<td>Danish (N=163) (D)</td>
<td>L1 Danish, L2 German (N=200) (DG)</td>
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<tr>
<td>German (N=200) (G)</td>
<td>L1 Danish, L2 English (N=200) (DE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British English (N=100) (E)</td>
<td>L1 German, L2 English (N=200) (GE)</td>
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The request contexts were the following:

1. A policeman asking a driver to remove her car (Policeman)
2. A student asking his flatmate to tidy up the kitchen (Kitchen)
3. A student asking a fellow student for her lecture notes (Notes)
4. A young man asking his neighbour for a lift (Lift)
5. A professor asking a student to present his paper a week earlier (Paper).

As a prerequisite for the analysis, it is assumed that requestive force can be modified on three major dimensions:

(1) by choosing a particular directness level;
(2) by modifying the request internally through the addition of mitigating or aggravating modality markers (syntactic or lexical 'downgraders' or 'upgraders');
(3) by modifying the request externally by means of supportive moves introductory or subsequent to the Head Act (the request proper).
For the present purpose, results relating to the first and third modificatory dimensions will be considered.

3.1 Directness levels

Following Blum-Kulka and House (in press), we can distinguish 3 degrees of directness, depending on the extent to which the illocution is transparent from the locution: direct, conventionally indirect, and indirect requests. With direct requests, the illocutionary force is indicated in the utterance by grammatical, lexical or semantic means; conventionally indirect requests express the illocution via fixed linguistic conventions established in the speech community; and indirect requests require the addressee to compute the illocution from the interaction of the locution with its context. Within these types of directness, we distinguish the following 9 directness levels (or request strategies):

1. Mood derivable: the grammatical mood of the utterance signals illocutionary force (Move your car!)
2. Explicit Performative: the illocutionary force is referred to by a performative verb (I’m asking you to move your car)
3. Hedged Performative: as (2), with the performative verb modified by a hedging expression (I have to ask you to move your car)
4. Obligation Statement: the hearer’s obligation to perform the act referred to in the proposition is stated (You have to move your car)
5. Want Statement: the speaker’s wish that the hearer carries out the act referred to in the proposition is stated (I want you to move your car)
6. Suggestory Formula: illocutionary force is indicated by a semantic formula expression a suggestion (How about moving your car)
7. Preparatory: a preparatory condition for performing the request is referred to, such as the hearer’s ability or willingness to carry out the act (Can/would you move your car)
8. Strong Hint: the requestive force has to be inferred from the context; however, at least one element pertaining to the proposition is explicitly mentioned (Your car is in the way)
9. Mild Hint: the requestive force has to be inferenced from the context; no mention is made of elements relevant for the proposition (We don’t want any crowding).

According to the definitions offered above, direct requests comprise directness levels 1–5, conventionally indirect requests, the levels 6 and 7, and indirect requests, levels 8 and 9 (cf. Blum-Kulka, in press and Weizman, in press for further discussion).

Due to the frequencies with which these directness levels are used in the data, they have been grouped for the present study as follows:

1. Mood Derivable
2. Performatives/Obligation Statement/Want Statement/Suggestories
3. Preparatory
4. Hints.

Figures 1–5 indicate the distribution of the four directness level categories in the six languages, each figure representing one of the five request contexts.

In the Policeman situation, it is noticeable that with two exceptions, all language groups use Preparatories most frequently, though with considerable intergroup variability. The British NSs use Preparatories as much as in 90% of their responses, whereas the three learner groups and the Danish NSs choose this directness level only in 15–56% of their responses. For all groups but the English NSs, direct realizations (Mood Derivables) are possible alternatives in this situation (between 16 and 29%); the German NSs even show a clear preference for Mood Derivables over Preparatories. The Danish learners of German have a still lower choice of Preparatories—only 15%; they prefer Hints instead (which they use with the amazing frequency of 40%). The choice of directness level thus varies considerably in the Policeman situation.
Moving on to the Kitchen situation (Fig. 2), the picture becomes more homogenous. There is still clear intergroup variation in the choice of directness level, but more impressive perhaps is the intergroup agreement: Mood Derivables and the Performative/Obligation/Want/Suggestory levels are chosen between 6–24%, Hints between 0–6%, and Preparatories are the clear favourites (between 53–85%).
As we go on to the remaining requests contexts, this trend towards similar choices becomes most pronounced in the Notes situation (Fig. 3), whereas both the Lift (Fig. 4) and the Paper situation (Fig. 5) show a bit more diversity: some groups make modest choices of the Performative/Obligation/Want/Suggestory levels, and to a lesser extent, Hints are again chosen somewhat more often—but without at all challenging the absolute dominance of Preparatory realizations.

Figure 3: Directness Levels (%) in “Notes”

Figure 4: Directness Levels (%) in “Lift”
To summarize the most significant descriptive facts:

In all situations and for all language groups (with the exception of the German NSs and the Danish learners of German, cf. Færch and Kasper, in press, for discussion), the most frequently chosen directness level is Preparatory. In the literature, reasonable explanations have been offered to account for this fact, which is corroborated by many other studies (e.g. Rintell 1979, Fraser and Nolen 1981, Kasper 1981): Preparatories as the most pervasive realization of conventional indirectness strike a convenient balance between the conversational maxim of clarity and marking for politeness, i.e. the requestive force is brought out unambiguously while at the same time social requirements for face-saving are observed (cf. Blum-Kulka, in press for further discussion).

Throughout the language groups and situations, the choice of directness levels follows a consistent pattern: few choices of Mood Derivables, somewhat more of the Performative/Obligation/Want/Suggestory levels; the single most frequent directness level is Preparatory, and the frequency of Hints is roughly between Mood Derivables and Performative/Obligation/Want/Suggestories. Within this overall pattern, contextual and interlingual variation is observable. The NSs of British English indicate least contextual variation in their choice of directness level: In 85% and more, they choose Preparatories. All other groups opt for alternative choices more often, reflecting the social constraints of the situational contexts. Thus, higher directness levels, such as Mood Derivables and
Obligation Statements, are chosen by all groups in Policeman; Want Statements and Suggestories, as well as Hints, are used somewhat more in Paper, whilst Mood Derivables are ruled out in this context for any of the groups.

In order to account for the observed variation, it has to be related to relevant aspects in language users’ sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge. The sociopragmatic knowledge in question comprises the ways the parameters in the language users’ internalized ethnography of speaking are set, to borrow current terminology. Both the VALUES of contextual factors and their relative WEIGHT may vary culture-specifically in otherwise comparable situations, and these culture-specific social perceptions may in turn determine the choice of SA realization procedure, in the present case, of directness levels in requests (cf. Blum-Kulka and House, in press). However, sociopragmatic values are likely not only to be attached to request CONTEXTS, but also to the pragmalinguistic REALIZATION PROCEDURES. A formally comparable request structure, such as English can I borrow your notes, German kann ich deine Aufzeichnungen leihen and Danish kan jeg låne dine noter is not necessarily functionally equivalent in the three languages and cultures, i.e. its sociopragmatic value might vary crossculturally.

The culture-specific values and weights of contextual factors, as well as the sociopragmatic values ascribed to alternative realization procedures, can usefully be investigated by means of metapragmatic judgments (cf. Hill, Ide, Ikurta, Kawasaki, and Ogino 1986 for metapragmatic judgments of request contexts and realization patterns in Japanese and English). Situational assessments uncover informants’ perceptions of context-external factors pertaining to the request situation, such as the interlocutors’ relative status and familiarity (dominance and social distance), their rights and obligations, and context-internal factors relating to the degree of imposition associated with the request goal, the likelihood for the addressee to comply with, and the difficulty for the speaker to perform, the request. In the situational assessment studies of the five request contexts conducted by House (1986) and Blum-Kulka and House (in press), it was found that NSs of German, Hebrew and Argentine Spanish distinguish between types of interaction which are pre-arranged by social contract, and interactions where ‘setting the social parameters’ is more open to negotiation. Thus the Policeman and Kitchen context stand out against the remaining three situations in that they were found to exert on the addressee high obligation and therefore likelihood for compliance, while at the same time
endowing the speaker with a strong right to carry out the request, and consequently associated with low difficulty of request performance. House (1986) distinguishes such standard situations from the Notes, Lift and Paper contexts as non-standard situations, characterized by relatively low obligation for the addressee to comply and equally low rights on the part of the requester, thus resulting in greater difficulty in performing the request.

The differential social perceptions of the request contexts have been shown to importantly determinate language users' choice of directness level. House's and Blum-Kulka's studies (op. cit.) suggest that standard situations allow for greater directness, whereas non-standard situations call for more indirect realization strategies with their inherent potential for negotiation. For native Hebrew, German and Argentine Spanish, the most effective directness predictor was demonstrated to be the degree of the requestee's obligation. Context-internal factors were found to determine the preference for conversational indirectness in the non-standard situations (Notes, Lift, Paper), where the addressee's ability and willingness to comply, as brought out in the semantics of Preparatories, constitute prerequisites for compliance, and are appropriate aspects to focus on in 'asking a favour'.

To apply these findings to the present study, one may ask whether the lower degree of variability in the British NS data suggests that British language users would NOT assign different degrees of imposition, and different distributions of rights and obligations, to the Policeman and Kitchen situations as opposed to the other three contexts? Or does the higher variability in directness level selection evidenced by the learner groups indicate that the NNSs perceive even greater differences between the five request contexts than the Danish and German NSs, and if so, what factors do they ascribe such differences to? To date, situational assessment studies with NNSs informants are scarce (but cf. Walters 1978). Their availability will provide one important source of information to account for learners' contextual variation in the choice of request strategies.

The other explanation of variable choices of directness levels relates to the requestive behaviour itself: The sociopragmatic value of modification procedures may be perceived differentially by different language groups. Metapragmatic judgment studies on request realization have been carried out, e.g. by Fraser and Nolen (1981), in order to assess different modification alternatives in English, and by House (1986) and Blum-Kulka (1987), investigating cross-culturally the
relationship between indirectness and politeness. While House’s and Blum-Kulkas’ studies grosso modo confirmed the psycholinguistic validity of the directness scale used in CCSARP for NSs of German, British English, Hebrew and American English, the politeness values attached to the individual directness levels were found to vary cross-culturally, though with the important shared feature that all four groups perceived conventional indirectness, rather than hints, as the most polite request strategy.

Again, replicating these sociopragmatic assessment studies with NNSs would yield another valuable source of information to explain variable choices of directness level, as learners’ perception of the relative directness and associated politeness value may well differ from native assessments, i.e. be IL specific. Furthermore, preferences for alternative directness levels should be related to relevant contextual variables. For instance, it is conceivable that a Mood Derivable level, while presupposing pre-existing obligations for all language groups in the present study, is associated with status DIFFERENCE by the German NSs, with status EQUALITY (emphasizing solidarity) by the English NSs, and with either by the learner groups.

Methodologically, then, to test hypotheses about the principles underlying observed contextual variation—here, in the use of directness levels—two types of metapragmatic judgment data are required, viz. CONTEXTUAL assessment data, probing for the value and weight of context-external and context-internal factors, and TEXTUAL assessment data, providing judgments on modification procedures.

3.2 External modification: supportive moves

By supportive moves we refer to additions to the context of the request that upgrade or downgrade its force. Aggravating moves can, for instance, be threats, insults, or moralizing utterances. Mitigating moves, which are the ones I will consider here, comprise preparing the request (I’d like to ask you something), pre-requesting (are you free this evening), Imposition Minimizers (can you give me a lift? But only if you’re going my way), and Grounders, giving justifications for the request (I missed the bus. Could you give me a lift?). In our data, the Grounder is by far the most frequently used Supportive Move.

The distribution of Supportive Moves across the five request contexts and six language groups is represented in Figure 6.
With the exception of the Policeman situation, a clear increase in the use of Supportive Moves is noticeable for all groups from the Kitchen context over Notes and Paper to Lift. In these four contexts, the learners modify their requests externally in 18–85% of their responses, whilst the two target language groups, English and German, only use 2–44% supportive moves. The Danish NSs, however, modify their requests externally with up to 80%. A first explanation for the Danish learners’ tendency towards external modification could therefore be transfer from their L1. Transfer cannot account for the German learners’ indulgence in Supportive Moves though, as such a tendency is absent from the native German data. Furthermore, in a study involving American learners of Hebrew, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986) found a similar over-use of Supportive Moves in the IL data as compared to the target language, and again there was no transfer effect. The observed preference for learners to use external modification thus appears to be IL specific communicative behaviour, which they display independently of their L1. This finding raises a number of questions, of which I wish to address two.

1. Do learners perceive the impositive force of requests as more face-threatening than NSs, and if so, why?

It has been argued that they do, and that the difference in using external modification is an expression of the learners’ self-perception as non-members of the target culture. As a consequence of their foreigner role (as discussed, for
instance, in Janicki 1986), learners may feel a stronger need than NSs to establish, rather than presuppose, common ground. Instead of relying on the interlocutor's cooperation in reconstructing the implicit justification for requesting, and consequently performing the request without external modification, NNSs may therefore prefer to explicitize the reasons for exerting an imposition on their interlocutor. On this argumentation, learners do not only invest more energy in face work—which, after all, could be done in many other ways. Rather, they appear to prefer a more transparent communicative style than do NSs (which might be considered as a specific kind of face-supportive activity).

As we observed elsewhere (Færch and Kasper, in press), learners' inclination towards "verbosity", which was already noted by Levenston (1971), is not confined to request realization, or even to SAs where face concerns are essentially involved.

In her study of cohesion in NS–NNS discourse, Stemmer (1981) reports that intermediate learners of English display a tendency towards "complete responses", i.e., repeating (part of) their interlocutors' initiating act when this is not functionally motivated, instead of using shorter and more efficient procedures such as ellipsis and pro-forms. In the same data, Kasper (1981) notes the learners' preference for propositional explicitness where NSs would prefer shorter and more implicit modes of expression (e.g., "would you like to drink a glass of wine with me" instead of something like "how about a glass of wine"). Moreover, in their studies of compensatory strategies used by NNSs for solving referential problems, Bongaerts, Kellerman, and Bentlage (1987) and Tarone and Yule (forthcoming) observe that the learners produce overcomplex and longwinded utterances as compared to NSs of English. These results from different areas of IL discourse tentatively suggest a universal trend for language learners to give preference to the conversational maxim of manner (or clarity), over the maxim of quantity (or parsimony) when these two maxims are in conflict. From the learners' point of view, explicitizing may function as a playing-it-safe strategy of communication. Implementing such a strategy presupposes, of course, a rather well-developed linguistic competence, a condition met by the intermediate to high intermediate learner groups reported on in the literature and in the present study.
(2) How is this learner-specific behaviour to be evaluated?

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986) suggest that by adhering to the conversational maxim of clarity rather than quantity, the learners violate the quantity maxim, thus producing instances of pragmatic failure. From the point of view of NS communication, which largely rests on a principle of parsimony, or least effort, this is a convincing analysis. However, as Janicki (1986) has pointed out, it may not be adequate to invoke the same criteria for assessing native and nonnative communicative behaviour. For NNSs' contributions to be successful and efficient, they may have to follow different conversational principles. What would count as overelaboration in native discourse may fulfill a useful metalingual and metacommunicative function in crosscultural communication, serving to clarify the learner's intended semantic and pragmatic meaning. From other areas of IL discourse, it has become apparent that rather than following target norms in crosscultural communication, it may be more appropriate to use conversational procedures that take account of the increased risk of miscommunication. To take but one example, I found in an earlier study (Kasper 1981) that in conversations with NSs, intermediate learners used considerably more hearer back-channel signals than NS controls in equivalent discourse roles. Through this increased phatic activity, the learners contributed to maintaining the discourse in a situation where mutual comprehensibility could not be taken for granted.

Returning to learners' high frequencies in the use of external modification in request realization, two types of studies seem requisite to look into the questions raised.

(1) It should be tested in performance studies whether the absence or presence of Supportive Moves in learners' requests is decisive for the success of the interaction, and what other factors they interact with in contributing to communicative efficiency, or lack of the same.
(2) Assessment studies should be carried out with NSs and NNSs as informants, examining how differential use of Supportive Moves as a function of membership vs. non-membership is perceived by native and nonnative language users. Because, if learners assess their tendency toward external modification as appropriate, while NSs perceive the same learner behaviour as inappropriate, then this would indeed strongly indicate a source for pragmatic failure, and hence potential breakdown, in crosscultural communication.

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