

**An analysis of requests produced by second language speakers of English and how these requests are received by English first language speakers.**

by  
Fatima Ganchi

*Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Philosophy in Intercultural Communication at  
Stellenbosch University*



Supervisor: Dr Frenette Southwood  
Co-supervisor: Dr Marcellyn Oostendorp  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

December 2012

## **Declaration**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: 3 September 2012

## Abstract

During the course of my work as Communications lecturer at a multicultural university, I have noticed differences in the manners in which Sesotho-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking students make the same requests to me while speaking English. There exists a possibility that these second language (L2) requests could be deemed inappropriate and/or unintelligible by first language (L1) speakers of English. It is possible that miscommunication may result when requests by one culture group is judged as inappropriate and/or unintelligible by another. The aims of my study were to investigate (i) whether there are indeed differences in the manners in which L1 Sesotho and L1 Afrikaans speakers make requests when speaking English and (ii) how the differences in the (a) politeness, (b) formalness, (c) appropriateness, (d) grammaticality and (e) intelligibility of these requests made by the above-mentioned two groups manifest, as judged by L1 speakers of English.

In terms of research methodology, I elicited requests in English from two culturally and linguistically different groups of students (17 L1 Afrikaans and 17 L1 Sesotho) by means of a written scenario completion task. One scenario involved a high imposition situation and the other a low imposition. The requests made by the two groups were then analysed using the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) framework of Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989a). Each request was also judged by eight L1 English speakers.

Data analysis showed that there are indeed differences in the way in which Afrikaans- and Sesotho-speaking people put forth English requests. In terms of CCSARP categories, the Sesotho speakers used more alerters and more politeness markers than the Afrikaans speakers did. Sesotho and Afrikaans speakers also differed in their responses to high and low imposition situations – for example, Sesotho speakers used more grounders in the low imposition request than in the high imposition request, whereas Afrikaans speakers' requests showed the reverse pattern. In terms of ratings received by L1 speakers, although Sesotho speakers' requests were judged as more polite, Afrikaans speakers' requests were judged as more appropriate and grammatically correct.

The findings have implications for curriculum design: By being mindful of the workings of intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication and by acknowledging that people from different cultural backgrounds bring to a conversation certain culturally inherited factors which influence them and the interlocutors, I can use the results of this study to better inform

the different L1 groups in my classes how to change their requesting behaviour so as to make requests that are judged by L1 English speakers as being appropriate.

## Opsomming

Tydens my werk as Kommunikasie-dosent aan 'n multikulturele universiteit het ek verskille opgelet in die manier waarop Sesotho-sprekende en Afrikaanssprekende studente dieselfde versoeke aan my rig wanneer hulle Engels praat. Die moontlikheid bestaan dat hierdie tweedetaal- (T2) versoeke as ontoepaslik en/of onverstaanbaar beskou kan word deur eerstetaal- (T1) sprekers van Engels. Dit is moontlik dat miskommunikasie kan ontstaan wanneer versoeke deur een kultuurgroep as ontoepaslik en/of onverstaanbaar beoordeel word deur 'n ander kultuurgroep. Die doelstellings van my studie was om die volgende te ondersoek: (i) of daar inderdaad verskille bestaan in die manier waarop T1 Sesotho- en T1 Afrikaanssprekendes versoeke in Engels rig en (ii) hoe verskille in die (a) hoflikheid, (b) formeelheid, (c) toepaslikheid, (d) grammatikaliteit en (e) verstaanbaarheid van hierdie versoeke deur bogenoemde twee groepe manifesteer, soos beoordeel deur T1-sprekers van Engels.

In terme van navorsingsmetodologie het ek versoeke in Engels van twee kultureel en talig verskillende groepe studente (17 T1 Afrikaans en 17 T1 Sesotho) ontlok deur gebruik te maak van 'n geskrewe scenario-voltooiingstaak. Een scenario het 'n versoek met 'n hoë afdwingingsvlak (*imposition*) behels en die ander met 'n lae afdwingingsvlak. Die versoeke gerig deur die twee groepe is toe geanaliseer deur gebruik te maak van die sogenaamde *Cross Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project* (CCSARP)-raamwerk van Blum-Kulka, House en Kasper (1989a). Elke versoek is ook deur agt T1-sprekers van Engels beoordeel.

Data-analise het aangedui dat daar wel verskille is in die manier waarop Afrikaans- en Sesotho-sprekendes versoeke in Engels rig. In terme van CCSARP-kategorieë het die Sesotho-sprekendes meer attentmakers (*alerters*) en meer hoflikheidsmerkers as die Afrikaanssprekendes gebruik. Sesotho- en Afrikaanssprekendes het ook verskil in hul reaksie op hoë en lae imposisie-situasies – Sesotho-sprekendes het meer redeverskaffers (*grounders*) in die lae afdwingingsversoek as in die hoë afdwingingsversoek gebruik terwyl Afrikaanssprekendes die teenoorgestelde gedoen het. Alhoewel die Sesotho-sprekendes se versoeke as meer hoflik beskou is deur die T1-sprekende beoordelaars, is Afrikaanssprekendes se versoeke as meer toepaslik en grammatikaal korrek beskou.

Die bevindinge het implikasies vir kurrikulum-ontwerp: Deur bewus te bly van die aard van interkulturele verbale en nie-verbale kommunikasie en deur te erken dat persone van

verskillende kulturele agtergronde sekere kultuur-inherente faktore na 'n gesprek toe bring wat hulle en hulle gespreksgenote beïnvloed, kan ek die resultate van hierdie studie gebruik om die verskillende T1-groepe in my klasse beter in te lig hoe om hul versoekgedrag aan te pas om versoeke te kan rig wat as toepaslik beskou word deur T1-sprekers van Engels.

## Table of contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Rationale for the study	1
1.2 Research questions	2
1.3 Thesis layout	3
1.4 Conclusion	4
<b>Chapter 2: Literature overview</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Introduction	5
2.2 Communicative and pragmatic competence	5
2.3 Intercultural communicative competence	8
2.3.1 Components of intercultural communicative competence	8
2.3.2 Criteria of intercultural communicative competence	11
2.4 Speech acts	12
2.4.1 Direct and indirect speech acts	15
2.5 Politeness	17
2.6 Requests	19
2.7 Conclusion	20
<b>Chapter 3: Research methodology and theoretical framework</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1 Introduction	21
3.2 Research design	21
3.3 General procedures followed	22
3.4 Data collection	23
3.5 Participants	25
3.5.1 Requesters	25
3.5.2 Raters	26
3.6 The Cross Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP)	27
3.7 Conclusion	33

<b>Chapter 4: Data analysis – The English requests of Afrikaans-speaking and Sesotho speaking students</b>	<b>35</b>
4.1 Introduction	35
4.2. Participant responses in terms of CCSARP categories	35
4.2.1 Intergroup comparison of the responses to the first scenario completion task	35
4.2.2 Intergroup comparison of the responses to the second scenario completion task	38
4.2.3 Intragroup comparison of the responses to the two scenarios	40
4.3 Raters’ ratings of the requests made by the two groups	43
4.3.1 Ratings for politeness	44
4.3.2 Ratings for formalness	44
4.3.3 Ratings for appropriateness	45
4.3.4 Ratings for grammaticality	45
4.3.5 Ratings for clarity of intended meaning	46
4.4 Conclusion	46
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusion</b>	<b>48</b>
5.1 Introduction	48
5.2 Answer to research question 1	48
5.3 Answer to research question 2	49
5.4 Pragmatic transfer	53
5.5 Implication of the findings of the study	53
5.6 Strengths and limitations of the study	54
5.7 Conclusion	55
<b>References</b>	<b>57</b>
Appendix A: Consent form (L2 participants)	61
Appendix B: Language background questionnaire completed by L2 participants	64

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

---

### 1.1 Rationale for the study

During the course of my work as a Communications lecturer at a Gauteng university, which has a multicultural student body, I noticed that students from different cultural backgrounds differ in the manner in which they put the same request to me. It came to my attention that some students request in a manner that may be considered inappropriate and/or unintelligible by people not belonging to the same cultural group as these students. It is therefore possible that miscommunication may result when requests by members of one cultural group are judged as inappropriate and/or unintelligible by members of another. Specifically, I have noticed differences in the manner in which first language (L1) Sesotho-speaking and L1 Afrikaans-speaking students formulate requests when speaking English. Additionally, when these speakers of English as a second language (L2) request in English, there exists a possibility that these requests may be found to be inappropriate and/or unintelligible by L1 speakers of English.

According to Gumperz (1990 as cited in Jawarowska n.d.), breakdown in interethnic communication may occur when L2 speakers who lack full mastery of the conversational norms of the target language (in this case English) speak to L1 speakers of that language. Kasper (1990: 193 as cited in Jawarowska n.d.) states that the L2 speakers then run the risk of being deemed impolite and accordingly not being treated as social equals (Jawarowska n.d.). Through frequent prolonged contact and through discussions with students from Afrikaans and Sesotho backgrounds, I have become familiar with the manner in which they formulate requests in English and I no longer deem such requests as impolite, even if they differ from the request that a L1 speaker of English would make. I was, however, interested to learn whether this would hold for other L1 speakers of English as well.

More often than not, in the course of communication, the hearer's interpretation of an utterance is influenced by factors such as social context, authority and culture. As regards social context, for example, Le Pair (1996: 652) analyses a Spanish utterance (which can be translated as "Stay in the shadow ... chocolates melt in the sun") from a cross-cultural

perspective. He also shows that from a pragmalinguistic view, the utterance can first be seen to be an imperative, such as an order (namely to stay out of the sun), but then when the same utterance is examined from a socio-cultural context, it is seen as an expressive speech act, namely as a compliment (where the addresser states that the addressee is as sweet as chocolate) rather than a direct speech act (“Do not go into the sun!”). If differences were to be found between the Sesotho-speaking and the Afrikaans-speaking participants’ L2 English requests, some of the reasons could pertain to social context, differences in how authority is viewed and differences in cultural practices of the two language groups.

Okolo’s (1993) study is one of the few available studies on requests in African languages. He (1993: 91-95) discusses requests made in Igbo. The study examines how social and conversational conventions govern whether a request is fulfilled or denied by members of a speech community. Okolo (1993: 91-95) concludes that certain variables such as status, relationship and power affect the request forms that members of a particular speech community employ. He further states that in order to better understand the request forms and the behaviour of a particular language group, it is essential that one learns to understand how the participants use their cultural knowledge when selecting utterance patterns (Okolo 1993: 95). One of the reasons for doing the present study was to ascertain whether the manner which Sesotho speakers select to make requests in English differ much from the manner which Afrikaans speakers select, and whether one of these manners is more acceptable to L1 speakers of English than the other.

## **1.2 Research questions**

The aims of the study reported on here were to investigate whether there are differences in the manner in which requests are made in English by L1 Afrikaans and L1 Sesotho speakers, and whether the speech act of request performed in English by L1 Afrikaans and L1 Sesotho speakers is judged as intelligible and/or appropriate by L1 speakers of English. In order to reach these aims, answers were sought to the following two research questions:

Question 1: What are the differences in the manner in which two groups of L2 English speakers (specifically, L1 Sesotho and L1 Afrikaans speakers) make requests when speaking English?

Question 2: How do the differences in the (i) politeness, (ii) formalness, (iii) appropriateness, (iv) grammaticality and (v) intelligibility of the English-language requests made by the L1 Sesotho and L1 Afrikaans speakers, as judged by L1 speakers of English, manifest?

English and Afrikaans are classified as West Germanic languages. Sesotho, by contrast, belongs to the Bantu language/family. The Bantu languages are divided into various subgroups, including Nguni, Sotho, Venda, Tsonga and Inhambane. The Sotho group can in turn be broken down into Southern Sotho (what I refer to as “Sesotho”), Northern Sotho and Tswana (Mesthrie 2002: 62). Because English and Afrikaans are typologically and possibly in terms of culture closer to each<sup>1</sup> other than to Sesotho, I expect more positive transfer from Afrikaans to English than from Sesotho to English.

### 1.3 Thesis layout

In chapter 2, communicative and pragmatic competences are discussed. The components of intercultural communicative competence as well as the criteria required for successful communication on an intercultural level are then discussed. Speech act theory is discussed and the different types of speech acts are classified and explicated. Brief mention is made of requests when discussing speech acts, but requests are treated in more detail later on in chapter 2. The role of politeness in requests is also discussed.

In chapter 3, the theoretical framework and research methodology used in this study are set out. The framework used to analyse requests, i.e. the theoretical framework of the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) of Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989a), is described. Where possible, examples from the study reported on here are supplied to illustrate the various CCSARP categories.

In chapter 4, the request data that were collected are analysed and discussed. The CCSARP categories found in the requests made by the speakers of the Afrikaans and Sesotho language groups are compared, as well as the ratings of these requests by the L1 speakers of English.

---

<sup>1</sup> Please note the *possibly* here; I am not claiming that this has been proven. At this point, it is a working assumption. It is conceivable that speakers of English and speakers of Afrikaans share more cultural norms and practices with each other rather than with speakers from a Sesotho background.

In chapter 5, the data that were analysed in chapter 4 are interpreted. An attempt is made to answer the two research questions that were posed above. Possible reasons for the conclusion reached are also given.

#### 1.4 Conclusion

The above study focuses on the speech act of a request. Questions were asked as to whether there exist differences in the manner in which L2 speakers (L1 Sesotho and L1 Afrikaans speakers) make requests when speaking English as well as to how the differences in appropriateness, grammaticality, formalness, clarity and politeness of requests made in English by the two groups manifest when judged by L1 speakers of English.

To end this chapter, I provide the following definitions of key concepts and terms that are employed in the remaining chapters.

- Appropriate: “proper”, “suitable” or “fitting” or “acceptable or correct in the circumstances” (McArthur 1992: 77). Ting-Toomey (1999: 262) states that “appropriateness refers to the degree to which the exchanged behaviours are regarded as proper and match the expectations generated by the insiders of the culture”.
- Cross-cultural communication: “any communication between two people who do not share a common linguistic or cultural background” (Thomas 1983: 91).
- Intelligible: “able to be understood or comprehensible, able to be understood by the intellect” (Fowler and Fowler 1974: 633)
- Miscommunication: “lack of clear or adequate communication” according to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s English dictionary (Hornby 1995: 49; 621).
- Positive transfer: “When a learner uses a L2 pragmatic feature with native form, function and distribution because of influence from the L1, this is positive (or ‘successful’) transfer from the L1” (Hassall 2003: 1905).

## Chapter 2

### Literature overview

---

#### 2.1 Introduction

In researching requests, it is first necessary to define a speech act, and more specifically, a speech act of request. As explained in Chapter 1, of particular interest to me is how L2 speakers of a language put forth a request to L1 speakers of that language. More precisely, are there differences in the manner in which L2 speakers of English with different L1s make requests, and would the English requests of these L2 speakers be regarded as *appropriate* and *intelligible* (amongst others) if judged by L1 speakers of English?

This chapter starts with a discussion of communicative competence and then specifically pragmatic competence (also pragmatic competence in a L2) (see section 2.2). Included in this discussion is the concept of ‘pragmatic failure’. Given that the requests that I studied are instances of intercultural communication, I then discuss the components and criteria of intercultural communicative competence (see section 2.3). Then the discussion turns to speech acts (see section 2.4), particularly to the ways in which they have been classified by various scholars, as well as to the difference between direct and indirect speech acts. As many scholars view politeness to be related to indirectness, I also discuss the concept of ‘politeness’ (see section 2.5). The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of requests (see section 2.6), the speech act on which this study focuses.

#### 2.2 Communicative and pragmatic competence

“Communicative competence” is an inclusive term describing knowledge of how to use language grammatically and how to use language to achieve communicative goals, considering that language usage is a dynamic process (Bachman 1990: 87). According to Bachman (1990: 81), language competencies can be classified into two main types, namely organisational competence and pragmatic competence. Both types consist of several subtypes of competence. Organisational competence comprises grammatical competence – which, according to Widdowson (1978, cited in Bachman 1990: 87) includes those competencies

involving knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology and graphology – as well as textual competence. Language competence can thus be said to include pragmatic competence, and pragmatic competence includes those abilities related to the functions that are performed through language use. As pointed out by Bachman (1990: 89-90), Van Dijk (1977) defines “pragmatics” as the study of the relationships between utterances and the functions the speakers intend to perform through these utterances. These intended functions are called the *illocutionary force* of utterances, whilst the suitability of the language that was used in context is termed the *appropriateness* of utterances. Therefore, pragmatic competence includes illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence (Bachman 1990: 89-90). As this study examines utterances in the form of requests and intended functions, pragmatic competence is discussed below in more detail.

In language use, all the different language competencies, such as grammatical competence, illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence, interact with each other and with features of the situation in which the language use takes place (Bachman 1990: 86). According to Jannedy, Poletto and Weldon (1994: 228), “pragmatics concerns itself with how people use language within a context and why they use language in particular ways.” Pragmatic competence is therefore knowledge of certain aspects of the rules of use of a language in context which are not language-specific and therefore need not be learned again in a L2 (Blum-Kulka 1982: 32). This is then referred to as the “pragmatic component” of the speaker’s communicative competence in a language. L2 learners do not need to be taught social rules in a context (Blum-Kulka 1982: 32). (Note, however, that other aspects may be language-specific and/or culture-specific and may therefore need to be learnt by L2 learners.)

I felt the need to investigate pragmatic competence after examining what Thomas (1983: 110) stated about the importance of pragmatic competence in communication: She agrees with Rintell (1979: 104) that students begin to acquire pragmatic knowledge once they are exposed to the target culture. Thomas, however, makes the important observation that adults who immigrated to Britain already speaking very fluent English as a L2, did not attain as high a degree of pragmatic competence as she expected they would upon being exposed to the British culture. This led Thomas to doubt whether grammatical competence necessarily implies a matching level of pragmatic competence (Thomas 1983: 110). According to Bachman and Palmer (1982, cited in Bachman 1990: 86), however, pragmatic and grammatical competence are closely associated with each other.

### *Pragmatic competence in a second language*

Blum-Kulka (1982: 29) states that studies of child discourse by Ervin-Tripp (1977) and Dore (1977) show that already in childhood, the social rules of a L1 are acquired together with the formal properties of the language. Regarding L2 pragmatic learning, as opposed to L1 pragmatic learning, the following conclusion can be inferred, according to Blum-Kulka (1982: 29) from the studies of Labov (1972), Ervin-Tripp (1976, 1977), Dore (1977) and Gumperz and Tannen (1979).

- (i) There is an interdependence between social and linguistic rules in the effective use of language in context;
- (ii) The two aspects of communicative competence mentioned in (i) (i.e. knowledge of the social and linguistic rules) are acquired in early childhood and
- (iii) Certain communicative aspects which refer to situational, social and linguistic knowledge that must be present for successful language use may be culture-specific and language-specific (Blum-Kulka 1982: 29-30).

Many studies of interlanguage pragmatics have been carried out with the focus on L2 usage, specifically on the extent and ways in which L2 learners' pragmatic usage of the L2 differs from that of L1 speakers of the target language. Much of the research regarding requests as a speech act has been done by comparing the pragmatic knowledge of requests of learners with different L1s and different cultural backgrounds. This work is mostly cross-sectional and not focused on the interlanguage development of requests (Achiba 2003: 5). Due to practical restrictions, the present study is also cross-sectional, comparing the interlanguage pragmatic competence of adult English L2 speakers of two different L1s.

Since speech acts constitute a combination of linguistics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics, it is implied that for a L2 learner to accomplish successful communication in their L2, situational, social and linguistic knowledge must be present. It is furthermore generally accepted that situational, social and linguistic conditions vary from culture to culture and from language to language (Blum-Kulka 1982: 30).

### ***Pragmatic failure***

Thomas (1983: 91) states that the inability to understand what is meant by what is said can be termed “pragmatic failure”. Thomas (1983: 109) distinguishes between two kinds of pragmatic failure, namely pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure. Pragmalinguistic failure occurs when the pragmatic force of an utterance differs from the force assigned to it by L1 speakers of the target language. In other words, pragmatic failure occurs when speech act strategies are not transferred appropriately from the speaker’s L1 to their L2. Sociopragmatic failure occurs when different perceptions of the utterance arise from differences between culture-specific perceptions of appropriate linguistic behavior (Thomas 1983: 99). Although other linguists have not found it necessary to make this distinction, Thomas (1983: 109) claims that the distinction between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure is significant even though the two cannot be fully separated. Thomas (1983: 109) claims that, for “a normal observer”, it would be difficult to distinguish between these two types of pragmatic failure, but for any language teacher, it should be compulsory to be able to make this distinction. When pragmalinguistic or sociopragmatic failure occurs, then two types of pragmatic decision-making can be performed by the teacher. The first is language-specific, whilst the other is culture-specific. The language-specific reason for pragmalinguistic or sociopragmatic failure can be easily corrected whilst the culture-specific reason involves one’s values and beliefs and cannot simply be corrected, but requires discussion.

Thomas (1983: 101) states that pragmalinguistic failure may arise from two possible sources, namely “teaching-induced errors” and “pragmalinguistic transfer” where inappropriate transfer from L1 to L2 has occurred which could cause a different interpretation and also result in a different pragmatic force in the target language. Should the present study find that the L2 speakers’ requests are not judged favourably by the L1 speakers, reasons for this judgment could include possible pragmalinguistic failure on the part of the L2 speakers.

## **2.3 Intercultural communicative competence**

### **2.3.1 Components of intercultural communicative competence**

The term “intercultural communicative competence” refers to the process of integrating *knowledge*, *mindfulness* and *communication skills* in order to best manage differences

between groups and cultures. There are three components that are critical in attaining optimal intercultural communicative competence, namely knowledge blocks, mindfulness and communication skills (Ting-Toomey 1999: 266). These three components are discussed in this section, drawing on Ting-Toomey (1999).

Knowledge holds the key to becoming aware of and understanding important intercultural differences which could help in being successful in the communication situation. Without culture-sensitive knowledge, communicators cannot be made aware of any ethnocentric views which they may unconsciously hold when evaluating behaviour in an intercultural situation. The *knowledge block* component of intercultural communicative competence, using verbal and nonverbal communication styles, shows how individualists and collectivists deal with communication, conflict and relationship differences. Additionally, dissimilar behaviour by others is also evaluated. Symbolic identity and culture-based identity, which influence one another, make us choose verbal and nonverbal codes to express our self-images. By understanding the workings of intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication, we can understand the cultural ethnic identity that play a role in the communication process. It is well known that even an insider of a particular culture cannot fully explain everything of that culture, so according to Ting-Toomey (1999: 266-267) it is advisable for an outsider to always underestimate his/her knowledge, and in doing so, always be willing to learn more of that culture.

By *mindfulness* is meant that whilst one attends to one's own cognitions, emotions and assumptions, one is also conscious of the other's cognitions, emotions and assumptions. A key to being able to monitor ethnocentric judgements reflexively, is by being mindful of the cultural "I" or "we" identity. One can only learn to be mindful of intercultural differences if one learns to see unfamiliar behaviour from a fresh viewpoint and to be open to new interaction situations. Mental flexibility is also required to integrate new ideas into ones' value system and to rethink assumptions about oneself and about the world, which eventually leads one to personal growth (Ting-Toomey 1999: 267-268).

According to Langer (1989, 1987, as cited in Ting-Toomey 1999: 268), to be able to act mindfully one should learn to do the following: (i) see the behaviour or information in a situation as fresh; (ii) look at a situation from different perspectives; (iii) stay attuned to the context and the person whose behaviour one is perceiving and (iv) try to create new categories through which to understand this new behaviour.

Through mindfulness, we can check our own ethnocentric evaluations and examine the needs of others from another viewpoint. Therefore, mindfulness remains the mediating step in linking intercultural knowledge with skillful practice (to be discussed below) (Ting-Toomey 1999: 268-269).

In any given situation, the ability to interact appropriately, effectively and satisfactorily largely depends on one's *communication skills*. The core communication skills are (i) mindful listening, (ii) mindful observation, (iii) identity confirmation and (iv) collaborative dialogue. In intercultural communication, it is important to listen mindfully to any views that are being discussed in a problematic situation. Paraphrase and perception checking skills should be used in a culture-sensitive way.

Mindful observation demands that one has to observe carefully the verbal and nonverbal signs being exchanged in the communication process, describe mentally and behaviourally what is happening in the interaction, interpret these signs in multiple ways to try and "make sense" of the behaviour and, lastly, suspend any ethnocentric evaluation (Ting-Toomey 1999: 269)

The third communication skill, i.e. identity confirmation, is used to convey recognition of the others' place in society by addressing others by their desired titles, names, labels and identities. Using inclusive and situational language rather than exclusive or polarised language is part of identity confirmation. Instead of stressing the in-group/out-group circles, one should rather acknowledge the identities of out-group members as if they are members of the in-group (Ting-Toomey 1999: 270). People have preferences regarding identity affiliations and one should take care of these in order to communicate sensitively with others.

In managing meaningful intercultural communication, one can also practice collaborative dialogue skills. This involves the discovering of mutual ground and the sharing of power by viewing each culture as a piece of the bigger picture.

Gudykunst and Kim (1997), Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, Sudweeks and Stewart (1995), Lustig and Koester (1996), and Wiseman and Koester (1993, as cited in Ting-Toomey 1999: 271), have identified seven attributes that an effective intercultural communicator should ultimately have. These are "tolerance for ambiguity, openmindedness, cognitive flexibility, respectfulness, situational adaptability, verbal and nonverbal sensitivity and creative thinking". Whilst I am interested in establishing whether the request-makers in this study are

successful in communicating in an multicultural setting, I will not be analysing their intercultural communicative competence (or lack thereof) according to the above components given by Ting-Toomey (1999).

### **2.3.2 Criteria of intercultural communicative competence**

There are three criteria of intercultural communicative competence, namely the appropriateness criterion, the effectiveness criterion and the satisfaction criterion. Ting-Toomey (1999: 262) states that “*appropriateness* refers to the degree to which the exchanged behaviours are regarded as proper and match the expectations generated by the insiders of the culture”. Each intercultural interaction scene is different, so individuals use their own cultural expectations and formulate their ideas of the other according to noticed verbal and nonverbal behaviours (Ting-Toomey 1999: 262). According to Ting-Toomey (1999: 263), although we may think that we are acting appropriately, others may not agree.

Ting-Toomey (1999: 264) states that “*effectiveness* refers to the degree to which communicators achieve mutual shared meaning and desired goal-related outcomes”. When the encoding and decoding of the message is effective, then it leads to mutually shared meanings. This, in turn, leads to perceived intercultural understanding. Intercultural miscommunication and misunderstandings can occur if one participant encodes and decodes ineffectively (Ting-Toomey 1999: 264). There are three parts of meaning that increase intercultural understanding, namely content meaning, identity meaning and relational meaning (Ting-Toomey 1999: 264). Content meaning relates to factual information in the message exchange process; identity meaning refers to ‘who’ one is in the intercultural scene; whilst relational meaning refers to how communicators see themselves in relation to intimacy and the power distance of the relationship (Ting-Toomey 1999: 264). Effective intercultural communication has been achieved when content, identity and relational meaning are attended to with accuracy and the desired goals of interacting have been achieved (Ting-Toomey 1999: 264).

Turning to the *satisfaction* criterion, human beings in all cultures need positive affirmation from others to support a sense of group membership identity and personal identity (Ting-Toomey 1999: 265). When others validate one’s identity, one feels more satisfied. If important identities are addressed positively and sensitively, then satisfaction will be

achieved. To be able to achieve this satisfaction in an interaction, one has to understand the possibility of assumptions surrounding verbal and nonverbal messages (Ting-Toomey 1999: 265).

It is suggested that all three criteria be used holistically in mastering knowledge, mindfulness and communication skills in practicing competent intercultural communication (Ting-Toomey 1999: 265). Being aware of the key to successful intercultural communication, the question still remains as to if and why different cultures, and more specifically L2 speakers of a language, request differently. Furthermore, can these requests be misunderstood and lead to miscommunication? Previous research done across cultures have shown that there are differences between speakers of the various cultures as regards the manner in which they perform the speech act of request (see, for example, Al-Issa 2003; Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989b; Fukkushima 1996; Hassall 2003; Marti 2006; Weizman 1993). By looking at speech act theory (to be discussed next), we can come to an understanding of how we use language to achieve our goals.

## 2.4 Speech acts

Jawarowska (n.d.) states that Austin's (1962) theory of speech acts identifies three distinct levels of meaning in what we say. These are *locutionary*/propositional meaning; *illocutionary* meaning and *perlocutionary* meaning. *Locutionary* meaning is the basic literal meaning of what is being said, for example "It's hot in here" can refer to the temperature being high. *Illocutionary* meaning refers to the social function of what is being said, for example "It's hot in here" could be meant as an indirect request for a person to open a window or door (or an indirect refusal to close a window or door because someone may be feeling cold and is enjoying the heat of the room); or a complaint that is emphatically expressed by implying that one should obviously not keep the windows and doors closed. *Perlocutionary* meaning concerns the effect of what is being said, for example "It's hot in here" may result in someone opening windows or doors. How speakers use language to convey the above intended meanings is part of what speech act theory attempts to explain (Jawarowska n.d.).

When we use language to perform a wide range of activities such as requesting information, conveying information, giving orders, making requests, making threats, giving warnings, making bets or giving advice, we are performing speech acts (Jannedy et al. 1994: 229).

Searle (1971: 39) refers to a “speech act” as an “illocutionary act”. He also states that these acts are sometimes referred to as “language acts” or “linguistic acts”. Furthermore, he states that the illocutionary act is “the minimal unit of linguistic communication” (Searle 1971: 39).

According to Bach (n.d.), speech acts are generally acts of communication. One uses communication to express certain attitudes, therefore the types of speech acts used normally match the type of attitude that one wishes to express. A successful speech act is one in which the audience identifies the attitude being conveyed by the speaker as intended by the speaker.

Austin (1962: 153-161), using the term “illocutionary act” instead of speech act, was one of the first scholars to attempt to classify speech acts. He originally divided speech acts into five general classes:

- (i) *Verdictives* are performed to give an evaluation or a verdict. They contain verbs of condemning, estimating, decreeing, assessing and judging.
- (ii) *Exercitives* are acts that are performed to show one’s rights and power. They contain verbs of voting, naming, appointing, proclaiming, etc.
- (iii) *Commissives* are performed to express undertakings or commitments. Their utterances contain verbs of betting, promising, guaranteeing, committing, etc.
- (iv) *Behabitives* are acts that are related to social attitudes and behaviours. Their utterances contain verbs of complaining, apologising, commending, etc.
- (v) *Expositives* are performed with the aim to expand one’s views in order to describe or explain. Their utterances contain verbs of stating, describing, arguing, illustrating, denying, etc. (Austin 1962: 153-161).

In classifying speech acts, Searle (1976) used a different approach after considering at least twelve criteria. Three of these criteria are of particular importance here. They are the *illocutionary point* of the utterance (i.e. the things that we do with language); the *direction of fit* (i.e. how the words we utter relate to the world) and the *psychological state*. Using these criteria, Searle (1976, as cited in Flowerdew 1988: 70-71) classifies illocutionary acts as follows:

- (i) *Representatives* are acts which describe events in the world, such as hypothesising, suggesting and swearing;
- (ii) *Directives* are acts in which the speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something, e.g. request, command and invite;
- (iii) *Commissives* are acts which involved the intention of the speaker to become involved in some future action (so that the speaker commits to something), e.g. threaten, undertake and promise;
- (iv) *Expressives* are acts in which the speaker does not assert himself/herself, but expresses feelings regarding something, e.g. congratulate, welcome and thank;
- (v) *Declarations* are acts that, when uttered, have an effect in changing the world, e.g. declarations such as “I declare you man and wife” and naming such as “I name this ship ‘Titanic’” (Flowerdew 1988: 70-71).

There have been many others who have attempted to classify speech acts, including Leech (1983: 110) who attempted to modify Searle’s framework. Many scholars accept Searle’s first four types, but exclude the fifth, which does not seem to concern itself with illocution. Willis (1983 as cited in Flowerdew 1988: 72). also adapted Searle’s work, stating that insufficient allowance was made for utterances and how they relate to one another. He therefore added three more types to Searle’s classification. They are “metacommunicatives”, “structives” and “elicitation”. Arndt and Ryan (1986), Martin (1981) and Halliday (1976, 1980) are but a few who have also worked on the classification of speech acts (as cited in Flowerdew 1988: 72).

More recently, Cruse (2011: 374-375) categorized speech acts into five types. They are:

- (i) *Assertives* in which the speaker is committed to the truth. Words that are used include *claim, report, warn (that), suggest, boast, state* and *complain*.
- (ii) *Directives* in which the speaker intends getting some kind of action from the hearer. Words used by the speaker include *command, request, order, advise (to), beseech, recommend, ask, warn* and *ask (to)*.

- (iii) *Commissives* in which the speaker is committed to do something in the future. Words used by the speaker include *offer, vow, promise, threaten, contract* and *undertake*.
- (iv) *Expressives* in which the speaker's psychological attitude regarding a certain situation is made known. Words that are used include *condole, praise, congratulate, thank, forgive, pardon* and *blame*.
- (v) *Declaratives*, the utterance of which brings about a change in reality. The world, in some way, will no longer remain the same after they have been uttered. Words that are used by the speaker include *dismiss, name, christen, resign, divorce* (in Islam), *sentence* (in court), *open* (an exhibition), *consecrate, bid* (at auction), *declare* (at cricket) and *excommunicate* (Cruse 2011: 374-375).

Blum-Kulka (1982: 31) states that for any speech act to be correctly performed there are certain felicity conditions that must be satisfied. Searle (1975, as cited in Blum-Kulka 1982: 31) refers to "felicity conditions" whilst Labor and Fanshel (1977 as cited in Blum-Kulka 1982:31) refer to "pragmatic conditions" as prerequisites for any utterance to count as a given act. Blum-Kulka (1982: 31) further notes this as a probable universal property of speech act realization.

If a speech act of request is to be regarded as a request, then there should be certain felicity conditions that need to be satisfied. Firstly, one usually makes a request for a single purpose only, which is to get something done. Secondly, one should not ask someone of a higher social standing to do things for one unless due to special circumstances. Thirdly, one should not make requests to do things that one does not want done (Jannedy et al. 1994: 232). (We return to felicity conditions in section 5.3.)

#### **2.4.1 Direct and indirect speech acts**

According to Jannedy et al. (1994), direct speech acts are those that perform their functions in a direct and literal manner. Jannedy et al. (1994: 232) state that direct speech acts may be performed in two ways:

1. By making a literal or direct utterance, e.g. *Sit down*, or

2. By using a performative verb that names the speech act, e.g. *I request you to sit down*.

An indirect speech act is one in which what the speaker literally says is different from what the speaker actually means (Jannedy et al. 1994: 233). There are many ways to establish if the utterance is an indirect speech act. Firstly, the utterance must not contain a performative verb. Secondly, the sentence type must contain words that are typically used in that sentence type – for example, a question is performed with an interrogative and an order is performed with an imperative. Thirdly, one could check whether any felicity conditions have been violated for the literal meaning but not for the intended meaning (Jannedy et al. 1994: 233-234). According to Achiba (2003: 7), there are two types of indirect strategies, namely conventionally indirect strategies and non-conventionally indirect strategies. These two types are discussed below.

### ***Conventionally indirect strategies***

For conventional indirectness, the two types of convention in indirectness as distinguished by Clark (1979, as cited in Achiba 2003: 8) – namely “conventions of means” and “conventions of forms” – determine what the speaker can do to signal a request.

Another feature of conventional indirectness is what Blum-Kulka (1989) refers to as “pragmatic duality”. Regarding pragmatic duality, there are two ways of interpreting conventionally indirect strategies (as stated by Achiba 2003: 8), namely on a literal level or on a requestive level. Consider the following example given by Achiba (2003: 8): A teacher is unable to hear a student and says, “Can you speak more loudly?” “Sorry, I can’t. I have a cold” may be a possible answer of a student. Most likely, the teacher was making a request, but the student responded as if it was a question as to her physical ability to speak more loudly. Therefore, a receiver can interpret the utterance on either one of the two levels (hence “duality”) or even both, and respond according to his or her interpretation (Achiba 2003: 8).

### ***Non-conventionally indirect strategies***

Non-conventionally indirect strategies are more commonly referred to as “hints”. According to Achiba (2003: 8), Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) state that a speaker can avoid the

responsibility for making a request when using this strategy. Since a hint has more than a single interpretation, it is left to the receiver of the utterance to interpret what the speaker actually intended. This interpretation is largely dependent on the context and the literal meaning of the utterance (Weizman 1993: 124).

Hints, which are referred to as an “off-record” strategy, are regarded by Brown and Levinson (1987: 71-75), Sifianou (1993) and Thomas (1995) (all as cited in Achiba 2003: 9) as more polite than “on-record” strategies, where an off-record strategy is one in which more than one meaning can be attached to the act and there is an option to not perform a potentially face-threatening act. By contrast, other studies on politeness strategies have shown that hints are not always regarded as the most polite strategy (also see the section on politeness below). In a study on the differences between L1 speakers of Hebrew and American English, Blum-Kulka (1987, as cited in Achiba 2003: 9) showed that *conventionally* indirect strategies were judged as being more polite than hints, a *non-conventional* indirect strategy (Achiba 2003: 9). Also, using the CCSARP framework in a study of speakers of Hebrew, American English, British English and German, House (1986, as cited in Weizman 1993:125) showed that hints were perceived to be less polite than conventional indirectness. From these studies, it was concluded that the use of conventional indirectness in making requests, instead of hints, was more effective (Weizman 1993: 125).

Weizman (1989), however, suggests that hints *are* used efficiently when, in making a request, the hint supplies the requester with the possibility of denying some of its illocutionary and propositional components. Hints are considered the only request strategy that holds a high “deniability potential” for both the requester and the hearer. The requester may deny having made a request, whilst the requestee may ignore the request or pretend to have misunderstood the request (Weizman 1993: 125).

## 2.5 Politeness

In this study, the L1 participants were requested to rate the L2 participants’ requests in terms of, amongst other things, politeness. This section briefly discusses politeness in requests. As cited in Le Pair (1996: 653), Lakoff (1973), Grice (1975), Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) and Leech (1983) state that politeness can be thought of as a communication strategy to maintain good relationships between communicators.

In studying politeness, indirectness plays an important role. According to Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989, cited in Marti 2005: 1841), directness is “the degree to which the speaker’s illocutionary intent is apparent from the locution.” According to Marti (2005: 1838), Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) believe that there is a strong link between politeness and indirectness. In Leech (1983: 108), the following example is given:

Utterance 1: *Could you possibly answer the phone?*

Utterance 2: *Answer the phone*

Leech (1983: 108, as cited in Marti 2005: 1838) remarks as follows on this example: Utterance 2 is perceived to be less polite than utterance 1 because of utterance 2 being more direct and giving less option to the hearer. This supports the assumption that in an utterance, if there are more options given to the hearer to say no, then that utterance is perceived as being more polite (Marti 2005: 1838). With regards to the link between politeness and indirectness, it should be noted that Blum-Kulka and House (1989 cited in Le Pair 1996: 653-654) state that indirectness is not necessarily the same as politeness. Different cultures may attach different social meanings to similar linguistic choices (Le Pair 1996: 653-654). In researching requesting behaviour, Blum-Kulka (1989) and Fukushima (1994), (both cited in Le Pair 1996: 654) have stated that variables such as power, social distance, situational setting and degree of imposition differ between cultures. While Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that the more indirect a strategy is, the more polite it is believed to be, Thomas (1995: 161) comments that the notion of optionality is a Western notion of politeness which does not necessarily apply to all cultures. Wierzbicka (1985 cited in Marti 2005: 1840), in her study which included Polish and English speakers, similarly comments that using an imperative form in Polish does not always imply impoliteness (Marti 2005: 1840).

However, Brown and Levinson (1987, as cited in Marti 2005: 1839) do rank politeness in terms of indirectness. Whilst referring to Goffman’s (1955, 1967 as cited in Marti 2005: 1839) idea of “the public self image”, they state that it is in the best interest of communicators to support one another’s face and avoid face-threatening acts. They further present five “superstrategies” for performing face-threatening acts, ranging from the most direct strategy to the most indirect (Marti 2005: 1839). (These strategies will not be discussed here, as they do not pertain directly to the present study.)

Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987, as cited in Marti 2005: 1839) politeness theory includes concepts of both positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness is considered a strategy where one seeks co-operation and common ground. Brown and Levinson (1987: 130 as cited in Marti 2005: 1839) state that in negative politeness, the wish to "be direct" and perform a face-threatening act clashes with the wish to "be indirect" in order not to force the hearer into anything. The resulting compromise is in the form of an indirect speech act. At the end of these indirect strategies, there are off-record strategies which consist of various types of metaphors and hints. (Recall that an off-record strategy is one in which more than one meaning can be attached to the act and there is an option to not perform a face-threatening act). According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 20-21), not performing a face-threatening act is considered to be even more polite than any off-record strategy (Marti 2005: 1839).

## 2.6 Requests

As the focus of the present study is on requests, I will discuss request as a speech act in this section. Becker's (1982) definition of "a request" is that it is an utterance that shows the speaker's intended desire to get the listener to do something (Achiba 2003: 6). According to Marti (2005: 1837), the speech act of request is one of the most investigated aspects in cross-cultural pragmatics, citing, amongst others, Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Garcia 1993; Hickey and Steward 2005; Rinnert and Kobayashi 1999; Sifianou 1992. According to Flowerdew (1988: 79), whereas Searle (1976) notes two distinct categories of directives, i.e. requesting and ordering, Leech (1981) finds the distinction scalar. He further states that as a result, it becomes difficult to determine the exact point at which a request shades into an order.

As cited in Achiba (2003: 6), in Searle's (1969) taxonomy, requests, alongside orders/commands, are categorised as "directives". Fraser (1975) and House and Kasper (1987) (both cited in Achiba 2003: 6) are amongst others who also categorised illocutionary verbs such as *order*, *command* and *request* (together with others such as *beg* and *plead*) under the category of requests. Ervin-Tripp (1976; 1977) also uses a category named "directives", which she divides into six subtypes. They are need statements, imperatives, embedded imperatives, permission directives, question directives and hints. Gordon and Ervin-Tripp (1984) use the same system of classification, but instead of using the term "directive", they use the term "request". Wolfson (1989), who uses Ervin-Tripp's (1976) classification, uses

“directives” and “requests” interchangeably. For the purposes of this study, “request” is used, and attention is paid to want statements (not need statements) and hints as part of the CCSARP’s categories.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In order to be able to answer the research questions posed in chapter 1, it was necessary to indicate the importance of pragmatic competence and its relation to communicative competence. Using Austin’s (1960) theory of speech acts where he identified three distinct levels of meaning of what we say, speech acts was classified. By looking at where the speech act of request is classified in speech act theory and how politeness is used as a strategy to maintain good relationships between interlocutors, we gain a deeper insight into the communication process. By specifically examining relationships and the process of how L2 learners transfer when they are communicating in the target language, one aims to understand how miscommunication could occur. Being aware of the criteria and components of intercultural communicative competence, one is reminded of the best way of managing intercultural differences successfully.

After this discussion of literature generally or specifically related to the speech act of request, the following chapter will set out the research methodology and theoretical framework which I have chosen for my study.

## CHAPTER 3

### Research methodology and theoretical framework

---

#### 3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 deals with the research methodology and theoretical framework of this study: how I have collected the data, the methodological approach that I have chosen, as well as how I have analysed the data. Concerning the latter, I used the CCSARP format to classify and analyse the data collected. I give an exposition of the CCSARP in section 3.6, where possible illustrating the CCSARP categories with examples from my own data.

#### 3.2 Research design

This section draws on information from a document made available by the University of Southern California (<http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=83009&sid=818072>). The research done was quantitative rather than qualitative. The latter generates non-numerical data and focuses on gathering mainly verbal data rather than measurements of a certain phenomenon. Gathered information is then analysed in an interpretative manner. Examples of data-gathering strategies used in qualitative research are individual in-depth interviews, structured and non-structured interviews, focus groups, narratives, content analysis, participant observation and archival research.

By contrast, quantitative research focuses more on counting and classifying features and constructing statistical models and figures to explain what is observed. Quantitative research makes use of tools such as questionnaires, surveys and other equipment to collect numerical or measurable data. In this study, scenario completion tasks and questionnaires were used and responses were tallied and then tabulated.

The research design that I used is referred to as “philosophical analysis” in the literature. Understood as more of a broad approach to examining a research problem than a methodological design, philosophical analysis is intended to challenge deeply embedded assumptions that form the foundation in an area of study. This approach uses the tools of

argumentation employed in philosophical traditions, concepts, models, and theories to critically explore and challenge, to analyse arguments about fundamental issues, i.e. to discuss the root of existing discourse about a research problem. These tools of analysis can be framed in three ways, i.e. in terms of ontology, epistemology and axiology, as discussed below.

Ontology is the study that of the nature of reality; for example, what is real and what is not, what is fundamental and what is derivative? Epistemology is the study that explores the nature of knowledge; for example, on what does knowledge and understanding depend and how can we be certain of what we know? Axiology is the study of values; for example, what values does an individual or group hold and why? How are values related to interest, desire, will, experience, and means-to-an-end? Axiology analysis seems well-suited to this research as studies employing such analysis can function as a means of gaining greater self-understanding and self-knowledge about the purposes of research as well as bringing clarity to general guiding practices and principles of an individual or group (in this case, two cultural groups who are L2 speakers of English). It offers clarity and definition to the practical and theoretical uses of terms, concepts, and ideas.

### **3.3 General procedures followed**

I elicited requests in English from two culturally and linguistically different groups of students (L1 Afrikaans and L1 Sesotho speakers, respectively – see section 3.5) by means of a written scenario completion task (see section 3.4). The responses of the two groups were then judged in terms of formalness, clarity, grammaticality, appropriateness and politeness by a third group (a group of L1 English speakers). The requests were also analysed according to CCSARP (see section 3.6). The number of times certain categories were used by the two L2 groups as well as the ratings that each group received from the L1 judges were then compared and discussed.

### **3.4 Data collection**

Data collection took place on two university campuses in the Vaal area of Gauteng. After approaching the relevant heads of department, I obtained permission to collect data in their institution. I then briefly addressed students in class informing them of what information I required, how long it should take them to complete the tasks and the general purpose of the study. As detailed information of the exact aim of the study would likely have influenced the elicitation of requesting information, I did not reveal that I was specifically interested in eliciting cross-cultural data on requests. Those students who were interested in participating were requested to fill in their relevant details on a list that I circulated through the classroom. I repeated the process in several classrooms until I had 18 Afrikaans-speaking and 34 Sesotho-speaking students who were interested in acting as participants, each with English as their L2. (The aim was to have at least 15 participants from each group, but upon my last classroom visit, more than the required number volunteered.)

Written consent for participation in the study was obtained from all potential L2 participants (see Appendix A for the consent form), and each completed a language background questionnaire (see Appendix B). With the aid of three sketched scenarios – two requiring requests and one (the foil) requiring a compliment – I elicited written-out speech acts. The specific scenarios were as follows:

#### **Scenario 1:**

Students enrolled for the first year course in English at the University. They require a minimum year mark of 50% in order to qualify to write the examination. It is left to the lecturer's discretion to ascertain whether a student who receives between 48%-49% should be given the extra marks to qualify for the exam. Lecturers are asked to observe student's participation in class as well as their attendance. A few students have obtained 48% and 49%. They have to request a change of mark from the lecturer in order to be able to qualify for the examination.

#### **Scenario 2:**

Students enrolled for the first year course in English at the University. A student is unable to attend the next class because he/she has to take a parent for an appointment

to the doctor. This student has to request to the lecturer if they could be excused from the upcoming class.

**Scenario 3:**

Students enrolled for the first year course in English at the University. The lecturer appears to be very well dressed. Students have the opportunity to compliment the lecturer.

L2 participants were told that they were one of the specific students in each scenario and that they had to write down their response. Each participant then received a code, after which the responses of the L2 participants were compiled into two typed documents (removing opportunity for any bias regarding handwriting), one containing both the L1 Afrikaans-speaking and L1 Sesotho-speaking participant responses to scenario 1 and the other likewise for scenario 2. Codes were given in order to (i) maintain participant anonymity, (ii) be free from any bias whether they were responses of L1 Afrikaans or L1 Sesotho participants, yet (iii) allowing me to trace each request back to the relevant L2 participant later. The responses were then presented to the L1 English raters in the form of response sheets randomised for each rater. The raters were asked to evaluate each request by answering five questions on each request made by each L2 participant. Specifically, the following written instructions were given: (one sheet for scenario 1 and another for scenario 2)

Below, you will find a list of requests. These are written responses of students who were asked to perform the following task:

Students enrolled for the first year course in English at the University. They require a minimum year mark of 50% in order to qualify to write the examination. It is left to the lecturer's discretion to ascertain whether a student who receives between 48%-49% should be given the extra marks to qualify for the exam. Lecturers are asked to observe student's participation in class as well as their attendance. A few students have obtained 48% and 49%. They have to request a change of mark from the lecturer in order to be able to qualify for the examination.

Please rate the following requests in terms of their formality, appropriateness and grammaticality as well as in terms of the requesters' politeness. Please do not reflect

on any rating too much; just rate instinctively. The letter-and-number codes (A1, Z46, etc.) as well as any spelling mistakes should please be ignored.

The yes/no questions that the raters had to ask for each request made by each L2 participant were the following:

1. Is the student polite?
2. Is the student formal?
3. Is the student's way of requesting appropriate for the situation?
4. In terms of grammar, does the student express his/her request clearly?
5. Is it clear what the student is intending to request?

### **3.5 Participants**

Participants for the study can be divided into two types: requesters and raters. Below, information is given on both types.

#### **3.5.1 Requesters**

The requesters, who were asked to respond to the three different scenarios, were selected as follows: All were students between the ages of 18 and 25 years that were studying at one of two universities situated in the Vaal area in Gauteng. There was no control for gender. The students were either L1 Afrikaans speakers or L1 Sesotho speakers, both groups speaking English as a L2.

##### ***L1 Afrikaans participants***

Eighteen L1 Afrikaans-speaking students volunteered for participation in the study. Selection criteria included the following:

- (i) that Afrikaans is their mother tongue and English their L2;
- (ii) that some formal schooling was done through the medium of Afrikaans and
- (iii) that their parents are also Afrikaans-speaking.

As a result of these criteria, one of the volunteering students had to be excluded from the study as the student failed to provide any information regarding formal schooling. I was therefore left with 17 L1 Afrikaans participants.

### ***L1 Sesotho participants***

Participants were selected from the 34 L1 Sesotho volunteers. The criteria for selection were as follows:

- (i) that Sesotho is their mother tongue and English their L2;
- (ii) that some formal schooling was done through the medium of Sesotho and
- (iii) that their parents also were Sesotho-speaking.

As a result of these criteria, the responses of 17 of the students had to be disregarded because their language background questionnaires showed that many of them were not mother tongue speakers of Sesotho, their parents were not Sesotho speaking and/or they did not have any formal education in Sesotho. Seventeen Sesotho speakers thus participated in the study.

### **3.5.2 Raters**

Raters are those participants who were selected to rate the responses that the L2 requesters had made regarding the different scenarios. They consisted of eight white, L1 English South Africans who reside in the Northern suburbs of Cape Town, recruited through a neighbourhood network of a student assistant in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University. Raters had to be L1 speakers of English, had to have spent their childhood outside of areas in which Sesotho was predominantly spoken and had to have been living in Cape Town for most of their adult lives. No special consideration was given to whether they were male or female. The age of half of the selected rater group ranged between 18 and 25 years, whilst the other half was over 40 years of age.

The raters were specifically selected because they have never resided in the same area as the L2 requesters. They were therefore not exposed to the same social environment as the requesters and would therefore have no experience of how specifically Sesotho L2 speakers of English make English requests. The two different age groups (18-25 years and above 40 years) were chosen to make provision for different perspectives that could be related to age, for example that a less formal address style that may be considered acceptable to people of university-going age, but not to older people.

### **3.6 The Cross Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP)**

L2 participants's requests were categorised according to the CCSARP framework. A spreadsheet containing participants on the x-axis and CCSARP categories (with examples from the literature) on the y-axis was drawn up in Word Excel. Each response was then classified by me after which the classification was verified by a lecturer in the Department of General Linguistics, Stellenbosch University. Differences between me and the lecturer were resolved through consulting the relevant literature and through discussion. The number of occurrences of each classification category was then tallied. These tallies were then processed and are presented in tables in the next chapter.

As noted by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989a), there have been many important theoretical and empirical studies of the speech act of request and of the strategies employed in performing this speech act. These studies include those of Blum-Kulka (1982), Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Dore (1977a), Ervin-Tripp (1976), Garvey (1975), Gordon and Ervin-Tripp (1984), House and Kasper (1981), Leech (1983), Liebling (1988) and Searle (1975). Because of its specific coding scheme, the most comprehensive and commonly-used framework to date is the CCSARP (Achiba 2003: 35). As mentioned earlier, the CCSARP has been used extensively in research investigating cross-cultural speech acts such as requests and apologies (Marti 2005: 1837). For this reason, I used the framework of the CCSARP, as set out by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989a) and Le Pair (1996), as well as additional strategies such as the 'mood derivable', as put forward by Achiba (2003).

I will proceed to outline the CCSARP below with relevant examples from my data (followed by the participant code). All examples are given verbatim, without correction to grammar, spelling or punctuation. In the event that an example is required which was not available in

my data, I used a relevant example given by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989a: 277-289).

For the speech act of request, the coding categories used are as follows:

### ***ALERTERS***

The function of alerters is to draw the hearer's attention to the speech act which is to follow.

The various types of alerters are:

- Title/role, e.g. *Mrs* (Y2)
- Surname, e.g. *Johnson*
- First name, e.g. *Fatima* (Y2)
- Nickname, e.g. *Judy* (for *Judith*)
- Endearment term, e.g. *Dear* (J99)
- Offensive term, e.g. *Stupid cow*
- Pronoun, e.g. *You*
- Attention getter, e.g. *Hey, excuse me, listen*
- Combinations of the above: Any combinations of the above.

### ***REQUEST PERSPECTIVE***

A request can be viewed from different perspectives, either from that of the speaker, the hearer or from that of both. However, mentioning of either participant's perspective can be avoided.

- Hearer dominance, e.g. *May you please...?* (X21) or *Could you please...?* (X14)
- Speaker dominance, e.g. *As you have seen, I got a... (S5) / Is there anything I can do...?* (F4)
- Speaker and hearer dominance, e.g. *Could we...?*
- Impersonal, e.g. using words such as *people, they*.

## **REQUEST STRATEGIES**

This refers to the level of directness with which the request is realised. Below are examples of request strategies, organised according to decreasing levels of directness.

- Mood derivable (in a request, the mood of the utterance determines its illocutionary force), e.g. *I'm going to ask you to...* (T51) or *Please reconsider my...* (J99)
- Explicit performative (the speaker explicitly states the illocutionary intent of the utterance by using an illocutionary verb), e.g. *I was asking your permission not to...* (S22)
- Hedged performative (the illocutionary verb which shows requestive intent is modified by using verbs which express intention), e.g. *I must/have to ask you to clean the kitchen right now...* or *I'd like to/wanted to ask you to present your paper a week earlier...*
- Locution derivable (the intent of the utterance can be determined by the semantic meaning), e.g. *Madam, you'll have to/should/must/ought to move your car.*
- Want statement (the speaker's desire in wanting the event to come about is expressed in the utterance), e.g. *I would like you to assist me by helping me to pass.* (T24)
- Suggestory formula (the actual illocutionary intent is phrased as a suggestion), e.g. *How about cleaning the kitchen?* or *Why don't you get lost?*
- Preparatory (the utterance contains words which serve as a preparatory condition to check for ability, willingness or possibility in a request; more often than not, the speaker questions rather than states the chosen preparatory condition), e.g. *May I please be excused?* (V409 and X21)
- Strong hint (when a strong hint is used, the illocutionary intent is not immediately clear, because strong hints require more inferencing), e.g. *I would not make it to come to class...* (Z8), *I have been in classes and work very hard...* (E12) or *No one else can take my parents...* (F4)
- Mild hint: (in a mild hint, there are no elements of immediate relevance to the intended illocution), e.g. *If it was me, I would've...* (G13):

## **SYNTACTIC DOWNGRADERS**

Generally, one can identify syntactic downgraders by checking which syntactic devices are optional in the given context and then determining whether the syntactic choice that was made has a clear function in the context.

- Interrogative (for requests, the interrogative form is unmarked), e.g. *Would you please excuse me from the...?* (Y2) compared with the more marked *Please excuse me from the ...* or *You have to excuse me from the ....* Another example is *I have to (do X), so may I please be excused...?* (X21) instead of *I have to (do X), so I want you to excuse me...*
- Negation of a preparatory condition (conditions for a request are that the hearer can comply and be willing to carry out the request), e.g. *Can't you give me an...?* (S60)
- Subjunctive, e.g. *Might be better if you were to leave now.*
- Conditional, e.g. *I would suggest you leave now.*
- Aspect, e.g. *I was wondering if...* (F104)
- Tense, e.g. *I was wondering if Mam/Sir can help me to require...* (F104)
- Conditional clause, e.g. *It would fit in much better if you could present your paper a week earlier than planned.*
- Combinations of the above, e.g. *I was wondering if I couldn't get a lift home with you.*

## **LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS**

Downgraders serve to soften the force of a request by modifying the Head Act using specific lexical and phrasal choices, where a Head Act is “the minimal unit which can realize a request; it is the core of the request sequence” (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 275). Types of downgraders include the following:

- Politeness marker (an option added to a request with the aim of getting cooperative behaviour), e.g. *Please reconsider my attendance...* (J99) or *Please do a re-mark...* (G11)
- Understater (the speaker under-represents the state of matters by using adverbial modifiers), e.g. *Would you please kindly boost...* (Y2)
- Hedge (when a speaker wants to avoid potential harm by being specific, then adverbials are used), e.g. *It would fit much better somehow if...*

- Subjectiviser (this refers to a way in which the speaker explicitly expresses his/her subjective opinion and in that way lowers the assertive force of the request), e.g. *I'm afraid you're going to have to move your car/ I wonder if you would...*
- Downtoner (special modifiers which are used by the speaker in order to modulate the impact of the request on the hearer), e.g. *Is it possible for you to...? (H5)*
- Cajoler (if the harmony between interlocutors in a request is threatened, then certain speech items are used to restore, establish or create harmony), e.g. *You know I'd really like you to present your paper next week.*
- Appealer (these are elements that are used by a speaker to appeal to the hearer's understanding), e.g. *Clean up the kitchen, dear, will you/okay?*
- Combinations: Any combinations of the above.

### **UPGRADERS**

Upgraders are elements that have the function of increasing the impact of the request. Types of upgraders include the following:

- Intensifier (adverbial modifiers used to intensify the utterance), e.g. *The kitchen is in a terrible/frightful mess.*
- Commitment indicator (modifiers used by speakers which indicate their degree of commitment), e.g. *I'm sure/I'm certain/Surely/Certainly you won't mind giving me a lift.*
- Expletive, e.g. *Why don't you clean that bloody/damn mess up?*
- Time intensifier, e.g. *You'd better move your car right now/immediately.*
- Lexical uptoner (here, an element in the utterance is given negative connotations), e.g. *Clean up that mess!*
- Determination marker (these are speech elements which show an extra degree of determination by the speaker), e.g. *I have tried my best in the subject; please give me the extra mark required! (K2)*
- Repetition of request (literally repeating the request or repeating by paraphrasing), e.g. *Mam, may you please give me the two extra marks that I am short of, please mam I need the marks (X21), Could you please give me more marks so that I can qualify for the exam. Please ma'am please (X14) or Get lost! / Leave me alone!*

- Orthographic/Suprasegmental emphasis (using exclamation marks, marked pausing or stressing to achieve dramatic effects), e.g. *Cleaning the kitchen is your business!*
- Emphatic addition (words used to provide added emphasis to the request), e.g. *Go and clean that kitchen!*
- Perjorative determiner, e.g. *Clean up that mess (there)!*
- Combinations: Any combinations of the above.

### ***SUPPORTIVE MOVES***

In the utterance which follows a request, the speaker tries to aggravate his/her request. Supportive moves occur before or after the Head Act; they are not part of the Head Act itself.

#### Mitigating Supportive Moves

- Preparator (here, the speaker prepares the hearer for the fact that he/she will be making a request without the speaker actually stating the content of the request which will follow), e.g. *May I ask you a question?* or *I'd like to ask you something.*
- Getting a precommitment (the speaker tries to commit the hearer before making a request, so that the speaker is able to check on a potential refusal), e.g. *Could you do me a favour?*
- Grounder (this occurs when the speaker gives justifications, reasons or explanations for the request, either before or after the request), e.g. *I have tried my best in this subject. Please give me the extra marks. (K2)* or *Please do a re-mark for me, because it is extremely important for me to pass. (G11)*
- Disarmer (this is when the speaker tries to remove any potential objections that the hearer may make regarding the request), e.g. *I take full blame for not being able to meet the minimum requirements, but I am asking for your mercy in granting me the 1% I am short of. (S22)*
- Promise of reward (this occurs when the speaker tries to increase the chances of the hearer's compliance to the request, by stating a reward for the hearer if they fulfil the request), e.g. *I promise I will work hard to make sure I score 50% and above for my next tests. (S5)* or *Could you please give me another chance to improve my marks; I promise I'll do better. (V7)*

- Imposition minimiser (when the speaker, by making a request, tries to lessen the imposition on the hearer), e.g. *Please give me another chance to boost my marks. Please give me another assignment to get extra marks.* (T77)

#### Aggravating Supportive Moves

- Insult (when the speaker uses certain words in the request which increase the force of the request, i.e. an insult is used), e.g. *You've always been a dirty pig, so clean up!*
- Threat (a speaker uses a threat in the request in order to ensure the compliance of the hearer), e.g. *Move that car if you don't want a ticket!*
- Moralising (to give a request extra worth, a speaker uses certain words to invoke the hearer's moral values), e.g. *If one shares a flat, one should be prepared to pull one's weight in cleaning it. So, get on with the washing up!*
- Combinations: Any combinations of the above.

#### **MODE**

This is a category used to classify irony and related phenomena.

- Neutral mode, e.g. *Excuse me, could you give me a lift home?*
- Marked mode: e.g. *Could I humbly beg to scrounge a lift home?*

#### **TYPE OF MODAL**

*Will* and *would* are classified as modal verbs. The use of modal verbs is a significant feature of requests in many languages (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989a: 289), e.g. Would you please give me... (T77) or Could you please give me more marks... (X14).

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, information was provided on the data collection methods, the participants and the scenario completion tasks. The theoretical framework, namely the CCSARP framework,

was briefly explained with the aid of examples. In the next chapter, I give the results of the data analysis and discuss these results.

## CHAPTER 4

### Data analysis – The English requests of Afrikaans-speaking and Sesotho speaking students

---

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the data that were collected on the English requests produced by L1 Afrikaans-speaking and L1 Sesotho-speaking students. Comparisons were drawn between the responses of the L1 Afrikaans and that of the L1 Sesotho participants to the first scenario completion task, as well as between the responses of the two groups to the second scenario completion task. Furthermore, comparisons were drawn between each group's responses to the two respective scenarios. These comparisons are given in section 4.2. Thereafter, in section 4.3, the raters' ratings of the requests produced by the two language groups to the two scenarios are discussed.

#### 4.2. Participant responses in terms of CCSARP categories

##### 4.2.1 Intergroup comparison of the responses to the first scenario completion task

Table 1 below shows the comparison of the two groups' responses to the first scenario. Recall that, in this scenario, participants were asked to request a change of mark from the lecturer in order to be able to qualify for the examination. This involved what is termed "a high imposition request".

Only 16 L1 Sesotho participants' responses could be assessed, because 1 participant's response was deemed "too odd" to be scored within the CCSARP framework. This was because the CCSARP section on request strategies does not make any provisions for pleas, which is what the participant produced: *Madam, due to the lack of marks in order to qualify to write, I will appreciate your mercy to give me extra work to uplift my marks. It would be honour and privilege of you to give me the chance.* (Z8)

Of the 17 L1 Afrikaans participants, only 15 participants' responses could be assessed. This was because two participants, despite being instructed to do so, did not use direct speech in

their responses. Rather, they gave a description in indirect speech of how they thought the situation could be handled: *I would set up a formal appointment to request this. I would start by stating that I've been present in all classes and I have really attempted all tasks and h/w assignments.* (F2) and *If the lecturer did observe the class attendance and if the student did do his/her homework I say they may give him/her the extra marks, but the students didn't participate they may not get extra marks.* (H309). Note that the 15 Afrikaans L1 participants' scores were recalculated (i.e. divided by 15 and multiplied by 16) to make these scores comparable to those of the 16 Sesotho L1 participants. Some of the categories will now be discussed.

The L1 Sesotho participants used twice as many alerters, especially title alerters, compared to the L1 Afrikaans participants (in total 15 vs. 8.5). As an illustration, consider the request of participant Y2: *Mrs Fatima, would you please kindly boost my marks with only 2%...?*

For the request perspective, although both groups of participants were assessed as preferring to use *hearer dominance*, the L1 Sesotho participants used requests with hearer dominance almost twice as often as the L1 Afrikaans participants did (16 vs. 9.6). Consider X3: *'Mam, could you please give me two more marks so that I can have 50 marks and write the exam?*

With regards to the type of request strategy used, both groups showed a preference for preparatory request strategies, although the Sesotho participants used twice as many compared to the Afrikaans participants (12 vs. 6.4). An example of using a preparatory request strategy is V409: *Mam, I am only short of one mark to pass my test. Could you please give me just that one mark?*

In terms of the use of lexical and phrasal downgraders, although both the Sesotho and Afrikaans participants used politeness markers, the Sesotho participants notably used almost twice the number that the Afrikaans participants used (15 vs. 8.5), as in T77: *Madam, would you please give me another chance to boost my marks to 50%...?*

**Table 1. Scenario 1 (Marks request) – Afrikaans L1 requests versus Sesotho L1 requests in English**

<b>Coding category</b>	<b>Coding subcategory</b>	<b>L1 Afrikaans</b>	<b>L1 Sesotho</b>
ALERTERS	Title	7.5	14
	First name	0	1
	Endearment term	1.1	0
	Total nr. of alerters	8.5	15
REQUEST PERSPECTIVE	Hearer dominance	9.6	16
	Speaker dominance	6.4	0
REQUEST STRATEGIES	Mood derivable	3.2	0
	Explicit performative	0	3
	Want statement	2.1	1
	Preparatory	6.4	12
	Strong hint	3.2	0
	Mild hint	1.1	0
SYNTACTIC DOWNGRADERS	Interrogative	6.4	9
	Negation of a preparatory condition	0	2
	Aspect	1.1	0
	Tense	1.1	1
	Total: Syntactic downgrader	8.5	12
LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS	Politeness marker	6.4	13
	Understate	1.1	2
	Downtoner	1.1	0
	Total: Downgraders	8.5	15
UPGRADERS	Determination marker	1.1	0
	Repetition of request	0	2
	Total: Upgraders	1.1	2
SUPPORTIVE MOVES	Mitigating Supportive Moves:	0	0
	Grounder	11.7	5
	Disarmer	0	1
	Promise of reward	1.1	2
	Imposition minimizer	0	1
	Total: Supportive moves	12.8	9

In terms of the use of supportive moves, the Afrikaans participants used grounders twice as often as the Sesotho participants (11.7 vs. 5). An example of a grounder would be the following of H5: *Mam, I need only 2% to be able to write exams. Is it possible for you to go over my participation marks to help me? I have a great interest in the subject and would like to complete my studying in the shortest amount of time.* The number of supportive moves used by the Afrikaans L1 participants show that these participants perceive a need to provide excuses for the request of change in mark, more so than the Sesotho participants, in a high imposition request.

#### **4.2.2 Intergroup comparison of the responses to the second scenario completion task**

Table 2 overleaf compares the Sesotho participants' responses to the Afrikaans participants' responses to scenario 2, after which some of the differences between the two language groups will be discussed. Recall that the second scenario involved a situation in which a student who is enrolled for the first-year course in English is unable to attend the next class because he/she has to take a parent to a doctor's appointment. This student has to request from the lecturer whether they may be excused from the upcoming class. This type of scenario involves a "low imposition request".

The responses of all 17 Sesotho participants could be included, but the responses of three Afrikaans-speaking participants had to be excluded because they used indirect speech. Therefore, the 14 included Afrikaans L1 participants' scores were recalculated (i.e. divided by 14 and multiplied by 17) to make these scores comparable to those of the 17 Sesotho L1 participants. Furthermore, it was not possible to determine the request perspective of two Afrikaans participants' responses, thus only 12 Afrikaans responses were considered as regards request perspective, and the Afrikaans scores for this category were thus divided by 12 and multiplied by 17.

**Table 2. Scenario 2 (Class non-attendance) – Afrikaans L1 requests versus Sesotho L1 requests in English**

<b>Coding category</b>	<b>Coding subcategory</b>	<b>L1 Afrikaans</b>	<b>L1 Sesotho</b>
ALERTERS	Title	3.6	14
	First name	0	1
	Endearment term	0	0
	Total nr. of alerters	3.6	15
REQUEST PERSPECTIVE	Hearer dominance	9.7	16
	Speaker dominance	4.9	1
REQUEST STRATEGIES	Mood derivable	0	1
	Explicit performative	0	5
	Want statement	0	1
	Preparatory	7.1	9
	Strong hint	4.3	1
	Mild hint	0	0
SYNTACTIC DOWNGRADERS	Interrogative	7.3	9
	Negation of a preparatory condition	0	0
	Aspect	0	0
	Tense	0	0
	Total: Syntactic downgrader	7.3	9
LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS	Politeness marker	3.6	11
	Understater	0	0
	Downtoner	0	0
	Total: Downgraders	3.6	11
UPGRADERS	Determination marker	0	0
	Repetition of request	0	1
	Total: Upgraders	0	1
SUPPORTIVE MOVES	Mitigating Supportive Moves:	0	0
	Grounder	8.5	17
	Disarmer	0	0
	Promise of reward	0	2
	Imposition minimizer	0	0
	Total: Supportive moves	8.5	19

With regards to alerters, notable differences were observed between the number of Sesotho participants and the number of Afrikaans participants who used title alerters. Sesotho participants used almost five times more title alerters than Afrikaans participants (14 vs. 3.6). An example is *Madam, may I please be excused from class because of family responsibility* (T77). This performance pattern was repeated when Sesotho participants' score was again almost double that of the Afrikaans participants for the use of *hearer dominance* as a request perspective (16 vs. 9.7). Consider for example *Mam, could you please excuse me from the next class* (X33).

In the request strategy category, only the Sesotho participants used explicit performatives; Afrikaans participants used neither explicit performatives nor *want* statements. Examples of explicit performatives are *I was asking your permission to not come to the next lecture as I have a doctor's appointment* (S22) and *Mam, I am hereby requesting not to attend the next class and I have to take my parent to a doctor, due to the fact that I am the only one who can help her* (Y5). The Afrikaans L1 participants did however use more (strong) hints than did the Sesotho L1 participants (4.3 vs. 1). Consider for example *My parent is very ill and needs medical attention. I will be unable to attend the class* (E12).

In terms of lexical and phrasal upgraders, the Sesotho participants used politeness markers three times more than the Afrikaans participants did (11 vs. 3.6). Consider *Miss, can you please excuse me from a class as I have to...* (S60).

Lastly, the Sesotho participants used double the number of grounders in supportive moves than the Afrikaans participants (17 vs. 8.5). An example of such as grounder is *Mam I cannot make it to the next class because I have to take my sick mother to the clinic, so may I please be excused....* (V409).

#### **4.2.3 Intragroup comparison of the responses to the two scenarios**

In table 3 overleaf, the scores provided in tables 1 and 2 are collated in order to allow easy comparison across language groups as well as across request imposition level. Some of the categories are then highlighted in the discussion below table 3.

*Table 3. Scenario 1, 2 and 1&2 combined for Afrikaans L1 requests versus Sesotho L1 requests in English*

Coding category	Coding subcategory	L1 Afrikaans			L1 Sesotho		
		Scenario 1 (n=16)	Scenario 2 (n=17)	Scenarios 1 and 2 combined (n=33)	Scenario 1 (n=16)	Scenario 2 (n=17)	Scenarios 1 and 2 combined (n=33)
ALERTERS	Title	7.5	3.6	11.1	14	14	28
	First name	0	0	0	1	1	2
	Endearment term	1.1	0	1.1	0	0	0
	Total nr. of alerters	8.5	3.6	12.1	15	15	30
REQUEST PERSPECTIVE	Hearer dominance	9.6	9.7	19.3	16	16	32
	Speaker dominance	6.4	4.9	11.3	0	1	1
REQUEST STRATEGIES	Mood derivable	3.2	0	3.2	0	1	1
	Explicit Performative	0	0	0	3	5	8
	Want statement	2.1	0	2.1	1	1	2
	Preparatory	6.4	7.1	13.5	12	9	21
	Strong hint	3.2	4.3	7.5	0	1	1
	Mild hint	1.1	0	1.1	0	0	0
SYNTACTIC DOWNGRADERS	Interrogative	6.4	7.3	13.7	9	9	18
	Negation of a Preparatory condition	0	0	0	2	0	2
	Aspect	1.1	0	1.1	0	0	0
	Tense	1.1	0	1.1	1	0	1
	Total: Syntactic downgrader	8.5	7.3	15.8	12	9	21
	LEXICAL AND PHRASAL DOWNGRADERS	Politeness marker	6.4	3.6	10.0	13	11
Understate	1.1	0	1.1	2	0	2	
Downtoner	1.1	0	1.1	0	0	0	
Total: Downgraders	8.5	3.6	12.1	15	11	26	

UPGRADERS	Determination marker	1.1	0	1.1	0	0	0
	Repetition of request	0	0	0	2	1	3
	Total: Upgraders	1.1	0	1.1	2	1	3
SUPPORTIVE MOVES	Mitigating Supportive Moves	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Grounders	11.7	8.5	20.2	5	17	22
	Disarmer	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Promise of reward	1.1	0	1.1	2	2	4
	Imposition minimizer	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Total: Supportive moves	12.8	8.5	21.3	9	19	28

In their responses to both the high imposition scenario 1 and the low imposition scenario 2, the Sesotho speakers used notably more alerters, specifically titles, when addressing the lecturer than the Afrikaans participants did. This observation is discussed in chapter 5. A point also worth noting is that the Sesotho participants used the same number of title alerters for both scenario 1 and 2, thus the level of imposition did not affect their use of titles, whereas the Afrikaans participants used double the number of titles in the high imposition scenario compared to the low imposition scenario, showing the need to address the lecturer with a title when there is a situation of high imposition.

In the first scenario (the one of high imposition), the Sesotho participants used slightly more politeness markers than in the second scenario (of low imposition). The Afrikaans participants, by contrast, used almost double the number of politeness markers in response to scenario 1 compared to scenario 2, which could mean that the Afrikaans participants felt the need to be more polite in high imposition situations. Yet, for the two scenarios combined, the Sesotho participants still used more than double the number of politeness markers than the Afrikaans speakers did. That said, a similarity noted between the two groups is that both the Sesotho and the Afrikaans participants used more politeness markers in scenario 1, which involved a high imposition situation, than in scenario 2, which was a low imposition scenario.

As regards grounders, more than triple the number of grounders were used by Sesotho participants in response to the second scenario. This shows that they felt the need to use more excuses in the low imposition scenario in comparison to scenario 1, which involved a high imposition situation. The reason for this is not clear. By contrast, Afrikaans participants used a higher number of grounders in response to scenario 1 compared to scenario 2. This could imply that the Afrikaans participants felt the need to offer more excuses in high imposition situations than in low imposition situations. Consider the following grounder used by an Afrikaans participant in scenario 1: *I have been in class and work very hard and I know that I can prove myself if I were given the chance* (E12).

### **4.3 Raters' ratings of the requests made by the two groups**

Recall that the eight English L1 raters had to answer five yes/no questions for each request made by each L2 participant, namely:

1. Is the student polite?
2. Is the student formal?
3. Is the student's way of requesting appropriate for the situation?
4. In terms of grammar, does the student express his/her request clearly?
5. Is it clear what the student is intending to request?

In the following sections, I present a summary of the raters' ratings for each criterion separately and then discuss certain aspects thereof. In the tables, the scores given reflect the answers of the raters to the above yes/no questions. A "no" answer was awarded 0 and a "yes" answer was awarded 1. The number of 0s and 1s given by the younger and the older raters were then tallied separately and combined. The totals were adjusted to accommodate the fact that the number of participants differed between the two language groups. Where there was a notable difference between the totals of the younger and the older raters, this is discussed; if no mention of age differences is made, there were no such differences. In order to increase ease of reading of the tables, no younger-older distinction is recorded in the tables themselves.

### 4.3.1 Ratings for politeness

As shown in table 4, the Sesotho speakers' requests on the whole were not considered more polite by the raters than the Afrikaans speakers' requests (239.7 vs. 232.4), even though the Sesotho participants used more politeness markers for both requests as compared to the Afrikaans participants (as discussed in section 4.2.3 above). However, the Afrikaans participants were considered less polite in higher imposition situations than in low imposition situations, whereas the opposite held for the Sesotho speakers.

*Table 4. Adjusted ratings of POLITENESS for Scenario 1, 2 and 1&2 combined for Afrikaans L1 requests versus Sesotho L1 requests in English*

	<b>Scenario 1</b> (high imposition)	<b>Scenario 2</b> (low imposition)	<b>Total</b> (for scenario 1 and 2 combined)
Afrikaans L1 participants	112.2	120.2	232.4
Sesotho L1 participants	127.5	122.0	239.7

### 4.3.2 Ratings for formalness

Both the Afrikaans and Sesotho participants were judged to be less formal in their formulations of a high imposition request than in their formulations of a low imposition request. When looking at the total tally, the Afrikaans participants were rated as more formal than the Sesotho participants (161.5 vs. 138.5), although the younger raters rated the Afrikaans participants as more formal than did the older raters (87.3 vs. 74.2), whereas the reverse pattern was observed for the ratings of Sesotho participants: 63.4 vs. 75.1 (younger raters vs. older raters). Younger raters rated the Sesotho participants as less formal than Afrikaans participants (63.4 vs. 87.3), whereas there was no such difference for the older raters.

*Table 5. Adjusted ratings of FORMALNESS for Scenario 1, 2 and 1&2 combined for Afrikaans L1 requests versus Sesotho L1 requests in English*

	<b>Scenario 1</b> (high imposition)	<b>Scenario 2</b> (low imposition)	<b>Total</b> (for scenario 1 and 2 combined)
Afrikaans L1 participants	68.0	93.5	161.5
Sesotho L1 participants	58.5	80.0	138.5

### 4.3.3 Ratings for appropriateness

Regarding scenario 1, both the Afrikaans and Sesotho participants' formulations of the request were rated as less appropriate by the younger raters than the older ones: 17.0 vs 37.4 for the Afrikaans participants and 11.7 vs 29.8 for the Sesotho participants. There was, however, no significant difference between the two groups of raters' ratings of request 2, the request with a low imposition. In scenario 1, where the students had to request an improved mark, the raters (younger and older combined) found the Afrikaans participants' requests to be more appropriate than those of the Sesotho participants. This pattern was also observed for the second scenario (see table 6). Notably, raters found that more appropriate requests were made by both Afrikaans and Sesotho participants in the second request (the one of low imposition) than in the first request which involved a high imposition situation. In general, the Afrikaans participants' requests were rated as being more appropriate than those of the Sesotho participants (150.3 vs. 128.5).

*Table 6. Adjusted ratings of APPROPRIATENESS for Scenario 1, 2 and 1&2 combined for Afrikaans L1 requests versus Sesotho L1 requests in English*

	<b>Scenario 1</b> (high imposition)	<b>Scenario 2</b> (low imposition)	<b>Total</b> (for scenario 1 and 2 combined)
Afrikaans L1 participants	54.4	95.9	150.3
Sesotho L1 participants	41.5	87.0	128.5

### 4.3.4 Ratings for grammaticality

Regarding grammaticality, in the total tally there was not a noteworthy difference between the ratings for the Afrikaans and Sesotho participants' requests, although the Afrikaans participants' requests were rated as slightly more grammatically correct than those of the Sesotho participants (203.2 vs. 193.5). However, in the low imposition situation of scenario 2, the Afrikaans participants' requests were found to be more grammatically correct than those of the Sesotho participants (106.8 vs. 83.0) whereas the reverse was noted for scenario 1 (96.4 for the Afrikaans participants vs. 110.5 for the Sesotho participants). Older raters found the requests of both the Afrikaans and Sesotho participants less grammatically correct than the younger raters did: for Afrikaans participants, 85.4 vs. 117.4; for Sesotho participants, 89.9 vs. 103.6.

**Table 7. Adjusted ratings of GRAMMATICALITY for Scenario 1, 2 and 1&2 combined for Afrikaans L1 requests versus Sesotho L1 requests in English**

	<b>Scenario 1</b> (high imposition)	<b>Scenario 2</b> (low imposition)	<b>Total</b> (for scenario 1 and 2 combined)
Afrikaans L1 participants	96.4	106.8	203.2
Sesotho L1 participants	110.5	83.0	193.5

#### 4.3.5 Ratings for clarity of intended meaning

In terms of the clarity of the intended meaning of the requests, there were no large differences between older and younger raters' ratings. The Sesotho participants' requests were rated somewhat higher in this regard than were the requests formulated by the Afrikaans participants (261.8 vs. 255.5). However, this difference is not notable in the case of either the first or second scenario. Both the Afrikaans and Sesotho participants' requests in the high imposition scenario were rated to be clearer in terms of intended meaning than were their requests in the low imposition scenario.

**Table 8. Adjusted ratings of CLARITY OF INTENDED MEANING for Scenario 1, 2 and 1&2 combined for Afrikaans L1 requests versus Sesotho L1 requests in English**

	<b>Scenario 1</b> (high imposition)	<b>Scenario 2</b> (low imposition)	<b>Total</b> (for scenario 1 and 2 combined)
Afrikaans L1 participants	129.2	126.3	255.5
Sesotho L1 participants	132.8	129.0	261.8

#### 4.4 Conclusion

As regards the CCSARP categories, the following noteworthy differences were observed between the two groups of English L2 participants: The Sesotho participants used more alerters, specifically *titles*, and also more *politeness markers* than the Afrikaans participants did. The Sesotho participants specifically used more politeness markers in high imposition situations than in the low imposition situations, whereas the opposite pattern was observed for the Afrikaans participants. Regarding *grounders*, the Sesotho participants used more in the low imposition request than in the high imposition request (thus offering more excuses or

reasons in the low imposition scenario than in the high imposition one), whereas Afrikaans participants' requests showed the reverse pattern for grounders.

Regarding the ratings by the L1 English raters, the Sesotho speakers' requests on the whole were *not* considered more *polite* than were the Afrikaans speakers' requests, despite the fact that the Sesotho participants used more politeness markers. Also in terms of *grammatically*, there was not a noteworthy difference between the ratings for the two language groups' requests. The Afrikaans participants' requests were rated as more formal than the Sesotho participants', whereas the Sesotho participants' requests were rated somewhat higher in terms of clarity of intended meaning. As regards appropriateness, both the Afrikaans and Sesotho participants' formulations of the requests were rated as less appropriate by the younger raters than by the older ones.

In chapter 5, an attempt will be made to answer the research questions that were posed in section 1.3, based on the results of the data analysis presented in the current chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion and conclusion

---

#### 5.1 Introduction

Labov and Fanshel (1977, as cited in Blum-Kulka 1982: 30) state that there is a combination of situational conditions, linguistic means and social variables which determine the successful performance of speech acts. With regards to L2 learning, the challenge lies in determining how these three factors vary from language to language and from culture to culture (Blum-Kulka 1982: 30). In this chapter, I discuss the findings on differences in the English requests of two groups of L2 speakers. Thereafter, I discuss pragmatic transfer as a possible explanation for the results. I then conclude the chapter with a brief discussion on the strengths and limitations of this study.

#### 5.2 Answer to research question 1:

*What are the differences in the manner in which L2 English speakers (specifically, L1 Sesotho and L1 Afrikaans speakers) make requests when speaking English?*

According to the data analysis by means of the CCSARP categories, there are indeed differences in the way in which Sesotho and Afrikaans speakers make requests in English. As stated in section 4.4, the Sesotho speakers used more alerters and more politeness markers than the Afrikaans participants did. Sesotho and Afrikaans speakers also differed in their responses to high and low imposition situations; Sesotho speakers used more grounders in the low imposition request than in the high imposition request, whereas Afrikaans participants' requests showed the reverse pattern.

Regarding the use of address forms, titles in particular were used more by Sesotho speakers than by Afrikaans speakers. In Akindele's (2008) study of Sesotho address forms, it was found that Sesotho speakers use the address form "title + surname" (e.g. *Ms Moloji*) when they are at work and are addressing either their bosses or a person unfamiliar to them. However, they also use "title + surname" for colleagues who are subordinate to them or on the same management level as they are. By contrast, in informal address outside the

workplace, the use of the teknonym “title + first name” (e.g. *Ms Thandi*) is more common than “title + surname”. Akindele concluded that bare first names and nicknames are rarely used as address forms in Sesotho. My study included scenarios where participants were in a subordinate position to the lecturer. The situation was thus a work-related one where the lecturer could be equated to a boss, but a boss with which the students were very familiar. As “title + last name” is used for less familiar bosses, one would not necessarily have expected the Sesotho participants to address the lecturer as such (i.e. as *Ms Ganchi*), and not one of the 17 Sesotho participants did. They frequently addressed the lecturer by “title + first name” (*Ms Fatima*), which in the Akindele (2008) study was found to occur in informal contexts outside the workplace. Although my data did not pattern exactly as the Akindele data did, I did find that titles are commonly used in address forms by Sesotho speakers when speaking English, more so than by Afrikaans speakers.

Politeness strategies function to minimise the threat that is present in any request in order to maintain good social relationships (Le Pair 1996: 653). A possible reason for the high incidence of use of politeness markers by Sesotho speakers could be an attempt to reduce the threat in the request, even in low imposition situations.

### 5.3 Answer to research question 2:

*How do the differences in the (a) politeness, (b) formality, (c) appropriateness, (d) grammaticality and (e) intelligibility of the English-language requests made by the L1 Sesotho and L1 Afrikaans speakers, as judged by L1 speakers of English, manifest?*

In answering the above question, let us consider the conditions that have to be met in order for a speech act to be termed successful. The following conditions were identified in the literature: politeness (discussed in sections 2.4 and 2.5; see amongst others Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987, as cited in Achiba 2003: 9; Le Pair 1996), appropriateness (briefly discussed in section 2.2; see for instance Finegan and Besnier 1989), and felicity conditions (briefly discussed in section 2.4; see Jannedy et al. 1994; Cruse 2011). For the purposes of this study, when I asked the L1 English speakers to rate the requests, I attempted to ask about these conditions for successful requesting in a manner comprehensible to people unfamiliar with the terminology used above. I used the terms *polite* and *appropriate*, but I added

questions regarding formalness as well as grammaticality and intelligibility (where intelligibility pertains to felicitousness); for the latter I asked whether it is clear what the L2 speaker was intending to request, thus avoiding the term *intelligible*. I will now discuss the findings on the ratings by the L1 English speakers.

As regards **politeness**, the Sesotho speakers received slightly higher ratings than did the Afrikaans speakers. Mills (2008) argues that in the past, many researchers have resorted to analysing impoliteness at a cultural level by using frameworks that were designed to analyse the interaction between two people instead of between two cultural groups. She states that this analysis on the level of individuals is based on stereotypical and ideological thinking, whereas a social model which could be developed to capture changes that have taken place at a cultural level, would be better suited (Mills 2008: 1047). My study might have rendered different results had I looked at the Sesotho group and the Afrikaans group as two wholes instead of as individuals in an intercultural situation. A possible reason for the Sesotho speakers' requests being judged more polite in the present study could be that the Sesotho speakers used more politeness markers in their requests and also addressed the lecturer in both scenarios with a title and first name. However, the use of extra politeness markers may be deemed by L1 speakers of English to comprise an overuse of politeness markers, and that may be why Sesotho requests were rated slightly more polite but less appropriate than the Afrikaans requests (see below).

Finegan and Besnier (1989: 330-331) refer to **appropriateness** conditions, which is their term for what Cruse (1996, as cited in Finegan and Besnier 1989: 330-331) terms "felicity conditions". While Cruse (1996) identifies three conditions (discussed below), Finegan and Besnier (1989) identify four appropriateness conditions. Propositional content is the first condition, where the words of the sentence are associated with the intended speech act and can convey the content of the act. The second, third and fourth conditions are preparatory condition, sincerity condition and essential condition, respectively, which will be discussed below as part of felicitousness. The Sesotho speakers' requests on the whole were judged less appropriate than those of the Afrikaans speakers in both the high and the low imposition requests. If one looks at the above mentioned "appropriateness conditions" of Finegan and Besnier (1989), it still remains difficult to pinpoint the reason as to why the Sesotho requests were not regarded as *as* appropriate by the judges. As the ratings for the two groups' requests were more or less the same for clarity (which could be said to be one of the necessary

requirements for the fulfilment of felicity conditions; see below), it is not clear why the Sesotho speakers' requests were deemed less appropriate, but one possible reason could be a perceived overuse (compared to the Afrikaans speakers) of politeness markers, specifically in low imposition requests.

Felicity conditions are also referred to as "happiness conditions". According to Cruse (2011: 376), there are three conditions that need to be fulfilled before an act can be said to be felicitous. As stated above, these are preparatory conditions, sincerity conditions and essential conditions. Preparatory conditions are those conditions that are necessary to be carried out because if they are not, then the act is said to have "misfired". For example, in the act of christening a baby, the act can only be said to indeed be an act of christening if the proper official has performed the act. Similarly, with other acts, certain officially recognised participants must be present and necessary proper ceremonies must be enacted in order for the act to be labeled as an act of a specific type (Cruse 2011: 376).

Sincerity conditions are those conditions which involve one's beliefs and feelings. For example, in an act of thanking someone, the speaker should have the necessary feelings of gratitude. In an act of making a promise, the speaker should sincerely intend to carry it out (Cruse 2011: 376).

According to Cruse (2011: 376), essential conditions are those conditions which define the speech act that is being carried out. For example, in the speech act of a promise, the speaker must intend his/her utterance to make him/her obligated to carry out the act which was proposed. Similarly, in a request, the speaker, after making his/her utterance, must intend for the utterance to be an attempt to get the hearer to do what the speaker has requested.<sup>2</sup>

According to Le Pair (1996: 652), it remains acceptable amongst most theorists to say that appropriateness and effectiveness are vital elements in defining communication competence (Koester et al. 1983, as cited in Le Pair (1996: 652). With "appropriateness" is meant that certain valued rules and expectations in a given situation are not violated, and with "effectiveness" is meant that effective interaction would produce valued objectives or

---

<sup>2</sup> Cruse (1996) as cited in Cruse (2011:376) also mentions an additional, fourth condition which he calls "uptake". This is where the hearer needs to recognise the speaker's intention to perform the act when the specific words are uttered. Uptake does not seem to be a necessary condition for speech acts, except in some cases. For example, if a person is boasting but nobody (i) hears the utterance and (ii) thinks of it as boasting, it is no longer clear whether the person is indeed boasting.

outcomes (Le Pair 1996: 652). Therefore, intercultural communication competence would be based on the speaker's ability in intercultural interaction to produce valued outcomes without violating the valued rules of a given cultural context (Le Pair 1996: 652). In this study, it was found that the Afrikaans speakers' requests were rated as more appropriate than those of the Sesotho speakers. As raters were not asked to justify their answers, the reasons for the difference in rating for the two language groups are not clear.

According to Le Pair (1996: 653), Lakoff (1973) proposed two rules that determine the level of "pragmatic appropriateness of utterances". They are for utterances to be clear and to be polite. As far as **clarity** is concerned, there were no significant differences between the two language groups; the raters gave similar ratings on the question as to whether it was clear what the student intended asking.

If one uses the Oxford Advanced English dictionary (Hornby 1995: 621) definition of "intelligible" – namely "able to be understood or comprehensible; able to be understood by the intellect" – then intelligibility can be linked to the answers on both clarity and grammaticality. Clarity ratings were treated above. As concerns **grammaticality**, the Afrikaans speakers' requests were rated as slightly more grammatically correct than those of the Sesotho speakers. This could be another reason why the Sesotho speakers' requests were considered less appropriate than the Afrikaans speakers' by the judges.

Ratings were also made on **formalness**. Afrikaans speakers were rated as more formal than Sesotho speakers. Both language groups were judged to be less formal in their formulations of high imposition requests than in their formulations of low imposition requests. The reason for this latter finding is not clear.

In summary, the Sesotho speakers were judged as being slightly more polite than the Afrikaans speakers. However, the Afrikaans participants' requests were judged as being more formal, more appropriate and more grammatically correct than those of the Sesotho participants. The Sesotho participants' requests were judged as being clearer in terms of the conveyance of intended meaning than the Afrikaans participants' requests.

#### 5.4 Pragmatic transfer

Wolfson et al. (1989: 141) state that pragmatic transfer occurs when one uses the pragmatic rules of one's L1 during interaction with speakers of another language. This transfer can occur when writing or speaking one's L2 (Kasper 1992: 205). In this section, I consider pragmatic transfer as a possible reason for the features and ratings of the English requests made by non-L1 speakers of English.

Scarcella (1990: 338) states that when interlocutors engaged in a conversation do not share the same knowledge of the subtle rules that govern the conversation, then difficulties in communication may arise. In other words, L2 speakers often transfer the rules of conversation of their L1 to the L2, which may result in intercultural miscommunication (Jawarowska, n.d.). This could be one reason why the Sesotho speakers' requests were judged as less appropriate than those of the Afrikaans speakers: perhaps the different cultures associated with the two languages allow for positive transfer of pragmatic rules from Afrikaans to English, more so than from Sesotho to English. As no traceable studies have been conducted on request behaviour in Sesotho or in Afrikaans, this possibility could unfortunately not be supported by available research findings.

#### 5.5 Implication of the findings of the study

The issue of whether or not speech acts are universal has often been addressed in the literature. Hudson (1980: 111) adopts a sociolinguistic view in which he emphasises the importance of the cultural aspect of speech acts. He states that if one assumes the categories of speech acts to be cultural concepts, then one has to expect them to vary from one society to another. Flowerdew (1988: 75) states that it is incorrect to assume that categories across two languages are the same, even if they appear to be common. He further states that lexical systems across languages are not the same, i.e. words that seem equivalent in meaning may not carry the same referential meaning in two different languages. Similarly, verbs in speech acts such as *congratulate*, *promise* and *explain* may refer to activities which are not exactly equivalent in the cultures associated with the different languages.

According to Brown and Levinson (1978, as cited in Blum-Kulka (1982: 31-32), social acts of indirectness are based on universal principles. However, it is also noted that the application

of these principles differ across groups, categories and cultures. A major factor that can be said to influence the application of these principles is the general ethos of one society as compared to another. There are different norms and levels of indirectness in different cultures and societies. If, in any given intercultural context, the social norms of the two cultures differ in relation to, for example, levels of directness, then there is a possibility that transfer of norms from one culture to the other may be deemed offensive. However, Fraser (1978, as cited in Blum-Kulka 1982: 33) claims that after researching and comparing request strategies in fourteen different languages, it was found that there are certain basic strategies that are available and common in each of the languages. Based on this observation, Fraser (1978) then argues that L2 learners need not be taught how to “code their intentions” in a L2. Schmidt and Richards (1980) confirm Fraser’s claim based on evidence concerning the similarity of indirect speech act strategies across languages (Blum-Kulka 1982: 33).

As stated in Chapter 1, I am a Communications lecturer at an institute of higher learning, where I am tasked with improving the use of English as a L2 by students in academic and social contexts. Some of the differences observed in the requests made by the L2 speakers in this study could be due to cultural differences. In my teaching in a multicultural situation, I need to constantly review the content of the curriculum to ensure that I do not spend time teaching those aspects of requesting (and other speech acts) that show themselves to be universal across cultures. Rather, I need to focus on those aspects which promote appropriate speech act performance that are not necessarily transferred from the L1, such as limiting the use of politeness markers, specifically in low imposition requests, by my Sesotho-speaking students.

## **5.6 Strengths and limitations of the study**

This was a small-scale study of which the results need to be interpreted with caution, seeing that generalisability of results are decreased by the small sample size, the limited number of languages involved, the focus on one type of speech act only and the fact that the study was conducted in one geographical area only.

Only written requests were elicited in this study. As stated by Chick (1995: 230-232), research methods using analyses of oral conversations are more accurate because the editing involved in “translating” from spoken to written mode is avoided. Future studies could make

use of recordings, particularly audiovisual recordings if Sesotho speakers are included as participants, as I have observed that my Sesotho L1 students often make predictable gestures while requesting orally. From my discussions with these students, it appears that these gestures are made to indicate humility and respect, and thus a study investigating the politeness and appropriateness of requesting behaviour should ideally consider the non-verbal behaviour accompanying the utterances.

Chick (1995: 230-232) emphasises that researchers and participants, as well as factors which guided their interpretations, should be taken into account in interactional sociolinguistics. In interactional sociolinguistics, daily conversations are influenced by factors and circumstances in a wider society, such as value systems, prevailing ideologies and the distribution of power and resources in different cultural and social groups. With regards to the above view, perhaps analysing requests according to an adequate social model would yield different results than those that I obtained in my study. In particular, a social model which captures cultural changes could provide a useful framework for analysing different cultures' politeness strategies and other aspects involved in making requests.

Although restricted in scope, it is hoped that the findings of this study will add to our limited knowledge and understanding of speech act performance, and specifically the expression of requests, by speakers of Sesotho and Afrikaans when conversing in L2 English.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

Language does not exist in isolation, so it follows that one cannot separate a language from the culture of its speakers. Similarly, people cannot be separated from their native cultural norms of interaction. Therefore, according to Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990), Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) and Olshtain and Cohen (1983), regardless of L2 learners' linguistic proficiency, they might experience difficulties in formulating and interpreting messages in their L2. According to Al-Issa (2003: 581-582), the conditions under which speech acts occur are to some extent dependent on culture-specific social constraints. This determines what the speaker chooses to say to whom and in what circumstances (Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Hymes 1962, as cited in Al-Issa 2003: 581-582). Thus, when people from different cultural backgrounds converse, they bring to the conversation certain culturally inherited factors which influence the interaction. Different communication styles, expectations and

interpretations are some of the factors which affect their communication (Al-Issa 2003: 581-582). The present study could be said to corroborate the above statements since the Afrikaans and Sesotho speakers showed differences in the manner in which they formulate requests in English and also in the ratings received by L1 speakers of English.

## References

- Achiba, M. 2003. *Learning to request in a second language: A study of child interlanguage pragmatics*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Al-Issa, A. 2003. Sociocultural transfer in L2 speech behaviours: evidence and motivating factors. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 27: 581-601.
- Austin, J.L. 1962. *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Akindele, D.F. 2008. Sesotho address forms. Available from *Linguistik online* 34, 2/2008. [http://www.linguistik-online.de/34\\_08/akindele.html](http://www.linguistik-online.de/34_08/akindele.html).
- Bachman, L. 1990. *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bach, K. (n.d.) *Speech acts*. Available online from [sfsu.edu/~kbach/spchacts.html](http://sfsu.edu/~kbach/spchacts.html). Accessed 15 February 2012.
- Blum-Kulka, S. 1982. Learning to say what you mean in a second language: A study of the speech act performance of learners of Hebrew as a second language. *Applied Linguistics* 3(1): 29-59.
- Blum-Kulka, S. and J. House. 1989. Cross-cultural and situational variation in requesting behaviour. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House and G. Kasper (eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Request and apologies*: 123-154. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Blum-Kulka, S., J. House and G. Kasper. 1989a. The CCSARP coding manual. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House and G. Kasper (eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Request and apologies*: 274-289. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Blum-Kulka, S., J. House and G. Kasper. 1989b. Playing it safe: The role of conventionality in indirectness. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House and G. Kasper (eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Request and apologies*: 1-34. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

- Chick, J.K. 1995. Interactional sociolinguistics and intercultural communication in South Africa. In R. Mesthrie (ed.), *Language and social history: Studies in South African sociolinguistics*: 230-241. Cape Town, Johannesburg: David Philip.
- Cruse, A. 2011. *Meaning in language: An introduction to semantics and pragmatics*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Finegan, E and N. Besnier. 1989. *Language. Its structure and use*. London, New York: Harcourt Brace Joanovich Publishers.
- Flowerdew, J. 1988. Speech acts and language teaching. *Language Teaching* 21(2): 69-82.
- Fowler, H.W. and F.G. Fowler. 1974. *The concise Oxford dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fukushima, S. 1996. Request strategies in British English and Japanese. *Language Sciences* 18(3-4): 671-688.
- Hassall, T. 2003. Requests by Australian learners of Indonesian. *Journal of Pragmatics* 35: 1903-1928.
- Hornby, A.S. 1995. *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary*. 5th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- House, J., G. Kasper and S. Ross. 2003. *Misunderstanding talk*. Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited.
- Hudson, R. A. 1980. *Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jannedy, S., R. Poletto and T.L. Weldon. 1994. *Language files*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition. Ohio: Ohio State University Press:
- Jawarowska, J. (n.d). Speech act theory. Available online: <http://instructional1.calsttela.edu/kamhis/tesl565-sp04/troy/spchact.htm>. Accessed 15 March 2012.
- Kasper, K. 1992. Pragmatic transfer. *Second Language Research* 8(3): 203-231.
- Le Pair, R. 1996. Spanish request strategies: A cross-cultural analysis from an intercultural perspective. *Language Sciences* 18(3-4): 651-670.

- Leech, G. 1983. *Principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Marti, L. 2006. Indirectness and politeness in Turkish-German bilingual and Turkish monolingual requests. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38: 1836-1869.
- McArthur, T. 1992. *The Oxford companion to the English language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mills, S. 2008. Impoliteness in a cultural context. *Journal of Pragmatics* 41: 1047-1060.
- Mesthrie, R. 2002. *Language in South Africa*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Okolo, B.A. 1993. *Making requests in Igbo*. University of Benin: Nigeria.
- Rintell, E. 1979. Getting your speech act together: The pragmatic ability of second language learners. *Working Papers in Bilingualism* 17: 97-106.
- Searle, J.R. 1969. *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, J.R. 1971. What is a speech act? In J.R. Searle (ed.), *The philosophy of language*: 39-53. Glasgow, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Scarcella, R.C. 1990. Communication difficulties in second language production, development, and instruction. In R.C Scarcella, E.S. Andersen, and S.D Krashen (eds.), *Developing communicative competence in a second language: Series on issues in second language research*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.
- Thomas, J. 1983. Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure. *Applied Linguistics* 4(2): 91-112.
- Thomas, J. 1995. *Meaning in interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Ting-Toomey, S. 1999. *Communicating across cultures*. New York, London: Guilford Press.
- Weizman, E. 1993. Interlanguage requestive hints. In G. Kasper and S. Blum-Kulka, (eds.), *Interlanguage requestive hints*: 123-137. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wolfson, N., T. Marmor and S. Jones. 1989. Problems in the comparison of speech acts across cultures. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House and G. Kasper (eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Request and apologies*: 174-196. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

## Appendix A: Consent form (L2 participants)



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY  
jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

### STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

---

#### Speech act of a request in L2 speakers of English

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Fatima Ganchi from the Department of General Linguistics at Stellenbosch University. The study is to form the basis of her thesis that will be submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree MPhil in Intercultural Communication for the Language Professions. The study requires both first language speakers of SeSotho who have attained a near-native level of second language English proficiency, a control group of first language speakers of English, an Afrikaans speaking group with English as second language. You were thus selected as a possible participant in this study because you fall into one of the abovementioned two categories.

#### 1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To investigate whether miscommunication occurs when the speech act of REQUEST is performed, due to lack of pragmatic competence in L2 speakers of English, or for other reasons.

#### 2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- (a) complete a language background questionnaire
- (b) if called upon, complete a standardised English task

The task will be scheduled to take place at the university on a day and at a time that suits the participants who are called upon after qualifying for the study on grounds of the information provided in the questionnaire. The task will take about 40 minutes to complete. All contact sessions will take place at the XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX and XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX (XXX campus).

#### 3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The participants will not experience or be exposed to any potential risks or discomfort by participating in this study.

#### 4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The participants will not benefit personally by participating in the research. The results of the study will, however, contribute to a better understanding of SeSotho-English bilingualism within the theoretical field of second language acquisition.

## **5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

Participants will not receive payment for participation in the study.

## **6. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by storing the data in hard copy form as well as electronically, with only the researcher and her supervisor having access thereto.

If participants should choose to do so, they are welcome to listen to the audio recording of their interview and see the results of the proficiency and grammaticality tasks. The recordings and the completed tasks will be stored in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher has access.

The results of the study will be documented in the final thesis that is to be submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree MPhil in Intercultural Communication for the Language Professions. No names of any participants will be mentioned in the final document. In the event of there being reference to individual results, participant numbers will be used, which will not allow anyone except the researcher to determine the identity of a participant.

## **7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to participate in this study or not. If you do volunteer to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

## **8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the principal investigator, Miss Fatima Ganchi (071 603 2216; fatimag@vut.ac.za), or her supervisor, Dr Frenette Southwood (021 808 2010; fs@sun.ac.za).

## **9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

<b>SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE</b>
--

The information above was described to me by Fatima Ganchi in English and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of Subject/Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Subject**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR**

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to \_\_\_\_\_ [*name of the subject/participant*]. [*He/she*] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B: Language background questionnaire completed by L2 participants

### Language background questionnaire

Participant number: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer all the questions below. Note that your response to this questionnaire will be handled in confidentiality and that you will remain anonymous in all documents that make reference to the information you have supplied.

#### A. Personal information

Surname: \_\_\_\_\_ First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_ Best time to contact: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex:  Male  Female

Year of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth: City \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_

If you were not born in South Africa, how long have you been living here? \_\_\_\_\_

How would you rate your immediate family's socio-economic status on grounds of your parents' income? Please circle the appropriate word.

Very low      Low                      Medium      High                      Very high

**B. First language (mother tongue) and English as a second language**

1. What is your first language? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the first language of your mother? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the first language of your father? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Which language(s) did you speak at home as a child? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What language did your primary caretaker (e.g. mother, grandmother, older sibling or playschool / crèche teacher) speak when interacting with you? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is the dominant language(s) spoken in the community that you grew up in?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What language(s) do you currently use when communicating with family members?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What language do you use most frequently in your current place of residence (e.g. university residence, flat, student house, family home, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_
9. At what age did you receive your first significant exposure to English (not counting the English heard in the media)? \_\_\_\_\_
10. In what context was this, e.g. at school, at a good friend's house, etc.?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**C. Education and Language Use**

1. What language(s) were used as the medium of instruction in the schools that you attended? Please also indicate the name of the schools and its location (city and country).

	Languages	Location
<b>Playschool / Crèche/ Preprimary School</b>		
<b>Primary / Elementary School</b>		
<b>Secondary / High School</b>		

2. Which language(s) do you use:

<b>At home</b>	
<b>In social situations</b>	
<b>At university</b>	
<b>When studying by yourself</b>	
<b>At your place of employment (if any)</b>	
<b>At religious gatherings (if applicable)</b>	

3. Please rate your linguistic ability in English and any other languages that you know (other than your first language). Use the following abbreviations:

- L = low
- I = intermediate
- A = advanced
- NN = near native (i.e. good enough to be easily mistaken for a first language speaker of English)

<b>Skill</b>	<b>English</b>	_____	_____
Reading			
Writing			
Speaking			
Understanding what you hear (listening)			
Overall competence			

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.**