

Pragmatic Instruction May Not Be Necessary Among Heritage Learners of Spanish: A Study on Requests

María J. Barros García (barrosgarcia@sxu.edu)

Saint Xavier University, USA

ORCID: 0000-0002-2326-0169

Jeremy W. Bachelor (jeremy.bachelor@heartland.edu)

Heartland Community College, USA

ORCID: 0000-0002-6447-5385

Abstract: This paper studies the pragmatic competence of U.S. heritage learners of Spanish in an attempt to determine (a) the degree of pragmatic transfer from English to Spanish experienced by heritage learners when producing different types of requests in Spanish; and (b) how to best teach pragmatics to students of Spanish as a Heritage Language (SHL). Additionally, the study compared the differences and similarities between the development of the pragmatic competence in SHL students and in students of Spanish as a second language (L2). Oral and written discourse completion tasks were used to assess requests in Spanish HL/L2 pragmatics. The results indicate that the pragmatic interventions only helped the Spanish L2 group, and that the Spanish HL group was already aware of the pragmatic principles that regulate requests in Spanish. Furthermore, no cases of negative pragmatic transfer were found in the Spanish HL data, so the study concluded that there is no need to teach heritage students pragmatic norms.

Keywords: pragmatic competence, requests, Spanish as a heritage language, Spanish as a second language, pragmatic instruction

Introduction

According to Kelleher (2010), a heritage language learner refers to a language student “who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or at least understands the language, and who is to some degree bilingual in that language and in English” (p. 2). Investigations into the pragmatic competence of heritage speakers of Spanish are scarce, with the majority of relevant studies focusing on this group’s grammatical competence (Montrul, 2004), phonetic variances (Ronquest, 2013), and language maintenance (Rivera-Mills, 2012). The analysis of heritage speakers’ pragmatic competence has been mostly limited to descriptive studies (Bachelor & Hernández, 2012; Pinto, 2012), with little attention paid to the teaching of pragmatics to this particular group, or to addressing a broader question left unanswered by Gironzetti and Koike (2016): should instructors attempt to teach pragmatics to students of Spanish as a heritage language? The fact that this question remains unanswered is troubling, considering Hispanics are set to become the majority people group in the United States by 2044 (Krogstad, 2014), henceforth increasing the number of SHL (Spanish as a Heritage Language) speakers drastically (Elias, 2016). Thus, a dire need exists to research SHL pragmatic competence, as studies strongly suggest that pragmatic errors are much more severe than grammatical errors (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgodá & Röver, 2001; Schauer, 2006).

To this end, the present study focuses on the unanswered question by Gironzetti and Koike (2016) by attempting to determine (a) the degree of pragmatic transfer (if any) from English to Spanish experienced by heritage speakers when producing different types of requests; and (b) how to best teach pragmatics to SHL learners. For comparative purposes, this study also analyzes the degree of pragmatic transfer and the impact of a number of pragmatic lessons in two groups of students whose first language is English and who are learning Spanish as a World Language (henceforth L2). The aim of this comparison is to analyze

the differences and similarities between the development of the pragmatic competence in Spanish L2 and HL speakers.

Pragmatic competence

Pragmatics has been defined as “a system of rules which enables us to successfully fulfil the functions we choose to accomplish by matching linguistic structures (at all levels from speech genre to phonology) with the environment in which we are operating” (Stalker, 1989, p. 184). That system of rules is not universal but changes from culture to culture, which means that in the process of learning a language the speaker needs to acquire knowledge on the best ways to convey messages in order for them to be successful and to avoid unintended consequences for both the speaker’s face and their relationship with the hearer(s).

Unfortunately, a review of some of today’s most popular textbooks for learning Spanish, which are supposed to be based on the communicative approach, shows how little attention is devoted to pragmatic principles. This lack of information is particularly negative when the language is not learned in an immersion environment and thus learners depend on the input they receive in the classroom. This is the case for many of the students who learn Spanish as a L2 in the United States. However, there is a growing group of students in the Spanish language classroom who do not fit under that category because they learnt their Spanish at home and use it with their families and/or other members of their community. This group of SHL are expected to be more aware of the pragmatic principles that regulate interactions in Spanish but, does living in the United States affect those pragmatic principles? In other words, does their proficiency in American English have an influence on their pragmatic competence in Spanish?

Request strategies in Spanish

In this study, we test Spanish HL/L2 speakers' knowledge of request strategies and pragmatic transference from English to Spanish when realizing them. To assess requests in Spanish HL/L2 pragmatics, oral and written discourse completion tasks were used. The tasks varied with respect to the social distance between the interlocutors, their power, and the degree of imposition caused by the request. Research defines requests as "an illocutionary act whereby a speaker addresses to a hearer that s/he requires some desired or intended action to be performed either for the benefit of the speaker, or the hearer, or both" (Su, 2017, p. 73). This speech act was selected for the present study because, as Su (2017, p. 73) explains, requests are performed daily and they have a potential face-threatening effect, which makes them a very complex speech act where the speaker needs to use different strategies to avoid being perceived as rude or offensive. For these reasons, requests have been widely studied (García, 2015). However, and as noted in the introduction to this paper, previous studies mainly focus on exploring the production of requests in different cultures from a descriptive perspective. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no study to date has analyzed the pragmatic competence of speakers of SHL living in the United States, and compared it the pragmatic competence of U.S. L2 speakers. The overarching goal of this research project is to determine pragmatic strengths and weaknesses regarding the production of requests by a SHL group of students, and to assess the effectiveness of pragmatic lessons on request strategies in the SHL and L2 groups.

Methodology

To address the above-mentioned goals, the following research questions were selected:

1. Has continuous contact with North American English affected the ability of SHL speakers to produce requests in Spanish in a pragmatically appropriate

- manner (according to the notions of pragmatic appropriateness established by previous research)?
2. Do pragmatic classroom interventions positively influence the ability of SHL speakers to produce requests in Spanish in a pragmatically appropriate manner (according to the notions of pragmatic appropriateness established by previous research)?
 3. Do pragmatic classroom interventions positively influence the ability of L2 Spanish speakers to produce requests in Spanish in a pragmatically appropriate manner (according to the notions of pragmatic appropriateness established by previous research)?
 4. Do pragmatic classroom interventions positively influence SHL speakers more or L2 Spanish speakers when producing requests in Spanish?

To answer these research questions, three groups of students were chosen from two separate institutions of higher education in the Midwestern region of the United States. These groups participated in the study during the entirety of the spring 2017 semester. Group one will be referred to as the SHL group, group two as the L2 experimental group, and group three as the L2 control group. The purpose of the L2 control group was to determine if pragmatic growth in request strategies could be attributed to other variables, such as grammar and vocabulary lessons. An SHL control group was deemed unnecessary due to factors that are explained later (see Results).

Among all three groups, 34 students decided to participate, ranging in age from 17-35 years old, with the average age at 22. Group one (SHL) consisted of 18 participants who were primarily of Mexican background. The following represents this group's ancestral variation: 87.5% had Mexican heritage, 5% Honduran, 5% mixed (Mexican-Guatemalan, Mexican-Ecuadorian), and 2.5% other. The members of group one were enrolled in a Spanish course for HL.

Before enrolling into this course, all of them took a placement exam that assessed an intermediate-high level of Spanish, per the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. This Spanish HL course was the students' first college-level Spanish course. With regard to groups two and three (L2 control and experimental), they were comprised of 16 participants equally divided into two groups of 8. These students all successfully completed Spanish I and were enrolled in their second semester of college-level Spanish. The students from these groups were all born and raised in the United States, except for one student from Australia. All participants in groups two and three are native English speakers.

Prior to the spring of 2017, authorization was granted to carry out this research project by all Institutional Review Boards involved. The above biographical information was obtained directly from the participants who signed a consent form and filled out a background questionnaire.

During the first week of the semester, students in all groups took a written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and an oral DCT (see Appendixes A and B, respectively). Both DCTs consisted of 10 scenarios each in which students had to respond to an equal number of formal and informal situations with varying levels of imposition. These oral and written DCTs served as pre-tests for this study. The purpose of the pre-tests was to assess participants' pragmatic competence before class instruction. Throughout the semester, three pragmatic lessons (interventions) on request strategies were imparted in groups one and two. All departmental and course outcomes remained intact, and no other classroom elements were modified as to not create additional variables between the control and experimental groups. The pragmatic lessons on requests were based on activities designed by Langer (2013), the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition [CARLA] (2006), and Martín Ruiz (2011), and were modified to meet the needs of the students based on their proficiency level (see

Appendix D). The lessons consisted of three 20-minute sessions, for a total of approximately 60 minutes, and dealt with differences between formal and informal situations, situations that ranged from great to little imposition, and situations that exposed students to the indirect and hearer-oriented nature of requests in Spanish (Langer, 2013). The first intervention started with an explicit lesson that displayed typical request strategies in Spanish by level of imposition and explained the hearer-oriented nature of these requests. The second half of this first lesson and the remaining two lessons followed a more implicit approach. In the final lesson, students had the opportunity to view clips from popular Spanish films containing a variety of requests and had to categorize them accordingly, per the instructions found in Martín Ruiz (2011).

At the end of the semester, after the students in groups one and two had been exposed to the three pragmatic interventions, the participants in all three groups took the same written and oral DCTs that they took at the beginning of the semester, in order to measure potential growth in their pragmatic competence. These oral and written DCTs serve as post-tests for this study.

Once the semester ended, the data was analyzed using criteria based on investigations by CARLA (2006) and Langer (2013) as to determine what is considered a pragmatically appropriate request in standard Spanish (see Appendix C).¹ Drawing on insights from these studies, the researchers looked for hearer-oriented strategies, conventionally indirect strategies, the student offering a reason, and the use of “tú” or “usted” conjugations depending on the situation. Other L2 and SHL characteristics, such as spelling or grammar mistakes, were not factors in the data analysis. The researchers listened to and read each response from both the pre- and post-tests and marked them as either “adheres”

¹ Limitations regarding these criteria and what Langer (2013) constitutes “standard Spanish” are later discussed (see Conclusions and pedagogical implications).

or “does not adhere” to pragmatic norms based on the previously mentioned criteria (Appendix C). When an item was marked as “does not adhere,” a comment was left explaining why it was considered inappropriate.

Results

The first research question attempted to discover if SHL speakers had experienced negative pragmatic transfer from English to Spanish when making requests. To answer this question, the results from the pre-tests were analyzed. The post-test results were not used in answering this question, as the pragmatic interventions may have impacted student request strategies. According to Ross (2008), students in Language Arts are considered proficient in the area being measured when they receive a score of 70% or higher. Having this in mind, the researchers determined that if the students in the SHL group all scored a 70% or higher on both the oral and written DCT pre-tests, they would be considered “proficient” in pragmatic request competency. In such case, group one would not have suffered from pragmatic transfer and will have maintained high pragmatic competence with regard to requests. As seen in Table 1, the average score on the written DCT pre-test was a 96.67%, and the average score on the oral DCT pre-test was a 97.78%.

Table 1. Pre-test DCT written and oral scores in group 1.

Number of written DCT questions	180	Number of oral DCT questions	180
Number of written DCT questions answered correctly	174	Number of oral DCT questions answered correctly	176
Written DCT average score	96.67%	Oral DCT average score	97.78%

In observing the results presented in Table 1, the average score of heritage students for both written and oral pre DCTs was well over a 70%, which was considered the proficiency threshold for these assessments (Ross, 2008). To answer research question number 1, the results suggest that exposure to American pragmatic norms did not influence Spanish pragmatic request strategies of group one participants in any significant way.

To answer research question 2, which sought to determine if pragmatic interventions in the classroom positively impact SHL learners' pragmatic request competence, a paired *t* test was used to determine if statistically significant growth occurred between the pre- and post-tests (written and oral DCTs) within group one. As shown in Table 1, pre-test average scores were 96.67% on the written DCT and 97.78% on the oral DCT. On the post-tests, students in group one scored a 89.44% average on the written DCT and a 94.44% average on the oral DCT. Test scores from pre- and post-tests were used in the paired *t* test, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Paired *t* test results in group 1.

	Pre-test scores	Post-test scores
Mean	97.2250	91.9400
SD	0.7849	3.5355
SEM	0.5550	2.5000
N	2	2

The paired *t* test results from Table 2 indicate that the two-tailed *P* value equals 0.2245. As such, this difference is not considered to be statistically significant. In fact, student scores in group 1 decreased by -7.23% between the pre- and post-written DCTs and by -3.34% between the pre- and post-oral DCTs. Using

information from the paired *t* test and from test score averages, we need to conclude that the pragmatic lessons did not help SHL students improve their pragmatic request competence. As mentioned earlier, there was not a control group within the SHL learner group (group 1), as there were not two sections of this particular class in the same semester. The original intention of the researchers was to select a control group of SHL learners the following semester; however, since it was later discovered that growth did not occur in this group, a control group would not have been necessary, given that the purpose of a control group is to determine if other variables impact growth (Pithon, 2013).

In order to determine growth between pre- and post-tests among L2 learners and to answer research question 3, a paired *t* test was also used with group 2 (see Table 3), following the same process as the previous question. Average scores on pre-tests for group 2 were 30% on the written DCT and 36.25% on the oral DCT. Post-test scores were 37.5% on the written DCT and 38.75% on the oral DCT.

Table 3. Paired *t* test results in group 2.

	Pre-test scores	Post-test scores
Mean	33.125	38.125
SD	4.4194	0.8839
SEM	3.125	0.625
N	2	2

The two-tailed *P* value for group 2 equals 0.2952; as such, the difference between pre- and post-tests is not considered to be statistically significant. However, post-test scores in group 2 increased by 7.5% between the pre- and post-written DCTs and by 2.5% between the pre- and post-oral DCTs.

While not statistically significant, the growth that occurred between pre- and post-tests in group 2 called into question the possibility of other factors or variables that may have influenced the students' pragmatic request competency in this group, such as grammar lessons, as some research indicates that grammar may positively contribute to pragmatic competence (Bachelor, 2015; Bachelor, 2016). Therefore, the difference between pre- and post-tests in the L2 control group (group 3) was also briefly analyzed. A growth of 3.75% occurred in this group between pre- and post-written DCTs and by 0% between pre- and post-oral DCTs. With this in mind, it can be suggested that other variables did not likely play a role in group 2's growth between pre- and post-tests.

Finally, research question 4 attempts to discern whether the pragmatic interventions helped the SHL group or the L2 group more. To answer this question, a comparison of growth percentages from the results of question 2 (SHL growth) and from the results of question 3 (L2 growth) was carried out. As previously stated, the SHL group saw a -7.23% decrease between pre- and post-written DCTs and a -3.34% decrease between pre- and post-oral DCTs, while the L2 experimental group experienced a 7.5% growth on the written DCT and 2.5% growth on the oral DCT. This indicates that the L2 experimental group (group 2) improved 14.73% more than the SHL group on the written DCT and by 5.84% more on the oral DCT, thus suggesting that the pragmatic interventions helped the L2 group significantly more than the SHL group. The implications of this finding among the other findings from the above analyses are discussed in the next section (see Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications).

Conclusions and pedagogical implications

In analyzing the findings, it appears that the pragmatic interventions did not help the SHL learners; however, the L2 experimental group did undergo slight improvements after the lessons. This suggests that lessons on pragmatics may be

especially useful for beginner L2 learners but unnecessary for SHL learners with a more advanced level of proficiency. This finding is in line with the authors' initial hypothesis: SHL are more aware of the pragmatic principles that regulate interactions in Spanish than L2 learners. The largest finding from this study, however, has more to do with the findings from research questions one and two. As noted above, the results indicate that the heritage learners had not experienced negative pragmatic transfer from English to Spanish in regard to request strategies, thus living in the United States for at least 75% of their lives and speaking American English in most of their daily activities does not affect their pragmatic competence in Spanish. Additional research would be needed in order to determine the factor(s) influencing this finding.

These findings help researchers address the previously unanswered question at the beginning of this paper by Gironzetti and Koike (2016): should we attempt to teach pragmatics to SHL learners? Some researchers have already attempted to answer that question and highly recommend the inclusion of pragmatic lessons in courses for learners of heritage languages, such as Taguchi and Roever (2017), who suggest applying a "language socialization perspective" of pragmatic teaching to the SHL classroom, which is a process in which novice learners acquire cultural and language knowledge simultaneously through contact with language experts. Likewise, Showstack (2016) makes the argument that pragmatics is an essential element of SHL classroom instruction and details her methods of teaching pragmatics to this particular group of students. And finally, Maróti (2012) adds, "one of the most important tasks in the continuously evolving field of language instruction is ... the need for language teachers to begin ... increasing awareness of intercultural pragmatic competence [among heritage learners]. How can instruction of heritage learners be improved?" (p. 220). The present study seems to question these recommendations, and if future investigations also suggest that SHL learners with other levels of proficiency

maintain the pragmatic norms of their family/community, it could be concluded that there is actually no need to teach heritage students pragmatic norms. In fact, as shown in the results from research question 2, the pragmatic lessons may actually confuse students and result in poorer pragmatic competence. While this one study cannot make such a declarative statement, the researchers hope that these results invite further investigations into this very matter.

Lastly, the researchers recognize that the data collection period (one semester), the number of participants (34), and the evaluation criteria used to assess the requests (there is no consensus regarding what is considered pragmatically appropriate) pose certain limitations to this study. However, future investigations that address these limitations should most definitely be carried out in the near future.

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Appendix A: Written Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

Respond in writing to each scenario in Spanish in a culturally appropriate way.

1) You forgot your Spanish textbook at home and ask a classmate if you can borrow his/her book for the day.

You say:

2) You run into the college president on your way to the cafeteria and ask him to lower (*rebajar*) tuition (*matrícula*) costs.

You say:

3) You and a Spanish classmate are working on a cultural presentation together but s/he is sending text messages instead of helping you.

You say:

4) You are at a restaurant and there isn't salt at your table. You see that an older lady at the table next to you has salt and isn't using it. You decide to ask her for it.

You say:

5) You are at the college cafeteria and realize that you forgot your money at home. You ask a friend for a few dollars.

You say:

6) You forgot your homework and need to ask your professor if it's okay to turn it in tomorrow.

You say:

7) You were sick last class period and need to ask your roommate (who is also in your class) to see his/her notes.

You say:

8) You are struggling in an introduction to statistics course and ask the TA (teacher's assistant) to tutor you.

You say:

9) You are studying for finals and your roommate has the TV volume turned up all the way.

You say:

10) You are at the grocery store and need to buy eggs but there are none on the shelf. You decide to ask a worker to bring out more.

You say:

Appendix B: Oral Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

Respond orally in Spanish to each scenario in a culturally appropriate way.

1) You are finding one of your courses very challenging. At the end of class, you ask one of your classmates for help with this course.

You say:

2) You realize that one of your final exams is on a very inconvenient date. You go to your professor's office to ask to take the final on a different date.

You say:

3) You are invited to a potluck with friends and want to cook a family recipe. You call your mother to ask for the recipe.

You say:

4) You work at a local restaurant and need to take the day off. You go talk to your manager to ask for the day off.

You say:

5) Your car is at the repair shop and you need to go pick it up. You ask your sibling for a ride to the repair shop.

You say:

6) You are at a job interview. At the end of the interview, you ask the interviewer if s/he could let you know when you will have an answer about their decision.

You say:

7) You live in a college dorm. You are having a party this weekend and ask your roommate if you could borrow some of his/her clothes.

You say:

8) You are walking in the street and need some help with directions. You see a couple of policemen and decide to ask them for help.

You say:

9) You are at home and your dad is watching TV and the volume is really loud. You are working on your homework. You ask your dad to turn it down.

You say:

10) You are in a packed grocery store and need to get home as soon as possible. You only have two items in your basket but all the cashier lines are really long. You ask the people in one of the lines if you could go first.

You say:

Appendix C: Grading criteria for oral and written DCTs

General instructions: *Go through each response and mark it as either “adheres” or “does not adhere” to pragmatic norms based on the following criteria. Provide a comment explaining what did not adhere, when applicable.*

For both Written and Oral DCTs

Formal situations (numbers 2, 4, 6, 8, 10). Students should use one or more of the following strategies, as interpreted by the grader, per Langer (2013, p. 1157) and CARLA (2006):

- The person being asked to do something is the subject of the sentence
- Conventionally indirect
- Offers a reason
- Use of “usted/ustedes” conjugations
- Use of “le/s importaría*” + infinitive

* If the grader sees as more appropriate due to the level of imposition, use of the present tense of “usted/ustedes” may be deemed appropriate

Informal situations (numbers 1, 3, 5, 7, 9). Students should use one or more of the following strategies, as determined by the grader, per Langer (2013, p. 1157) and CARLA (2006):

- The person being asked to do something is the subject of the sentence
- Conventionally indirect, though commands may be deemed acceptable*

* This is based on the relationship involved and the level of imposition, as determined by the grader

- Offers a reason
- Use of “tú” conjugations
- Use of “te importa*” + infinitive

* If the grader sees as more appropriate due to the level of imposition, use of the conditional tense of “tú” may be deemed appropriate

Sample of how to grade student responses

“You forgot your Spanish textbook at home and ask a classmate if you can borrow his/her book for the day.”

1. Student response: ¿Me puedes prestar tu libro?

Grader: Adheres

2. Student response: ¿Puedo tener tu libro?

Grader: Does not adhere, the response is not hearer-oriented

3. Student response: ¿Le importaría prestarme su libro?

Grader: Does not adhere, the response is too formal; the strategy does not match the level of imposition

Appendix D: Pragmatic lessons

Lesson 1 (based on the lesson by Langer, 2013)

What is a request?

Requests are common forms of communication in both English and Spanish. However, there are slight differences in how each language realizes these actions. A request is when the speaker asks something of the hearer. Therefore, the goal of a request is to get the hearer to perform some task.

Use of requests

In Spanish, speakers make requests with different levels of politeness. The speaker chooses an appropriate level of politeness based on the context in order to get to the hearer to perform a given action. The greater the imposition of the request, the more politeness is required. In other words, if the request requires a great deal of effort or inconvenience, then the speaker will be more polite in order to increase the chance that the task be completed.

Level of Politeness		Form	Level of Inconvenience
Less polite	Low	pásame la sal	Low
	Low	me pasas la sal	Low
	Low	me puedes pasar la sal	Low
	High	me quieres pasar la sal	High
	Higher	me podrías pasar la sal	Higher
More polite	Highest	sería tan amable de pasarme la sal	Highest

For example, one way of asking for salt would be to use the command form, "pásame la sal." However, "me pasas la sal" is often the preferred form in Spanish since it is slightly more polite than the command form, which is blunt and direct.

Notice how the verb form will change to express formal or informal requests according to social distance. For example, with your boss or professor, you would use the *usted* form, and therefore would conjugate the verb as "(usted) me ayuda con la tarea", but with a classmate or friend you would use the *tú* form, "(tú) me ayudas con la tarea."

Let's say you are a student, and you miss a day of class. The following day you ask a classmate for his/her notes. In English, it is common to ask for the notes by saying, "Can I see your notes?" with the requester functioning as the subject of the sentence. However, in Spanish, the form, "me das tus apuntes," where the person being asked to do something (*tú*), is the subject of the sentence.

Therefore, in this context "puedo ver tus apuntes" is not a preferred form but rather a transfer from English grammar.

Another common expression in Spanish is *te/le/les importa + infinitive* or *me + verb in present tense* to ask something of another person. The *conditional*² is used to express politeness for a formal situation, for example in the very formal form, "le importaría cerrar la ventana."

Level of

<u>Politeness</u>	<u>Form (Tú - informal)</u>	<u>Form (Usted - formal)</u>
Less polite	¿Te importa cerrar la ventana?	¿Le importa cerrar la ventana?
More polite	¿Te importaría cerrar la ventana?	¿Le importaría cerrar la ventana?

Exercise 1 - Structures

Translate the following requests using the informal tú form and the structures seen above.

Example: May I see your notes? -->

¿Me das tus apuntes?

A) May I borrow (*prestar*) your book? --> _____

B) Can you give me five dollars? --> _____

C) Could you help me with the homework? --> _____

D) Can you pass me the salt? --> _____

Exercise 2 - Practice

Complete the following with an appropriate form of these formulas to make a request.

² The "conditional" is when you say "I would run" or "I would talk to her" instead of "I run" or "I talk to her." With all regular verbs, you take the infinitive (the unconjugated form, such as 'hablar' or 'comer') and simply add "ía" to the end of it. For example, *I would talk to her* (if only I had more time) would be *Hablaría con ella (...)*.

- Yo hablaría, tú hablarías, él/ella/usted hablaría, nosotros hablaríamos, ellos/ustedes hablarían, etc.

1) You want your roommate to help take out the trash (*sacar la basura*). (Low inconvenience)

¿Me ayudas _____?

2) You ask your friend to take (*llevar*) you home. (Low inconvenience)

¿Te importa _____ a casa?

3) You ask to meet (*reunirse*) with your professor. (High inconvenience)

¿Le importa _____?

4) You ask your boss to look over (*mirar*) a report (*informe*) with you. (Higher inconvenience)

¿Me ayudaría _____?

5) You go to a cafe and there is an open seat next someone you don't know. You ask to sit down. (High inconvenience) ¿_____?

Exercise 3 - In context

Read the following conversation and answer the questions on the following page.

Jorge y Roberto son estudiantes en la Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Jorge estaba enfermo y no asistió a la clase de historia el día anterior. Jorge quiere ver los apuntes de Roberto para no perder la materia de la clase.

Jorge: Hola Roberto, ¿Cómo estás?

Roberto: Estoy bien, ¿y tú? Estabas enfermo, ¿no?

Jorge: Sí, pero hoy estoy mucho mejor. Oye, ¿me das tus apuntes de la clase de historia?

Roberto: Sí, aquí están los apuntes de ayer.

Jorge: Gracias Roberto, me has ayudado mucho.

Roberto: De nada. Hay un examen en dos días así que voy a la biblioteca a estudiar.

Jorge: ¡Hay un examen! Bueno, voy a la biblioteca también.

Roberto: Vale, nos vemos en la biblioteca.

Jorge: Gracias de nuevo, nos vemos pronto.

Roberto: Venga, hasta luego.

Jorge: Hasta luego.

1) What purpose does Jorge have in this conversation?

2) What key words led you to categorize the conversation as you did? What level of politeness was used?

3) What roles did each of the speakers have? Who is making the request? Who was asked to do something?

4) Was this a formal or informal conversation?

5) Was the conversation successful? Was the goal reached?

Lesson 2 (based on the lesson by CARLA, 2006)

Why are social factors important when making requests?

When selecting the proper language strategies to use in Spanish, you always need to consider the broader context. Sometimes, requests can even be welcome and demonstrate solidarity between the speakers. It is important to understand how the social factors surrounding your request can help (or hurt) your ability to have the request granted.

There are three primary social factors that have been determined to influence the performance of requests in terms of their level of politeness: degree of social distance, power, and rank of imposition.

1. Degree of Social Distance refers to how close the interlocutors are (e.g., distant, semi-close, or close).
2. Power refers to the power relationship between the person making the request and the person receiving the request.
3. Rank of Imposition refers to how big the request is. A small rank of imposition indicates a small request (e.g., a glass of water) and a big rank of imposition indicates a large request (e.g., borrowing \$10,000).

Each of these factors plays a different role in requesting behavior and carries a different weight depending on the language variety. For example, in requests, it appears that rank of imposition tends to have the biggest impact on the strategies used in Canadian English as well as in Costa Rican Spanish. However, **degree of social distance tends to play an equally important role for the Spanish speakers** and not for English speakers.

In this lesson we will specifically look at degree of social distance.

Degree of Social Distance (closeness of relationship between the speakers) is one of the most important social factors to consider when making requests in Spanish. It can be a very important clue in helping you select the proper language strategies to perform a request.

Read the following two conversations. The first conversation is an interaction between two friends in which the degree of social distance is very low. The second conversation involves a professor and a student and demonstrates a greater degree of social distance. As you read each conversation, pay special attention to the type of request strategies used by the native speakers and think about how they might be related to social distance.

Conversation 1:

Iker: Hola Gemma. Oye, se me ha olvidado (*I forgot*) el libro de *Vistazos*. ¿Me prestas el... tu libro?

Gemma: Claro.

Iker: Para la clase. ¿sí?

Gemma: Umjú, ¿Cuándo lo necesitas?

Iker: Lo necesito ahora... la verdad.

Gemma: Sí bue... ¿me lo podrás devolver luego (*will you be able to return it to me later*)? Porque lo necesito para mi clase.

Iker: Claro, sí, sí.

Gemma: ¿Sí?

Iker: Luego te lo... paso por la oficina y te lo dejo. ¿bien?

Gemma: Vale, ningún problema.

Iker: Vale, gracias Gemma. Hasta luego.

Gemma: De nada.

Iker: Chao.

Conversation 2:

Estudiante: Profesora,

Profesora: Hola. Buen día.

Estudiante: ¿Cómo está usted?

Profesora: Bien.

Estudiante: Bien.

Profesora: Dime (*tell me* → *informal tú command*).

Estudiante: Eh... mira, eh, mire usted estaba pensando si no sería (*would be*) posible... eh encontrarme (*to meet*) con usted en su oficina más tarde.

Profesora: "Más tarde," ¿a qué hora?

Estudiante: Eh... como, ¿a las once o así?

Profesora: A las once... Sí, a las once puedo.

Estudiante: Sí, sí, gracias.

Profesora: Okey bueno, nos vemos allá.

Estudiante: Bueno, hasta luego.

Synthesis. With a partner, discuss:

1. What do you notice about the request strategies in each of the interactions (directness)?
2. In which of the situations is the request more direct? How might this be related to social distance?
3. Find one request strategy from each of the conversations that reflects the differences in social distance.
 - a. Less Social Distance
 - b. More Social Distance
4. Is this relationship between directness and social distance the same in English?

Lesson 3 (based on the lesson by Martín Ruiz, 2011)

Indirect requests

Read the following two scenarios in which a worker asks his boss for a raise.

Scenario 1: *Súbame el sueldo, por favor.*

Scenario 2: *Disculpe, señor. Quería hacerle una pregunta. ¿Podría usted, si no es mucha molestia, considerar la posibilidad de concederme un aumento? Ya sé que no le gusta que se lo pidan, pero es que estoy pasando por ciertas dificultades... Le prometo que mi trabajo mejorará.*

Which conversation will likely help the worker get his raise?

In Spanish, when someone wants something, different strategies are used. Sometimes it's better to request something in an indirect way. One way to do this is via questions. Through questions, we make sure that the listener understands that our questions are actually requests.

Looking at the above scenarios, classify them in the following chart:

ELEMENT	EXAMPLE	SCENARIO
Command	<i>Súbame el sueldo</i>	1
Used to get the listener's attention		
Request via question		
Justification		
Anticipation of a counterargument		
Use of "please"		

**Now, read over the following scenes with a partner from Spanish movies.
Different request strategies are used.**

Scene 1: "El Bola" (36:10-36:50)

(Context: Alfredo and Pablo are school friends. Alfredo's dad goes to Pablo's house to ask his dad if Pablo can go with them on a trip. The two fathers don't know each other)

PADRE DE ALFREDO: – Perdona que le moleste.

PADRE DE PABLO: – No, hombre, ninguna molestia, dígame. [...]

PADRE DE ALFREDO: – Mire, es que vamos a ir un grupo de amigos a una casa cerca de la sierra y había pensado que se viniera el chaval con nosotros.

PADRE DE PABLO: – Ya. ¿Van a volver hoy?

PADRE DE ALFREDO: – Sí, estaremos en Madrid a la hora de cenar, sobre las diez o las once.

Scene 2: "El otro lado de la cama" (37-38:40)

(Context: Monica's boyfriend, Javier, asks her if he can use her cabin in the mountains this weekend with his new girlfriend)

JAVIER: – Oye, Mónica... ¡Huy, qué guapa estás!

MÓNICA: – ¿Qué quieres?

JAVIER: – ¿Que qué quiero? No quiero nada... bueno sí... sí que quería una cosa: te quería preguntar si sigues sin novio.

MÓNICA (visibly upset): – Javier, ¿no crees que ya me has hecho bastante daño?

JAVIER: – Es que es precisamente por eso, Mónica, que te quería presentar a un amigo mío, es que estáis hechos el uno para el otro, de verdad.

MÓNICA: – Eso decías también de nosotros, hasta que te cansaste de mí, claro.

JAVIER: – Tampoco pasa nada... Ah, es que también te quería preguntar por el tema de la casa que tienes en la sierra, para ver si me la podías alquilar o... dejar..., casi mejor, ¿no? MÓNICA: – Ya... sí, claro, casi mejor... ¿pero cómo puedes tener tanto morro? Ya sé para lo que quieres la casa de la sierra (se va enfadada).

JAVIER: – Bueno, vale, Mónica... ¡te la alquilo! [...]

Scene 3: “Volver” (30:20-30:44)

(Context: Raimunda and Regina are good friends. Raimunda needs Regina to loan her money)

RAIMUNDA: – Oye, ¿no podrías prestarme cien euros?

REGINA: – Muchacha, si yo estoy “pelá”. Acabo de comprar una bola de aguja de puerco así.

RAIMUNDA: – Huy, pues me vendría muy bien. ¡Te la compro!

REGINA: – Me costó 10,80 pero es que es lo único que yo tengo.

RAIMUNDA: – Bueno, mañana te los doy, enróllate mujer.

REGINA: – Está bien. Te lo voy a llevar a tu casa ahora.

RAIMUNDA. – ¡Gracias, reina!

Scene 4: “Mensaka” (17:27-17:42)

(Context: Javi walks into a coffee shop and orders coffee)

JAVI: – ¿Me pones un café con leche?

Now, answer the following question with your partner about all three movie scenes:

What is the relationship between the speakers? Do they know each other well? Are they friends? What is asked? Is it something important?

Finally, read over the following e-mails with a classmate. They are from international students living in Spain. Decide if the requests are appropriate and if the student will get what s/he wants. Discuss why.

SITUATION 1:

Vlad is a Russian student living in Barcelona; he has a test on February 14; however, that same day his brother is getting married in Moscow, so he asks his professor to change the date:

PROFESOR:

CÁMBIAME LA FECHA DEL EXAMEN SI NO TE IMPORTA, YA QUE NO PODRÉ ACUDIR PORQUE SE CASA MI HERMANO. ¡GRACIAS!

SITUATION 2:

Tanako is a Japanese student living in Seville. She's written her classmate, someone who doesn't know well, and asks her for her notes:

HOLA: DEBO PEDIRTE QUE ME DEJES LOS APUNTES DEL CURSO DE CULTURA Y CIVILIZACIÓN. OTRO DÍA TE LOS DEJARÉ YO. LOS NECESITO PORQUE NO HE ASISTIDO A CLASE, Y TIENES QUE DEJÁRMELOS. SALUDOS.

SITUATION 3:

Alí es a Moroccan student living in Madrid. He found a new room to live in for next semester. The room is available on September 1; however, he can't move in until October but hopes that they can save the room for him anyways. He writes

his would-be roommates, people he doesn't know well, to explain the situation:

Querido compañero: Tengo que pedirte algo. Por favor, quisiera que me guardases la habitación hasta octubre. Ya sé que no te viene bien, pero para mí es muy importante, y podría pagarte la mitad del dinero, si quieres. Te la agradecería mucho. Un abrazo.

SITUATION 4:

Sveta is a Belorussian student living in Granada and isn't going to make it to the university on time to register for classes. He decides to write a friend and ask her to do it for him; however, registering is a time-consuming process:

QUERIDA MASHA: ESTE AÑO NO VOY A PODER LLEGAR A TIEMPO PARA HACER MI MATRÍCULA PORQUE HAY UNA FIESTA MUY DIVERTIDA EN MINSK QUE NO QUIERO PERDERME. POR FAVOR, HÁZMELA TÚ. TIENES QUE IR AL EDIFICIO DE LA UNIVERSIDAD EL DÍA 14 Y HABLAR CON EL PROFESOR MARTÍNEZ. NO LLEGUES TARDE, TIENES QUE ESTAR A LAS 7 DE LA MAÑANA. TE ADJUNTO LA LISTA DE ASIGNATURAS. GRACIAS,