DARING TO REFER TO THE ADDRESSEE: FINNISH SPEAKERS’ REQUESTS IN L2 FRENCH

Tuuli Holttinen

Exploring and Assessing Pragmatic Aspects of L1 and L2 Communication: From Needs Analysis through Monitoring to Feedback

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Introduction: requests

• Frequency in everyday life → “one of the most basic and ubiquitous activities in social interaction” (Drew & Couper-Kuhlen 2014:1)

• Requests threaten the hearer’s freedom of action → ”inherently face-threatening acts” (Brown & Levinson 1987)

• The way requests are formulated is crucial for interpersonal relationships

• Typical ways of formulating requests vary considerably between languages and cultures (e.g. Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Ogiermann 2009) → possible problems for non-native speakers
PhD project

- Development of request strategies in L2 French: comparing the interlanguage of Finnish speakers to L1 Finnish and L1 French

- Elements to be analyzed:
  - Degree of directness
    - e.g. Open the window [imperative] –vs.– Can you open the window? [ability question] –vs.– It’s hot here [hint]
  - Internal modification
    - e.g. Open the window, please; Could you open the window?
  - External modification
    - e.g. Can you open the window? I’d like to get some fresh air.
  - Request perspective
    - e.g. Can you open the window? –vs.– Can we open the window?
  - Addressing
    - e.g. Tu peux ouvrir la fenêtre? –vs.– Vous pouvez ouvrir la fenêtre?

The focus of today’s paper
Request perspective

• “Choice of perspective presents an important source of variation in requests” (Blum-Kulka 1989: 58) → emphasizing the speaker as recipient or the hearer as agent

• One of the aspects analyzed in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989)

Speaker perspective: Can I borrow your notes?
Hearer perspective: Can you lend me your notes?
Impersonal perspective: Is it possible to have a look at your notes?
Joint perspective: Can we copy your notes for me?

• Preference for request perspective varies substantially between languages and cultures
  • e.g. Argentinian Spanish → hearer perspective; Australian English → speaker perspective; Hebrew → impersonal perspective (Blum-Kulka 1989)
Address pronouns in Finnish and French

- The same means for referring to the hearer (T & V); impersonal constructions

- Morphological differences
  - e.g. Finnish pro-drop (sinä) *menet* (T), (te) *menette* (V)

- Differences in usage
  - Finnish: T widely used, impersonal constructions used more
  - French: V standard in many contexts, T reserved for close relationships
  - Changes: in Finnish, V has become more popular in service encounters
  - Contextual and individual variation in both languages

(e.g. Havu 2009a, Havu, Isosävi & Lappalainen 2014)
Previous studies on L2 requests

- Main focus has been on **directness**…
  - Direct strategies: e.g. *Give me a pen; I want/need a pen*
  - Conventionally indirect strategies: e.g. *Can you pass me a pen?; Is it possible to use your pen?*
  - Non-conventionally indirect strategies (hints): e.g. *I forgot to take my pencil case with me*

- ...and **internal modification**
  - Syntactic (e.g. conditional mood) and lexical downgraders (e.g. politeness markers)

- **External modifiers**, or **supportive moves**, have also been studied

- Only a few studies on **request perspective**

- No studies on **forms of address** in L2 requests
Previous studies on L2 requests

- The pragmatics of Finnish speakers of L2 French has been mostly ignored; only a few studies on L2 French requests in general (Warga 2005, Forsberg-Lundell & Erman 2012, Holttinen 2017)

- Finnish politeness described previously as “withdrawing and evasive, avoiding direct reference to hearer or speaker” (Yli-Vakkuri 2005: 200) → effect on Finnish speakers’ L2?
Previous studies: L2 request perspective

- Mostly studied in L2 English (Trosborg 1995, Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis 2010; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2012) and L2 Spanish (Pinto 2005, Félix-Brasdefer 2007)

- The results vary considerably:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The L1 of NNSs may have an effect on the choice of perspective</td>
<td>Spanish speakers of L2 English: Pinto (2005), German and Japanese speakers of L2 English: Woodfield (2008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Possible reasons for variation: perspective within all strategies vs. specific strategies, different methods, different L1s and L2s, different levels of acquisition...
Previous studies: addressing in L2 French

- Studies conducted in
  - L2 textbooks (Havu 2008, Planchenault 2009)
  - study abroad contexts (Kinginger, Blattner & Roulon 2009)
- "Sociolinguistic tightrope" (Dewaele 2004)
- Possible solutions: awareness-raising activities, CMC with native speakers, stays abroad (DuFon 2010)
- Learning a complex address system is easier when the address system in L1 is also complex (Dewaele 2004)
- Differences in usage of T and V in L1 (Finnish) and L2 (French) → possible problems (cf. Havu 2009b)
Research questions

1) How do Finnish speakers of L2 French refer to their addressee when making requests?

2) How does their use of different request perspectives and address pronouns differ from L1 Finnish and L1 French?

3) What kind of development in these pragmalinguistic choices may be observed from a beginner to an advanced level?
Data collection method

- **Oral Discourse Completion Test (ODCT):** Participants react orally to written descriptions of situations that require the production of a request.

- 8 request situations in different contexts, designed for university students’ daily life: service encounters, university, home.

- Photos in situations in which the addressee is unknown.

  - Used to elicit oral requests from L1 speakers of Finnish and French + beginner, intermediate and advanced L2 speakers of French.

*It is morning and you feel tired. You hurry to a lecture and stop at a café on the way in order to buy a coffee to go. You say to the salesperson:*
Participants of the cross-sectional study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informants (N)</th>
<th>L1 Finnish</th>
<th>Beginner L2 French</th>
<th>Intermediate L2 French</th>
<th>Advanced L2 French</th>
<th>L1 French</th>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>University students</th>
<th>University students, French at Language Center</th>
<th>1st year students in French Philology</th>
<th>MA students in French Philology</th>
<th>University students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female (N) / Male (N)</td>
<td>6 / 4</td>
<td>6 / 4</td>
<td>9 / 1</td>
<td>10 / 0</td>
<td>9 / 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informants (N) with &gt;3 months’ stay in L2 country</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
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Analysis

• Transcribing the 400 requests → Determining the head act (=the minimal unit which can realize a request) → Categorizing the head acts into direct and indirect strategies

• Request perspective analyzed in the head act according to the mentioned (not assumed) agent → separate analysis for direct and conventionally indirect strategies
  • Hearer: *J'aurais voulu savoir si vous pouviez me donner un délai supplémentaire* (I would have wanted to know if *you* could give *me* an extension) (L1 French)
  • Speaker: *Ce serait possible que je rende le devoir plus tard?* (Would it be possible that *I* submit the assignment later?) (L1 French)
  • Impersonal: *Serait-il possible de rendre le travail plus tard?* (Would it be possible to submit the assignment later?) (L1 French)
  • Joint: *Mitkä on nyt mahdollisuudet siihen et me voitais siirtää tän esseen palautuspäivää?* (~What are the possibilities so that *we* can change the deadline of the essay?) (L1 Finnish)

• Address pronouns analyzed in the whole requestive utterance
  • T forms
  • V forms (singular & plural)
  • T and V forms
  • No T/V
Analysis: examples – borrowing notes from a fellow student 1/2

salut euh j’étais pas là au cours euh euh pendant deux semaines parce que j’étais malade euhm: est-ce que ça te dérangerait de me passer tes notes du cours s’il te plaît

hi um I haven’t been to classes for two weeks because I was ill um would you(T) mind lending me your(T) notes please(T)

(L1 French)
Analysis: examples – borrowing notes from a fellow student 2/2

bonjour j'étais malade pendant deux semaines et je n'ai pas le note mais est-ce que c'est possible copier votre note s'il vous plaît

hello I was ill for two weeks and I don’t have the note but is it possible copy your note please

Perspective = impersonal Address pronouns = V

salut comment ça va ((rire)) euh euh: excusez-moi je je dois te demander parce que j'étais absente deux fois et j'ai pas eu le les notes pour le cours pour ce cours euhm est-ce que je pourrais regarder les tes notes euh pour pouvoir me mettre à jour s'il vous plaît

hi how’s it going ((laughter)) um um excuse me I have to ask you because I was absent twice and I don’t have the notes for this course um could I look at your notes um to be able to catch up please

Perspective = speaker Address pronouns = T+V

(L2 Intermediate)

(L2 Advanced)
Results

- Request perspective in direct request head acts
- Request perspective in conventionally indirect request head acts
- Address pronouns in all requests, the whole requestive utterance
Request perspective in direct requests (N=80)

Hearer perspective

- L1 Finnish (N=11): 10.5%
- L2 Beginner (N=19): 19.0%
- L2 Intermediate (N=21): 0%
- L2 Advanced (N=15): 0%
- L1 French (N=14): 0%

Speaker perspective

- L1 Finnish (N=11): 81.8%
- L2 Beginner (N=19): 57.9%
- L2 Intermediate (N=21): 61.9%
- L2 Advanced (N=15): 73.3%
- L1 French (N=14): 78.6%

Impersonal perspective

- L1 Finnish (N=11): 18.2%
- L2 Beginner (N=19): 31.6%
- L2 Intermediate (N=21): 19.0%
- L2 Advanced (N=15): 26.7%
- L1 French (N=14): 21.4%
Request perspective in conventionally indirect requests (N=304)
Request perspective – statistical tests ($X^2$)

- Request perspective in direct requests not eligible for chi square tests due to small frequencies (expected values were less than 5 in several cells)

- Request perspective in conventionally indirect requests
  - Difference between L1 speakers and beginner L2 speakers of French
    → non-significant ($p>0.05$, $df=2$)
  - Difference between L1 speakers and intermediate L2 speakers of French
    → highly significant ($p<0.01$, $df=2$)
  - Difference between L1 speakers and advanced L2 speakers of French
    → significant ($p<0.05$, $df=2$)

→ With regard to request perspective of conventionally indirect head acts, beginner L2 speakers are closer to L1 speakers than advanced L2 speakers
# Address pronouns (all requests, N=400)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>L1 Finnish</th>
<th>Beginner L2 French</th>
<th>Intermediate L2 French</th>
<th>Advanced L2 French</th>
<th>L1 French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>T</strong></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>40,0</td>
<td>16,3</td>
<td>18,8</td>
<td>22,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Singular/plural V</strong></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>15,0</td>
<td>52,5</td>
<td>58,8</td>
<td>65,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T and V forms</strong></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>5,0</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>3,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Forms without T/V</strong></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>42,5</td>
<td>26,3</td>
<td>20,0</td>
<td>8,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Address pronouns – statistical tests ($X^2$)

• Difference between L1 speakers and beginner L2 speakers of French
  → highly significant ($p<0.01$, df=3)

• Difference between L1 speakers and intermediate L2 speakers of French
  → significant ($p<0.05$, df=3)

• Difference between L1 speakers and advanced L2 speakers of French
  → non-significant ($p>0.05$, df=3)

→ Clear developmental pattern from a beginner to an advanced level
→ Advanced L2 speakers close to L1 usage
Summary of results:
L1 Finnish vs. L1 French

- **Address pronouns**
  - Finnish prefers T and no T/V; in French V is the most common address form

- **Request perspective**
  - Direct requests: no differences (both prefer speaker perspective)
  - Conventionally indirect requests: French makes more use of hearer perspective compared to Finnish; in Finnish the use of different perspectives is more evenly distributed

→ Finnish makes more use of “avoidance” strategies compared to French
Summary of results:
L2 French vs. L1 French – address pronouns

• T & V forms:
  L2 Beginner < L2 Intermediate < L2 Advanced < L1 French

• No T/V:
  L2 Beginner > L2 Intermediate > L2 Advanced > L1 French

→ Linear developmental pattern
→ Advanced L2 speakers "dare" to refer to their addressee more explicitly than less advanced speakers – but even they do not use T forms as often as L1 speakers
Summary of results: L2 French vs. L1 French – request perspective 1/2

- Direct requests
  - **Speaker perspective** the most common in all groups
    L2 Beginner < L2 Intermediate < L2 Advanced < L1 French
  - **Hearer perspective** used by L2 Beginner & L2 Intermediate, not by L2 Advanced or L1 French

- Conventionally indirect requests
  - **Hearer perspective** the most common in all groups
    L2 Intermediate < L2 Advanced < L2 Beginner < L1 French
  - **Speaker perspective** not common in L1 French but used to a certain extent by non-native speakers
    L2 Intermediate > L2 Advanced > L2 Beginner > L1 French

→ L1 speakers are more likely to say “est-ce que vous pourriez me prêter ce livre” (can you lend me the book) whereas especially intermediate L2 speakers also make requests such as “est-ce que je pourrais emprunter votre livre” (could I borrow your book)
Summary of results: L2 French vs. L1 French – request perspective 2/2

→ The developmental pattern is U-shaped; the advanced L2 speakers are not as close to L1 usage as with address pronouns

→ As to the request proper (the head act), L2 speakers do not “dare” to refer to their addressee as explicitly as L1 speakers
Discussion

• Address pronouns
  • Beginner and intermediate L2 speakers’ stronger preference for requests without T/V: transfer effects from L1 in some situations and/or low level of linguistic competence
    • In short utterances T/V is less likely to appear; French politeness phrases in which T/V would show (excuse/excusez-moi; s’il te/vous plaît) are less common at lower levels of acquisition
  • Advanced L2 speakers are more confident in their addressing choices (confirmed by a qualitative analysis of retrospective interviews conducted after the ODCT, Holttinen & Isosävi [submitted])

• Request perspective
  • Advanced L2 speakers & “daring” to refer to the addressee: the whole requestive utterance vs. the request proper
  • Transfer from L1? Needs to be analyzed qualitatively in more depth
    • Transferring specific request formulations OR the preference for “avoidance” strategies (considering them more polite)
Conclusion

• Request perspective should be studied within direct/indirect request strategies
  • Directness and perspective are associated, at least to some extent
  • Comparison across different studies

• The results of the current study: interlanguage effects both in address pronouns and request perspective
  • More native-like use of T/V than in previous studies on Finnish speakers of L2 French in which the subjects were school students (Havu 2008, 2009b)
  • Addressing is often taught explicitly whereas request perspective is chosen more unconsciously

• The results will be confirmed with more subjects and with an indepth qualitative analysis to point out the specific differences between native and non-native speakers (cf. Blum-Kulka & Levenston 1987)

• More studies are still needed:
  • Request perspective in L2 French with subjects from other L1s → possible transfer effects
  • Request perspective in other L1s and L2s → general developmental patterns, possible universalities
References 1/2


References 2/2


Holttinenu, Tuuli & Johanna Isosävi. [submitted]. Forms of address choices among Finnish and French university students and native French teachers. In Yasemin Bayyurt and Çiler Hatipoğlu (eds.), *Address Terms in Educational Contexts*.


