



**DEPARTAMENT DE FILOLOGIA ANGLESA I DE GERMANÍSTICA**

**Contrastive Pragmatics: Requests in British  
English and Peninsular Spanish**

Treball de Fi de Grau/ BA dissertation

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## **Abstract**

The present dissertation aims at comparing the use of requests by speakers of British English and Peninsular Spanish. By means of previous research in the field of contrastive pragmatics and the use of corpus-based examples, this study will try to provide evidence to support the argument that speakers of British English have a tendency towards using indirect strategies when uttering requests while Peninsular Spanish speakers are more prone to use direct strategies during the act of requesting.

The content of this thesis is structured as follows: Firstly, an introduction to the topic is presented. Secondly, a theoretical framework based on Politeness Theory and Speech Act Theory is developed in sections 2 and 3. Thirdly, a contrastive analysis between British English and Peninsular Spanish is offered. Finally, the concluding remarks of the study are stated.

**Keywords:** Requests; Indirectness; Politeness theory; Speech acts; Contrastive pragmatics; British English; Peninsular Spanish



## **1. Introduction**

Over the course of the last decades, a large amount of work has been carried out on speech acts and Politeness Theory. Austin (1962) carried out studies on performative utterances and theorized on illocutionary acts, while Searle (1969) further developed the concept of speech acts. In the ensuing years, Brown & Levinson (1978) and Leech (1983) developed the concept of Politeness Theory which, to some extent, relates to the use of speech acts (requests, apologies, greetings, promises, among others).

On the other hand, the field of pragmatics, which studies language use and the ways in which context contributes to meaning, has been rapidly evolving. One of its sub-disciplines, contrastive pragmatics, studies how language use varies across languages and cultures. Several studies in the field of contrastive linguistics have focused on speech acts and politeness variation (Kitagawa 1980, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984, Fukushima 1996, Márquez-Reiter 2000, Díaz Pérez 2003).

The present dissertation compares the use of requests in British English and Peninsular Spanish. The study will be presenting the differences and similarities on the way in which speakers of British English and Peninsular Spanish realize requests in relation to Politeness Theory and, more specifically, to the notion of directness. The main aim is to provide evidence to support the assumption that speakers of British English tend to use indirect strategies when uttering requests while speakers of Peninsular Spanish are prone to use direct strategies.

This dissertation is based on previous studies in the field of contrastive pragmatics which have focused on the use of requests in British English and Peninsular Spanish. In addition, examples from corpora are used to further compare the use of requests in both languages. The sources used for the corpora are: The British National Corpus, the RAE Corpus and the esTenTen11 Corpus.

With regards to the structure of the dissertation, it is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a review of Politeness Theory and the model proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978). Next, section 3 presents the theoretical background regarding Speech Act Theory and the concept of request. Following the literature review of sections 2 and 3, section 4 provides a comparative analysis of requests in relation to previous studies and the examples extracted from the corpora. Finally, section 5 offers the concluding remarks of the study.

## **2. Politeness theory**

### **2.1 Brown and Levinson**

The concept of politeness as a linguistic theory was first proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978). The theory was first introduced in a study by the aforementioned authors related to Grice's Conversational Maxims (1975). In this study, Brown and Levinson found out that there were some similarities and correlations between linguistic strategies carried out by speakers of three different languages (English, Tamil and Tzeltal) for reasons of politeness. The fact that speakers of different languages employed similar

strategies led to the assumption that politeness works as a universal regulative factor in conversational exchanges (Márquez-Reiter 2000: 11).

The model is based on a series of basic concepts such as the notion of *face*, the existence of acts that threaten the speaker's or the hearer's face or the different strategies employed during the realization of Face Threatening Acts. According to many authors (Escandell Vidal 1996, Márquez-Reiter 2000, Díaz Pérez 2003, among others), this model<sup>1</sup> is considered to be the most influential and coherent with regards to the concept of politeness as a linguistic theory.

Nonetheless, there are other models which are considered to be influential to a certain extent, such as the politeness principles of Lackoff (1973) and Leech (1983) (Díaz Pérez 2003: 96). Both of these models were based on Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) and consist of a series of rules of politeness that are directly related to Grice's Conversational Maxims. However, as has been stated above, the most influential model is Brown and Levinson's (1978) and, in the following subsections the different concepts that are part of their Politeness Theory will be developed.

### **2.1.2 The notion of face**

The main concept in Brown and Levinson's (1978) model is the notion of face, which is derived from two sources, Goffman's notion of face and the English terms *losing face* and *saving face* (Díaz Pérez 2003:106). Goffman (1967: 5) defines the notion of face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [...] an image of self-

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<sup>1</sup> According to Díaz Pérez (2003:118-123), the model presented by Brown and Levinson, although generally well received, has been criticized by authors such as Matsumoto (1989), Kachru (1991) or Mao (1994) who question the universality of the concept of face and state that the model has been developed under a cultural Anglo-western perspective.

delineated in terms of approved social attributes”. Goffman states that face can be withdrawn, maintained or incremented depending on the way the individual behaves. He also points out that each individual does not only worry on maintaining his/her own face, but the individual also tries to preserve that of the other participants.

Brown and Levinson’s interpretation of face slightly differs from the notion developed by Goffman. The former consider face as a basic need that every individual from society has, much like physical well-being or education, while the latter considers that face is a social value (an element which society considers to be valuable). They define it as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (Brown and Levinson 1987:61).

The authors distinguish between two types of the notion: *positive* and *negative face*. On the one hand, positive face refers to the wish for acceptance, the need to be integrated as part of a social group. It is the “want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others” (Brown and Levinson 1987:62). On the other hand, negative face refers to an individual’s desire to freely carry out an act. It is more related with the need of being an independent entity and having personal autonomy. Brown and Levinson (1987:62) define it as “the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others”.

In relation with the two types of face, there are two types of politeness: positive and negative. The former is oriented towards the positive face of the hearer while the latter is oriented towards the negative face of the hearer. These two types of politeness will be developed in the following section.

### **2.1.2 Face-threatening acts (FTAs)**

There are, according to Brown and Levinson, a series of speech acts that are considered to be harmful for the maintenance of both the speaker and the hearer's face. In other words, these acts threaten the needs or desires of the hearer and/or the speaker's face. These speech acts are known as face-threatening acts (FTAs) and, can be divided according to which component of face are threatening: FTAs that threaten the positive face and FTAs that threaten the negative face.

Another type of distinction can be made depending on whether the FTA threatens the hearer or the speaker. With the aforementioned categories in mind there are four different types of FTAs: FTAs that threaten the hearer's positive face, in which the speaker may show no interest in the hearer's needs or desires or has no interest in the hearer to conduct them (acts of disapproval, insults, complains, accusations or challenges); FTAs that threaten the hearer's negative face, in which the speaker may pressure the hearer to conduct a future act, the speaker announces some positive future act towards the hearer/speaker or the speaker desires a possession or attribute of the hearer (orders, requests, threats, offers, promises, compliments or challenges); FTAs that threaten the speaker's positive face (apologies, acceptance of compliments, admission of guilt, confessions or lack of emotional control); FTAs that threaten the speaker's negative face (show gratitude, acceptance of gratitude, excuses, hearer's apologies or acceptance of offers).

### **2.1.3 Strategies for the realization of FTAs**

According to Brown and Levinson (1978), individuals who realize FTAs will use certain strategies which will maximize or minimize the impact of the FTA. When realizing FTAs, the speaker will take into consideration a series of needs or wants: "(a)

the want to communicate the content of the FTA x, (b) the want to be efficient or urgent, and (c) the want to maintain Hs [the addressee's] face to any degree" (Brown and Levinson 1987:68).

There are different groups of strategies that the speaker may use in order to accomplish the aforementioned goal. Figure 1 below shows the different groups of strategies that the speaker can conduct in order to maximize or minimize the impact of an FTA:

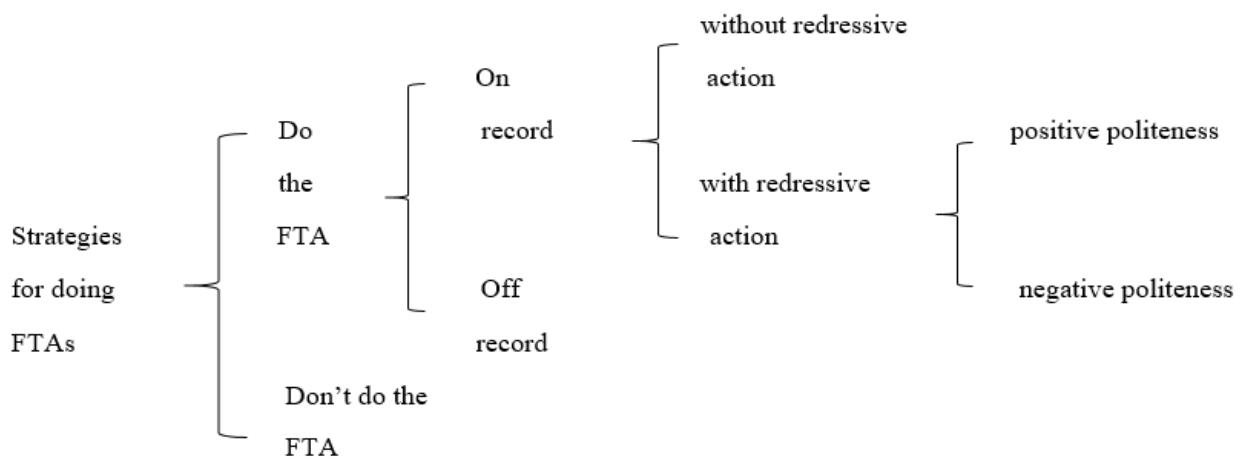


Figure 1. Brown and Levinson's strategies for doing FTAs (1987:69)

The speaker will use a certain level of politeness and a certain strategy for the realization of an FTA depending on three factors: *Relative power* (P), *social distance* (D) and *degree of imposition* (R). The first factor *P* refers to how much power an individual can exert over another individual, the second factor *D* refers to the level of familiarity between the speaker and the hearer, and the third factor *R* refers to how imposing an act is considered by a given culture. Brown and Levinson established an equation in which the weight of the FTA (with regards to how threatening is the act towards face) can be

measured with the aforementioned factors: “ $W_x = D(S, H) + P(S, H) + R_x$ ” (Brown and Levinson 1987:76).

Regarding acts on record, they always imply a single interpretation of the communicative intention behind them; there is no room for ambiguity. This particular act can be realized with or without redressive action. A speaker who utters an act on record without redressive action is leaving no space for misinterpretations; the message is direct, clear and concise. This type of strategy is often used when the speaker does not fear any kind of retaliation from the hearer (higher degree of familiarity, a situation of urgency or efficiency or a situation in which the speaker exerts a lot of power over the hearer). A speaker who realizes an act on record with redressive action is, in contrast, worried about the impact that the act may have on the hearer’s face. In order to lessen the impact of the FTA, the speaker may use positive or negative politeness strategies. On the one hand, when positive politeness is used, the speaker makes it clear that there is a common goal between him/her and the hearer; the hearer is a member of a common group and his/her wants and personality are being appreciated. On the other hand, negative politeness is concerned with making it clear to the hearer that the speaker has the utmost respect for the wants and needs of the negative face of the hearer. One of these strategies is the use of conventional indirectness, which is a negative politeness strategy which consists in masking or concealing the act. A clear example of conventional indirectness is the use of ability questions such as *Can you open the door?*<sup>2</sup> This strategy will be developed more extensively in the following section.

As for the realization of an act off record, there is an intention by the speaker to create a sense of ambiguity by which the speaker is protected from any specific intention

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<sup>2</sup> Examples appearing in sections 2-3 are provided by the author of this dissertation.

of the act. This is done in order to protect one's face in case the hearer refuses to comply with the request. For instance if an individual utters *It is very cold in here*, he/she may want the hearer to close the window. If the hearer responds with *Yes it is* which, may be understood as a refusal to carry out the requested action, the speaker would still maintain his/her face protected.

### **3. Speech Acts: Requests**

#### **3.1 Speech Act Theory**

Speech Act theory was first introduced by the British philosopher John Austin (1962) and was further developed by one of his students in Oxford, the American philosopher John Searle (1969). As Márquez-Reiter (2000: 31) points out: "Austin observed that when people use language they do not just produce a set of correct sentences in isolation, they produce them in action".

A speech act consists in a speaker uttering a statement towards a hearer in a specific context (Díaz Pérez 2003: 140). When a speaker produces an utterance, he/she is therefore producing a speech act. Searle (1969: 16) states that the reason behind focusing on Speech Act Theory is that for every instance of linguistic communication, that is, every time a speaker utters something, there is a speech act being performed. Thus, the minimal unit of human communication is the realization of a certain speech act (Márquez-Reiter 2000: 31).

Austin established that speech acts are formed by three components: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. The first component, the locutionary act, refers to the utterance produced by sounds which carry a certain meaning. Austin (1962:109) stated that "[...] a locutionary act, [...] is roughly equivalent to uttering a



certain sentence with a certain sense and reference”. The second component, the illocutionary act, is the intention behind what the speaker says. Austin (1962) considered the illocutionary act as the most significant component and is, in fact, regarded as the center piece of Speech Act theory. Referring to this act, Austin stated the following:

To perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also eo ipso to perform an illocutionary act, as I propose to call it. Thus in performing a locutionary act we shall also be performing such an act as: asking or answering a question, giving some information or an assurance or a warning, announcing a verdict or an intention, pronouncing a sentence, [...] and the numerous like (Austin 1962:98).

Each illocutionary act is, therefore, associated to a concrete illocutionary force: ordering, promising, stating, asking, etc. (Díaz Perez 2003:142). Regarding the last component of a speech act, the perlocutionary act, Austin defined it as “what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading” (Austin 1962:109). The perlocutionary act is, then, the consequences and the effect on the hearer after a speech act has been performed.

Another distinction made by Austin with regards to speech acts is that of constative and performative utterances. The former can be evaluated in terms of truth or falseness while the latter is used to perform actions and thus, it has no true or false value. Austin evaluated performative utterances in terms of *felicity conditions*, which need to be satisfied in order for the speech act to achieve its purpose. The three main conditions are: (a) the *essential condition*, by which there must be a conventional procedure which allows for a certain effect to be caused by a stream of words; (b) the *preparatory condition*, by which the speech act is carried effectively by all the individuals involved and (c) the *sincerity condition*, by which the participants must think, feel or do what has been previously established in the process.

### 3.1.1 Classification of speech acts

The first classification of types of speech acts was introduced by Austin (1962). It is, essentially, a lexical classification of the so-called performative verbs. Austin's classification consisted of: verdictives (giving a verdict), expositives (expressing opinion or making clarifications), exercitives (exercising rights, power or influence), behabitives (demonstrating social behavior) and commissives (promising or undertaking). However, as Márquez-Reiter points out: "One of the problems with his taxonomy is that these categories are not mutually exclusive and [...] the author assumes that there is a one-to-one correspondence between speech acts and speech act verbs" (Márquez-Reiter 2000:150).

Another classification was proposed by Searle (1979). This classification differs from Austin's in that the criteria is not related to the nature of the words (lexicity) but rather on illocutionary purpose, direction of the act, the psychological state of the speaker and the propositional content. Following these criteria, Searle (1979) distinguished between five types of speech acts: *assertives*, *directives*, *commissives*, *expressives* and *declarations*.

The first category, *assertives*, refers to speech acts in which the speaker describes what he/she believes to be the case. They have as an illocutionary purpose to commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. Some actions that belong to this category are: claiming, stating, describing, predicting, agreeing or disagreeing, concluding or deducing.

In the second category, *directives*, the illocutionary purpose is for the speaker to make the hearer do (or not do) something. The act of requesting belongs to this category.

Other actions that also belong in this classification are: commanding, prohibiting, advising, ordering, inviting or instructing.

The third category, *commissives*, refers to speech acts in which the speaker commits him/herself to a future action. Some of the actions that are considered to be commissives are: offering, volunteering, promising, refusing, threatening or guaranteeing.

The fourth category, *expressives*, are those speech acts which have as an illocutionary purpose to state what the speaker feels. They are expressions of the psychological state of the speaker. Some of the actions which belong to this category are: apologizing, welcoming, thanking, regretting or congratulating.

The final and fifth category, *declarations*, are those speech acts that, when successful, bring a correspondence between propositional content and reality. They are related to Austin's performatives. Some of the actions that belong to declarations are: declaring, pronouncing, sentencing, appointing or nominating.

### **3.2 Requests**

Requests, following Searle's (1975) classification, are considered to be directives, which, according to Searle himself are:

“attempts (of varying degrees, and hence, more precisely, they are determinates of the determinable which includes attempting) by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. They may be very modest ‘attempts’ as when [I] invite you to do it or suggest that you do it, or they may be very fierce attempts as when I insist that you do it” (Searle 1975:11)

The action which is undertaken by the hearer will generally have a positive impact on the speaker because, as Tucker states, “requests serve to change a current state of

affairs to the advantage of the speaker, whether by having another act to this effect or by seeking permission to act oneself.” (Tucker 1988:155).

Due to the nature of the act, requests are considered to be an intrusion on the hearer’s territory (Díaz Pérez 2003:248). They limit the hearer’s freedom of action and so, are an example of an FTA. Trosborg (1995:188) states that a speaker who is making a request is trying to exercise power over the hearer and thus it threatens the hearer or requestee’s negative face. In addition to threatening the hearer’s negative face, it can also be argued that requests threaten the speaker’s face due to the fact that there is the possibility that the hearer may refuse to undertake the action requested (Brown and Levinson 1987:76).

### **3.2.1 Directness in requests**

Requests can vary in form and be uttered in different ways. One of the ways in which requests can be classified is according to the directness with which they are expressed. Directness refers to the explicitness of the act, to the relation between form and meaning. To perform a request in a direct manner, is to mark explicitly the act of requesting; there is a direct correspondence between the form of the request and the meaning expressed. On the other hand, to perform an indirect request, implies that there is no direct correspondence between the form and the meaning of the act (e.g. uttering a request in the form of a question). In section 3.2.2, the different levels of directness will be presented in relation to the types of strategies that are used for requesting.

There are a series of factors that have an influence on the way in which requests are performed with regards to directness. As Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984:201) point out, two of the most influential are situational and cultural factors.

As far as situational factors are concerned, situations which have a low imposition do not require a high level of indirectness and thus requests tend to be more direct. In situations where there is higher imposition, the speaker will tend to use more indirect strategies. One of these situational factors is familiarity: if there is a higher level of familiarity between the speaker and the hearer, the need to be indirect will be reduced considerably and the act of requesting will be far more informal (e.g. a request between friends).

Regarding cultural factors, they can also have an important influence in the performance of requests. As Blum-Kulka and Olshtain point out: “A certain language (like German) may tend to use more direct-level requests than other languages (like Japanese) equally in an appropriate manner within the culture” (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984:202).

### **3.2.2 Request strategies**

Blum-Kulka and House (1989) presented a *scale of indirectness*, in which strategies are classified from the most direct type to the most indirect. This classification is part of the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), which is a collaborative study among several linguists on apologies and requests, and is based on previous classifications of request strategies (Ervin-Tripp 1976, House and Casper 1981 and Blum-Kulka 1982). There are nine request strategy types, and in order to further distinguish the levels of directness, they will be divided into three main categories, with the most direct being *direct strategies* and least direct being *non-conventionally indirect strategies*:

## Direct Strategies

1. Mood derivable: The illocutionary force is signaled by the grammatical mood of the verb of the utterance, e.g. *Close the door.*
2. Performatives: The illocutionary force is made explicit in the utterance, e.g. *I'm telling you to close the door.*
3. Hedged performatives: The explicitness of the illocutionary force is modified by hedging expressions, e.g. *I would like to ask you to leave this room.*
4. Obligation statements: The utterance explicitly states that the hearer is obliged to carry out the act, e.g. *You will have to show your identification.*
5. Want statements: The utterance explicitly states that the speaker wants the hearer to carry out the act, e.g. *I really wish you'd start listening to me.*

## Conventionally indirect strategies

6. Suggestory formulae: The utterance contains a suggestion to carry out an act, e.g. *How about you start taking things seriously?*
7. Query preparatory: The utterance contains reference to the ability or willingness (preparatory conditions) to carry out the act; these preparatory conditions are conventionalized in each language. It is the most common strategy used across a wide range of languages (Blum-Kulka and House 1989:127). E.g. *Could you bring me a cup of coffee?*

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

8. Strong hints: The utterance contains partial reference to the element needed to carry out the act. The act is directly pragmatically implied, e.g. *Your bedroom is a mess.*
9. Mild hints: The utterance makes neither reference to any element needed nor to the request proper. The utterance is interpretable as a request by means of context, e.g. *Isn't it hot in here?* (requesting to open the window).

### **3.2.3 Perspective and internal modifications of requests**

There are other aspects which are taken into account when discussing the form of requests. One of those aspects is the perspective that the speaker adopts in order to carry out the act of requesting. According to Blum-Kulka and House (1989:19) and Díaz Pérez (2003:270), the choice of perspective is a major source of variation within the act of requesting across languages. Perspective can emphasize one of the roles which are present in the utterance when requesting, there are three main types of perspectives for requests: speaker-oriented, hearer-oriented or impersonal.

Speaker-oriented requests are those in which the role of the agent is emphasized over the recipient or hearer (e.g. *Can I have a drink?*). By emphasizing the role of the speaker as the beneficiary of the act, and leaving behind the agent of the requested action, the impact of the hearer's face is diminished as well as the imposition of the FTA (Blum-Kulka and Levenston 1987:158).

Hearer-oriented requests are those in which the emphasis is placed on the role of the hearer, that is, the individual which will carry out the act (e.g. *Can you give me that*

*book?*). It is considered to be more threatening to the recipient of the request than the other two types of perspectives as the role of the hearer is highlighted as well as the action that he/she will carry out.

Impersonal requests are those in which the roles of agent and recipient are omitted. The effects of this type of perspective are similar to those of speaker-oriented requests as the threatening level of the FTA is diminished by not expressing the action that the hearer will carry out (e.g. *It has to be done*).

Along with perspective, there is another element that is also related to the form of requests: *internal modifiers*. These elements, which are part of the request proper but are not essential for the utterance to be understood, act as devices which impact the level of imposition of the request.

When the speaker wants to mitigate, that is, reduce the impact of the FTA on the hearer's face, he/she may use *downgraders*, which soften the impact of the request. Downgraders, as Díaz Pérez (2003:281) states, may be divided into two categories: syntactic downgraders and lexical downgraders. The syntactic type, encompasses negation (e.g. *I wonder if you **wouldn't mind** helping me with my luggage*), interrogatives (e.g. ***Could you do the washing?***), past tense (e.g. ***I wanted to** ask you for a promotion*) and embedded *if* – clauses (e.g. ***I would appreciate it if you closed the door***). Lexical downgraders are divided in five subcategories: consultative devices (e.g. ***Do you think I could borrow your laptop?***), understaters (e.g. ***Could you clean up the kitchen a bit** before they arrive?*), hedges or no specification (e.g. ***Could you do something** with that mess?*), downtoners (***Could you perhaps** drive me home?*) and politeness devices (***Can I use your phone, please?***).



By contrast, if the speaker desires to emphasize the coerciveness of the request, he/she may use *upgraders*, which increment the level of imposition of the requesting act (Blum-Kulka, 1987). There are two types of upgraders: intensifiers and expletives. The former consists in the speaker exaggerating reality (e.g. *Could you open the window? I think I'm going to puke*) while, the latter explicitly express negative attitudes (e.g. *Will you open the damn door?*).

#### **4. Requests in British English and Peninsular Spanish**

In this section of the dissertation, a comparative analysis between British English (BE) and Peninsular Spanish (PS) requests is provided. This analysis is based on previous studies on this matter along with data extracted from the British National Corpus in the case of BE requests, and the RAE Corpus and the esTenTen11 Corpus in the case of PS requests. In order to properly compare the manner in which BE and PS speakers produce requests, the data is divided into three sub-sections based on the three levels of directness: impositives (direct strategies), conventional indirectness and non-conventional indirectness.

##### **4.1 The use of impositives**

The category of impositives is formed by putting together the five most direct strategy types of requests (discussed in section 3.2.2.). This category is based on Blum-Kulka and House (1989) study of requesting behavior in five different languages. The illocutionary purpose of impositives is to make the speech act explicit, so much so that it

is almost impossible to interpret the utterance incorrectly. Another important characteristic is the elevated degree of imposition and the elevated threatening nature towards the hearer's face (Díaz Pérez 2003: 253).

With regards to the use of impositives in British English, one of the determining factors in whether or not speakers use them is the social distance between the speaker and the hearer (Han, 2013:4). In fact, familiarity plays a very important role when BE speakers decide to use impositives. In Márquez-Reiter (2000), BE speakers only used impositives in 2 out of 12 situations as the author points out:

The British found the use of the strategy appropriate only in situations 4 (ask for directions) and 7 (cancel holiday) [...] the common denominator in both situations is the fact that the interlocutors are familiar with each other. In R4 the participants are friends and in R7 they are work colleagues (Márquez-Reiter, 2000: 102).

Díaz Pérez (2003) found out that only 1.6% of the BE speakers used impositives in any of the 5 situations presented in his work. The author states that BE speakers consider that autonomy or personal independence of the hearer is an important matter (Díaz Pérez 2003:254). In addition, Han's study of requests in BE and Chinese (Han 2013) concluded that the British tend to see relationships with friends more distant than other cultures, which would account for the overall low production of impositives by BE speakers (Han 2013: 5).

In the case of Peninsular Spanish, the use of impositives is apparently more accepted. As Díaz Pérez (2003) states, PS speakers do not consider autonomy and personal independence to be as important as BE speakers and, in fact, for PE speakers uttering a direct request can be seen as a show of trust from the speaker towards the hearer rather than an interference in the hearer's autonomy (Díaz Pérez 2003: 254). Compared to other varieties such as Argentinian or Uruguayan Spanish (Blum-Kulka and House

1989, Márquez-Reiter 2000, 2002), PS is considered to be more direct due to a lack of hedging expressions and downgraders which are more common in other varieties of Spanish as well as in other languages such as BE (Márquez-Reiter 2000, 2002). With respect to the corpora, examples in BE and PS that help to illustrate this category are the following:

- (1) Go and get that ruler Jimmy. (BNC)
- (2) Clean up the area to gauge the extent of the cut. (BNC)
- (3) Put it, put it over there mate. (BNC)
- (4) (BNC) Oye Pili, dame el teléfono de tus hijas. (RAEC)
- (5) Rosario, coge el sacacorchos que estará cerca de ella. (RAEC)
- (6) Dame dinero mamá. (esTenTen11)

The BE examples that have been extracted occur in different contexts. For instance in (1), the request is uttered by a teacher, while the hearer is a student and thus, it is a situation in which the speaker can exert more power over the hearer. In (2), a paramedic is giving instructions on how to treat a cut; the circumstances in which the request occurs may require to be quick and direct (treating a cut from an individual hurt in a karate competition). In (3) the speaker and the hearer are familiar with each other as they are work colleagues. In the case of PS, (4), (5) and (6) occur in situations where the individuals are really close, either by being friends or by being siblings.

There are no instances of downgraders in either BE or PS but, the use of vocatives as a positive politeness strategy can be seen in (3) and (5). In the former the speaker refers to the hearer as *mate* in order to highlight the fact that both speaker and hearer share a common goal and belong to a common group (work colleagues). In the latter the speaker

refers to the hearer as *mamá* in order to highlight that the hearer is the speaker's mother (they belong to the same group as they are family). In general, these examples show an ample range of situations in which impositives are uttered, which may help to draw a more general picture on the use of impositives in BE and PS. Concerning perspective, all examples are hearer-oriented, which is related to the idea of directness, since the speaker is not concerned about threatening the hearer's face. All of the examples extracted from the corpora belong to strategy 1. *Mood derivable* and thus, there are no instances of hedging, obligation or wants.

#### **4.2 The use of conventional indirectness**

Conventional indirectness consists of categories 6 and 7 from Blum-Kulka's classification and is considered to be the preferred strategy when requesting in a vast range of languages (Brown and Levinson 1978, Blum-Kulka and House 1989, Márquez-Reiter 2000). The reason behind this preference is that conventional indirectness allows for a minimum level of coerciveness and imposition while, at the same time, the conventionalized aspect allows for a good interpretation by the hearer (Márquez-Reiter 2002).

The use of this strategy in British English is very frequent (Han 2013:5) and in the study conducted by Díaz Pérez (2003), 95% of the requests uttered by BE speakers belonged to this category. Márquez-Reiter (2000:105) states that social distance plays an important role for BE speakers when selecting this type of strategy. As Brown and Levinson (1978) state, the less familiar the two individuals are, the more power the hearer

has over the speaker and the more imposition an act involves, the more indirect the speaker will be.

Regarding the use of conventional indirectness by PS speakers, in Díaz Pérez (2003) study, 84% of the requests uttered by this group belonged to the category of conventional indirectness. In Pérez-Ávila's (2005) study, 40% of the requests produced by PS speakers belonged to this category which, although an inferior result compared to Díaz Pérez's study, is still a large amount. In addition, Márquez-Reiter (2002) confirmed that the same negative correlation between social distance and indirectness that is found in BE can be applied to PS. It can be stated then, that although slightly inferior than in the case of BE speakers, the use of conventional indirectness in the act of requesting by PS speakers is very frequent.

In relation to the corpora, 5 examples of BE requests and 4 examples of PS were extracted. The examples used to illustrate the category of conventional indirectness are the following:

(7) Would you bring that other chair? (BNC)

(8) Simon, will you continue? (BNC)

(9) Margaret, can you give me a phone number for her? (BNC)

(10) Would you mind telling me what the connection is between eczema and asthma? (BNC)

(11) I wondered if you wouldn't mind giving Betty a hand with the arrangements. (BNC)

(12) ¿Podrías dejarme fotocopiar los apuntes de esta optativa?

(esTenTen11)

(13) ¿Te importaría decirme el número? (esTenTen11)

(14) ¿Susana podrías ayudarme a encontrar una peluquería en Málaga donde poder hacerme el alisado de keratina? (esTenTen11)

(15) ¿Te importa si duermo contigo? Tu cama tiene mejores vistas.

(esTenTen11)

The examples from British English show that the negative correlation between social distance and indirectness is present, as (7) and (8) occur in meetings (Amnesty International meeting in (7) and meeting of councilors in (8)) and the request in (9) belongs to an interaction between a teacher and a student. In these three instances, there is a certain level of social distance and these situations call for high levels of politeness. On the other hand, though, (10) and (11) occur in a situations of higher familiarity, as (10) is extracted from an interaction between a couple and (11) belongs to an interaction between two friends. The fact that conventional indirectness is used in different situations accounts for the high frequency of use of this strategy in British English. With concerns to the examples from Peninsular Spanish, a similar conclusion can be drawn, as requests (12) and (13) occur in situations of high social distance (a conversation between university students who did not know each other, and two strangers chatting on a webpage respectively), while (14) and (15) occur between individuals with a higher level of familiarity (a conversation between friends and an interaction between lovers respectively).

Speakers of both BE and PS tend to use a large amount of internal modifiers in conventional indirect requests. Syntactic downgraders appear in the vast majority of the examples with use of interrogation in (7), (8), (9), (10), (12), (13), (14) and (15), use of past tense and an embedded *if*-clause in (11) and the use of past tense modals and conditional in (7), (10), (11), (12), (13) and (14). However, there are no instances of lexical downgraders. The use of vocatives as a positive politeness strategy is also present in (8), (9) and (14). Concerning perspective, all the examples extracted from the corpora are hearer-oriented, which, as has been previously mentioned, tend to be more threatening to the hearer's face, although, since the strategy used is that of conventional indirectness, the impact of the hearer's face is already minimized. It should also be noted that none of the examples from the corpora belong to strategy 6. *Suggestion formulae* but rather to strategy 7. *Query preparatory*. It is possible that if a larger amount of data had been extracted from the corpora, instances of the use of strategy 6 would have appeared.

### **4.3 The use of non-conventional indirectness**

Non-conventional indirectness is considered to be the least face-threatening strategy of the three categories. This category encompasses strategies 8 and 9 from Blum-Kulka's classification, in which the request is produced by means of a hint. According to Weizman (1989:71), non-conventional indirectness allows for a certain ambiguity with respect to the speaker's intention when uttering a request. It could be assumed, then, that the non-face-threatening nature of this category would be considered by the speaker to be the most viable option when uttering a request in situations of high social distance.

However, results from several studies show otherwise (Blum-Kulka and House 1989, Díaz Pérez 2003, Márquez-Reiter 2000).

The use of non-conventional indirectness by speakers of British English is lower than the use of conventional indirectness. In his study, Díaz Pérez (2003) states that only 1.1% of the strategies uttered by BE speakers were non-conventionally indirect, while as it has been previously mentioned, conventional indirectness was used in 95.7% of the cases. Furthermore, Márquez-Reiter's (2000) study shows that "the strategy [non-conventional indirectness] had a higher incidence than that of impositives, though a lower incidence than CI [conventional indirectness]" (Márquez-Reiter 2000:108).

The use of this strategy by PS speakers shows a similar pattern, with the strategy being used in 0.5% of the situations in Díaz Pérez (2003) study. However, Pérez-Ávila's (2005:4) study showed that the strategy was used in 33.33% which, although a low percentage is higher than in Díaz Pérez's (2003).

The low incidence of this strategy could be explained by the fact that speakers may fear that the illocutionary purpose of the utterance will not be correctly interpreted by the hearer. In some instances, the speaker may not want the hearer to make a remarkable effort to infer the meaning of the utterance (Díaz Pérez 2003:256).

With regards to the data extracted from the corpora, only four examples were found in which either BE or PS speakers produce non-conventionally indirect requests. The examples provided from the corpora are the following:

(16) God, I'm hungry. (BNC)

(17) Look at that mess! Our Mam'll go mad! (BNC)



(18) Me he dejado la cartera en el trabajo, está el taxista abajo.

(esTenTen11)

(19) La verdad es que tengo hambre pero mira como está todo esto.

(esTenTen11)

With regards to the examples of British English, each of them belong to one of the two strategies which form the category of non-conventional indirectness. The use of a mild hint, that is, strategy 9, can be seen in (16), where there is no explicit reference to the request proper and so, it can only be interpreted by context. On the other hand, (17) belongs to strategy 8, as there is a strong hint of the request proper. As for the situational factors in which the requests were uttered, neither of the examples correspond to a situation of high social distance as in both cases the speaker and the hearer are very familiar with each other. As for PS, (18) corresponds to strategy 9, as there is only a mild hint of the request proper (borrowing money from the hearer in order to pay the taxi). On the other hand, (19) corresponds to strategy 8 as there is a strong hint of the requested act. As for situational factors, in both cases the requests are uttered towards family members (husband to wife in (18), brother to sister in (19)).

In relation to the use of internal modifiers, there are no instances of them in any of the examples. As for the perspective of the requests, it is not possible to state that there is a clear perspective in (16) and (18) as they are mild hints without a request proper while, in the case of (17) and (19), the requests are clearly hearer-oriented, as the speaker is clearly addressing the hearer.

## 5. Conclusion

The present dissertation aimed at providing evidence of the tendency of speakers of British English to be more indirect when uttering requests while speakers of Peninsular Spanish are more prone to use direct request strategies. By contrasting the use of strategies in both languages, through reviewing previous studies while also providing corpus-based examples, a series of concluding remarks have been reached.

First, the results from previous research on the use of request strategies in BE and PS show that speakers of both languages have a tendency to produce conventionally indirect requests, although BE speakers produce more instances of this strategy than the PS ones. With regards to the corpus, the examples of conventional indirectness show an important amount of internal modifiers in both languages.

Second, the literature provides enough evidence to suggest that BE speakers tend to use more indirect strategies than PS speakers. That contrast between the two languages can be seen when comparing the second most used strategy. In BE it is non-conventional indirectness whereas in PS it is impositives. Thus, there is a correlation between BE and indirect strategies and another one between PS and direct strategies.

Third, the use of corpora based on the British National Corpus and the RAE Corpus / esTenTen11 has provided information with respect to the elements that form requests strategies, especially the use of internal modifiers. It has also been useful to provide actual context or situations in which requests can occur besides the information from the literature.

In conclusion, speakers of British English are more prone to produce indirect request than speakers of Peninsular Spanish, who tend to produce more instances of direct

requests. In addition, the elevated frequency of the use of conventional indirectness in both languages shows its status as the preferred strategy in a vast range of languages which includes both British English and Peninsular Spanish.

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## Appendix

The conventions used for referencing the examples vary depending on the corpus from which they have been extracted.

### Examples extracted from the British National Corpus:

- (1) Go and get that ruler Jimmy. (BNC)

*Teacher's conference: discussing assessment procedures (Edu/inf)*. Recorded on September 1997.

- (2) Clean up the area to gauge the extent of the cut. (BNC)

Mitchell, David. (1991). *Winning Karate Competition*. London: A & C Black.

- (6) Put it, put it over there mate. (BNC)

*132 conversations by "Mark3"*. Recorded on December 1991.

- (7) Would you bring that other chair? (BNC)

*Amnesty International Meeting*. Recorded on February 1992.

- (8) Simon, will you continue? (BNC)

*Personal Services: Meeting of councilors*. Recorded July 1992.

- (9) Margaret, can you give me a phone number for her? (BNC)

*Audio Description Action Group: meeting*. Recorded September 1992.

- (10) Would you mind telling me what the connection is between eczema and asthma? (BNC)

*31 conversations by "Martine". Recorded March 1992.*

(11) I wondered if you wouldn't mind giving Betty a hand with the arrangements.

(BNC)

Browning, Amanda. (1992). *The Stolen Heart*. Richmond: Mills & Boon.

(16) God, I'm Hungry. (BNC)

Cornwell, Bernard. (1990). *Crackdown*. London: Michael Joseph Ltd.

(17) Look at that mess! Our Mam'll go mad! (BNC)

Gates, Susan. (1990). *The lock*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

#### **Examples extracted from the RAE Corpus:**

(3) Oye Pili, dame el teléfono de tus hijas. (RAEC)

*Domicilio particular, conversación entre madre e hija*. Recorded June 1991.

(4) Rosario, coge el sacacorchos que estará cerca de ella. (RAEC)

Suárez, Marcial. (1988). *Díos está lejos*. Madrid: Antonio Machado.

#### **Examples extracted from the esTenTen11 Corpus:**

(6) Dáme dinero mamá. (esTenTen11)

Document number: 286537; Extracted from:

<http://www.saber.es/web/biblioteca/libros/la-calle-coronao/html/sal-fina.php>

(12) ¿Podrías dejarme fotocopiar los apuntes de esta optativa? (esTenTen11)

Document number: 3907393; Extracted from:

<http://www.fceye.ull.es/moodle/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=1216&mode=-1>

(13) ¿Te importaría decirme el número? (esTenTen11)

Document number: 1077275; Extracted from:

<http://www.singlesmadrid.es/profiles/blogs/una-invasion-extraterrestre-en>

(14) ¿Susana podrías ayudarme a encontrar una peluquería en Málaga donde poder hacerme el alisado de keratina? (esTenTen11)

Document number: 2182049; Extracted from:

<http://iphoneapps.es/2008/04/24/primeros-pasos-que-hacer-una-vez-tienes-el-installer-en-tu-iphone-ipod-touch/>

(15) ¿Te importa si duermo contigo? Tu cama tiene mejores vistas. (esTenTen11)

Document number: 1353632; Extracted from:

<http://www.singleslaspalmas.es/profiles/blogs/antiguos-alumnos-primera-parte>

(18) Me he dejado la cartera en el trabajo, está el taxista abajo. (esTenTen11)

Document number: 1851455; Extracted from:

<http://blogs.20minutos.es/nilibreniocupado/2010/11/16/nunca-sabremos-que-paso/>

(19) La verdad es que tengo hambre pero mira como está todo esto. (esTenTen11)

Document number: 13570305; Extracted from:

[http://www.fanfics.cl/sfz/touchstone/fanfics/unnuevodomingo\\_alexia.html](http://www.fanfics.cl/sfz/touchstone/fanfics/unnuevodomingo_alexia.html)

