Deixis and Verbal Politeness in Request Production in English and Spanish

FRANCISCO JAVIER DÍAZ PÉREZ
UNIVERSIDAD DE JAÉN

ABSTRACT: The main aim of this article is to analyse the links between time and person deixis, and the expression of verbal politeness in English and Spanish. The research instrument implemented has been a discourse completion test, which has been administered to native speakers of English and Spanish and to non-native English speakers whose mother tongue is Spanish. The results obtained show that there exists a close connection between the notions of deixis and verbal politeness in English and Spanish. However, significant differences have also been observed between both languages in this respect.

Keywords: cross-cultural pragmatics, politeness, deixis, speech acts, requests, English, Spanish.

RESUMEN: El principal objetivo de este artículo consiste en analizar la relación entre la deixis personal y temporal y la expresión de la cortesía verbal en inglés y en español. El instrumento de investigación ha sido un cuestionario para completar el discurso, que se ha administrado a hablantes nativos de inglés y de español y a hablantes no nativos de inglés cuya lengua nativa es el español. Los resultados obtenidos muestran evidencia de la existencia de una conexión íntima entre las nociones de deixis y de cortesía verbal en inglés y en español. No obstante, se han apreciado diferencias significativas entre ambas lenguas en este sentido.

Palabras clave: pragmática intercultural, cortesía, deixis, actos de habla, peticiones, inglés, español.

1. Introduction

This article focuses on the relationship between time and person deixis, and the expression of verbal politeness in the realization of requests. Evidence comes from data collected from native speakers of English and Spanish, as well as from

English non-native speakers whose mother tongue is Spanish. Therefore, apart from contrasting the data in English and Spanish as native languages, a comparison is also established between the requests produced by the English native speakers and those produced by the English non-native speakers, in order to consider whether the production by the speakers of English as a foreign language is influenced by their native language, Spanish in this case.

Research in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics has focused mainly on the contrasts between the pragmatic rules of English and those of a small number of other languages, such as Japanese, Chinese, Polish, Hebrew, Arabic, German, French or Spanish. In Clyne's (1998: 246) opinion, there is not a sufficiently established theoretical basis, while part of the research in this field may be considered still anecdotic. Among the pragmatic aspects which have been shown to be subjected to variation across the different cultures, we could mention speech act realization, discourse organization, or intonation patterns. With respect to speech act production, differences have been observed regarding the use of certain routines, the degree in the use of direct or indirect strategies, the use of lexical or syntactic downgraders or intensifiers, or aspects related to politeness.

It is the aspect of the production of certain speech acts that has most attracted the attention of researchers in cross-cultural pragmatics. As Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989: 7) point out, special attention has been given to two specific aspects in connection with speech act production in different languages, namely, the value and function of politeness or deference in speech act realization, and the universality of politeness phenomena across languages and cultures. In this sense, House and Kasper (1981) compare the use of politeness markers in request and complaint production by native English and German speakers, while Hill, Ide, Ikuta, Kawasaki and Ogino (1986) analyse certain aspects related to the verbal expression of politeness in requests in American English and Japanese.

Special attention deserves the international project called *Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project* (*CCSARP*). The aim of such a project was to investigate the intralinguistic and interlinguistic variation in the production of two speech acts: requests and apologies. These two speech acts were analysed in eight different languages and varieties, namely, Australian English, American English, British English, Canadian French, Danish, German, Hebrew, and Russian. The results obtained in this investigation indicate that each of the languages studied presents specific linguistic strategies to carry out a given pragmatic function. Likewise, it is observed that each language shows particular preferences in choosing among the structures available in different linguistic systems (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, 1989: 22).

Concerning the comparative studies of request production in English and Spanish, the following aspects have been studied: level of directness (Cenoz and Valencia, 1996; Márquez Reiter, 1997); alerters, perspective, level of directness, and syntactic and lexical modifiers (Cenoz Iragui, 1999); level of directness and aspects related to the organization of the information, such as selection of focus and theme in instructional texts (Murcia-Bielsa, 2000); level of directness and supporting moves (García, 1993); and level of directness, perspective, internal modifiers, and external modifiers (Márquez Reiter, 2000). However, there is no study that we may be aware of which specifically focuses on the role of deixis and politeness in the production of requests in English and Spanish.

2. Method

2.1. Subjects

Seventy-five British English native speakers and seventy-five non-native speakers of English whose mother tongue is Spanish acted as informants to this study. For the sake of comparison, data in Spanish as a native language were also collected from another seventy-five subjects. Therefore, two hundred and twenty-five informants participated in this study altogether. All of them were university students at the universities of Leeds, Stirling, and Jaén. Their ages range between twenty and twenty-five years old. The reason for choosing students as our target population, apart from purely practical reasons of availability, was to ensure as much homogeneity as possible with regard to educational background, social class or age range. The distribution between sexes is the same in the three groups: 29 male informants and 46 female informants.[1]

2.2. Research Instrument

A common concern in linguistic research in general, and in the fields of cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics in particular is how to collect the data or, in other words, the research instrument which is used to compile the linguistic material which will be analysed.[2] Ideally, the data should be obtained

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1. The reason why the number of female informants is higher than the number of male informants has to do with mere availability, since there are more female students enrolled in the *Filología Inglesa* [English Studies] degree at the University of Jaén. In order to make the three groups comparable, the same proportion has been kept in the other two groups.
2. For an analysis of the characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of different research methods, see Díaz Pérez (2004).

from language used in natural conditions, as Labov (1972: 209) suggests: «[our] goal is then to observe the way that people use language when they are not being observed»; and, in order to solve the paradox implicit in Labov's statement, one option would be for an observer to record a natural interaction. However, in this study our intention has been to compile wide samples, classified in three groups of informants, of a specific speech act produced in the same contexts. The speech act was to be compared cross-culturally, in native speakers of British English and native speakers of peninsular Spanish, but also within the same language, in native and non-native English speakers. The need to compile a great quantity of data and the requirements for a reliable comparison have invalidated the possibility of using ethnographic observation as a research method in this study. The use of a written questionnaire, on the contrary, presents the obvious advantage of allowing the collection of a great quantity of data extracted from a large number of informants with relative speed. Likewise, it facilitates the quantification of the results and the manipulation of the variables, which favours the cross-cultural comparison, as well as the comparison between native language and interlanguage.

The use of ethnographic observation, in contrast, would render this comparison impossible, since, for productions of the specific speech act to appear, very long speech periods would have to be recorded, and even when a great quantity of data were compiled, there would be no guarantee that the same situation had been repeated even once, therefore, making it impossible to control the contextual variables at play.

The pressure to which non-native speakers are subjected when they have to express themselves orally in a foreign language has been another factor which has conditioned the choice of data collection method, and which has made us opt for a written means instead of an instrument which would force the informants to express themselves orally. The discourse completion test offers, specially to the non-native speakers, the opportunity to answer in an accurate way. In this sense, we agree with Eisenstein and Bodman (1986: 169) when they state: «if learners were not able to provide native-like responses in a relatively unpressured situation such as this, it would be unlikely that they would be able to function more effectively in face-to-face interactions with their accompanying pressures and constraints».

Another aspect which has prompted us to choose a discourse completion test to the detriment of a role play as a data collection instrument has been the fact that in the latter the interaction takes place between the informant and a real interlocutor, who plays the role of a fictitious interlocutor. In our opinion, the relationship which exists between the informant and the real interlocutor could condition the informant's productions to some extent. Hong (1998: 39) expresses

the same opinion in his study about request production patterns in German and Chinese:

> It is believed that the presence of tape-recorder and interviewer would exert pressure on interviwees and affect their choice of linguistic means in responses. For example, interviewees may not use scolding or impolite words in front of interviewer even though they would use these words under the designed «situations» without the presence of the interviewer and tape recorder.

The use of written questionnaires for the collection of data does not only present practical advantages from a methodological point of view, but also theoretical advantages, since it allows us to obtain more stereotypical answers, the prototype of the variants which may occur in an individual's actual speech, as pointed out by Hill, Ide, Ikuta, Kawasaki and Ogino (1986: 353). It is precisely that stereotypical aspect of speech behaviour that it is advisable to pay attention to in the cross-cultural comparison. Moreover, it is undoubtedly useful to investigate what type of language people consciously generate in their minds, that is, what the informants' linguistic attitudes are. For all these reasons, the instrument employed to collect the data has been a *discourse completion test* (*DCT*).

In spite of the advantages mentioned, we are aware of the possible shortcomings of the research instrument used in this study. Firstly, there is no certainty that the collected linguistic material will reflect the language of spoken discourse faithfully. However, in order to be able to carry out a comparison of specific aspects exactly under the same conditions, it is impossible to avoid a certain degree of artificiality in the collection of data. Secondly, a written questionnaire does not offer the possibility to investigate speech turn changes and strategies of negotiation which the production of a given speech act may imply. Nevertheless, in spite of its unquestionable interest, the investigation of such aspects is not among the aims of this study. Finally, the fact that discourse completion tests do not offer the informant the possibility not to say anything, not to produce the speech act in question, has also been highlighted as a disadvantage inherent in this method. In the questionnaire devised for the present study, however, the informant has the option to leave the space for the answer blank if he/she considers that he/she would have said nothing in a given situation.

The discourse completion test used in this study is composed of five socially differentiated situations which vary depending on the interlocutors' relationship, that is to say, on the dimensions of dominance or social power, and social distance or familiarity. Therefore, it has allowed us to investigate also the effect of social factors on those realization patterns. The situations are as follows:

S1   You are in class and you ask another student to lend you his/her notes.

S2   You are in one of your teachers' office and you remember that you have to make a phone call urgently. There is no public telephone around and you ask your teacher to let you use his/her office telephone.

S3   You need a book from the library for a paper, but it is already on loan. You see another student you do not know with the book and ask him/her to lend you the book to photocopy a couple of chapters.

S4   You have to hand in a paper for one of your courses and you find out that there is a new lecturer at your school whom you have never seen before and who is a specialist in the subject of your paper. You go to his/her office for him/her to read the outline of your paper and give you some bibliographical references.

S5   You are in the university library. You want to take a book from a shelf but it is too high for you. You ask a class mate taller than you to get the book down for you.

As has been mentioned before, the five situations vary with regard to the social relationship between the interlocutors across the dimensions of social distance or familiarity, and social power or dominance. Social distance is a binary variable in this case, that is to say, either the interlocutors know each other, in which case there is no social distance (-SD), or they have never met, which implies the existence of social distance (+SD).

The variable of social power, in turn, also has two possible values: hearer's dominance (S<H) or equal power between speaker and hearer (S=H). Following Bonikowska (1988), Trosborg (1995) and Sasaki (1998), the situations have been designed in such a way that the informants (all of them university students in a western society) would find them familiar everyday situations. In order to avoid the artificiality emanating from the adoption of a role that would be completely alien to the students –such as that of a company manager, teacher, or boss in an office–, in the present study we have opted for not including situations in which the speaker had to adopt a power position with respect to the hearer. In this connection, Hernández Sacristán (1999: 59) states that, if situations which would be foreign to the informants were included, the effort of metapragmatic reflection demanded from them would have to do, therefore, not with what the informant would say in a given situation, but with what he/she would think that an interlocutor A would say to an interlocutor B in the situation described. This would obviously affect the reliability of the data obtained.

The following table shows the relationship between speaker (S) and hearer (H) with respect to these two dimensions and to the weight of imposition of the requested action.

Table 1. Description of the situations proposed in the discourse completion test

Situations	Social Distance	Social Power	Weight of imposition
S1 Notes	SD -	S = H	+
S2 Phone call	SD -	S < H	+
S3 Book	SD +	S = H	+
S4 Paper	SD +	S < H	+
S5 Shelf	SD -	S = H	-

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Person Deixis

One aspect which must be considered in analyzing the nuclear act of a request is the perspective adopted by the speaker to carry out the request. In the data compiled in this study three types of perspectives have been observed, namely, *speaker perspective*, *hearer perspective*, and *impersonal perspective*: when producing their requests, speakers may emphasize the role of the hearer as the agent of the action; the function of the speaker as the recipient of the action; or they may avoid the problem altogether and resort to an impersonal form. Thus, requests can be divided into requests oriented towards the speaker, requests oriented towards the hearer, and impersonal requests. There is a fourth potential possibility which involves adopting an inclusive perspective which, by means of a first person plural pronoun, refers both to speaker and hearer. However, in the data collected for this study this type of perspective has not been registered. The examples presented below illustrate each of the perspectives adopted by the participants in this study:[3] In (1), (4), and (7) the speaker perspective has been adopted; in (2), (5), and (8) the hearer perspective has been chosen; and (3), (6), and (9) illustrate the impersonal perspective.

(1) I missed the last lesson. Could *I* possibly borrow your notes? (I/46/1)[4]

(2) I need a few chapters from a book you have. Could *you* please lend it to me? (I/35/3)

(3) Would *it* be at all possible to use your telephone? I know it's rude but it's urgent. (I/28/2)

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3.   All the examples have been extracted from Díaz Pérez (2003).

4.   The relevant linguistic item or sequence appears in italics. In the code system used to identify the examples, the first number represents the group of speakers (I: English native speakers, II: Spanish native speakers, and III: English non-native speakers), the second number (from 1 to 75) represents the informant, and the third number (1 to 5) refers to the situation.

(4) Perdone, ¿pued*o* llamar un momentín? Es que es urgente y no hay por aquí ningún teléfono. (II/38/2)

(5) Perdona, ¿*te* importaría dejarme el libro para fotocopiar algunos capítulos? Te lo devuelvo en un momento. (II/39/3)

(6) Tengo que hacer una llamada urgente. *¿Sería posible* usar su teléfono? (II/17/2)

(7) I was wondering if *I* could possibly use your phone, if you don't mind. (III/30/2)

(8) Could *you* please lend me yesterday's notes? I mean, if you don't mind. (III/29/1)

(9) *Would there be any possibility* to have a look at my paper? (III/69/4)

In producing a request of the type appearing in (1), (4), or (7), as far as perspective is concerned, the speaker avoids referring directly to the hearer as the agent who would have to carry out the requested action. By contrast, the speaker emphasizes his or her own role as recipient or beneficiary of the action or object being requested. Taking into account that requests, following Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) terminology, are acts which threaten the hearer's negative face, by means of the requests oriented towards the speaker, the coercive level of the request is reduced and the risk of potential threat to the hearer's negative face is minimized.[5] Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1987: 158) express it in the following terms: «*could you* emphasizes the role of the hearer, whereas *could I* shifts the emphasis to the role of the speaker. Because requests usually threaten the hearer's face, to avoid naming the hearer as the performer of the requested act is to minimize the imposition».

The impersonal perspective produces the same effect in this sense, since by means of this type of perspective a direct reference to the hearer as the agent of the action is also avoided. Thus, the requests oriented towards the hearer, as well as those in which the perspective is impersonal, are characteristic of negative politeness, that is to say, of a type of politeness oriented towards the hearer's negative face, by means of which the speaker tries to reduce the coercive level of a request.

In this study, relevant differences have been observed between the group of native English speakers and the other two groups of informants with regard to the adoption of perspective in requests. Whereas most of the requests produced

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5. The terms positive and negative face are taken from Brown and Levinson (1987: 62), and they are defined as follows:
   - negative face: the want of every «competent adult member» that his actions be unimpeded by others.
   - positive face: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.

by the native English speakers are oriented towards the speaker –namely 45.6 %–, both Spanish speakers –with 87.8 %– and non-native English speakers –with 79.7 %– resort more frequently to requests oriented towards the hearer. The second preferred option for the native English speakers is the perspective oriented towards the hearer (43.4 %); while the speaker perspective, with 11.9 % and 19.7 % respectively, is favoured by the Spanish speakers and the non-native English speakers. Finally, as regards the adoption of the third type of perspective, the impersonal one, important differences have been observed as to the percentages: 11.0 % in the group of the native English speakers (significantly higher than the rest), and in the other two groups: 0.3 % in the Spanish speakers, and 0.5 % in the non-native English speakers. As has been already stated, the differences are statistically significant in all cases except between Spanish speakers and non-native English speakers in the category of impersonal perspective.

These results may be interpreted as proof that verbal politeness in English is more oriented towards the hearer's negative face, whereas Spanish speakers and non-native English speakers do not attach so much importance to the fact of not interfering with the hearer's personal autonomy. It may also be observed that with regard to the adoption of perspective in requests, the practice of the non-native English speakers who have Spanish as their mother tongue stands between that of the non-native English speakers and that of the Spanish native speakers, although it is closer to the latter's. A possible explanation for these results would be the occurrence of a transference from their native language, Spanish, to the foreign language, English.

Besides the group of informants, situational factors have also influenced the adoption of perspective in requests. The results of the linear-logarithmic analysis undertaken in this study indicate that there is an interaction between the independent variables of group of informants and situation, which together affect the dependent variable of perspective in requests.

Some coincident tendencies have been observed across the three groups, but also many differences, with respect to the perspective adopted in requests. As regards the similarities, it could be mentioned that in the three groups of informants situation S5 (*Book*) –in which there is neither power relation nor social distance between speaker and hearer– is that in which the hearer perspective reaches the highest percentage: 97.3 % in the group of native English speakers and 100 % in the other two groups. The Spanish native speakers have also adopted the hearer perspective in 100 % of the requests produced in situation S1 (*Notes*). Another common feature across the three groups is related to the fact that in situation S2 (*Call*) the impersonal perspective reaches the highest percentage in the three groups, although the native English speakers employ it in 23.3 % of their requests, while the informants of the other two groups in only 1.4 %. These differences become significant from a statistical point of view.

The differences across groups are more relevant. Thus, for example, whereas in the group of native English speakers the highest percentage of the speaker perspective corresponds to situation S1 (*Notes*), exactly 78.7 %, in the non-native speakers that percentage is reduced to 21.3 %, which means that this situation occupies the third place with regard to the adoption of the speaker perspective, after S2 (*Call*) and S3 (*Book*). Such a divergence between native and non-native speakers of English implies that while the former tend to produce their requests by means of the formula *Can I borrow…?*, the latter, on the contrary, normally opt for the formula *Can you lend me…?*, which questions the hearer more directly, with the resulting threat to his/her negative face. The verbal realizations of the non-native speakers may be influenced in this sense by their native language, since the percentage of use of the speaker perspective in this situation by the Spanish speakers is 0 %.

In considering the differences between the group of native English speakers and the other two groups of informants, it is worth highlighting that, in situations S1 (*Notes*), S2 (*Call*), and S3 (*Book*), the native English speakers significantly differ from both Spanish speakers and non-native English speakers with regard to the adoption of the three types of perspectives. The Spanish speakers and non-native English speakers, however, do not differ from each other. These data, therefore, seem to reveal an influence of the native language on the productions in the foreign language by the non-native speakers.

3.2. Time Deixis

There are several syntactic devices to increase the degree of politeness in a request. A common characteristic to all of them has to do with the ability to distance the request from the sphere of reality (Haverkate, 1992: 510; Trosborg, 1995: 209-210). A shift away from the speaker's deictic centre (I-HERE-NOW) implies an increase of the politeness level with which the request is produced, since the speaker's expectations as to the fulfilment of the request by the hearer are reduced. If the expectations are low, the risk that the speaker loses his/her own face is diminished in the event of the request being rejected by the hearer. In addition, the hearer will have the possibility of answering negatively if he/she does not want to comply with the speaker's demands.

The type of syntactic downgrader which is more widely used by the informants of the three groups is a *combination of interrogative structure and a conditional verb form*. In this instance, it is the group of English native speakers that reaches the highest percentage (58.2 %), followed by the group of non-native English speakers (51,6 %) and, finally, the Spanish speakers (45.1 %). Differences are statistically significant between native English speakers and Spanish speakers.

Both the interrogative structure and the conditional mood involve a shift away from reality. Therefore, when both mechanisms are combined within the same utterance, this distance is increased, which helps to reduce the degree of imposition in the request, and, consequently, to raise its level of negative politeness.

As stated in Haverkate (1992: 509), in the componential analysis of the conditional two fundamentally contrastive temporal features are present: [+ past] and [+ future]. This componential analysis indicates that conditional verb forms are negatively marked for present time, which implies that their point of reference does not coincide with the time of the utterance. Thus, the combination of the distinctive features [+ past] and [+ future] indicates a point of reference which is distanced from the deictic centre (I-HERE-NOW). It may also be argued that those utterances which contain a conditional verb form do not refer to the real world, but to a possible one. Such a distance from reality is connected with the mitigation of the illocutionary force of requests, and, consequently, with the expression of verbal politeness. To that avail, Haverkate (1992: 510) states:

> Metaphorically speaking, the distance involved may be associated with the interpersonal distance speakers create in order to express mitigation. This is equivalent to stating that the potentially mitigating interpretation of the conditional can be explained in terms of metaphorical distance or space.

The inclusion of the conditional, therefore, reduces the expectations as to the fulfilment of the request even more, since it distances the utterance from its deictic centre in such a way that the separation between the utterance and reality is increased from a metaphorical point of view. If utterances (10)-(15) are compared to utterances (16)-(21), it can be seen that the distance from reality and, consequently, the politeness level are greater in the latter:

(10) *Can I borrow your notes for a minute please?* (I/18/1)
(11) *Will you pass me that book?* (I/60/5)
(12) Por favor, *¿me puedes dejar los apuntes?* (II/16/1)
(13) *¿Me alcanzas ese libro?* (II/46/5)
(14) *May I make a call from here?* (III/25/2)
(15) *Can you lend me your notes?* (III/26/1)
(16) I have to make a very urgent call. *Could* I please use the phone*?* (I/23/2)
(17) *Would* it be at all possible to use your telephone*?* I know it's rude, but it's urgent. (I/28/2)
(18) Tengo que hacer una llamada urgente. *¿Sería* posible utilizar su teléfono*?* (II/17/2)
(19) *¿Le* *importaría* dejarme el teléfono*?* Es que tengo que hacer una llamada urgente. (II/25/2)

(20)   *Could you* lend me your book for a moment just to photocopy a couple of chapters, please*?* (III/7/3)
(21)   *Would you* mind reading the outline of a paper I have to present*?* (III/21/4)

In addition to appearing in combination with interrogative structures, the *conditional mood* has also been occasionally found as the only syntactic downgrader. The percentages corresponding to the requests in which this happens are: 3.2 % in the native English speakers, 4.3 % in the Spanish speakers, and 6.2 % in the non-native English speakers. In this case, the differences across groups of informants are not statistically significant.

(22)   I've been told that you have borrowed a book that I really need, I wonder if I *could* borrow it for a few minutes to photocopy. (I/4/3)
(23)   Me han dicho que usted es especialista en este tema y me *gustaría* que le echara un vistazo a este trabajo. (II/31/4)
(24)   I *would* like to ask you whether I could use your telephone for a moment. There is no public telephone around here and it is really urgent for me to call now. (III/10/2)
(25)   I need to photocopy a couple of chapters. I*'d* be very grateful if you could lend it to me for a while, please. (III/38/3)

As regards the temporal coordinate, in addition to the use of the conditional, a distance from the deictic centre may also be achieved by means of resorting to the past tense or subjunctive mood. The use of verb forms in the past tense or in the subjunctive mood also reduces, at least metaphorically, the expectations of the hearer answering positively to the speaker's requirement.

The requests in which the past tense has been chosen as the only syntactic downgrader represent 0.3 % in the native English speakers, 1.9 % in the Spanish speakers, and 0.8 % in the non-native English speakers. In this case, the native English speakers significantly differ from the Spanish native speakers.

(26)   I *wondered* if you would give me some references for the topic of my paper please. (I/52/4)
(27)   Disculpe, pero me han comentado que usted ha trabajado en el tema de mi trabajo y me *preguntaba* si podría dejarme algún tipo de información. (II/19/4)
(28)   I *wondered* whether I could make a phone call. (III/56/2)

The fact that the requests in which the past tense is the only syntactic downgrader are so few is due to the fact that in most cases it is employed in combination with some other downgrader, particularly with the progressive

aspect in English. This combination represents 6.9 % in the group of native English speakers, and 1.9 % in the group of non-native speakers. The Spanish speakers have not resorted to this combination of downgraders in any of the situations. The three groups of informants significantly differ with respect to the use of this combination of syntactic downgraders.

(29)   I *was* just *wondering* if you had any time to have a look at a paper I've been writing. It might interest you. (I/1/4)

(30)   I'm working on this paper and I *was wondering* if you could help me with it. (III/67/4)

Except for one case, reproduced below as (31), the progressive aspect has been used always in combination with the past tense. It is only the verb *wonder* that appears in the progressive aspect. By means of the election of the progressive aspect, the speaker manages to intensify the meaning of the verb. In this way, the doubtful semantic content of the utterance is emphasized, which implies a reduction of the speaker's expectations that the hearer will agree to the speaker's wishes. Therefore, this syntactic downgrader, either alone or in combination with some other downgrader, contributes to the protection of the hearer's negative face, constituting another device which serves to express respect for the interlocutor's freedom of action. In comparing requests (31) and (33) to (32) and (34) respectively, it will be observed that (31) and (33) transmit a higher degree of hesitation than (32) and (34), and, consequently, a higher level of politeness.

(31)   I'm doing an essay on your subject and I'm *wondering* if you'd mind just going over it for me. (I/16/4)

(32)   Hi, I wonder if you could help me. I was recommended to you. What I'm looking for is any books on _____. (I/40/4)

(33)   Hi, I *was wondering* if you could give me some advice for an assignment. (I/37/4)

(34)   I *wondered* if you would give me some references for the topic of my paper please. (I/52/4)

Another syntactic downgrader which is related to the temporal component of the deictic centre is the *subjunctive mood*. This type of downgrader, which also indicates a distancing from reality and from the deictic centre, appears only in requests produced by Spanish speakers, representing 1.4 % of the total number of requests produced by the informants of this group.

(35)   Hola, perdona que te moleste, pero un compañero tuyo me ha dicho que estás trabajando con el tema central de mi trabajo y *quisiera* pedirte que

me dejaras algunas reseñas bibliográficas que me pudieran orientar un poco. (II/21/4)

(36)   Hola. *Quisiera* que, por favor, me ayudara con un trabajo que tengo que presentar; no le ocuparé mucho tiempo. (II/60/4)

4. Conclusion

As has been shown, there is a close connection between the notions of person and time deixis, and the expression of verbal politeness, both in English and Spanish. However, there are also significant differences between one language and the other in this respect. It has been frequently stated that English is a language oriented towards negative politeness, and this fact has a reflection in the type and frequency of deictic elements used in the requests produced by English and Spanish native speakers. The non-native English speakers who participated in this study, who have Spanish as their mother tongue, often occupy a middle position between the other two groups, which seems to indicate that they are influenced by their native language.

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