SPEECH ACTS OF REQUEST AND APOLOGY REALISED BY CZECH STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: SELECTED FINDINGS OF A PILOT STUDY

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Abstract: During the second half of the 20th century, there was a shift in focus in second-language-acquisition research from linguistic competence to communicative and pragmatic competence (Hymes 1972, Canale & Swain 1980, Bachman 1990, Bachman & Palmer 1996, Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor 2006). This resulted in a growing number of studies on speech acts in general. Motivated by a lack of studies on the speech acts of apology in conversations of Czech learners of English as a foreign language, my study aims to shed light on request and apology strategies used by Czech university students. The aim of this paper is to present the findings of a pilot investigation into the speech acts of apology and request. The first aim of the study is to compare two data collection techniques: the open-ended written discourse completion task (DCT) and the oral production task (OPT). The second aim is to investigate the use of request and apology strategies by Czech learners of English. The findings suggest that both of the data collection techniques produced very similar data. In terms of requests, most respondents opted for a conventional indirect strategy. In terms of apologies, respondents opted for statements of remorse, offers of repair and account.

Keywords: pragmatic competence, speech acts, requests, apologies, written discourse completion task, oral production task

1   INTRODUCTION

The development of the pragmatic competence of Czech university students in terms of linguistic politeness is a topic which has not been sufficiently addressed in English-language courses and textbooks. Specifically, I investigate one aspect of pragmatic competence: the development of linguistic politeness norms in English as a second language (L2). Through a comparative study of linguistic politeness, I want to establish the level of pragmatic competence of Czech students of English; whether they are able to use the various English linguistic devices appropriately when communicating in various situations, and what phrases they do and do not know. The study compares speech acts of request and apology, and the strategies deployed in using them, performed by Czech native speakers using English as L2, with the strategies of native English speakers (English as first language or L1). The findings could be used in teaching, and for devising various methods for developing pragmatic competence while teaching English as a foreign language to university students.

This paper presents selected results of my pilot study into the speech acts of apology and request and addresses the following research question: what are the strategies of speech acts of request and apology used by Czech students using English as L2? In what follows I first describe the theoretical background and previous studies of the speech acts of request and apology. Then I introduce the methods and procedures used. The last section describes the course of the pilot study, reports the results of the analysis and discusses the implications of my research.

2   THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1   Pragmatic competence and the theory of politeness

These days, communicative competence is the chief concept that defines the content and goal of foreign language teaching. Knowledge of language continues to be considered important; however, the ability to use it in context is coming to the fore.

The term 'communicative competence' was first used by Hymes (1972: 281–286) in his critical response to Chomsky's (1965: 4) separation of language into competence and performance. Hymes's concept includes not just the knowledge of grammar and ability to use it, but also the ability to communicate appropriately in various social environments. The concept was then developed further (Canale & Swain 1980, Thomas 1983, Bachman 1990, Bachman & Palmer 1996, Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor 2006). There are many definitions of communicative competence and there is some overlap between them. The development of communicative competence in a foreign language continues to be a focus of teaching, where the emphasis is on the efficient use of language in a social context. This then implies the need to develop pragmatic competence and awareness of politeness norms in the teaching of foreign languages.

Interlanguage pragmatics is the study of the pragmatic competence of foreign language students, focusing in particular on interaction and speech acts: it examines students' ability to use various linguistic means in the target language when interacting in various contexts, and looks at how they are able to devise and appropriately use

speech acts, such as compliments, apologies, requests and complaints. The discipline also examines how their interlanguage pragmatic competence improves alongside their general advancement in the language.

Requests and apologies are among the most commonly studied speech acts, because they are frequently used. They are also acts that tend to be examined in terms not just of pragmatic competence but also politeness theory. Apologies, which are examples of expressive speech acts (Austin 1962, Searle 1979), are difficult for foreign language students to grasp, as they are culturally specific expressions.

One area that falls under the heading of pragmatic competence is politeness. Politeness is understood to consist of ways of behaving and acting that are based on the values and norms of a society. By linguistic politeness, we mean verbal communication that reflects the speakers' relations with, and their positions relative to, their communication partners in mutual interactions.

The study of linguistic politeness is relatively new, starting in the 1960s. This study draws on Brown and Levinson's theory (1987), according to which people cooperate in their interactions in order to perform face-saving activities (1987: 61). The authors adopted Goffman's concept of face and linked it with the idiom 'to lose face'. All members of society have a face – it is their public display of themselves, how they want to be seen by others. Brown and Levinson developed a model of politeness, in which each speaker has several options or strategies to choose from, and they argue that these strategies are universal. During interaction, face-threatening acts (FTA) may appear. Any speech act may be an FTA, threatening the face of the speaker, the addressee or both. The measure of the threat depends on three factors: the social distance of the speaker and addressee; the relative power of the speaker over the addressee; and the degree of threat to the addressee's face in the given culture.

Although Brown and Levinson's theory has been widely criticised (Wierzbicka 1991, Eelen 2001), and for example, experts on Asian cultures do not consider their theory universal, as it is incompatible with Asian notions of politeness – most studies of linguistic politeness continue to refer to, and work with, this theory.

2.2 Speech acts of request

Requests are examples of directive speech acts (Searle 1979), in which the speaker asks the hearer to perform an action which is often for the exclusive benefit of the speaker (Trosborg 1995). That is why requests are considered to be face-threatening acts.

Requests can be more or less direct. According to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Sifianou (1992) and Trosborg (1995), requests usually consist of two main parts: the head act (which is an obligatory part of the request, or the request itself; it can stand on its own) and other modification devices. There are two types of modification device: internal (which appear within the head act) and external (they appear in the immediate context of the head act). They are optional and their role is to mitigate the illocutionary force of the request.

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984: 202) identified three main types of head act: direct, conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect. These can be further divided into nine types of strategy, which are ordered according to the level of directness (see Table 1).

Main category	Types	Examples
Direct	1 Mood derivable	*Clean up this mess, please.*
	2 Explicit performative	*I'm asking you not to park the car here.*
	3 Hedged performative	*I would like you to give your lecture a week earlier.*
	4 Locution derivable	*Madam, you'll have to move your car.*
	5 Scope stating	*I really wish you'd stop bothering me.*
Conventionally indirect	6 Language specific suggestory formula	*How about cleaning up?*
	7 Reference to preparatory conditions	*Could you clear up the kitchen, please?*
Non-conventionally indirect	8 Strong hints	*You've left the kitchen in a right mess.*
	9 Mild hints	*You've been busy here, haven't you?*

Table 1: Request strategy types – coding categories and examples
(Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984: 202)

This study is focused solely on request strategies, not on request modification devices. For that reason, I have employed the categorical system of requests according to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984).

2.3   Speech acts of apology

Apologies are examples of expressive speech acts (Searle 1979). Goffman defines an apology as a remedial utterance, pronounced in an effort to re-establish social harmony after an actual or virtual transgression (1971: 109). Thus, if one of the communicants offers an apology, they show their willingness to demean themselves. This makes an apology a face-saving act for the hearer, and, concurrently, a face-threatening act for the speaker.

According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984: 206–207) an apology can take one of two basic forms, or a combination of the two. An apology is performed using an illocutionary force indicating device (IFID). These are utterances commonly used to express apology, such as the verbs (*be) sorry*, *excuse*, *apologise*, *forgive*, *regret* and *pardon*. Another option for performing an apology (with or without an IFID) is to make an utterance involving one of four apology strategies: account, assumption of responsibility, offer of repair and promise not to repeat the offence (there are multiple taxonomies and the wording of the categories differs slightly among the authors).

Fraser enumerated apology strategies in 1981, citing nine of them. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) then reduced the number of strategies to five; Trosborg (1987) first proposed six strategies, but later reduced the number to two main strategies and two sub-strategies (1995).

For my study, I adopted the classification of strategy types according to Sugimoto (1997), who distinguishes primary, secondary and seldom used strategies. She then divides these three categories into eleven subcategories (see Table 2).

Main category	Subcategories
I. Primary strategies	Statement of remorse
	Accounts
	Description of damage
	Reparation
II. Secondary strategies	Compensation
	Promise not to repeat offence
III. Seldom used strategies	Explicit assessment of responsibility
	Contextualization
	Self-castigation
	Request for forgiveness
	Gratitude

Table 2: Apology strategy types – coding categories
(Sugimoto 1997: 356)

In the next section, I give an overview of existing research into requests and apologies in interlanguage pragmatics and in foreign language learning.

3   SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

3.1   Foreign studies

3.1.1 Requests

The study of requests within interlanguage pragmatics research has received considerable attention. The main reasons for the interest might be the importance and frequent use of requests in social life, and their face-threatening nature. Despite the fact that they may be realised using clearly identifiable formulae, requests differ cross-linguistically and they place considerable demands on L2 learners.

Most relevant studies on the speech acts of request have focused on the strategies language learners opt for including the modification devices and whether and how the requesting behaviour differs from native-speakers' norms (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1986, Economidou-Kogetsidis 2010, Márquez-Reiter 2000, Trosborg 1995). Others have investigated the development of requests in learners' interlanguage (Bella 2012, Flores Salgado 2011, Woodfield 2012). Most studies are cross-sectional; only a few are longitudinal. Most frequent data collection techniques were written discourse completion tasks, sometimes complemented with a questionnaire, cartoon oral production tasks, role-plays or interviews.

A discourse-completion task (DCT) is a research instrument used in linguistics. Originally it was used in the study of speech acts by native speakers and students of Hebrew (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). It consists of descriptions of various social situations placed in a certain context, from which one can glean the background of the dialogue and the mutual social positions of the communicants. Respondents are asked for their

reactions, i.e. speech acts expressing how they think they would respond in an actual situation.

Perhaps the most often cited work is Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) *Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project* (CCSARP), which studied requests and apologies in a large range of languages, aiming to uncover possible pragmatic principles at work when speech acts of request and apology are performed. This project has been crucial for the study of speech acts in several respects: it created the DCT, now in widespread use, and led to a system of categories for analysing requests and apologies.

The studies cited suggest that as learners' L2 language proficiency improves, so does their ability to formulate requests as well as the breadth of their repertoires (a pragma-linguistic development is apparent). However, no evidence has yet been found that their ability to choose an appropriate strategy with respect to the social variables also improves (socio-pragmatic development).

3.1.2 Apologies

There are many studies of apologies in various languages. Some researchers have investigated politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson 1987, García 1989, Márquez-Reiter 2000), the factors influencing the choice of a particular strategy (Cohen & Olshtain 1981, Fraser 1981, Olshtain & Cohen 1983), intercultural variations in expressing apologies (García 1989, Trosborg 1987, Sugimoto 1997, Márquez-Reiter 2000, Bataineh & Bataineh 2008), negative transfers from the native language (Olshtain & Cohen 1983) and gender differences (Márquez-Reiter 2000, Bataineh & Bataineh 2008). These studies were all cross-sectional, with a discourse completion task or test, cartoon oral production task, or role-playing as the main data collection methods.

Studies of apologies found the following: there are substantial similarities in the performance of an apology across cultures, but there are also differences: the choice of apology strategy is often informed by social and situational factors and the sociocultural norms of the native language influence the manner of apology in a foreign language.

3.2 Czech studies

Little attention has been given to studying the development of pragmatic competence and linguistic politeness. Two monographs, by Grepl and Karlík (1998) and Hirschová (2013), examined pragmatics and the theory of speech acts in the Czech language. Chejnová published an article on requests in Czech institutional correspondence (2014) and Válková investigated speech acts of apology in Czech (2004, 2008 and 2014). There has been no specific study of how native Czech speakers formulate speech acts of request and apology in English.

4 PILOT STUDY METHODS

4.1 Goals of the pilot study

The pilot study had three main goals.
1. Test the main research instrument, the DCT, and its reliability and validity.

2. Establish what strategies native Czech speakers use in English in various situations that necessitate them making requests and apologies (a DCT in English, in two parts).

3. Establish whether social variables (formal and informal situations) influence the choice of their request and apology strategies.

4.2 Pilot study research questions

1. What are the similarities and differences in apology and request strategies, when gathered by two different data collection techniques, DCT and OPT?

2. What strategies and means of expression do Czech students use in English in various situations that necessitate them making requests and apologies?

3. What is the influence of social variables (in formal and informal situations) on their choice of request and apology strategies?

4.3 Research design

One of the aims of the pilot study was to verify the reliability and validity of the data-collection technique, DCT. To this end, I compared the outcomes of DCT and OPT, i.e. the written and oral responses to an identical set of situations, necessitating expressions of request and apology, gathered using the two techniques.

The DCT was divided into two sections, each containing a description of 10 situations, to which students were expected to respond with a request (five) and an apology (another five). There were five formal and five informal situations. The situations were mixed together in the sample, so that the questionnaire did not contain any distractors (for the DCT No. 1 questionnaire, see Appendix 1).

The description of each situation in the DCT indicates the social distance and relative power between the participants. All situations are drawn from the daily lives of university students, be it communication with teachers or fellow students, working at a coffee shop or parking their car. Thus, the situations should be intelligible and familiar to the students.

There was a delay before students completed the second questionnaire, with the aim of making them forget what they had said in their answers to the first questionnaire. The descriptions of the situations are identical in the second questionnaire, but the social power relations and distance between the actors are different. For instance, in the first DCT, the subjects ask their tutor to lend them a book and in the second they ask the same from a fellow student. This was designed to answer research question number three.

The OPT was likewise divided into two parts, with the same aim.

4.4 The sample

The respondents for the pilot study were drawn from Czech students of the first and second years at the Faculty of Business and Economics, Mendel University in Brno. This was an available, selected sample of the population (cf. Hendl & Remr 2017: 138).

All of the students met the same set of initial parameters: their secondary education had been completed by a school-leaving exam ('maturita' in Czech); they had

been accepted for study at university; they had completed a written English-language test at admission; and they were aged 19–25. Students admitted to the Business English course, who formed my sample, had to have B1 proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

4.5   Data processing procedure

All data obtained through DCT and OPT were transcribed and coded. For the request strategies, the Blum-Kulka and Olshtain coding system was used (see Table 1). For apology strategies, I devised my own system, following Sugimoto's (1997) model. Having obtained the data, I excluded some of Sugimoto's categories, simply because they did not appear in my sample at all (*promise not to repeat offence* and *gratitude*). Owing to their incidence in my data set, I added certain categories, bringing the total number to 14 – see Table 3 (the strategies are ordered by first occurrence in my data, not according to frequency).

Apology strategy types	Examples
Statement of remorse	*I'm sorry. / I apologize.*
Account	*I've lost the book.*
Description of damage	*It's only a small crash.*
Offer of repair	*The coffee is on the house. / I'll pay for the repair.*
Explicit assumption of responsibility	*That was my fault. / I know it was my mistake.*
Self-criticism	*It was my stupid mistake. / I'm so clumsy.*
Request not to get angry	*Please don't kill me.*
Showing lack of intent to do harm	*I didn't want to.*
Thanking	*I appreciate you've come but . . .*
Reassuring the injured party, downplaying	*Don't worry. / It will be OK. / I believe it will be OK.*
Finding out the consequences	*Are you OK? / How serious is it?*
Being at a loss for words	*I don't know what to say.*
Blaming external circumstances	*I have a bad day today.*
Cautious response	*How much did the phone cost?*

Table 3: Apology strategy types – coding categories (adapted and extended based on pilot study data sets)

4.6   Reliability and validity

The DCT is "perhaps the most widely used methodology in interlanguage pragmatics" (Gass & Neu 2006: 46). Evidently, DCT data cannot be considered authentic utterances obtained in a natural conversation. They are what students indicated they would say in a given situation.

There are numerous studies that have compared DCT data with data from observations or recordings of authentic discourse (e.g. Wolfson, Marmor & Jones 1989, Gollato 2003, Economidou-Kogetsidis 2013). Similarities as well as differences were found. Yet as far as similarities are concerned, it was shown that the same strategies were used by respondents with both research methods.

Despite certain limitations, DCT can serve as an instrument for obtaining a large amount of data under the same set of conditions and concurrently, hence it is valid and reliable. The authors of the cited comparative studies nonetheless note that DCT should be complemented with another research instrument in order to triangulate data (Golato 2003, Economidou-Kogetsidis 2013).

In order to verify the reliability and validity of DCT, I decided to use both DCT and OPT in my pilot study.

5   THE PILOT STUDY

5.1   The course of the pilot study

I collected my DCT data in the spring semester of 2017/2018 at the Business English tutorial at the Faculty of Business and Economics, Mendel University Brno, from ten students.

I collected my OPT data in the spring semester of 2018/2019 from a sample of three Czech students who met the same prerequisites. The recordings were made in separate sittings. The students were informed about the purpose of the study and the procedure. However, the topic of the study was not disclosed to them, in order to avoid influencing their oral utterances and their choice of strategy. The students received cards describing the situations (the same situations, in the same order, as in the DCT). They read the card, and responded orally, in English. I recorded this on a Dictaphone. Two such sessions were held with every student, four weeks apart.

5.2   Pilot study results

Here I present the results of my analysis of Czech students of English, focusing on the strategies they used and on whether there was a difference between formal and informal situations.

5.2.1 Requests

For DCT, I obtained 100 requests, 50 each in formal and informal situations. For OPT, I obtained 30 requests, 15 formal and 15 informal. Looking at Tables 4 and 5, which show the frequency of request strategies in DCT and OPT, it is apparent that the *conventionally indirect strategy*, more specifically *reference to preparatory conditions*, is the most commonly used (90.0% and 93.4% respectively).

DPT					OPT			
Formal and informal situations					**Formal and informal situations**			
Strategies	**Number of strategies**	**Frequency [%]**	**Total number of strategies used**		**Strategies**	**Number of strategies**	**Frequency [%]**	**Total number of strategies used**
1 Mood derivable	2	2	100		1 Mood derivable	1	3.3	30
2 Explicit performative	1	1			2 Explicit performative	0	0	
3 Hedged performative	0	0			3 Hedged performative	1	3.3	
4 Locution derivable	0	0			4 Locution derivable	0	0	
5 Scope stating	0	0			5 Scope stating	0	0	
6 Suggestory formula	0	0			6 Suggestory formula	0	0	
7 Reference to preparatory conditions	90	90			7 Reference to preparatory conditions	28	93.4	
8 Strong hints	7	7			8 Strong hints	0	0	
9 Mild hints	0	0			9 Mild hints	0	0	

Tables 4 and 5: A comparison of the frequency of request strategies in DCT and OPT

If we compare the frequency of request strategies between formal and informal situations (see Figure 1), we see that with DCT the frequency of *reference to preparatory conditions* was 90 per cent in both formal and informal situations. Students opted for *strong hints* as the second most frequent strategy (8% in formal situations and 6% in informal). With OPT in formal situations, the frequency of *reference to preparatory conditions* was 100 per cent, while in informal situations, the figure stood at 86.8 per cent, followed by *mood derivable* and *hedged performative* strategies (both occurring in 6.6% cases; see Figure 1).
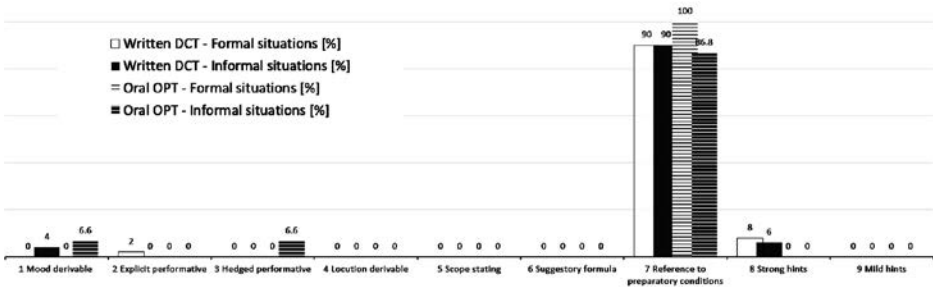

Figure 1: Request strategies, DCT and OPT (in formal and informal situations)

5.2.2 Apologies

For DCT, I obtained 100 apologetic responses, involving 266 individual strategies, thus each apology involved 2.66 strategies on average. Thirty responses were recorded as part of OPT, with 89 individual strategies (an average of 2.97 strategies per apology). Tables 6 and 7 compare the frequency of occurrence of strategy categories across DCT and OPT. In what follows I limit myself to those strategies whose incidence was above ten per cent.

DCT				OPT			
Formal and informal situations				Formal and informal situations			
Strategies	Number of strategies	Frequency %	Total number of strategies	Strategies	Number of strategies	Frequency %	Total number of strategies
Statement of remorse	82	30.8	266	Statement of remorse	25	28.1	89
Offer of repair	46	17.3		Account	22	24.7	
Account	44	16.5		Offer of repair	19	21.3	
Description of damage	19	7.1		Finding out the consequences	6	6.7	
Explicit assumption of responsibility	15	5.6		Description of damage	3	3.4	
Finding out the consequences	12	4.5		Thanking	3	3.4	
Being at a loss for words	11	4.1		Reassuring the injured party, downplaying	3	3.4	
Reassuring the injured party, downplaying	8	3.0		Explicit assumption of responsibility	2	2.2	
Showing lack of intent to do harm	7	2.6		Self-criticism	2	2.2	
Blaming external circumstances	7	2.6		Showing lack of intent to do harm	2	2.2	
Thanking	5	1.9		Being at a loss for words	1	1.1	
Self-criticism	4	1.5		Cautious response	1	1.1	
Cautious response	4	1.5		Request not to get angry	0	0.0	
Request not to get angry	2	0.8		Blaming external circumstances	0	0.0	

Tables 6 and 7: A comparison of the frequency of apology strategies in DCT and OPT

The DCT questionnaires involved 14 categories of apology strategy, ordered by frequency of occurrence: *statement of remorse, offer of repair* and *account*.

Statements of remorse were clearly the most prevalent, appearing in 30.8 per cent of apologies. The incidence of the following two categories was nearly half that of *statements of remorse*. Still, the data indicate that both *offers of repair* and *accounts* appeared in nearly half of the sample of apologies obtained (17.3% and 16.5%

respectively). There was a large gap between the incidence of the third and fourth most often used strategies: strategy no. 3 (*account*) was nearly twice as prevalent as strategy no. 4 (*description of damage*).

If we divide these apologetic reactions (100) into formal (50) and informal (50), the order of the three most frequently used categories does not change (see Figure 2). Thus the in/formality of the situation did not influence the frequency of the most commonly employed strategies in DCT.

In OPT, respondents used twelve strategy categories. Unlike in DCT, the strategies of *blaming external circumstances* and *request not to get angry* did not appear here at all. The most frequently employed strategies in OPT were as follows: *statements of remorse, accounts* and *offers of repair.*

Thus, again, *statement of remorse* was the most frequent strategy. However, in OPT the frequency of occurrence of the top three categories was more uniform than in DCT. The order remained the same in formal and informal situations (see Figure 2).
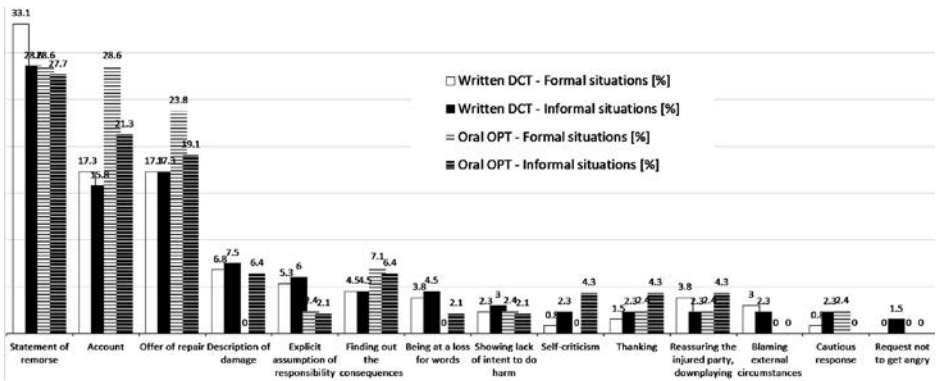

Figure 2: Most frequently used apology strategies in DCT and OPT – a comparison of formal and informal situations

5.3   Discussion

My analysis of data obtained from DCT and OPT indicates that Czech students of English in expressing their requests clearly opted for a *conventionally indirect strategy*, namely a *reference to preparatory conditions*. This is in line with the outcomes of previous studies of acts of request. The social variable (formal or informal situation) did not seem to play a role in the selection of the strategy.

The analysis indicates that the three most frequently used categories of apology strategy remained the same across formal and informal settings, in DCT and OPT. The other categories of strategy appeared less often, their incidence being under ten per cent. For DCT, there were 14 strategy categories, and for OPT, twelve. Of these, the incidence of strategies nos. 4-12 was very small (one to three instances out of 30). Since the sample of apologies was very small, every instance could change the order and frequency.

Respondents filling out the written DCT had more time to consider their response and strategy than those in the oral OPT setting. Despite this, as far as requests were concerned, the choice of reference to preparatory conditions clearly dominated; with apologies, the three most commonly used strategies were the same across DCT and OPT. In their oral utterances, respondents evidently limited themselves to the main strategy for requests: a conventionally indirect strategy, i.e. conventional phrases, which they had acquainted themselves with during their studies. As far as apologies are concerned, these are the three main categories cited above. The other strategies can be considered specific to the situation to which they responded.

The results obtained from DCT and OPT of respondents expressing requests and apologies were very similar. Thus, since the results are equivalent, it can be said that the DCT method is more suitable for my study of linguistic politeness than OPT. In recordings, the respondents limited themselves to a narrower gamut of linguistic expressions and strategies, but their written responses indicate they knew a broader spectrum of apology strategies. Given that my study is focused on neither suprasegmental phenomena nor interaction competence, but merely on the linguistic expressions of politeness, there is no need to record the student responses. A written DCT, by contrast, is able to record a broader spectrum of their knowledge of linguistic devices.

My pilot study also aimed to ascertain whether social variables influenced the selection of request and apology strategies in expressing politeness. I have presented here a comparison of requests and apologies in both formal and informal situations. The data obtained from DCT and OPT show that Czech students used the same strategies, whether the context was formal or informal. Here the results of my research could suggest a practical application, by designing recommendations, in teaching materials and in teaching itself, to develop the pragmatic competence of students of English as a foreign language, so that they are more aware of the difference between formal and informal situations, and subsequently more able to use linguistic devices in English appropriate to the context.

6   CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the results of the pilot study for my dissertation, focused on the development of pragmatic competence in Czech university students learning English. The pilot study showed that the DCT questionnaire is reliable, valid and suitable for collecting data for my dissertation project itself. Hence I have decided to abandon the idea of using OPT and will use only DCT. I also found that, in expressing their requests in English, the Czech students overwhelmingly used *reference to preparatory conditions*. In making apologies, they most often used the following three strategies: *statement of remorse, offer of repair* and *account*. Among my sample of Czech students the social variable – the formality or informality of the situation – seemed to have no influence on their choice of strategy.

In this country no comparative study of the speech acts of request and apology has yet been done. The aim of my dissertation project is to shed light on the intercultural

differences that influence Czech native speakers when using English. The development of communicative competence in a foreign language must not be focused solely on organisational competence, but above all on pragmatic competence. The various linguistic expressions which students of foreign languages use in performing their speech acts are variously socio-linguistically appropriate to the socio-cultural context in which they are being used. Thus, students need to know when to say what to whom (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 121). Hence, in teaching, we need to emphasise the selection of the correct linguistic expression, and its use in a specific speech act, so that it corresponds to the social meaning. Findings obtained by analysing the corpus of student utterances, created for comparative purposes, can enrich our knowledge of how foreign languages are acquired, and pragmatic competence developed, among Czech university students. I believe the results of my study will help when developing new textbooks and teaching methods of English as L2, in approaches that will place greater emphasis on developing pragmatic competence.

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APPENDIX 1:   DCT NO. 1

Situation 1: A Phone Call
You are at the faculty.
You need to make an urgent phone call but you have left your mobile at home. Ask your

classmate to lend you his/her phone to make a short call.
You say:

Situation 2: A Broken Mobile
You are at the faculty.
You need to make an urgent phone call but you have left your mobile at home. You ask your classmate to lend you his/her phone to make a short call. Unfortunately, the mobile slips out of your hands and breaks into three pieces. What do you say?
You say:

Situation 3: A Book
You have been working on your master's thesis and you need a book that a professor borrowed from the library six months ago but has not yet returned. You have never met the professor but you urgently need the book. Go and ask the professor if he/she can lend it to you.
You say:

Situation 4: A Lost Book
You borrow a book from one of your teachers at university because you need it for your term paper. The term is over and you realize you have lost the book. What do you say to the teacher?
You say:

Situation 5: Switching off the light
You are about to give a PowerPoint presentation in one of your classes at university. The light switch is at the far end of the room and one of your classmates is standing by it. Ask him/her to turn the light off.
You say:

Situation 6: Coffee Spilt on a Friend
You work in a café. You are serving your friends who have dropped in. You trip over your own feet and spill some coffee on one of your friends. What do you say?
You say:

Situation 7: A Car
You are walking to your car and you can see somebody you do not know parking in such a way that his/her car is blocking your way out of the parking space. Go and ask him/her to move his/her car.
You say:

Situation 8: A Crashed Car
You are parking your car and bump into another, stationary, car. The driver of the car gets out and starts to approach you. What do you say to him/her?
You say:

Situation 9: A Questionnaire
You need to do research for your thesis, and this means getting a sample of twenty people to fill in a questionnaire five pages long. You have decided to ask your classmates to fill it in for you. You come to the classroom and ask them for it.
You say:

Situation 10: A Lost USB Flash Drive
You need to do research for your thesis and this means getting a sample of twenty people to fill in a questionnaire five pages long. Your classmates agree to come to the faculty on Friday afternoon to fill it in, but you lose your USB flash drive with the questionnaire and cannot print it out. What do you tell them?
You say: