

# TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF MODIFIERS FOR THE SPEECH ACT OF REQUESTING: A SOCIO-PRAGMATIC APPROACH<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *The purpose of this paper is to propose a functional typology of peripheral modification devices (i.e. optional elements that serve to soften or intensify the impositive nature of requests) from a socio-pragmatic approach. To that end, we will first provide a definition of these particular devices by explaining the difference between internal and external modifiers, as well as highlighting which is the purpose in using these devices. Second, we will review in detail previous research conducted on these elements by examining studies from both the cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics perspectives. Third, we will present the typology we have elaborated on the basis of these studies, as well as the analysis of EFL learners' oral production data. Finally, several pedagogical implications will be suggested concerning the integration of our proposed typology in the foreign language classroom with the aim to foster learners' pragmatic competence as far as requestive behaviour is concerned.*

**KEYWORDS.** *Requests, peripheral modification devices, interlanguage pragmatics*

**RESUMEN.** *El propósito de este artículo es el de proponer una taxonomía de elementos de mitigación, es decir, elementos opcionales que sirven para suavizar o intensificar la naturaleza impositiva de las peticiones. Para llevar a cabo este propósito, se presentará en primer lugar la definición de estos marcadores explicando la diferencia que existe entre mitigadores internos y externos. Así mismo, también se señalará cuál es la función pragmática de dichos elementos. En segundo lugar, se revisará en profundidad la investigación que se ha llevado a cabo sobre estos elementos de mitigación examinando tanto estudios del ámbito de la pragmática intercultural como de la pragmática del interlenguaje. En tercer lugar, se presentará la tipología que hemos elaborado en base a estos estudios, y el análisis de la producción oral de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. Por último, se comentarán brevemente algunas de las implicaciones pedagógicas relacionadas con la inclusión de dicha tipología en el aula de lenguas extranjeras con la finalidad de desarrollar la competencia pragmática de los estudiantes al mitigar peticiones.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE.** *Peticiones, elementos de mitigación, pragmática de la interlengua*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The speech act of requesting has been widely examined in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) research. Considering Searle's (1969, 1976) classification of illocutionary acts (i.e., representatives, directives, expressives, commissives and declarations), it can be claimed that requests fall under the second category, that of directives, which has been regarded as "attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something" (Searle 1979: 13). More specifically, Trosborg (1995: 187) defines the speech act of requesting as "an illocutionary

act whereby a speaker (requester) conveys to a hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act which is for the benefit of the speaker". Taking this fact into account, that is, the speaker imposes and exerts his/her influence over the hearer in order to obtain his/her intentions, the speech act of requesting has been considered as an impositive exhortative act (Haverkate 1984), and one of the most face-threatening speech acts according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory.

Given the impositive face-threatening nature of this speech act, the speaker may mitigate it by employing particular modification devices that soften his/her requests when invading the hearer's territory. Therefore, having knowledge of these devices would increase the speaker's use of appropriate requests in different contextual situations to a great extent, which in turn would contribute to improve his/her overall pragmatic competence in the target language. In fact, existing descriptions of this particular speech act differentiate two main subcomponents: the request head act, and those peripheral modification devices that accompany it. However, as Hassall (2001) points out, most of the studies that have examined the performance of requests by second language learners have focused on the particular linguistic strategies necessary to convey the request act itself, thus providing only a partial account of learners' actual request performance. Therefore, in order to have a more complete picture of their total request performance, there is a need to pay more close attention to whether learners modify their requests, and which modifiers they employ to accompany this speech act. To that end, we need to be aware of the wide range of modification items employed with the speech act of requesting which have already been included in several classifications (House and Kasper 1981; Trosborg 1995; Hill 1997; Achiba 2003). Nevertheless, we would argue in the present paper that such classifications are based on grammatical and syntactical considerations when defining and categorising these modifiers without paying attention to more interactional and contextual factors that play an important

role in performing appropriate requests. In order to account for this fact, the purpose of this paper is to propose a functional typology of peripheral modification devices from a pragmatic approach. Such a typology will be described after defining the concept of these modifiers, and reviewing the research that has already been conducted.

## 2. DEFINING THE PERIPHERAL MODIFICATION DEVICES

### 2.1. *Concept*

Modification devices are peripheral elements that accompany the head of a speech act. As has been previously mentioned and focusing on the speech act of requesting, Trosborg (1995), Sifianou (1999), Márquez Reiter (2000), and Safont (2005) among others, have claimed that requests consist of two parts, (i) the core request or head act, and (ii) the peripheral elements. On the one hand, the head act is the main utterance which has the function of requesting and can stand by itself. On the other hand, the peripheral elements are additional items which may follow and/or precede the request head act. They do not change the propositional content of the request head act, but rather serve to either mitigate or aggravate its force.

These peripheral modification elements can be distributed into two groups: (i) internal modification, and (ii) external modification. According to Sifianou (1999: 157-158), the former refers to those linguistic elements that appear within the same request head act (see Example 1), whereas the latter concerns those devices that occur in the immediate linguistic context surrounding the request head act (see Example 2).

Example (1):

- Could you *possibly* lend me your car to get to the airport?

Example (2):

- *I've missed the train to get to the airport and my plane leaves in one hour. Could you lend me your car?*

The use and classification of these peripheral modification elements into two types has been regarded as a *universal phenomenon* of language use (Nikula 1996: 22; Hill 1997: 62). Therefore, the occurrence of these optional elements when making a request appears in all languages. However, this does not mean that the same “rules” apply to their use in all situations, since the influence of the *context* is crucial for the appropriate use and interpretation of these modifying devices.

## *2.2 Purpose and Function*

The use of peripheral modification devices with directive face-threatening speech acts, such as requests, serves to vary the politeness degree involved when performing this particular speech act, as well as to decrease or intensify the degree of imposition of the request. Thus, the ability to use these elements appropriately is one aspect of pragmatic proficiency, which according to Nikula (1996: 29), refers to “speakers’ ability to use language not only correctly as far as grammar and vocabulary are concerned but also appropriately, so that language use fits the social situation in which it is being used”.

In order to achieve this appropriate use of the language when employing modifying devices, speakers need to master both knowledge of the means which they can use to weaken or strengthen the force of their message, that is *linguistic knowledge*, and knowledge of which particular means are likely to be the most successful for a given situation, that is *socio-cultural* and *context knowledge* (Nikula 1996; Sifianou 1999). In other words, the speaker will have to choose among the wide range of language choices that are available to him/her during the act of requesting, and s/he may also need to consider other factors. Those factors include (i) the topic of a given situation, (ii) the relationship between the participants in such

a situation, and (iii) the contextual constraints involved in that particular situation. Thus, requesters need to possess not only pragmalinguistic knowledge, but also sociopragmatic knowledge in order to perform an appropriate request (Leech 1983; Thomas 1983).

Considering these assumptions, Nikula (1996) mentions the contextual factors that affect the appropriate use of peripheral modification devices on the basis of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, and Brown and Yule's (1983) different types of discourse interaction. On the one hand, Brown and Levinson (1987) distinguish three main sociopragmatic variables or parameters that influence the choice of particular pragmalinguistic items as being appropriate. First, *power* refers to the relative power of the speaker with reference to the hearer (e.g. boss-employee, teacher-student, mother-son). Therefore, those who are in a position of lower power, such as the employee, the student or the son, will need to employ modification devices when making a request to those of a higher position, that is the boss, the teacher or the mother, so that they soften the impositive nature of their requests. Second, *social distance* involves the degree of familiarity between interlocutors (e.g. close friends versus two strangers). Thus, those who are strangers will employ more modification devices than those who know each other well. As Nikula (1996: 27) points out, "an act which is likely to be non-risky among friends and can thus be performed directly (e.g. request for a cigarette) may be much more risky among strangers and require use of modifying devices and other politeness strategies to be successfully accomplished". Third, *ranking of imposition* is related to the type of imposition the speaker is forcing upon the hearer. Put it more simply, it concerns how great it is the request to be made (e.g. asking for a pen versus asking for a huge amount of money). Therefore, a requester who is asking someone for a huge amount of money will use modification devices to soften his/her impositive request so that such request may be accomplished.

On the other hand, Brown and Yule (1983) distinguish two types of interaction that may

influence the use (or not use) of these peripheral modification devices, that is, an interaction (i) for *transactional* purposes, i.e. transmitting information, or (ii) for *interactional* purposes, i.e. making and maintaining relationships. In the first case, the request can be direct with no use of modification devices, since the main result of the request act does not threaten the hearer's face (e.g. a surgeon's direct and unmodified orders to a nurse during an operation). In the second type of interaction, the request is usually modified as it may exert an impositive force on the hearer (e.g. a conversation between neighbours).

To sum up, the appropriate use of peripheral modification devices is of paramount importance when making a request, since (i) it reflects politeness as well as the face-threatening nature of the directive speech act of requesting, and (ii) it depends on the contextual factors given in a particular situation.

### 3. RESEARCH ON PERIPHERAL MODIFICATION DEVICES

As previously mentioned, most of the ILP research dealing with the speech act of requesting has focused on the linguistic realisations of the request head act (Scarcella 1979; Walters 1979; Schmidt 1983; Baba and Lian 1992; Ellis 1992; Cohen and Olshtain 1993; García 1993; Weizman 1993; Francis 1997; Ohta 1997; Takahashi and DuFon 1989; Svanes 1992; Trosborg 1995; Zhang 1995; Takahashi 1996; Hill 1997; Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei 1998; Rinnert 1999; Rinnert and Kobayashi 1999; Li 2000; Rose 1999; 2000; Cook and Liddicoat 2002; Warga 2002; Achiba 2003; Barron 2003; Hassall 2003). In contrast, the studies that have examined learners' use of internal and external modification devices in both second and foreign language contexts are more limited (Kasper 1981; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1986; House and Kasper 1987; Faerch and Kasper 1989; Ellis 1992; Trosborg 1995; Hill 1997; Rose 2000; Hassall 2001; Achiba 2003; Barron 2003; Kobayashi and Rinnert 2003; Schauer 2004). Given the importance of these studies for the present paper, a detailed

description of this research is in turn.<sup>2</sup>

One of the first studies that examined modification devices in requesting refers to Kasper's (1981) investigation, which involved three groups of participants, namely German native speakers (NSs), English NSs and German learners of English. The author compared the participants' requests which were elicited in role-plays and found that in overall, learners made less mitigated requests than the NSs counterparts. More specifically, they used less internal modification than NSs (e.g. *downtoners* were employed in less frequency, and *consultative devices* were not employed at all), with the exception of *hesitators*, which were employed with a mitigating effect on particular utterances. Regarding external modification, it was found that learners employed the same amount as NSs and, in particular, *grounders* were employed with the same frequency, whereas *preparators* were overused.

Using a different data elicitation method, that of a Discourse Completion Test (DCT), Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986) examined the request formulations and modifications by NSs and non-native speakers (NNSs) of Hebrew. Results revealed no significant differences between their amount and type of internal modifications, whereas the opposite findings were found regarding external modifications. In fact, the group of learners overemployed external modifiers, particularly the type of *grounders*, and this was the reason why learners' utterances were longer than those of the NSs. This fact of providing more information than is necessary by using "too many words" created a "verbosity" effect which was regarded as inappropriate and, consequently, resulted in pragmatic failure on the part of the group of learners.

Given the different results found in the two previous studies as far as NNSs' use of both internal and external modification devices, which may have been due to the data collection instrument employed (i.e. oral versus written data elicitation method), House and Kasper (1987) used another DCT to compare the requests employed by German and Danish learners

of English with those by English, German and Danish NSs. Regarding internal modification, findings showed that both groups of learners employed less internal modifiers than the NSs' groups, a result which was in line with Kasper's (1981) abovementioned study. As far as external modification is concerned, both groups of learners employed more external modifiers than the NSs, above all the type of *grounders*. The authors claimed that the high use of grounders may have been related to the fact that "it is psychologically most plausible to make the addressee understand the reason(s) behind a request" (House and Kasper 1987: 1281). Additionally, the overuse of external modifiers on the part of German learners resulted in long request utterances, which was similar to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1986) learners' requesting performance. House and Kasper (1987) argued that this result could have been derived from the written DCT data collected which, in contrast to the oral role-play data, may have provoked learners' need "to explicitize, justify and thereby counter-balance the face-threatening impact of their request, [a need that comes from their] insecure social status associated with the foreigner role" (House and Kasper 1987: 1285; quoted from Hill 1997: 55).

Using the same type of DCT as part of the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), Faerch and Kasper (1989) analysed the requests employed by Danish learners of English and German, and compared them with those produced by the NSs of both languages. Starting with internal modification, the authors found that learners underused *downtoners* (e.g. *possibly*), a result that was also found in Kasper's (1981) study, and overused the politeness marker *please* in both English and German. The authors claimed that learners' preference for the politeness marker could have been due to the fact that it has a "double function as illocutionary force indicator and transparent mitigator" (Faerch and Kasper 1989: 232). Moreover, the use of the politeness marker requires less pragmalinguistic competence on the part of the learners than the use of *downtoners*, and this may have also

been the reason why *downtoners* were employed to a lesser extent. Concerning the use of external modification, the type of *grounders* was again the most frequently employed type of external modifier by both learners and NSs, which was considered as “an efficient mitigating strategy”, since it reduces the threat to the addressee’s face (Faerch and Kasper 1989: 239). Finally, when comparing the amount of internal and external modification devices, the authors pointed a preference for internal over external modifiers in both groups of participants, that is NSs and NNSs. According to Faerch and Kasper (1989: 242), this could be due to the fact that “internal modification is an obligatory choice, [while] external modification [is] an optional choice”.

Danish learners of English were also the participants in Trosborg’s (1995) study. The author compared three groups of learners, who differed in their age and number of years studying English. The author employed role-plays, which varied along the two sociopragmatic factors of dominance and social distance, to elicit learners’ high imposition requests, and compared their performance with that of NSs of English. With respect to internal modification, results showed that learners underused the number of internal modifiers. In particular, the type of *downtoners* (e.g. *probably*) was the most frequent type of mitigator used by NSs, although learners made a very low use of them, similar to the findings obtained by Kasper (1981) and Faerch and Kasper (1989). The type of internal modifier that was employed most frequently was that of *hesitators* in line with Kasper (1981). However, in contrast to the overuse of the politeness marker *please* found in Faerch and Kasper’s (1989) study, learners in Trosborg’s (1995) used it infrequently, and the NSs did not use it at all. As the author pointed out, this may have been due to the fact that the use of *please* is specifically required for certain requests, which were not elicited in the situations employed in her role-plays.<sup>3</sup> As far as external modification is concerned, Trosborg (1995) also found that the three groups of learners employed significantly less external modifiers than the NSs. More

specifically, the author examined particular modifiers pointing out that NSs considerably used more *preparators*, *disarmers*, *sweeteners* and *cost minimizers* than the groups of learners. Regarding the *grounder*, and in spite of the fact that it was the most frequent type of external modification employed for all groups, the NSs still used them approximately three times more than the learners. Unlike Faerch and Kasper (1989), who found that their Danish learners overused external modifiers, Trosborg (1995) found in overall that the three groups of learners underused both internal and external modifiers when compared to her NS control group.

In Hill's (1997) study, which involved three groups of Japanese learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) representing three proficiency levels, similar results were obtained, as learners underused both internal and external modifiers when compared to the NSs' requesting performance in a written DCT. This initial underuse was attributed to lack of linguistic means, since their use of both types of modification devices improved as proficiency level increased thus indicating a clear developmental trend for request modifiers. More specifically, and focusing on internal modification, results showed that an overuse of the politeness marker *please* was found in the three groups of learners in comparison with the NS group. This use decreased considerably with the group of advanced level learners, which in addition showed a development in the positioning of this politeness marker within the request act, thus approximating to the NS norm. The same developmental pattern was not found however for the *downtoners* (e.g. *perhaps*, *possibly*), which in line with previous studies by Kasper (1981), Faerch and Kasper (1989) and Trosborg (1995), was the most frequent type of mitigator used by NSs and the less one employed by the learners. Hill (1997: 138) argued that the underuse of this type of internal modifier by his Japanese participants could have been caused by L1 interference. Regarding external modification, the use of *grounders* was again the most frequently type of supportive move employed by all groups,

followed by *preparators*. Additionally, a clear development to the NS norm was found for the use of *grounders*, since the advanced learners and NSs used almost the same amount of this type of external modifiers.

The participants in Kobayashi and Rinnert's (2003) study also consisted of Japanese EFL learners distributed into two groups according to their proficiency level (i.e. high versus low). Their performance on two role-plays, which elicited high and low imposition requests, was compared to naturally occurring data produced by Japanese and English NSs. After analysing the NSs' request sequences, it was found that the higher imposition requests included more supportive moves and mitigating strategies than the lower imposition requests. Regarding learners' performance, results indicated that although learners from both groups employed *preparators*, *grounders* and *pre-conditions* to mitigate their requests, only those from a high proficiency level used *disarmers* and *imposition minimizers*. In this sense, the authors (2003: 169) reported that "the higher proficiency learners used a greater number and variety of supportive moves than the lower proficiency groups, particularly in the high imposition situation". This fact indicated that the higher proficient group of learners approximated more to NSs norms, whose higher imposition requests included a high amount of *grounders* and *mitigators*. Additionally, the role-plays performed by this group of learners contained more elaborated negotiations and more words, which resulted in long pre-request sequences than those found in the lower proficiency learners' role-plays. According to Kobayashi and Rinnert (2003: 171), this finding could indicate a developmental stage in learners' acquisition of target pragmatic norms, since the high proficient learners, and only very few of the lower proficiency learners, employed a "verbosity" strategy by giving more explicit and detailed information in order to support their imposing requests.

Whereas Kobayashi and Rinnert (2003) pointed out that the use of long utterances supporting their requests was a sign of developmental trend observed in the higher

proficiency participants, Hassall (2001) reported that the “verbosity” effect found in the *grounders* produced by his Australian adult learners of Indonesian was sometimes regarded as inappropriate, as too much information seemed redundant and overexplicit. The author compared the requests produced by this group of learners in interactive oral role-plays with those employed by a group of Indonesian NSs. Concerning internal modification, it was found that learners rarely used this type of modifiers, which seemed to have been due to the fact that adding this type of modifiers to a bare head act is inherently difficult for learners as it involves the use of a more complex pragmalinguistic structure (Hassall 2001: 271; see also Faerch and Kasper 1989 on this point). In contrast, they employed supportive moves on the majority of their requests and, indeed, more often than the group of NSs. This finding also supported previous studies that found learners’ preference for external modifiers, and especially the type of *grounders*, which may have been due to the fact that they are more explicit in their politeness function (Faerch and Kasper 1989). However, Hassall (2001) also mentioned that the high use of *grounders* employed by his learners in oral role-plays,<sup>4</sup> thus resulting in excessively long supportive moves, may have been related to an artefact of the elicitation method, since they mainly consisted of information that appeared in the role-play cue.

Contrary to the participants taking part in the studies above, which mainly included university and adult learners, Ellis (1992) and Achiba (2003) examined children’s pragmatic development in requests. In Ellis’ (1992) study, the participants included two beginner level learners of English (aged 10 and 11), who had immigrated to Great Britain. The author analysed their directives over a number of school terms in a classroom setting, and found that their initial requests were characterised by propositional incompleteness. In fact, they used a high amount of direct requests with only a very few instances of internal or external modifications, which were restricted to the use of *please*, repetition and a few *grounders*.

This trend of using direct requests diminished considerably over time, and the use of conventionally indirect requests increased. Similar developmental stages concerning the acquisitional patterning of requests were observed by Achiba (2003). The author examined her seven-year-old daughter's requesting behaviour in English during her 17-month stay in Australia. At the beginning of the study, the child mainly used direct requests for goods, similar to Ellis' (1992) learners, whereas an increase of conventionally indirect strategies was observed from week 13 onwards. Regarding the use of modification devices, a steady developmental pattern was observed, since at the beginning the child did not know how to modify requests and merely repeated herself or employed a limited number of internal modification devices (i.e. *lexical/phrasal modifiers*). Over time, she significantly increased the use of *toners*, *reasons*, and *please*. In fact, Achiba (2003: 147) pointed out that "reasons [i.e. *grounders*] were the most frequently selected means of all the support moves", which seems to support findings obtained in previous studies discussed above which involved adult learners (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1986; House and Kasper 1987; Faerch and Kasper 1989; Trosborg 1995).

In line with the studies conducted by Ellis (1992) and Achiba (2003), Rose (2000) also found that his higher level proficiency groups of pre-adolescent Cantonese EFL learners decreased their use of direct requests when compared to the lower groups, while their number of conventionally indirect strategies increased at the same time. As far as their use of modification devices is concerned, it was found that only a minimal use of supportive moves, which mainly consisted of *grounders*, was employed.

Adopting a different perspective, that of the "study abroad context", but also examining learners' developmental stages, Barron's (2003) longitudinal investigation involved a group of Irish learners of German, who spent a year abroad studying in Germany, and two groups of NSs (German and English). The author compared the requests employed by both groups on

their performance in different instruments, namely DCTs, written free discourse completion tasks (FDCTs), metapragmatic assessment questionnaires and role-plays.<sup>5</sup> Results showed a clear developmental pattern of learners' requesting behaviour over time. In fact, regarding their use of modification devices,<sup>6</sup> Barron (2003) found that at the beginning of the study learners underused *downtoners*, in line with Kasper (1981), Faerch and Kasper (1989) and Trosborg (1995), while they overused the politeness marker *bitte* (*please*), similar to Faerch and Kasper's (1989) and Hill's (1997) studies. This pattern changed considerably over time, since learners increased their use of *downtoners* towards the NS norm, as well as decreased their high use of *bitte* (*please*). Moreover, focusing specifically on the positioning of this politeness marker, it was observed that over time learners approximated the NSs' preference by using it in an embedded position rather than extrasententially (see also Hill 1997), which also indicated an increase in learners' pragmatic competence.

Similar to Barron's (2003) study, Schauer (2004) also conducted a longitudinal investigation by focusing on a group of German learners of English studying at a British university during one academic year. The request modifiers produced by this group of learners, which were elicited in an oral mode by a Multimedia Elicitation Task (MET), were compared to those employed by a control group of English NSs. Regarding external modification, it was found that learners used more external modifiers than the NS group. This finding was in line with previous research that also reported a high use of external modification on the part of learners, thus causing a "verbosity" effect (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1986; House and Kasper 1987; Hassall 2001). Schauer (2004: 267) claimed that a possible reason for learners' overuse of supportive moves may have been related to the conditions of the data elicitation procedure, which could have been perceived as similar to an exam situation and, consequently, may have provoked learners' deliberate elaboration of their requests. With respect to internal modification, results showed that some modifiers, namely

the politeness marker, *downtoner*, *consultative device*, *understater*, and *past tense modal*, were used by both learners and NSs, whereas others such as *tag question* and *negation* did not appear in the learners' data either at the beginning or at the end of their stay. In spite of this, the author concluded that an acquisitional pattern linked to the length of stay in the target community was observed in learners' overall requesting behaviour (see also Barron 2003).

### 3.1. *Summary*

From the previous review of research on learners' use of peripheral modification devices, several points can be raised. First, results regarding learners' use of more internal over external modification devices, or viceversa, cannot be generalised as their L1s and the target languages addressed in the different studies were not the same. In fact, whereas some studies reported learners' underuse of internal modification, and more specifically the *downtoner* (Kasper 1981; House and Kasper 1987; Faerch and Kasper 1989; Hassall 2001; Barron 2003), other studies, such as the one conducted by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986), claimed no differences in the amount of this type of modifiers between NSs and learners. Regarding external modification, most studies showed learners' overuse of this type of modifiers, and particularly *grounders* (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1986; House and Kasper 1987; Hassall 2001), although Kasper (1981) reported that learners and NSs used the same amount of these modifiers, and Trosborg (1995) stated that learners underused them when compared to NSs. Additionally, it has been observed that learners' proficiency level plays an important role, since more advanced learners used more modification devices than lower learners (Kobayashi and Rinnert 2003). However, it was also demonstrated that even advanced learners did not modify their requests as often as NSs did, or showed a "verbose" effect when employing supportive moves that included excessive and redundant information (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1986; House and Kasper 1987; Hassall 2001).

Second, it seems that the particular data elicitation method employed (i.e. oral versus written) may have an effect on the amount and type of modifiers produced. Third, some of the aforementioned studies have presented a classification of modification devices based on grammatical and syntactical considerations as they have differentiated syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders within the internal type (House and Kasper 1987; Faerch and Kasper 1989; Trosborg 1995; Hill 1997; Barron 2003; Schauer 2004).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, they have paid no attention to the importance of lying in interactional and contextual factors. Finally, none of the studies has focused on Spanish learners' of English learning how to request in an EFL setting. For this reason, the elaboration of a typology that addresses all these aspects, and that can be used to analyse and/or instruct Spanish EFL learners' use of modification devices when requesting is the focus of the next section.

#### 4. A TYPOLOGY OF PERIPHERAL MODIFICATION DEVICES

The following typology of peripheral modification devices that we present in this paper is based on research described in the previous section, particularly the studies by House and Kasper (1981), Trosborg (1995), Nikula (1996), Hill (1997), Sifianou (1999), Márquez Reiter (2000) and Achiba (2003). Additionally, the analysis of Spanish EFL learners' oral production data as far as their use of modification devices when requesting is concerned has also been taken into account (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006a, 2006b). Table 1 below shows our proposed typology of peripheral modification devices which, in line with previous research, has been divided into two types: internal modification and external modification.

TYPE	SUB-TYPE	EXAMPLE	
<b>Internal Modification</b>	Openers	- <i>Do you think</i> you could open the window? - <i>Would you mind</i> opening the window?	
	Softeners	Understatement	- Could you open the window <i>for a moment</i> ?
		Downtoner	- Could you <i>possibly</i> open the window?
		Hedge	- Could you <i>kind of</i> open the window?
	Intensifiers	- You <i>really</i> must open the window. - <i>I'm sure</i> you wouldn't mind opening the window.	
	Fillers	Hesitators	- <i>I er, erm, er</i> – <i>I wonder</i> if you could open the window
		Cajolers	- <i>You know, you see, I mean</i>
		Appealers	- <i>OK?, Right?, yeah</i>
		Attention-getters	- <i>Excuse me ...; Hello ...; Look ...; Tom, ...; Mr. Edwards ...; father ...</i>
	<b>External Modification</b>	Preparators	- <i>May I ask you a favour?</i> ... Could you open the window?
Grounders		- <i>It seems it is quite hot here.</i> Could you open the window?	
Disarmers		- <i>I hate bothering you but</i> could you open the window?	
Expanders		- Would you mind opening the window? ... <i>Once again, could you open the window?</i>	
Promise of reward		- Could you open the window? <i>If you open it, I promise to bring you to the cinema.</i>	
Please		- Would you mind opening the window, <i>please?</i>	

Table 1. Typology of peripheral modification devices in requests

#### 4.1 Internal modification

In order to classify the different sub-types of internal modifiers proposed in our typology, we have mainly followed Sifianou's (1999) description of this type of modification, rather than Trosborg's (1995) classification,<sup>8</sup> for two main reasons. On the one hand, Trosborg (1995) divides internal modification devices into *downgraders* and *upgraders* by

following House and Kasper's (1981) classification of modality markers. The *downgraders* refer to those modality markers which tone down the impact an utterance is likely to have on the hearer, whereas the *upgraders* have the opposite effect, that is increasing the impact of an utterance on the hearer. However, Sifianou (1999: 157) points out that in English "intensifying devices are rarely used with requests". Therefore, an extensive description of *downgraders* (or *softeners* as they are called in the typology we present), instead of *upgraders* (or *intensifiers*) will be provided. On the other hand, Trosborg (1995) further classifies *downgraders* into two sub-types by paying special attention to grammatical aspects when producing these modifiers: (i) syntactic downgraders, and (ii) lexical/phrasal downgraders. In contrast, Sifianou (1999) claims that not only linguistic and syntactic knowledge is required to modify a request appropriately, but also knowledge of the interactional and contextual factors that influence the realisation of a particular request.

Bearing these considerations in mind, four sub-types of internal modification are included in our typology, namely *openers*, *softeners*, *intensifiers*, and *fillers* (see Table 1). The first type, *openers*, refers to those opening words and expressions which look for the addressee's co-operation and modify the request as a whole (Sifianou 1999). The use of openers is a conventionalised way of introducing requests in English as they are associated with formality by means of softening the declarative illocutionary force of the sentence (Lakoff 1977). They can either initiate the request (Example 3) or be placed at the end (Example 4):

Example (3):

- *Do you think* you could open the window?

Example (4):

- Could you open the window, *do you think*?

Making these *openers* function as questions has also been considered by Trosborg (1995), who points out that questions are more polite than statements. Other examples of *openers* include: *would you mind ...?*, *I don't suppose ...*, and *I would be grateful ...*. The first example would be similar to Trosborg's (1995) lexical/phrasal downgrader of *consultative device*, the second example would refer to *negation*, and the third example to a *conditional clause*.<sup>9</sup> However, we have not regarded such a grammatical sub-classification but rather have left an open sub-type of *openers* on the basis of the assumptions previously stated and findings obtained from our analysis of EFL learners' oral production data (see Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006a, 2006b).

The second sub-type of internal modification consists of *softeners*,<sup>10</sup> which refer to those devices that serve to soften and mitigate the force of the request (Sifianou 1999).<sup>11</sup> Sifianou (1999) further distinguishes three types of softeners, namely diminutives, tag questions, and a variety of fixed expressions which she terms miscellaneous. Regarding the *diminutives*, the author claims that they are not very frequently used in English, in contrast to their high frequency in other languages, such as Greek (Sifianou 1999) or Uruguayan Spanish (Márquez Reiter 2000). For this reason, they have not been regarded in our proposed typology. In the same way, and although Sifianou (1999) claims that English requests can be often softened by *tag questions*, we have not considered these devices in the typology we present, since no instances of these elements appeared in the Spanish EFL data analysed (see Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006b). In contrast, we have included the third sub-type of softeners considered by Sifianou (1999), that of *miscellaneous*, which given their importance and high frequency in English, has been further divided it into three sub-types by following House and Kasper's (1981) and Trosborg's (1995) classifications:<sup>12</sup> (i) understatement, (ii) downtoner, and (iii) hedge. Whereas *understatement* includes a variety of fixed expressions, such as *a moment*, *a second* or *a little bit* (Example 5), *downtoners* involve a series of

adverbs (e.g. *possibly, just, simply, perhaps, rather, maybe*), which according to Sifianou (1999: 172) are used “to tentativize what speakers say, thus allowing them not to fully commit themselves to what they are saying” (Example 6). Finally, *hedges* have been defined as adverbials, such as *kind of, sort of, somehow, and so on, more or less* (Example 7), which are “used by the speakers when they wish to avoid a precise propositional specification” (Márquez Reiter 2000: 139).

Example (5):

- Could you open the window *for a moment*?

Example (6):

- Could you *possibly* open the window?

Example (7):

- Could you *kind of* open the window?

Moving to the third sub-type of internal modification proposed in our typology, that of *intensifiers*,<sup>13</sup> Sifianou (1999: 179) has described them as those modifiers that “aggravate the impact of the request indicating instances of impolite behaviour” (Example 8). Although House and Kasper (1981) and Trosborg (1995) have also sub-divided this type of internal modifiers into three sub-types, namely those of *adverbial intensifier* (e.g. *such, so, very, quite, really, terribly, awfully, absolutely*), *commitment upgrader* (e.g. *I’m sure, I’m certain, it’s obvious, surely, obviously*), and *lexical intensification* (e.g. *the hell, use of swear words*), we have decided to present only an open type of intensifiers. This decision has been made considering Sifianou’s (1999) assumptions about the fact that this type of internal modifier is rarely employed in English, a fact that has been supported by our analysis of Spanish EFL

learners' oral production data which illustrated that no instances of intensifiers were used in the role-plays eliciting request use (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006a).

Example (8):

- You *really* must open the window.

The last sub-type of internal modification devices refers to *fillers*, which are optional lexical items used by the speaker to fill in the gaps that occur during an interaction. Specifically, Sifianou (1999: 179) points out that the function of these devices is more socio-pragmatic than semantic, since they are “highly formulaic and mostly semantically void in that although they have a certain literal meaning, they do not retain it when used as fillers.” The most common ones employed with requests are those of (i) hesitators, (ii) cajolers, (iii) appealers, and (iv) attention-getters. *Hesitators* take place “when the speaker is uncertain of the impact of a request on the addressee” (Sifianou 1999: 179).<sup>14</sup> Thus, various means of hesitation may be used such as simple stuttering (e.g. *erm, er*), repetition, or a combination of the two (Example 9):

Example (9):

- I *er, erm, er* – I *wonder* if you could open the window.

The use of hesitators can be regarded as an important modification item which usually takes place in interactive situations that elicit the speakers' request use. In fact, a high use of this type of filler was reported by Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan (2006a, 2006b), who claimed that such a frequent use of hesitators could be attributed to learners' interactive oral performance in spontaneous role-plays. *Cajolers* were also found in Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan's (2006a, 2006b) studies, although to a lesser extent when compared to the use of

hesitators. Specifically, these items refer to addressee-orientated modifiers that function as “attempts by speakers to make things clearer for the addressees and invite them, at least metaphorically, to participate in the speech act” (Sifianou 1999: 180).<sup>15</sup> Examples of cajolers are expressions such as *you know*, *you see* and *I mean*. Other addressee-orientated modifiers are those of *appealers*, which are employed by the speaker at the end of a sentence to appeal to the addressee’s understanding and elicit consent (Sifianou 1999; Achiba 2003). Instances of *appealers* in English are *OK?*, *right?* and *yeah*,<sup>16</sup> the first two of which were found after analysing EFL learners’ oral request production data (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006a).

Finally, the speaker may also employ *attention-getters* to attract and alert the addressee before the actual request is made (Sifianou 1999; Achiba 2003). According to Sifianou (1999: 181), these devices include three main categories, namely those of formulaic entreaties (i.e. *excuse me*), formulaic greetings (i.e. *hello*), and imperative constructions (i.e. *look*, *listen*, *wait*). The analysis of the request data from the EFL learners’ performance in oral role-plays with respect to the use of this type of fillers (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006b) illustrated that learners used the three kinds of these categories to a considerable extent. Moreover, we have also regarded under this type of internal modifier the addressee’s name (e.g. *Tom ...*, *Mr. Edwards ...*), and what Hassall (2001) calls the kinship term of address (e.g. *father*, *mother*). In fact, Hassall (2001: 265) claims that the speaker’s use of this kinship term of address can have either a positive politeness function by showing some degree of intimacy when metaphorically including the addressee within the family of the speaker, or a negative politeness function by showing respect for the addressee in virtue of his/her position or age (Brown and Levinson 1987).

#### 4.2 External modification

With respect to the classification of the different sub-types of external modifiers

proposed in our typology, we have not followed the terminology employed by Sifianou (1999), who divided these modifiers into *commitment-seeking devices* and *reinforcing devices*. In contrast, we have preferred to adopt the terminology proposed by Trosborg (1995), Márquez Reiter (2000) and Achiba (2003), who considered all the different external modifiers at the same level, with the exception of *please*, which according to these authors was a type of internal rather than external modifier. Additionally, we have considered findings from our analysis of EFL learners' oral request production (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006a, 2006b), and in this sense, our typology comprises six sub-types of external modification devices, namely *preparators*, *grounders*, *disarmers*, *expanders*, *promise of reward*, and *please* (see Table 1 above).

The first type, *preparators*, refers to those elements employed by the requester to prepare the addressee for the ensuing request (House and Kasper 1981; Trosborg 1995; Márquez Reiter 2000; Achiba 2003). Trosborg (1995) distinguishes different ways in which a requester can prepare his/her request, which include (i) preparing the content, (ii) preparing the speech act, (iii) checking on availability, and (iv) getting a pre-commitment. We are interested in the preparators included in the last category, which refer to the *commitment-seeking devices* proposed by Sifianou (1999), or the “pre-exchanges” mentioned by Edmonson (1981), since these are the ones which have been found in our EFL learners' oral production data (see Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006a, 2006b). As Sifianou (1999: 183) claims, when the requester employs this type of preparators, or pre-requests, they do not tell the addressee the content of his/her request, but oblige the addressee to respond either positively or negatively (Example 10).

Example (10):

- *May I ask you a favour?*

Requesters do not usually expect negative responses, but rather positive responses that will place him/her in a safe position to make the request and increase expectations that this will be successful. Other examples of preparators are *Would you mind doing me a favour?*, *Would you help me out?* or *I wonder if you'd give me a hand* (Trosborg 1995: 217) and *I have to ask you a question* or *I would like to speak to you* (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006b).

The second sub-type of external modification is that of *grounders*, which consists of reasons and justifications for the request being made (House and Kasper 1981; Trosborg 1995; Márquez Reiter 2000; Achiba 2003). This type of external modifier has been widely employed by our EFL learners when compared to other external modifiers (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006a, 2006b). According to Sifianou (1999: 185), grounders are a type of *reinforcing devices*, which “contribute to a harmonious encounter in that the speaker, by giving reasons for a request, expects the addressee to be more understanding and willing to co-operate”. Moreover, Hassall (2001: 266) claims that providing reasons makes the request more polite, and can convey either positive or negative politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987). The former occurs when the requester assumes the addressee’s cooperation if he/she sees why such a request is necessary, whereas the latter takes place when the requester shows the addressee that he/she would not impose on him/her without a good reason. This type of external modifier can either precede (Example 11) or follow (Example 12) the request head act.

Example (11):

- *It seems it is quite hot here. Could you open the window?*

Example (12):

- *Could you open the window? It seems it is quite hot here.*

The third sub-type of external modification refers to *disarmers*, which according to Sifianou (1999) are also a type of *reinforcing devices*. These elements, which have also been

found in our analysis of EFL learners' oral production data (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006a), consist of external modifying devices that aim at disarming the addressee from the possibility of a refusal. Put it another way, when a requester employs a disarmer, he/she tries to remove any potential objections the addressee might raise upon being confronted with the request (Márquez Reiter 2000). As Sifianou (1999: 187) points out, this particular type of external modifier may be expressed as “complimenting phrases, entreaties, or formulaic promises, and, in general, phrases which express the speakers' awareness and concern that the requests might be an imposition on the addressees” (see Example 13).

Example (13):

- *I hate bothering you but could you open the window?*

The fourth sub-type of external modifiers proposed in our typology, that of *expanders*, has been included on the basis of Sifianou's (1999) classification, since this is the only author who mentions this kind of modifier, as well as its occurrence in our EFL request data collection (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006a, 2006b). Expanders are devices which serve to indicate tentativeness, and are related to repetition. More specifically, Sifianou (1999: 188) claims that when employing this type of external modification, “speakers can repeat their words identically, expand on them by adding further elements, or use synonymous expressions”. Usual expressions employed as expanders are those of *have I told you this before?* or *once again* (see Example 14). Additionally, it has been claimed that expansion is a feature that takes place in consecutive turns rather than single acts, and that can be used to stress agreement between interactants.

Example (14):

- *Would you mind opening the window? ... Once again, could you open the window.*

Moving to the fifth sub-type of external modification devices included in our proposed typology, it needs to be mentioned that we had initially considered the two of *cost minimizing* and *promise of reward* presented by Trosborg (1995: 218). However, after analysing Spanish EFL oral requests and finding no instances of the first type (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006a, 2006b), we decided to include only the type of *promise of reward*, which has also been regarded by Márquez Reiter (2000). Specifically, this modifier consists in offering the addressee a reward which will be given upon fulfilment of the request. Thus, it is employed by the speaker to make such request more attractive to the addressee in order to increase its compliance (Trosborg 1995; Márquez Reiter 2000) (see Example 15).

Example (15):

- Could you open the window? *If you open it, I promise to bring you to the cinema.*

Finally, the last sub-type of external modifiers presented in our typology is the politeness marker *please*, whose frequency of use in our EFL learners' oral production data has been very high (see Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006a, 2006b). In contrast to the classifications proposed by House and Kasper (1981), Trosborg (1995) and Achiba (2003), which regards this politeness marker as an internal lexical modifier, we have followed Sifianou's (1999) assumptions of including this particle as another external modification device. According to Sifianou (1999: 189), *please* is "possibly the commonest and most significant modifier in requests", which signals politeness by softening the imposition carried out by this speech act, and elicits cooperative behaviour from the addressee. Apart from this main function, Trosborg (1995: 258-259) and Achiba (2003: 134) also point out that the addition of *please* to an utterance "explicitly and literally marks the primary illocutionary point of the utterance as a directive" (Searle 1975: 68). Thus, the unique presence of *please* in a given utterance has the role of marking such utterance as a directive and, consequently, it

can be specifically used as “a request marker”. In addition to these two functions, Achiba (2003: 134) further states that *please* can be also used (i) to beg for cooperative behaviour from the addressee (i.e. in an emphatic way); and (ii) to emphasise what a speaker says.

Given the multifunctionality of the politeness marker *please*, Safont (2005) highlights the importance of treating it as a sole entity. Moreover, it is the only modifying device, either internal or external, which can substitute a whole utterance. Therefore, *please* is examined in our proposed typology as a unique modification device, which can be employed at the beginning (Example 16) or at the end (Example 17) of the request act. Furthermore, it can also appear in an embedded position, similar to most of the *downtoners* (i.e. a type of internal modification device) described in the previous section (Example 18), or alone, when substituting a whole utterance (Example 19).

Example (16):

- *Please*, open the window.

Example (17):

- Would you mind opening the window, *please*?

Example (18):

- Could you *please* open the window?

Example (19):

A. Can you open the window?

B. ... Mm ... I have to ...

A. *Please* ↗

## 5. CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this paper has been the description of a suggested typology of peripheral modification devices in requests from a socio-pragmatic perspective. Such a typology has included both internal and external modifiers, and it has been drawn up on the basis of previous research conducted adopting cross-cultural and ILP perspectives. The importance of using these optional devices when modifying the impositive nature of the speech act of requesting has been highlighted throughout the paper.

We understand request acts as being made of two main components, namely those of the request head act and the modification items that accompany it. Research has mainly focused on those linguistic realisations involved in the production of the request head act, and various taxonomies have been created and adapted for that purpose (House and Kasper 1981; Trosborg 1995; Achiba 2003). However, less attention has been paid to the peripheral modification items accompanying the request head act, thus providing a partial account on requestive behaviour. As presented in this paper, research on the use of those modifiers points to the absence or scant presence of these items in learners' requestive behaviour as compared to the NSs' use. Moreover, previous studies acknowledge the existing mismatch between the learners' grammatical and pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999), as we find advanced learners who may not use the language appropriately. Due to this fact, there is an interest for promoting pragmatic competence of language learners with a view to foster communicative competence in turn. According to some authors (Ellis 1992; Hill 1997; Barron 2003), the presence of peripheral modification devices in making requests may be considered as an indicator of pragmatic development. Therefore, further research on the use and acquisition of these modifiers may contribute to improve the learners' pragmatic competence in the target language, which would then affect their overall communicative competence.

In this respect, we have signalled out the fact that studies examining the use of request modifiers present contradictory findings, which relate to (i) the type of modifier employed, (ii) the learners' proficiency level in the target language, and (iii) the type of elicitation method used. We have attributed such results to the fact that learners in the studies mentioned before did not share their L1, and as reported by Safont (2005), the learners' mother tongue and any additional languages known may play a role in the development of their pragmatic competence in the target language. In fact, results from Safont's study (2005) show that bilingualism influenced the learners' use of request modification items in a third language. We may then assume that further investigation adopting a systematic pattern for the analysis of request modifiers is needed in order to confirm or contradict findings from existing and ongoing research. In this line, we have suggested our typology, which may not only serve for the purposes of investigation but it may also bear some pedagogical implications.

The teaching of pragmatics in the foreign language classroom is now considered as an instance of promoting language learners' communication (Rose and Kasper 2001; Martínez-Flor, Usó-Juan and Fernández-Guerra 2003; Alcón and Martínez-Flor 2005). If our aim is to implement the use and understanding of request acts in the foreign language classroom, we should consider requestive behaviour in a systemised way. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we should merely focus on traditional form-focused typologies, as has been the case with most previous studies dealing with modifiers (Trosborg 1995; Sifianou 1999). Instead, we should consider findings from previous studies in the field of second language acquisition and ILP and apply them to particular aspects of the situation we are dealing with, like those of contextual features, participants relationship or motivation. Following this view, we have suggested a taxonomy of peripheral modification items from a socio-pragmatic perspective.

We believe that the integration of such a typology in the foreign language classroom

(i.e. a context where learners lack exposure to authentic pragmatic input and have few opportunities to practice the target language) might be convenient to foster learners' pragmatic awareness of requesting. Consequently, by employing such a typology in future investigations concerning learners' use of requests in foreign language contexts, a more complete picture of learners' full requesting behaviour could be examined. Additionally, the elaboration of tasks that allow learners to practice these modification devices in different contextual situations that vary along the three sociopragmatic variables proposed in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, namely power, social distance and ranking of imposition, would raise their pragmatic awareness towards the appropriate use of these devices.

## 6. NOTES

1. This study is part of a research project funded by (a) the Spanish Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia (HUM2004-04435/FILO), co-funded by FEDER, and (b) Fundació Universitat Jaume I and Caixa Castelló-Bancaixa (P1.1B2004-34).
2. The studies included in this section belong to both the cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics perspectives.
3. See Trosborg (1995: 258-259) for a detailed explanation on this point.
4. Same results regarding the high use of *grounders* have also been found in previous studies which employed written data elicitation methods (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1986; House and Kasper, 1987; Faerch and Kasper, 1989).
5. In addition to requests, offers and refusals of offers were also examined.
6. Barron (2003) did not examine external modification devices. The author only focused on internal modifiers, which were divided into syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders (similar to House and Kasper, 1987; Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Trosborg, 1995; Hill, 1997).
7. See also Yates (2000) for this type of classification.
8. We have focused specially on Trosborg's (1995) study in order to propose our typology, although as previously mentioned other researchers have also followed the same type of considerations for classifying internal modifiers.
9. These devices are also mentioned by House and Kasper (1981).
10. This type of modifiers has also been referred to as *downgraders* in other classifications (House and Kasper, 1981; Trosborg, 1995; Hill, 1997)
11. In fact, Sifianou (1999) includes this type of *softeners*, together with *intensifiers*, under what she calls *hedges*. However, for the purposes of our typology, we have decided to classify *softeners* and *intensifiers* as two independent types of internal modifiers.

12. These devices are also regarded by Nikula (1996), who refers to them as lexical-phrasal markers.
13. This type of modifiers has also been referred to as *upgraders* in other classifications (House and Kasper, 1981; Trosborg, 1995; Hill, 1997)
14. These devices are also mentioned by House and Kasper (1981) and Trosborg (1995).
15. *Cajolers* are also included in House and Kasper's (1981), Nikula's (1996) and Márquez Reiter's (2000) classifications.
16. Trosborg (1995) has referred to both *cajolers* and *appealers* as *interpersonal markers*.

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