



The pragmatic competence in Macedonian learners of German – an intercultural study on the example of speech act request

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Structure of the presentation:

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Description of the research project
- 3. Participants
- 4. Analysis (strategies, politeness marker “bitte”)
- 5. Results
- 6. Conclusion



Introduction

- ▶ The study presented in this article is a part of the project "The role of explicit Instruction in developing pragmatic competence in English and German as foreign languages", carried out at "Goce Delčev" University in Štip, R. Macedonia.
- ▶ It is an interlanguage study of how the Macedonian students of German formulate the speech act request with respect to strategy use, speech act modification and speech act perspective. Additionally, it compares non-native speaker to native speaker requests and investigates what makes non-native speaker requests sound inappropriate.

The aim of this study

- ▶ to describe and to analyze the speech act of request and its strategies in the interlanguage of the Macedonian learners of German and the German native speakers.
- ▶ This research focuses on the following topics:
 - realization of the speech act *request* in the interlanguage of Macedonian learners of German;
 - analysis of the components, such as: degree of familiarity, authority, social distance and power that are expressed by this speech act,
 - strategies expressed with this speech act;
 - the role of the politeness marker *bitte* in the expressions used by the Macedonian learners of German compared to those of the German native speakers.



Participants:

- ▶ The participants were 59 Macedonian students of German at B2 level, age 19 to 24, and 32 adult native speakers of German. Data were collected through Discourse completion test consisting of six scenarios with different contextual features. The classification of the request strategies is based on Blum-Kulka (1982) and House & Kasper (1989).

Table 1. Macedonian learners of German

Features	Type	Number
Gender	Female	51
	Male	8
Age	18	1
	20	46
	23	11
	30	1
Country of birth	Macedonia	59
Mother tongue	Macedonian	59
Residence (nearest major city within 30 km)	Štip	45
	Probistip	5
	Kocani	6
	Sveti Nikole	1
	And small villages in the surrounding	2
knowledge of other languages	English as first foreign language (8 years of instruction)	45
	Russian in primary school	7
	French in primary school	7
Stays abroad	previous stay in German-speaking countries	
	< 6 weeks	/
	≥6 weeks	49
	Other stays	10

Table 2. Native speakers of German (NSG)

Features	Type	Number
Gender	female	20
	male	12
Age	16 +	32
Country of birth	Germany	32
Mother tongue	German	32
residence (nearest major city within 30 km)	Schwerin (Berlin)	18
	Mölln	3
	Bamberg	2
	Gudow	2
	Zarrentin	1
	Dreilützow	2
	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	4
Knowledge of other languages	No data	/
Stays abroad	No data	/

Table 3: Contextual features of the scenarios

Situation	Contextual embedding	Authority	Social Distance	Degree of offence
Request				
S1.	Submit a project paper	+	+	middle
S2.	An invitation to give a lecture	+	+	high
S3.	Ask for a light	-	+	middle
S4.	Ask for a trip home	-	+	middle
S5.	Re-park the car	-	-	middle
S6.	Borrow money from a friend	-	-	high

Table 4. Request categories proposed by Blum-Kulka (1987, p. 133)

Descriptive category	Examples
➤ 1. Modus Ableitung (mood derivable)	<i>Räum die Küche auf!</i> <i>Parke dein Auto um.</i>
➤ 2. Performativ (performative)	<i>Ich bitte Sie, Ihr Auto umzuparken.</i>
➤ 3. Versterkt-Performativ (hedged performative)	<i>Ich möchte Sie bitten, Ihr Auto zu bewegen.</i>
➤ 4. Verpflichtungsfeststellung (obligation statement)	<i>Sie müssen Ihr Auto bewegen.</i>
➤ 5. Wunschfeststellung (want statement)	<i>Ich möchte mir die Küche aufräumen.</i> <i>Ich möchte, dass Sie das Auto umparken.</i>



➤ 6. Vorschlagsformel (suggestive formulae)

Wie wäre es mit der Aufräumung?

Warum kommst du nicht um den Mist wegzuräumen?

➤ 7. Vorbedingungsfrage (query preparatory)

Können Sie den Chaos in der Küche in Ordnung bringen?

Würden Sie bitte das Auto umparken?

➤ 8. Starke Andeutung (strong hints)

Wir haben die Küche in Chaos gelassen.

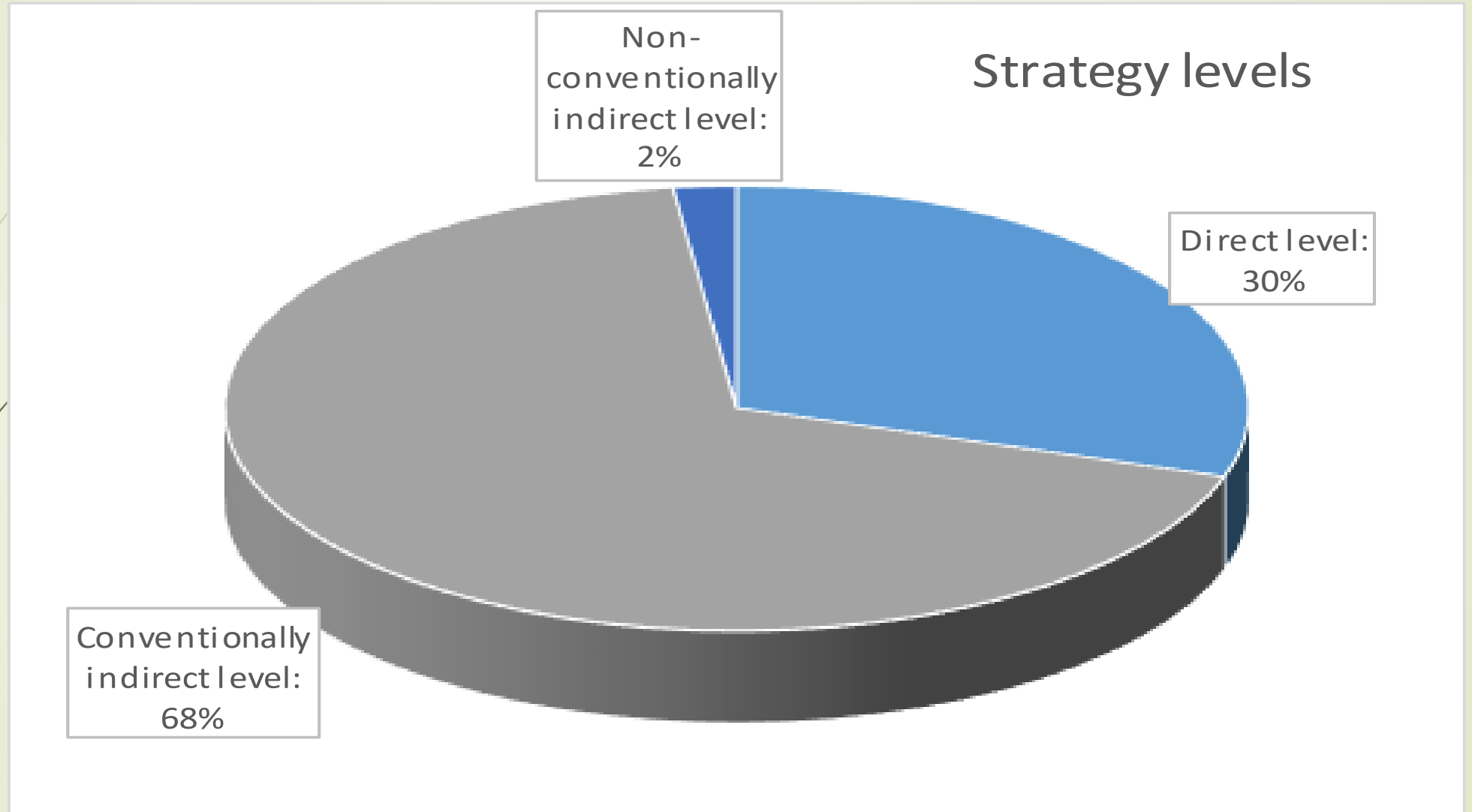
➤ 9. schwache Andeutung (mild hints)

Wir wollen hier keine Verdrängung (mit der Aufforderung/Bitte das Auto umzuparken).

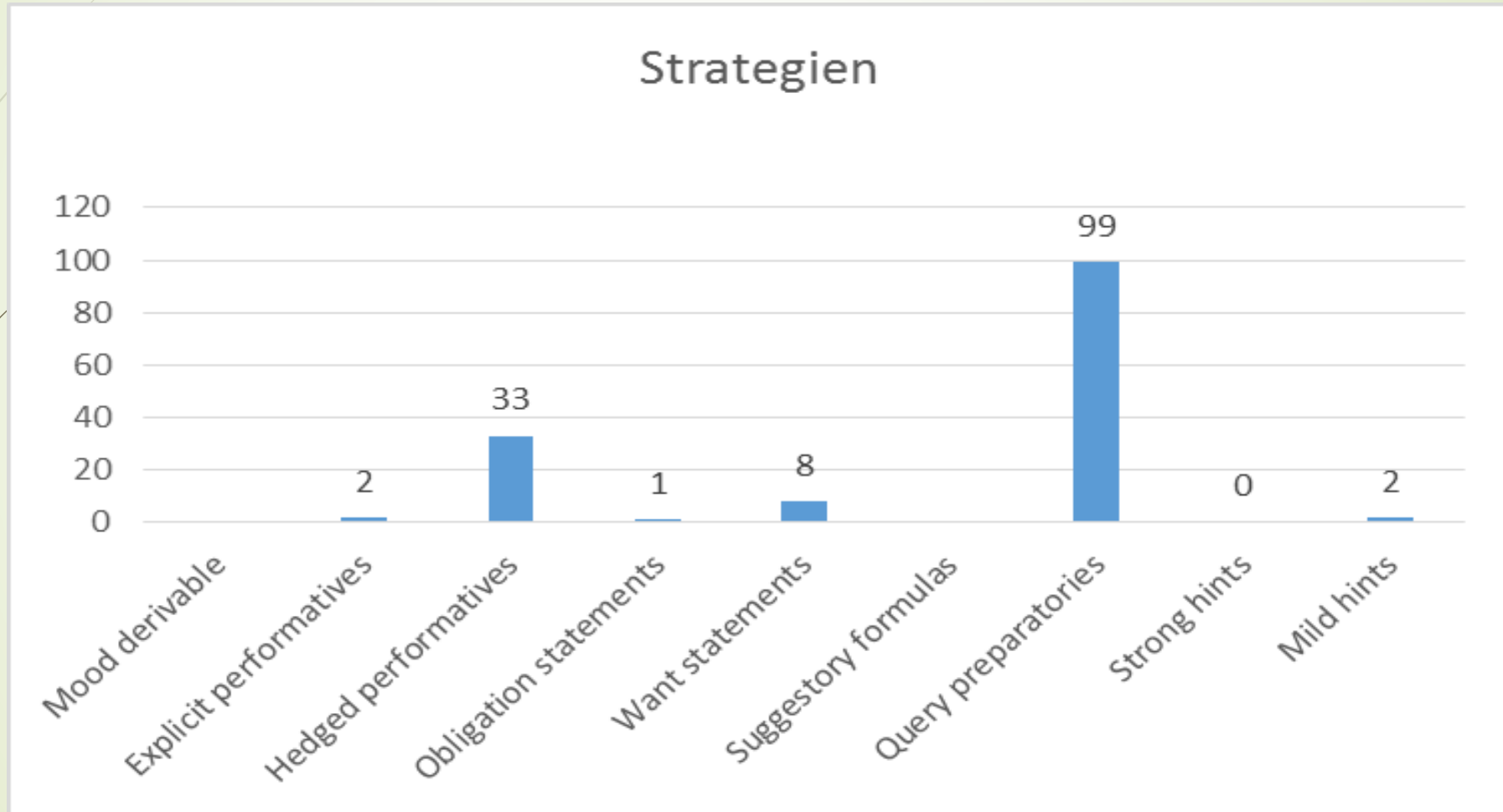
Table 5. Macedonian learners of German - strategies

Strategie	DCT 1-2 (formell)	DCT 3-4 (formell / informell)	DCT 5-6 (informell)	Total
Direkte Ebene (direct level):				
Ausdrücke in Befehlsform (<i>mood derivable</i>)	-	-	-	-
Explizite Performative (<i>explicit performatives</i>)	2 3,77%	-	-	2
Modifiziert performative Äußerungen (<i>hedged performatives</i>)	12 22,64%	9 21,95%	12 23,52%	33
Verpflichtende Akte (<i>obligation statements</i>)	1 1,86%	-	-	1
Aufforderungsakte in Form von Wünschen (<i>want statements</i>)	5 9,43%	3 7,31%	-	8
Konventionell-indirekte Ebene: (conventional-indirect level)				
Als Vorschlag formulierte Formeln (<i>suggestory formulas</i>)	-	-	-	-
Einleitende Fragen (<i>query preparatories</i>)	33 63,26%	27 65,85%	39 76,47%	99
Unkonventionell-indirekte Ebene: (Indirect level)				
Starker Hinweis (<i>strong hints</i>)	-	-	-	-
Milder Hinweis (<i>mild hints</i>)	-	2 4,87%	-	2

1. Pie Diagram - Strategy levels



► 1. Simple Bar Chart – Strategies





Results/MSG

- ▶ **MSG**
- ▶ 1. Conventional indirect level:
 - ▶ Query preparatories - 68,2%
- ▶ 2. direct strategy:
 - ▶ Hedged performatives - 22,7%
 - ▶ Strong hints - 0%
 - ▶ Sugestory formulas - 0%
 - ▶ Mood derivable - 0%

Table 6: German native speakers - strategies

Strategie	DCT 1-2 (formell)	DCT 3-4 (formell)	DCT 5-6 (formell / informell)	DCT 7-8 (formell / informell)	DCT 9-10 (informell)	DCT 11-12 (informell)	Total
Direkte Ebene: 21,98%							
Ausdrücke in Befehlsform (mood derivable)	1 6,25 %			1 6,67%	1 7,69%	5 33,33%	8
Explizite Performative (explicit performatives)							0
Modifiziert performative Äußerungen (hedged performatives)	5 31,25 %	1 7,69 %	2 10,53 %		1 7,69%	1 6,67%	10
Verpflichtende Akte (obligation statements)							0
Aufforderungsakte in Form von Wünschen (want statements)			1 5,26 %		1 7,69%		2
Konventionell-indirekte Ebene: 73, 63 %							
Als Vorschlag formulierte Formeln (suggestory formulas)	5 31,25%	5 38,46 %	3 15,79 %	5 33,33%	6 46,15%	4 26,67%	28
Einleitende Fragen (query preparatories)	5 31,25 %	7 53,85 %	9 47,37%	9 60%	4 30,77%	5 33,33%	39
Unkonventionell-indirekte Ebene: 4,39%							
Starker Hinweis (strong	-	-	4	-			4



Results/GNS


- ▶ GNS
- ▶ 1. Conventional indirect level :
 - ▶ Query preparatories – 42.8%
 - ▶ Suggestory formulas – 30.7%
- ▶ 2. direct strategy
 - ▶ Hedged performatives – 10.9%
- ▶ Mild hints 0%
- ▶ Explicit performatives 0%
- ▶ Obligation statement 0%

Table 7: Internal modifications - lexical

	DM	MGS
Abtönungspartikel (Downtoners)	<p>Ich könnte einfach nichts tun. ...könnte ich eventuell vorgehen? ...etwas krank. Wären Sie vielleicht so nett...</p> <p>***</p> <p>...ich habe es leider sehr eilig und nur ein einziges Teil in der Hand. (Intensivierung, Abschwächung, Begrenzung) <i>Es tut mir <u>wahnsinnig</u> Leid, ...</i> <i>..., es tut mir <u>unendlich</u> Leid,...</i> <i>..., es tut mir <u>total</u> Leid...</i> <i>Deshalb mochte ich Sie inständig bitten, mir eine Verlängerungsfrist zu gewähren.</i></p>	<p>(Intensivierungen/intensifiers) Es tut mir wirklich Leid... Es tut mir so Leid... Es tut mir sehr Leid...,</p>
Begrenzungen (Limiters)	<p>So schnell wie möglich nachzureichen Einen Moment Zeit haben? Dürfte ich die Seminararbeit erst (Intensifikator) in einer Woche abgeben?</p>	<p><i>...<u>nur ein paar Minuten</u></i> Nicht genug Zeit haben...</p>
Abschwächungspartikel (Understaters)	<p>Ein bißchen eilig, und möchte nur ein Getränk kaufen.</p>	<p><i>ein <u>bißchen</u>...</i></p>
Heckenausdruck (Hedges)	<p>Irgendwie, ziemlich, so</p>	<p>/</p>
Subjektivierungen (subjectivizer) embedding bei Trosborg, 1995	<p>Ich schätze, dass ich dafür noch eine Woche benötige. Ich wäre dir dankbar, wenn...</p>	<p><i>Ich meine, ...</i> <i>Ich glaube, ...</i></p>

Internal modifications (morphological and syntactical)

	GNS	MSG
<p>1. Past tense forms - syntactic mitigations (internal markers). The reference time is in the present, and past tense could be replaced by a present tense without changing the semantics of the utterance.</p>	<p><i>Ich wollte dich bitten, . . .</i> <i>Ich wollte dich fragen, ob du mir 1000 leihen könntest?</i> <i>Ich meinte, Sie kommen . . .</i></p>	<p>Present structures with auxiliary verbs and modal verbs</p>
<p>2. Conjunctive forms</p>	<p><i>Das wäre nett!</i> <i>Könnte ich bitte einen Zeitaufschub bekommen?</i> <i>Das wäre eine grosse Erleichterung.</i></p>	<p><i>Haben Sie Zeit,</i> <i>Können Sie...</i> <i>Wollen Sie ...</i> <i>Darf ich ...</i></p>
<p>3. Perfect completed tense with modal verb</p>	<p>Ich habe die Seminararbeit leider nicht fertig machen können, da ich krank geworden bin.</p>	
<p>Selection of lexems</p>	<p>Versuchen Sie . . . Ich denke, hier hast du Recht...</p>	<p>Ich hoffe, ...</p>



Attention/warning signals	<i>Hey , entschuldigung, eigentlich möchte ich... Hallo... Hi..., Hör mal, ...</i>	<i>Guten Tag, Entschuldigung,</i>
Imperative interjections	<i>Wart mal kurz, Hör zu, ... Hör mal, ...</i>	-

Intensifiers	GNS	MSG
Intensifiers	<i>So, sehr, wirklich, nur, furchtbar</i> <i>Ziemlich krank</i> Ich wäre Ihnen <i>sehr</i> dankbar.	<i>Sehr</i> <i>Sehr krank...</i> <i>So, sehr ...</i>
Epistemic language tools	Ich weiss es <i>tatsächlich</i> , ... Ich bin nicht <i>sicher</i> , ...	Ich weiss <i>natürlich</i> ,

I. Direct strategies

Fokushandlung Request strategy	1.Imperativ form	Utterances in which there is a standard correlation between sentence form (imperative clause) and illocution (request).	<i>Hilf mir bitte bei meiner Seminararbeit!</i>
	2.Explicites performativ	Utterances in which the Illocution is explicitly mentioned	<i>Ich bitte Sie, ... Ich bitte dich, ob du mir ... (combination of explizit Performativ und Query preparatory)</i>
	3.Hedged performative	The illocutionary verb is combined with a modal verb	<i>Ich möchte Sie bitten, mir diese Woche frei zu geben.</i>
			<i>Ich wollte dich fragen, ob du mir eventuell helfen könntest. (combination of hedged performative and query preparatory)</i>
	4.Lokutionsderivativ (locution derivable)	Necessity aspect: the illocution is directly derivable from the semantics of the locution and treated as a necessity aspect.	<i>Ich würde nur Ihre Erlaubnis brauchen, um die nächste Woche frei zu bekommen.</i>
		Determination: the Illocution is directly derivable from the semantics of the lokution and represents a statement or a question / with internal marker/.	<i>Du hilfst mir jetzt mal schnell bei der Seminararbeit. Hilfst du mir schnell bei der Seminararbeit?</i>
	5.Want statement	The desire of the speaker is expressed that a certain situation may occur.	<i>Ich hätte gerne, dass Sie sich das nochmals anschauen.</i>

II. Conventional-indirect strategies

Query preparatory:	Utterances in which the introductory conditions (ability, possibility, will, etc.) in questions are verbalized:	examples
	<i>Können</i> -question:	<i>Könnten wir vielleicht unsere Termine tauschen?</i>
	Question about the possibility	<i>Wäre es möglich...?</i>
	Question about wanting	<i>Möchtest du vielleicht...</i>
	Question about availability	<i>Hättest du Zeit...?</i>
	Permission question (Erlaubnisfrage)	<i>Darf ich/kann ich dir die nächste Woche?</i>

III. Indirect strategies

Hinweis (hint)

Utterances whose illocution can be derived solely from the context and not from the form itself)

Ich finde, dass Sie meine Schularbeit schlecht benotet haben, und sie ungerecht benotet ist.

Figure 1. Use of mitigators and intensifiers in both groups of participants

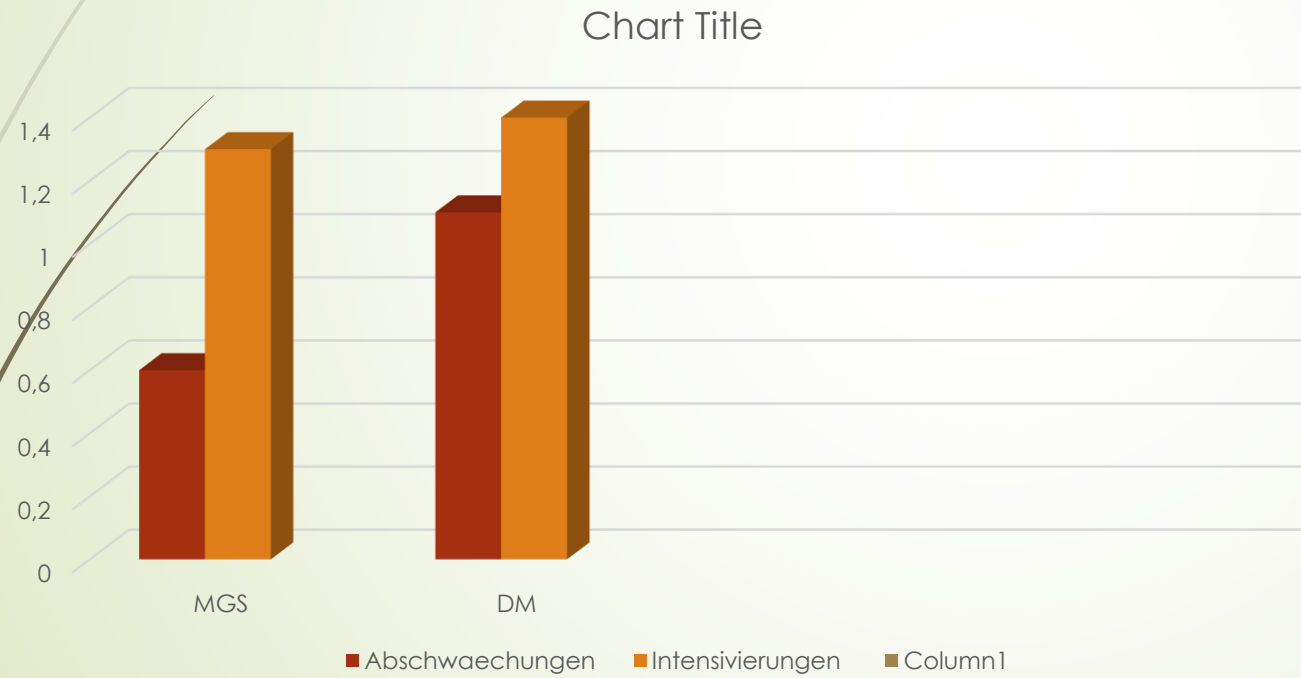


Fig. 1: Szenario 1 (die Seminararbeit abgeben), formell

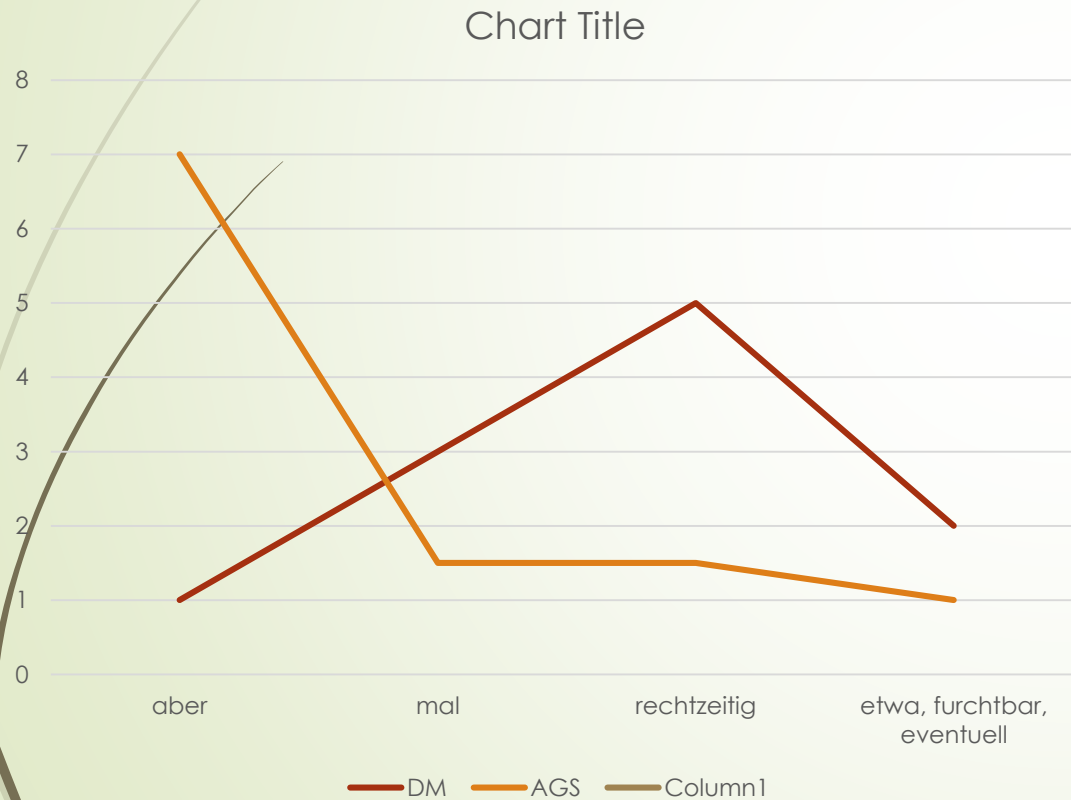
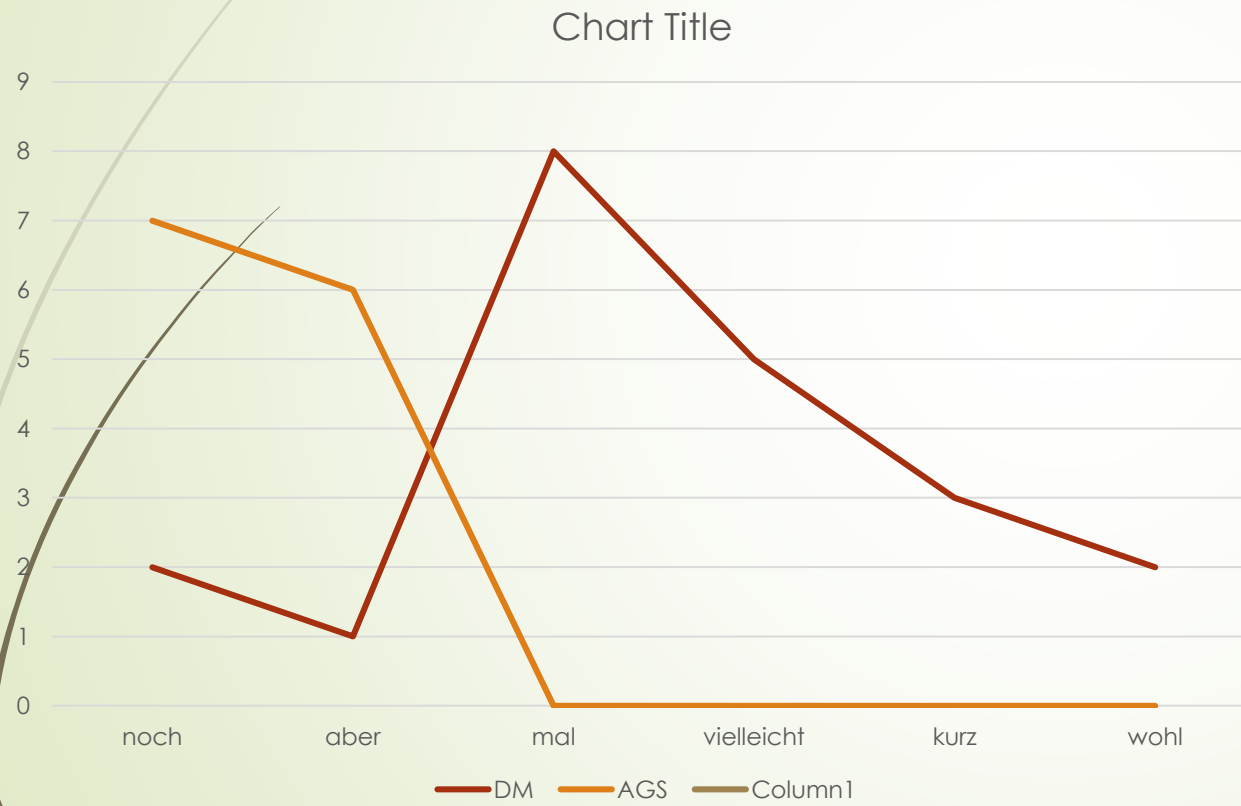



Figure 2: Szenario 3 (um ein Feuer bitten), informell



The politeness marker bitte

- ▶ The politeness (and/or requestive) marker for distinguishing a request or a question (*entschuldige bitte!*) is often found in the following linguistic surroundings and constructions with the following function:
- ▶ -to distinguish a [polite] request (*bitte, bedienen Sie sich!/ bitte setzen Sie sich!*); (these utterances are not requestive in force, but invitatory, although they are imperative in form and freely combine with *bitte*. They carry potential benefits for the addressee, rather than potential costs.)
- ▶ -an affirmative answer to a question (*bitte [ja]!*);
- ▶ -in response to an apology or acknowledgment of gratitude ("*bitte / sehr, schön /!*");
 - in order to repeat an utterance that was not [right] understood [*wie bitte?*];
 - phrases, idioms, proverbs [*na bitte!*] (*na also, das habe ich doch gleich gesagt!*).




➤ Barron (2003) emphasizes the ambiguous function of the particle *doch* (and compares it to "bitte") and gives the following examples for illustration purposes, that she has overtaken from Helbig G. (1994: 113).

➤ *Setzen Sie sich doch / (bitte)! (mitigator)*

➤ *Komm doch / (bitte) endlich zum Essen! (intensifier)*

➤ However, the politeness marker can also be used as an emphatic additional element, as the following example shows:


➤ *Peter, bitte, schreibe die Projektarbeit bis zu Ende. (Situation A1)*



Analyzing the responses of the MSG, we can notice that they present the fact that it is more appropriate or polite to say **bitte** or **danke** more often, than not at all. The expressions like:

Danke! Danke schön! Na toll! Schön! Super! Thanks! are also used to express irony.

These linguistic means can, however, be preceded by the main act in such a way that, (while it remains neutral), it is reinforced by the implicit irony, which these expressions present:

- 
- *Danke schön, dass du so kurzfristig absagst. (Situation A6)*
 - *Schön, dass du das Auto gestern sauber gemacht hast. (Situation A5)*
 - *Toll, danke! Das hättest du mir auch früher sagen können. (Situation A6)*

At the lexical level, the requestive marker *bitte*, as well as modal particles were often used as a means to mitigate the request strategies as a whole, by both groups of participants (MGS / GNS).

DISCUSSION

Nur - as a mitigating element often occurs in the responses of the GNS. The MSG have used this element less often and with a (temporal) indirection / limitation:

... ich habe nur es bemerkt, (in letzter Zeit), und deswegen reagiere ich jetzt.

The subjectivisers ***Ich schätze (ich vermute...)*** are used by both groups of subjects, but in the responses of MSG we found more often forms, like:


ich glaube, ich denke, ich meine...

The negation forms *Denken Sie nicht, Meinen Sie nicht, Glauben Sie nicht...* were found much less or not at all in the MSG. Much more often, these terms are used by GNS.



Resumee

- This analysis shows that language learners at an intermediate proficiency level in the Republic of Macedonia prefer conventional indirect strategies for expressing requests and that the repertoire of expressions they use is substantial, but most of them use a limited number of expressions. They use different types of modifications in order to sound polite, but very often there is not a big difference between the expressions they use in formal and informal situations.
- This indicates that they need more exposure to various situations and more practice of request strategies in order to learn how to use them appropriately to the situation and the people they are speaking to.

- 
- ▶ Length and politeness of the utterances - Verbosity: MSG use more words than GNS for the same pragmatic act because they are not able to express themselves concisely (“kurz and knapp”), primarily due to linguistic deficits.
 - ▶ - Learners’ utterances are longer than the native expressions as learners elaborate on the context - background, prerequisites, reasons, justifications, explanations. They give more background information, present preconditions in more detail, and more often and more reasons, justifications, and explanations than the GNS do.

► -in responses of MSG more often appear questions, such as:

► *Haben Sie..., Hast du..., Entschuldigung, kann ich...?*

and thus they use frequently questions with auxiliary verbs or modal verbs in infinitive or indicative forms, in comparison to the GNS who use preconditioning questions (subjunctive forms), query preparatory (conjunctive forms of verbs) */Könnten, Möchten, Würden Sie.../* combined with internal/external modifications. E.g.:

► *Würden Sie mir kurz Ihr Feuerzeug geben, Könnte ich mir..., Oh, hätten Sie vielleicht Feuer für mich, Entschuldigung, haben Sie mal..., Könnte ich bitte mal Feuer haben, Könnten Sie ..., Könnte ich ...*

More often, the warning signals (*Oh, Entschuldigung...*), that have a mitigation function, were used by the GNS and rarely by the MSG.



Perspective and future analysis

- - Analysis of other speech acts, their meaning and function (*Drohung, Versprechen, Entschuldigung*).
- - Other instruments for analysis of the speech act *request* (role plays, authentic situations, retrospective interview).

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