

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

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**Abstract:** *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 the "Goce Delčev" University in Štip, R. North 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. Special focus is also placed on how Macedonian learners of German use the politeness marker 'bitte' in comparison to German native speakers. The importance of this study for the Macedonian linguistic environment is twofold. First, it contributes to the enlargement of the pool of cross-cultural and interlanguage studies in pragmatics in the Republic of North Macedonia. Second, it provides for evidence-based approach to German language learning in general, and in Macedonia in particular. The classification of the request strategies is based on Blum-Kulka (1982) and House & Kasper (1989). The results show that although there is some correlation in the way requests are formulated by the two groups, the requests of the Macedonian learners of German show some deviations. This analysis shows that intermediate learners of German in the Republic of North Macedonia prefer conventional indirect strategies for formulating requests. However, 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 with respect to different interlocutors. The native speakers' requests are more formal and thus sound more polite. Macedonian learners give more elaborate background information, their explanations and justifications are longer, and the politeness marker 'bitte' is not always appropriately used. They found it as an important feature which adds courteousness to the utterance and they use it too often because they do not want to sound impolite and think that its omission can lead to a completely impolite sentence.*

*They also use expressions oriented to the listener more often, while the expressions from a common perspective are very rare. There is a lack of valid standards, materials and hardly any curricula that place a focus on developing communicative and pragmatic skills in foreign language learners in the Republic of North Macedonia, and there is a significant need for effective*

*ways of improving learners' communication and pragmatic skills. The aim of our paper is to fulfill this gap.*

**Key words:** interlanguage; pragmatic competence; requests; strategies; modification.

## 1. Introduction

The study presented in this article is a part of the project "The role of explicit instructions in developing pragmatic competence in English and German as foreign languages", carried out at "Goce Delčev" University in Štip, R. North Macedonia. It is an interlanguage study of how the Macedonian students of German formulate their speech act *request* with respect to strategy use, speech act modification and speech act perspective. Additionally, it compares non-native speakers to native speakers requests and investigates what makes non-native speakers requests sound inappropriate. The aim of this study is to compare how the speech act of request is realized by the Macedonian learners of German (MLG) and the German native speakers (GNS). This research focuses on the realization of the speech act *request* with respect to the following:

- strategies that both MLG and GNS use in the realization of this speech act;
- analysis of some variables such as degree of familiarity, authority, social distance and power that play a role in how this speech act is realized;
- 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.

The results of this research are expected to give both theoretical and practical significances. Theoretically, these findings are expected to enrich the comprehension and understanding of pragmatics, especially about speech act *request* to the other linguistic researchers. Practically, the research will give some benefits for the foreign language learners. We believe that the results and the insights from this project will contribute to shedding more light on learners' pragmatic competence in the Republic of North Macedonia and the ways of developing their pragmatic ability that would help them become more competent users of the target language.

## 2. Literature review

The cross-cultural study of pragmatic competence conducted by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) is one of the most comprehensive one. In this study the authors investigated the realization patterns of requests and apologies in eight languages by native and non-native speakers. The results of their investigation revealed rich cross-cultural variability and showed that the realization of speech acts is closely connected with the interaction between situational and cultural factors. This study was the basis for many similar studies on the use of request strategies by language learners. Several studies aimed to determine the difference between the request strategies used by

native speakers of different languages. Fukushima (1996) conducted a study that presents differences between British and Japanese native speakers in their use of request strategies and found some similarities as well as some differences. The degree of imposition as well as social and power distance between the interlocutors had an important influence on both groups of participants in relation to the strategies they used. However, while Japanese speakers preferred more direct strategies, British speakers used more conventional indirect ones. Another study found out that the main difference in the use of request strategies between British and Polish speakers is in the use of interrogatives as a result of cultural differences between these two groups (Wierzbicka, 1985). While interrogatives are frequently used by British speakers because they are considered polite ways of requesting, Polish speakers view them as formal and overpolite and indicate uncertainty on the part of the speaker as to the willingness of the hearer to fulfill the request. According to Bach and Harnish (1984, p. 48), a request is a speech act which is used to express the speaker's desire so that the interlocutor does what the speaker wants. According to Trosborg (1995, p. 187), a request is an illocutionary act in which a speaker (requester) conveys to hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the hearer to perform a certain act which is beneficial to the speaker. The act of request may be expressed directly (often perceived as being aggressive and demanding) or indirectly (the person is making a request to others in implicit way). Haverkate (in: Trosborg, 1995, p. 188) defines impositive speech acts in the following way, stating that the degree of imposition may vary from small favours to demanding acts:

"Impositive speech acts are described as speech acts performed by the speaker to influence the intentional behaviour of the hearer in order to get the latter to perform, primarily for the benefit of the speaker, the action directly specified or indirectly suggested by the proposition."

Some researchers analysed the speech act of request in English (Francis 1997; Kaneko, 2004; Kim, 1995; Parent, 2002). Other studies focus on request realization in Spanish (Ruzickova, 2007), and in Japanese (Kubota, 1996; Kahraman & Akkus, 2007). Most of these studies deal with interlanguage pragmatic performance (Garcia, 2004) while, as Rose (2000, p. 29) notes:

"unlike performance research, studying pragmatic development requires either longitudinal research with a given group of participants over an extended period of time, or cross-sectional studies with participants at various stages of development."

### **3. Research methodology**

The first stage of the research consisted of certain preparatory activities, including study of relevant literature, choice of data collection methods and

written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) creation. This research deals with the possibilities to describe and solve the problem by collecting, classifying, analyzing, and interpreting data. According to Bungin (2007, p. 28), the research is categorized as a descriptive qualitative research when producing descriptive data in conducting a qualitative research. The data which are elicited must be in the form of sentences, utterances, or even short stories. Our empirical research relies also on the results obtained through assessment of these data received by the analysis of the DCTs. The data were analyzed based on the context in which the utterances occurred in the answers given by the foreign language learners. They were gathered by means of a written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) created for the needs of the research in accordance with the set tasks. The DCTs consisted of six scenarios describing different situations to which the participants were asked to react. It is probably the most widely used data collection instrument in cross-cultural pragmatics, a field of enquiry that compares different speech acts across languages, and in interlanguage pragmatics, which examines learners' pragmatic competence and development. Since DCTs can be translated into any language and distributed to large groups of informants within a short period of time, they are the ideal instrument for the contrastive study of speech acts (Aston 1995, p. 62; Barron 2003, p. 85). It has been shown that DCT data "accurately reflect the content expressed in natural speech" (Beebe and Cummings 1996, p. 75). 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 a written Discourse completion test (DCT) consisting of six scenarios with different contextual features. The classification of the request strategies is based on Blum-Kulka (1982) and Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989).

In Table 1 we present the features of the Macedonian learners of German according to gender, age, country of birth, mother tongue, residence, knowledge of other foreign languages and length of stay abroad.

**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 Probistip Kocani Sveti Nikole small villages in the surrounding	45 5 6 1 2
Knowledge of other languages	English as a first foreign language (8 years of instruction) Russian in primary school French in primary school	45 7 7
Stays abroad	previous stay in a German-speaking country < 6 weeks ≥6 weeks Other stays > 6 Weeks	/ 49 10 0 0

In Table 2 we present the features of the German native speakers according to gender, age, country of birth and mother tongue.

**Table 2.** Native speakers of German

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

Stay abroad	No data	/
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The DCT used for evaluating pragmatic competences of Macedonian learners of German consisted of six request scenarios. The characteristics of the requests regarding the social status of the interlocutors (power), as well as the horizontal (social) distance between them and the severity of the offence are presented in the table below.

**Table 3:** Contextual features of the scenarios

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

The current study investigates the influence of context-external variables, such as social power (high, medium and low), social distance (familiar and unfamiliar) and degree of offence on the perception of Macedonian and German speech act of request. These findings can provide some cultural insights about Macedonian and German cultures regarding the similarities and differences in their perception of speech act of request. Based on the analysed responses, Macedonian foreign language learners showed a certain deviation in the responses, which might be due to the different German native culture. This, we suppose, might be due to the Macedonian sensitivity toward social power and social distance variations more often than the German native speakers. The responses obtained by the Macedonian learners of German showed sociopragmatic failure. That is because the perceptions of the contextual variables are still influenced by the Macedonian cultural norms that are different from the German native culture. These differences might be closely related to the cultural differences which are considered as social conditions placed on language use stemming from cross-culturally different perceptions (Thomas, 1983).

#### 4.Strategies used by the MLG and GNS

According to Brown and Levinson (1978), requests are face-threatening acts in which both the speaker's and hearer's face is at risk, because "by making a request, the speaker impinges on the hearer's claim to freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984, p. 201). In order to minimize the imposition, speakers tend to use more indirect request strategies which sound more polite and preserve the hearer's face. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (ibid.) describe three major levels of directness of request strategies:

a) the most direct, explicit level, realized by requests syntactically marked such as imperatives ("Mach die Tür auf, bitte."), performatives (Ich bitte / fordere dich auf, mir dein Vorlesungsskript zu leihen), and 'hedged performatives' ("Ich möchte Sie bitten, mir das Vorlesungsskript zu geben").

b) the conventionally indirect level; procedures that realize the act by reference to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance, as conventionalized in a given language (Wishes: „Ich möchte dein Vorlesungsskript ausleihen“. Desires/needs: „Ich möchte/ich muss dein Vorlesungsskript bis Ende der Woche ausleihen“).

c) nonconventional indirect level, i.e. the open-ended group of indirect strategies (hints) that realize the request by either partial reference to an object or element needed for the implementation of the act ("Warum ist das Fenster geöffnet?"), or by reliance on contextual clues ("Es ist kalt hier"). These three levels are further divided into nine sub-levels of request strategy types 'that form a scale of indirectness' (Table 4). The first five strategies belong to the direct level, the next two belong to the conventional indirect level and the last two belong to the nonconventional indirect level.

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

<b>Descriptive category</b>	<b>Examples (from the corpus/MLG)</b>
1. Modus Ableitung (mood derivable)	<i>Räum die Küche auf! / 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 die Küche aufräumen. Ich möchte, dass Sie das Auto umparken.</i>
6. Vorschlagsformel (suggestory formulas)	<i>Wie wäre es mit der Aufräumung? / Warum kommst du nicht um den Mist wegzuräumen?</i>
7. Vorbedingungsfrage (query preparatory)	<i>Können Sie das Chaos in der Küche in Ordnung bringen? / Würden Sie bitte das Auto umparken?</i>
8. Starke Andeutung (strong hints)	<i>Wir haben die Küche in Chaos gelassen.</i>
9. Schwache Andeutung (mild hints)	<i>Wir wollen hier keine Verdrängung (mit der Aufforderung/Bitte das Auto umzuparken).</i>

In the following table we give an overview of the strategies used by the Macedonian learners of German.

**Table 5.** Strategies used by the MLG

Strategy	DCT 1-2 (formal)	DCT 3-4 (formal / informal)	DCT 5-6 (informal)	Total
Direkte Ebene (direct level):				
Ausdrücke in Befehlsform (mood derivable)	-	-	-	-
Explizite Performative (explicit performatives) /Gib mir dein Vorlesungsskript./	2 3,77%	-	-	2
Modifiziert performative Äußerungen (hedged performatives) /Ich möchte dich bitten, mir dein Vorlesungsskript zu leihen./	12 22,64%	9 21,95%	12 23,52%	33
Verpflichtende Akte (obligation statements) /Du musst mir dein Vorlesungsskript leihen./	1 1,86%	-	-	1
Aufforderungsakte in Form von Wünschen (want statements) /Ich möchte dein Vorlesungsskript ausleihen./	5 9,43%	3 7,31%	-	8
Konventionell-indirekte Ebene: (conventional-indirect level)				
Als Vorschlag formulierte Formeln (suggestory formulas)	-	-	-	-
Einleitende Fragen (query preparatories) /Würde es Ihnen etwas ausmachen, Ihr Auto umzuparken?/	33 63,26%	27 65,85%	39 76,47%	99
Unkonventionell indirekte Ebene (indirect level)				
Starker Hinweis (strong hints)	-	-	-	-
Milder Hinweis (mild hints)	-	2 4,87%	-	2



/Wir wollen hier kein Gedränge... (als Aufforderung, das Auto umzuparken./				
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The Macedonian learners of German used conventionally indirect strategies in their answers more frequently, out of which 65.8% were in form of query preparatory, and rarely direct strategies in form of hedged performatives (app. 22%). Strong hints, mood derivable and suggestory formulas were not used at all by them.

Our analysis showed that the native speakers of German used more frequently conventionally indirect strategies, most of which were query preparatories (42.8%), and suggestory formulas (30.7%). This analysis showed that the German language learners in the Republic of North Macedonia as well as the native speakers of German preferred conventional indirect strategies for expressing requests and that the repertoire of expressions they used may depend on communication situations, so they offered a rich variety of expressions. But, most of the Macedonian learners of German used a limited number of expressions. They used different types of modifications in order to sound polite, and 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 interlocutors they are speaking to.

As direct strategies GNS used hedged performatives (10.9%), but they did not use mild hints, explicit performatives and obligation statements (0%) at all. Utterances in which the introductory conditions (ability, possibility, will, etc.) are used in form of query preparatory occur in the following forms used by GNS, such as: *Können*-question (*Könnten wir vielleicht unsere Termine tauschen?*); Question about the possibility (*Wäre es möglich...?*); Question about wanting (*Möchtest du vielleicht...*); Question about availability (*Hättest du Zeit...?*); permission question /Erlaubnisfrage/ (*Darf ich/kann ich dir die nächste Woche ....?*) etc. The indirect strategies occur in form of hints such as 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*). The suggestory formulas were frequently used by the GNS (*Wie wäre es mit...*), and were not used at all by the MLG.

## 5. Modification of requests

In order to make their requests more effective, the speakers often mitigate or intensify them. The aim of mitigation is to make requests milder and polite and show that the aim of the speaker is to make the hearer fulfill his/her request, and wants to avoid/prevent threatening the face of the hearer by sounding polite. According to this interpretation, Finkbeiner R. (2015, p. 136) differentiates positive and negative politeness. The speaker applies positive

politeness, when he/she tries to maintain the face of the hearer, by giving him/her courage, or knowing his/her wishes. The speaker applies negative politeness when he/she tries to maintain the negative face of the hearer by carrying out indirect instead of direct requests or avoids explicit assumption about preferences of the hearer, thus minimizing his/her wishes. For this purpose, speakers use a number of downgraders, e.g. *ein bisschen*, *ein wenig*, *ziemlich*, etc. According to Warga M. (2004, p. 166) the internal modality modifications consist of morphological, syntactical and lexicological elements, that mitigate or intensify the illocution of the request. For the same purpose, speakers may grammatically modify utterances using questions, past forms and embedded questions. However, sometimes speakers feel that they need to intensify their requests, so that they would make hearers change their behavior and fulfill their wish/request. To achieve this, they may use upgraders like: *sehr*, *viel* so, etc. Some of the most common downgraders and upgraders that appeared in the questionnaires are shown in the tables below (table 6 and table 7).

The use of modal particles in communication can be regarded as a politeness strategy. Not knowing the importance and the function of the modal particles in an utterance can lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The basic knowledge of the foreign language, in our case German, is not enough because German language learners are mainly exposed to commercial teaching materials rather than authentic language and materials, and could have the consequence that the interlanguage of the German learners might be sometimes impolite or even rude. Since the late 1960s researches discovered German modal particles due to a more pragmatically oriented approach to linguistics. Thurmair (1989) named this group of words as "Modalpartikel". In the German language, modal particles include words like: *auch*, *aber*, *bloß*, *denn*, *doch*, *eben*, *eigentlich*, *einfach*, *erst*, *etwa*, *halt*, *ja*, *mal*, *nur*, *ruhig*, *schon*, *sowieso*, *überhaupt*, *vielleicht*, *wohl*. The functions of modal particles in conversations are content related or personal related. Referring to the content, modal particles ensure whether both interlocutors are still on track with the conversation. The use of modal particles allows connecting a current issue to an earlier statement in the same conversation. This function of modal particles is creating a network of relationship between the interlocutors (Weydt 1981, p. 164; 2006, p. 215). Utilizing modal particles in the communication allows the speaker to express special views, intentions and evaluations or perceptions consciously (Wolski 1989, p. 352). These perceptions are evaluated as positive in the German society related to social-psychological issues (Steinmüller 1981, p. 143). In the following table (table 6) we present the modifications used by the MLG and GNS.

**Table 6.** Modifications used by the MLG and GNS

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

**Table 7.** Internal modifications (morphological and syntactical)

	<b>GNS</b>	<b>MLG</b>
1. Past tense forms - syntactic mitigation (internal markers). The reference	<i>Ich möchte Sie daher bitten,...</i>	<i>Ich wollte dich bitten, . . .</i>

time is in the present, and past tense could be replaced by a present tense without changing the semantics of the utterance.	<i>Ich möchte Sie ebenfalls um Unterstützung und Geduld bitten, ... Nun wollte ich dich fragen...</i>	<i>Ich wollte dich fragen, ob du mir 1000 MKD leihen könntest? Ich meinte, Sie kommen . . .</i>
2. Conjunctive forms	<i>Das wäre nett! Könnte ich bitte einen Zeitaufschub bekommen? Das wäre eine große Erleichterung.</i>	(no conjunctive forms in MLG were found, therefore the grammatical competence of these foreign language learners should be improved)
3. Perfect tense with a modal verb	<i>Ich habe die Seminararbeit leider nicht fertig machen können, da ich krank geworden bin.</i>	
4. Present structures with auxiliary verbs and modal verbs		<i>Haben Sie Zeit, Können Sie... Wollen Sie ... Darf ich ...</i>
Selection of lexems	<i>Versuchen Sie . . . Ich denke, hier hast du Recht...</i>	<i>Ich hoffe, ...</i>
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>	-

The overall value of the internal modifiers that Macedonian speakers of German used to mitigate or intensify their requests is shown above in table 7. However, we may note that GNS have a higher usage of all types of internal and external modifications. Consequently, the overall data results show that GNS use more intensifiers and mitigators for request modification compared to the Macedonian speakers.

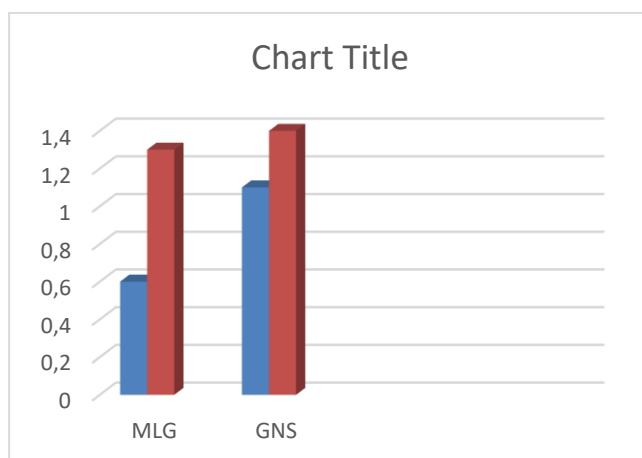
Another group of linguistic means are the upgraders which increase the impact of the requests and are likely to strengthen the requests. For example, the intensifiers such as adverbs that intensify part of the proposition (*sehr, sicher, so* etc.) and the epistemic language tools are presented in table 8.

**Table 8.** Intensifiers used by GNS and MLG

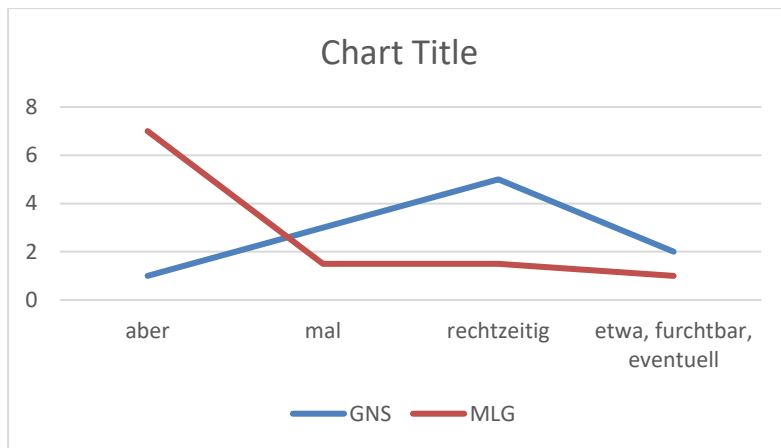
	GNS	MLG
Intensifiers	<i>So, sehr, wirklich, nur, furchtbar</i> <i>Ziemlich</i> krank Ich wäre Ihnen <i>sehr</i> dankbar.	<i>Sehr ...</i> <i>Sehr</i> krank... <i>So, sehr ...</i>
Epistemic language tools	Ich weiß es <i>tatsächlich</i> , ... Ich bin nicht <i>sicher</i> , ...	Ich weiß <i>natürlich</i> ,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

In the following we present the use of mitigators and intensifiers in both group of participants (MLG and GNS), as well as the use of these elements for the first and third scenarios, as an example in a formal and informal situation. The downgraders and intensifiers were more frequently used by GNS, and for the first scenario we noticed that adverbials and particles were frequently used by the GNS (*mal, rechtzeitig, etwa, eventuell*) in contrast to the MLG who used the particle *aber* more often. In the third scenario the downgraders (*vielleicht, kurz, wohl*) were not used at all by the MLG.

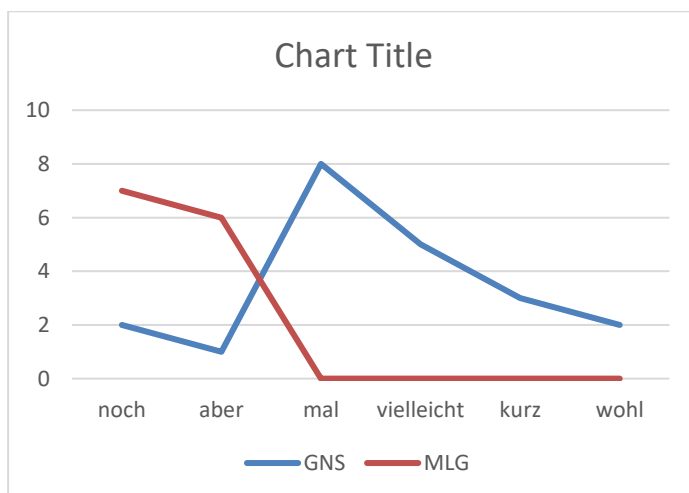
**Figure 1.** Use of mitigators and intensifiers in both groups of participants (Abschwächungen und Intensivierungen in beiden Gruppen der Probanden)



**Figure 2:** Frequently used mitigators and intensifiers in scenario 1 ("submit a project paper/die Seminararbeit abgeben", formal situation)



**Figure 3:** Mitigators and intensifiers used in the 3<sup>rd</sup> scenario (um Feuer bitten/ask for a lighter, informal situation)



## 6. 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 environmental constructions with the functions listed below:

- 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. We have found in our

study the marker *bitte* in following language surroundings with the different meaning and function in the utterance:

- 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 correctly 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 took over from Helbig G. (1994, p. 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 MLG, 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. But, on the other hand, the expressions like:

- *Danke! Danke schön! Na toll! Schön! Super! Thanks!* are also used to express irony, too.

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 means to mitigate the request strategies as a whole, by both groups of participants (MLG / GNS).

## 7. Summary

The analysis presented in this paper shows that German language learners at an intermediate proficiency level in the Republic of North Macedonia prefer conventionally 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. In this context we should mention that DCT requests and naturally occurring requests present significant differences in number of dimensions but at the same time they follow similar trends in terms of directness and lexical modification. (Economidou-Kogetsidis, M., 2013)

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.

Regarding the length and politeness of the utterances (verbosity) we can conclude that MLG use more words than GNS for the same speech act because they are not able to express themselves concisely ("kurz und 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.

Questions, such as: *Haben Sie..., Hast du..., Entschuldigung, kann ich...?* appear more often in the MLG responses which makes questions with auxiliary verbs or modal verbs in infinitive or indicative forms more frequent 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 ...*

The warning signals (*Oh, Entschuldigung...*), that have a mitigation function, were used more often by the GNS and rarely by the MLG. The negation forms *Denken Sie nicht, Meinen Sie nicht, Glauben Sie nicht....* were found much less frequently or not at all in the MLG. Much more often, these terms were used by GNS.

*Nur* - as a mitigating element often occurs in the responses of the GNS. The MLG have used this element less often and with a (temporal) indirection / limitation: *... ich habe nur bemerkt (in letzter Zeit), und deswegen reagiere ich jetzt.*

*Nur* as a particle can have several different meanings: it gives a certain emphasis to a question, statement, request or wish (*warum hat er das nur gemacht?*); it can express reassurance, also encouragement in statements and prompts (*nimm dir nur, was du brauchst*); or it can express inner sympathy, alarm, amazement in questions (*was hat er nur?*).

*Nur* can have also several different meanings used as an adverb in an utterance: it can express that something is limited to what is mentioned with the meaning: *nichts weiter als; lediglich (ich war nicht krank, nur müde)*; it can also express that something is limited to a certain degree, not more than (*ich habe nur 10 Euro*); or it can express an exclusivity, nothing else than; nobody, not other than (*man konnte nur Gutes über sie berichten*); it can restrict the statement of the previous main clause, with the meaning: *however or but (die Wohnung ist hübsch, nur ist sie zu klein für uns).*

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

## 8. Perspective and further research



We plan to proceed our analysis with the following research topics:

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

We recommend that this study be replicated using other varieties of German and Macedonian speech acts. Further research may address the effect of some variables (e.g., power, degree of offence, authority, social distance, gender, age) on the use of the speech act request. Furthermore, as this research has not analyzed learners' grammatical and structural errors (e.g., errors in subject-verb agreement, tense etc.), these may be further researched, too. Moreover, due to their importance for teaching German as a foreign language and intercultural pragmatics, other speech acts (e.g., complaint, promise, threats, compliments, warnings etc.) constitute fertile grounds for future research.

The project referred to in this paper was motivated by the lack of valid data on pragmatic competences of Macedonian learners of English and German as well as by the need of tracing effective methods for reinforcing pragmatic skills in foreign language learners. The further research may include contrastive analysis of speech acts (of complaining, warning, prohibition etc. in German and Macedonian), design of instruments for pragmatic competence assessment and design of learning modules for developing pragmatic competence. We believe that with these proposed topics the project will make great contribution to the development of language learners' pragmatic skills.

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