



THE EFFECT OF PRAGMATIC TRANSFER AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ON MOROCCAN EFL LEARNERS' PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

Hicham Latifⁱ

Ibn Zohr University, FLHS,
Department of English Studies,
Agadir, Morocco

Abstract:

In the present study, we investigate the potential effects of first language negative pragmatic transfer and target language proficiency on Moroccan EFL learners' pragmatic competence as reflected in their request productions. The data were collected by means of a written discourse completion task from four samples of Moroccan Arabic native speakers, American English native speakers, and two proficiency groups of Moroccan EFL learners. The results revealed some pragmatic transfer of direct requesting strategies, especially the imperatives and want statements. Proficiency also had a positive impact on learners' use of request perspective and lexical downgraders. However, the lower-level group was not the most direct as expected, indicating a negative correlation between proficiency and pragmatic competence. The study concludes with several research and pedagogical implications.

Keywords: pragmatic transfer, L2 proficiency, pragmatic competence, EFL request strategies, Moroccan EFL learners

1. Introduction

Researchers in pragmatics have been interested in exploring the mechanisms that ensure the successful flow of a conversation. Their assumption is that people observe certain principles or maxims in their turns to sustain the conversation. One such principle is the Cooperative Principle, which stipulates that interactants cooperate in the conversation by contributing to the speech event (Grice, 1975). Another principle is the Politeness Principle (Leech, 1983), which ensures that people behave politely to one another and appeal to each other's face (Brown and Levinson, 1987). However, these pragmatic principles are not identical across languages and cultures (Fukushima, 2000). The

ⁱ Correspondence: email h.latif@uiz.ac.ma

growing interest in such phenomena culminated in many cross-cultural and cross-linguistic studies. These studies reported that what is considered polite in one language may not sometimes be polite in another.

Cross-cultural pragmatics was enriched by contrastive analysis practice (James, 1980). The traditional contrasting of formal aspects of language was relinquished for the study of aspects of language use across languages. Thus, a number of pragmatic contrastive English-German studies were undertaken, in which some discourse routines and conversational strategies were contrasted within the framework of a larger project investigating learners' development of communicative competence (Edmondson, House, Kasper, and Stemmer, 1984). The different studies conducted within this tradition revealed general common aspects in the organization of discourse in different languages, as well as interesting cross-cultural differences in the type, distribution, and performance of many pragmatic and discourse functions. Studies within cross-cultural pragmatics revealed some culture-specific aspects of discourse. These findings corroborated the claim that speech communities develop quite distinct cultural styles (Gumperz, 1982). The notion of directness was one of the themes that constituted the object of a wide range of studies. Studies conducted within the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project are instrumental in this respect (Blum-kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989). They adopted an empirically based discussion of the issues involved in speech act studies. The aim of the cross-cultural speech act realization project, as stated in Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989: 22), was "*to establish patterns of speech act realization under different social constraints across a number of cultures and languages*". The notions of directness and indirectness have been found to work differently in certain cultures, such as the Greek, compared to the American culture (Tannen 1981, Economidou- Kogetsidis 2008, 2009). Nevertheless, the issue of universality versus cultural specificity has led to much controversy. Two classical views are very much cited in the literature. Brown and Levinson (1987) contend that speech act realization strategies, along with politeness and mitigation of forms, are mostly similar across languages and cultures. However, Wierzbicka (1985) criticizes this view, attributing the differences between the Polish and the English in the area of speech acts "*to deep-seated cultural norms and values*". She maintains that language differences are due to basic differences in "*cultural ethos*" and that any claims to universality in the politeness of speech act performance are nothing but "*ethnocentric Anglo-Saxon claims*".

Matsumoto (1988) also criticized Brown and Levinson's model. He argues that the negative politeness strategies in their model function as a social register in Japanese. In addition, Gu (1990) argues that the model is simply 'unsuited' to the Chinese language, in which politeness forms reflect to some degree the etymology of the word for politeness. In the context of the blooming research in the fields of cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics (Blum-kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989, Kasper and Rose, 2002; Kasper and Roever, 2005), several studies have examined a number of factors affecting learners' pragmatic competence, such as the effects of the first language and the target language proficiency.

Applying first language knowledge to a second or foreign language results in pragmatic transfer (Thomas, 1983). This transfer can either be positive if the first language knowledge is similar to the target language norms or negative if there is a conflict between the pragmatic norms of the two languages. Negative pragmatic transfer has received more attention because it often results in pragmatic failure. In the present study, we will focus on Moroccan learners' pragmatic competence, namely, their production of requests in English. We will draw a comparison between their requesting performance in Moroccan Arabic, their first language, and English, which is their third or fourth language, in order to evaluate the extent to which Moroccan EFL learners transfer their native Moroccan Arabic requesting strategies to English.

Furthermore, one of the most widely investigated factors affecting pragmatic competence is second/foreign language (L2 henceforth) proficiency (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013; Kasper and Rose, 2002). In Bachman's model (1990) of language competence, organizational competence, which comprises linguistic knowledge, works in tandem with pragmatic competence. However, it is not clear how one affects the other. In this study, we will compare first-year EFL university students with their third-year counterparts. We adopt Bachman's model of language competence to define L2 proficiency. For practical reasons related to the convenience sampling adopted in data collection, the proficiency level is determined by the university level and not by a standardized language test. Numerous previous empirical studies have used similar criteria to determine L2 proficiency (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009, Felix-Brasdefer, 2007; Pinto, 2005). Along the standardized tests, the semester or grade level are considered very dependable measures of language proficiency since semester or grade levels are determined by systematic evaluations and exams within a specific program (Xiao, 2015). This study will, therefore, investigate whether overall proficiency in English affects Moroccan EFL learners requesting strategies and whether or not higher proficiency results in less pragmatic transfer of their native Moroccan Arabic requesting strategies to English and more native-like pragmatic competence.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pragmatic Competence

During the 1970s, the interest in language as a means of communication rapidly gathered great momentum. Many linguists clearly realized that the formal knowledge of the target language was certainly not sufficient for effective competence. The term "*communicative competence*" was first used by Dell Hymes (1972), who argued that a comprehensive theory of language and communication should necessarily incorporate social and cultural factors into linguistic description. He criticized Chomsky's theory of linguistic competence (Chomsky, 1965) as neglecting the rules of use and "*contextual appropriacy*" (Munby, 1978). Hymes' original idea was that speakers of a language need to have more than grammatical competence in order to be able to communicate effectively in a

language; they also need to know how language is used by members of a speech community to accomplish their purposes.

Later, other linguists addressed the issue of communicative competence. Canale (1983), in a modified version of Canale and Swain (1980), included four components within his model of communicative competence: the grammatical, the sociolinguistic, the discourse and the strategic sub-competencies. The sociolinguistic component is concerned with one's understanding of social relations and the potential impact such understanding has on communication and with selecting what to say that is appropriate. In a later development, Bachman (1990) emphasized the role of pragmatics in communicative competence. He subdivided "*language competence*" into "*organizational competence*" and "*pragmatic competence*". Organizational competence includes linguistic knowledge and the rules joining linguistic units at the sentence and discourse levels. Pragmatic competence branches down into "*illocutionary competence*" and "*sociolinguistic competence*". White (1997), commenting on Bachman's model, remarks that "*competence embraces not only appropriateness, that is sociolinguistic competence, but also the communication of the speaker's intention, that is illocutionary appropriateness.*"

2.2 Pragmatic Transfer

Pragmatic transfer is one of the research issues which bring together interlanguage pragmatics and second language acquisition (Kasper 1992:205). It is considered by many one of the main factors which affect non-native speakers' pragmatic knowledge and performance (ibid.). Pragmatic transfer in interlanguage pragmatics refers to: "*the influence exerted by learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production, and learning of pragmatic information*" (Kasper, 1992: 207).

The British pragmaticists Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983) subdivided pragmatic knowledge into pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic components. Pragmalinguistics can be applied to "*the more linguistic end of pragmatics*" and refers to the particular resources that a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions (Leech, 1983:11). To complement Leech's definition, Kasper (1992) suggests that the dimension of politeness needs to be added to the strategies and forms associated with particular illocutions. These politeness devices include a legion of directness, indirectness, lexical, syntactic, and prosodic elements, which can soften or intensify the illocutionary force of various speech acts (Kasper, 1992, 1997).

Leech (1983: 10) defined sociopragmatics as "*the sociological interface of pragmatics*". Sociopragmatics studies the aspects in which pragmatic performance is influenced by the underlying socio-cultural perceptions of participants. This influence is extended to the performance and interpretation of speech acts. Sociopragmatics was approached from a cultural ethnographic perspective through the study of specific speech acts. These studies revealed the central role of social factors like social distance, social power, speaker and hearer's rights and obligations, and other purely contextual factors like the degree of imposition in determining variation in speech act behavior.

In this respect, Brown and Levinson (1987), in their seminal work on politeness, contend that estimates of power and familiarity interact with estimates of imposition in determining the choice of linguistic behavior. Sociopragmatics also considers the role of other factors, such as sub-types of a given speech act and the linguistic medium. Another approach to the study of Sociopragmatics has been through experimental psychology (Blum-Kulka, *et al.*, 1989). Studies conducted within this research tradition highlighted the conflicts that might arise between two culturally different interactional styles. Learners usually assess the relevant situational factors using their first language sociopragmatic norms. When the latter are different from the target language norms, sociopragmatic failure automatically happens.

On the other hand, pragmalinguistics refers to *"the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions"* (Leech, 1983:11). Pragmalinguistic transfer happens when first language procedures and linguistic strategies of speech act performance are transferred to the learner's interlanguage. Pragmalinguistic transfer, as Kasper (1992:209) points out, *"shall designate the process whereby the illocutionary force or politeness value assigned to particular linguistic material in L1 influences learners' perception and production of form-function mappings in L2."* In her discussion of pragmalinguistic transfer, Thomas (1983), highlights its negative role as the cause of pragmalinguistic failure. She explains that transferring semantically or syntactically equivalent forms of speech acts from L1 to L2 might result in a *"different pragmatic force in the target language"* (Thomas, 1983: 101). While this might be true sometimes, negative pragmatic transfer does not automatically lead to communication failure or misunderstanding (Kasper, 1992).

White (1997) illustrates this pragmalinguistic transfer with an example of a Korean hotel concierge who, after calling a technician to fix the customer's malfunctioning telephone, she said to her: *"I think you had better wait in your room"*. This example is a clear case of pragmalinguistic transfer of *"norms"* to the target language. The concierge's aim in saying, *"I think you had better wait in your room"*, was to demonstrate *"solicitousness"* for the guest. However, she used a form which was inappropriate to convey those intentions taking into consideration the type of relationship between the two parties. Her utterance would certainly fit as a recommendation from a person with some authority of status or knowledge in a British context to a hearer who accepts that authority. In this example, however, the relationship is reversed. As White (1997) points out, within an Anglo-American context, it is generally regarded as inappropriate for subordinates to make a recommendation to a superordinate. She, thus, proposes that the speaker use a tentatively expressed suggestion, such as *"If you'd like to wait in your room, someone will be along shortly"*. This utterance preserves the hearer's right to act freely. Therefore, by using such a conventionally polite suggestion, the speaker would not have communicated imposing intentions to the hearer.

2.3. Proficiency and Pragmatic Transfer

The studies that investigated the effect of language proficiency on L2 pragmatic competence revealed mixed results. A group of studies which used standardized tests or grade levels as proficiency indicators showed a noticeable increase in pragmatic competence in high-proficiency learners as compared to their low-proficiency counterparts (Algahtani and Roever, 2012; Bardovi-Harlig and Su, 2018; Geyer, 2007; Pinto, 2005; Wannaruk, 2008). In her study of refusals by Thai learners of English, Wannaruk (2008) found out a negative correlation between proficiency and negative pragmatic transfer. Her upper-intermediate learners transferred fewer L1 refusal strategies than their low-intermediate and intermediate peers. In addition, Pinto (2005) investigated L2 Spanish requests by four course-level groups ranging from low to high proficiency. Lower proficiency groups were generally more pragmatically ambiguous, transferring their English request-for-permission strategy 'can I' into Spanish when requesting a favor, which might indicate pragmalinguistic failure. Similarly, Algahtani and Roever (2012) analyzed Saudi learners of Australian English requests. They compared role plays by four groups ranging from beginner to advanced and found out that higher proficiency participants produced more pre-requests and details in the conversations. They concluded that proficiency had a positive effect on pragmatic competence at the discourse level but not necessarily at the sociopragmatic level. In addition, Alhadidi (2017), investigating the effect of pragmatic transfer from Arabic on the acquisition of English by Saudi adults, reports that the beginner group showed clear transfer from their first language, whereas the advanced group did not resort to pragmatic transfer.

On the other hand, different other studies revealed mediated effects of proficiency on L2 pragmatic competence. For example, Felix-Brasdefer (2007) investigated the production of requests by three proficiency groups of L2 Spanish learners in America. Low-proficiency learners displayed more direct requests, while the advanced group outperformed the other groups in conventional indirect requests. However, proficiency did not have an effect on the three groups' use of hints. The modality of pragmatic behavior also seems to condition the proficiency effect. Bardovi-Harlig (2009) points out that proficiency made a difference in formulaic expressions' recognition but not in production. However, in their investigation of the role of proficiency in the acquisition of conventional pragmalinguistic expressions in L2 Chinese, Bardovi-Harlig and Su (2018) concluded that proficiency significantly affected the acquisition of these expressions as the fourth-year group investigated produced far more conventional expressions than the lower proficiency groups. With regard to the sociopragmatic aspects of pragmatic competence, the majority of studies did not find any significant effects of proficiency in this part of pragmatic competence (Allami and Naeimi, 2011; Takenoya, 2003).

3. Material and Methods

The study adopts a cross-sectional, non-experimental design (Nunan, 1992). The data were elicited through a written discourse completion task (DCT henceforth) from two groups of Moroccan university EFL learners (MEFLs henceforth) belonging to semester two and semester six, a group of Moroccan native speakers of Moroccan Arabic (MANS henceforth) and a group of American native speakers of English (ANSs henceforth).

3.1 Participants

To investigate the effect of L1 pragmatic transfer on Moroccan EFL pragmatic competence, 48 Moroccan native speakers and 36 American native speakers participated in the study. The Moroccan sample was recruited among Ibn Zohr University students and was equally composed of males and females. Their age ranged between 19 and 22. The American sample, on the other hand, comprised 17 males and 19 females, totaling 36 participants. They were volunteers from Alakhawayn University students (15), teachers of English at two American Language Centers (15), and the Peace Corps (six). Their age ranged between 20 and 27.

In addition, to examine the effect of L2 proficiency on pragmatic competence and L1 pragmatic transfer, the data were also collected from two samples of MEFLs belonging to two different university levels within the English Studies *Licence* (BA equivalent) Program at Ibn Zohr University. Based on the courses they had taken and the official examinations they had passed, semester two students' levels ranged between low to mid-intermediate, whereas semester six students belonged to the upper-intermediate to advanced level. The two groups were homogeneous in terms of age and gender (see Table 1 above for more details).

Table 1: Distribution of Participants by Group and Gender

Group	Males	Females	Age	Total
American native speakers	17	19	20-27	36
Moroccan native speakers	24	24	19-22	48
Semester six EFL learners	30	30	21-23	60
Semester two EFL learners	30	32	19-21	62

3.2 Data Collection

The data for the present study were elicited via a written discourse completion task. This research instrument has been extensively used in similar studies in interlanguage pragmatics (Kasper and Dahl, 1991 for a review). The design of the study, involving the comparison of ANS, MANS, and MEFL requesting behavior, makes it ideal to use a DCT, which is a replicable instrument that allows for the systematic variation of as many control variables as needed and for comparability across groups and situations.

A number of steps were followed to ensure the validity and reliability of the DCT data. First, only realistic, comparable situations in both American and Moroccan cultures were selected. In other words, only situations in which both cultures would normally

produce requests were kept. Second, names or other gender markers were mostly avoided when making the request situations in order to minimize cultural or gender bias. Throughout the questionnaire, roles and neutral pronouns like he or she were generally used to refer to people in the situations. Finally, and most importantly, given the fact that the issue of the impact of rejoinders on subjects' productions is highly contentious, the open-questionnaire format was adopted to avoid rejoinders compromising the data. Proponents of the inclusion of rejoinders assert that a rejoinder constrains the subject from opting for the required speech act. Johnston, Kasper, and Ross (1998) explained that *"for interlanguage pragmatics research, then, dialogue completion appears to be the preferable format when the speech act under study is a responding act"*. In the case of requests, though, we deal with pre-events or initiating turns, which entail a certain reaction from the hearer. The inclusion of rejoinders would look unnatural compared to the order of events in real life, and that would be at the expense of the face validity of the instrument. Another reason for not including rejoinders is that there are many favor-asking requests in the discourse completion task, which are systematically varied for their imposition on the hearer's face wants. Therefore, the presence of a positive or negative rejoinder would very likely influence the choice of the type of requesting strategies and modification categories since the latter are thought to be directly linked to the speaker's perception of the hearer's readiness to comply with the request.

Three versions of the DCT were produced. An English version for American native speakers, a slightly simplified English version for Moroccan EFL learners, and a Moroccan Arabic version for Moroccan native speakers. The three versions were piloted with a small number of volunteers belonging to the three groups. As a result, the number of scenarios was reduced from 16 to 10 as the participants in the piloting phase needed much time to complete the tasks and most often ended up skipping some of them, which yielded incomplete data. Second, some scenarios were modified, especially on the Moroccan EFL learners' questionnaire, which was simplified to ensure a complete understanding of the situation context. Other modifications included the choice of some lexical items and the layout of the questionnaires.

The final version of the questionnaire contained ten scenarios. Each scenario begins with a short description of the interlocutors' roles, the request goal, and additional relevant elements of the context. Then, the subjects are instructed to provide the appropriate speech act as they would in real life. Four situational variables were built in the discourse completion task situations: two context external variables - power and social distance, and two context internal variables - request goal and imposition. They were systematically varied across the ten situations of the discourse completion task. The table below summarizes the DCT situations.

Table 2: The Variables Controlled in the Discourse Completion Task

Situation	Power	Distance	Imposition	Goal
Bus	Equal	Stranger	Easy	Information
Computer	Equal	Close	Easy	Permission
Restaurant	Equal	Stranger	Easy	Service
Loud Music	Equal	Acquaintance	Difficult	Right
Library	Superior	Stranger	Easy	Right
Extension	Inferior	Acquaintance	Difficult	Favor
MA program	Inferior	Acquaintance	Easy	Information
Party	Inferior	Close	Difficult	Permission
Presentation	Superior	Acquaintance	Difficult	Favor
Post-card	Equal	Stranger	Easy	Service

3.3 Data Analysis

To analyze the requests produced by the four groups who participated in the study, we adopt the coding scheme which was developed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper (1989), and Faerch and Kasper (1989) for the cross-cultural speech act realization project. This analytical framework has acquired wide usage in interlanguage Pragmatics and gained much credibility through its adoption in the majority of studies in the field of cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics. The CCSARP (Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper 1989) identifies nine strategy types ranging from the most to the least direct. The strategies and their corresponding examples are presented in Table 3 below. The scale is based on degrees of illocutionary transparency. Therefore, as we move up the scale from one to nine, the length of the inferential process needed for identifying the utterance as a request becomes longer. Strategies from one to five are considered direct and more face-threatening. Those from six to seven are conventionally indirect, whereas those between eight and nine are non-conventionally indirect.

Table 3: Request Strategies Across Directness Levels

Direct strategies	1. Mood derivable: e.g. <i>"Give me your car."</i>
	2. Performatives: e.g. <i>"I am asking you to calm down."</i>
	3. Hedged performatives: e.g. <i>"I would like to ask you to give your presentation next week."</i>
	4. Obligation statements: e.g. <i>"You have to submit the thesis."</i>
	5. Want Statements: e.g. <i>"I really wish you'd let me go out tonight."</i>
Conventionally indirect strategies	6. Suggestory formulae: e.g. <i>"How about closing that door?"</i>
	7. Query preparatory: e.g. <i>"Could you clean up the kitchen, please?"</i>
Non-conventionally indirect strategies	8. Strong hints: e.g. <i>"You have left the kitchen in a mess."</i>
	9. Mild hints: e.g. <i>"I feel extremely hot."</i>

In addition to the requesting strategies indicating levels of directness, the subjects' responses were also analyzed using modification categories, including alerts, syntactic downgraders, lexical downgraders, and mitigating supportive moves. Other variables include request perspective.

Table 4: Alerters, Modification Categories, and Request Perspective

Alerters	Syntactic downgraders	Lexical/phrasal downgraders	Mitigation supportive moves	Request perspective
1. Title	1. Interrogative	1. Politeness Marker	1. Preparator	Hearer-oriented
2. Surname	2. Subjunctive	2. Understater	2. Precommitment	Speaker-oriented
3. First Name	3. Conditional	3. Hedge	3. Grounder	Inclusive
4. Endearment term	4. Aspect	4. Subjectiviser	4. Disarmer	Impersonal
5. Offensive	5. Tense	5. Downtoner	5. Promise	
6. Pronoun	6. Conditional clause	6. Cajoler	6. Imposition minimizer	
7. Attention getter	7. Combinations	7. Appealer	7. Combinations	
8. Combinations	8. Concession	8. Combination	8. Apology	
9. Attention getter+ title	9. Inclusive pronoun		9. Thanking	
10. Greeting	10. Determiner		10. Praise	

The data were sorted into percentages in order to compare the performance of the different groups on the different request pragmalinguistic strategies analyzed in the study. The multi-dimensional Chi-square test was chosen to study the significance of differences between the two proficiency groups of Moroccan EFL learners. The non-parametric multi-dimensional Chi-square test was chosen for the present study because the data were nominal, yielding frequencies, not scores (Brace *et al.*, R., 2003).

4. Results

4.1 Head-requesting Strategies

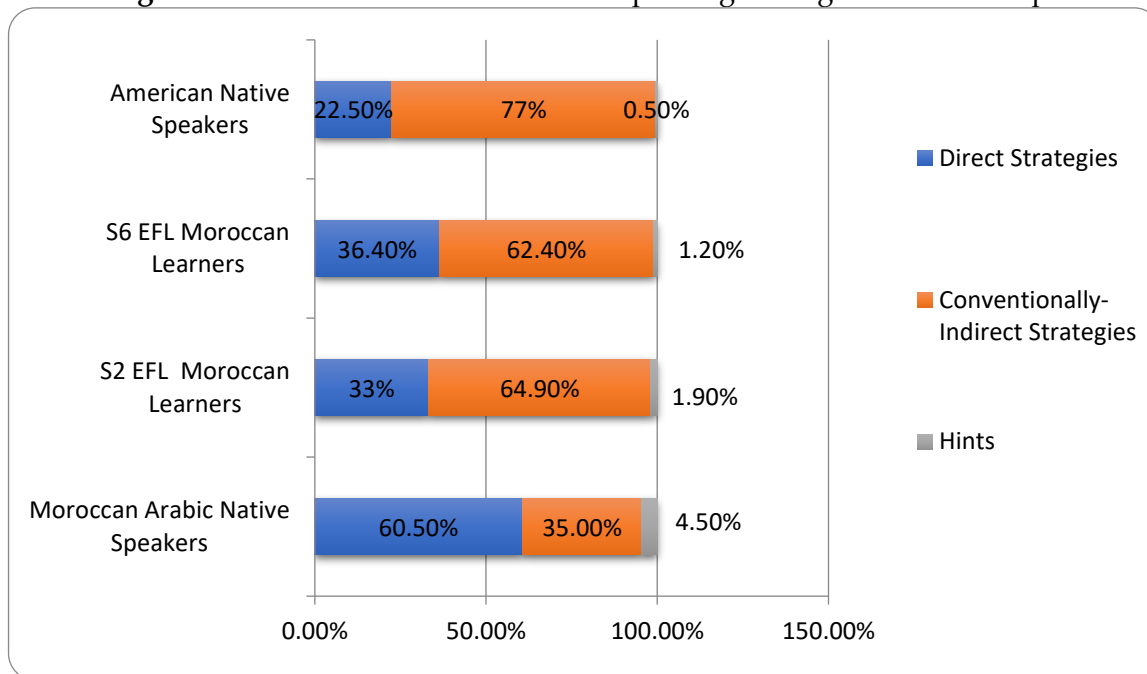
4.1.1 Directness Distribution Patterns

As indicated in Figure 1 below, the quantitative analysis of the data revealed marked differences between MEFLs, ANSs and MANs at the level of the main head-requesting strategy types. The differences between ANSs and MANs are outstanding. MEFLs showed more similarities with ANSs than with MANs, whereas relatively minor differences between the two groups of MEFLs were recorded.

A number of interesting observations emanate from this graph. First, while MANs were outstandingly the most direct group (60.5%), ANSs were the most conventionally indirect group (77%). The two groups of MEFLs, on the other hand, occupied a middle position. They were not as direct as MANs and not as indirect as ANSs. The percentages of their direct and conventionally indirect strategies indicate a tendency to approximate ANSs patterns, but the effect of their L1 can be clearly seen in the higher levels of directness they showed. In addition, although the differences between semester two and six MEFLs were small, it is interesting to observe that the lower proficiency group showed more indirectness and, therefore, more similarities with ANSs. With regard to the use of non-conventionally indirect strategies, although the use of the latter is marginal compared to the other two main strategy types discussed earlier, the previous pattern of indirectness is reversed. MANs outperformed all the groups in the

use of hints (almost 5%), followed by semester two and six MEFLs (1,9% and 1.2% respectively), whereas ANSs hardly used any hints (0.5% only).

Figure 1: Distribution of Main Head-Requesting Strategies across Groups



A multi-dimensional Chi-square was run to test the strength of the differences between the two groups of MEFLs. Table four below presents the output of the Chi-square test. The results revealed that there was no significant relationship between proficiency and degree of directness ($\chi^2 = 5.116$; $df = 2$; $p = .077$), indicating the L2 proficiency did not have a significant effect on MEFLs pragmatic competence as measured by their requesting performance.

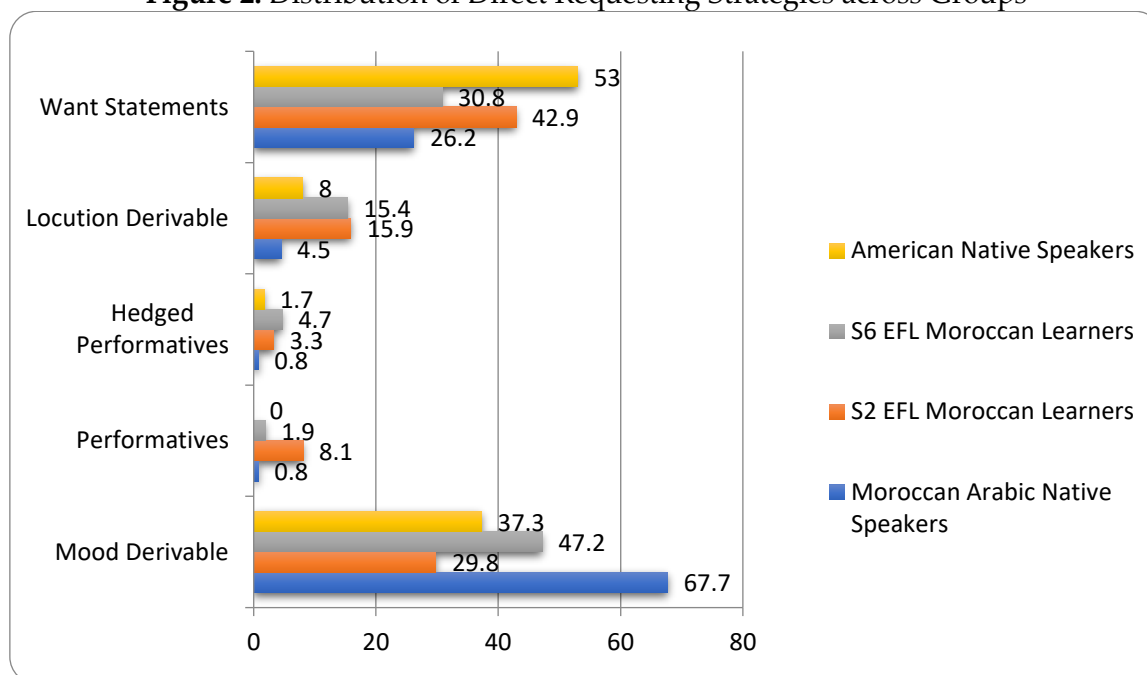
Table 4: Chi-Square Test for Relationship between L2 Proficiency and Directness

Pearson Chi-square	Value	df	Sig
	5.116	2	.077

4.1.2 Direct Strategies

Direct strategies involve five sub-strategies ranging from the most direct, the imperative, to the least direct, want statements. The following graph summarizes the use of these strategies by the four groups of participants.

Figure 2: Distribution of Direct Requesting Strategies across Groups

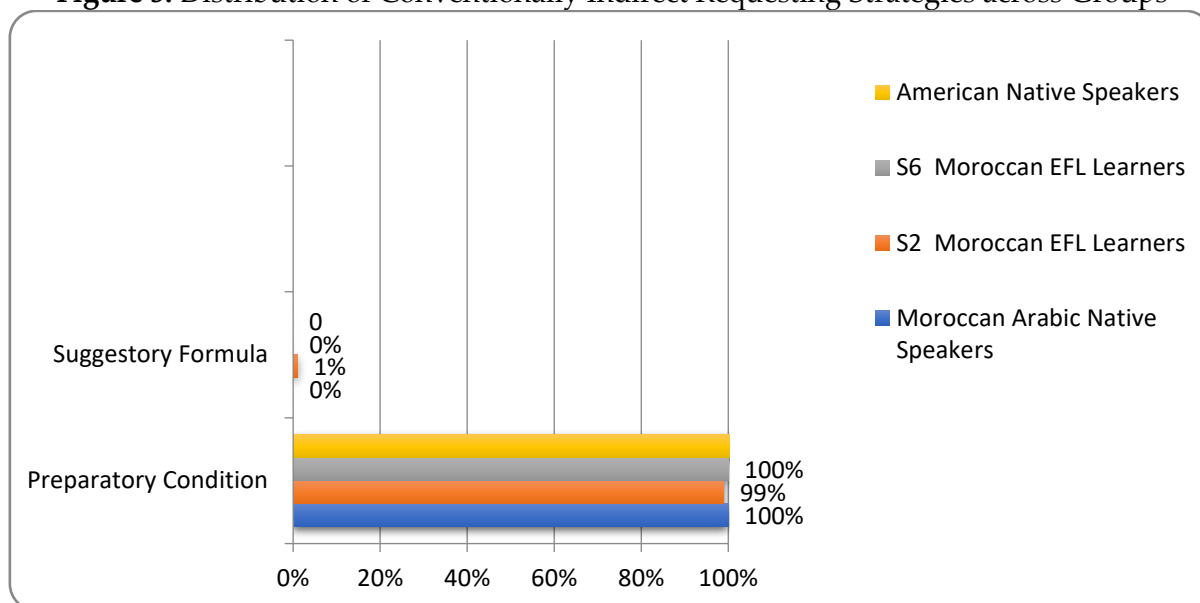


The three most used direct strategies by all the groups were mood derivables, want statements, and locution derivables. These three strategies represented 98.4%, 88.6%, 93.4%, and 98.3% of the direct strategies used by MANSs, Semester two MEFLs, semester six MEFLs, and ANSs, respectively. However, the preference order for these strategies was not identical. While MANSs and semester six MEFLs mostly preferred the mood derivable sub-strategy, which was mainly expressed by means of imperatives (67.7% and 47.2%, respectively), ANSs and semester two MEFLs opted more for want statements (53% and 42.9% respectively). The pattern observed earlier with directness levels across the main request strategy types was also observed in the use of want statements. ANSs ranked first, semester two MEFLs second, Semester six MEFLs third, and MANSs last. It should be noted, though, that the want statements produced by both groups of Moroccan learners were mostly in the form of “I want”, which is similar to the Arabic expression used by MANSs ‘brit’ meaning I want. ANSs used expressions, such as ‘I need’ and I would like”. In the use of mood derivables, though, a unique pattern emerged. MANSs ranked first, semester six MEFLs second, ANSs third, and semester two MEFLs last. This does not mean that semester two learners used less mood derivables than ANSs, but maybe they were more aware than their semester six peers that such a strategy is not a very common request strategy in English, especially in formal situations. Another noteworthy pattern peculiar to MEFLs is their use of locution derivables, hedged performatives, and performative. Although their production was relatively rare in the data for all groups, MEFLs outperformed both groups of native speakers in the use of these direct sub-strategies. The difference between the two groups of Moroccan learners was clear in the production of performatives, which semester two learners used far more than their counterparts.

4.1.3 Conventionally Indirect Strategies

This main type of head-requesting strategies includes two sub-strategies: the suggestory formula and the preparatory condition. Figure 3 below shows their use by the four groups. Unlike direct strategies, all the groups performed almost similarly on conventionally indirect strategies. Except for semester two MEFLs, who rarely opted for the suggestory formula (1%), the other three groups exclusively resorted to the preparatory condition to produce their conventionally indirect requests.

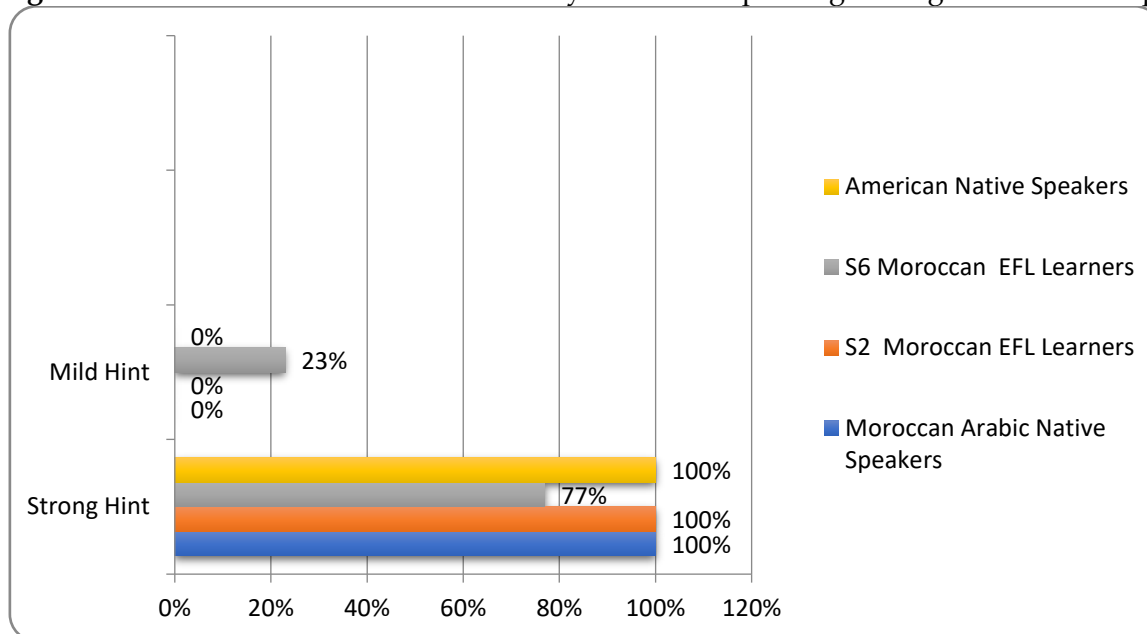
Figure 3: Distribution of Conventionally Indirect Requesting Strategies across Groups



4.1.4 Non-conventionally Indirect Strategies

Non-conventionally indirect request strategies involve strong hints and mild hints. While the former make some kind of reference to the elements of the request, the latter are very opaque and difficult to interpret as requests without appropriate contextual and background information. The results of the use of these two strategies by the four groups are presented in figure four below. The results indicate that strong hints are the preferred non-conventionally indirect sub-strategy for all groups. This strategy was exclusively used by both groups of native speakers and by semester two MEFLs, whereas 23% of semester six MEFLs' hints were mild hints. As presented in figure one above, the proportion of hints among the three main request strategy types is marginal since it varies between 4.5% and 0.5% only.

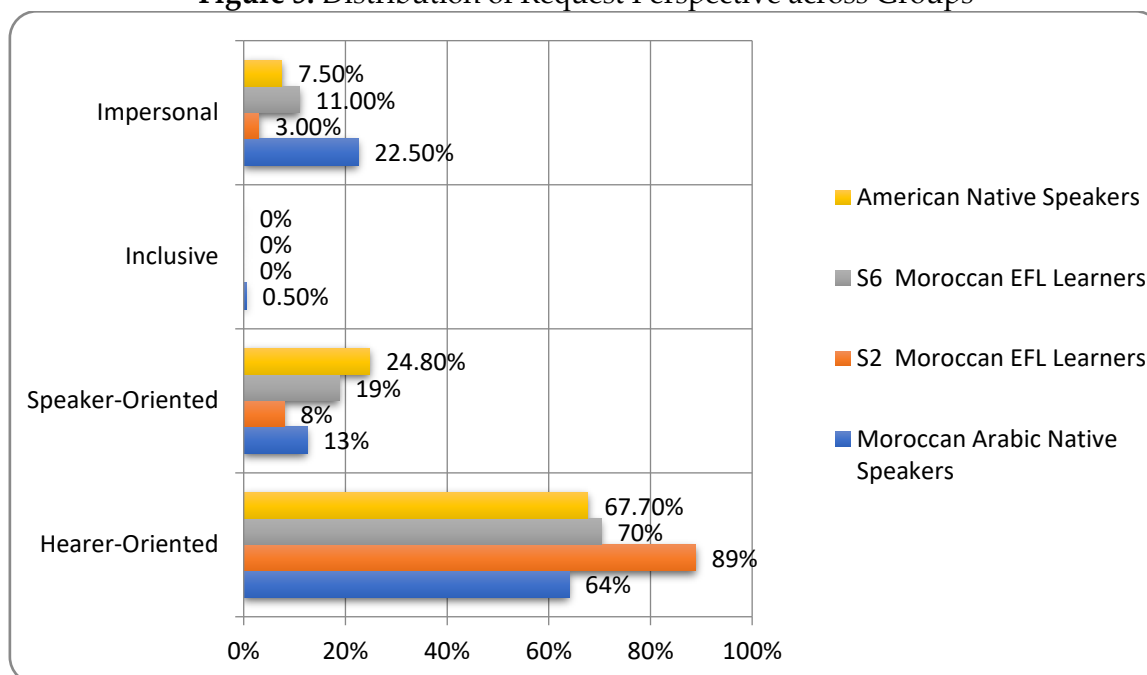
Figure 4: Distribution of Non-conventionally Indirect Requesting Strategies across Groups



4.1.5 Request Perspective

The graph below describes the distribution of the four types of request perspectives across the four groups. The first pattern which emerges from the data summarized below is the extensive use of hearer-oriented strategies across all the groups. Both groups of MEFLs outperformed the two groups of native speakers. Semester 2 MEFLs relied heavily on this type of perspective (89%) as compared to their semester six peers (70%), indicating a quite different tendency from their L1(Moroccan Arabic) and L2 (English). As a result, semester two MEFLs produced the lowest percentage of the other perspective types among the four groups. Regarding the second type of request perspective, ANSs displayed the highest percentage of speaker-oriented requests (24.8%), followed by semester six MEFLs (19%), while MANSs showed a lower percentage (13%). Furthermore, the use of the impersonal perspective was not as popular as the two previous ones except for MANSs (22,5%), who preferred this strategy over the speaker-oriented perspective. MEFLs showed opposite tendencies. While semester six learners outperformed ANSs (11% and 7.5%, respectively), their semester two counterparts rarely produced the impersonal perspective (only 3%). Finally, the use of the inclusive perspective was insignificant across the four groups.

Figure 5: Distribution of Request Perspective across Groups



A Chi-square test was run to measure the differences between Semester 2 and semester 6 MEFLs in terms of the type of request perspective used. The test revealed that there was a significant relationship between university level and the use of the different perspective strategies. ($\chi^2 = 29.222$; $df = 3$; $p = .005$). These results suggest that semester six MEFLs were more syntactically proficient since they used more speaker-oriented and impersonal perspective requests. Their syntactic proficiency resulted in more pragmatic competence.

Table 5: Chi-Square Test for Relationship between Proficiency and Request Perspective

Pearson Chi-square	Value	df	Sig
	29.222	3	.005

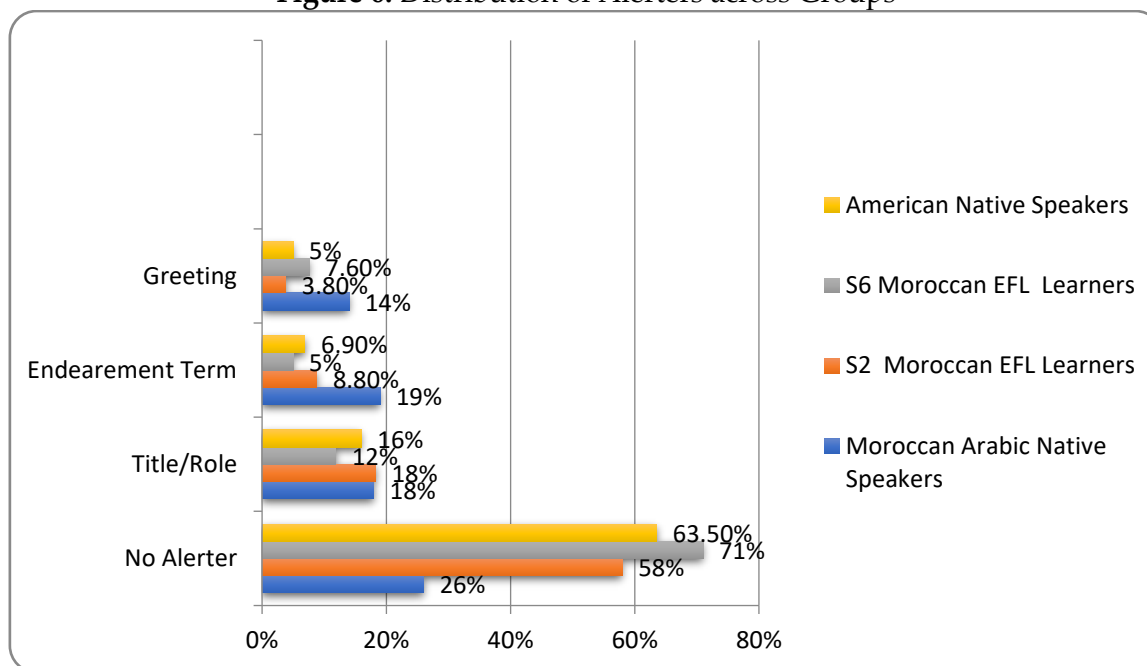
4.2 Modification Strategies

Modification categories are optional linguistic elements subordinated to head request acts. They soften or increase the effect of the request on the hearer. The analysis below will cover alerters, syntactic downgraders, lexical/phrasal downgraders, and mitigating supportive moves. Alerters come at the beginning of the requests and usually establish contact between the speaker and the hearer. Internal modifiers are embedded in the head and act either as syntactic or lexical/phrasal downgraders. External modifiers are added before or after the head act in order to mitigate its impact. All the figures included in this section report the percentage of subjects who did not opt for the specific modifiers, along with a rank order of the three most used modifiers for each group.

4.2.1 Alerters

Figure 6 describes the preferences of the four groups relative to the use of alerters in their requests. The comparison of the overall use of Alerters showed some differences and similarities among the groups. While the majority of MANs used alerters in their requests, less than half the participants among semester six MEFLs, semester two MEFLs, and ANs used alerters (zero alerter: 71%, 58%, and 63.5%, respectively). semester six MEFLs displayed a clear preference for zero-alerter requests, as only 29% of their requests contained alerters as compared to the semester two group (42%).

Figure 6: Distribution of Alerters across Groups

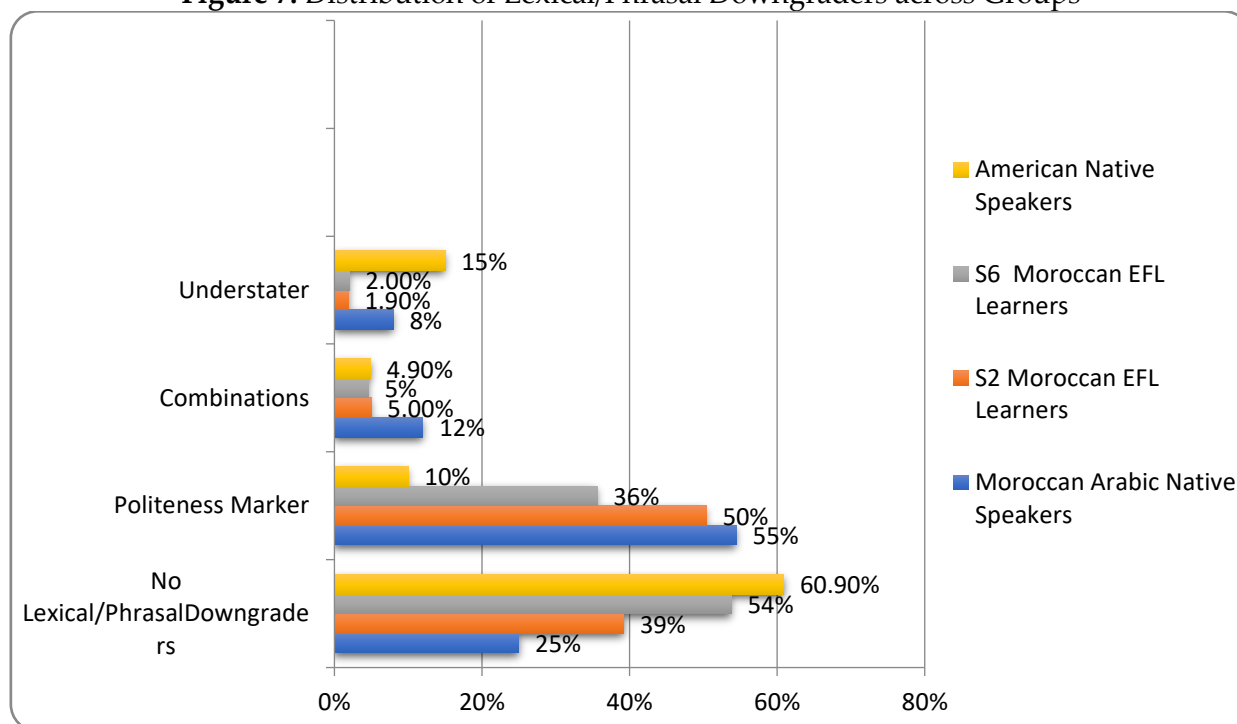


However, all four groups used the same top three alerters. Moroccan Arabic native speakers' use of the three alerters seemed more balanced and consistent. They noticeably opted for more endearment terms and greetings compared to the other groups. On the other hand, the four groups showed minimal variation in the use of the title /role sub-strategy.

4.2.2 Lexical and Phrasal Downgraders

Three interesting observations emerge from Figure 7 below. The first one is that both ANs and MEFLs used far fewer lexical/phrasal downgraders than MANs. Similar to their use of alerters, MANs modified 75% of their requests lexically. Semester six learners used far less lexical/phrasal downgraders than semester two learners and slightly more than ANs. Another interesting characteristic of lexical/phrasal downgraders' use across the groups is the use of the same top three lexical/phrasal downgraders, namely, the politeness marker, combinations, and understater.

Figure 7: Distribution of Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders across Groups



However, both MANs and MEFLs displayed far more use of the politeness marker than ANs. While only 10% of ANs' requests contained that marker, 55% of MANs' requests did so. The MEFLs two groups showed a clear transfer of this strategy from Arabic, especially semester two students. To test the significance of the differences between the two levels, a chi-square test was run as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Relationship between Proficiency and Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders

Pearson Chi-square	Value	df	Sig
	4.74	1	.029

The results of the Chi-square test showed that there was a significant relationship between the use of lexical/phrasal downgraders and the L2 proficiency of Moroccan learners ($\chi^2 = 4.74$; $df = 1$; $p = .029$), suggesting there were marked differences between semester two and semester six MEFLs at the level of lexical and phrasal downgraders.

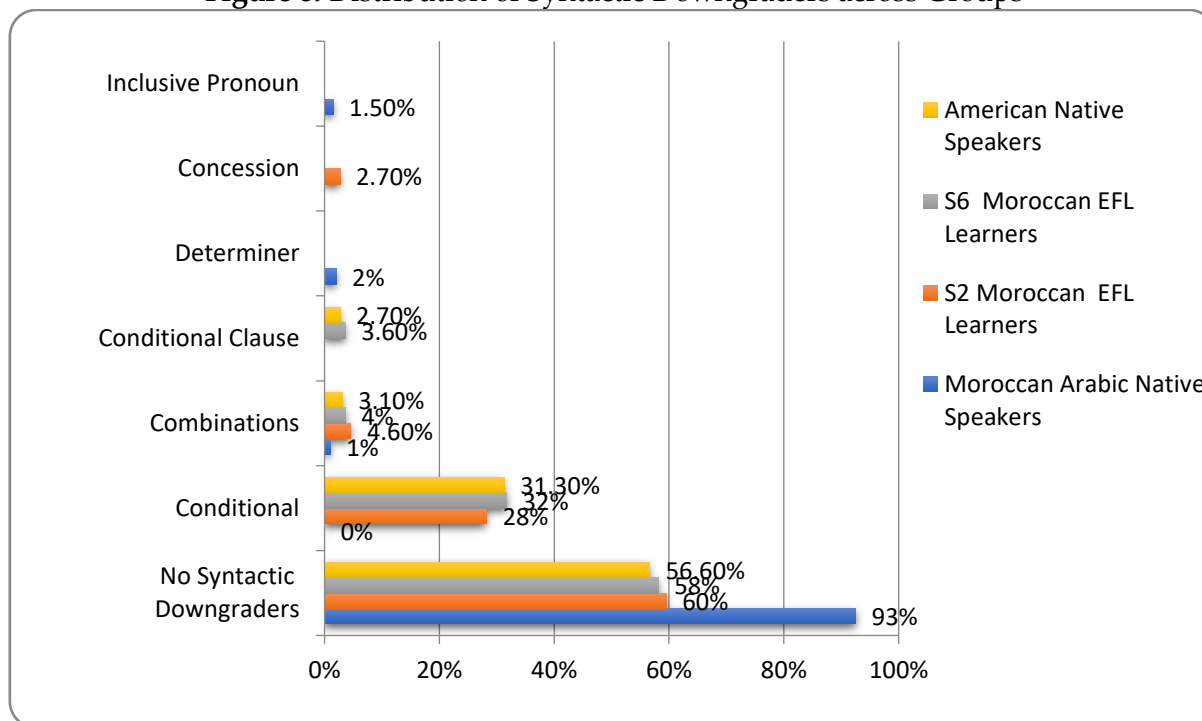
4.2.3 Syntactic Downgraders

Syntactic downgraders modify the request head act internally by means of syntactic choices, such as the use of the conditional, conditional clause, tense, aspect, etc. The syntactic downgraders used by the four groups are reported in Figure 8 below.

There was a marked difference between the percentage of MANs and the other groups in terms of syntactic downgraders. Unlike their use of alerters and lexical/phrasal downgraders, the majority of MANs' requests were not syntactically modified (93%). ANs use of these syntactic modifiers is consistent to a large extent with their previous

use of lexical phrasal downgraders (56.6% vs 60.9%), whereas both groups of MEFLs did not divert much from ANSs' pattern (58-60%).

Figure 8: Distribution of Syntactic Downgraders across Groups



Both groups of Moroccan EFL learners mostly used the “conditional”, like ANSs. Although the differences between the two groups of learners are not large, semester six learners showed more syntactic proficiency in the use of the conditional. This was also clear in the use of the conditional clause, which semester two students did not use. MANsS exclusively used a small number of determiners and inclusive pronouns as syntactic downgraders.

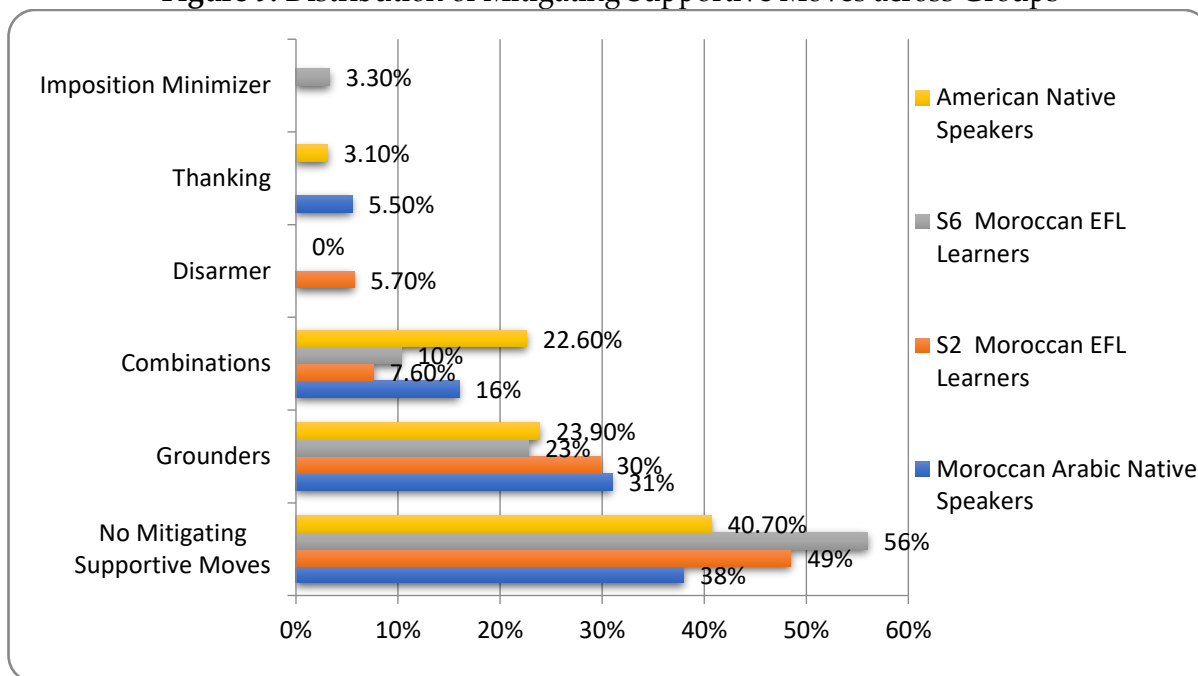
4.2.4 Mitigating Supportive Moves

The following graph summarizes the percentage distribution of mitigating supportive moves across the four groups. The results reflected a more substantial use of mitigating supportive moves by MANsS and ANsS (62% and 59.3%, respectively). In contrast to the pattern observed in syntactic downgraders, both groups of MEFLs left a greater percentage of their requests unmitigated with supportive moves (49 to 56%). In addition, grounders emerged as the most used mitigating supportive move across the groups. Their use was very outstanding in comparison with disarmers, imposition minimizers or combinations of different mitigating supportive moves.

MANsS showed higher use of grounders similar to semester two MEFLs, whereas ANsS and semester six MEFLs displayed lower percentages of grounder use. This might indicate that semester two learners are more influenced by their L1 pragmatic norms than their semester six counterparts in the use of grounders. Both groups of native

speakers used higher percentages of combination of different supportive moves, suggesting that MEFLs pragmatic knowledge is not very sophisticated yet.

Figure 9: Distribution of Mitigating Supportive Moves across Groups



A Chi-square test was run to compare the use of mitigating supportive moves by the two groups of Moroccan EFL learners. The table below provides the results for the relationship between the university level and the use of mitigating supportive moves by both groups of MEFLs.

Table 7: Relationship between Proficiency and Mitigating Supportive Moves

Pearson Chi-square	Value	df	Sig
	1.831	1	.176

The Chi-square test revealed that there was no significant relationship between proficiency and the use of mitigating supportive moves ($\chi^2 = 1.831$; $df = 1$; $p = .176$), suggesting that the two groups of MEFLs use mitigating supportive moves in similar ways.

5. Discussion

The investigation of MEFLs' pragmatic transfer and how their L2 proficiency mediates such an effect on their pragmatic competence revealed insightful patterns. MANs were found to be far more direct than MEFLs. More than 60% of MANs' requests were formulated using direct strategies, followed surprisingly by semester six MEFLs, who phrased 36.4% of their requests using direct strategies. If we assume that L2 proficiency positively impacts pragmatic competence, it was semester two MEFLs who should have

ranked second in terms of directness. Furthermore, MEFLs' requests were more similar in directness levels to ANSs than to MANs. American native speakers produced about 22% of direct requests only. Therefore, one can conclude that in terms of major head-requesting strategy distribution, MEFLs' requests did not display clear-cut pragmatic transfer.

However, with regard to the direct requesting strategies, semester six MEFLs displayed more similarities to MANs' direct sub-strategies than their semester two counterparts. After calculating the proportion of imperatives (mood derivable) in all the requesting strategies, it was found that imperatives alone represented 17,18% and 9.83% of semester six and two MEFLs' requesting strategies, respectively. Imperatives also constituted 40.95% and 8.39% of MANs' and ANSs' requests, respectively. These percentages reveal that semester six MEFLs used twice as many imperatives as their semester two counterparts. The latter's use of this type of requesting strategy was quantitatively consistent with ANSs'.

One possible explanation of this could be the instruction effect. Semester two MEFLs were still fresh from high school and semester one university courses where English textbooks and instructors usually teach the use of conventional indirectness as the most appropriate way to make requests, which perhaps discouraged them from using imperatives. The effect of such instruction is thought to weaken as learners shift focus from the study of formal aspects of language to the study of more specialized content in English in more advanced levels. This may suggest that enough practice of these aspects was not achieved, which seems to have prevented their acquisition.

Unlike the pattern observed above for the use of imperatives among MEFLs, semester two MEFLs showed more similarities to MANs than to ANSs in the use of want statements. Considering only the proportion of want statements among direct requesting strategies (see Figure 2 above), semester two MEFLs ranked second after ANSs. However, the overall proportion of this strategy among all requesting strategies indicates a different pattern. Want statements represented 15.85%, 14.15%, 11.92%, and 11.21% of MANs, semester two MEFLs, ANSs, and semester 6 MEFLs' requesting strategies, respectively. Accordingly, semester two MEFLs tended to be more similar to MANs in contrast with what was observed with imperatives, whereas semester six MEFLs seemed to be more similar to ANSs. In this case, semester two MEFLs seemed to display pragmatic transfer from Moroccan Arabic. The results of the chi-square test did confirm the differences in terms of overall directness between the two groups of MEFLs although the significance of the test (.07) was below the set alpha level (.05) by only 2%. This could be attributed to the other similarities in the use of conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect strategies between the two groups.

In addition, the only significant difference between the two groups of MEFLs concerns the use of perspective. The sweeping majority of semester 2 MEFLs' requests were hearer-oriented (89%), compared to 70% only of hearer-oriented requests by semester 6 learners. In comparison with ANSs, semester two learners overused this type of perspective, while semester six learners displayed similar ANS levels. Furthermore,

semester six MEFLs showed significantly more use of speaker-oriented (19%) and impersonal strategies (11%). Their use of speaker-oriented strategies approximated native speakers' (about 25%).

This heavy reliance of semester two students on a hearer-oriented perspective could be due to several reasons. First, they used more conventionally indirect strategies than their semester six counterparts (see Figure 1). They also seemed not to be proficient in formulating speaker-oriented and impersonal requests, unlike semester six learners who showed a more varied use of perspective. This suggests that this aspect of requesting directness should be given special attention in the teaching of requests since the appropriate use of speaker-oriented perspective in some service or permission requests seems to be conventionalized and more polite, and learners need to be aware of that at early stages of instruction.

All in all, in terms of the directness of head-requesting strategies, MEFLs displayed some pragmatic transfer of Moroccan Arabic direct strategies. Although MEFLs' requests were found to be significantly more direct than American native speakers', they were also significantly less direct than MANSs. It seemed that MEFLs were aware of the need to be indirect, but sometimes and for various reasons they used direct strategies such as imperatives and want statements.

The use of a very high percentage of imperatives by semester six learners indicates pragmatic transfer. Similarly, the use of a high percentage of want statements by semester two learners also suggests some pragmatic transfer. Moreover, when considering the expressions used as want statements, the pragmatic transfer is clearly established. Most MEFLs from both groups used the expression "I want" as compared to ANSs, who mostly opted for "I need" or "I'd like". The expression used by MEFLs sounds like the exact translation of the Moroccan Arabic equivalent of the statement "brit". The use of 'I want (you to)' rather sounds commanding in English and, therefore, is likely to sound inappropriate in most requests.

Furthermore, the difference noted between semester two and semester six MEFLs could not be significantly linked to the effect of proficiency level except for the use of request perspective. A larger sample could possibly have revealed other significant differences. The observations discussed above suggest that semester six learners used noticeably more imperatives than their semester two counterparts, but it is likely that this difference is due to instruction (beyond the scope of this study) rather than overall L2 proficiency.

At the level of modification categories, MANSs used the greatest number of alerters, lexical/phrasal downgraders, and mitigating supportive moves, but the least number of syntactic downgraders. ANSS produced the highest number of syntactic downgraders, the least number of lexical phrasal downgraders, and almost as many mitigating moves as MANSs. while EFL Moroccan learners used far more syntactic downgraders. MEFLs showed similar numbers of syntactic downgraders to ANSs, produced far fewer mitigating moves than the other two groups of native speakers, far more alerters and lexical phrasal downgraders than MANSs.

MANs used far more alerters than the other three groups. They used more "endearment terms" and "greetings", suggesting a clear tendency to appeal to the positive face needs of both the speaker and hearer. The number of MEFLs' requests which were modified by alerters was more similar to the number of alerters used by ANs, which does not suggest any pragmatic transfer. The semester six group produced fewer alerters, while the semester two group opted for slightly more alerters than ANs. This pattern does help establish a clear connection between proficiency and pragmatic competence.

Similarly, MANs significantly outperformed Moroccan EFL learners in the use of lexical/phrasal downgraders. 75% of their requests were lexically modified as compared to about 39% only for ANs. MEFLs showed different tendencies. While semester six learners approximated ANs' use, semester two learners produced fewer lexical downgraders than MANs but clearly more than the remaining two groups. The huge difference between the two native speaker groups in the use of lexical modification suggests marked cultural differences between Moroccan and American requesting norms. The overuse of the politeness marker by Moroccan Arabic native speakers could be a plausible explanation for such differences. 55% of MANs' requests were modified using politeness markers as compared to only 10% for Americans. Most of these politeness markers were used with the great number of imperatives used by Moroccan learners. The use of many "combinations" and "understaters" also seemed to account for such a high number of lexical/phrasal downgraders. The differences in the percentages of lexically modified requests do not allow us to claim pragmatic transfer of Moroccan Arabic lexical modification strategies. However, when considering the use of the politeness marker alone, the picture looks quite different. The number of politeness markers used by MEFLs seemed so high when compared to how ANs used politeness markers, which could be due to pragmatic transfer from Moroccan Arabic.

In contrast, there was an outstandingly marked difference in the use of syntactic downgraders between MANs and both MEFLs and ANs. While syntactic downgraders were used only rarely by Moroccan Arabic native speakers (7%), semester two MEFLs, semester six MEFLs, and ANs modified about 40%, 42%, and 43% of their requests, respectively, with syntactic downgraders. The use of syntactic downgraders by Moroccan EFL learners seemed to approximate American native speakers' use of these downgraders. This difference can be accounted for by the nature of the direct requesting strategies used by Moroccan Arabic native speakers. These strategies, such as the imperative, do not allow for the use of devices like the "conditional" and the "conditional clause". The conditional, for instance, is directly linked to the use of conventionally indirect requesting strategies. Most syntactic downgraders used by MEFLs fall within these two categories. Therefore, the use of mostly direct strategies by MANs seemed to explain these significant differences. Here, neither pragmatic transfer nor proficiency effect was observed.

With regard to external modification, MANs outperformed MEFLs in the number of mitigating supportive moves used to modify their requests. The use of more

“combinations” of mitigating supportive and many “thanking expressions” and “grounders” seemed to explain such differences. However, the use of grounders was mostly similar, especially between MANSs and semester two MEFLs. These two groups used relatively more grounders than ANSs (about 24%) and semester six MEFLs (23%). These similarities between MANSs and semester 2 MEFLs might suggest some degree of pragmatic transfer, but the chi-square test did not detect any significant differences between the two MEFLs proficiency groups.

All in all, except for syntactic downgraders, MANSs used more modification categories than MEFLs and ANSs both internally and externally. However, there were a few similarities that could be attributed to pragmatic transfer. A case in point was the use of the politeness marker in lexical phrasal modification and, to a lesser extent, grounders in mitigating external modification. Therefore, we conclude that there is a mild negative pragmatic transfer from Moroccan Arabic request modification strategies.

The findings of the present study do not corroborate the results obtained by Abdou (1999.) at the level of pragmatic transfer. In this respect, Abdou (ibid.) claims that EFL Moroccan learners' requesting behavior is “*shaped to a large extent by their native socio-cultural norms*”. The amount of directness and modification categories used by Moroccan EFL learners as compared to Moroccan Arabic native speakers did not allow us to make such a strong claim.

Other Moroccan studies pointed out a pragmatic transfer from Moroccan Arabic requesting strategies to English. For instance, Loutfi (2016) claims that Moroccan EFL learners transfer Moroccan Arabic direct strategies into English based on the higher number of direct requesting strategies used by Moroccan EFL learners as compared to native speakers of English. Abidi (2022) also asserts that MEFLs use more direct strategies than ANSs. He attributes the ‘overuse’ of direct requesting strategies to negative pragmatic transfer from Moroccan Arabic since Moroccan Arabic requests are more direct than English requests (El Hiani, 2015; Ezzaoua, 2021; Hammani, 2019; Loutfi 2016). Furthermore, Talay (2022) equally asserts that MEFLs displayed numerous deviations from English norms of directness. He explains that Moroccan learners use direct requesting strategies similar to their L1, which according to him, proves that there is pragmatic transfer. These conclusions largely confirm the present study findings about MEFLs' request directness patterns.

On the other hand, several other researchers outside Morocco found out instances of pragmatic transfer among EFL learners. For example, Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010) reported that first-language pragmatic knowledge and cultural norms' transfer influenced Jordanian EFL learners' requestive choices. They tended to use long request structures loaded with justifications to soften the imposition of their requests. This was attributed to the “*Jordanians' preference for such interpersonal elements in Jordanian Arabic*”. However, in the present study MEFLs used far less external request mitigators than ANSs. Besides, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008) found out that Greek ESL learners showed many deviations in terms of the amount and type of modification embedded in their requests. She attributed such deviations to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer.

Alhadidi (2017) also concluded that Saudi EFL learners fall back on their Arabic pragmatic knowledge to substitute for the missing pragmatic knowledge in English.

With respect to the comparison between semester two and semester six EFL Moroccan learners, although there were numerous observed differences, the proficiency differences between the MEFL groups could not be statistically connected to any gains in pragmatic competence other than in the use of request perspective and lexical phrasal downgraders. At the level of alerters, semester six MEFLs used quite fewer alerters than semester two learners, who seemed more sensitive to this type of modification; however, these differences were not statistically confirmed.

Similarly, semester two MEFLs used more mitigating supportive moves than semester six learners. Although the low-level group used more grounders and disarmers, semester six learners produced more combinations. However, the differences reported between the two groups were not confirmed by the Chi-square test.

On the other hand, there were significant differences in the use of lexical/phrasal downgraders by both groups of MEFLs. Again, semester two learners outperformed semester six learners in the use of lexical modification. This was mainly attributed to the over-use of the politeness marker. As discussed above, the over-use of the politeness marker was probably a case of pragmatic transfer from Moroccan Arabic requesting norms. However, in the case of modification, the amount of transfer seemed to decrease as proficiency increased. In addition, semester six MEFLs significantly used fewer hearer-oriented and more speaker-oriented requests than semester two MEFLs. With both request perspective and lexical phrasal downgraders, semester six learners displayed a better approximation of ANSs requesting behavior, which might indicate a positive correlation between proficiency and pragmatic competence.

However, the patterns observed in the distribution of direct and indirect requesting strategies seem to indicate otherwise. Semester six MEFLs used almost twice as many imperatives as semester two MEFLs, whereas ANSs produced almost the same number of imperatives recorded in semester two MEFLs' data. Therefore, the differences observed in request directness seem to suggest a negative correlation between proficiency and pragmatic competence.

These findings are partly in line with Latif's (2001). He contended that proficiency, as measured by the university level, had a positive correlation with Moroccan learners' use of direct strategies and modification categories. He concluded that fourth-year university MEFLs were more direct, verbose, and syntactically proficient than first-year MEFLs. In the present study, semester six learners were more direct than semester two learners but produced fewer externally and internally modified requests. At the level of syntactic downgraders, semester six learners showed more frequent use of some syntactic downgraders, but the differences were not significant.

In addition, the findings of this study do not confirm Hassall's (2003) conclusions. Comparing low-intermediate with high-intermediate Australian learners of Indonesian, he concluded that conventional indirectness increased with higher proficiency. Similar results were confirmed by Otcu and Zeyrek (2006), who compared low-intermediate and

upper-intermediate Turkish EFL learners and by Warga (2007), who compared three groups of Austrian learners of French. Similarly, in his investigation of American learners of Spanish, Félix-Brasdefer, J.C. (2007) also signaled an increase in the number of conventional indirect strategies as the learners' proficiency increased. He pointed out significant differences between beginner and intermediate learners but no significant differences between intermediate and advanced learners. In our study, the more advanced group produced fewer conventional indirect strategies, but the differences were not significant between the two groups.

The results of this investigation do not corroborate the conclusions of other researchers who have also pointed out the significant positive gains in the learners' requesting performance due to an increase in their proficiency level (Alhadidi, 2017; Ellis, 1992; Jorda, 2005; Takahashi and Dufon, 1989). For example, in her study of monolingual and bilingual Spanish EFL learners, Jorda (2005) found out that intermediate learners significantly used more external and internal modification than beginner learners. The opposite seems to be true for this study. This can be attributed to the level of the groups, which ranges from intermediate to advanced. In the present study, semester two learners generally seemed more proficient in the use of directness and semester six in modification categories.

On the other hand, Abdou (1999) seems to agree with the fact that proficiency level did not have significant effects on Moroccan EFL learners' use of requesting strategies. Other studies also reported a marginal influence of proficiency level on requesting behavior (Takahashi, 1996; Sifianou, 1999), but most of them collected data from intermediate and advanced learners. This seems to be the case for the current study since semester two MEFLs are considered intermediate students, and semester six MEFLs are high intermediate to advanced learners.

Pinto (2005) also points to the marginal gains in requesting competence across levels. Comparing the data from different university levels, she discovered that low-level learners were not always the most direct. She concluded that all learners, regardless of their level, faced difficulties when their first language differed markedly from the target language. Her conclusions about low-level learner directness are in line with the present study findings.

6. Recommendations

The analysis in the present study has mainly focused on pragmalinguistic requesting strategies and did not examine sociopragmatic transfer. Investigating sociopragmatic aspects of learners' pragmatic competence and their potential interactions with pragmalinguistic elements might reveal different transfer patterns and shed more light on how proficiency interacts with pragmatic transfer. In the same vein, the investigation of various data collection modalities, such as the receptive, the oral, and the naturally occurring modes, is highly recommendable in foreign language contexts. The face-threatening nature of requests, for example, is highly sensitive to such modalities, which

might yield more insightful findings. Furthermore, we highly recommend investigating the effect of how pragmatic competence is instructed in academic contexts and in textbooks on learners' pragmatic competence.

Pedagogically speaking, the findings of this study are highly relevant to EFL practitioners, especially in Morocco. Both the American English native speaker and the Moroccan Arabic corpus could serve as a benchmark to be used by textbook writers, material designers, and teachers of English when building teaching activities and lessons. It has been observed that English language textbooks focus on conventionalized speech act forms. In the case of requests, for instance, direct strategies and hints are generally not present in the textbook. Lessons are usually based on various conventionally indirect strategies, which are classified into informal and formal. The production of more conventionally indirect strategies by semester two MEFLs might indicate such a stereotypical instruction of requests since semester two learners were more recently exposed to such lessons than the more advanced group. Modification strategies, especially external mitigating moves tend also to be marginalized in textbooks because they do not have specific form-to-function mappings.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined the effects of L1 negative pragmatic transfer and L2 proficiency on Moroccan EFL learners' pragmatic competence. The analysis of the pragmalinguistic requesting strategies produced by the four investigated groups yielded several patterns of L1 negative pragmatic transfer and proficiency effects. Moroccan learners displayed higher levels of directness through the use of more imperatives and want statements typical of Moroccan Arabic native speakers, indicating negative pragmatic transfer. Learners' proficiency showed some effects on pragmatic competence and, in some instances, mediated pragmatic transfer. While it had a positive effect on Moroccan learners' use of request perspective and lexical downgraders, it did not improve request indirectness to approximate American native speaker patterns. The more advanced group showed more directness than the intermediate group.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

Hicham Latif is an associate professor of L2 pragmatics and applied linguistics at the Department of English Studies, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Ibn Zohr University in Morocco. He holds a doctorate degree in L2 pragmatics and a master's degree in applied linguistics and TEFL. His research interests cover pragmatics, L2 pragmatics, second language acquisition, language teaching, and L2 reading.

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