

THE USE OF REQUESTS IN PANDEMIC PRESS RELEASES. A CROSS-CULTURAL CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The current paper presents an analysis of the realisation of requests in three European linguacultures - British English, Spanish, and Romanian - as expressed in weekly press releases during the Covid-19 pandemic. A comparative study that looks into the Request Speech Act, more precisely into its various forms of expression and its conventional realisation patterns, was conducted according to a cross-cultural pragmatic analysis framework. The conclusive observations underline the fact that each linguaculture constructs a culture-bound pattern for the realisation of the Request Speech Act, despite certain similarities explicable due to common origins or global linguistic influences.

Keywords: requests; pandemic; linguacultures; cross-cultural pragmatics; speech acts

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1. Introduction

Requests, along with apologies, are among the most studied speech acts in corpus-based pragmatic studies. Both speech acts have face-threatening features (Brown and Levinson, 1987), are culturally embedded and represent an essential pragmatic concept. They are also studied because of the great variation in form and structure that requests take in language and their constant and recurrent presence in conversations.

The study conducted in 1989 by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper is probably among the first complex endeavours to observe the structure, the usage and the frequency of requests and apologies produced by native and non-native speakers belonging to different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The findings of the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) were published in a volume which continues to be highly cited and applied frequently in studies that deal with pragmatics, language acquisition and even teaching.

Juliane House, one of the authors of the CCSARP, publishes an extended manual of cross-cultural pragmatics in collaboration with Daniel Kádár, restating the “need in the field for a replicable cross-cultural pragmatic framework”. (2021: 26) They also

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acknowledge the relevance of the 1989 project, but they decide to approach a different direction of analysis intertwining the native vs. non-native perspective with the cross-cultural pragmatic analysis of different linguacultures.

In one of the chapters of *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics* (2021) House and Kádár conduct a case study on speech acts which served as a model for the present study, in the sense that the framework of analysis has been applied accordingly. The two authors studied historical letter Closings in three different linguacultures: Chinese, German and British English. The letter Closings were divided into different speech act categories, which were compared between linguacultures to establish both similarities and differences among the three culturally embedded patterns. Once the contrastive analysis had been performed, the final discussions of the study looked into the formality of Closings and the performative or non-performative realisations of Leave-Take. According to House and Kádár's typology of speech acts, Closing consists of three interrelated speech act categories: Extracting, Wish-Well and Leave-Take. Depending on specific cultural rituals, habits related to formality and informality, or different forms of politeness applied according to similar contexts, the choice of using all of the speech act categories or only some of them whether in a specific order or apparently at random reveals specificities of the communicative situations which can only be examined through pragmatic analysis.

The aims of the current study are to identify and compare the categories that compose request sequences as they were identified in a series of press releases delivered by both medical specialists and governmental representatives during the Covid-19 medical crisis. Accordingly, this study also aims to research whether the similarities and differences between the three linguacultures manage to stay culturally embedded or if it is the predominance of the patterns established by the *lingua franca* (in the British English variant) that succeeds in creating an almost identical framework of communication. According to the previously stated aims, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1.) Are there any similarities and differences between the realisations of the Request Speech Act in the Spanish and Romanian corpora studied?
- 2.) What are the main features that characterise the British English patterns of Request realisation?

2. Methodology and Data

2.1 A set of operational definitions

Given the fact that the corpus analysis conducted throughout the study follows a pattern designed in the past recent years (House and Kádár, 2021), an overview of

the main terminology becomes useful so as to facilitate a better understanding along with clarity and precision.

1. Linguaculture: a cross-cultural pragmatic term which refers to “culture manifested through patterns of language use.” (House and Kádár, 2021: 5). The cross-cultural pragmatic analysis looks into the diverse and complex uses of language paying close attention to aspects such as context, cultural background, ritual frame, politeness, social distance and hierarchy. To have kept only the term “language” to refer to the object of study would not have seemed quite enough since cross-cultural pragmatics studies the use of language in context, by analysing the choice of words in a given situation, the intention behind this choice and the outcome of the speech act.

2. Ritual Frame Indicating Expressions (RFIEs): these are expressions that became one of the most important study units (along with speech acts and discourse) in the cross-cultural pragmatic analysis. To put it simply, these are “expressions with strong conventionalised pragmatic use” (House and Kádár, 2021: 73) that indicate a good degree of pragmatic competence on the speaker’s behalf. The appropriate use of such expressions usually indicates that the speaker is highly aware of their rights, obligations and the conventions used in a particular standard situation. Cross-cultural pragmatic research on RFIEs can easily focus on one-word expressions such as *please*, *sorry* or *bye* since the use of words of this type usually bears a consistent pragmatic complexity. Moreover, when engaging in contrastive analysis between different linguacultures, it is often noticed that there is a significant variation in the recurrence of the studied expressions. This variation is justified by the relations that usually exist between these expressions and different pragmatic phenomena like politeness, sarcasm or irony, which are all strongly culturally embedded. RFIEs can be “speech act anchored” (House and Kádár, 2021: 84) in the sense that they are expected to appear more frequently in the realisation of certain speech acts. Comparison between linguacultures has shown that variations are expected here, too.

3. Head Acts: This can be made of one or more utterances which represent the minimal unit of the speech act itself. The level of *directness* of the studied speech act is a key element in determining the correct typology. *Directness* is meant as “the degree to which the speaker’s illocutionary intent is apparent from the locution” (House and Kádár, 2021: 119) and since the different levels are entirely exclusive, that is a Head Act can only be realised with one clear intention behind it, their classification is extremely important for an adequate understanding. According to Blum-Kulka’s typology (1989), these nine directness levels can be grouped into three main categories of speech act realisations: *direct* (mood derivable, explicit performative and hedged performative), *indirect* (locution derivable, want statement, routine formulae and preparatory) and finally, *non-conventionally indirect* (strong hint and mild hint).

4. Core Code Categories: the other parts of the speech act which are not essential for its realisation. Their presence or absence usually reveals important realisation patterns which can be proper to a specific linguaculture while inappropriate to another. The Core Code Categories which interest the present study the most, because they are recurrent components of the Request Speech Act are as follows:

Alerters: it is a category which typically precedes the Head Act and its main function is to warn the hearer about the upcoming Head Act. Some of the most common alerters are identified as title/ role (*doctor, professor, your honour*), surname, first name, nickname, endearment term (*darling, love*), offensive term, pronoun or attention getter (*hey, stop, listen*).

Supportive Moves: these can be either mitigating or aggravating, thus modifying the force of the speech act according to the speaker's intention, level of directness and verbal aggressivity. Also, depending on their place of occurrence they can be pre-posed (if they occur before the Head Act) or post-posed (if they occur after the Head Act). Some of the most common Mitigating Supportive Moves are: **grounder** (utterance through which the speaker gives explanations, justifications and provides reasons for their intention), **expander** (the speaker flouts the Gricean Maxim of Quantity (Grice, 1975) by offering more information than necessary in an intent to hide fear and insecurity), **disarmer** (the speaker tries to prevent and discourage any potential rejection that the hearer might have), **imposition minimiser** (an attempt to minimise the force of the speech act's imposition upon the addressee) or **query precondition** (an attempt to throw doubt on the gravity of the situation). Conversely, among the typical Aggravating Supporting Moves are **threat, insult** or **moralising**.

Downgraders: they modify the Head Act internally, "by mitigating the impositive force of the speech act by means of syntactic choices (**syntactic downgraders:** subjunctive, conditional, aspect, tense, conditional clause) or lexical and phrasal choices (**lexical and phrasal downgraders:** understate, hedge, subjectiviser, downtoner)" (House and Kádár, 2021: 121,123)

Upgraders: they also modify the Head Act internally but with the purpose of amplifying the pragmatic force of the speech act. As such, some examples would be: **intensifier, commitment indicator, expletives, time intensifier, or emotional expressions.**

2.2 Corpus components and analytical patterns

The data used in the study consist of press releases issued during the months of June and October of 2020, in the middle of the Covid-19 medical crisis. The two months were not chosen at random, but I was rather interested in periods which described a context of changes where new measures or restrictions were imposed. In June, after a spring of lockdown, the restrictive measures were generally eased whereas in

October, once the vacation period terminated and the school year had long started, new restrictions were about to be imposed once more. These two periods of shifts and new approaches in the management of the pandemic created a suitable context for the realisation of the Request Speech Act.

In terms of length, the following table comprises the descriptive information related to the corpora analysed in the study:

Linguaculture	Length (Number of Words)	Dates	Source ²
British English	2 press releases (12.857 w)	22.06.2020 12.10.2020	gov.uk
Spanish	2 press releases (13.439 w)	05.06.2020 09.10.2020	sanidad.gob.es
Romanian	2 press releases (10.131 w)	16.06.2020 05.10.2020	gov.ro

A contrastive pragmatic approach was applied in order to analyse the realisation of the Request Speech Act in the three different linguacultures. As such, the contrastive pragmatic analysis performed in the present study involves data from the following linguacultures:

- a.) Spanish versus Romanian = typically similar data
- b.) Spanish and Romanian versus British English = typically different data

What is generally understood as *typically* comes from an over-generalisation of assumptions based on previously acquired knowledge which can be related to linguistics, sociology, history or other humanities. Both Spanish and Romanian belong to the linguistic family of the Romance languages, alongside French, Portuguese and Italian. All of these languages descend from Latin (Bennett and Muresan, 2016: 96) and present similarities regarding structural aspects such as common core vocabulary, and similar syntactic structures. Moreover, given the fact that the past decades have witnessed a considerable increase in the number of Romanian immigrants in the Iberian Peninsula (Rodriguez-Rodriguez and Gyorfı, 2018: 199) who succeeded in adapting to the Spanish culture and language, it becomes appropriate to say that the recent linguistic interchange and proximity has facilitated a context which brings the two linguacultures closer than ever before. This is a dangerous approach for the pragmatic researcher, however, in the sense that clear evidence is needed in order to either support or reject these initial presuppositions.

² The press releases have been compiled from the websites of each state's official institution. In the case of the British corpus, the videos whose transcription was not provided by www.gov.uk, have been transcribed using www.rev.com; for the Spanish corpus www.cockatoo.com was used and the Romanian website provided their transcriptions.

In the first phase of the analysis, the Spanish and the Romanian corpora have been contrasted in search for both similarities and differences in the realisation patterns of Request. To do so, the texts were broken into several divisions according to the sequence unit they represented. This comparison was realised in terms of the frequency of occurrence or the absence of a certain Supporting Move, the type of Head Act employed, syntactic or morphological features which reoccur persistently and the length of utterances.

Secondly, the British English corpus was analysed independently and it was approached from the assumption that certain different patterns of speech act realisation will be identified. This corpus acted as a *tertium comparationis* unit in the cross-cultural pragmatic analysis in the sense that Spanish and Romanian were to be similar as opposed to British English which follows its own specific patterns. Furthermore, British English was considered one of the European languages that has exerted over the past decades one of the strongest most prominent influences upon all of the other languages from the European space (Wulff, 2004: 188).

3. Corpus Analysis

3.1 Similarities and differences between the realisations of Request in the Spanish and Romanian corpora

As a starting point of the present analysis, a series of general observations concerning the outline of the press releases is considered necessary. The main communicative objective of these texts was to inform the general audience of the pandemic's progression and present new measures that were being enforced at the time. All speeches were delivered from an official standpoint by medical professionals trying to explain to the population the phases of the ongoing medical crisis to convince everybody that the imposed measures were absolutely necessary. The current study's main interest is to observe the use of pragmatic devices in the search for a pattern of the Request Speech Act realisation.

The overall perspective of these press releases shows the following structure. The press releases are divided into two major parts: the first one is a presentation of the data concerning the evolution of the coronavirus cases, followed by an interpretation of these figures from an epidemiological point of view and in some of the texts, an update on the safety methods is also provided. Accordingly, the Spanish texts begin by providing an extended amount of space in which numerous data are discussed and interpreted from the virus expansion point of view. Aspects related to the current international and national crisis are detailed and explained in long utterances that waltz through figures and percentages alike. The beginning of the Romanian press releases also refers to statistical data regarding the evolution of the virus spread, but in a considerably shorter space which is exclusively dedicated to discussing the

situation inside the country. The focus however is placed on the measures that the government enforces in order to control the pandemic and it is in this context in which most of the Request Speech Acts were identified. Conversely, in the Spanish corpora, the Request Speech Acts were identified in the second part of the press releases which consists of a question-and-answer sequence. In these cases, the Request Speech Acts are challenged by topics and situations addressed by the reporters.

Although it might sound like a generalisation, it was expected from the very beginning of this study that numerous similarities would be found between Spanish and Romanian, since they both belong to the more extended category of the Romance languages. However, it was observed that while this may be true, it is so to a minor extent from the perspective of the cross-cultural analysis.

On the one hand, the two languages showed similarities with respect to the length of the utterances, which tend to be quite extended with two or more subordinated clauses, and to some syntactic aspects. There is a great preference for the use of the passive-reflexive voice (*s-a decis, s-a gestionat/ se han identificado, se reciben*) for the first person plural form of the verb (*vom vedea, suntem intr-un moment/ hemos dicho, sabemos*), for starting the sentence with impersonal verb structures (*există motive, este imposibil/ es cierto que, no hay*) or for the recurrent use of the first person either singular or plural form of the personal pronoun.

On the other hand, with regard to the realisation of the speech act of request, one striking similarity is related to the fact that both linguacultures make use of Aggravating Supporting Moves in the proximity of the Head Act. Whether it is Moralising or Threat, this type of Supportive Move was observed in both corpora with frequency. As far as the general features of the Supporting Moves are concerned, both corpora showed that the Supportive Moves can be pre-posed or post-posed without delineating a clear pattern of occurrence.

Conversely, the two linguacultures showed precise differences in their realisation patterns of Request. All of the Requests from the Spanish corpora were preceded by upgraders (time intensifier: *ahora mismo*, commitment indicator: *sí que es cierto* or emotional expression: *siento decirlo*) whereas none of the speech acts identified in the Romanian corpora has upgraders. The upgrader is a supporting move which increases the force of the speech act by means of lexical or emotional exaggeration, its presence or absence from the speech act pattern becoming the more relevant. In the Romanian corpora, it was observed that the Request was introduced by preparators (*dați-mi voie să vă informez*) which convey a more formal and distant register. The following table shows examples from both corpora in order to observe the unfolding of the component parts of the speech acts:

Spanish sample		Romanian sample	
Example	Decoding of the speech act	Example	Decoding of the speech act
<p><i>Sí que es cierto que lo más importante ahora mismo para poder valorar la posibilidad de contagio en un punto u otro es valorar en principio las fechas de inicio de síntomas. No hay muchos casos asociados. Sí que se podían haber infectado en cualquier otro punto. Como les acabo de comentar, las profesiones sanitarias son personas como cualquier otra. Tienen una vida social, tienen una familia, tienen un lugar de trabajo y en algunos casos tienen fiestas como esta. Sí que es cierto y siento decirlo que en la situación en la que estamos y en las fases de evolución de la epidemia en la que estamos, fiestas grandes como de este estilo, pues es mejor no realizarlas, no se deberían de realizar, al menos sin poder mantener las medidas de seguridad adecuadas. Pero sí que es cierto que es difícil identificar el punto</i></p>	<p>UPGRADERS: Commitment indicator; Intensifier</p> <p>GROUNDER: to explain and justify</p> <p>UPGRADER: commitment indicator</p> <p>HEAD ACT (direct): Mood derivable. (infinitive and conditional forms)</p> <p>QUERY PRECONDITION: attempt to throw doubt</p> <p>GROUNDER: to explain and justify</p>	<p><i>Dați-mi voie să vă informați despre deciziile luate astăzi în ședința de guvern.</i></p> <p><i>După cum știți, în cadrul evoluției pandemiei, la nivelul țării noastre, suntem încă pe panta descendentă.</i></p> <p><i>După un număr de 166 de cazuri noi ieri, astăzi am avut 250 de cazuri, 10 decese de ieri până astăzi, avem peste 4.500 de cazuri active.</i></p> <p><i>În acest context și tocmai în evoluția focarelor care se află în diseminare, s-a decis prelungirea cu 30 de zile a stării de alertă.</i></p> <p><i>În aceste condiții, s-a gestionat și se gestionează în continuare și un al treilea pachet de măsuri de relaxare.</i></p>	<p>PREPARATOR: ask for permission</p> <p>GROUNDER: to justify</p> <p>EXPANDER: detailed supplementary information</p> <p>HEAD ACT (direct): Locution derivable. Expressed through a syntactic downgrader (use of passive voice) to avoid mentioning the person who took the respective decision.</p> <p>IMPOSITION MINIMISER: attempt to minimise the impositions the speech act might cause on the addressee</p>

Spanish sample		Romanian sample	
Example	Decoding of the speech act	Example	Decoding of the speech act
<p><i>de infección. También es cierto, dicho esto, que de nuevo los profesionales sanitarios son personas como cualquier otra y después de toda la carga de trabajo excepcional que han tenido yo comprendo que haya una tentación importante para tener algún momento de relajación con los compañeros.</i></p>			

Moreover, there is a distinction between the types of Head Act that the two linguacultures employ. More than half of the speech acts identified in the Spanish corpora presented Head Acts with a non-conventionally indirect level of directness that is, either strong or mild hints. For instance, in one of the press releases, the population is asked to undertake as frequent a test as possible in order to be able to detect any new cases of infection immediately. This is narrowed down to a Head Act expressed as a strong hint: *el objetivo es el control precoz*. In another case where people are asked to reduce their daily journeys, the Head Act is expressed as a mild hint: (*yo apelo un poco a la responsabilidad individual de todos los ciudadanos para entender el riesgo al que pueden poner a otras personas ... con la movilidad excesiva*). This is an aspect which balances smoothly the use of upgraders and their emotional triggers. Oppositely, almost more than half of the speech acts identified in the Romanian corpora presented Head Acts with direct levels such as locution derivable, that is, the illocutionary force of the speech act is directly derived from the meaning of the locution (*cei care vin să stea pentru o perioadă mai lungă intră în carantină pentru 14 zile*). These types of Head Acts are usually preceded by grounders, preparators or expanders. There has been a situation in which the Head Act expressed as locution derivable was addressed without any pre-posed supporting moves. Right after the conventional greetings, the speech act is constructed with the Head Act at the very beginning, followed immediately by a grounder (*a fost propusă prelungirea stării de alertă pe întreg teritoriul țării pentru o perioadă de 30 de zile + grounder: există motive pentru care am făcut acest lucru*).

Given the fact that this study focused only on short corpora of texts, it is possible that these occurrences may be simple idiosyncrasies. However, if one considers also the fact that the texts were taken from a very specific context and with an exclusive time reference (June and October of 2020), they might then be accepted as linguacultural tendencies.

3.2 *The British English Patterns of Request Realisation. Main features*

As far as the structure of the press release is concerned, the British English corpus reveals a similar one to those in Spanish and Romanian. At first, the Secretary of State makes an overall presentation of the current situation relying only briefly on statistical data relevant to the country's situation. Afterwards, medical professionals are invited to explain and provide details about the evolution of the virus spread, the vulnerable categories and the effect and necessity of the imposed sanitary measures.

While analysing the British English corpus, the overall impression was that of clarity, of more being said in fewer words. Obviously, this aspect does not remain simply an impression since there are numerous studies that acknowledge the English's quest for clarity and precision especially when considering academic or professional languages (e.g. Bennett and Muresan, 2016).

One of the most obvious particularities of the Request realisation in this corpus is the recurrence of the explicit performative form of the Head Act, meaning that the illocutionary intent is named explicitly by the speaker (*we advise this clinically vulnerable group to be particularly stringent in following social distancing guidance; we're advising that people who are shielding may want to start meeting in groups of up to six people outdoors*). This aspect makes them rather easily identifiable to the researcher and again, helps in keeping the message clear. A reason why this may be is the necessity of an expressed subject in the English clause. Although this could be avoided through syntactic devices such as passive voice or impersonal verb structures, in the analysed corpus the presence of the first-person plural of the personal pronoun is highly notable.

Another feature which was observed while analysing this corpus was the constant presence of the Grounder. It is used both as a pre-posed and post-posed Supporting Move and it focuses mainly on providing detailed explanations rather than justifying the speech act, as it can be observed in the table below which shows a complete decoding of the speech act:

British English sample	
Example	Decoding of the speech act
<i>I thought it might be helpful to say a few words on the clinical basis for the current shielding program, what we're advising</i>	PREPARATOR: introduce the intention without mentioning the exact content of the speech act

British English sample	
Example	Decoding of the speech act
<p><i>now and what we might see in the future. And that is particularly to the adults, but specifically, also the children who've been shielding. This is a new virus. We're continuing to learn about its transmission. And that knowledge will continue to grow over the coming years. At the start of the epidemic in the U.K., using the information we had available, and our best understanding gained from other respiratory viruses, such as flu and SARS, we recognised that some people were likely to be more vulnerable to severe outcomes from disease than others. This included older people and those with underlying medical conditions. And those are normally the people who would have a flu vaccination each year. This clinically vulnerable group we advise to be particularly stringent in following social distancing guidance. And that recommendation continues. But senior clinicians recognize that, for a small subset of the population, there may be an even greater risk. So, for example, this would be those who may be on particularly high combinations of immunosuppressive treatments or where their disease was particularly poorly controlled. And this group, the clinically extremely vulnerable, were those that we advised to shield. Shielding doesn't alter the risk to an individual of illness if they become infected, but it does reduce the likelihood of meeting the virus in their daily lives</i></p>	<p><u>GROUNDNER</u>: extended explanations</p> <p>HEAD ACT (direct): explicit performative</p> <p>UPGRADER: intensifier which acts as a warning</p> <p><u>GROUNDNER</u>: exemplification with an explanatory intention</p> <p>Repetition of HEAD ACT (direct): explicit performative</p> <p>IMPOSITION MINIMISER: to outline a positive effect of complying with the request</p>

It is also notable the absence of the Aggravating Supportive Moves as component parts of the examined speech acts which serves as an argument to the idea that there is a preference in the patterns identified in this corpus for reason and scientifically backed-up explanations in the detriment of emotional triggers. This is an observation strictly based on the analysis of the sequence units of Request which does not imply that in other speech acts throughout the corpus, these Aggravating Supportive Moves might not be present. These devices are extremely relevant when looking into

persuasion or manipulation techniques and their absence from this particular niche studied here does not exclude by all means their presence in other parts of the corpus.

All in all, the main features of the British English patterns of Request realisation are: Head Acts are realised directly mainly at the explicit performative level, Grounders is a Mitigating Supporting Move which almost always precedes or follows the Head Act and the Aggravating Supportive Moves are absent altogether from the studied speech acts.

4. Contrasting the realisation patterns of the Request Speech Act

Certain particularities were observed along the cross-cultural pragmatic analysis conducted in order to break down and delineate the component parts of the Request Speech Act. A challenging question to answer in this case would be whether these features are simple idiosyncrasies or they could be considered culturally embedded, thus belonging to a culture-bound pattern of realisation. Although one of the limitations of the present study refers to quantity - the corpora studied here are rather small and by no means should it be used as an argument for general, rule-like conclusions – there were certain pieces of data whose interpretation leads to an unquestionable outcome.

To begin with, the different types of Head Act realisation identified in the corpora provide information regarding the level of directness approached in the Request realisation patterns. On the one hand, this is related to aspects of politeness and it is important to remember here that Request is considered a face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson, 1987) and as such, it creates certain imposition upon the hearer. Given that all the texts in the corpora were delivered in what is considered by all three linguacultures, a formal context and by highly educated members of society (medical professionals, secretary of state, head of different medical departments) it would be expected that the rules of politeness are followed accordingly. And this occurs so, to a certain extent. The types of Head Acts identified throughout the analysis were either direct or non-conventionally indirect (strong and mild hint). All of the ones identified in the British English corpus were direct, more precisely, explicit performative. In both Spanish and Romanian corpora the two mentioned typologies were observed, although the occurrence of the non-conventionally indirect was more frequent in the Spanish texts (predominantly mild hint). It would be tempting to say that the higher the level of indirectness, the higher the level of politeness. However, it is my opinion that these differences are linked to the inner characteristics of the linguacultures which make them stand as independent manifestations of language. British English's need for clarity and precision is fulfilled also through this level of directness, whereas the other two linguacultures seek to achieve the realisation of Request through less direct means of expression, simply because this is how they meet their communicative objectives.

Moreover, the data used for the study shows interesting phenomena related to the use of the Supporting Moves. Apart from the Head Acts, which are the basic unit of Request realisation, observing these types of moves and their pattern of occurrence outlines some interesting aspects. In the case of Mitigating Supportive Moves, the presence of upgraders and grounders is relevant to the present discussion. On the one hand, it was noticed that upgraders have the greatest rate of occurrence in the Spanish corpus: the four requests identified in the corpus initiated with an upgrader (*pero ahora; sí que es cierto que; vamos a ver, yo, aquí; en cuanto a la movilidad, vamos a ver*) The appeal to emotions through linguistic devices is extremely relevant in the socio-cultural context of this language and this does not come as a surprising fact at all. Conversely, these moves appear the least frequently in the British English corpus, which also falls under their own cultural paradigm. On the other hand, grounders were mostly present in the British English corpus, mainly in their explanatory form. Throughout the five identified requests, a total of eight grounders have been observed (*At the start of the epidemic in the U.K., using the information we had available, and our best understanding gained from other respiratory viruses, such as flu and SARS, we recognize that some people were likely to be more vulnerable to severe outcomes from disease than others; which is a time period from when other lockdown measures have been eased, so we can ensure we're monitoring the epidemiology continuously;*) It must be said that grounders are a quite common type of Supportive Move, but their reoccurrence in the British English texts cannot be ignored and it actually served perfectly to this linguaculture's objectives of clarity and precision.

However, when the Aggravating Supporting Moves (insult, threat and moralising) are considered, the data continues to support the culturally embedded features of each linguaculture. These moves were not identified at all in the realisation patterns of Request studied in the British English corpus. They were present nevertheless, in the other two corpora, at almost comparable levels of occurrence. In the Romanian corpus, two instances of threat (*totuși există semne că situația poate oricând să se deterioreze și să avem cel puțin focare serioase sau să avem o situație mai grea în următoarea perioadă, dacă nu se respectă măsurile compensatorii; este suficient să fie o singură persoană infectată ca să se întoarcă toți care au călătorit în mijocul respectiv infectați acasă*) and one moralising move (*unii dintre noi nu au realizat încă că portul unei măști poate să ne aducă într-o stare de liniște și nu în fața unei măști a unui aparat de respirat*) have been identified, whereas in the Spanish corpus, two moralising instances (*yo apelo un poco a la responsabilidad individual de todos los ciudadanos para entender el riesgo al que pueden poner a otras personas; Yo creo que tenemos que ser conscientes (...) una de las razones a las que me refería antes cuando apelaba a la responsabilidad de las personas, independientemente de todas las decisiones judiciales*) and one threat move (*tenemos que buscar la manera de que esto dure 15 días un mes en lugar de durar cuatro o cinco meses*) have been observed throughout.

5. Conclusions

This paper presented the results of a corpus-based research which studied a particular speech act from a cross-cultural pragmatic perspective. The conclusions drawn in the end were both anticipated and unexpected.

In regard to the first research question, both similarities and differences were found when the two corpora were compared. As far as the cross-cultural pragmatic realisation of the studied speech act is concerned, the Romanian and Spanish corpora did not reveal as many aspects in common as was initially expected. It was rather surprising to see how two linguacultures who could apparently be considered to share common ground, choose to produce speech acts with consistent differences.

In the Spanish corpus, the use of upgraders was far more frequent and three out of four Head Acts were expressed as strong (1) and mild (2) hints; the fourth Head Act was expressed as mood derivable, meaning that the illocutionary force of the Request was conveyed through the grammatical mood (in this particular case, the use of the conditional: *no se deberían realizar*). The choice of these specific pragmatic categories constructs a less direct form of expressing the requests, with the purpose of mitigating the possible threatening force of the speech act. This particular use of language shows an intent of respecting the polite code of addressing on the one hand, and also, an anticipated form of protection against foreseeable protests or counter-arguments. From this point of view, the language usage observed in the Romanian corpus showed a higher level of directness, with three out of four Head Acts expressed as locution derivable and the fourth one as strong hint.

Out of the three, the Romanian corpus provided the most diverse pattern of realisation in the sense that all that turned out to be specific for one or the other, was identified here in moderate rates of occurrence. However, this corpus shared more common features (the presence of Aggravating Supporting Moves, the non-conventionally indirect type of Head Act (strong hint), the length of utterances, and similar syntactic downgraders) with the Spanish corpus, rather than with the British English one.

In relation to the second research question, the study revealed interesting features which were not identified in the other two corpora. Probably the most striking characteristic of the Request pattern realisation found here refers to the Head Act typology. The explicit performative was only observed in this corpus and it provides relevant information related to aspects of politeness, clarity and precision of language. Also, the absence of Aggravating Supportive Moves conveyed a higher level of formality to the speech, along with a sense of certainty and control on the speaker's behalf.

To sum up, the study described in this paper applied an already acknowledged framework in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics in order to reach its research objectives. It is by no means an exhaustive analysis, but it rather opens new directions of pragmatic investigation of other speech acts, Ritual Frame Indicating Expressions or even discourse realisation patterns.

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