

3 Requests in Chinese by heritage and foreign language learners

Xiaohong Wen

Abstract

This study investigated the effects of different first language backgrounds on the performance of “requests” by two learner groups: 35 Chinese heritage language learners and 35 Chinese as foreign language learners from the same advanced Chinese courses. A mixed-methods approach was adopted. The heritage group outperformed their foreign language counterparts in terms of grammar and lexicon accuracy and in a few mitigating devices. In contrast, the foreign language group produced various forms of *head acts* that more closely approximated the production of Chinese native speakers. However, learner groups shared several characteristics: Underproduction of the modal verb *neng*, downtoners, understaters, and supportive moves, particularly in higher imposition situations, and overproduction of *query preparatories* and politeness expressions in lower imposition situations. The study revealed a large discrepancy between the learners’ and the NSs’ groups in pragmatically functional expressions. The learner groups under-produced these functional expressions that are less transparent in form-meaning/function connections.

Keywords: Request, pragmatics, language background, heritage language learners

摘要

本研究调查了不同母语背景的汉语二语学习对象对言语行为“请求”的习得情况。35名华裔和35名非华裔高级汉语水平的学生参加了此调查。研究用了定量与质性的分析方法，结果表明这两组不同背景的学习者在语法和词汇的准确度、请求的直接性、对情感动词的选择方面存在着显著的不同。华裔背景学习者的语法和词汇使用的正确率显著高于非华裔背景者，而使用强制性语言的频率显著低于非华裔背景者。非华裔背景学习对象所产出的请求语言形式明显多于华裔背景学习对象，从而更接近本族语者所产出的不同的表达形式。两组学习对象都呈现的共性包括：较少使用情态动词“能”，在请求难度大时较少使用委婉缓和词语、保守说法和请求辅助语；而在请求难度并不很大时，过多地使用疑问句和礼貌语言。两组二语学习对象和本族语者的一个明显区别在于学习对象的请求中缺少语用功能强的委婉缓和表达。这些表达在语言形式、意义与功能的映射方面不够透明但在请求中却是不可或缺的。

关键词：请求，语用，华裔背景，有传承语背景的学习者

Background

Heritage and foreign language learners differ not only in cultural background, but also in literacy, learning motivation, language use, and pragmatics (Chen & He, 2001; Comanaru & Noels, 2009; He, 2015; Wen, 2011; Xiao, 2006). A growing number of studies have examined the language acquisition of heritage language learners in the areas of phonetics and phonology (e.g., Au, Knightly, Jun, & Oh, 2002; Oh, Jun, Knightly, & Au, 2003), morphological awareness and literacy (e.g., Koda, Zhang, & Yang, 2008; Lü & Koda, 2011), morphosyntactic and grammatical knowledge (e.g., Montrul & Bowles, 2010; Polinsky, 2008a, 2008b), and language modalities of comprehension and production (e.g., Bowles, 2011; Polinsky, 2011). However, little attention has been paid to the area of pragmatic competence, particularly in languages other than English. The present study is an attempt to fill this gap by analyzing Chinese language learners' production of "requests." The study compares the pragmatic performance of two learner groups: Chinese heritage language (CHL) learners and Chinese as foreign language (CFL) learners in two different types of sociopragmatic situations.

The growing CHL population has a direct impact on CHL learning in the US. The 2011 American Community Survey documented that Chinese-Americans were the largest sub-group (23.4%) of the Asian-American population in the US (US Census Bureau). A large number of students of Chinese descent take Chinese language courses within the US educational system from kindergarten to college. Furthermore, this number of Chinese students is increasing rapidly, raising an urgent need for research in the area of CHL learners' language acquisition (Yao, 2005). Polinsky and Kagan (2007) proposed a working definition of heritage language learners: the individuals who have been exposed to a particular language in childhood but did not acquire it fully because another language became dominant, and/or have a cultural affinity associated with the language. In the Chinese setting, based on He (2008), CHL learners are individuals who are raised in Chinese-speaking households, and speak or at least understand some Chinese. They may have had substantial or sparse Chinese language exposure at home.

Research on pragmatic competence of heritage, CHL, and CFL learners

Pragmatic competence, although less studied, is a critical language component that merits more attention. Montrul (2004) examined if Spanish HL speakers' syntax-related interfaces with semantics and discourse-pragmatics undergo transference and convergence from English to Spanish, since English is dominant in the linguistic environment for learners. Unlike English, Spanish is a null subject language where the subject has pragmatic constraints. The premise is that if syntax-related interfaces with semantics and pragmatics are less resilient than syntax for HL learners, it is likely that Spanish HL learners' grammar becomes a case of convergence through contact with English. The results showed that HL learners' subject expressions, which are regulated not only by syntax but also by pragmatic features related

to topic and focus in a discourse, demonstrated divergence from the monolinguals. The participants, especially the group at the lower proficiency level, produced more overt subjects than they did null subjects. They displayed incomplete knowledge of pragmatic features of subjects converging with English.

In a different approach, Pinto and Raschio (2007) compared request performance by three groups: Spanish heritage language learners, Mexican NSs of Spanish, and NSs of English. The study examined the level of directness in *head acts* (the request itself), as well as the level of directness combined with downgraders. The heritage learners differed significantly from the NS group on the level of directness of *head act*. They were more in line with the English and less direct than Spanish NSs in their requests. When strategy level and frequency of downgrading were examined together, the heritage group exhibited trends that differentiated itself from both of the NS groups. Pinto and Raschio (2007) postulated that that in their heritage language, heritage learners display many of the same characteristics of an L2 learner.

Kagan (2012) examined requests made by Russian heritage learners for a makeup test. The results showed that many requests did not fit properly into the Russian teacher-student relationship. Inappropriateness appeared in three areas: (1) the address form to the professor, (2) a lengthy explanation as to why they missed the test, and (3) the suggested time for the makeup test, which was convenient for the students themselves. Similar to Montrul's and Pinto & Raschio's findings, Kagan's study indicated that pragmatic domain was an area of incompetence for HL learners.

An overview of the literature reveals that studies pertaining to CHL learners' pragmatic competences are scarce. Taguchi, Li, and Liu (2013) compared comprehension of Chinese implicature between college CHL and CFL learners at the advanced proficiency level. Their results demonstrated that implicature type and learner group type significantly affected comprehension accuracy. Specifically, heritage learners outperformed CFL learners on accurate comprehension; however, no significant group difference was found in the amount of time taken to produce correct responses. It is also possible that the CHL group's pragmatic knowledge was not readily available, meaning that decoding the functional meaning of implicature would likely take as much effort as it would for the CFL group.

Similarly, there is a dearth of studies on pragmatic performance by CFL learners. Previous studies (Hong, 2011; Sun & Zhang, 2008) compared CFL learners to Chinese native speakers. The studies discovered that the CFL participants overproduced conventional indirect strategies (the query preparatory form) when compared with the NS group. When social distance was close and social power was equal, direct request was appropriate; but learners still used the conventional indirect strategy, which sounds overtly polite and thus was inappropriate. Furthermore, the CFL group produced far fewer external modifications (i.e., mitigating devices before or after *head acts* to support the request) than the NS group. Expressions such as thanks, apologies, and promises rarely occurred in the CFL groups' data. Both studies concluded that the CFL group was not perceptive

enough to adjust the request strategies according to social distance and power in different situations.

Apart from the tradition of comparing pragmatic performance between L2 learners and NSs, two studies investigated the effects of CFL linguistic proficiency level on request production (Li, 2014; Wen, 2014). Li (2014) also investigated the effects of the proficiency level on processing ability in a study-abroad context in China. The results from Li's study (2014) showed that the intermediate and advanced groups made comparable gains as a result of study abroad and showed similar patterns of change in their production of alerters, *head acts*, and internal and external modifications. Both groups, however, under-produced internal modification (i.e., syntactic, phrasal, and lexical downgraders and upgraders within *head acts*) and the ability-query modal verb 能 *néng* 'can,' and over-produced the willingness/permission query modal verb 可以 *kěyǐ* 'may.' In terms of pragmatic knowledge processing ability, neither group significantly reduced planning time in their post-tests; only the Advanced group gained in speech rate. The results indicated that automatic processing develops gradually through large amounts of practice in applying their linguistic knowledge to meaningful communication. Learners must develop the pragmatic knowledge before it can be used in processing.

Wen's study (2014) investigated the pragmatic development of CFL learners at two proficiency levels, lower and advanced. The advanced proficiency group showed an overall better performance than the lower level group. Furthermore, this group demonstrated a wider range of request strategies, internal modifications at the syntactic and lexical levels, and external modification than the lower proficiency group. However, they did not perform better than their lower-level counterpart as a group in the use of pragmatically functional expressions. For example, similar to the findings from Li (2014) and Sun and Zhang (2008), both groups over-produced the modal verb 可以 *kěyǐ* 'may' and under-produced the modal verb 能 *néng* 'can' when using the query preparatory form. At the lexical/phrasal level, both group under-produced pragmatically functional downgraders, politeness markers, and downtoners such as a sentence-final particle 吧 *ba*, and 行吗? *xíngma?* 'Ok?' for an approval.

In summary, although CFL learners at different proficiency levels steadily progress in their pragmatic development, the pragmatics learning tasks, particularly certain internal modifications, pose challenges for learners regardless of their language levels and culture backgrounds (Li, 2014; Taguchi et al., 2013; Wen, 2014).

The literature cannot yet provide a full picture of Chinese interlanguage pragmatic development for the reasons that (1) the number of studies is few and (2) the findings are inconclusive. Researchers (Lynch, 2003; Montrul, 2012) have called for the need for "comparative investigations" between HL learners and L2 language learners in order to "understand and explain fully the extent of the differences between these two groups" as well as the similarities between them (Lynch, 2003, p. 38). In addition, research on the relationship between interlanguage pragmatics and grammar development indicated that learners' grammar may not necessarily

develop in parallel with their pragmatic abilities (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Salisbury & Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, 2001). Since previous research on the relationship between grammar and pragmatic development largely focused on ESL learners, this study aims to extend the examination to both CHL and CFL learners. This study compared data in two categories (1) pragmalinguistic forms and strategies concerning form and pragmatic function mapping and (2) sociopragmatic knowledge, which entails the contextual constraints of sociocultural factors on language use (Kasper & Roever, 2005). Contextual situations affect the choice of a particular pragmatic form and function. Sociopragmatic analysis was employed on pragmalinguistic performance, measuring linguistic forms such as the degree of directness, internal mitigating devices, and accuracy of language use; as well as the frequencies of external modifications such as alerters and appropriateness of request.

The research questions that guided the present study are as follows:

1. What are the differences and similarities between the CHL and CFL groups in request strategies and internal modification?
2. What are the differences and similarities between the CHL and CFL groups in their use of alerters and external modification?

Method

Participants

Participants were seventy learners enrolled in four mixed classes (i.e., both CHL and CFL learners were in the same classes) at the advanced-low and advanced-mid levels at a university in the Southern US. Thirty-five participants were CHL and 35 were CFL students. Thirty-two CHL participants were from Chinese ethnic backgrounds and three were from mixed Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds. Twenty-three (66%) CHL participants indicated that they were born in the US; the remaining twelve were born in Chinese-speaking countries and immigrated to the US young ages: 23% in the age range of 0 to 5 years and 11% in the range of 6 to 11 years. All CHL participants identified themselves as “somewhat bilingual” in either Mandarin Chinese or a Chinese dialect. The majority (83%) had taken Chinese language courses in Chinese heritage schools and/or high schools for durations ranging from one to six years.

The other thirty-five participants were CFL learners. Thirty-three participants indicated that English was their first language while the remaining two came from Vietnamese and Spanish L1 backgrounds. Although they did not have any Chinese ethnic background, almost half of the CFL learners (49%) attended Chinese heritage schools and/or took Chinese language courses in high schools for durations ranging from one to four years. Furthermore, most (80%) participated in study abroad programs in Chinese-speaking countries for durations ranging from one month to one year. Table 3.1 displays the background information of the two groups.

Table 3.1 Participants' background information

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Language at home</i>	<i># took Chinese courses prior college</i>	<i># took Chinese classes abroad (Range)</i>	<i># enrolled at course levels</i>
CHL group <i>n</i> = 35	15:20	Chinese: 32 Mixed: 3	English: 5 Chinese: 18 Combined: 12	29 (1–6 years)	7 (1month–1 year)	Adv I: 18 Adv II: 17
CFL group <i>n</i> = 35	19:16	Caucasian: 21 Afrc Amrc: 3 Hispanic: 6 Vietnamese: 2 Mixed: 3	English: 30 Vietnamese: 1 Spanish: 1 Combined: 3	17 (1–4 years)	28 (1month–1 year)	Adv I: 17 Adv II: 18

Thirty-five Chinese native speaker (CNS) undergraduate students from a university in China, 17 males and 18 females, were recruited for this study to provide a baseline for comparison

Instrument

The instrument was a two-part questionnaire. The first part consisted of questions regarding the participants' background information. The second part was a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Using DCTs to collect data has been supported by numerous cross-linguistic studies (e.g., Hong, 1997, 2011; Li, 2012, 2014; Hendriks, 2008; Pinto & Raschio, 2007; Rose, 2009; Sun & Zhang, 2008). Although a DCT may not prompt naturally occurring conversation, the language collected is produced in a specific and authentic social situation for communicative purposes and pragmatic functions. The written data demonstrate pragmatic performance for language use contextualized in a particular discourse, and as such, offer advantages for a study of this nature. Prior research (Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Pinto & Raschio, 2007; Rose, 2009) has provided evidence or support that the DCT is a valid instrument for investigating speech act production.

Several variables may potentially make a request easy with a low degree of imposition, or difficult with a high degree of imposition. If interlocutors share equal social status, the request is considered socially small, and the speaker is able to decide which linguistic forms to use in the context, the request is likely to be understood and considered. However, if any of these conditions are not met, the request may be difficult to formulate. As Brown and Levinson (1987) postulate, requests are face threatening by definition because hearers can interpret requests as intrusive impingements on freedom of action, or even as an exercise of power.

Based on previous studies (Hong, 1997; Schauer, 2009; Wen, 2014), four scenarios were developed to elicit requests: 1) borrowing a pen from a friend, 2) asking a professor to postpone an essay submission, 3) proposing an appointment

from a professor, and 4) asking a roommate to return a library book. Since all participants were university students, all scenarios were designed for the role of students in a university setting, where they made requests to their professors and friends on a regular basis. Every scenario had a detailed description, explaining to the participants the relationship between the interlocutors. The DCT questionnaire was in English for the learner groups and in Chinese for the CNS group so that the participants could clearly understand each given situation. The questionnaire was piloted with five non-native speaker students and five native speakers to check that the scenarios would be valid to elicit requests and targeted mitigation devices. The results of the pilot tests indicated that the scenarios were unambiguous and interpreted as intended. Table 3.2 shows the categorization of the four request situations according to three variables: social power status, social distance, and the degree of imposition.

Procedure

It took two consecutive spring semesters to collect questionnaire data from all 70 participants. In both procedures, the researcher handed out copies of the questionnaire to instructors who were teaching Chinese upper division I and II courses. Participants were informed that they could write in either characters or pinyin. It took about 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire in class. Copies of the questionnaire for NSs were sent and collected back through email.

Data coding and analysis

A data coding scheme was developed based on previous research on request production (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Li, 2014; Schauer, 2009; Wen, 2014). Requests were coded for level of directness of the *head act*, e.g., conventionally indirect: 能借一支笔吗? *Néng jiè yī zhī bǐ ma?* ‘Can (I) borrow a pen?’ for internal modification at the syntactic and lexical/phrasal levels, e.g., 要是你去图书馆，顺便把我的书也还了吧。 *Yàoshi nǐ qù túshū guǎn, shùnbìàn bǎ wǒ de shū yě huáile ba* ‘If you go to the library, (can you) also conveniently return my book?’; for alerters, e.g., 李小京 *Lǐxiǎojīng* ‘a person’s name’; and for supportive

Table 3.2 Four situations with two degrees of imposition

<i>Equal status, closer social distance (Student to student) Low imposition</i>	<i>Higher status, farther social distance (Student to professor) Relatively high imposition</i>
Situation 1 (S1): Borrowing a pen from a classmate.	Situation 2 (S2): Asking a professor to postpone an essay submission.
Situation 4 (S4): Asking a roommate to return a book since he/she is going to the library.	Situation 3 (S3): Proposing to a professor an appointment other than his/her office hours because you have questions.

moves, e.g., 这个星期的作业太多了，中文作文我交不了了。 *Zhège xīngqī de zuòyè tài duōle, zhōngwén zuòwén wǒ jiāo bùliǎole* ‘This week’s assignment is too much. I cannot submit the Chinese composition (on time).’

In addition, a grammatical and lexical rating scale was used to measure the accuracy in the request; whereas an appropriateness rating scale was used to measure pragmatic appropriateness in both request and supportive moves. Both scales (Table 3.3) were adopted from Taguchi (2012) and Li (2014) with minor revisions. Both accuracy and appropriateness were evaluated based on a rating scale ranging from 0 to 5.

During the coding procedure, the researcher and a trained graduate assistant in applied linguistics rated each of the DCT data. The ratings achieved satisfactory inter-rater reliability ($r = .92$). Any disagreements were resolved item-by-item through consensus coding.

Considering the relatively small sample size, independent samples Mann-Whitney U, paired samples Wilcoxon, and Kruskal-Wallis tests were adopted to address the research questions. In addition, qualitative discourse analyses were also conducted to examine pragmalinguistic competence (in request strategies and internal modification) and sociopragmatic competence. In the following section, quantitative analyses are presented first, followed by discourse analyses.

Table 3.3 Grammar and appropriateness rating scales

Rating	Description
Grammar & lexicon	
5. Excellent	Almost no grammatical and lexical errors.
4. Good	One or two minor grammatical and lexical errors.
3. Fair	A few major grammatical and lexical errors that do not cause misunderstanding.
2. Poor	Many major grammatical and lexical errors that cause misunderstanding.
1. Very poor	Incomprehensible due to fragmental or excessive grammatical errors.
0.	No response.
Appropriateness	
5. Excellent	Fully appropriate and effective in the level of directness and politeness. Communicative function realized.
4. Good	Adequately appropriate and effective in the level of directness and politeness. Communicative function realized.
3. Fair	Somewhat appropriate and effective in the level of directness and politeness. Communicative function somewhat realized.
2. Poor	Clearly inappropriate in the level of directness and politeness. Communicative function barely realized.
1. Very poor	Not sure if the target speech act is performed. Communicative function not realized.
0.	No response.

Results

~~Quantitative analyses~~

Accuracy and appropriateness between groups and between situations

A Mann-Whitney U test on grammar accuracy showed a significant difference with a moderately large effect size ($U = 328$, $p = .001$, $r = .400$). The CHL group outperformed the CFL group in using more accurate grammar and vocabulary in their requests (see Table 3.4). Another Mann-Whitney U test on pragmatic appropriateness revealed little significant difference between the two learner groups ($U = 450.5$, $p = .056$), although the CHL group produced more appropriate requests in context. Table 3.4 presents the descriptive summary for accuracy and appropriateness, indicating that grammar and lexicon accuracy seemed to develop ahead of pragmatic appropriateness regardless of learners' first language.

The home languages of the CHL groups could be classified into three categories: Chinese (including Chinese dialects), a combination of Chinese and English, and English. Spearman correlation revealed a significant relationship between the home language and the ratings for grammar and lexicon accuracy ($r = .37$, $p < .05$, -tailed) but not between the home language and the appropriateness rating.

Among the four request scenarios, two presented a low degree of imposition with an equal social power status and close social distance, whereas the remaining two presented a relatively high degree of imposition. Two Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed that there were no significant differences across the two types of situations for grammar accuracy rating, but significant differences were found in sociopragmatic appropriateness, with a large effect size, for both groups: $Z = -4.22$, $p = .000$, $r = .505$ for the CFL group, and $Z = -3.92$, $p = .000$, $r = .468$ for the CHL group. Since learners of both groups are capable of functionally making correct requests, grammatical correctness did not significantly differ between the two groups. However, when the social distance and power relationships constituted a higher degree of imposition, both groups produced significantly more inappropriate requests than they did in the low imposition situations. Table 3.5 presents the descriptive statistics for the two types of sociopragmatic situations.

Table 3.4 Descriptive statistics of accuracy and appropriateness

	Accuracy			Appropriateness		
	Median	Mean	SD	Median	Mean	SD
CFL $n = 35$	18	17.73	0.26	17	16.33	0.41
CHL $n = 35$	19	18.89	0.17	17.5	17.43	0.25

Note. Score range: 0–20 for each mean score.

Table 3.5 Descriptive statistics of appropriateness across situations

	<i>Low imposition S1, S4</i>			<i>High imposition S2, S3</i>		
	<i>Between students</i>			<i>Between student & instructor</i>		
	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
CFL <i>n</i> = 35	9	8.8	0.21	7.5	7.53	0.26
CHL <i>n</i> = 35	9.5	9.24	0.09	8	8.19	0.22

Request strategies

Participants' request strategies for *head acts* were classified into three major categories: (A) direct, (B) hedged performative, and (C) conventionally indirect, although a small number of strategies could not be classified into any of these categories. The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed that there were significant differences among the three groups in terms of the direct strategy ($\chi^2 = 8.54$, $p = .014$, $\eta^2 = .082$), hedged performative ($\chi^2 = 18.97$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .182$), and conventionally indirect ($\chi^2 = 17.15$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .165$). The Mann-Whitney U test revealed that the CFL and CHL groups differed significantly in terms of the direct strategies ($U = 454$, $p = .006$, $r = .330$) and conventionally indirect strategies ($U = 417$, $p = .007$, $r = .320$), with the CFL group's production more closely approximating that of the CNS group. No significant difference in terms of hedged performative was detected between the two learner groups.

Internal modification

Internal modification within *head acts* was analyzed at the syntactic and lexical/phrasal levels. The syntactic modifiers in *head act* included (A) adverbial clauses, (B) question-tag appealers in tag questions, and (C) modal verbs (能 *néng* 'can' and 可以 *kěyǐ* 'may') to form *query preparatory* questions. The results of Mann-Whitney U tests showed that there was a marginally significant difference in the frequencies of the modal verb 能 *néng* 'can' between the two learner groups ($U = 483.5$, $p = 0.043$), with the CHL group outperforming the CFL group. There were no significant differences in terms of adverbial clauses and question-tag appealers between the two learner groups, although the CFL produced more in both categories.

At the lexical/phrasal levels, the results revealed that there was a barely significant difference between the CHL and CFL groups in the frequencies of upgraders such as 给我/为我 *Gěi wǒ/wèi wǒ* 'for me' and 要 *yào*, 'want' ($U = 471$, $p = .054$). No significant differences were observed in politeness markers, downgraders, and downtoners. There existed, however, significant differences between the learner groups and the native speaker group in the frequencies of politeness markers ($U = 349$, $p = .002$ and $U = 301$, $p = .000$ for the CFL and CHL groups respectively), upgraders ($U = 314$, $p = .000$ and $U = 455$, $p = .003$ for the CFL and CHL

groups respectively), downtoners ($U = 90, p = .000$ and $U = 132, p = .000$ for the CFL and CHL groups respectively), and understaters ($U = 168, p = .000$ and $U = 190, p = .000$ for the CFL and CHL groups respectively).

Alerters

Alerters precede a *head act* to attract the interlocutor's attention. Alerters produced by the participants included two major types: addressing the interlocutor (1) by name and (2) by formal/polite attention catchers such as 请问 *qǐngwèn* 'may I ask/excuse me,' and 对不起 *duìbùqǐ* 'I am sorry.' There were no significant differences between the learner groups in terms of each type of alerter, although the CHL group produced more alerters than the CFL group. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests demonstrated significant differences, with relatively large effect sizes, across two sociopragmatic situations within each group: $Z = -3.351, p = .001, r = .401$ and $Z = -3.844, p = .000, r = .459$ for the CFL and CHL groups respectively. In other words, alerters of the address-by-name type occurred more frequently in the higher imposition situations (2 & 3) than in the lower situations (1 & 4), suggesting that both CHL and CFL learners were aware of the differences between the sociopragmatic situations.

Supportive moves (external modification)

Supportive moves are utilized before or after *head acts* to help minimize the face threatening effect and persuade the listener to perform a desired act. The supportive moves produced by the participants included *grounder, preparatory, apology, promise, and thanking*. There were no significant differences between the learner groups in the frequencies of types of supportive moves. The Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed significant differences, with a large effect size, between the higher and lower imposition situations in terms of *grounder*: $Z = -5.01, p = .000, r = .599$ and $Z = -.11, p = .000, r = .611$ for the CFL and CHL groups respectively.



Qualitative analysis

Request strategies

The requests produced by the CHL and CFL learners included direct, hedged performative, and conventionally indirect strategies. The direct category consisted of *imperative and plain statements*. Sentence 1 is an example of the imperative. A plain statement, as shown in Sentence 2, presents no intent to request, but calls for the interlocutor's attention, in which case it appears that the speaker does not have to persuade the professor.

- (1) 小友，请(你)借我一支/笔。(CHLL#92, CFLL#45, S1)
Xiaoyou, will (you) please lend me a pen?

- (2) 老师，我要跟你定时间见面问问题和说中文。(CFLL#50, S3)
Teacher, I want with you make an appointment to meet and to ask questions and speak Chinese.

The *hedged performative* form of request is characterized by an explicitly stated intent, but with the illocutionary force being modified by hedging expressions. One category of *hedged performative* in the data was the *want statement*. Although a *want statement* is direct in English, in Chinese, the criterion frequently lays on the choice of the verb. The verb 想 *xiǎng* ‘would want’ entails intention with politeness whereas the verb 要 *yào* ‘want’ can be aggravating especially when used with little modification. Sentence 2 is a directive *head act* whereas Sentence 3 is a hedged performative.

- (3) 李老师，我对这个课文有一些问题也想和您练练中文。我想跟你定时间见面。(CHLL#87, S3)
Teacher Li, regarding this lesson I have a few questions and also would want to practice Chinese with you. I want to make an appointment with you.

Sometimes the request was followed by a tag question, which had an intention of request clearly specified in the main clause yet had a degree of politeness in the question-tag/the appealer as in Sentence 4.

- (4) 老师星期一的作文我还没做完因为别的课太mang [sic]了。星期四我再给您，好吧？(CFLL#35, S2)
Teacher, the Monday’s composition I have not finished because other courses are overwhelming. I will submit to you on Thursday, ok?

Conventionally indirect strategies in a *head act* were classified into two categories. The first and the most frequently used was the *query preparatory* strategy with a modal verb such as 能 *néng* indicating ‘ability/can,’ or 可以 *kěyǐ* indicating ‘permission/may’ (cf., Li, 2014). The second category concerned time availability as used in Situation 3: “您下星期什么时候有时间？*when will you next week have time?*” This strategy shows consideration towards the listener because a possible reason (e.g., lack of time) to reject the request is embedded in the utterance (Schauer, 2009). Table 3.6 presents the descriptive summary of the three strategies.

Both learner groups heavily relied on query preparatory strategies (Sentence5), with the CHL group making use of it significantly more frequently than the CFL group. It should be noted that although the conventionally indirect strategy is a polite means of realizing a request in English, it may not be necessarily the case in Chinese. This may be due to the fact that the Chinese language does not have as many syntactic modifications as English (e.g., a variety of tenses and modalities). Internal downgraders and external modifications are essential to soften the illocutionary force. The CNS group used the conventionally indirect strategy least

Table 3.6 Means and SD of the frequencies for head act strategies

	<i>Direct</i>		<i>Hedged performative</i>		<i>Conventionally indirect</i>	
	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>
CFL (<i>n</i> = 35)	0.34	0.09	0.43	0.15	3.20	0.16
CHL (<i>n</i> = 35)	0.06	0.04	0.11	0.06	3.74	0.09
CNSs (<i>n</i> = 35)	0.14	0.06	0.94	0.17	2.69	0.21

Note. Score range: 0–4 for each mean score, although a number of *head acts* did not all into these three categories.

whereas the CHL group used it most frequently, as Table 3.6 shows. *Query preparatory* may make a *head act* sound excessively polite in a low imposition situation, as in Situation 1, borrowing a pen from a classmate (Sentence 6). Furthermore, the CHL group used fewer direct strategies and *hedged performative* forms than the CFL group. The *head acts* produced by the CHL group appeared to be more uniform with fewer variations than the CFL group (Table 3.6). *Query preparatory*, a conventionally indirect strategy, seemed to be a “safe” form adopted by the CHL group.

- (5) 小京, 你能 /可以帮我还 (这本) 书吗? (CHLL#83, 85, 86, 90; CFL#S4)
Xiaojing, you can help me return this book QMP?
- (6) 小友, (请问) 我可以 (jie) 用你的笔 /bi [sic] 吗? (CHLL#82, 85, 86, 90S1)
Xiaoyou, may I ask, I can use your pen QMP?

Internal modification

The syntactic modifiers in *head acts* included adverbial clauses, question-tag appealers in tag questions, and modal verbs to form *query preparatory* questions. The adverbial clauses in the data included both time and reason clauses, which provided an opt-out option for the listener and a distance to the speaker (Sentence 7).

- (7) 李小京, 你去图书馆的时候可不可以顺便帮我 还这本书?
(CHLL#95, S4)
Li Xiaojing, when you go to the library may or may not conveniently help me return this book?

When a question-tag appealers is added to a declarative sentence, the tone of an utterance is softened to encode politeness. Different appealers in Chinese, however, can mitigate or aggravate the illocutionary force. For example, the appealers

“... 好不好 *hǎobù hǎo* ‘ok?’ would be appropriate only when used by an interlocutor of a higher social status addressing someone of a lower social status. The question-tag appeler did not sound appropriate even between interlocutors of the same social status (Sentence 9). None of the CNSs produced the appeler”. . . , 好不好? *hǎobù hǎo* ‘ok?’ whereas three participants from the CFL and one from the CHL groups did. These three learners also used alternative forms such as 可以吗? *kěyǐ ma* ‘ok?’ or 好吗? *hǎo ma* ‘ok?’. The data therefore suggested that the participants may have regarded appealers as interchangeable across different social contexts. The question-tag appealers in Chinese, however, frequently present different functions, and thus are sociopragmatically sensitive. For example, in a situation where a request was proposed from a student to a teacher, the tag-question appeler that entails approval 行吗? *xíng ma?* ‘ok?’ or possibility 可以吗? *kěyǐ ma* ‘ok?’ is more appropriate than 好不好 *hǎobù hǎo* ‘ok?’

- (8) 王老师，这个星期我忙极了。我给您我的功课这个星期四，好不好？
(CFL#40, S2)
Teacher Wang, this week I am extremely busy. I give you my homework this Thursday, ok?
- (9) 请你把一支笔借给我，好不好？(CFL#40, S1)
Please you lend a pen to me, ok?

As previously discussed, *query preparatory* requires a modal verb such as 能 *néng* ‘can’ or 可以 *kěyǐ* ‘may.’ Both CHL and CFL groups predominantly used the modal verb 可以 *kěyǐ* ‘may’ that indicates permission; whereas the CNS group predominantly used more 能 *néng* ‘can’ (see Table 3.7). A close examination revealed that 76% of learners exclusively relied on 可以 *kěyǐ* ‘may.’ Only 5 (14%) CFL learners and 12 (34%) CHL learners produced 能 *néng* ‘can.’ One of the CFL learners consistently used “能” in the formula: 麻烦你能不能 *V*. . . *máfan nǐ néng bùnéng*. . . ‘bother you if you can *V*. . . .’ This student reported having

Table 3.7 Means and SD of frequencies for syntactic internal modifications

	<i>Adverbial clause</i>		<i>Tag question</i>		<i>Modal verb 能</i>		<i>Modal verb 可以</i>	
	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>
CFL (<i>n</i> = 35)	0.26	0.44	0.31	0.76	0.23	0.73	2.17	1.04
CHL (<i>n</i> = 35)	0.14	0.36	0.09	0.28	0.71	1.20	2.40	1.12
CNSs (<i>n</i> = 35)	0.29	0.52	0.34	0.59	1.20	1.07	0.89	0.99

Note. Score range: 0–4 for each mean score, although a number of *head acts* did not all fell into these three categories.

studied in China for one year, which may explain his formulaic usage. In a study abroad context, learners tend to receive a large amount of language input including formulaic expressions and use their L2 in a variety of contexts with different interlocutors, which have an impact on their communicative and cross-cultural competence (Barron, 2003; Schauer, 2009; Li, 2014). Similarly, heritage learners have more exposures to language input, especially to formulaic expressions used in daily routines for communicative functions, which may explain why they outperformed the CFL group in the production of the modal verbs to a certain extent. Table 3.7 presents the descriptive summary of syntactic modifications in *head act*.

The lexical/phrasal modifiers in *head acts* can be largely categorized into four types. The first included politeness markers such as 您 *nín* ‘honorific you’; 请 *qǐng* ‘please’ and downgraders such as 麻烦... 帮我/替我 *máfan... bāng wǒ/tì wǒ* ‘bother you to help me.’ The CFL group overproduced the politeness marker 请 *qǐng* ‘please’ but under-produced formulaic expressions such as 麻烦... 帮我/替我 *máfan... bāng wǒ/tì wǒ* ‘bother you to help me.’ When the politeness marker 请 *qǐng* ‘please’ was used in low-imposition situations, the requests frequently sounded overly polite. The second type included upgraders such as 给我/为我 *gěi wǒ/wèi wǒ* ‘for me,’ which were produced by CFL learners in Situation 4 when asking the roommate to return a book to the library. The third type included *downtoners*, i.e. adverbials for reducing the forcefulness of the request (Barron, 2003; Schauer, 2009), such as 顺便 *shùnbiniàn* ‘conveniently/simultaneously,’ 也 *yě* ‘also,’ 再 *zài* ‘time emphasize,’ 吧 *ba*, a sentence-final particle for a suggestion. The fourth type included *understaters*, i.e. adverbial modifiers for mitigating the illocutionary force by under-representing the proposition such as V一下 *yíxià* ‘V a little bit.’ Table 3.8 displays the descriptive summary of lexical/phrasal modifications in *head act*.

Table 3.8 Means and SD of frequencies for lexical/phrasal modifications

	<i>Polite markers</i>		<i>Upgraders</i>		<i>Downtoners</i>		<i>Understaters</i>	
	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>
CFL (<i>n</i> = 35)	1.57	1.57	0.57	0.61	0.54	0.82	0.23	0.43
CHL (<i>n</i> = 35)	1.21	0.88	0.38	0.55	0.53	0.70	0.29	0.52
CNSs (<i>n</i> = 35)	2.49	1.36	0.03	0.17	2.40	1.24	1.43	0.92

Note. The CFL group’s mean politeness markers were higher than that of the CHL group because the former overproduced 请 *qǐng*, ‘please’ (*n* = 15) in comparison to the CHL group (*n* = 2) and the CNS group (*n* = 3).

Politeness Markers: 您 ‘honorific you’; 请 ‘please’; 麻烦 ‘bother’; 帮/替我/忙 ‘help me.’

Upgraders: 要 ‘want/will’; 给我/为我 ‘for me.’

Downtoners: 也 ‘also’; 一起 ‘together’; 顺便 ‘conveniently/simultaneously’; 再/才 ‘not till’; 吧 *ba* (a suggestive particle).

Understaters: (V)一下儿 ‘a little,’ and verb duplicates.

In addition, The CHL group produced more formulaic politeness markers and fewer upgraders than the CFL group. For example, in Situation 4 when asking a roommate to return a book, the CHL group produced 28 (80%) formulaic expressions of 帮我 *V. bāng wǒ V.* ‘help me V.’ and the CFL group produced 4 (11.43%) as compared to the 31 (88.57%) produced by the native speakers. Instead of 帮我 *bāng wǒ* ‘help me,’ learners used 给我 *gěi wǒ* ‘for me’ or 为我 *wèi wǒ* ‘for me’ (Sentence 10). Although semantically it was indeed true that the listener was the sole agent who would return the book, pragmatically 给我 *gěi wǒ* ‘for me’ or 为我 *wèi wǒ* ‘for me’ sounded aggravating and impolite. In contrast, 帮我 *V. bāng wǒ V.* ‘help me V.’ would be pragmatically appropriate in the context. The aforementioned CFL learner who studied in China for one year consistently used the polite formulaic expression 麻烦你能不能 *V. . . máfan nǐ néng bùnéng . . .* ‘bother you if you can V . . .’ (Sentence 11) in all his *head acts*, although the sentence still sounded impolite because of the use of 为我 *wèi wǒ* ‘for me.’

(10) 你要为我还了这本书，可以吗？(CFL#40, S.4)
You want for me return this book, ok?

(11) 小京, *mafan*你能不能为我把这本书还给图书馆？(CFL#48, S4)
Xiaojing, bother you cannot can for me particle this book return to library?

Although the two learner groups did not differ significantly from one another in their frequency of use of downtoners and understaters, both differed significantly from the CNS group. A close examination revealed distinctive discrepancies between the learner and CNS groups in the use of certain downtoners. A downtoner, 顺便 *shùnbiàn* ‘conveniently/simultaneously,’ occurred frequently in the data of the CNS group ($n = 25$), yet rarely in the CFL ($n = 1$) and CHL ($n = 2$) groups’ data in Situation 4 (Sentence 12). Instead of 顺便 *shùnbiàn*, learners used the adverb 也 *yě* ‘also’ ($n = 10$, $n = 11$ from the CFL and CHL groups respectively) as presented in Sentence 13. Although 也 *yě* ‘also’ has a similar meaning to 顺便 *shùnbiàn*, the latter makes the utterance more polite and face-saving for both interlocutors (Sentence 12).

(12) 小京，你去图书馆顺便帮我把我借的一本书也还一下吧！(NS #4, S4)

Xiaojing, you go to the library conveniently/simultaneously help me particle I borrow a book also return a little bit particle!

(13) 你可以也还我的书/把我的书也退了吗？(CHLL#94, CFL#41, S4)
‘You can also return my book/particle my book also return QMP?’

Another downtoner clearly under-produced by the learner groups was 再 *zài* ‘then/not until.’ The CFL group produced a few ($n = 2$); the CHL group produced more than the CFL group ($n = 8$), whereas the CNS group produced it frequently

($n = 20$). The adverb 再 *zài* has a pragmatic function that smoothed the time transition and reduced the illocutionary force as illustrated in (Sentence 14).

(14) 对不起王老师，我其他课的作业太多了，我可不可以星期四再交作文？(CHLL#89, S2)

Sorry, Teacher Wang. I other classes' assignments too many, I may not may Thursday then submit composition?

Still another downtoner rarely produced by the learner groups ($n = 3$ for the CFL group; $n = 0$ for the CHL group) was the sentence-final particle 吧 *ba*. Semantically, 吧 *ba* has no concrete meaning, yet pragmatically it not only softens the tone but also implies a notion of suggestion (Sentence 12). The CNS group produced it not only frequently ($n = 18$) but also in various forms such as 吧 *ba*, 么 *me*, 呗 *bei*.

Understaters, such as *verb* 一下儿 *yīxiàèr* 'V a little bit' (e.g., 用一下儿 *yòng yīxiàèr* 'use a little bit') or *verb* — *verb* (用一用 *yòng yī yòng* 'use a little bit') mitigate the illocutionary force with a softened tone. The CFL group produced a total of eight ($n = 8$), of which only three were in the form of *verb* 一下儿 *yīxiàèr*. The CHL group produced a total of ten ($n = 10$), of which again only three were in the form of *verb* 一下儿 *yīxiàèr*. The rest of their understaters were in the form of *verb*—*verb* (用一用 *yòng yī yòng*) or a verb duplicate (用用 *yòng yòng*). The CNS group predominantly used the phrase “V一下” such as 用一下 *yòng yīxià* 'use a bit,' 还一下 *huán yīxià* 'return (the book) a bit,' 请教一下 *qǐngjiào yīxià* 'consult a bit,' and 问一下 *wèn yīxià* 'ask a bit.' Most of their understaters were in the form of V一下 *yīxià* ($n = 47$).

Consistent with the findings of Wen (2014), the downgraders frequently used by the CNS group but clearly under-produced by learner groups share at least one distinctive feature. The relationships between the downgraders' forms and functions are opaque, and their meanings are frequently lost in translation. These downgraders include the particle 吧 *ba* as a suggestion marker, the VP 帮我 *bāng wǒ* 'help me' really meaning 'for me,' the adverb 顺便 *shùnbìàn* 'simultaneously/conveniently,' and the verb complement V一下 *yīxiàèr* 'V a bit,' an understater. Semantically these expressions are not transparent, and pragmatically they are indispensable, making utterances less coercive and more polite. The only modifier frequently used by both learner groups was the downtoner 也 *yě* 'also,' which has a concrete, straightforward meaning.

In summary, the analyses of the production of *head acts* revealed three findings. First, both learner groups heavily relied on *query preparatory*, with the CHL group using it significantly more frequently than the CFL group. Furthermore, the CHL group produced fewer varied forms and strategies than the CFL group. The request forms and strategies produced by the CFL group more closely approximated that of the native speakers' norms than did those of the CHL group, as shown in Tables 3.6–3.7. Second, both learner groups overproduced the modal verb 可以 'may/permission' when making *query preparatories*. The CHL group, however, produced fewer 可以 *kěyǐ* 'may/permission' and more 能 *néng* 'can/

possibility' than the CFL group. Furthermore, the CHL group produced more formulaic downgraders and fewer upgraders than the CFL group (Table 3.8). Therefore, the CHL group outperformed the CFL group in terms of politeness and formulaic expressions. Finally, in comparison with the CNS group, both learner groups significantly under-produced the ability-query modal verb 能 *néng* 'can,' as well as politeness markers, downtoners, and understaters, yet significantly overproduced upgraders.

Alerter

Alerters produced by the participants included two major types, addressing the interlocutor by name and by formal/polite attention catchers. Table 3.9 presents a descriptive summary of the participants' alerter productions in two situations.

The Chinese culture highly values addressing people. To address people by name or title is both a method of greeting and an alerter to catch the interlocutor's attention. Although learners were aware of differences between the sociopragmatic situations to a certain extent, their sociopragmatic performance fell distinctly behind that of the CNS group. As Table 3.9 shows, both learner groups produced far fewer alerters of all types than the CNS group in Situations 2 and 3. Furthermore, both learner groups overproduced polite attention catchers in Situations 1 and 4 and under-produced polite attention catchers and consultatives in Situations 2 and 3. Although the attention grabbers such as 请问 *qǐngwèn* 'may I ask/excuse me,' 对不起 *duìbùqǐ* 'excuse me,' and 不好意思 *bùhǎoyìsi* 'I am embarrassed' convey politeness, learners' overproduction of these in low imposition situations made their requests overly polite and thus, inappropriate (e.g., Sentences 15–16). In contrast, the CNS group did not produce any of this type of

Table 3.9 Means and SD of frequencies for alerters in comparison

Levels	Situations 1, 4 Low degree of imposition			Situations 2, 3 Higher degree of imposition			
	Name	Polite attention catcher	Casual terms	Name	Polite attention catcher	Consultatives	
CFL	Mean	0.86	0.11	0.11	1.51	0.03	0
	SD	0.14	0.05	0.07	0.14	0.03	0
CHL	Mean	1.03	0.14	0.06	1.74	0.14	0
	SD	0.13	0.07	0.04	0.10	0.07	0
CNS	Mean	1.51	0.00	0.26	2.03	0.23	0.23
	SD	0.13	0.00	0.09	0.03	0.08	0.09

Name: First name 小友; Surname + first name/title 李小友, 李老师

Polite attention catcher: 请问 'may I ask,' 对不起 'excuse me,' 不好意思 'I am embarrassed'

Casual address: 哥们儿 'brother'; 兄弟 'brother,' 同桌 'desk-mate'

Consultatives: 您看 'you see'

alterer in Situations 1–4. In addition, the CNS group frequently produced consultatives which were absent in the data of both learner groups.

- (15) (李)小友, 请问, 我能/可以借一支 (你的) 笔吗? (CHLL #85, 93, 105, 106, S1)

Li Xiaoyou, please ask, I can/may I borrow a (your) pen QMP?

- (16) 对不起 (不好意思) 李小京, 你可以不可以帮我把这本书还到图书馆? (CHLL #91, 108, S4)

Excuse me Li Xiaojing, can you help me return this book to the library?

Supportive moves (external modification)

Among the five identified supportive moves, *grounder*, which provides explanations for the request, was the most frequently produced, and *preparatory*, which prepares the listener for a request, was the second most frequently produced by all groups. Reasons and justifications for a request are cognitively primary in our communication, particularly in a situation where the degree of imposition is high.

Table 3.10 presents the descriptive summary of supportive moves made by the participants. The means of *apologizing*, *promising*, and *thanking* were identical between the CFL and CHL learners. Both learner groups under-produced the supportive moves of all types in comparison with the CNS group.

Supportive moves are frequently sociopragmatically specific and are closely tied to pertinent situations. Accordingly, two sets of frequency data are presented in Tables 3.11 and 3.12, one for each sociopragmatic situation. Both learner groups produced a larger quantity and variety of supportive moves in the situations where the degree of imposition was higher. Hence, the data suggested that learners were not only aware of different sociopragmatic situations, but also, to a certain extent, were able to alter their supportive moves to fit the situation. Nevertheless, as Tables 3.11 and 3.12 indicate, in comparison with the CNSs' data, the learner groups clearly under-produced supportive moves, both in frequency and variety, especially in Situations 2 & 3 when the degree of imposition was high.

Table 3.10 Means and standard deviations of supportive moves

	<i>Grounder</i>		<i>Preparatory</i>		<i>Apology</i>		<i>Promise</i>		<i>Thanking</i>	
	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>
CFL (<i>n</i> = 35)	3.06	0.21	0.23	0.07	0.20	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
CHL (<i>n</i> = 35)	3.44	0.23	0.17	0.06	0.20	0.06	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
CNSs (<i>n</i> = 35)	3.86	0.23	0.57	0.09	0.43	0.11	0.26	0.09	0.60	0.14

Table 3.11 Means and SD of supportive moves in situations 2 and 3

Groups		Situations 2, 3 (Higher degree of imposition)				
		Grounder	Preparatory	Apology	Promise	Thanking
CFL	Mean	2.49	0.09	0.20	0.00	0.00
	SD	0.95	0.28	0.41	0.00	0.00
CHL	Mean	2.69	0.03	0.20	0.00	0.00
	SD	0.96	0.17	0.41	0.00	0.00
CNS	Mean	2.86	0.09	0.41	0.20	0.09
	SD	0.88	0.28	0.61	0.41	0.37

Table 3.12 Means and SD of supportive moves in situations 1 and 4

Groups		Situations 1, 4 (Low degree of imposition)				
		Grounder	Preparatory	Apology	Promise	Thanking
CFL	Mean	0.57	0.14	0.00	0.03	0.03
	SD	0.65	0.35	0.00	0.17	0.17
CHL	Mean	0.66	0.14	0.00	0.03	0.03
	SD	0.73	0.35	0.00	0.17	0.17
CNS	Mean	1.00	0.49	0.03	0.06	0.51
	SD	0.84	0.56	0.17	0.24	.066

Discussion

Pragmalinguistic competence in request strategies and internal modifications

To address RQ1: the study revealed that while the CHL and CFL groups differed in a number of pragmalinguistic dimensions, they also shared similarities as discussed below.

The learner groups significantly differed in their usage frequencies of direct strategies and conventionally indirect strategies. The CHL group predominantly relied on *query preparatory*, which made their requests overly polite in low-social-power and close-social-distance situations. Similarly, the CHL group also under-produced adverbial clauses and tag questions (Tables 3.6–3.7). It seems that the CHL group adopted a conservative approach to make their requests grammatically correct and conventionally indirect. Although lacking variety, the forms they used were communicatively functional, and accurately conveyed their intents. Consequently, the CHL learners may not necessarily need to expand their pragmalinguistic strategies and forms. In contrast, the CFL group used direct strategies, specifically *hedged performative* as well as *query preparatory*. Their strategies were more varied and more closely approximated the norm of the native speakers' group than they did the CHL group.

The CHL group outperformed the CFL group by achieving higher grammatical and lexical accuracy rates and producing fewer upgraders. Although the differences between the two learner groups were not significant, the CHL group clearly produced more formulaic expressions such as 帮我 *V. bāngwǒ V* ‘help me V.’ and fewer upgraders such as 为我 *wèi wǒ* ‘for me’ and 要 *yào* ‘want’ than the CFL group. Furthermore, the CHL group produced significantly more of the modal verb 能 *néng* ‘can’ than the CFL group when making *query preparatories*. These results indicate that CHL learners in this study may be slightly more advanced in their grammar and lexicon development than the CFL group despite the fact that they were from the same instructional classes. The wider heritage language exposure and sociocultural contact may provide more opportunities for them to develop pragmalinguistic competence, particularly in formulaic expressions and avoidance of some upgraders. Such results were also observed in previous studies (Hong, 1997; Taguchi et al., 2013).

The similarities shared by both learner groups demonstrate that learners are in the process of acquiring their linguistic and pragmalinguistic forms and function. Their underproduction of downgraders and overproduction of upgraders are analyzed as follows. First, their underproduction seemed to be constrained by their linguistic competence. For example, learners from both groups frequently used 我不能交作文 ‘I cannot submit composition’; however, native speakers used a VP composed of a verb and a verb-complement such as 我交不了作文 ‘I submit not particle composition’ or 星期二我写不完作文 ‘Tuesday I write not complete composition.’ The *verb-complement* structure is Chinese language specific with a collocated complement following a verb to express the result of an action. It is linguistically more complex than the sentence 我不能交作文 ‘I cannot submit composition.’ If learners are still struggling with the language form, it would be difficult for them to retrieve the form with which to encode the meaning; subsequently, the pragmatic expressions would be secondary in terms of acquisition (Salsbury & Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, 2001; Takahashi, 1996; Hill, 1997; Wen, 2014). If unable to use the polite expression, participants would rely on their repertoire. Consequently, both learner groups used far fewer mitigating devices than the native group.

Secondly, the downgraders frequently produced by the NS group, but largely missing in the learners’ requests, share at least one distinctive feature: Semantically, these expressions are not transparent, and pragmatically they are highly functional, making utterances less coercive and consequently more polite. For instance, the formulaic expression 顺便帮我 *V shùnbìan bāngwǒ V* ‘simultaneously help me V’ is merely a polite way of saying “do it for me.” Learners, particularly the CFL group, used the upgrader 为我 *wèiwǒ* ‘for me,’ which pragmatically sounds offensive. Additional downgraders include the sentence-final particle 吧 *ba* as a suggestion marker, 行吗? *xíngma* ‘ok?’ as a polite softener for approval, and 想 *xiǎng* ‘would want/intend’ as an indirect expression for a request. Instead of using these polite downgraders, learners in both groups frequently dropped the particle 吧 *ba* and used 好不好? *hǎobù hǎo* ‘ok?’ and utilized 要 *yào* ‘want’ in favor of 想 *xiǎng* ‘want’.

The use of downgraders is frequently situation-sensitive. They may be optional or necessary in a particular context. For example, 一下 *yīxià* ‘a bit’ in “V一下” can be optional. The verb itself has inherent semantic value; therefore, the complement “一下” is semantically redundant although pragmatically preferred (cf., VanPatten, 2002). These expressions are Chinese language specific. DeKeyser (2005) posits that the redundancy and optionality of a form-meaning relation may result in a lack of transparency and pose learning difficulties. Findings from the present study lend support to this claim. Wen (2014) speculates that, in the process, learners must gradually realize that these opaque and non-literal expressions are not just “regular words” needed for correct grammar usage, but essentially functional devices for communicative politeness.

Sociopragmatic competence in relation to contextual factors

To address RQ2: The study revealed that the CHL and CFL groups differed, and shared similarities, in the following sociopragmatic dimensions.

Although the two learner groups did not differ significantly in the types of alerters and supportive moves they produced, the CHL group outperformed the CFL group by addressing listeners’ names and using polite attention catchers in high imposition situations. The CHL group produced more alerters and grounders, which more closely approximated the production patterns of the CNS group. Therefore, this suggests that the home language environment, with its socially appropriate input, may be beneficial to learners. However, the CHL group’s underproduction of casual terms of address when the degree of imposition was low made their request utterances overly polite (see Table 3.9, Situations 1 & 4). The CHL group showed overt politeness in a few situations, e.g. their overuse of *query preparatory* strategies in low imposition situations.

Both CHL and CFL groups were able to adjust requests to fit into the given contexts to a certain degree. In addition to alerters (Table 3.6), the learner groups also produced a greater quantity and variety of supportive moves in the high imposition situations (Tables 3.7 and 3.8). However, compared with the CNS group, both learner groups used far fewer contextualized sociopragmatic strategies, particularly in high imposition situations.

In summary, the findings of this study suggest that the HL learners’ first language advantage is beneficial only in certain aspects of pragmatic development, e.g., grammar and lexicon accuracy and formulaic politeness expressions. The advantage, however, may be less pronounced in other aspects, e.g., pragmalinguistic forms and mitigation devices that are highly functioning but lack transparency, and complex syntactically. Their sociopragmatic knowledge and function need to continuously develop in the learning processes and sociocultural interactions. Furthermore, some HL learners’ home language environment does not necessarily fully foster their heritage language. In this study, only 18 HL participants had Chinese as their home language; 12 HL participants had mixed languages with both Chinese and English, and 5 HL participants had English as their home language (Table 3.1). Consequently, home and community language exposures

are likely insufficient for HL learners to acquire the pragmalinguistic knowledge needed in sociopragmatic contexts. They face similar challenges to those faced by CFL learners in developing their pragmatic abilities to perform in sociocultural contexts.

Pedagogical implications

The pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic functions are greatly influenced by language contact such as input, linguistic exposure, and sociocultural interactions. However, textbooks and materials currently used in L2 Chinese instruction provide minimal attention to pragmalinguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge. Instruction on metapragmatic awareness and activities that enhance learners' ability to both notice and connect form with pragmatic function should be incorporated into curricula and instruction. The findings of this study suggest that instruction that fosters L2 pragmatic development may not be the same as those that foster L2 grammatical development (cf., Bardovi-Harlig & Vellenga, 2012). Pragmatic awareness needs to be addressed explicitly and separately from grammar.

Furthermore, this study shows that although CHL learners had language contact, distant and limited exposure to target language input and sociocultural interactions are insufficient for the development of sociopragmatic awareness because pragmatic functions and relevant contextual factors are often not salient to learners. As a result, the chance for learners to notice pragmatic features through exposure alone is slim (cf., Schmidt, 1993). Therefore, teachers need to tailor their instruction according to the types of social contact available for learners and create a variety of sociopragmatic situations and learning tasks for students to use the language in socially appropriate and culturally polite manners.

Limitations and future inquiry

This study has a number of limitations. First, although the DCT is a valid method to collect speech act data as discussed previously, data acquired in a natural environment, such as naturally occurring conversations, may reveal more in-depth findings related to the complexity of learners' pragmatic competences. Second, although the CHL and CFL groups were recruited from the same instructional classes, their proficiency levels may not be exactly equal with one another. A pre-test should have been conducted to confirm that the two groups' proficiency levels did not significantly differ. Third, there were only four scenarios in which the data were collected. An increase in the number of scenarios with additional variations in social power and social distance may reveal more information. Fourth, the results of this study suggest that CHL learners took a relatively safe approach to language use as observed in their predominant use of the *query preparatory* strategies and language forms that were uniform across sociopragmatic situations. It would be interesting and useful to incorporate measures to examine the relationship between speech acts and affective factors, including risk-taking and the sense of security in language use. Both qualitative and

quantitative analyses may help reveal more substantial discoveries and present a more complete picture for our understanding of the processes of pragmatic development.

Acknowledgment

I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their insights and helpful comments. This work was supported by a Research Project Grant from the University of Houston.

References

- Au, T., Knightly, L., Jun, S., & Oh, J. (2002). Overhearing a language during childhood. *Psychological Science, 13*, 238–243.
- Bardovi Harlig, K., & Vellenga, H. E. (2012). The effect of instruction on conventional expressions in L2 pragmatics. *System, 40*(1), 77–89.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1999). Exploring the interlanguage of interlanguage pragmatics: A research agenda for acquisitional pragmatics. *Language Learning, 49*, 677–713.
- Barron, A. (2003). *Acquisition in interlanguage pragmatics: Learning how to do things with words in a study abroad context* (Vol. 108). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Beebe, L. M., & Cummings, M. C. (1996). Natural speech act data versus written questionnaire data: How data collection method affects speech act performance. In S. M. Gass & J. Neu (Eds.), *Speech acts across cultures* (pp. 65–86). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. (Original version 1985).
- Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (1989). The CCSARP coding manual. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House, & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies* (pp. 273–294). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Bowles, M. (2011). Exploring the role of modality: L2-heritage learner interactions in the Spanish language classroom. *The Heritage Language Journal, 8*(1), 30–65.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. D. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, Y., & He, A. W. (2001). *Dui bu duias* a pragmatic marker: Evidence from Chinese classroom discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics, 33*, 1441–1465.
- Comanaru, R., & Noels, K. (2009). Self-determination, motivation, and the learning of Chinese as a heritage language. *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 66*(1), 131–158.
- DeKeyser, R. (2005). What makes foreign-language grammar difficult? A review of issues. *Language Learning, 55*(1), 1–25.
- He, A. (2008). Chinese as a heritage language: An introduction. In A. He & X. Yun (Eds.), *Chinese as a heritage language* (pp. 1–12). Honolulu: National Foreign Language Resource Center, University of Hawaii Press.
- He, A. (2015). Literacy, creativity, and continuity: A language socialization perspective on heritage language classroom interaction. In N. Markee (Ed.), *Handbook of classroom interaction* (pp. 304–318). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.
- Hendriks, B. (2008). Dutch English requests: A study of request performance by Dutch learners of English. In M. Pütz & J. Neff-van Aertselaer (Eds.), *Developing contrastive pragmatics: Interlanguage and cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. 331–350). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

- Hill, T. (1997). *The development of pragmatic competence in an EFL context* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Temple University, Tokyo.
- Hong, W. (1997). Socio-pragmatics in language teaching: With examples of Chinese request. *Journal of Chinese Language Teachers Association*, 32(1), 95–107.
- Hong, W. (2011). Refusals in Chinese: How do L1 and L2 differ? *Foreign Language Annals*, 44(1), 122–136.
- Kagan, O. (2012). Intercultural competence of heritage language learners: Motivation, identity, language attitudes, and the curriculum. *Proceedings of Intercultural Competence Conference*, 2, 72–84.
- Kasper, G., & Dahl, M. (1991). *Research methods in interlanguage pragmatics*. Honolulu: National Foreign Language Resource Center, University of Hawaii Press.
- Kasper, G., & Roever, C. (2005). Pragmatics in second language learning. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 317–334). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Koda, K., Zhang, Y., & Yang, C-L. (2008). Literacy development in Chinese as a heritage language. In A. W. He & Y. Xiao (Eds.), *Chinese as a heritage language: Fostering rooted world citizenry* (pp. 137–149). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, National Foreign Language Resource Center.
- Li, S. (2012). The effects of input-based practice on pragmatic development of requests in L2 Chinese. *Language Learning*, 62, 403–438.
- Li, S. (2014). The effects of different levels of linguistic proficiency on the development of L2 Chinese request production during study abroad. *System*, 45, 103–116.
- Lü, C., & Koda, K. (2011). Impact of home language and literacy support on English-Chinese biliteracy acquisition among Chinese heritage language learners. *Heritage Language Journal*, 8, 44–80.
- Lynch, A. (2003). The relationship between second and heritage language acquisition: Notes on research and theory building. *Heritage Language Journal*, 1(1), 26–43.
- Montrul, S. (2004). Subject and object expression in Spanish heritage speakers: A case of morpho-syntactic convergence. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 7(2), 125–142.
- Montrul, S. (2012). Is the heritage language like a second language? *EUROSLA Yearbook*, 12, 1–29.
- Montrul, S., & Bowles, M. (2010). Is grammar instruction beneficial for heritage language learners? Dative case marking in Spanish. *The Heritage Language Journal*, 7(1), 47–73.
- Oh, J., Jun, S., Knightly, L., & Au, T. (2003). Holding on to childhood language memory. *Cognition*, 86, B53–B64.
- Pinto, D., & Raschio, R. (2007). A comparative study of requests in heritage speaker Spanish, L1 Spanish, and L1 English. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 11(2), 135–155.
- Polinsky, M. (2008a). Russian gender under incomplete acquisition. *Heritage Language Journal*, 6(1), 40–71.
- Polinsky, M. (2008b). Relative clauses in heritage Russian: Fossilization or divergent grammar? *Formal Approaches to Slavic Linguistics (FASL)*, 16, 1–29.
- Polinsky, M. (2011). Reanalysis in adult heritage language: New evidence in support of attrition. *Studies in Foreign Language Acquisition*, 33, 305–328.
- Polinsky, M., & Kagan, O. (2007). Heritage languages: In the “wild” and in the classroom. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 1, 368–395.
- Rose, K. R. (2009). Interlanguage pragmatic development in Hong Kong, phase 2. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41, 2345–2364.
- Salsbury, T., & Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2000). Oppositional talk and the acquisition of modality in L2 English. In B. Swierczbin, F. Morris, M. E. Anderson, C. A. Klee, & E. Tarone

- (Eds.), *Social and cognitive factors in second language acquisition* (pp. 57–76). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- Salsbury, T., & Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2001). “I know your mean, but I don’t think so” disagreements in L2 English. In L. Bouton (Ed.), *Pragmatics and language learning* (Vol. 10, pp. 131–151). Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois, Division of English as an International Language.
- Schauer, G. (2009). *Interlanguage pragmatic development*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Schmidt, R. (1993). Consciousness, learning and interlanguage pragmatics. In G. Kasper & S. Blum-Kulka (Eds.), *Interlanguage pragmatics* (pp. 21–42). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sun, X., & Zhang, D. (2008). American college students’ requesting competence in Chinese as a foreign language. *Chinese Teaching in the World*, 3, 105–113.
- Taguchi, N. (2012). *Context, individual differences and pragmatic competence*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Taguchi, N., Li, S., & Liu, Y. (2013). Comprehension of conversational implicature in L2 Chinese. *Pragmatics and Cognition*, 21(1), 139–157.
- Takahashi, S. (1996). Pragmatic transferability. *Studies of Second Language Acquisition*, 18, 189–223.
- VanPatten, B. (2002). Processing instruction: An update. *Language Learning*, 52, 755–803.
- Wen, X. (2011). Chinese language learning motivation: A comparative study of heritage and non-heritage learners. *Heritage Language Journal*, 8(3), 41–66.
- Wen, X. (2014). Pragmatic development: An exploratory study of requests by learners of Chinese. In Z. Han (Ed.), *Second language acquisition of Chinese: A series of empirical studies* (pp. 30–56). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Xiao, Y. (2006). Heritage learners in the Chinese language classroom: Home background. *Heritage Language Journal*, 4, 47–56.
- Yao, T. (2005). From SATII to AP Chinese program. In S. Teng et al. (Eds.), *The 2005 international symposium on: Operational strategies and pedagogy for Chinese language programs in the 21st century*. Taipei: Department of Psychology, National Taiwan University.