Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

SciVerse ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 84 (2013) 361 – 366

Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences

3rd World Conference on Psychology, Counselling and Guidance (WCPCG-2012)

Identity vs. Foreign Language and Culture in Production of Speech Acts

Daša Munková [a] *, Eva Stranovská [a], Zuzana Fráterová [a], Beáta Ďuračková [a]

[a]*Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Tr. A. Hlinku 1, Nitra 949 74, Slovakia*

Abstract

Our paper focuses on investigating cognitive and language variables, which significantly condition anchoring in the language and culture (identity vs. language and culture). At the same time, they condition comprehension, interpretation and production of speech acts in the acquired (foreign) language. We study the impact of cognitive style category width on comprehension and production of selected speech acts in mother tongue and foreign language.

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Huseyin Uzunboylu & Dr. Mukaddes Demirok, Near East University, Cyprus

Keywords: 'Category width' cognitive style, factors of politeness in speech acts of requests, mother tongue, foreign language;

1. Introduction

Nowadays, spontaneity, success and coherence of intercultural communication are studied from the point of view of different linguistic theories. However, not enough attention is always paid to individual characteristics of the communicating people (from the cognitive and linguistic aspect). These characteristics, as well as the context and social specifics of communication, influence communication behaviour in a foreign language utterance.

We mainly paid attention to the relevance of student interactions and content contingency of produced speech acts in chosen situations of mother tongue as well as foreign language discourse. Situations, we have chosen, represent cultural and linguistic differences between Anglo-Saxon, Germen, Spanish and Slovak languages and cultures.

Our choice of research methods was based on the assumption that the selection of language means for realisation of speech acts of the required type depends on cognitive indicators of student's personality. These indicators determine the function of cognitive schemes in comprehension and cognition of the language.

2. 'Category width' cognitive style

We focus on the dimension of ***category width*** cognitive style because in understanding spoken or written communication we suppose a ***global/overall and detailed understanding***. This dimension relates to individual differences in category width that are conditioned by differences in strategies of processing information from the utterance. The category 'broad categorizer' represents strategies of global understanding of text or utterance. The category 'narrow categorizer' represents a detailed understanding of text or utterance. Koršáková and Tomengová

Corresponding author name: * Daša Munková Tel.: +421-905-832-723

E-mail address: dmunkova@ukf.sk

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Huseyin Uzunboylu & Dr. Mukaddes Demirok, Near East University, Cyprus
doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.06.567

(2004) have studied strategies of information processing during reading a text and have analysed strategies of information processing through:

- *acquiring information,*
- *interpreting a text*,
- *reflecting to and evaluating a text.*

If we take into consideration the cognitive style ***category width and the individual strategies of information processing***, we can say that ***in the category narrow categorizer*** (we will only study the category narrow):

- *acquiring information* concerns detailed processing of utterance and its analysis, proving of an exact understanding of long and complex texts in relation to known, everyday knowledge, concentration on less usual knowledge,
- *interpreting a text* concerns thinking about particular parts of utterance and their meaning, explaining the meaning of particular words and phrases, comparing them and putting them in contrast, explaining the meaning of slight differences,
- *reflecting and evaluating a text* concerns critical evaluation or setting a hypothesis, concentrating on terms that are in contrast with expectations, creating connections or comparisons, explaining or evaluating one text feature. (Koršáková et al., 2004; Pettigrew, 1958; Sarmány-Schuller, 1997; Jurčová at al., 1993; Gavora at al., 2009).

3. Social and expressive factors of a politeness speech act - request

To produce a request, an interlocutor can use various elements that he/she usually forms according to a special (culturally conditioned) structure. According to Díaz-Pérez (2003) a request is formed out of internal and external elements. The external elements of a request - social and expressive factors include:

F1 *Attention getters*
F2 *Speaker's perspective* - e. g.: ... can I borrow.., .. can I copy.., can I use your mobile phone ?, etc.
F3 *Listener's perspective* - e.g.: could you lend me (Vous form) .., could you hand me (Tu form)...
F4 *Politeness factors*
F5 *Pre-sequences*
F6 *Post-sequences/supporting details*
F7 *Mitigating devices*
F8 *Minimizers*

We have analysed a selection of politeness factors in speech acts of requests in foreign language and mother tongue on the basis of 'category width' cognitive style - narrow categorizer.

4. Research

Our research question is: How does the 'category width' cognitive style - narrow categorizer influence the choice of politeness factors in producing requests in various social situations in foreign language and mother tongue?

To gather data, we used an estimation scale C-W - narrow categorizer and a Speech acts simulation questionnaire based on a summary of speech acts simulation scenarios. According to Díaz-Pérez (2003) we chose the following scenarios - Situations:

S1 *You did not attend the last lecture and you are asking your peer to lend you his notes.*

S2 *You are in the professor's office and you need to make an urgent call. You are in a situation where no other phone can be used so you ask the professor to use the one in his office.*

S3 *You are preparing a presentation for a key subject and you've just learned there is a new professor at the department specializing in your topic. You don't know the new professor but you decide to pay him a visit and ask him to read the summary of your work and recommend you some literature.*

S4 *You are requesting a book in the university library. They tell you the book is not available because a student borrowed it earlier. You don't know him but you manage to find him and ask him to lend you the book to copy some chapters.*

S5 *You are in the university library. You want to take a book off the shelf, but you cannot reach so high. You ask your mate, who is taller than you, to hand you the book.*

The situational scenarios were prepared in a way that the subject had to think and decide before making the actual speech act whether the presented communicative tools are appropriate or not for the formulation of a request in context of social dominance and social distance and also in context of the given culture (mother tongue and foreign language), knowing that the differences may be huge.

Social distance was typical for Situations S3, S4 and S5, on the contrary, the interlocutors knew each other in Situations S1 and S2. Social dominance was potentially present in Situations S2 and S3 (perhaps also in S4). This division was made to be able to analyse the use of the various politeness factors in the formulation of requests based on the occurrence of social dominance and social distance.

5. Results

Based on the results of Cochran Q test (Fig. 1-5), the zero hypotheses, claiming that *there is a statistically significant difference in the incidence of politeness factors in examined situations in a foreign language as well as in the mother tongue*, are rejected at the 1% significance level.

Kendall's coefficient of concordance represents the degree of concordance in the incidence of factors of politeness in examined situations. The values of coefficients (Fig. 1-5) are from 0.097 to 0.556, while 1 means a perfect concordance and 0 represents discordance (Munk and Drlík, 2011). Low values of coefficients confirm Q test results. The highest concordance in the incidence of politeness factors was shown in Situation 1 and 5, the lowest in Situations 2 and 4.

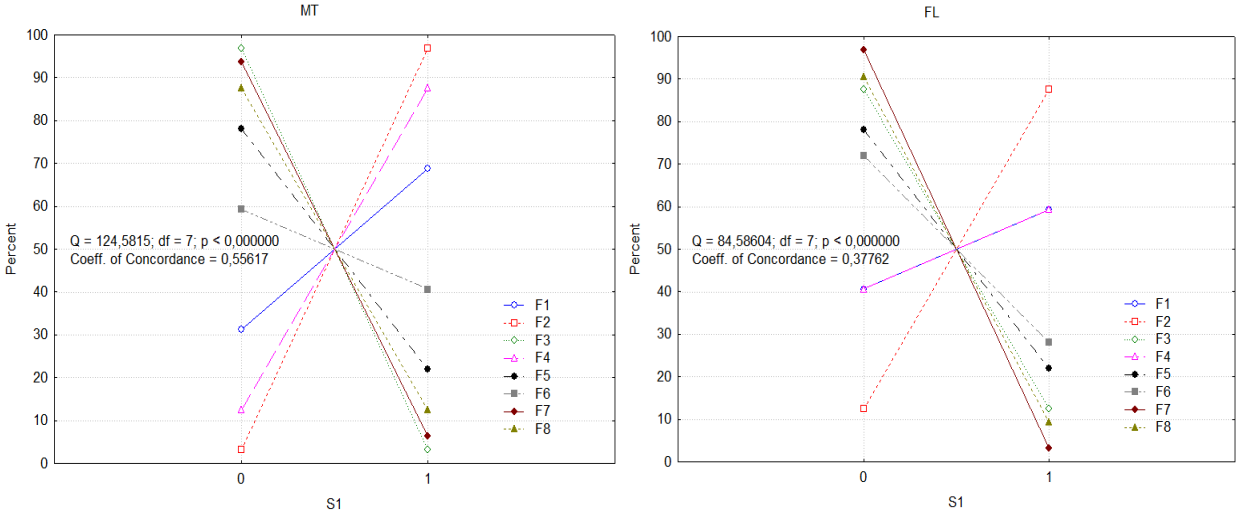

Figure 1. Interaction plot for Situation 1: a) mother tongue (MT), b) foreign language (FL)

Factors that students - narrow categorizers used in their MT the least were factors F3, F7, F8 and F5, and they used factors F2 and F4 the most. Similarly in FL they used the factor F7 the least and F2 the most. As we can see in the diagram (Fig. 1), narrow categorizers used in Situation 1 almost the same factors in Slovak - their MT (0.556) as in FL - English, German, and Spanish (0.378).

In Situation 2 (Fig. 2) narrow categorizers used in their MT factors F8 and F3 the least, and factors F2 and F6 the most. As opposed to that, in the FL, they used the factor F8 the least and F1 the most. The graphical comparison of the incidence of factors in Situation 2 shows that students used various factors of requests for the particular languages (0.163; 0.097).

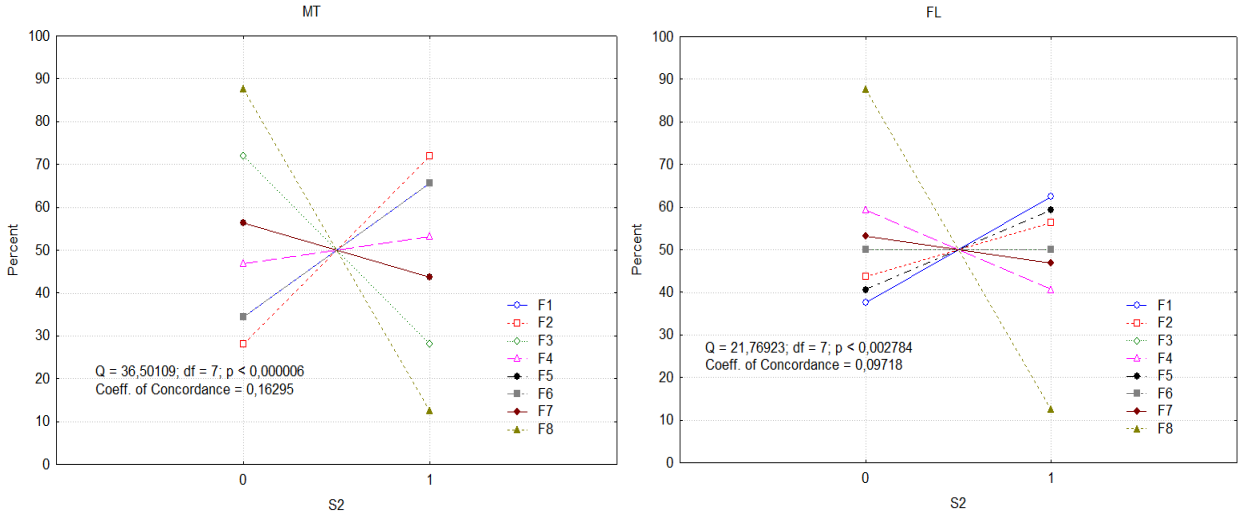

Figure 2. Interaction plot for Situation 2: a) mother tongue (MT), b) foreign language (FL)

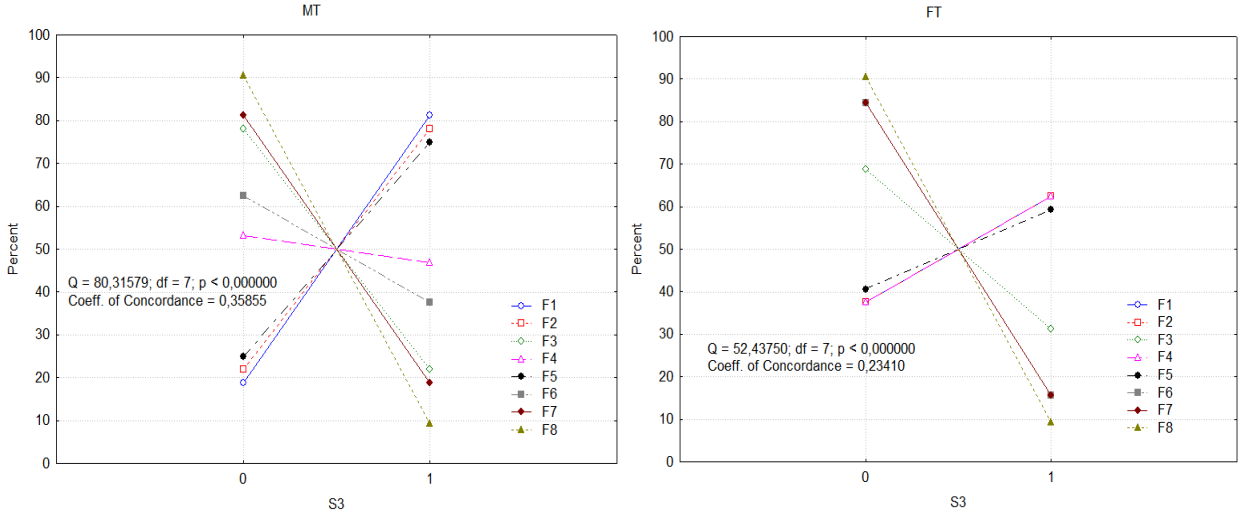

Figure 3. Interaction plot for Situation 3: a) mother tongue (MT), b) foreign language (FL)

Factors F8, F7 and F3 were the least used in MT in Situation 3 and the most used were the factors F1, F2 and F5 (Fig. 3). The same factors F8, F7 and F3 were the least used also in FL. The factor F4 was the most used in FL (unlike in MT).

In Situation 4 (Fig. 4), narrow categorizers used in their mother tongue factors F7 and F3 the least, and factors F1, F5 and F2 the most. In FL, the factors F7 and F8 were used the least, and F1, F4 and F5 the most. The diagram shows the variability of politeness factors use in both languages together and also separately (0.278; 0.167).

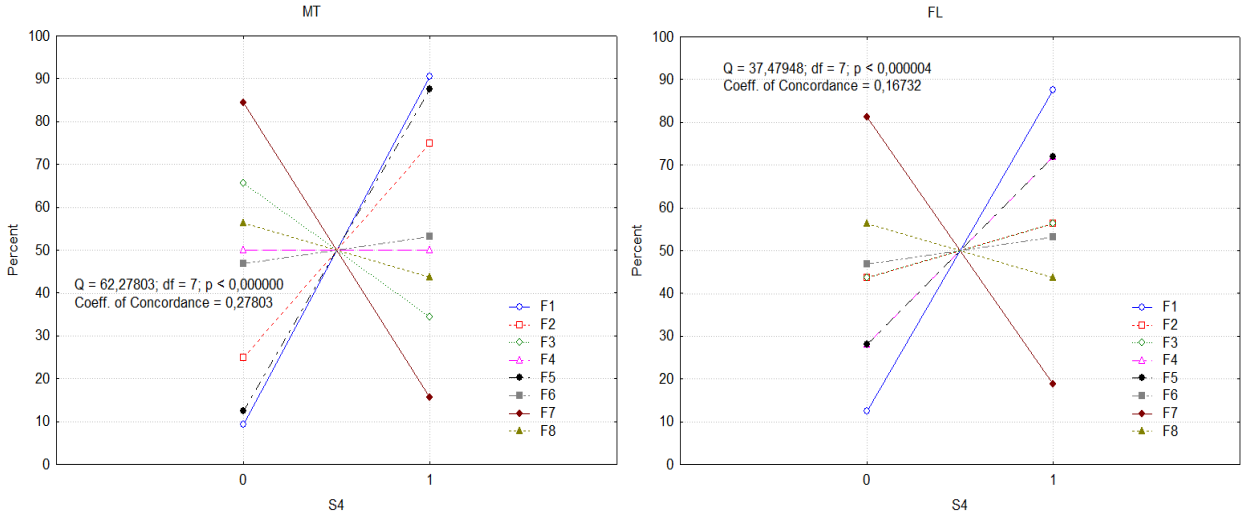

Figure 4. Interaction plot for Situation 4: a) mother tongue (MT), b) foreign language (FL)

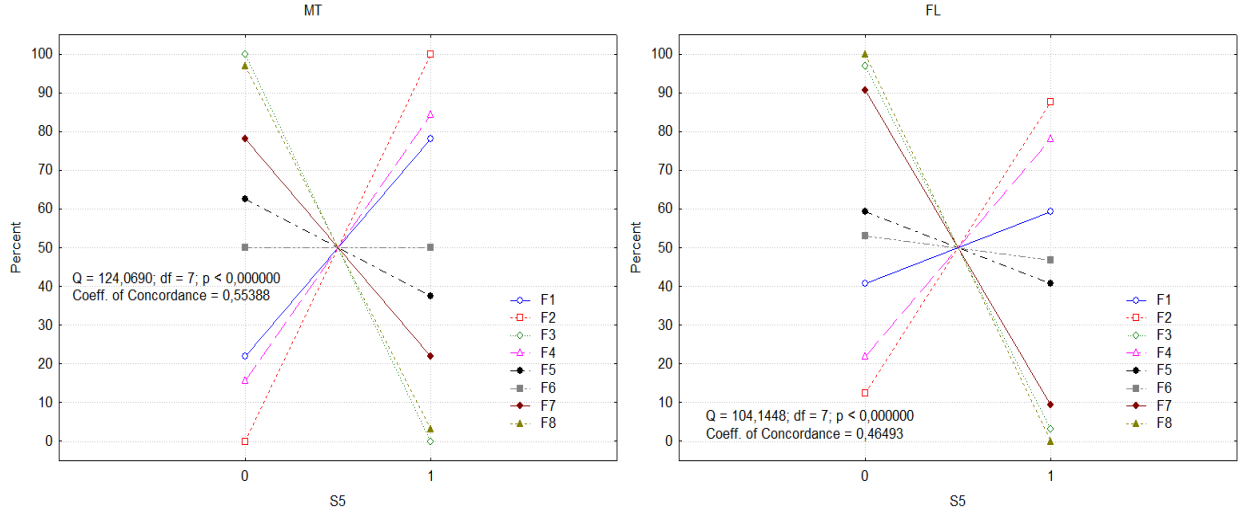

Figure 5. Interaction plot for Situation 5: a) mother tongue (MT), b) foreign language (FL)

In the last Situation 5 (Fig. 5), students used factors F3, F8 and F7 the least, and, on the contrary, F2, F4 and F1 the most in Slovak - MT. In FL, the least used were factors F8, F3 and F7, the most used were F2, F4 and F1. A high concordance can be also found here in the use of chosen politeness factors in MT (0.554), as well as in FL (0.465).

6. Conclusion

The summary of research finding has shown that narrow categorizers used as factors of request in S1 most frequently *speaker's per.* and *politeness elements*, on the contrary, the least frequent factors were *listener's per.*, *mit. devices* and *minimizers* in MT. In FL, the most used was *speaker's per.* and the least *mit. devices*.

In S2, the least used in MT were *minimizers* and *listener's per.*, and the most used were *speaker's per.* and *post-sequences*. In FL, the least used was the *minimizer* and the most used *the att. getter*.

In S3, students used in their MT *minimizers*, *mit. devices* and the *listener's per.* the least, and *att. getters*, *speaker's per.* and *pre-sequences* the most. Narrow categorizers used in FL *minimizers*, *mit. devices* and *listener's per.* the least frequently, and *politeness elements* the most frequently.

Mit. devices and *post-sequences* were the least used in MT in S4, and the most used were *att. getters*, *pre-sequences* and *speaker's per*. *Minimizers* and *mit. devices* were the least used, and *attention getters*, *politeness elements* and *pre-sequences* the most used in FL.

Listener's per., *minimizers* and *mit. devices* were identified as the least used factors in S5, and *speaker's per.*, *politeness elements* and *att. getters* were the most used in MT. In FL, the least frequently used were *minimizers*, *listener's per.* and *mit. devices*, and the most frequently used were *speaker's per.* and *politeness factors*.

The results of the research have also shown that students - narrow categorizers most often used in socially close situations (where communicators know each other, S1 and S2) the following factors: *speaker's per.*, *politeness elements*, *post-sequences* and *att. getters*. On the contrary, the least used were *listener's per.*, *mit. devices* and *minimizers*. On the other hand, narrow categorizers used in socially distant situations *att. getters*, *speaker's per.*, *pre-sequences* and *politeness elements* more often than *minimizers*, *mit. devices*, *listener's per.* and *post-sequences*.

If we look at the results from the point of view of the language, either MT or FL, in both situations the same element was used very often - *speaker's per.*, and sometimes *mit. devices* and *minimizers* were used.

From the point of view of social dominance, which is present in S2 and S3 (the speaker addresses the professor), probably also in S4, irrespective of the language used, the most frequently used politeness factors were *speaker's per.*, *post-sequences*, *att. getters*, *pre-sequences* and *politeness elements*. On the contrary, *minimizers*, *listener's per.* and *mit. devices* were the least frequently used. The same result was achieved by Kendall's coefficient of concordance of the incidence of politeness factors that was the lowest particularly in S2, S3 and S4.

Narrow categorizers strengthen, by the use of *pre-sequences* and *post-sequences*, their assumption about a greater „chance" to fulfil the request, even in the case of a less-challenging situation (in which no social dominance or social distance is present). In this case, the hidden aim of the speaker is to inform the listener about the reasons that drive him to express a request. The recipient concentrates its attention to himself/herself with the aim to evoke empathy or understanding from the side of the communication partner.

Narrow categorizers´ manifestation of politeness in FL with the help of *pre-sequences* and *post-sequences* in socially close interaction can be connected with carefulness, intolerance of mistakes by narrow categorizers, which is manifested by a detailed explanation. Explanation, to a certain extent, helps the narrow categorizer to achieve in FL a sense of certainty that the percipient will understand the request and fulfil it.

Narrow categorizers use in their MT less politeness factors than in FL. This can be connected with the fact that FL means uncertainty, alienation, automation processes and procedures are different to those in MT, so they have to be more careful in the area of mistake intolerance. Subsequently, the simulations of social situations may become routine and they do not consider it necessary to re-evaluate their typical communication behaviour except for S2 and S4, which are examples of social distance. We can state that the use of politeness factors by narrow categorizers in producing requests in FL may rather depend on social situation, whereas in MT more on politeness patterns.

Acknowledgement

This paper is published with the financial support of the project of Slovak Research and Development Agency (SRDA) "Linguistic intervention programme", project number APVV-0451-10.

References

Díaz Pérez, F. J. (2003). *La cortesía verbal en inglés y en español*. Actos de habla y pragmática intercultural. Jaén: Universidad de Jaén, pp. 485.

Jurčová, M. & Sarmány Schuller, I. (1993). Kognitívny štýl „šírka kategorizácie". *Československá psychologie*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 1-13.

Pettigrew, T. (1958). The measurement of category width as a cognitive variable. *Journal of Personality*, Vol. 26, pp. 532-544.

Sarmány Schuller, I. (1997). *Integrálne výsledky výskumov kognitívnych štýlov a praktická inteligencia* IV., Bratislava: ÚEPs SAV.

Gavora, P., Šrajerová, H. (2009). Porozumenie textu zisťované cloze-testom vo vzťahu k niektorým charakteristikám žiakov. In *Slovo o slove*, roč. 15, 2009, s. 199-207. ISBN 978-80-8068-972-8.

Koršáková, P., Tomengová, A. (2004). PISA SK 2003 : Národná správa. Bratislava : Štátny pedagogický ústav, 2004. 40 s. ISBN 80-85756-87-0.

Munk, M., & Drlik, M. (2011). Influence of Different Session Timeouts Thresholds on Results of Sequence Rule Analysis in Educational Data Mining. *Communications in Computer and Information Science*, 166, 60-74.