CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction
Analysing the learners’ ILP competence in an SL or FL context has become one of the main concerns in the field of SLA. The intention behind this chapter is to present some of the theoretical background on which research into pragmatics has been based. The first section deals with the concept of pragmatics, its historical background, main characteristics and underlying areas of study. Sections 2.1-2.4 address some of the main areas of pragmatics that are pivotal to this research, namely, the concept of pragmatics, pragmatic universality, pragmatic competence and pragmatic transfer. Section 2.5 is devoted to ILP as a subfield of pragmatics and different studies conducted in this field either cross sectional or longitudinal in both SL and FL contexts. Politeness theory and speech act theory are addressed to thoroughly in sections 2.6 and 2.7. Section 2.8 examines the speech act to be analysed, that is requests, on the grounds of previous research in the area of ILP, provides a definition of this speech act and reviews those studies that have paid attention to it, cross sectional and longitudinal. The final section, 2.9 is devoted to examining the notion of indirectness and politeness as applied to requests by some scholars, mainly by Blum-Kulka (1987).

2.1 The Concept of Pragmatics
As the inadequacy of the previous approaches, both purely formalist and abstract, in the study of language is evident, pragmatics becomes very important. In this sense, the specific area of research known as pragmatics has aroused the interest of a number of scholars over the last three decades. The origin of this term was coined by the philosopher Charles Morris (1938) who developed a science of signs (semiotics) which was divided into three main components, namely syntax, semantics and pragmatics, as shown in Figure 2-1 below.
As figure 2-1 illustrates, the three branches of semiotics consist of signs, the objects to which signs are applicable and sign users or interpreters. Syntax refers to the sentences that are grammatically acceptable, since it involves the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and the identification of well formed sentences. Semantics, which is mainly concerned with the meaning of lexical items, addresses the relationship between literal words and entities in the world. Taking into account that neither syntax nor semantics considers the users, Morris refers to pragmatics as the semiotic relationship between sign and sign users.

In the 1970s, the research field of pragmatics or the study of language in use came to be regarded as a discipline in its own right. This fact was based upon the work of a series of philosophers of language such as Austin (1962), Searle (1969) and Grice (1975), who developed what was to become a science of language with enormous relevance. Levinson (1983) argued that the interest in pragmatics appeared as a reaction to Chomsky’s use of language as an abstract construct on the one hand, and as a necessity to bridge the gap between existing linguistic theories of language and accounts of linguistic communication on the other. Unlike Chomsky’s (1965) theory of mental faculty as a competence theory based on the independence of grammar from the users and functions of language rather than a performance theory, Leech (1983) encouraged a shift of direction within linguistics deviating from competence, tilting towards performance, with the creation of a fresh paradigm. This new paradigm, that is to say pragmatics, paid attention to meaning in use rather than meaning in the abstract, Leech (1983:4). According to Alcaraz (1990) and Cenoz (2003) the main characteristics that define pragmatics refer to: (1) the use of language as a means of communication; (2) the importance of language use focusing on
functions rather than on forms; (3) the study of the processes which occur in communication; (4) the importance of context and authentic language use; (5) the interdisciplinary nature of pragmatics; and (6) the application of linguistic theories based on the concept of communicative competence.

In this sense, a new paradigm with particular characteristics was born and since then scholars (Stalnaker, 1972; Searle, Kiefer and Bierwisch, 1980; Wunderlich, 1980; Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1983; Crystal, 1985; Mey, 1993; Verschueren, 1999, among many others) have provided numerous definitions of this term bearing in mind the variation in interpretation of words according to the specific context in which they are used. According to Stalnaker (1972:383) pragmatics was defined as “the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed”. In their introduction to Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics, Searle, Kiefer and Bierwisch (1980) refer to pragmatics as being “concerned with the conditions according to which speakers and hearers determine the context and use dependent utterance meanings”. The importance of context dependence is also supported by Wunderlich (1980:304) as he has stated that “Pragmatics deals with the interpretation of sentences (or utterances) in a richer context”. Levinson (1983:24) regards pragmatics as “the study of the ability of language users to pair sentences with the contexts in which they would be appropriate”. In Leech’s (1983) words, pragmatics could be defined as the study of the use and meaning utterances have in specific situations.

All the above definitions lead to the identification of two important characteristics that differentiate pragmatics from other linguistic disciplines, such as syntax and/or semantics. On the one hand, particular attention is devoted to users of language, and on the other hand, great emphasis is given to the context in which these users interact. Yule (1996) assumes that pragmatics is primarily concerned with the study of speaker meaning and contextual meaning. Verschueren (1999) also considers pragmatics as the study of meaning in context, since meaning is not regarded as a static concept but as a dynamic aspect which is negotiated in the process of communication. Context is also a key concept in LoCastro’s (2003:12) definition of pragmatics, this being the discipline that explores “how utterances have meaning in the context of situation”. Apart from the previous consideration about pragmatics, and in line with Kasper (1997b), one of the most elaborate definitions was proposed by David Crystal (1985:240), who considered pragmatics as “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they
encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication."

This definition has been explained in detail by Kasper and Rose (2002), and also by LoCastro (2003) who considers that pragmatics is distinguished by the following distinguishing features

Meaning is created in interaction with speakers and hearers. Context includes both linguistic (context) and non-linguistic aspect. Choices made by the users of language are an important concern. Constraints in using language in social action are significant. The effects of choices on co-participants are analysed (p.29).

These characteristics clearly show all the aspects that are involved in pragmatics. Moreover, apart from the users and the context, interaction also plays a very important role when dealing with pragmatics, since the process of communication does not only focus on the speaker’s intentions, but also on the effects those intentions have on the hearers. Thomas (1995) regards pragmatics as meaning in interaction. According to this author, pragmatics involves three main processes, namely those of negotiating meaning between speaker and hearer, the context of utterance, whether physical, social or linguistic and the meaning potential of an utterance.

Thomas (1995) points out that work carried out in the field of pragmatics had only paid attention to both social or psychological factors and thus falls into one of the two different approaches, namely the cognitive approach and the social approach. The social approach is concerned with utterance meaning and is mainly interested in the receiver of the message, whereas the psychological approach concentrates on the study of speaker meaning. In their relevance theory, Sperber and Wilson (1986), for example, limit pragmatics to whatever can be said in terms of a cognitively defined notion of relevance. Moreover, Blackemore (1992) deals with a cognitive approach, since she does not accept the possibility of combining a cognitive and a social approach into one general theory of pragmatics. In contrast, other scholars such as Mey (1993:42) leave out the cognitive approach and focus only on the social one, since for this author, “pragmatics is the study of the conditions of human language uses as these are determined by the context of society”. Taking these considerations into account, Thomas (1995) argues that it is a mistake to adopt an approach to pragmatics, cognitive or social, which pays attention to one of them and excludes the
This view was supported by Lo Castro’s (2003) view on pragmatics as social action. According to this author, pragmatics is related to language in use and, more specifically, a form of social action. Lo Castro (2003:15) defines pragmatics as “the study of speaker and hearer meaning created in their joint actions that include both linguistic and non-linguistic signals in the context of socio-culturally organized activities”.

All the previous definitions of pragmatics dealt extensively with pragmatics as a general discipline and its main characteristics. Since this area of language is not a unitary field, rather, it includes different theoretical and methodological approaches which depend on certain aspects of human communication. In this respect, Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983) make a distinction between general pragmatics and the area of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics.

As illustrated in Figure 2-2, Leech (1983: 10-11) defines general pragmatics as “the study of linguistic communication in terms of conversational principles”, whereas pragmalinguistics (which is language specific) and sociopragmatics (which is culture specific) belong to more specific local conditions of language use. On the one hand, pragmalinguistics refers to the grammatical side of pragmatics and addresses the resources for conveying particular communicative acts. Such resources include pragmatic strategies like directness and indirectness, pragmatic routines and a range of modification devices which can intensify or soften the communicative acts. On the other hand, sociopragmatics deals with the relationship between linguistic action and social structure, since it refers to the social factors such as status, social distance and
degree of imposition that influence the kind of linguistic acts that are performed and how such acts are performed.

These two sides of pragmatics are of particular relevance to this study, since it has been claimed that although the adult learners already possess universal pragmatic knowledge (discussed in the next section), they need a lot of time to acquire the ability to choose linguistic forms appropriate to particular social categories (Kasper and Rose, 2002). Moreover, these authors argue that in FL contexts, which is the particular setting of the present study, the development of pragmalinguistic as well as socio-pragmatic aspects appear to be especially difficult.

2.2 Pragmatics Universality

The proposition that learners’ L2 pragmatic ability can be ahead of their grammar is at odds with the commonsense view that in order to do things with words in a TL, the “words” used for the grammar must be already in place (Kasper & Rose 2002). Like many stubborn myths about language learning and teaching, this belief persists in FL curricula and teaching materials around the world. Even if language instruction ultimately aims to enable students to communicate in the TL, pragmatic ability must be grounded in a solid foundation in L2 grammar, which is later put to pragmatic use. The myth of the primacy of grammar disregards the indisputable reality that unlike children, normal adult L2 learners are already fully pragmatically competent in at least one language and most people in more than one, given the fact that the majority of the world’s population grows up multilingually rather than monolingually. Adults and children thus face quite different learning tasks in pragmatics, as predicted by Bialystok’s (1993) two-dimensional model of language use and proficiency. Children primarily have to develop analytic representations of pragmalinguistic and socio-pragmatic knowledge, whereas adult L2 learners mainly have to acquire processing control over already existing representations. To some extent, adults have to acquire new representations as well, such as unfamiliar socio-pragmatic distinctions and practices, new pragmalinguistic conventions, their social meanings, and their contextual distributors, but in developing L2 specific pragmatic ability, adult learners can build on broad basis of prior knowledge.

Regardless of ethno-linguistic specificities, competent adult members of any community bring a rich fund of universal pragmatic knowledge and abilities to the task of learning the pragmatics of another language (Blum-Kulka, 1991). Such
knowledge is conceptualized differently in various theories of pragmatics, discourse and interaction. Kasper and Rose (2002) maintained that universal pragmatic competence mainly comprises implicit knowledge and ability to use the following:

- Goffman’s “System constraints” of interaction and their extensions in conversation analysis, including principles and practices of turn-taking repair, the social accomplishment of actions, and preference organization.
- Differences between ordinary conversation and at least some other, usually institutionalized, speech exchange systems.
- Acts of speaking, writing, and using hybrid modalities, such as the main categories of illocutionary acts, verdictives, exercitives, commisives, behavitives, expositives (Austin, 1962), or representatives, directives, commisives, expressives, declarations (Searle, 1976).
- Specific communicative acts, greetings, leave takings, requests, suggestions, invitations, offers, refusals, acceptance, (dis)agreements, apologies, complaints, compliments, expressions of gratitude (Ochs, 1996).
- Indexicality as an implicit expression of epistemic, affective, and social distance (Ochs, 1996) and contextualization (Gumperz, 1996).
- Politeness as a mutually face-saving strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987).
- Major realization strategies for communicative acts, such as levels of directness in requesting (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Fukushima, 2000).
- Discursive construction of social identities and relations (Bakhtin, 1986; Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998).
- Collaborative and autonomous accomplishment of activities (Levinson, 1979) and genres (Bakhtin, 1986).

From the perspective of linguistic anthropology, Ochs (1996) subsumes some of these competencies under a “universal culture principle” proposing that “There are commonalities across the world’s language communities and the communities of
practice in the linguistic means used to constitute certain situational meanings. This principle suggests that human interlocutors use similar linguistic means to achieve similar social ends” (p.245). But since the competencies summarily listed above constitute the pragmatic knowledge and skills that competent adult members draw on in their communicative practice, they specifically point to a universal pragmatic principle, not just a universal culture principle, which would also encompass cross-culturally shared non-linguistic, non-discursive and non-textual phenomena. For the most part, universal pragmatic competencies are implicit and proceduralised types of knowledge and ability whose availability for conscious inspection is quite limited. Kasper & Rose (2002) noted that the prime occasions for noticing and meta commentary are violations of expected lines of conduct (e.g. ‘Don’t interrupt me’, ‘he was readily rude’), which may well be that because universal pragmatic competencies are omnipresent, taken for granted, and acquired in social interaction rather than formally learned, their role in adult SL and FL learning is not easily recognized. They, Kasper and Rose, concluded that whether or not linguistic universal are at work in adult SL acquisition, pragmatic universals enable learners to participate in L2 mediated interaction from early on and to acquire L2 specific pragmatic knowledge.

2.3 Pragmatic Competence

Along the continuum of ILP processes, L2 learners are already equipped with general pragmatic knowledge (the cumulative use of language in general as defined by Blum-Kulka, 1991), L1 pragmalinguistic knowledge (knowledge of particular linguistic forms conveying particular illocutions as defined by Leech, 1983) and L1 sociopragmatic knowledge (knowledge of social and discourse principles which vary in different social contexts, cultures and language communities as also defined by Leech, 1983). The ability to use such utterances in an effective and efficient manner is described as communicative or pragmatic competence (Francis, 1997).

Communicative competence is relevant in the field of SLA, since the main aim in an FL classroom is to make learners communicatively competent in the TL. It has also had an important influence in the field of SLA, since it has been the basis for the teaching approach known as communicative language teaching. It is for this reason that different scholars have attempted to define the specific components that make up the construct of communicative competence. Among the different constituents, the pragmatic competence is essential in the context of FL, since it is
very important to teach sentences that are not only correct grammatically, but are also appropriate to the situation or the context where the utterance is taking place.

In this sense the most representative models analyzing the components integrated in the framework of communicative competence belong to the field of SLA. The first such model was proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) and further developed by Canale (1983). According to these authors communicative competence is made up of four main competences; grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse competence, which may be illustrated as follows:

![Canale and Swain's (1980) and Canale's (1983) model of communicative competence](Source: Cenoz, 1996 : 104)

Later on, Savignon (1983, 1997, and 2001) put forward another model of communicative competence represented as an inverted pyramid. According to this model, communicative competence, similar to the previous model (Canale and Swain 1980), and Canale (1983) above, includes four types of competencies, namely; grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. What is relevant about Savignons’s model is her concept of interaction among the four competencies. According to Savignon, the fact that each component has a different size allows her to demonstrate that communicative competence is greater than the rest of the components. She argues that a measure of both sociolinguistic and strategic competence, without any knowledge of grammatical competence, can contribute to increase someone’s communicative competence (i.e. without the use of language, a person can be communicative through gestures or facial expressions)

Models of communicative competence mentioned above have been criticized on the basis that they do not take into account the importance of the pragmatic component. Schachter (1990) points out that the model proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) does not clearly distinguish between sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence. In this regard, Schachter (1990:42) asks “where does pragmatics fit into the Canale and Swain framework? Is it assumed not to exist”? However, it may be argued that Canale (1983) considered pragmatics as an area within sociolinguistic competence.

Bachman (1990) was the first researcher to explicitly divide language knowledge into organizational and pragmatic competence. Organizational competence implies the control of the formal structure of language in order to produce or recognize grammatically correct sentences, to understand their prepositional content and to order them to form texts. Pragmatic competence on the other hand, is concerned with two significant aspects of communicative language use, the relationship between these signs and referents, and the language users and the contexts of communication. The notion of pragmatic competence, according to Bachman (1990) is subdivided into two sub-components, namely those of illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence figure 2.5. Illocutionary competence refers to the knowledge of the pragmatic conventions for performing acceptable language functions, whereas sociolinguistic competence is concerned with the knowledge of the sociolinguistic conventions for performing language functions appropriately in a given context.

![Figure 2-5: Bachman’s (1990:87) model of communicative competence.](image-url)
On the basis of Bachman’s (1990) model of language competence, integrating the pragmatic component, Barron (2003:10) offers a working definition of pragmatic competence as “knowledge of the linguistic resources available in given language for realizing particular illocutions knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts, and finally knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular language’s linguistic resources.”

Quite recently, Alcon (2000a) in her proposal for a model of communicative competence, reported that the models presented by Canale (1983) and Bachman (1990) show us the different knowledge and abilities required to acquire an SL, but neither of the two models tries to specify the way in which the different competencies are interrelated with each other. Alcon (2000a) proposes the following model as illustrated in the table 2.2 below.

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<th>Discourse Competence</th>
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<td>Pragmatic Competence</td>
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<td>Learning Strategies</td>
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As can be seen in the framework presented by Alcon, there are sub-competencies that are related to each other. Discourse competence is the main component which includes the linguistic, textual and pragmatic constituents. As far as psychomotor skills and competencies are concerned, the author suggests that discourse competence is influenced by the abilities of listening, speaking, reading and writing, which are interrelated with one another in order to use the language for communication purposes. Alcon’s (2000a) model is an attempt not only to show all the constituents needed to develop communicative competence to acquire an SL or FL, but also to integrate and relate those components to each other in order to build discourse competence. According to this author, discourse competence is the main element needed by language learners in to become communicatively competent.
2.4 Pragmatic Transfer

Inter-language and cross-cultural pragmatics studies have provided ample evidence that L2 learners’ L1 pragmatic knowledge significantly influences their comprehension and production of pragmatic performance in the L2 (Kasper, 1992). Pragmatic transfer is one of the most frequently addressed issues in ILP that has an intermediate link to SLA research (Kasper and Rose, 1999). As its name reveals, the study of pragmatic transfer incorporates two disciplines. On one hand, it relates to theories of general L1 transfer within SLA research. On the other hand, it involves general pragmatic theory.

2.4.1 Pragmatic Transferability

The conditions that favour or disfavour transfer (Pragmatic transferability) were addressed by a number of scholars such as (Kasper, 1981; Blum Kulka, 1982; Olshtain, 1983; Takahashi and Beebe, 1987; House and Kasper 1987; Bodman and Eisenstein, 1988; Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Olshtain and Cohen, 1989; Takahashi and Dufon, 1989; Robinson, 1992; Takahashi, 1995; Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper and Ross, 1996; Hill, 1997; and Baba 1999). Grounded on the studies by Kellerman (1977, 1978, 1983 and 1986), many of these scholars adopted the psycholinguistic approach to transferability. Kellerman indicated that learners have perceptions of what is potentially transferable and what is not in their own language. These perceptions then influence what learners actually transfer. The two main constructs in Kellerman’s transferability framework are ‘projection’ and ‘conversion’. The former refers to the process whereby learners make use of their beliefs about the relationship between their NL and TL to judge what is transferable and what is not. The latter refers to the learning decision (i.e. whether they should transfer a particular LI structure or not) that is based on learner perception. Kellerman proposed three conditions for transferability, namely psychotypology, psycholinguistic markedness, and the reasonable entity. The first condition refers to the learners’ perception of L1-L2 distance. The second is connected with coreness or language specificity/neutrality and the latter labeled ‘prototypically’ (learners’ perception of L1 characteristics). The last condition is TL reasonableness assumption by learners in the absence of TL knowledge. Of these, Kellerman found psychotopology more influential than prototypicality in determining the transferability of a specific L1 element. He argued that while prototypicality only effects what is judged as being transferable by learners.
it is their psychotypology, which changes as their proficiency develops, that governs what is actually transferred.

Language-specificity (where learners insist upon using their L1 pragmatic features rather than the TL) has an important influence on learners’ perception on what they transfer (what is transferable). Kasper (1981) reports a case of consistent transfer avoidance where German English as a second language (ESL) learners are found not to use the mitigating routine “I mean” when performing a variety of the TL linguistic acts although this cajoler is used most frequently in NL equivalent contexts. House and Kasper (1987) have noted that high-intermediate Danish learners resisted transferring their L1 negative marker “ikke” when making requests in English and German. The reason was that they thought this mitigating device does not carry a presupposition of non-compliance as do its English and German counterparts in comparable contexts. Bodman and Eisenstein (1988) illustrate the effect of learners own judgment about the transferability of some pragmalinguistic features of gratitude expressions in their NL. They found that in spontaneous role-play data, advanced Arabic, Farsi and Punjabi speaking learners of English avoided transferring ritualized expressions of gratitude which they considered L1-specific. They hesitated and paused frequently, which these researchers saw as a signal of transfer resistance and which they attributed to learners being aware of their L1 specificity.

Olshtain (1983) and Robinson (1992) have revealed the same picture at the sociopragmatic level. As a result of the performance data and the interviews conducted with learners about their overall perceptions of apology as language-specific or language-universal, Olshtain found that the Russian learners of Hebrew tended to have a more language universal perception of apology. They thought that in all languages and cultures people need to apologize when they feel it necessary. The English learners of Hebrew, in contrast, holding a more language-specific view of this speech act, deduced that Hebrew speakers perform far fewer apologies. As a consequence, the Russian speakers produce more apologies than Hebrew NSs, demonstrating negative transfer and the English speakers produced fewer apologies than they would in their NL but still apologized more often than Hebrew NSs. Kasper (1992) explains that the English participated learners’ intuitions about what is transferable and what is not may have been overridden by highly authorized NL pragmatic behaviour. She suggests that when pragmatic knowledge is automized, it overrides pragmatic transfer based on controlled processing.
Robinson (1992) indicates that Japanese ESL learners tend to be relatively direct in refusing their American interlocutors’ offers and requests as they view directness as more acceptable in American culture than in their native culture. Such perception can also account for some cases of the ‘non-transfer’ of the Japanese pragmalinguistic patterns in refusals. Han (1992) reports that the Korean informants’ tendency to accept the compliments given by their American interlocutors is encouraged by their belief that Americans are always ‘frank’ and ‘direct’ and therefore, prefer to accept compliments. In (1989) Faerch and Kasper illustrate the relationship between learners’ perception of L1-L2 distance and the transferability of L1 requests. They found that while Danish modal verbs, consultative devices and negation rules are transferred into German by the Danish participants in their study, these features are not transferred into English. Faerch and Kasper argue that these learners fall back on their L1 when requesting in German more than in English probably as a result of their perception that Danish is closer to German than to English.

In addressing transferability from TL proficiency perspective, two conflicting views of relationship between proficiency and transfer have been found in pragmatic transfer literature. Some researchers hypothesize that pragmatic transfer has positive correlation with language proficiency since they hold that transfer can take place only when L2 learners have gained sufficient TL resources to make it possible (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Takahashi and Beebe, 1987; Olshtain and Cohen, 1989; and Hill, 1997). Takahashi and Beebe’s hypothesis (1987) was based on their own findings that highly advanced Japanese participants often drew on their NL while performing English refusals. This hypothesis was further substantiated by Baba’s (1999) study on compliment responses, which found that the amount of pragmatic transfer increased with learners’ language proficiency. Baba has suggested that as learners become more proficient, they are less likely to rely on simple and formulaic TL patterns. Instead, they are confident enough to attempt more complex TL material to express their own cultural identity. Cohen (1997) also has supported this hypothesis with his interesting finding about sociopragmatic transfer. He kept a diary about his progress in acquiring different aspects of pragmatic competence in Japanese. He reported intending to conform to his own cultural norms, which means being more interactive and specific than is appropriate in Japanese culture. Yet, he failed to do this due to a
lack of L2 knowledge and control. As a result, he had to involuntarily observe Japanese conversational norms.

The converse, on the other hand, was assumed by some other studies (Takahashi and Dufon, 1989; Robinson 1992; Takahashi, 1992; and Maeshiba et al. 1996). Robinson (1992) ,for example, found that although both low and high proficiency groups of Japanese ESL learners were aware of the differences in appropriate American and Japanese refusal behaviour, the former were more likely to be influenced by their NL whereas the latter approximated NS norms more closely. Maeshiba et al (1996) discovered that the lower proficiency participants in their study tended to transfer L1 apology strategies more often than their higher proficiency counterparts. These findings obviously did not lend support to Takahashi and Babe’s assumption about the positive correlation between transfer and proficiency.

2.4.2 Pragmatic Transfer in IL Pragmatics Process

In the field of ILP there are two kinds of transfer, sociopragmatic transfer and pragmalinguistic transfer (Leech, 1983). In Leech’s definition, pragmalinguistics refers to the linguistic resources used to perform a speech act whereas sociopragmatics is concerned with the social perceptions that govern one’s comprehension and performance of speech acts. Thomas (1983) defined pragmalinguistic transfer as

The inappropriate transfer of speech act strategies from one language to another, or the transferring from the mother tongue to the target language of utterances which are semantically/syntactically equivalent, but which, because of some different interpretive bias; tend to convey a different pragmatic force in the target language”(p.101)

Kasper (1992) criticized this definition arguing that transfer is not necessarily limited to “inappropriateness” as it can be both ‘positive’ (which facilitates learning) and ‘negative’ (which inhibits learning). Kasper also pointed out that the above definition of pragmalinguistic transfer needs to cover the transfer of the politeness values and the illocutionary force given to a particular linguistic device as well. Pragmalinguistic transfer is then defined by Kasper as the process whereby learners’ assignment of illocutionary force and politeness value to particular L1 linguistic material influences how they interpret and perform an equivalent L2 speech act. Sociopragmatic transfer, on the other hand, refers to the process whereby learners’
subjective judgment of the equivalence between L1-L2 contexts affects the social perceptions underlying their comprehension and production of L2 speech act.

The distinction between pragmalinguistic transfer and sociopragmatic transfer reveals that learners transfer not only their L1 linguistic features but also their cultural values, concept of politeness, and their perception of social distance and power when performing an illocution in the TL. Moreover, there is evidence that sociopragmatic transfer tends to affect learners’ perception and production of L2 speech acts more than pragmalinguistic transfer (Takahashi and Beebe, 1987; Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1990; Fukushima, 1990; Tanaka 1997). This is because sociopragmatic judgment seems to often play a more important role than pragmalinguistic judgment in the success of intercultural communication.

It is precisely these sociopragmatic decisions (...) that govern what is and what is not mentionable in certain contexts in a given culture or speech community both in terms of taboo topics and in terms of speech acts, the mention of which may be considered inappropriate in certain circumstances (Bonikowska 1988, p.171).

Kasper (1992), based on Gass and Selinker’s (1983) operational definition of language transfer, proposes to qualitatively identify instances of positive and negative transfer based on the frequencies of a particular pragmatic feature in the NL, TL, and IL data. Specifically, as she puts it, the presence of positive transfer is determined by the lack of statistically significant differences in the frequency of occurrences of a pragmatic feature in all the three sets of data (IL=TL, NL=TL, IL=NL). Instances of negative transfer are determined by the occurrences of statistically significant differences between IL and TL and between NL and TL in the frequency with which a pragmatic feature occurs, plus a lack of statistically significant difference in the frequency of occurrences of that feature between IL and NL (ILTL, NLTL, and ILNL). Kasper also notes that of these two types of transfer, positive transfer is of less interest to ILP researchers because of the methodological difficulty of disentangling it from learners’ overgeneralizations or the operation of universal pragmatic principles and because of the unlikelihood of it leading to communication failure.

The data from ILP research show that learners of the same TL from different L1 backgrounds present different patterns of pragmatic transfer (Olshtain, 1983; House and Kasper, 1987). Sociopragmatic transfer, for example, is reported in a
number of studies. In Takahashi and Beebe’s (1993) study of the speech act of correction by Japanese ESL learners, it was found that these learners’ conceptualizations of politeness underlying their NL style-shifting patterns according to the relative social power and distance have affected their selection of L2 politeness strategies. Similar findings have been reported by House’s (1988) study on German learners of British English. She found that these learners transferred their NL communicative style, i.e. the preference for self oriented apologizing strategies (as opposed to the other oriented strategies often chosen by the British). Similarly, in a study of the speech act of refusal, Robinson (1992) showed that Japanese ESL learners tended to transfer the Japanese avoidance of saying “no” to a request in English.

Concerning the preference for positive or negative politeness, Garcia (1989) on apologies, Venezuelan reported that Spanish ESL learners often made use of positive politeness strategies as they did in NL contexts and underused the negative politeness strategies employed by NSs of English. Takahashi and Beebe (1993) discovered that in contrast to their American interlocutors, Japanese ESL learners seemed to be reluctant to employ positive politeness strategies in correcting people of lower status due to the influence of their L1. The transfer of politeness preferences also manifests itself in the IL data of advanced Japanese learners in Baba’s (1999) study on compliment responses. Those learners frequently opted for negative politeness strategies in responding to TL compliments just as they usually did in their NL.

Regarding the pragmalinguistic transfer, there is ample evidence for both negative and positive transfer. In two studies by Blum-Kulka (1982, 1983) on requests by English learners of Hebrew as an L2, while these learners were found to successfully transfer the NL semantic formulas which are similar to the TL (e.g. “imperatives”, “ability questions”, “why not questions”, and “do you mind if.............” form), they were also observed to exhibit inappropriate use of the TL ability question. As a result, they produced non-TL request forms. Blum-Kulka explains that a cross-linguistically surface similarity in both NL and TL forms does not necessarily guarantee a similarity in function. Faerch and Kasper (1989) found evidence of negative pragmalinguistic transfer relating to the use of internal and external modifications in request realization by Danish learners of German. They found that these learners transferred Danish modal verbs which are formally similar to the TL.
resulting in “a distorting effect on the illocution or politeness” (p.228). These learners also employed Danish “consultative devices” when mitigating their requests in the TL.

2.5 Interlanguage Pragmatics

ILP is a second generation hybrid. As its name reveals, ILP belongs to two different disciplines, both of which are interdisciplinary. As a branch of SLA research, ILP is one of several specializations in IL studies, contrasting with IL phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. As a subset of pragmatics, ILP figures as a sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, or simply linguistic enterprise, depending on how one defines the scope of pragmatics (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993a).

The language system developed by learners in their own way to acquire the TL has been defined as ILP (Trosborg, 1995). Ellis (1985) claimed that IL entails knowledge of language which is different from both the learners’ mother tongue and the TL system they are trying to acquire. The term IL was first introduced by Selinker (1972), although other alternative terms have been employed to refer to the same phenomenon. Nemser (1971), for example, refers to it as approximate systems and Corder (1971) calls it idiosyncratic dialects and transitional competence. These two terms reflect two different concepts; the notion of IL and IL continuum. According to Ellis (1985), the former deals with “the structured system which the learner constructs at any given stage in his/her development”, whereas the second addresses the series of interlocking systems which forms what Corder (1971) calls the learners “built-in-syllabus”. During the seventies, the area of IL studies, as it has come to be known, expanded rapidly and different types of IL were investigated: the language of SL and FL learners, of migrant workers, of pidgin and creole speakers. Irrespective of which of these types of IL has been in focus, researchers have concentrated on one of the following main areas of interest:

1. The IL as a linguistic system, described relative to various types of IL at different states of their learning process.

2. The learning process described in terms of the IL development and means whereby the IL user builds up and extends his IL System.
3. The IL communication process, described in terms of the reception/production process in the IL user and the way he makes use of his IL system for communicative process (Faerch & Kasper, 1989).

The basic assumption underlying the notion of IL implies that the learner’s language is permeable, dynamic and systematic (Ellis, 1985). The first characteristic, that is to say its permeability, implies that the rules that constitute the learner’s knowledge at any particular stage are not fixed, but open to amendment. With regard to the second feature, continual revision of the internal system of rules and adoption of new hypotheses about the TL system mean that the learners’ IL is constantly changing. Finally, the learner’s selection from his store of IL rules is not a haphazard process but is carried out in a systematic and predictable manner based on his existing rule system. All these characteristics may be summarized in KoiKe’s (1996:257) definition of IL as “a system that represents dynamic stages in the learning process and that are subject to continual change and modification”.

In this sense, the importance of the IL system in the process of becoming communicatively competent in the TL also entails the acquisition of pragmatic aspects. As a part of pragmatics, ILP can be figured out as a sociolinguistic or psycholinguistic or merely a linguistic action. ILP, therefore, has been defined as “the study of the nonnative speakers’ use and acquisition of linguistic action in second or foreign language” (Kasper, 1989 b). Moreover, considering Kasper and Blum-Kulka’s (1993 b:3) definition of ILP as “the study of non-native speakers’ use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in second language”, it can be realized that the main focus of ILP has been on linguistic action, or speech acts, and this is also the area being addressed in the present study, that is, learner’s enactment of a particular speech act, that of requests.

A number of studies have examined the learner’s ILP by contrasting the learners’ performance with native performance of different types of speech acts such as requests (Fraser & Nolen, 1981; Walters, 1980; Blum-Kulka, 1982; Blum-Kulka and Levenston, 1987), refusals (Beebe, Takahashi and Illiss-weltz, 1990; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981), gratitude (Eisenstein & Bodman 1986), and complaints (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987). Kasper (1989b) assumed that most of the research done in SLA has entered, on the one hand, on comparing learners IL speech act realizations with NSs performance. On the other hand, it has also analysed the production or perception of different speech acts of the same group of learners. The focus on comparing NS’ with
NNS’ performance in certain pragmatic aspects belongs to cross-cultural pragmatics. One of the first and most influential works in this field involves the research carried out by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), whose main concern was devoted to the analysis of different subjects’ production of speech acts from various sociolinguistic environments. Results from their work, as well as other studies conducted in this area, have shown that SL learners’ grammatical competence differs from their pragmatic competence, which focuses on their inappropriate speech act realizations. Nevertheless, as argued by Kasper (1982), cross-cultural pragmatics has served as a model for ILP research and, in this way, it has provoked the dominance of comparative studies over acquisition studies in ILP, as well as in separation from SLA.

In this respect, Bardovi-Harlig (1999) raised the question “if interlanguage pragmatic research cannot be characterized as acquisitional, what is an accurate characterization?” (p.678). According to this author, it has been essentially comparative, comparing what learners or NNSs do with what NSs do. As Kasper (1992) observed

The bulk of interlanguage pragmatics research derived its research questions and methods from empirical, and particularly cross-cultural, pragmatics. Typical issues addressed in data based studies are whether NNS differ from NS in the 1) range and 2) contextual distribution of 3) strategies and 4) linguistic forms used to convey 5) illocutionary meaning and 6) politeness – precisely the kind of issues raised in comparative studies of different communities….interlanguage pragmatics has predominantly been the sociolinguistic, and to much a lesser extent a psycholinguistic (or acquisitional) study of NNS linguistic action (p.205).

According to Barron (2003), there are lots of definitions of ILP, such as the one presented earlier by Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993b) or the one proposed by Kasper and Dahl (1991:215) as “the investigation of non-native speakers’ comprehension and production of speech acts”, which have considered NNSs rather than learners. The authors state that this sort of definition, together with the main interest in analyzing the use rather than the development of pragmatic competence, comes from the field of cross-cultural pragmatics. Thus, it has been argued that in
order to bring ILP research more directly to SLA research, it is very important to conduct more acquisition oriented studies that analyse the developmental perspectives of the ILP system (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999, 2002; Kasper and Rose 1999, 2002). Within this perspective, ILP should rely more on the psycholinguistic basis that ILP studies have predominately adopted (Kasper, 1992). The importance of adopting an SLA perspective towards the study of ILP has also been based on the research which has shown that even proficient learners of SL or FL may fail in their pragmatic appropriateness (Bardovi–Harlig, 1999, 2001). As this author mentions: “having a high level of grammatical competence does not necessarily correlate with a high level of pragmatic competence”. As a result, there has been an increasing interest in ILP in order to examine the possible factors that affect learners’ acquisition of pragmatic competence. According to Locastro (2003), there are six main areas that influence learners’ difficulty in either comprehending or producing pragmatic knowledge, which may result in pragmatic failure. These six main possible causes of pragmatic failure are (1) pragmatic transfer, (2) stages in IL development, (3) lack of adequate exposure to pragmatic norms, (4) inadequate or uninformed teaching, (5) loyalty to first language and culture and (6) motivation. Table (3-2) by Bardovi-Harlig (1999a:682) represents the basic questions about SLA with respect to ILP.

Table 2.2 Basic questions about SLA with respect to ILP
(a) Are there universals of pragmatics and do they play a role in ILP?
(b) How can approximation to TL norms be measured?
(c) Does L1 influence L2 pragmatics? (Transfer)
(d) Is the development of L2 pragmatics similar to learning a first language?
(e) Do children enjoy an advantage over adults in learning an SL?
(f) Is there a natural route of development as evidenced by difficulty, accuracy, or acquisition orders or discrete stages of development?
(g) Does type of input make a difference? (FL vs. SL)
(h) Does instruction make a difference?
(i) Do motivation and attitudes influence level of acquisition?
(j) Does personality play a role?
(k) Does a learner’s gender play a role?

(l) Does (must) perception or comprehension precede production in acquisition?

(m) Does chunk learning (formulaic speech) play a role in acquisition?

(n) What mechanisms drive development from stage to stage?

The above mentioned aspects together have given rise to a substantial amount of literature on pragmatic performance research, but as previously mentioned, there is still a great need for developmental pragmatics research. As Rose (2000) points out, studying pragmatics development requires two types of research which should be incorporated into ILP; on the one hand, cross-sectional studies involving participants at various stages of development and, on the other hand, longitudinal research, implying the study of a given group of subjects over an extended period of time. In order to show the research conducted in this area, the next two subsections will be devoted to the different perspectives dealing with ILP in both SL and FL environments. The first subsection will address the cross-sectional studies which focus on the use of speech acts. Then the focus will be on longitudinal studies that relate to the development of speech acts.

2.5.1 ILP Cross-sectional Studies

These studies focus mainly on speech act use and investigates developmental processes by examining features observed at different stages of development (Rose, 1997). Most of the cross-sectional research conducted to date has paid attention to the effects different levels of proficiency and the length of stay in the target community have on pragmatic development (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999); and the most common population in all studies has been adults. As suggested by Kasper and Rose (1999, 2002) most of the cross-sectional studies have examined learners’ production of speech acts, whereas only a small number of studies have been devoted to analysing the development of pragmatic awareness.

Among the studies carried out in SL settings, the research that has focused on comprehension and awareness, are the studies by (Olshtain and Blum-Kulka, 1985; Kerekes, 1992; and Koike, 1996). Olshtain and Blum-Kulka’s (1985) study of appropriateness of request and apology strategies by learners of Hebrew showed that NNSs tend to accept the TL norms more as the length of residence in the target
community increases. Whereas the length of stay was a decisive factor in this study with respect to the perception of more appropriate forms, the other two studies focused on the effects of proficiency. In Kerekes’s (1992) study of assertiveness and supportiveness in troubles talk, the author found that proficiency influenced learners’ perceptions of qualifiers (i.e. I think, sort of), as with increasing proficiency their perceptions became more native like. Koike (1996) also found proficiency effect in her study of the perception of Spanish suggestions by English-speaking learners of Spanish.

Moving to the cross-sectional studies that pay attention to learners’ production of speech act in SL environment, on the one hand it is found that learners have access to the same range of realization strategies as NSs, regardless of their proficiency level (Kasper and Schmidt, 1996; Kasper and Rose, 1999). This is documented in different studies focusing on requests (Takahashi and Dufon, 1989; Hassall, 1997, 2001), apologies (Maeshiba, et al. 1996), and refusals (Robinson, 1992). On the other hand, learners differ from NSs in the way they use linguistic strategies when choosing conventions of form depending on different social factors (Kasper and Rose, 1999). In this sense, proficiency effects are found for both the frequency and contextual distribution of realization strategies (Kasper and Schmidt, 1996). Scarcella (1979) carried out one of the first studies which examined this aspect, and showed that learners’ repertoire of pragmatic routines and other linguistic means of speech act realization expanded as their proficiencies increased. Takahashi and Dufon (1989) also reported that with increasing proficiency, in their study, the Japanese learners of English moved from a preference for more indirect requestive strategies to more direct, target like conventions. A similar development was found in Olshstain and Blum-Kulka’s (1985) study of NNSs of Hebrew, where subjects’ perceptions of TL directness and positive politeness were associated with their length of residence in the target community rather than their TL proficiency. In another study, Blum-Kulka and Olshstain (1986) noted that learners’ use of supportive moves in request performance also approximated a target like distribution with increasing TL proficiency. In his study of English speakers learning Bahasa Indonesian as an SL, Hassall (1997, 2001) found that higher proficiency learners were closer to TL use. Examples of this study include the decline in the use of “want” statements, the preference for elided imperatives to express direct requests or hinting as proficiency increases.
Regarding the studies conducted in FL settings, it is worth noting that there are only a few cross-sectional studies dealing with the development of pragmatic competence in the context of EFL. Among the studies that have focused on the effects of the learning environment on the development of EFL learners’ pragmatic awareness are those conducted by Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998) and Niezgoda and Rover (2001). Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998) compared pragmatic and grammatical awareness in different EFL and ESL population, which consisted of both learners and teachers. Their study dealt with different speech acts, namely those of requests, suggestions, apologies and refusals, which appeared at the end of videotaped interactions between two university students, a female and a male; participants were asked to distinguish between appropriate-inappropriate and correct-incorrect utterances in order to focus on their degree of awareness of errors in grammar and pragmatics. Results from this study indicated that there were clear effects for learning contexts (ESL/EFL), in terms of proficiency and learner versus teacher status. In fact, within the ESL group, learners at a higher level of proficiency showed more pragmatic awareness than learners at a lower level of proficiency. Moreover, both the ESL learners and the teachers scored significantly higher on pragmatic appropriateness judgment than the two groups of EFL learners, namely those of students in Hungary and Italian primary school teachers in Hungary. In contrast, the EFL groups, either learners or teachers, rated grammatical errors significantly more important than ESL learners and teachers do. Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998) pointed out that although awareness increased in both groups, there is a need to carry out more studies focusing on both awareness and production within the same group of participants.

Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei’s (1998) study was replicated by Niezgoda and Rover (2001) who focused on the effects of learning environment on the development of grammatical and pragmatic awareness in order to determine whether the former study could be generalized to all SL and FL settings. The authors used the same instruments and procedures as those explained before in Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei’s (1998) study, but dealt with different learner population without paying attention to teachers. Participants in this study consisted of 48 ESL and 124 EFL Czech students at university level. Similar to Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998), the authors found that their ESL students rated pragmatic errors as being significantly more serious than grammatical errors. However, the Czech EFL students noticed a
much higher number of pragmatic and grammatical errors and judged the two types of errors to be more serious than ESL population did. This finding highlighted the fact that the learning environments in each study were different. The Hungarian EFL students in Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei’s (1998) belonged to both secondary school and university levels receiving only 3-6 hours of English instruction per week, whereas the Czech EFL students in Neizgoda and Rover’s (2001) study consisted of a highly selected sample of university students who received 14 to 20 hours of monolingual English instruction per week. Hence, the authors suggest that not all FL settings are equal to develop learners’ pragmatic competence.

Moving from cross-sectional studies focusing on comprehension and awareness of speech acts to studies dealing with learners’ production of speech acts, we find the latter are more numerous. Takahashi and Beebe (1987) compared the written refusals of 20 NSs of Japanese, 20 NSs of English and 40 Japanese NNSs of English (20 each in Japan and the United States). The NNS groups were further divided into low and high proficiency groups. The authors pointed out that pragmatic transfer from Japanese to English was found in both contexts (ESL and EFL) and at both proficiency levels, although Japanese ESL learners approximated NS norms better than EFL learners in their production of refusals. In another study, Hill (1997) analysed the requests of a total of 60 University level Japanese learners of English, who represented three levels of proficiency. The author found a heavy reliance on direct requests for the low proficiency group, while the advanced group employed direct requests less frequently. However, the opposite pattern was found for conventionally indirect requests, which, according to the author, indicated a clear development trend for request strategy. According to Hill (1997), as proficiency increased, there was an approximation of native like request strategies, which included the use of up-graders, down graders and supportive moves, for example he found that the use of down graders per request increased with proficiency though the advanced group skill fell short of NS level. Kasper and Rose’s (2002) is the only cross-sectional study dealing with pre adolescent participants. It was based on the development of request, apologies and compliment responses in English among three groups of Cantonese-speaking primary school students in Hong Kong. The author found little evidence of situational variation for any of the speech acts, although he suggested a precedence of pragmalinguistics over sociopragmatics in the early stages of pragmatic development in the TL. Given the need to focus on beginner
populations. Safont (2001) analysed beginner and intermediate students’ acquisition of the speech act of requesting in the instructional setting of the university. Safont focused on the effects of level of proficiency, the type of task to be performed, learners’ sociolinguistic background (monolinguals versus bilinguals), and the role of instruction and reported the explicit teaching of requests to EFL learners as playing a positive role. In fact, learners at the two levels of proficiency improved their awareness and use of request acts formula, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

2.5.2 ILP Longitudinal Studies

One major advantage of longitudinal studies over cross-sectional studies is that they provide data from different points of time, and this fact makes it possible to construct a reliable profile of the SLA of individual learners. However, an important disadvantage lies in the difficulty involved in making generalizations based on the profiles of only one or two learners. Moreover, longitudinal ILP research deals with a much wider range of pragmatic aspects than cross-sectional studies, including not only the study of speech acts but also interactional routines, conversational ability, politeness, communicative and pragmatic competence, listener responses and modalities in disagreements. The three longitudinal studies conducted by Schmidt (1983) Ellis (1992) and Achiba (2003) took place in an ESL context and involved the IL development of a particular speech act, that is requesting, and will be discussed in section 2.8.1.

Shifting from beginning to advanced ESL learners, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993a) carried out a study of the development of suggestions and rejections by NNSs of English in the context of academic advising sessions. Their results revealed an interesting pattern of development which seemed to favour sociopragmatics over pragmalinguistics, since the participants competence increased over time, although they still did not know how to mitigate their speech act realizations. Another relevant finding from their study relates to the taxonomy employed by the authors to analyse their data, as they favoured the relationship between the speakers’ status and the appropriateness of certain realization strategies to a specific context. This use of congruent speech acts with the expected role of participants in a given situation is regarded as the Maxim of Congruence (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1990). This maxim is described on the ground of six status preserving strategies referred to as: (1) appear congruent, use the form of a congruent speech act where possible; (2) mark your contribution linguistically, use mitigators;
(3) timing, do not begin with a non-congruent contribution; (4) frequency, avoid non congruent turns; (5) be brief and (6) use appropriate content.

Concerning the longitudinal studies conducted in FL settings, it might be said that most of studies have been set in Japanese FL classrooms (Cohen, 1997; Kanagy and Igarashi, 1997; Ohta, 1997, 1999, 2001a, 2001b; Kanagy, 1999). The studies by Kanagy and Igarashi (1997) and Kanagy (1999) took place in a Japanese immersion Kindergarten where the author analysed children’s acquisition of pragmatic routines. Results showed that children increased their use of spontaneous utterances after seven weeks of immersion. The studies conducted by Ohta (1997, 1999, 2001a, 2001b), also illustrate the development of different pragmatic aspects, such as effective particles or the productive use of ne, and provide evidence for language socialization as a framework to acquire pragmatics in the EFL classroom. German as a TL was addressed in the studies by Barron (2000, 2003), who examined the development of pragmatic competence in a group of Irish students of German during an academic year in the target speech community; thus, analyse the effects of study abroad. Barron’s (2000) first study dealt with pragmalinguistic issues relating to requests, that is international modification, whereas her recent study (2003) has analysed not only international modification but also discourse aspects and learners’ pragmatic competence in realization of requests, offers and refusals of offers. In both the cases, results have shown that the period of study abroad has a positive effect on learners’ pragmatic development.

2.6 Politeness Theory

Turning to the importance of directness and indirectness for a classification of speech act, an overview of the politeness theory will be presented, since it affects research carried out in the field of ILP (Trosborg, 1995; Hill, 1997; Safont, 2001; Barron, 2003, Bou-Franch and Garces-Conejos, 2003, among many others) and learners’ choice of specific speech acts. Ellis (1994) pointed out that politeness is a dimension that usually enters into speech act performance. This dimension is so crucial that the violation of it may deprive not so competent participants, such as NNSs, of the chance to be engaged fully in the speech community as social equals with others (Kasper, 1990). Politeness as claimed by LoCastro (2003 p.274) “has to do with the addressee’s expectations that the speaker will engage in situationally appropriate behaviour”. Watts, Ide and Ehlich (1992) distinguished between two types of politeness. The first type referred to common sense notions of politeness,
such as address terms, whereas the second type dealt with a theoretical approach within the theory of social behaviour and language usage. Kasper (1992) addressed the second type of politeness as strategic politeness consisting of pragmatic phenomenon, which involves the strategic use of language. To date, most research into politeness as a linguistic dimension has concerned on one of the following perspectives: conversational maxims (Lakoff 1973; Leech, 1983), face saving (Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987), conversational contracts (Fraser and Nolen. 1981; Fraser, 1990), and social norms (Gu, 1990).

2.6.1 Conversational Maxim

The conversational maxim view of politeness is based on Grice’s “Cooperative Principle” related to verbal interaction, and the four maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner. The main point of cooperative principle is that in a conversation, the hearer expects whatever the speaker says to be truthful, appropriately informative, relevant and clear. When one of these maxims is violated, e.g. the speaker says something that seems irrelevant on the surface or uninformative enough; the hearer assumes that the speaker is expected to infer some other hidden meaning that the speaker wishes to convey. Regarding the conversational maxim perspective, Lakoff (1973) was the first to adopt Grice’s assumption on conversational principles in order to account for politeness. According to Lakoff (1973), politeness is a device used to reduce friction in personal interaction. She proposed two rules of pragmatic competence, namely be clear and be polite and three politeness sub-rules (1) Don’t impose, (2) Give options and (3) Make the other persons feel good. These three rules are employed depending on speaker’s perception of the type of politeness situation he or she is facing. In later work, Lakoff (1990) claimed that those three sub-rules of politeness may not necessarily have an equal weight of different cultures that is, European cultures may prefer distance (sub-rule 1), while Asian culture can be deferential (sub-rule 2) and modern American culture adheres to camaraderie (sub-rule 3). Leech (1983) also built his politeness model on Grice’s cooperative principle but equates politeness with favourableness to hearer along the scale of cost vs. benefit, praise vs. dispraise, agreement vs. disagreement and sympathy vs. antipathy. For example, in classifying imperatives according to the cost-benefit scale. Leech claims that an imperative is more polite when it brings benefit to the hearer and less polite when it is uttered at cost of the hearer. Thus,
while “peel these potatoes” sounds impolite (at the cost of the hearer), “Have another sandwich” is not necessarily impolite (benefit to the hearer). Generally, Leech’s model can be presented as follows:-

1) Tact Maxim : (a) Minimize cost to others ; (b) Maximize benefit to other
2) Generosity Maxim : (a)Minimize benefit to self (b) Maximize cost to self
3) Approbation Maxim : (a) Minimize dispraise to others (b) Maximize dispraise of other
4) Modesty Maxim: (a) Minimize praise of self; (b) Maximize dispraise of self.
5) Agreement Maxim : (a) Minimize disagreement between self and others; (b) Maximize agreement between self and others
6) Sympathy Maxim: (a) Minimize antipathy between self and others; (b) Maximize sympathy between self and others (Leech, 1983).

2.6.2 Face Saving

The face saving view of politeness was adopted by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). As its name claims, this particular view of politeness is based on the notion of face Goffman, (1967). Goffman (1969 p.3) has described the concept of face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” or as Brown and Levinson (1987) put it, face consists of a person’s feeling of self worth or self image. Based on Goffman’s (1967) definition of face, Brown and Levinson define positive face as one’s desire to be approved or accepted by others and negative face as one’s desire to be free from imposition from others. These two types of faces, in their view, can be lost, threatened, damaged or maintained and elevated. Therefore they need to be continually attended to in the process of communication so that politeness can be achieved. Brown and Levinson also claim that certain speech acts are inherently face-threatening, i.e., they may threaten either the positive or the negative face of the interlocutors involved. On these grounds, they put forward the notions of positive politeness (which serves to save ego’s positive face), and a politeness model consisting of a number of steps that people usually take in performing a particular speech act. According to this model, there is a choice between positive and negative politeness strategies available to speakers in a situation that calls for a particular speech act. If the speakers opts to prefer a face threatening act (FTA), he or she
estimates the ‘weightiness’, Wx, (i.e. the seriousness in terms of face loss) of this FTA is as follows:

\[ Wx = D(S,H) + P(S,H) + Rx. \]

D stands for the social distance (the degree of familiarity and solidarity) between speaker and hearer. P stands for the relative power (the degree to which speaker can impose wants on hearer) between speaker and hearer. R is the absolute ranking of imposition (how threatening the performed FTA is perceived to be within a particular culture) and x is the performed FTA. On the basis of the outcome of the calculation, speaker then can choose either to ‘go on record’ i.e. perform a direct speech act, or to “go off record”, i.e. opt for more indirect strategies such as metaphor, irony, rhetorical questions, understatement, and all kinds of hints. If the speaker chooses a direct strategy, he or she can either ‘go bold on record’ without compensating for it or ‘soften’ it by various politeness strategies. In case the speaker decides to modify the illocutionary force of the speech act he or she intends to perform, he or she will have to consider the pay-off that the use of each type of politeness strategy brings and then make decisions accordingly. Brown and Levinson’s model is schematized as below:-
Figure 2-6 possible options for doing FTAs
(Source: Olshtain and Blum-Kulka, 1985:307; Brown and Levinson, 1987:69)

Given the fact that the participants must adopt certain strategies in order to preserve hearers’ face, Brown and Levinson (1987) propose that the choice of which strategy to use will depend on the speakers’ assessment of the size of FTA, which is constrained by contextual factors. This assessment is based on three variables, earlier mentioned, that determined the seriousness of the FTA. The first variable refers to the social distance between the speaker and hearer, which is the degree of familiarity that exists between the interactants. In this sense, as social distance increases, politeness
also increases. Regarding the second parameter, that of the relative power of the speakers with respect to the hearer, it is assumed that the more powerful the hearer is, the more polite the speaker will be expected to be. Finally the ranking of imposition, which addresses the third contextual factor, implies that the greater the imposition on the hearer, the more polite the speaker is required to be.

Although Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory has been regarded as one of the most influential linguistic views of politeness, it has been criticized by a number of researchers. The most often cited criticism relates to their claim for the universality of their theory. First, it is doubtful whether ‘face’ operates similarly across cultures since cultures are not homogenous (Kasper, 1994, Baron, 2002). According to Watts (1989) and Wierzbicka (1991), the whole idea of face presented by Brown and Levinson (1987) is biased towards Western culture. In this sense, many researchers from Asian speaking countries (Ide, 1989; Matsumoto, 1989; Gu, 1990) have argued against Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness framework, since it fails to address formal linguistic forms such as honorifics, which is among the major ways of expressing linguistic politeness in some languages, such as Japanese. Ide (1989) and Matsumoto (1989) argue that given the lack of individualistic orientation in Japanese culture, negative face seems of little importance and cannot explain politeness behaviour. Wierzbicka’s (1985) also found Polish verbal interaction prefers involvement and sincerity over distance, thus disfavouring negative politeness.

2.6.3 Conversational Contract

This approach was adopted by Fraser (1990). Fraser’s politeness principle is an elaboration of the principle presented by Fraser and Nolen (1981). This approach differs from the other two approaches as it considers politeness an integral part of interaction and, instead of focusing on speech acts, this view pays attention to a discourse-based approach. The basic point in Fraser’s conversational contract view is that the interlocutors bring into their conversation and understanding certain initial contractual rights and obligations towards other interlocutors. These rights and obligations are renegotiable as the conversation goes on and the context changes. This approach also argues that politeness is a complex notion, which does not necessarily operate in a similar way in every society. Hence, as Kasper (1990) suggests, for the time being, a model of politeness should not attempt to generalize but confine itself to a specific speech community.
2.6.4 Social Norms

Unlike the view of universal politeness adopted by the face saving approach, the social norms approach assumes that each society has its own set of rules and standards, and politeness according to this view is the awareness of one’s social obligations to other members of the society. This means politeness is more concerned with conforming to the norms of expected behaviour than with attending to one’s public self-image in Brown and Levinson’s sense.

The social norms approach is empirically based on a number of studies of oriental politeness, for example, Matsumoto (1989), Ide (1989), and Gu (1990), thus serving as an appropriate model for accounting politeness in these cultures. Matsumoto indicates that in a society where public face (related to social norms and expected behaviour) is placed over private face (related to individual desire), it is more important for individuals to discern what is appropriate and act accordingly than to act according to strategies designed to accomplish a particular inter-personal goal. Likewise, based on his study of the honorific system in Japanese, Ide argues that in a culture where the individual is more concerned with conforming to the social norm, it is discernment but not face that underlies the notion of politeness and governs the interactant’s behaviours. A similar argument is found in Gu (1990), who accounting for the function of politeness in Chinese culture, found the politeness principle is “a sanctioned belief that an individual’s social behaviour ought to live up to the expectations of respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth and refinement” (p.245).

2.7 Speech Act theory

Speech act theory attempts to explain how speakers use language to accomplish intended actions and how hearers infer intended meaning from what is said. Although speech act studies are now considered a sub-discipline of cross-cultural pragmatics, they actually take their origin in the philosophy of language. The notion of speech acts dates back to the British language philosopher J. Austin (1962) who has been regarded as the father of speech act theory with his famous assumption that people use language not to say things, but to do things. This view is considered a breakthrough in linguistics since it points out that many everyday language declarative sentences are not intended to make true or false statements, as is firmly asserted by logical positivists. Rather, they are used to do things, that is, to perform
certain linguistic actions such as requesting, complimenting, apologizing, and so on. To quote (Austin, 1962)

It was for long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a 'statement' can only be 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact', which it must do either truly or falsely. But now in recent years, many things, which would once have been accepted without question as 'statements' by both philosophers and grammarians have been scrutinized with new care. It has come to be commonly held that many utterances which look like statements are either not intended at all, or only intended in part, to record or import straightforward information about the facts (p.1).

In fact, Thomas (1995) argues that Austin’s assumption about the direct correlation between “doing things with words” and the existence of a corresponding performative verb is clearly erroneous, since there are many acts in real language use where it would be impossible, or very unusual, to use a performative verb. Later on, Austin conceptualized performatives as involving three acts, namely locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary, the three kinds of acts that, according to him, constitute what people do with words. Of these, a locutionary act is defined as the act of vocalizing a sentence and assigning a propositional meaning to it (performing the act of saying something). An illocutionary act is the one of performing a particular language function (performing an act in saying something), and a perlocutionary act is the one of producing some kind of effect on the addressee (performing an act by saying something). The core interest of Austin as well as of other pragmatists is the illocutionary act, which Austin later termed 'speech act' (Levinson, 1983).

Figure 2-7: Diagram represents the hierarchical interpretation of the three types of speech act. From Geoffrey N. Leech ‘Principals of Pragmatics (1983, p.201)’
Philosophers like Austin (1962), Grice (1957), and Searle (1965) offered basic insight into this new theory of linguistic communication based on the assumption that “the minimal units of human communication are not linguistic expressions, but rather the performance of certain kinds of acts, such as making statements, asking questions, giving directions, apologizing, thanking, and so on” (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989, p.2). Austin (1962) defines the performance of uttering words with a consequential purpose as “the performance of a locutionary act, and the study of utterances thus far, and in these respects, refers to the study of locutions, or of the full units of speech” (p.69). These units of speech are not tokens of the symbol or word or sentence but rather units of linguistic communication and are “the production of the token in the performance of the speech act that constitutes the basic units of linguistic communication” (Searle, 1965, p.136). According to Austin’s theory, these functional units of communication have prepositional or locutionary meaning (the literal meaning of the utterance), illocutionary meaning (the social function of the utterance), and perlocutionary force (the effect produced by the utterance in a given context) (Cohen, 1996b, p.84).

Austin (1962) addressed the second type of speech acts by developing a taxonomy of five types of illocutionary acts, which includes (1) Verdictives which involve the giving of a verdict or judgment (i.e. acquit, convict, diagnose), (2) Execrative which refer to the exercising of power, right or influence (i.e. appoint, order, name), (3) Commisive which entail the assuming of obligation or the giving of an undertaking (i.e. promise, agree, bet), and (5) Expositions which address the clarifying of reasons, arguments and expounding of views (i.e. deny, inform, concede). And on the basis of this taxonomy, Searle (1969), put forward the important notion of indirect speech acts. According to Searle, direct speech acts enjoy a transparent relationship between form and function. On the other hand, they display no such relationship and therefore, their illocutionary force does not derive from their surface structure. Put it differently, indirect speech acts consist of two acts, a primary illocutionary act and a secondary one where the primary act operates through and in force of the secondary one.

Later on Searle (1976) developed a taxonomy of illocutionary acts. This taxonomy includes a five major categories (1) Representatives are linguistic acts in which the speaker’s purpose in performing the act is to commit himself to the belief that the propositional content of the utterance (i.e. assertions, claims, reports), (2)
Directives refer to acts in which the speaker’s purpose is to get the hearer to commit himself to some future course of action. As Searle puts it, directives are attempts to make the world match the words (i.e. suggestions, requests, commands): (3) Commisives in which the speaker commits himself to some future course of action (i.e. promises, offers, threats). (4) Expressives have the purpose of expressing the speakers’ psychological state of mind about, or attitude towards, some prior action or state of affairs (i.e. apologies, complaints, thanks) and (5) Declaratives are acts which require extra linguistic institutions for their performance (i.e. decrees, declarations).

One more contribution by Searle is his attempt to use Austin’s felicity conditions to categorize speech acts. As Austin noticed that although performatives cannot be verified as true or false, they can go wrong, i.e. they can be asserted as felicitous or infelicitous. Hence, there must be certain conditions for them to be successfully performed and their illocutionary force to be achieved. Searle, however, emphasized that felicity conditions are not only the dimension in which utterances can go wrong as was suggested by Austin, but they are also constitutive of the various illocutionary forces, and therefore, can differentiate illocutionary acts from one another. For example, in performing the act of promising, speaker must (1) say he or she will perform a future action, (2) intend to do it, (3) believe he or she can do it, (4) think he or she would not do it anyway, in the normal course of action, (5) think the addressee wants him or her to be under obligation to perform it. These conditions are actually constituted of promising and therefore can differentiate promising from other speech acts such as threatening, complaining and so on. Searle classified these felicity conditions into four kinds which he termed, ‘propositional content’, ‘preparatory preconditions’, ‘conditions on sincerity’ and ‘the essential conditions’. Among them, ‘preparatory preconditions’ are concerned with the relationship between speaker and hearer, and hearer’s will, benefit or ability. The act of commanding, for example, is usually performed by a person of higher status but not the other way around. ‘Sincerity conditions’ on the other hand, refer to speaker’s ‘psychological state’ in performing a specific linguistic action. For example when one ‘announces’ something, one must believe in it. The ‘essential conditions’ are about the obligations and responsibility assigned to speaker or hearer once the act is performed. Upon promising, for example, speaker is under the obligation to perform what is promised.

Although Austin’s and Searle’s theories of speech acts have had a tremendous influence on the functional aspects of pragmatic theory, they have also received very
strong criticism. The claim is that they had paved the way to research into linguistic functions instead of linguistic forms. According to Geis (1995), not only Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) but also many other scholars based their work principally on their intention, focusing exclusively on sentences isolated from the context where they might be used. In this regard, one of the most important issues that some researchers have argued against Searle’s (1976) suggested typology refers to the fact that the illocutionary force of a concrete speech act cannot take the form of a sentence as Searle considered it. Thus, Trosborg (1995) claims that sentence is a grammatical unit within the formal system of language, whereas the speech act involves a communicative function. Thomas (1995) also criticized Searle’s typology on the ground that it accounts for formal considerations. In fact, Thomas (1995) says that speech acts cannot be regarded in a way appropriate to grammar as Searle claimed and suggests that these functional units of communication may be characterized in terms of principles instead of formal rules. Thomas (1995) also in line with Leech (1983) focuses on meaning and presents functional perspectives of speech acts against a formal viewpoint. He refers to functional, psychological and effective factors influencing speech acts. Moreover, he claims that distinguishing among speech acts in a clear cut category following Searle’s rules is not always possible. For this reason, although it may be seen that some speech acts are in some sense related to one another, according to Thomas (1995), they are by no means interchangeable if interactional and contextual factors are taken into account. Here the author refers particularly to speech acts that share certain key features, such as asking, requesting, ordering, commanding or suggesting, all of which involve an attempt by the speaker to make the hearer do something. In fact, Locastro (2003) also claims that there is a need to expand the analysis of speech acts in isolation to study them in context, since the comprehension of the pragmatic meaning implied a speech act must take into consideration not only linguistic forms but all the other factors previously mentioned.

Apart from these considerations, Wunderlich (1980:297) has also strongly argued that Searle’s typology of five illocutionary acts was not really convincing, since his taxonomy excludes many speech acts like warnings, advice acts and proposals which share some properties of the representative and the directive type. Thus, Wunderlich proposes four main criteria for speech act classification, which include (1) the use of grammatical markers; (2) the type of propositional content and the illocutionary outcome; (3) their function and (4) their origin, that is, whether they
are primary or natural speech acts, or secondary or institutional speech acts. Yule (1996) proposed another way of classifying speech acts paying attention to their structure. According to Yule, there is a relationship between the three structural forms, namely those of declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives, and the three general communicative functions, namely statement, question and command or request. This is illustrated in the following example by Yule (1996:54):-

a. You wear a seat belt. (declarative)
b. Do you wear a seat belt? (interrogative)
c. Wear a seat belt. (imperative)

This distribution entails the distinction between direct and indirect speech acts, since a direct speech act consists of a direct relationship between a structure and a function, whereas an indirect speech act involves an indirect relationship between a structure and a function. Thus, a direct speech act would relate a declarative structure to a statement, whereas an indirect speech act would refer to the use of the same declarative structure to make a request. Put it differently, within an indirect speech act, structure and speech act is not matched (LoCastro 2003). These two pragmatic strategies, namely those of indirect and direct or routinised pragmatic intent, are claimed by Kasper and Schmidt (1996) to be universally available since they are connected with the term on-record and off-record from the politeness theory.

Moreover, Newell and Shutman (1989, cited in Hartley, 1996) reported that Austin and Searle’s taxonomies do not seem to be able to account for complex speech acts. For example, they pointed out that the speech act of complaining may easily fall under four out of five categories specified by Searle. It is expressive because it expresses a psychological state; it is representative because it expresses a negative belief about a state of affairs, it is directive because it implies a demand for remedy and it is commissive as in complaining one commits himself to a course of action. This is because, according to Hartley (ibid), a single complaint may be made up of many different acts, each of which carries a different illocutionary force. For instance, it could be a compilation of an expression of annoyance (expressive), a statement of the offensive act (representative) a request for repair of the offence (directive) and so on. Thus, the effort to place it in any single category in Austin’s or Searle’s taxonomies will fail.
2.8 Speech Act of Requests

ILP studies are concerned with the language learners’ performance and acquisition of pragmatic competence in their FL or SL. Consequently, any ILP research that identifies cross-linguistic and cross-cultural influences on the use of various speech act realization strategies in English language can be extensively beneficial, considering its pertinent pedagogical implications for future research. A number of ILP studies, both cross-sectional and longitudinal, regarding the use of pragmatic realization patterns and strategies have been conducted on a number of languages such as English, Hebrew, Spanish, French, German, Danish, Arabic, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean etc. This current study will address the speech act of requests as performed by the Yemeni undergraduates learning English as an FL. Thus, the language on focus is English as the TL.

The speech act of request is a directive that embodies an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something generally for a speaker’s goal. In addition, requests are “face threatening acts (FTAs)” (Brown and Levinson, 1987), which call for considerable cultural and linguistic expertise on the part of the learner. Moreover, requests differ cross-culturally and linguistically in that they require a high level of appropriateness for their successful completion, very often, they are realized by means of clearly identifiable formula and degrees of politeness.

Searle (1969) described the speech act of requests as “a directive speech act which counts as an attempt to get the hearer to do an act which speaker wants hearer to do, and which speaker believes that hearer is able to do and which is not obvious that hearer will do in the normal course of events or of hearer’s own accord”. This notion of “act” may include the purely verbal acts of giving information, or granting permission. A request may vary in strategy type and level of directness. Three levels of directness for request have been identified (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989). The first is ‘direct’ which includes forms that convey requestive force by purely syntactic means, such as grammatical mood or an exploit performative verb. The second level is ‘conventionally indirect’ which comprises indirect formulas that are conventionalized in the language as a means of requesting. The last level is ‘non-conventionally indirect’. This refers to limits, indirect request forms that are not conventionalized in the language, and hence require more information by the hearer in order to derive the speakers’ requestive intent. The following two sections will
address the longitudinal and cross-sectional studies on the speech act of requests from both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic perspectives.

2.8.1 Longitudinal Requests Studies

The development of L2 requests can be characterized generally as a move from reliance on routine formulas in the earliest stages of development to a gradual introduction of analysed, productive language use. In the case of the speech act of requests, a good deal can be said about possible stages of development. Based on results from his longitudinal study of two beginning ESL learners’ (whom Ellis refers to as J and R) request development in a classroom setting, Ellis (1992) proposes a three stage developmental sequence for requests. In the first stage of request development, learners’ utterances conveyed requestive intent through highly context-dependent, minimalist realizations, expressing the intended reference and illusion but no relational or social goals. In the second stage, requests were mainly performed by means of unanalysed routines and imperatives. The third stage brought with it the unpacking of routine formulas which then became increasingly available for productive use, and more frequent use of conventional indirectness. A somewhat overlapping analysis is provided by Achiba (2003), the other longitudinal study which involved a beginning learner Achiba’s daughter, Yao. However Yao seems to be more than an absolute beginner when observation began, and she also appears to have developed her ability to request to a greater degree than J and R. Thus, Achiba’s analysis actually posits four stages of development, with Yao’s earliest requests (Achiba’s first stage) more reminiscent of Ellis’s second stage, and her second stage analogous to Ellis’s third. Achiba’s third and fourth stages – characterized by what Achiba calls pragmatic expansion and fine tuning -represent levels of development not observed in J and R. Each of these proposed stages will be discussed in turn.

In Ellis’s first stage of request development, requestive intent is expressed through a pragmatic mode, featuring highly context-dependent, minimalist realization of illocutionary forced devoid of syntax. J and R’s earliest requests were proportionally incomplete, including no more than Sir as a request for the teacher to staple the student’s card, or big circle as a request when the learner needed a cutout of a big circle, both of which illustrate well the entire context – dependent nature of early requests. And once J and R began to produce propositionally complete requests, these were largely formulaic, making frequent use of imperatives, such as leave it and give
In Ellis’ stage two (which is Achiba’s stage one) requests are performed primarily through use of unanalysed routines and continued reliance on imperatives. Achiba points out that although unanalysed formulas and imperatives were used most frequently at this stage, Yao also made use of the full range of strategies – direct, conventionally indirect, and even hints – displaying more variety than J and R. Schmidt’s (1983) work in Wes began at about Ellis’ second stage of development because Wes’s earliest recorded requests indicate a reliance on unanalysed formulas and imperatives. However, like Yao, Wes’s requests at this stage also include a wider range of strategies, including hints, in additional to the use of unanalysed formula and imperatives.

It is interesting to consider why J’s and R’s requests at this stage were of a more restricted range than those of Wes and Yao. One possible explanation afforded by Kasper and Rose (2002) is that J and R, being absolute beginners, lacked the pragmalinguistic resources to produce more varied request forms. Another possible explanation is differences in learning context–while Wes and Yao had more varied opportunities for exposure to, and use of, the TL, and were also observed in a range of settings, it would appear that J’s and R’s exposure to use of English might have been limited to the classroom, as was Ellis’ observation of them. Yet another potential explanation is offered by Schmidt, who attributed Wes’s early use of hints to the influence of Japanese, his and Yao’s first language.

Ellis’ third stage (which is Achiba’s second stage) brings with it the unpacking of routine formulas that then become increasingly available for productive use, as well as more frequent use of conventional indirectness, and the beginning of more frequent and direct mitigation of requests. For example, Ellis notes that in this stage, J’s and R’s routinized conventionally – indirect ability questions were now used as flexible sentence frames, shifting in perspective between speaker ( e.g. “Can I take the book with me? ”) and hearer focus (“Can you pass me the pencil? ”). J’s and R’s relational goals (i.e. politeness) were also beginning to be overtly marked in stage three, although with a restricted range of strategies. Achiba’s stage two very closely matches Ellis’ third stage, particularly with Yao’s requests shifting from formulaic to productive (i.e. analysed) request forms, as the following examples indicate.

Yao’s stage two requests

*Can you pass the pencil please?*

*Can you do another one for me?* (Achiba, 2003)
Schmidt (1983) also notes that Wes’s directives provided evidence of considerable development by the end of the three-year observation period. Among the changes he noted were the productive use of formulas, use of mitigated imperatives and more elaboration, as the following examples illustrate:

**Wes’s late requests**

*Shall we maybe go out for coffee now, or you want later?*

*Ok. if you have time please send two hand bag, but if you are too busy, forgets it.*

(Schmidt, 1983, p.154)

The final two stages of Yao’s request development were from about eight months to just under a year and a half. Achiba characterizes stage three, that is, the addition of many new forms to Yao’s pragmalinguistic repertoire for requests, as one of pragmatic expansion. This included shift in modality (e.g. from *can* to *could*), more frequent use of mitigation, fully-analysed formulas, as seen in the following examples:

**Yao’s stage three requests**

*Could I have another chocolate because my children – I have five children?*

*I don’t know how to play this / can you – could you tell me how to play this?*

*Can I see it so I can buy it?*

*Can you help me to draw a donkey?*

*Can you put glue here and here?* (Achiba, 2003)

While noting that by this stage, Yao had already acquired most of the pragmalinguistic features of requesting observed in the final stage. Achiba argues that in stage four, Yao’s requesting became considerably refined, particularly in her ability to fine-tune the force of her requests. Indicative of this refinement is Yao’s expanded use of *could* as both an ability question and a (more subtle) suggestion.

**Yao’s stage four requests**

*Could you please do that here and then I do the pants?*

*You could put some blue tack down there.* (Achiba, 2003)

Other networking patterns observed are that Yao’s use of conventionally indirect requests had more than doubled since the first stage, and by stage four had become the most frequent strategy used. And while hints were not used as frequently, after a slight drop in frequency from stage one to stage two, Yao’s use of hints doubled with each stage. Two hinting strategies added in the final stage include “Is there any...?” and “Have you got....?” as shown below.
Yao’s use of hints

Is there any more white?

Mum have you got a lid?

(Achiba, 2003)

Taken together, then, the longitudinal studies (i.e., Achiba, 2003; Ellis, 1992, Schmidt, 1983) provide a good starting point for describing the development of requests in an SL with Ellis’ and Achiba’s overlapping analysis combining into five developmental stages, summarized by Kasper and Rose (2002) in the following table.

Table 2.3 Five stages of L2 Request development (From Kasper and Rose, 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pre-basic</td>
<td>Highly context – dependent, no syntax, no relational goals</td>
<td>“Me no blue”, “Sir”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Formulaic</td>
<td>Reliance on unanalysed formulas and imperatives</td>
<td>“Lets play the game”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Lets eat breakfast “</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Don’t Look”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Unpacking</td>
<td>Formulas incorporated into productive language use, shift to conventional</td>
<td>“Can you pass the pencil please?” “Can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>indirectness</td>
<td>you do another one for me.?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pragmatic</td>
<td>Addition of new forms to pragmalinguistic repertoire, increased use of mitigation,</td>
<td>“Could I have another chocolate because my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion</td>
<td>more complex syntax</td>
<td>children – I have five children”, “Can I see it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>So I can copy it ?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Fine tuning</td>
<td>Fine-tuning of requesitive force to participants, goals, and contexts</td>
<td>“You could put some blue tack down there”, “Is there any more white?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.8.2 Cross-sectional Requests Studies
Appeals to the cross-sectional research on L2 requests are useful because cross-sectional designs often involve significantly larger numbers of participants, making more robust generalizations possible, especially when findings from cross-sectional studies support those from longitudinal research (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p.141). While none of the cross-sectional request studies represents the full range of development of stages, several studies do offer evidences that confirm general developmental trends. Hill’s (1997) study of the requests of learners of EFL at a Japanese University showed a marked decrease in the percentage of direct requests with increasing proficiency. The distribution of conventionally indirect requests followed the opposite pattern, with advanced learner’s use of this strategy approaching NS levels. Rose (2000) also found that the frequency of conventional indirectness increased with proficiency among Cantonese- speaking primary-school students in Hong Kong and that directness was most frequent among the lowest proficiency group. Trosborg (1995) also found a preference for conventional indirectness in evidence across the three levels of Danish learners of EFL she examined, noting a slight shift from what she refers to as hearer–oriented (i.e. ability/willingness and suggestory formula) to what she calls speaker based strategies (i.e. wishes and desires/needs) as proficiency increased. Interestingly, the use of direct requests actually increased with proficiency, while the reverse was true for hints, which run directly counter to most studies. Trosborg suggests that the lower-proficiency learners avoided the use of direct requests out of fear of sounding impolite, but it is not clear why advanced learners would not have had the same concerns. The discussion so far has focused on global strategies for requesting – two additional issues are the development of mitigation in requesting and insights from the L2 request studies concerning sociopragmatic development.

The learners in Ellis’ (1992) study initially produced requests that were simple (i.e. usually consisting of a bare head act with little internal or external modification) and formulaic, but one of the first mitigating devices they introduced was please. This also was the case for Wes and Yao. However, it appears that please (particularly in early production) may best be considered a requisitive marker rather than a politeness marker (House, 1989). Schmidt (1983) notes an elaboration of Wes’ requests, but does not offer a detailed analysis of mitigating devices (i.e. when and how they were introduced). It is clear from the examples presented above, though, that Wes was able to use devices such as imposition minimizers (e.g. “OK, if you have time please send
two handbags, but *if you are too busy, forget it*) in a rather sophisticated manner. And, as noted above, Achiba found that Yao’s use of mitigation increased over time, particularly during stages four and five when supportive moves became more frequent, as did the modal shift to *could* and *would* (although *can* and *will* were still far more frequent overall). Hill (1997) found that use of downgraders per request increased with proficiency, though the advanced group still fell short of NS levels. He notes that because the Japanese NSs used considerably more internal modification than the native English speakers, the limited use of internal modification by the learners was probably not the result of first language influence. Trosborg (1995) also reported a general increase in internal and external modification with proficiency, but differences across groups were minimal, and even learners in the highest proficiency group fell short of English NSs, especially in external modification of requests. Rose (2000) observed minimal use of supportive moves (mostly grounders, e.g., “*I don’t know that question. Can you teach me?*”) by the highest proficiency group alone.

It is worth pointing out that an examination of major analytical categories (e.g. directness level or use of mitigation for developmental patterns) is not without flaws. As noted above, Hill (1997) found a shift towards conventional directness with increased proficiency among his learners. However, he points out that the global trend towards NS’ use of conventionally indirect requests concealed a number of patterns in the use of specific sub-strategies that did not converge toward NS norms. For example, want strategies (*I want to* / *I would like to*), which were hardly ever used by the NSs of Irish–English, were overused by learners from beginning and continued to increase as proficiency improved. The increase of ability strategies (*can* / *could you*) seen from low to intermediate did not continue at the advanced level, permission strategies (*may I*) though slightly on the rise, remained greatly underused; but willingness strategies (*would you*), while stable from low to intermediate, sharply increased at advanced level. So although an analysis based simply on major categories would appear to indicate that Hill’s learners were moving closer to NS norms in their use of conventionally indirect requests, analysis of sub-strategies actually indicated the opposite. That is, the spike in use of conventional indirectness was the result of learners’ overuse of want and willingness strategies, actually a movement away from native speaker norms as proficiency increased. The same was true for mitigation; despite what appeared to be another developmental trend, Hill again noted patterns at the sub-strategy level that indicate movement away from NS norms, such as an
overuse of syntactic downgrades (e.g. interrogative, negation, continuous, conditional) at the expense of those of the lexical/phrasal variety (e.g., politeness markers, understaters, down toners) which were most frequently used by the native speakers. This was particularly evident in the learners’ use of conditionals (e.g. *if you don’t mind*), which Hill argued was transferred from very common Japanese forms such as *moshi yokattara* (if it’s okay) and is regressive rather than developmental. The same general trend was found in external modification with proficiency and advanced learners’ use approaching NS levels. Here again, despite the apparent developmental trend, Hill found regressive patterns in the use of specific sub-strategies such as overuse of apology moves (e.g. *so I’m sorry very much, I’m feel bad but, sorry to interrupt you but*) as external modifiers.

The discussion so far has addressed learner development in terms of pragmalinguistics, but what about sociopragmatics? Quite early on, Scarcella (1979) argued that “the acquisition of politeness forms appears to precede the acquisition of the socio-linguistic-interactional rules and mechanisms underlying the use and distribution of these forms” (p.285). It would appear that this claim finds considerable support in the literature on L2 request development. Scarcella concluded that while use of indirectness by NSs on a role play task that varied according the status of the hearer formed a cline across status levels, ESL learner groups at two proficiency levels, on the other hand, varied minimally in their use of indirectness according to status. Given that adult learners bring considerable universal pragmatic knowledge to the L2 learning task, Scarcella’s conventional indirectness in requesting goods and joint activity (e.g., “*Could I please have one choc chip?*” “*Let’s pretend this is Safeway*”. There was also variation observed in requests depending on addressee, with, for example, all of the *want* statements used with adults rather than peers, the majority of requests with *let’s* used with peers rather than adults, and *please* used almost exclusively to Yao’s mother. Schmidt also reports some sociopragmatics awareness in Wes’s responses to Scarcella’s (1979) test of verbal routine, for example, on an item designed to elicit an apology for being late. Wes initially responded with “*Hi! I’m sorry. Somebody call, *” but he then noted that “*No this is Japan need two story. Here I’m only just say ‘Hi, sorry, you waiting long time?’*” (p.154), demonstrating the level of pragmatic sophistication with concomitant grammatical infelicities that have made him famous. Thus, Wes and Yao did appear to develop some sociopragmatic competence in the TL, no doubt largely due to the
fact that their learning took place in an acquisition rich environment, with ample opportunity for input and interaction.

2.9 Politeness and Speech Act of Requests

In the light of the importance of the speech act of requests in this current study, the aim in this section is to re-examine the notions of indirectness and politeness as applied to requests. In the literature of politeness and indirectness, it is often argued that the two notions represent scalable and parallel dimensions. Thus, for example, Leech (1983: 108) cited in Blum-Kulka (1987:131) suggests that given the same propositional content, it is possible “to increase the degree of politeness by using a more and more indirect kind of illocution. Indirect illocution tend to be more polite (a) because they increase the degree of optionality and (b) because the more indirect or illocution is the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be”. Blum-Kulka (1987) argued that at least for requests, such claims need to be modified by distinguishing between two types of indirectness; conventional and non-conventional. Politeness seems to be associated with the former but not with the latter. In particular, Blum Kulka argued that politeness and indirectness are linked in the case of conventional indirectness but not always in the case of non-conventional indirectness.

Brown and Levinson’s model (1978:65), figure 2.6, section 2.6.2, predicts a strong link between politeness and indirectness, based on a hierarchical model of politeness strategies. Given a face-threatening act, such as a request, according to this model the speaker has the following options (1) to do the act boldly, ‘on record’, without redress; (2) to use positive redress action, i.e. to give face by indicating in some way solidarity with the hearer (positive politeness); (3) to use negative redressive action, by using mechanisms which leave the addressee an ‘out’ and permit him or her to feel non-coerced and respected (‘negative politeness’); and finally (4) the speaker may choose to go ‘off-record’, i.e. to perform the act in a way that will enable him or her to avoid taking responsibility for doing it. This model (Brown and Levinson, 1978:56), posits a scale of directness from on record pragmatically transparent way of doing an act, the off record, pragmatically opaque ways of doing it, via both negative and positive politeness strategies. It also predicts that the more imposing, face–threatening a given act, the higher in number (i.e. the more indirect) will be the strategy chosen by the speaker (Brown and Levinson, 1978). Given an inherently face threatening act, such as requesting, the degree of indirectness by
which it is expressed will count as an indicator of the effort invested in minimizing the threat, which in turn equals politeness.

Brown and Levinson’s assumption is claimed to be universally valid, since cross-cultural variation is allowed in the preferences between option 2 and 3, namely between orientation towards positive politeness and negative politeness, but not in the correlation posited between levels of indirectness and levels of politeness. The cross-cultural variation possibility has been strengthened by Blum-Kulka’s (1987) study of the language of requesting in Israel society. This study suggests that Israel basically is a solidarity-politeness oriented society, hence differing in attitude to politeness from the allegedly negative politeness oriented societies, such as Japan and probably England (Blum-Kulka, Danet and Gerson, 1985). The arguments put forward by Wierzbicka (1985) on the basis of Polish examples point to a similar cultural divergence along the positive-negative politeness dichotomy. The experiments conducted in her study (Blum-Kulka, 1987) bear on the more general claim. Blum-Kulka (1987) proposed an explanation for the results of her study, based on the following arguments:

A) In request, a distinction should be drawn between two basic types of indirectness, each requiring a different process of interpretation. The two types of indirectness in requests can be distinguished by the criterion of conventionality. On the one hand, conventional indirect request realizes the act by systematic reference to some precondition needed for its realization, and shares across languages the property of potential pragmatic ambiguity between requesitive meaning and literal meaning. It seems to be the case that only in the speech act of requesting does conventionalization acts on both the propositional content of the utterance (the types of preconditions evoked systematically in any given language) and the actual choice of linguistic element (‘can’ versus ‘be able’). Non-conventional indirectness, on the other hand, is by definition open-ended both in terms of propositional content and linguistic form, as well as of pragmatic force. Thus, there are formal limitations (except those dictated by Gricean type conversational maxims, (Blum-Kulka, 1987) neither on the kinds of hints one might use to make a request, nor the range of pragmatic forces that might be carried by any non-conventional indirect utterance. Thus, non-conventional indirectness in requests is not different from other types of indirectness in discourse, namely, utterances that convey something more or different from their literal meaning.
Blum Kulka (1987) suggested that in conventional indirectness, properties of the utterance may play the more dominant role, while in non-conventional indirectness, pragmatic context is probably as, if not more, important. She added, if her hypothesis is correct, then the difference between conventional and non-conventional requests will be manifested by focus of interpretation. Given an appropriate context, and given a conventional request of the ‘salt passing’ variety, hearers will tend to focus on the requisitive interpretation. If requisitive interpretation is found not to match the pragmatic context, or if the hearer or speaker deliberately chooses to opt out, then either or both can revert to a second literal interpretation. By this proposal, Blum-Kulka points that in the group of conventional indirect requests which are characterized both by a conventionality of form (linguistic devices use) and conventionality of means (choice of semantic content referred to), both levels of meaning are co-present and accessible at all times. Yet, other things being equal, it is the requisitive interpretation which is the dominant one. On the other hand, when no conventionality of means or form is involved (i.e. the request is of the “off-record variety”), and the context is not a standard requesting one, the hearer must first compute the literal meaning of the utterance, attempt to match that with relevant features of the pragmatic context, and (in the case of incongruity) derive the indirect requisitive meaning.

Thus, the difference in focus will manifest itself according to the relative length of the inferential process involved. The advantage of this proposal is that it can explain the peculiarity of conventional indirectness in requests (which does not seem to have a parallel in any other speech act) in that the forms included are by definition always potentially interpretable on two different levels.

B) Degree of imposition and length of inferential process

Speakers of English and Hebrew join in using conventional indirectness as the most polite way to make a request (Bhum-Kulka, 1987). This result means that between two postulated inferential processes, the shorter one is considered the more polite. However, it also should be noted that the shortest path, namely the use of direct strategies is deemed impolite. Thus the most polite way of making a request is by appearing to be indirect without burdening the hearer with the actual cost of true indirectness. Brown and Levinson (1978) suggest that conventional indirectness encodes the clash between the need to go ‘on record’, e.g. to convey requisitive force, and the need to avoid appearing coercive. By using a conventionally indirect form, the speaker relies on
conventionality to carry the requestive force and on the form’s inherent pragmatic ambiguity for avoiding coerciveness. But according to Blum-Kulka, by this analysis, the politeness of conventional indirectness is still derived from its indirectness, since the need to go on record and the need to avoid coerciveness are seen as opposed to each other. Then she argued for a different explanation: the politeness of conventional indirectness is derived from the interactional balance between pragmatic clarity and apparent non-coerciveness achieved by these strategies. By this argument the need for pragmatic clarity, as proposed by R. Lakoff (1973) is an important element in politeness. This need can be derived from Grice’s (1975) Maxim of Manner, as interpreted by Leech (1983). Leech interprets the Maxim of Manner to apply to the propositional level of utterance as well as their illocutionary point. In line with this interpretation, the submaxim of pragmatic clarity can be phrased as follows:

Do not obscure your illocutionary point beyond reasonable limits, or more than necessary by face-saving constraints. Alternatively weigh the imposition involved in being coercive against the imposition involved in cognitively burdening the hearer and making it difficult for him or her to guess your meaning (Blum-Kulka, 1987, p.144).

Politeness in this view is motivated both by the need to adhere to the submaxim of pragmatic clarity and the need to minimize the threat to face. The highest levels of politeness are achieved when both needs can be satisfied simultaneously, as in the case of conventional indirectness. It follows that tipping the balance in favour of either pragmatic clarity or the appearance of non-coerciveness might be perceived as impolite. Thus, direct, explicit strategies have a high chance of being perceived as impolite due the fact that they testify to the dominance of pragmatic clarity concerns over those of face-saving. On the other hand, highly indirect strategies might also be perceived as lacking in politeness, because they testify to a lack of concern for pragmatic clarity, in this case superseded by considerations of non-coerciveness.

C) Constraints operating on the choice of the level of pragmatic clarity. Brown and Levinson allow for other wants besides face wants to become part of politeness considerations subject to cross-cultural variation, cultures may differ in the degree to wants other than face wants (such as the need for efficiency, or for the expression of power) are allowed to supersede face wants.
D) Politeness and minimization, the thrust of the argument presented is that a certain adherence to pragmatic clarity is as essential for the successful achievement of interactional balance as is maintaining face. This argument can have a weaker or a stronger version. Blum-Kalka suggested that the weaker version calls for a ‘cultural relativity’ type of explanation. Cultures differ in the relative importance attached to pragmatic clarity, and thus on a very general level, there will be cross cultural differences in the degree to which considerations of clarity are allowed to dominate and affect notions of politeness. The stronger version claims potential universality, but this version, minimization of the inferential path (to avoid imposing by cognitive burdening) is essential for achieving interactional balance. Hence the need to preserve pragmatic clarity is inherent in politeness. To prove whether one or the other of these versions is correct, we need to investigate cross-culturally the types of phenomenon associated with moving away from indirectness in speech, namely, balance what we know about the factors motivating the avoidance of directness with those motivating the avoidance of indirectness (Blum-Kulka, 1987).

To conclude, in many SL and FL learning/teaching contexts, the vital pedagogical goal of various speaking and listening activities and materials is to introduce to students some motivating experience and greater amount of opportunities of exposure to the different norms and voices of interpersonal talk in the TL. In such a context, SL or FL, learners usually find the areas of pragmatics (that is using different speech acts such as refusing, requesting, complementing, etc. and the related appropriate conventions) problematic. Consequently, one needs to take the issue of cross-cultural pragmatics into the classroom as Jung (2001) indicates; pragmatics is an indispensable part of language learning which has received insufficient attention in acquisition. But the question is how to go from recognising the importance of the issue to moving into classroom language learning and mitigating cross-cultural communicative failure. There may be no easy solution, it would appear. Thomas (1993) may be alluding to such difficulties when she refers to the “potentially explosive area” of making a judgment on what is pragmatically acceptable to the foreign learning openness to different pragmatic interpretations consistent with the sensitivities of various cultures and social groups.