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Young Greek Cypriot and Norwegian EFL learners: Pragmalinguistic development in request production

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ABSTRACT

Situated within the field of developmental interlanguage pragmatics, this cross-sectional study examines pragmalinguistic development in the request production of two groups of young English learners: Greek Cypriot and Norwegian, aged roughly 9, 11 and 13. Specifically, it focuses on learners' request head acts and modification across the three proficiency levels within the Greek and Norwegian groups, and across the two L1 contexts. Eighty-eight Greek and 79 Norwegian learners participated in the study. The data was elicited through a video-based oral discourse completion task, performed in groups of 3–5. Overall, a clearer developmental path was observed in the Norwegian learners' pragmatic performance, whose requests displayed significant differences between the age groups regarding head act sub-strategies, use of modal verbs, lexical downgrading and supportive moves. While also showing a clear linear development in head act sub-strategies, Greek Cypriot learners' only other area of development was the head act directness. A comparison of corresponding age groups from the two contexts revealed both areas of convergence (head act strategies and modal verbs) and divergence (lexical downgraders and supportive moves) with increasing age and proficiency, as well as areas that remained similar throughout (syntactic downgraders), suggesting different underlying influences on young learners' request development.

1. Introduction

Situated within the field of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), specifically developmental pragmatics, this cross-sectional study examines the request production development of two groups of young learners of English as a foreign language (EFL): Greek Cypriot and Norwegian, aged roughly 9, 11 and 13. Foreign/second language (L2) learners' pragmatic development of requestive behaviour has been investigated through cross-sectional designs, exploring learner groups of different proficiency levels at a single point in time (e.g. Rose, 2000), or longitudinal designs, tracing the development of the same participants over a period of time (e.g. Barón Parés, 2015; Ellis, 1992). However, the great majority of these studies focused on adult learners (e.g. Félix-Brasdefer, 2007; Goy et al., 2012; Schauer, 2004; 2006; 2009; Trosborg, 1995; Woodfield, 2012), thus creating a need for "further research to analyse early young learners whose L1 cognitive and pragmatic skills are still not completely developed" (Portolés, 2015:54).

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Indeed, even when they are at a beginner level of language proficiency, adult learners "have fully developed their pragmatic systems in the L1 as well as their cognitive and processing skills" (Portolés, 2015:54). Acquiring pragmatic competence requires a complex set of cognitive and social abilities, including, for example, the ability to draw inferences about speaker intentions based on the language and various sources of contextually relevant information, and the ability to use language to manage interpersonal relationships (Zufferey, 2015), which take time to develop in L1 as well as in other languages. Children's pragmatic abilities evolve in concert with their cognitive, social and emotional growth, which is why in the current study, the age and language proficiency variables are viewed not as independent but as closely interconnected.

Interlanguage pragmatic development studies with young L2 learners have so far, to the best of our knowledge, exclusively investigated learners from homogeneous first language (L1) backgrounds, and no study has compared the request development of two learner groups with different L1 backgrounds. The present study does exactly that, attempting to chart the learners' developmental trajectories by identifying similarities and differences in their pragmatic performance, and exploring which ones might be attributed to their diverse backgrounds (e.g. Wierzbicka, 2003 [1991]) and which ones might be a result of more general L2 developmental tendencies. It thus aims to make a contribution to the understudied area of the early stages of young learners' L2 pragmatic development from a comparative perspective, largely absent in the ILP field. Additionally, by employing a video-prompted oral discourse completion task (VODCT), the study contributes to the development of participant-friendly data elicitation techniques. Consequently, the study sets out to identify the pragmalinguistic features in requests produced through the VODCTs by young Greek Cypriot and Norwegian EFL learners aged 9–13, and to compare their development across three proficiency levels and between the two L1 contexts, by addressing the following research questions:

1. Do the young Greek Cypriot (henceforth GCLs) and Norwegian EFL learners' (henceforth NLs) request strategies and request modification develop across proficiency levels and age? If so, what evidence of pragmalinguistic development is there across the three age groups within the two countries?
2. How does the two groups' pragmalinguistic development (if any) compare with each other? Are there any similarities and/or differences in the developmental patterns of the two groups?

These two learner groups have been chosen for comparison due to their marked linguistic and cultural differences. Their L1s belong to two different branches of the Indo-European language family, they are geographically situated at two opposite ends of Europe, and the general cultural politeness orientations are different, with Greek orienting predominately to positive politeness (Bella and Ogiermann, 2019) and Norwegian being "remarkably short on conventional markers of positive politeness" (Fretheim, 2005:145). Such differences may facilitate discovering patterns in these learners' developmental trajectories and illuminate prevalent influences on their pragmalinguistic development in early stages of L2 acquisition.

2. Setting the scene

This section offers an overview of the studies examining child pragmatic development through request production from an L1 and L2 acquisition perspective before presenting the findings from the limited ILP research involving Greek and Norwegian EFL learners.

2.1. Children's requests in L1 English

As confirmed by a number of studies with preschool and primary school children, requests emerge early in L1 language development (Ervin-Tripp, 1977; Ervin-Tripp et al., 1990; Garvey, 1975; Read and Cherry, 1978) and are refined throughout adolescence (Cekaite, 2013). Even children as young as two and a half have been found to possess a number of ways to express requests through direct (e.g. *Get a juice*) and conventionally indirect (CI) means (e.g. *May I have a cookie?*) (Read and Cherry, 1978). Comparing the requests produced through role play by English-speaking children aged 2½, 3½ and 4½, Read and Cherry (1978) found no developmental trends in terms of the frequency of direct and indirect requests produced, but they identified qualitative changes in the choice of specific request strategies. Namely, the use of gestural requests decreased with age, while the use of both direct imperatives and CI requests significantly increased. The rise in the direct imperatives specifically was accounted for by the characteristics of the data collection instrument. The authors conclude that their preschool participants already have "extensive and flexible repertoires" (Read and Cherry, 1978:241) of request strategies. Children's ability to use both direct and CI requests was confirmed by Garvey (1975), who focused on peer interactions involving children aged between 3.6 and 5.7. Within this group, an increase in the use of more complex CI forms was observed with age, but direct requests predominated throughout. Ervin-Tripp (1977) reports that 4-year-old children employ a range of indirect forms, including hints (e.g. *That house is nice inside*), suggesting that pre-schoolers already have a broad range of direct and indirect requests strategies in their repertoires (Becker, 1982).

Sensitivity to contextual factors starts developing in children as young as two and a half, and is clearly identifiable by the age of 5. This is reflected in the use of 'please', modal forms, past tense mitigation and intonation depending on the addressee, as evidenced in Ervin-Tripp et al.'s (1990) investigation of 31 American children up to 11 years old. Surprisingly, the older school-age children in their study resorted less frequently to "polite forms and mitigators" (Ervin-Tripp et al., 1990:330).

Primary school children in Liebling's (1988) study demonstrated that both request comprehension and production become increasingly more sophisticated throughout primary school, with "the more striking improvements" (1988:94) in production, developing hand in hand with children's understandings of the interrelatedness of language forms, functions and context. While the first graders tended to opt for direct requests or for CI requests (beginning with *can* and *will*), with *please*, alerters, and prosodic cues employed as softeners, third and fifth graders consistently used CI requests headed by, for example, *would* and *could*. The fifth graders also produced hints, but mostly when probed. A shift from need statements (e.g. *I need a blue marker*) to interrogative forms (*Where's the marker?; Do you have a green marker?*) was identified by Gordon et al. (1980, quoted in Achiba, 2003:19) with participants from kindergarten to fifth grade. Such interrogatives were internally modified through tags (*Do you have a blue marker I can use?*) in older participants' requests, indicating both mastery of a wider range of request forms and a developing sensitivity to the perspective of the addressee. Thus, request development in children towards more frequent and refined use of indirect forms and mitigation, as well as an increasing sensitivity to contextual factors reflects their social and cognitive maturation (Achiba, 2003).

In addition to all the context- and variety-specific intricacies of requesting, and similarly to children acquiring their L1, young L2 learners face another challenge. Referring to Becker (1982), Achiba (2003:24) highlights that "[a]t any given point in his or her development, a child's ability to use requests will be constrained by his or her basic semantic and syntactic abilities". Since mastery of language forms is a prerequisite for their appropriate use in social contexts, the focus of the literature review below and the current study is specifically on the pragmalinguistic realisations of young learners' requests. The examination of their sociopragmatic development falls outside the scope of the present study.

2.2. Young L2 learners' request development

A number of L2 studies, both with adults and with children (e.g. Achiba, 2003; Félix-Brasdefer, 2007; Savić, 2015) have documented staged development of L2 requestive behaviour in accordance with sociocognitive maturity and overall language proficiency. Following Ellis' (1992) and Achiba's (2003) longitudinal case studies, Kasper and Rose (2002) proposed a summary of five stages of L2 request development: pre-basic, formulaic, unpacking, pragmatic expansion and the fine-tuning stage. The first stage is characterised by request realisations that are heavily dependent on the context and are devoid of syntax, while the second stage involves mainly unanalysed formulas and imperatives. The third stage (the unpacking stage) reveals the first signs of productive language use and is characterised by a shift to conventional indirectness (CI). In the pragmatic expansion stage, more complex syntax appears, as well as an increased use of mitigation and an expanded pragmalinguistic repertoire. Finally, the fine-tuning stage involves the ability to adapt requests to the social context.

In agreement with the stages above, one common finding reported in L2 longitudinal studies has been the increase in requestive indirectness, syntactic complexity, and use of modification devices over time, a finding which seems to agree with previous studies on child L1 request production (e.g. Ervin-Tripp et al., 1990; Garvey, 1975). Examining the pragmatic development of her 7-year-old Japanese daughter (Yao) during her stay in Australia, Achiba (2003) showed that Yao's pragmatic development was characterised by a fast decrease in imperatives and a shift to CI as her requests became more complex. A shift from directness to indirectness was also reported in Ellis' longitudinal study (1992), which investigated two young ESL beginner learners (aged 10 and 11) in an immersion context. Ellis (1992) identified a three-stage developmental sequence: a reliance on highly context-dependent realisations that had no syntax and no relational goal in stage one; unanalysed routines and imperatives in stage two; and CI and other routine formulas in stage three. A similar trend was observed in Barón Parés' (2015) longitudinal study of a young learner, Mary, in the EFL context. Over a six-year span (from 10 to 16 years of age), Mary transitioned from mainly imperative or verbless requests (pre-basic) over formulaic ones to more elaborate requests, but it was only at the age of 16 that some features from the pragmatic expansion stage appeared. In these studies, the transition from routinised to more complex conventionally indirect requests was identified at different ages, possibly due to the differences in the contexts – second (Achiba, 2003; Ellis, 1992) vs. foreign language (Barón Parés, 2015), age of onset and overall proficiency levels.

Regarding request modification, the findings of these longitudinal studies appear less aligned. Achiba (2003) reports a steady developmental pattern in Yao's use of mitigation devices, employed systematically to achieve specific request goals. In contrast, Ellis' (1992) learners overall exhibited limited development of request modification and relied on a restricted range of internal and external downgraders, mainly through the use of 'please', grounders or repetition. Similarly, Barón Parés (2015) found that Mary's production was overall devoid of any internal or external mitigation, apart from attention getters and the marker 'please', which was used at the early stages mainly as an intensifier rather than a softener. Barón Páres (2015:193) attributes this finding to the child participant's "possible lack of even the L1 pragmatic competence", which could explain why more direct requests with no mitigation were used.

The findings of cross-sectional studies also lend support to the developmental paths identified in longitudinal ones. In his analysis of the pragmatic development among three groups of primary school EFL learners in Hong Kong (aged 7, 9 and 11), Rose (2000) identified a shift from direct strategies (most frequent in the youngest group, confirming a reliance on direct requests in the early stages), to conventionally indirect query preparatory strategies (with 'can' or 'may') as the most preferred strategy overall, appearing with increasing frequency in older groups. Surprisingly, Rose (2000) additionally identified the use of hints by the youngest group. Limited use of external modification was observed, with only minimal use of supportive moves, mainly grounders, which were employed by the older learners (11-year-olds). Barón Parés' (2012) study, investigating request development in Catalan-Spanish bilingual EFL learners (aged 10, 12, 16, and 18–19) revealed a similar developmental

trend: from direct strategies accompanied by attention getters at the early stages, to internally and externally modified conventionally indirect requests produced by the oldest participants, possibly "conditioned by the proficiency level in the target language" (Portolés, 2015:61).

2.3. Greek EFL/ESL learners' requests

The available information on Greek learners' interlanguage requests comes from adult learners of proficient or beginner level (e.g. Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2012, 2018). These studies reveal certain common tendencies, some of which may be attributed to L1 influence while others may be seen as following more interlanguage developmental trends, being more in line with the requestive behaviour of learners from other L1 backgrounds. Perhaps the most prominent tendency in relation to adult, advanced Greek learners of English has been their overall preference for a high degree of requestive directness, documented in studies involving written discourse completion tasks (DCTs) (cf. Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2003), oral production (cf. Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2012) as well as email production (cf. Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011, 2018). A number of studies on L1 Greek (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2005; Pavlidou, 1997; Sifianou, 1992) have consistently showed that Greek speakers favour requestive directness, which has been ascribed to the positive politeness orientation of the Greek society (Bella and Ogiermann, 2019).

Regarding request modification, a common trend identified, again in relation to adult, advanced Greek EFL and ESL learners, concerns their preference for zero marking in relation to lexical/phrasal request downgraders (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009, 2011). Economidou-Kogetsidis's study (2012), which specifically focused on low proficiency (beginner and intermediate) Greek Cypriot EFL learners, also revealed that they overused zero marking, significantly underused internal modification, relied heavily on external modification, especially grounders, and largely employed direct need and want statements, in line with the studies above involving more proficient learners.

A recent investigation particularly relevant to the current research is Economidou-Kogetsidis' (forthcoming) developmental study which analysed 40 Greek Cypriot EFL learners' pragmalinguistic development in making requests. The study used interactive role-plays to investigate adult learners across three proficiency levels (lower intermediate, higher intermediate, advanced), and found a linear pragmalinguistic development in their use of syntactic and phrasal request modification. Importantly, the study further revealed that requestive directness predominated across proficiency levels, which points towards L1 cultural influences on their pragmatic performance, particularly in the foreign language context. However, the important differences that appeared in the learners' repertoire, regarding their sub-strategies, allowed for the identification of specific pragmatic stages corresponding to those proposed by Kasper and Rose (2002).

2.4. Norwegian EFL learners' requests

Turning to the findings from the ILP research in the Norwegian context, only a handful of studies have so far focused on young learners (Savić 2015; Savić and Myrset, forthcoming A; Savić and Myrset, forthcoming B), with Savić (2015) being the only study examining Norwegian children's request production from a developmental perspective. In general, studies with teenagers (Brubæk, 2012), adults (Krulatz, 2016) and children (Savić, 2015; Savić and Myrset, forthcoming B) point towards a general preference for conventional indirectness, with Svanes (1989) highlighting the same tendency in Norwegian.

With a similar focus as the current study, Savić (2015) investigated the request development of 8, 10 and 12-year-old Norwegian EFL learners. Unlike the findings from the studies reviewed in 2.1 and 2.2 above, Savić's study releveled a general preference for CI across all proficiency levels. In line with Rose (2000), Savić's youngest learners resorted to CI with the lowest frequency (43%), unlike the 10- and 12-year-olds, who employed CI in over 80% of their requests. This study found the youngest group to "display requestive-behaviour characteristics of stages one and two on Kasper and Rose's (2002) L2 request development list, i.e., a heavy reliance on the context accompanied by simple utterances devoid of syntax, and the use of unanalyzed formulas" (Savić, 2015:454). Contrary to Rose (2000), hints in Savić's study started to appear in the requests produced by the 12-year-old learners, thus evidencing developmental patterns across the three groups and supporting claims that hints appear later in both L1 and L2.

Regarding request modification, Savić (2015) found a developmental trend in the learners' use of supportive moves. While the grounder was by far the most common external modifier, mirroring previous research (e.g. Ellis, 1992), its frequency steadily increased with proficiency. A similar development was observed in the syntactic structures of the request head acts. The use of modal 'can' decreased steadily with age and was accompanied by an increase in the use of 'could' and 'would' by the 10-year-olds, and by a wider variety of structures (e.g. if clauses, 'do you have' + relative clause) in the highest proficiency group. A reversed developmental trend was observed in the use of the marker 'please' as its number of appearances decreased in the oldest group. Overall, her results "revealed clear patterns of pragmalinguistic development with regard to the complexity of head acts and the use of alerters, supportive moves, and downgraders" (2015:443).

Concerning request modification with adult Norwegian EFL learners, Krulatz (2016) found the markers 'please' and 'possibly' to be the most preferred mitigators, along with alerters and supportive moves. In the same vein, the young learners in Savić and Myrset's study (forthcoming B) perceived the marker 'please' as improving the appropriateness of CI requests. However, Fretheim (2005:145) states that Norwegian is remarkably short of conventional markers of positive politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987), explaining that the Norwegian counterpart of 'please' is not an appropriate mitigating device in requests with a high level of imposition or in highly face-threatening requests. Overall, "verbal politeness in Norwegian is not

of the conspicuous sort", and it is generally "characterized by a tendency towards parsimony: conventional indirectness in the performance of requests exists but too much linguistic embroidery for the sake of mitigating devices is normally counter-productive" (Fretheim, 2005:158).

To sum up, findings from the few longitudinal and cross-sectional developmental ILP studies of young learners' requests indicate a shift from directness to CI, also documented in L1 studies. Additionally, these studies show that young learners from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds tend to increase the syntactic complexity of their requests and use of some modification devices over time and with increasing proficiency, similarly to adult L2 learners. Yet, unlike adult L1 and L2 users' performance, research on young L2 learners reports only limited use of external modification, mainly in older/more proficient young learners. Finally, staged development of pragmatic competence in accordance with cognitive maturity and L2 proficiency has been documented.

With young learners being largely under-researched and all investigations thus far focusing on young learners with a homogenous L1/cultural background, the field of ILP lacks studies comparing the development of learners with varied language and cultural backgrounds acquiring the same L2. Such studies have the potential to reveal the complex L1-specific influences and more general interlanguage influences on pragmatic development in early L2 acquisition, thus providing both new theoretical understandings and empirical evidence that can inform future studies and be utilised in L2 classrooms with these age groups. The present study is a step in that direction.

3. Methods and procedures

3.1. Participants

The participants were 167 young Greek Cypriot and Norwegian EFL learners, aged 9–13, residing in Cyprus and Norway at the time of the study. In both countries, learners whose parents were native speakers of English or had lived in an English-speaking country were not included in the study. The Greek Cypriot sample consisted of 88 learners (46 girls, 42 boys), attending EFL lessons at four different private English language institutes, where the data were collected. All participants were Cypriots and the language spoken in their households was Greek. Their English proficiency levels in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, based on the results they had received in the Cambridge Assessment English exams for Young learners, ranged from pre-A1 to low B2[1].

The Norwegian sample consisted of 79 EFL learners (41 girls, 38 boys) attending 3rd, 5th and 7th grade at two state primary schools in the South West of Norway. The data were collected during regular school hours. The 3rd and 5th-grade pupils were from the same primary school, while the 7th graders were from two schools with comparable socioeconomic backgrounds. They all spoke Norwegian at home and they had all studied English as a compulsory school subject from their first year of primary education, i.e. from the age of 6. Regarding their English language proficiency, it corresponded to the proficiency levels of the equivalent Greek Cypriot age group (Hasselgreen, 2005). The information about the sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Information about the sample.

Age and approximate proficiency level	Greek Cypriot learners (n = 88)	Norwegian learners (n = 79)
Age 9 (Pre-)A1	31	24
Age 11 A1-A2	29	28
Age 13 A2-B1	28	27
Total	88	79

Both samples were convenience samples and initial contact was made through the researchers' professional networks. State schools were approached in Norway and private language institutes in Cyprus due to the differences in the common school research practices in the two countries. In Norway, state school access for research purposes is granted commonly if relevant ethical considerations are met, while in Cyprus such access to state schools is much more difficult and less common. On the other hand, the majority of Cypriot primary school pupils attend private language institutes, as opposed to Norwegian pupils, so these institutions were approached in Cyprus. Consequently, the sample comprised learners corresponding in language proficiency and age in different educational settings where access was granted.

Information about the study was emailed to schools ahead of time to gain access and secure their permission. Following their positive response, they helped facilitate by distributing information to parents/guardians, organising the learners into

[1] At the time of the study, the Cypriot children were preparing for the Starters https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/starters/, Flyers https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/flyers/ and KET https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/key-for-schools/ Cambridge Assessment English exams for Young learners.

groups, and providing the researchers with rooms for data collection. The learners' parents/guardians were informed about the general aim of the study, the study procedures, as well as anonymity, confidentiality, and the child's right to withdraw at any point (in accordance with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation). Due to the participants' age, parental written consent was obtained prior to the data collection.

3.2. Data collection and procedures

The data collection technique used in the present study was a video-based oral discourse completion task (VODCT). The traditional oral DCT was adapted in order to meet the needs of our young learners, since research with children requires "the creation of innovative techniques or the adaptation of traditional ones in order to account for children's different life experiences and competencies" (Punch, 2002a:45). Cartoon videos were, therefore, employed to reduce the cognitive strain of the task (Punch, 2002a), and to provide the learners with the context for producing requests. While the VODCT is subject to some of the criticism accompanying the traditional written DCT as a data elicitation method (e.g. Ogiermann and Bella, 2020), the videos provided a richer context for request production than written DCTs normally do, the responses were oral, resulting in a "matched modality" task (Bardovi-Harlig, 2018), and it allowed for comparability across the age groups and between the two contexts.

During the data collection, the researchers emphasised that there were no right or wrong answers to put the learners at ease and encourage them to participate (Pinter and Zandian, 2014). A non-threatening environment was also supported by the VODCTs being conducted in small groups of 3–5 learners, which aimed to alleviate the researcher-child power imbalance (Punch, 2002b). The learners' teachers were not present during data collection to avoid giving the learners the impression that their responses were being assessed. The introductions and the task instructions were given in the learners' L1 to make them feel comfortable, ensure that they understood the task, allow them to ask questions, and accommodate for the very low proficiency learners.

The learners' request production in the VODCT was prompted by four cartoon videos from an English language learning YouTube channel for children ('English Singsing'). One of the researchers played each video (without subtitles), pausing it right before the child character produced a request, and presenting the learners with a printed screenshot as an additional visual stimulus (see Fig. 1). The learners were then asked what they thought the character in the video would say in English in that particular situation, e.g. "This girl is hungry. This is what she orders. What do you think she says?" All the learners were invited to contribute by providing oral request constructions of their choice.

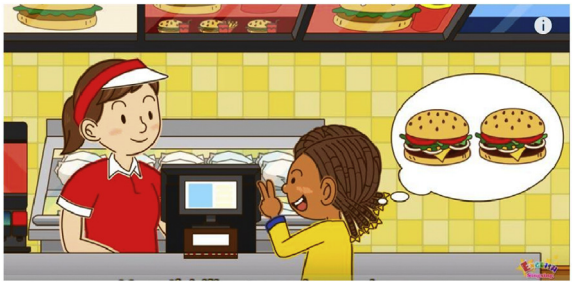

Fig. 1. A screenshot from one of the videos used as a visual prompt https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49QFHWIky-k&feature=youtu.be.

The scenarios represented in the video clips varied along the dimensions of familiarity and age. As such, the child characters interacted with familiar adults (i.e. parents, teachers), unfamiliar adults (i.e. shop assistant, friend's parent) and familiar children (i.e. classmates). There were 11 request scenarios altogether in the four videos. Table 2 provides an overview of the videos used.

Table 2
VODCT scenarios.

Situation	Video	Interlocutor	Familiarity	Age Difference	Requestive goal
Fast Food	https://youtu.be/49QFHWIky-k	Fast food cashier	-	+	Two cheeseburgers
[A girl is ordering from the fast food cashier]			-	+	Two cokes
Classroom	https://youtu.be/UFy02dqJCUs	Classmate	+	-	Coloured pencil
[Pupils are drawing in a classroom]		Teacher	+	+	Green paper
		Teacher	+	+	Orange paper
		Classmate	+	-	Yellow pencil
Shopping	https://youtu.be/P5Vi4j1F4sE	Parents	+	+	Kite
[A girl is out shopping with her parents and wants to buy a kite and a hat.]			+	+	Hat
Dinner with friends	https://youtu.be/CtsG2klnuGk	Friend's parent	-	+	Fork
[Two children are visiting a friend and her mother for dinner.]			-	+	More soup
			-	+	Ask to visit again

The data collection in Norway took place in the spring of 2018, and in Cyprus in the autumn of 2020. All three authors were involved in the data collection process in Cyprus, while the first and third author collected the data in Norway.

3.3. Data analysis

The VODCTs were audio-recorded and transcribed. In total, 1147 requests were collected. Of these, 68 were excluded on the following grounds: 1) The pupils had misunderstood the scenario (e.g. *What is your favourite colour?*), and/or 2) The request was syntactically problematic to the extent that its pragmatic function was unclear (e.g. *Please have got a green*). Thus, 1079 requests were included in the data analysis. Their distribution is shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Data sub-sets.

	Age			Total
	9	11	13	
Cyprus	161	211	223	595
Norway	128	184	172	484
Total	289	395	395	1079

The requests were analysed within a shared analytical framework (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). They were first coded according to the three levels of directness: direct (*Give me this hat*), conventionally indirect (*Can I have the yellow pencil?*), or non-conventionally indirect/hints (*Do you have a yellow pencil?*). Each request was further coded with regard to the head act sub-strategy (e.g. want statement, query preparatory), internal modification (choice of modal verb, lexical/phrasal downgraders and syntactic downgraders), and external modification (supportive moves). The analysis for lexical/phrasal mitigation included the following mitigators: the marker 'please', understaters/hedges (*some, a bit*), and downtoners (*maybe*). In terms of syntactic mitigation, the requests were analysed for conditional structures (*could, would*), and aspect (I *was wondering* whether/if…). Following Blum-Kulka et al. (1989:289), choice of modal verb was analysed separately since "modal verbs feature significantly in requestive behaviour in many languages, and as the set of modals is always small". Only the strategies identified in the data are listed here.

For both the coding and the tests, SPSS (IBM SPSS Statistics 25) was used. Chi-square test of independence and z-test for a proportion were employed to test for the differences in the frequency of strategy use (1) among the three age groups within each country, and (2) between corresponding age groups from the two countries, e.g. 9-year-old GCLs' requests were compared to 9-year-old NLs' requests. The threshold for statistical significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

4. Results

4.1. Research question 1

The first research question aimed to determine whether GCLs' and NLs' request strategies and request modification develop across proficiency levels and age, and, if so, to chart their developmental trajectories. The results of the statistical tests for the GCLs are presented first, followed by the results for the NLs.

4.1.1. GCLs: head act strategies and sub-strategies

Results in relation to the GCLs showed that conventional indirectness (CI) was the most preferred strategy among all age groups (see Table 4). Nevertheless, chi-square tests revealed a significant difference among the age groups, both in terms of the head act directness levels ($X^2 = 44.842$, $p = .000$), and some of the specific sub-strategies within them ($X^2 = 26.359$, $p = .000$). With regard to direct and conventionally indirect strategies, the z-test revealed significant differences between the 9-year-old learners (group A) on the one hand, and the 11- and 13-year-olds on the other (groups B and C) [2]. Namely, the youngest group (Group A) resorted to direct strategies more frequently than the other two groups (39.8%, vs. 18% and 21.1% respectively), while the reverse was the case for CI (Group A: 55.9%, Group B: 74.4%, Group C: 72.6%). No significant differences were identified in the use of hints.

[2] The subscripts 'a' and 'b' indicate the results of the z-test run for each strategy separately: if all three age groups are marked by the same letter, there are no significant differences between the groups, such as in the case of hints. Different letters indicate statistically significant differences and are marked in bold.

Table 4
Greek Cypriot learners: Head act strategies across age groups.

	Group A Age 9	Group B Age 11	Group C Age 13	Total
Direct	**64_a (39.8%)**	**38_b (18.0%)**	**47_b (21.1%)**	149 (25%)
Conventionally Indirect	**90_a (55.9%)**	**157_b (74.4%)**	**162_b (72.6%)**	409 (68.7%)
Hints	7_a (4.3%)	16_a (7.6%)	14_a (6.3%)	37 (6.2%)
Total	161	211	223	595

A further analysis of the sub-strategies showed a more complex picture in relation to the GCLs' use of imperative, elliptical and want statements. Importantly, z-test results demonstrated that the use of imperatives and elliptical statements steadily decreased with age. Imperatives (e.g. 'Buy me this hat' (GCL.9[3])) were employed in 6.2% of the 9-year-olds' requests, dropping to 2.8% with 11-year-olds and further to 0.4% with 13-year-olds. Similarly, elliptical requests (e.g. 'Two coke, please' (GCL.11)) were employed in 14.3% of the 9-year-olds' requests, dropping to 8.1% (11-year-olds) and 5.8% (13-year-olds). Want statements (e.g. 'I want a crayon' (GCL.9)) were used to a similar extent by the 9- and the 13-year-old learners (18.6% and 12.1% respectively), but the 11-year-olds resorted to this strategy significantly less frequently (5.7%). Overall, the query preparatory sub-strategy was the most frequently employed by all age groups (68.7%), and significantly more so by the two older groups (55.9% vs. 74.4% and 72.6%) (Fig. 2).

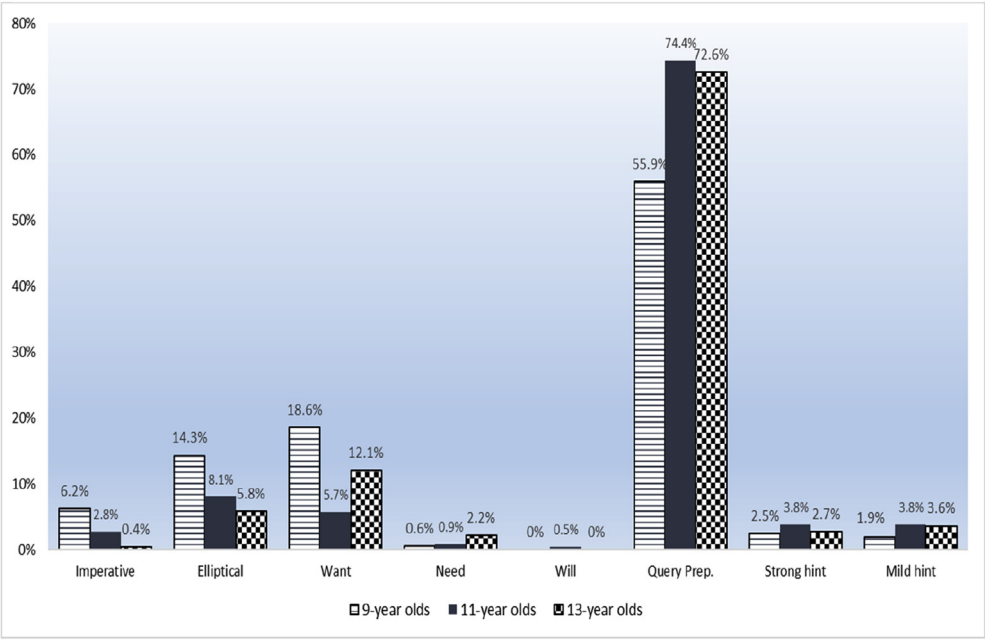

Fig. 2. Greek Cypriot learners: Head act sub-strategies across age groups.

4.1.2. GCLs: internal and external modification

When it comes to internal modification, the learner requests were analysed in terms of the modal verbs, syntactic and lexical downgraders. With regard to modal verbs and syntactic modification, overall chi-square results revealed no significant differences among the three age groups, indicating therefore no development. *Can* was the preferred option in 94% of all the GCL requests, totaling nearly 97% with the youngest learners (Group A), 94% with Group B, and 93% with Group C. The vast majority of all the learners' requests were found to be syntactically unmodified to an almost equal degree (Group A: 99.4%, Group B: 97.6%, Group C: 97.8%).

As for lexical downgrading, significant changes were observed in the use of 'please', and zero marking. The frequency of the marker 'please' significantly dropped from 34.8% with the youngest group (Group A) to 24.7% with the oldest group

[3] GCL.9 stands for Greek Cypriot learner aged 9.

(Group C). At the same time, a non-linear development was observed in relation to zero marking. Zero marking appeared in 61.5% of Group A requests, then dropped to 57.3% in Group B and then significantly increased again to 68.6% in Group C.

No significant differences among the age groups were identified in the use of external modifiers. Grounders (e.g. 'I really like this hat.' (GCL13)) were the preferred option across all groups (Group A: 5.6%, Group B: 7.6%, Group C: 11.2%), but the learners most often chose not to modify their requests externally (zero marking - Group A: 93.2%, Group B: 89.6%, Group C: 85.7%).

In sum, the 9-, 11-, and 13-year-old GCLs displayed pragmalinguistic development in their distribution of direct and conventionally indirect strategies: direct strategies decreased significantly with age, while CI increased. Certain direct sub-strategies (i.e. want statements, elliptical statements and imperatives) also revealed pragmatic development as their use significantly dropped. In the same vein, query preparatory sub-strategies increased with age and proficiency. As far as internal and external modification was concerned, overall results did not reveal any significant differences among the three GCL groups (with the exception of 'please' which significantly dropped), therefore indicating no development.

4.1.3. NLs: head act strategies and sub-strategies

Turning to Norwegian learners, statistical analyses revealed some interesting differences in their developmental paths compared to the GCL ones. As shown in Table 5, the three age groups used the three directness levels to a similar extent, which was reflected in the chi-square test results ($X^2 = 5.591$, $p = .232$). All the age groups resorted to CI in at least 75% of the cases while direct requests and hints were employed much less frequently.

Table 5
Norwegian learners: Head act strategies across age groups.

	Group A Age 9	Group B Age 11	Group C Age 13	Total
Direct	16_a (12.5%)	19_a (10.3%)	26_a (15.1%)	61 (12.6%)
Conventionally Indirect	96_a (75.0%)	153_a (83.2%)	129_a (75.0%)	378 (78.1%)
Hints	16_a (12.5%)	12_a (6.5%)	17_a (9.9%)	45 (9.3%)
Total	128	184	172	484

In contrast, head act sub-strategies demonstrated considerable differences, confirmed by both chi-square ($X^2 = 37.926$, $p = .001$) and z-test results. While the most frequently used query preparatory sub-strategy was employed similarly by all the groups, statistically significant differences were found in the use of want statements, strong hints and what we termed 'will statements' ('I will have this kite.' (NL9)), which are direct translations of the Norwegian *Jeg vil ha (I will have)*. Interestingly, the use of want statements increased significantly from group A (0.8%) to group B (6%) and group C (5.8%), unlike the GCLs' performance, which revealed a drop in the use of this sub-strategy. The use of strong hints (e.g. 'Do you have a yellow pencil?' (NL9)), on the other hand, revealed a non-linear pattern, decreasing from Group A to B, and then increasing again. The number of 'will statements' dropped significantly with age, showing a linear development. However, it is important to keep in mind that these three strategies were not used often in the data set as a whole. These results can be seen in Fig. 3.

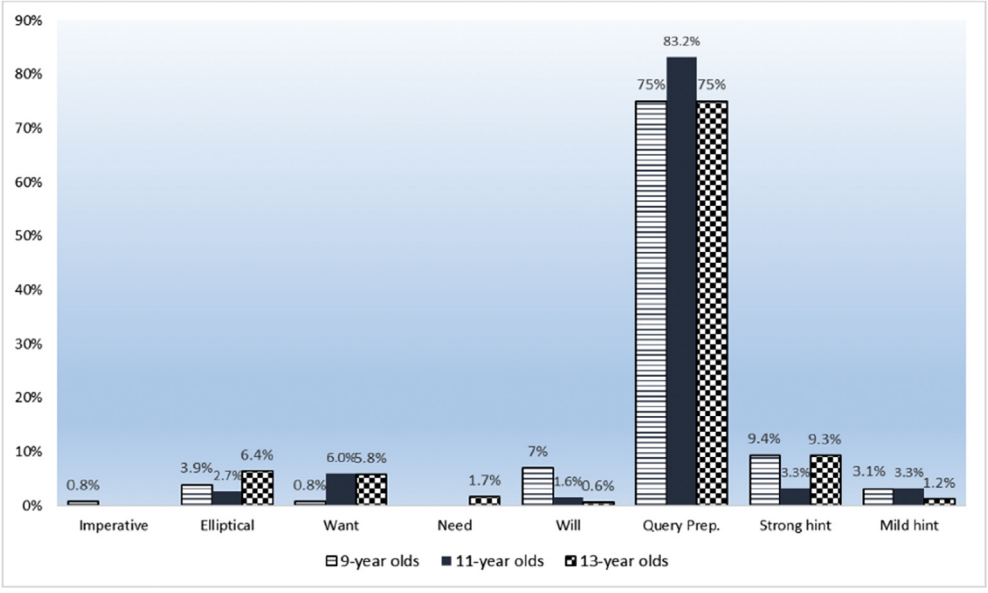

Fig. 3. Norwegian learners: Head act sub-strategies across age groups.

4.1.4. NLs: internal and external modification

As far as internal modification was concerned, the chi-square results showed significant differences and a non-liner development regarding the use of modal verbs ($p = .000$) and lexical downgraders ($p = .000$) (Table 6). With the exception of the most frequently used *can* and the least frequently employed *should*, all other modal verbs were found to differ in distribution. For instance, *could* and *may* were more prominent in the 11-year-old group, *would* in the oldest group, while *will* featured most prominently in the youngest group in the *I will have* construction.

Table 6
Norwegian learners: Internal modification across age groups.

		Age				Chi-square test	
		9	11	13	Total	X^2	Sig.
Modals	Can	95_a	131_a	122_a	348	**41.074**	**0.000**
		89.6%	84.0%	89.7%	87.4%		
	Could	**0_a**	**10_b**	**2_a**	12		
		0.0%	**6.4%**	**1.5%**	3.0%		
	May	**1_a**	**12_b**	**$4_{a,\ b}$**	17		
		0.9%	**7.7%**	**2.9%**	4.3%		
	Should	0_a	0_a	1_a	1		
		0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.3%		
	Will	**9_a**	**3_b**	**1_b**	13		
		8.5%	**1.9%**	**0.7%**	3.3%		
	Would	**$1_{a,\ b}$**	**0_b**	**6_a**	7		
		0.9%	**0.0%**	**4.4%**	1.8%		
	Total	106	156	136	398		
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Syntactic downgraders	Conditional	**1_a**	**9_b**	**$7_{a,\ b}$**	17	5.837	0.212
		0.8%	**4.9%**	**4.1%**	3.5%		
	Aspect	0_a	0_a	1_a	1		
		0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.2%		
	None	**127_a**	**175_b**	**$164_{a,\ b}$**	466		
		99.2%	**95.1%**	**95.3%**	96.3%		
	Total	128	184	172	484		
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Lexical downgraders	Understater/Hedge	**1_a**	**30_b**	**23_b**	54	**35.051**	**0.000**
		0.8%	**16.3%**	**13.4%**	11.2%		
	Downtoner	0_a	0_a	2_a	2		
		0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	0.4%		
	Please	**43_a**	**43_b**	**37_b**	123		
		33.6%	**23.4%**	**21.5%**	25.4%		
	Please & downgrader	**$3_{a,\ b}$**	**13_b**	**3_a**	19		
		2.3%	**7.1%**	**1.7%**	3.9%		
	None	81_a	98_a	107_a	286		
		63.3%	53.3%	62.2%	59.1%		
	Total	161	211	223	595		
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%		
Supportive moves	Grounder	**5_a**	**$17_{a,\ b}$**	**17_b**	39	**21.640**	**0.017**
		3.9%	**9.2%**	**9.9%**	8.1%		
	Sweetener	**1_a**	**4_a**	**12_b**	17		
		0.8%	**2.2%**	**7.0%**	3.5%		
	Preparator	0_a	4_a	2_a	6		
		0.0%	2.2%	1.2%	1.2%		
	Thanking	1_a	1_a	1_a	3		
		0.8%	0.5%	0.6%	0.6%		
	Imposition minimiser	0_a	0_a	2_a	2		
		0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	0.4%		
	None	**121_a**	**158_b**	**138_b**	417		
		94.5%	**85.9%**	**80.2%**	86.2%		
	Total	128	184	172	484		
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%		

Lexical downgrading was used in approximately 40% of requests overall, with *please* and understaters/hedges accounting for the vast majority of examples (e.g. 'Can I get *some* more soup?' (NL.11)). A significant decrease in the use of 'please' was accompanied by a significant increase in the use of understaters/hedges between the 9- and 11-year-old groups. A combination of 'please' with an understater/hedge ('May I have *some* more soup, *please*?' (NL.11)) was more common in the 11-year-old group compared to the 13-year-old one.

Albeit used rather infrequently (in less than 4% of requests), and with no significant differences overall, syntactic downgraders displayed some different patterns of use, specifically regarding conditionals (e.g. 'It was a pleasure being here. It would be cool to come back.' (NL.13)) and opting for no syntactic downgrading.

Regarding external modification, supportive moves appeared in approximately 14% of the total requests. Similarly to the GCLs, for the NLs grounders were the most preferred supportive moves, which they used with an increasing frequency across age groups (e.g. '*The hat is very beautiful*. Can we buy this mum?' (NL.9)). Unlike the GCLs, however, the NLs also revealed some development in their use of sweeteners, whose employment significantly increased in the oldest group (e.g. '*The dinner was really good*, so I was wondering if I could eat here another day.' (NL.13)) (see Table 6).

To sum, up, unlike GCLs, where the use of CI increased with age and proficiency, the NLs maintained their preference for CI across all groups. The query preparatory sub-strategy was used similarly by all three proficiency groups of the GCLs and the NLs, but both groups revealed significant differences in their use of various other sub-strategies. In the case of both the GCLs and the NLs, no pragmatic development was found in their use of syntactic modification. While no changes were identified in the GCLs' use of external modification, the NLs revealed a linear developmental pattern in their use of grounders and sweeteners, which significantly increased. No development was found regarding internal modification on the part of GCLs except for the marker 'please'; however, NLs' performance revealed pragmatic development in their use of modal verbs, the marker 'please' and the use of understaters/hedges.

4.2. Research question 2

The second research question aimed to compare the two linguistic groups (GCLs and NLs) in terms of their pragmalinguistic development, and identify any similarities and/or differences in their developmental patterns. Each age group is discussed below separately, first in relation to the main request strategies and sub-strategies, and then with regard to the internal and external modification employed. Graphical representations of the data are provided at the end of each section.

4.2.1. Head act strategies and sub-strategies: GCLs and NLs

4.2.1.1. Learners aged 9. As far as the main head act strategies of the 9-year-old learners were concerned, the chi-square test indicated a significant difference ($X^2 = 29.127$, $p = .000$) in the frequency of occurrence of the three directness levels between the two groups. Z-test results further confirmed differences for each individual strategy. As can be seen from Fig. 4(a), GCLs resorted to direct strategies in nearly 40% of their requests, compared to 12.5% produced by NLs, while NLs opted for conventionally indirect requests (75%) and hints (12.5%) much more commonly.

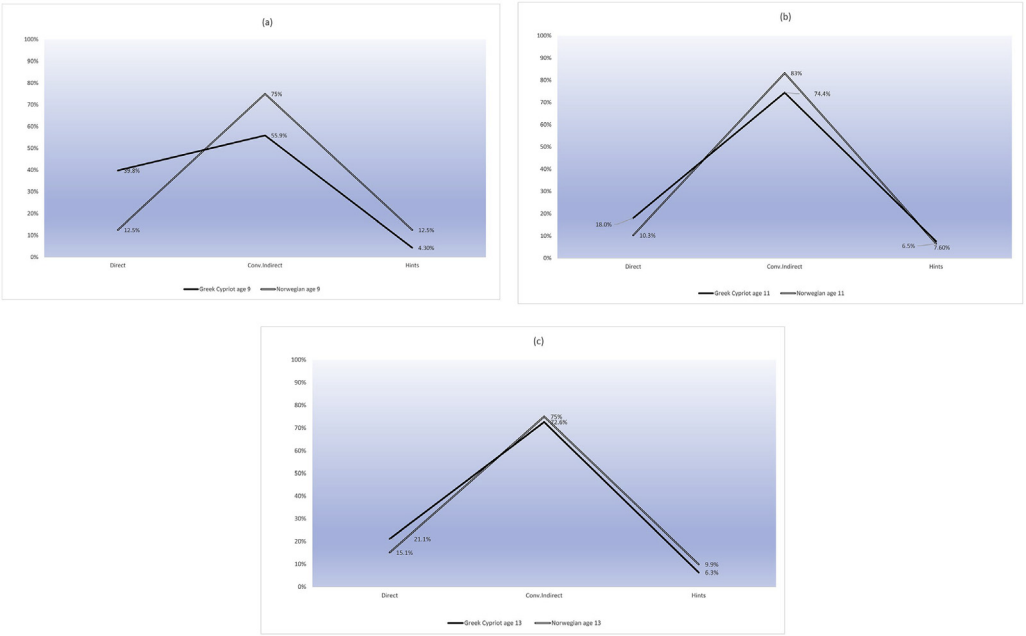

Fig. 4. Greek Cypriot and Norwegian learners: Head act strategies across age groups.

These general preferences for specific directness levels were also reflected in the head act sub-strategies ($X^2 = 57.381$, $p = .000$). Statistical differences between the groups were found for most of the sub-strategies, with the GCLs resorting to imperatives, elliptical statements and want statements significantly more often (GCLs: 6.2% vs NLs: 0.8%, GCLs: 14.3% vs. NLs: 3.9%, GCLs: 18.6% vs. NLs: 0.8% respectively). NLs, on the other hand, opted for significantly more 'will statements' (indicating

a clear L1 influence), query preparatory and strong hints (GCLs: 0% vs. NLs:7%, GCLs: 55.9% vs. NLs: 75%, GCLs: 2.5% vs. NLs: 9.4%). Examples from the data are presented below:

Greek Cypriot learners
(1) Give me orange colour, please. (GCL.9)
(2) Two glasses Fanta. (GCL.9)
(3) I want the orange paper. (GCL.9)

Norwegian learners
(4) I will have a kite. (NL.9)
(5) Can I have a yellow pencil? (NL.9)
(6) Do you have a yellow pencil? (NL.9)

4.2.1.2. Learners aged 11. Overall, learners aged 11 did not display significant differences in their head act strategies ($X^2 = 5.135$, $p = .077$). However, as can be seen from Fig. 4(b), there were still differences in their preferences for direct strategies, more often employed by GCLs (GCLs: 18% vs. NLs: 10.3%), and conventionally indirect ones, more commonly used by the NLs (GCLs: 74.4% vs. NLs: 83.2%), according to the z-test results. These were confirmed by chi-square test results at the sub-strategy level ($X^2 = 17.448$, $p = .026$). Importantly, comparing Fig. 4(a) with 4(b), one can easily observe that the performance of the two groups becomes more similar and starts to converge.

In addition, the results for sub-strategies revealed fewer significant differences between the groups. These differences concerned only the imperatives and elliptical statements, which were used significantly more by the GCLs (GCLs: 2.8% vs. NLs: 0%; GCLs: 8.1% vs. NLs: 2.7%), and the query preparatory sub-strategies, still more common in the Norwegian data set (GCLs: 74.4% vs. NLs: 83.2%). The differences in the use of want statements, will statements and strong hints were no longer present.

4.2.1.3. Learners aged 13. As distinguished from the younger groups, 13-year-old learners seemed to have converged in terms of their preferred head act realisation strategies. This convergence can be observed in Fig. 4(c), compared with 3(a) and 3(b). Both chi-square and z-test results confirmed that there were no significant differences in their distribution between the two 13-year-old groups.

At the sub-strategy level, significant differences ($X^2 = 17.065$, $p = .029$), were identified only for want statements and strong hints, the former employed more frequently by the GCLs and the latter by the NLs (GCLs: 12.1% vs NLs: 5.8%; GCLs: 2.7% vs NLs: 9.3%).

4.2.2. Internal and external modification: GCLs and NLs

4.2.2.1. Learners aged 9. Chi-square test results concerning the internal modification strategies employed by the 9-year olds revealed significant differences in the use of modal verbs ($X^2 = 8.508$, $p = .037$). However, a closer look at individual modal verbs shows hardly any differences between the two groups, with the exception of *will* ('I will have two cola' (NL.9)), which was employed by the NLs significantly more (GCLs: 0% vs. NLs: 8.5%) (Fig. 5(a)).

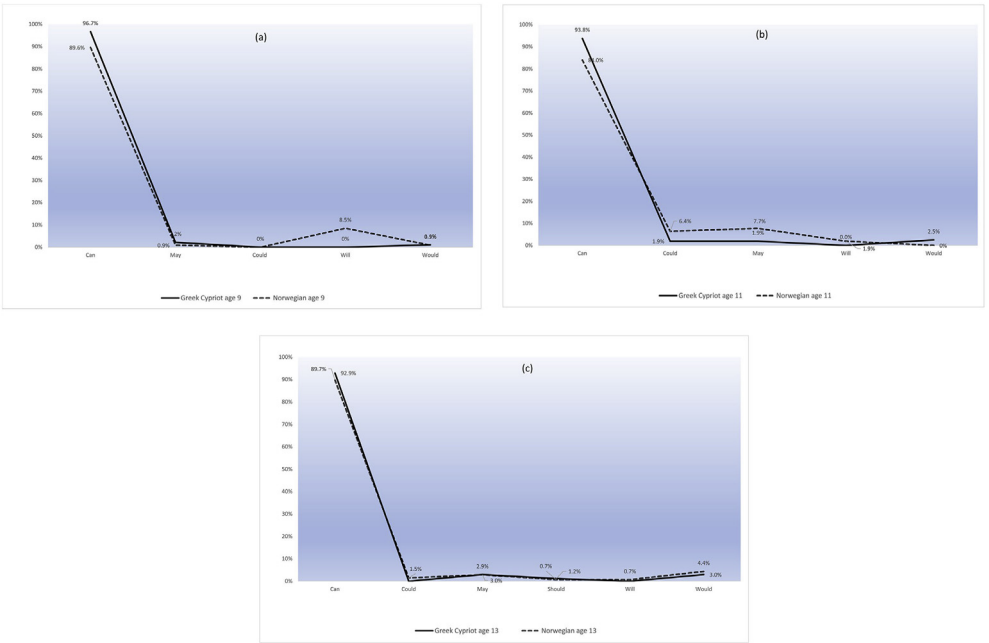

Fig. 5. Greek Cypriot and Norwegian learners: Use of modal verbs across age groups.

No statistically significant differences were found in relation to the use of syntactic downgraders, lexical downgraders or supportive moves. Syntactic downgraders were employed in less than 1% by both groups (zero marking GCLs: 99.4%, NLs: 99.2%), while the marker 'please' was the most preferred lexical downgrader (GCLs: 35.4%, NLs: 35.9%) (see Fig. 6(a)). Regarding external modification, the type, range and frequency of individual supportive moves were the same across both groups, which mostly employed requests with zero marking (GCLs: 93.2%, NLs: 94.5%). Grounders (GCLs: 5.6%, NLs: 3.9%), sweeteners (GCLs: 0.6%, NLs: 0.8%) and thanking (GCLs: 0.6%, NLs: 0.8%) were produced by both groups almost equally (see Fig. 7(a)). Some examples from the data follow:

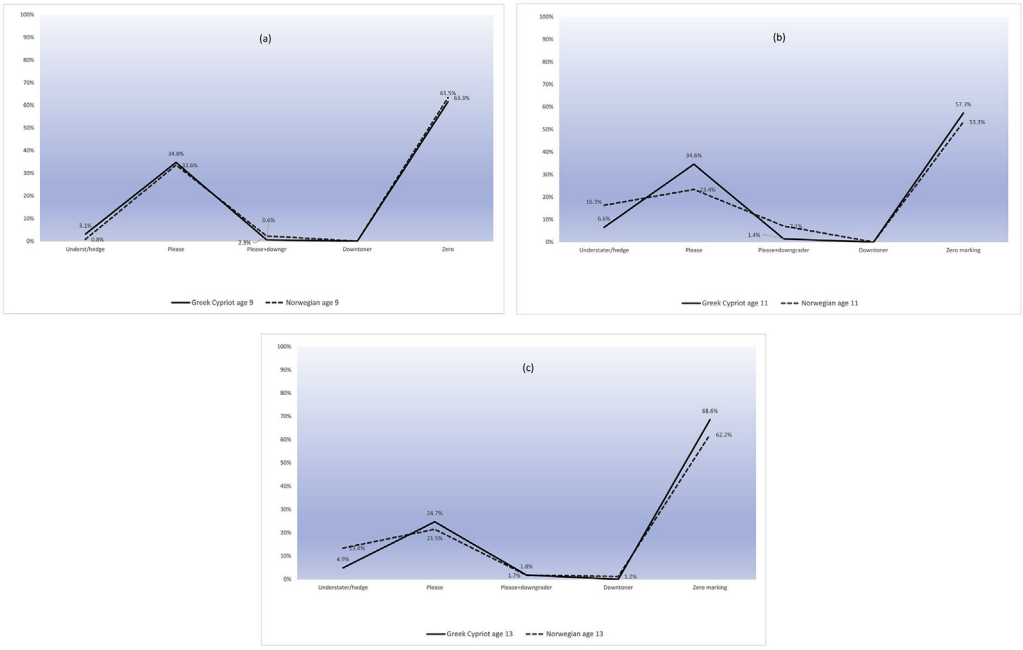

Fig. 6. Greek Cypriot and Norwegian learners: Lexical downgrading across age groups.

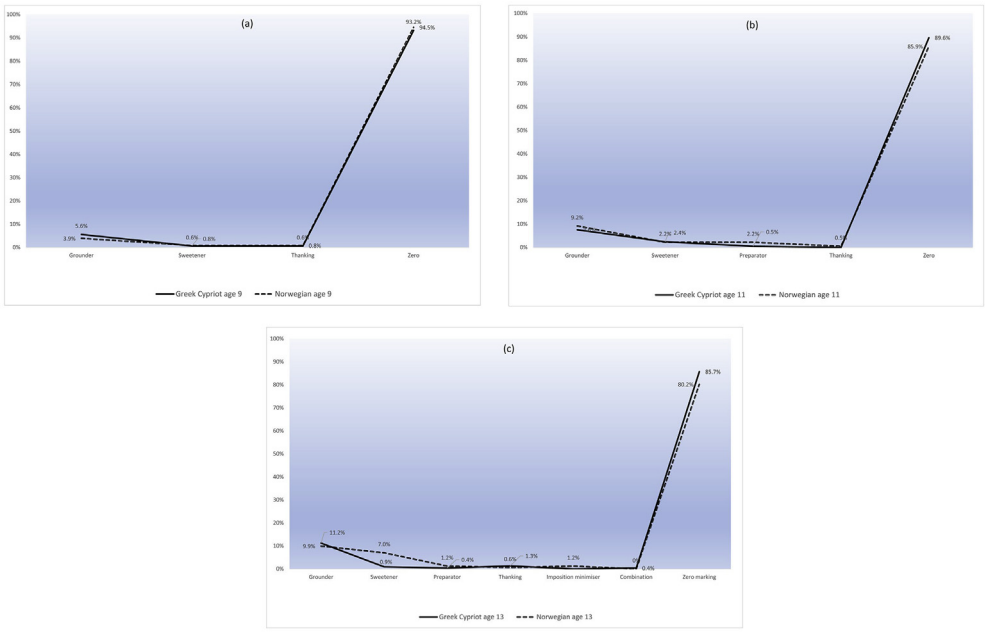

Fig. 7. Greek Cypriot and Norwegian learners: Supportive moves across age groups.

Grounder [Shopping situation]
(7) Please, Mum, can you buy me this ten-dollar hat? *It is not that expensive*. (GCL.9)
(8) *The hat is very beautiful*. Can we buy this mum? (NL.9)

Sweetener [Dinner with friends]
(9) *I had a very nice dinner today*. Next time, can I come again to play? (GCL.9)
(10) *That was really fun*. Can I come again? (NL.9)

Thanking [Dinner with friends]
(11) *Thank you for inviting us*. Can we come again for another delicious dinner? (GCL.9)
(12) *Thank you*, can I come back again? (NL.9)

Overall, Figs. 5(a), 6(a) and 7(a) show that the two 9-year-old groups follow very similar developmental trends as far as their external and internal request modification is concerned.

4.2.2.2. Learners aged 11. Eleven-year-old learners' performance exhibited a greater variation and more frequent use of internal modifiers, and displayed more substantial differences than did 9-year-old learners. As can be observed from Fig. 5(b), there were differences in the use of all the modal verbs except for *will* ($X^2 = 17.406$, $p = .002$). Whereas *can* still remained the most common choice in both groups, *can* and *would* were employed significantly more frequently by the GCLs (GCLs: 93.8% vs. NLs: 84%; GCLs: 2.5% vs. NLs: 0%). *May* and *could* were more prominent in Norwegian requests (GCLs: 1.9% vs NLs: 7.7%, GCLs: 1.9% vs. NLs: 6.4% respectively).

Significant differences in lexical downgrading also emerged ($X^2 = 20.493$, $p = .000$) (Fig. 6(b)) and were especially prominent in the use of understaters/hedges and 'please'. Understaters/hedges were used significantly more by the NLs (GCLs: 6.6% vs. NLs: 16.3%), while the use of 'please' was still the preferred strategy for the GCLs, in line with the 9-year-old GCLs' requests.

As for supportive moves, there was an increased range of strategies in both groups, which is displayed in Fig. 7(a) and 6(b), and similar types were employed with similar frequencies by the two learner groups. Preparators were performed for the first time in both groups, while an increase in the use of sweeteners and grounders was noted. Examples from the data follow:

Grounder
(13) Can you buy me this kite *because it's my birthday*? (GCL.11)

Sweetener
(14) *We had a very good time* and we want to visit you again. (GCL.11)
(15) *This was fun*. May we come back another day? (NL.11)

Preparator
(16) *See, this is a kite*. Can I get this? (NL.11)

Overall, Figs. 5(b), 6(b) and 7(b) show that the two 11-year-old groups follow a very similar developmental trend in use of supportive moves, and a somewhat similar trend when it comes to modals and lexical downgraders, where some prominent differences stand out.

4.2.2.3. Learners aged 13. Regarding internal modification by the oldest learners, chi-square test results reveal significant differences only in the distribution of lexical downgraders ($X^2 = 11.648$, $p = .020$), stemming from the more frequent use of understaters/hedges by the NLs (GCLs: 4.9% vs NLs: 13.4%.) (Fig. 6(c)). None of the differences in the use of modal verbs found with 11-year-old learners were present in 13-year-old learners' requests (Fig. 5(c)). As in the two younger groups, syntactic downgrading was still used comparatively rarely (in less than 5% of requests) and the learners opted only for conditional structures, with the exception of a single request modified through the use of the past tense and progressive aspect.

The 13-year-old learners' use of supportive moves ($X^2 = 15.207$, $p = .019$) revealed a significant difference in their use of sweeteners, much more often used by the NLs (Fig. 7(c)) (GCLs: 0.9% vs NLs: 7%). Albeit used only twice, imposition minimisers, which were previously absent, appeared for the first time with the NLs ('Can I get any of the papers? *Doesn't matter what colour it is*.'). Additionally, a combination of two supportive moves was attempted by a 13-year-old GCL ('*Thanks for dinner. It's very good*. We can meet you again to eat for us.'), suggesting an expansion of their repertoire.

Overall, as visible in the line graphs, the GCLs and the NLs' preferred head act realisation strategies converged with increasing proficiency and age. Similarly, the request modification developmental patterns of the two groups were found to follow a similar trend, especially regarding the range of strategies with older groups, and converged even more as age increased and the learners gained language control, although some differences in lexical downgrading and supportive moves still predominated at age 13. More specifically, the 9-year-old learners displayed systematic differences in their choice of specific head act strategies and sub-strategies, despite sharing considerable similarities regarding the types and frequency of

internal modification and supportive moves. The 11-year-old learners' requests differed in terms of preferred directness levels and some head act sub-strategies although the differences were not as substantial as with the 9-year-old groups. Their internal modification choices were more diverse than in the younger group, especially regarding modal verbs and lexical downgrading. In contrast, syntactic downgraders and supportive moves were realised similarly and with comparable frequencies in the two groups. The requests produced by the learners aged 13 were much more similar in terms of head act strategies, sub-strategies and modal verbs than those produced by the younger groups, and their choice of strategies converged with age, despite some significant differences that remained in their use of want statements and strong hints. Lexical downgrading, was, for both groups, the preferred way to modify requests internally, while syntactic downgrading was still largely absent. Finally, the range of supportive moves expanded to a certain extent. In terms of other significant differences that remained present, reference should be made to the use of understaters/hedges and sweeteners, which were more often employed by the NLs.

5. Discussion

5.1. Development of head act strategies and sub-strategies

Our results revealed that, while the NLs maintained a constant preference for conventional indirectness across all age/proficiency groups, the GCLs exhibited increasing preference for CI as age and proficiency increased. The NLs' inclination towards CI was not surprising and may be ascribed to positive transfer from their L1, given that this was found to be the preferred strategy in Norwegian requests (Svanes, 1989; Urbanik, 2017). Additionally, CI in Norwegian and in English can be realised through very similar linguistic means (the Norwegian modal verb *kan* corresponding to *can* (Fretheim, 2005)), which may have facilitated the NLs to positively transfer this structure into their L2 performance. At the same time, this finding is in line with previous ILP studies with Norwegian learners of English, which revealed similar results with 10- and 12-year-olds (Savić, 2015) as well as with older Norwegian learners (Brubæk, 2012; Krulatz, 2016). However, reaching a certain proficiency level seems to have been a necessary prerequisite for the positive transfer to take place. Namely, the 8-year-old learners in Savić's (2015) study, a year younger than the youngest group in this study and hence possibly less proficient, resorted to gestural requests, also present in early stages of L1 development (Read and Cherry, 1978), in approximately 55% of their requests, and to conventionally indirect ones in around 43% of cases. This is considerably lower than the 75% of conventionally indirect head acts in the present study, which suggests that our 9-year-old participants may be at the unpacking stage of request development.

However, the GCLs' overall sharp decrease in the use of direct strategies, and the strong preference for CI on the part of 11- and 13-year-old learners, contrasts markedly with previous studies with adult, Greek EFL learners (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011, 2012, 2018), including those with adult Greek learners of different proficiency levels (Economidou-Kogetsidis, forthcoming). Yet, importantly, this increasing preference for CI among the young learners of the present study is in line with the findings of previous research, which found that directness decreases with proficiency (e.g. Félix-Brasdefer, 2007) and with the findings of other ILP studies with young learners (Achiba, 2003; Barón Parés, 2015; Ellis, 1992; Rose, 2000), which confirmed the same tendency. This might therefore suggest that the shift to indirectness on the part of the GCLs as age increases represents a linear development from the formulaic stage (stage 2) towards the unpacking stage (stage 3). Such a movement is characterised by a shift from imperatives to conventionally indirect strategies (Kasper and Rose, 2002) and has been identified in the majority of studies with young learners (Achiba, 2003; Barón Parés, 2015; Ellis, 1992; Rose, 2000). The fact that such a shift was not observed in the performance of the NLs might suggest that the youngest Norwegian learners (9-year-olds) were already at the unpacking stage when the study commenced. The results in relation to the GCLs' decreasing use of direct head act sub-strategies can further support the argument that these learners evidenced movement from stage 2 to stage 3. The GCLs' increasing use of query preparatory requests went hand in hand with a decrease in their use of elliptical statements and imperatives, thus approximating more closely English native speaker preferences in a wide variety of request situations in American (Pinto and Raschio, 2007; Savić, 2014), Australian (Blum-Kulka and House 1989), British (Barron, 2008; Fukushima, 2003; Færch and Kasper 1989; Márquez Reiter, 2000) and Irish English (Barron, 2008), and demonstrating a clearer movement towards the unpacking stage. A further sociopragmatic explanation for this shift might relate to "the ongoing shift towards negative politeness" among younger generations in Greece (Bella and Ogiermann, 2019). Bella and Ogiermann's study, however, involved adult Greek speakers, so further research is needed with younger participants to confirm such a claim.

Simultaneously, the use of NLs' 'will statements', which presented a clear L1 influence, significantly decreased after the age of 9, reflecting a change in their general language proficiency and a subsequent elimination of pragmatically infelicitous forms. Thus, in both the Greek and the Norwegian group, the reliance on the sub-strategies which may have been influenced by L1 request realisation patterns (NLs: will statements, GCLs: elliptical statements, imperatives) was reduced after the age of 9 or 11. This may tentatively allow for the argument that L1 influence on the L2 pragmatic performance might not be as salient among younger learners as it is among adults, and that L1 interference decreases as proficiency and age increase, a claim which calls for further investigation. One of the main findings of the present study has been that the developmental trajectories of the two groups converged with age, a finding which seems to support this claim and point towards a more interlanguage-specific developmental trend as compared to culture-specific influences.

The preference for CI in both the NLs' and GCLs' performance might additionally be the result of instructional effects and textbooks' emphasis on CI strategies, as both groups were EFL learners who received significant input about the L2 through classroom and textbook English. Usó-Juan's investigation (2008:237) on the presentation of the speech act of requesting in textbooks showed "a clear preference for the conventionally indirect request strategies rather than the direct or indirect ones". At the same time, a preference for CI might also be related to extramural exposure to English and more opportunities for interaction with native speakers, who have repeatedly been found to prefer CI regardless of the variety of English examined (e.g. Barron, 2008; Fukushima, 2003; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Pinto and Raschio, 2007; Savić, 2014).

Affective factors, specifically positive attitudes to the target language that younger learners bring to language learning, may also account for the participants converging with native speaker preferences despite L1-L2 differences, especially in the GCLs' case. Namely, a number of research studies with adult learners (Ishihara and Tarone, 2009; LoCastro, 2001; Savić, 2014, 2016) demonstrate that L1 influences on L2 pragmatic production and perceptions of L2 pragmatic practices may persist despite advanced language proficiency since "our awareness of pragmatic norms and social rules is initially acquired as we are socialized into our primary cultural values and behaviors" (Ishihara and Tarone, 2009:102). However, this may not necessarily be the case with young language learners, whose openness and natural curiosity (Ness, 2019) may facilitate more positive attitudes to the pragmatic practices different from the ones they have been socialised into. Indeed, a selection of the young Norwegian learners from the current sample have been found to unanimously assign positive evaluations to English and its speakers' pragmatic practices even when they differ from the learners' L1 practices (Savić and Myrset, forthcoming A). Thus, including pragmatics instruction early in children's schooling could be beneficial for their long-term pragmatic development, which certainly warrants further exploration.

5.2. Development of internal and external modification

The present study found that, overall, the GCLs' and the NLs' request modification developmental patterns followed a very similar trend and converged even more as age increased. However, whereas the learners were developing towards more uniform modification choices, there were still some significant differences at the age of 13. This finding seems to add more support to the argument made above, namely that despite the groups' different cultures and L1s, their performance might indicate more an interlanguage-specific developmental trend, where culture-specific influences became less salient with age and proficiency. Yet, further empirical research with young learners from divergent linguistic backgrounds acquiring the same L2 would serve to confirm or reject this specific argument.

Regarding the differences that still emerged and with specific reference to internal modification, linear changes were identified in lexical downgrading with NLs, with a decrease in the use of 'please' after age 9 and a corresponding increase in the occurrence of understaters and hedges. A similar trend was observed for the marker 'please' in the GCL group, with a significant reduction in its use after age 11. The decrease in the use of 'please' with age and proficiency mirrors previous research findings in studies with young L2 learners (e.g. Barón Parés, 2012; Rose, 2009; Savić, 2015). Indeed, 'please' tends to be overused by learners at very early stages as a way of not only softening but also pleading (Barón Parés, 2015). Thus, this developmental trend in our sample may reflect an increase in the learners' linguistic repertoire since, in NLs' case, it was accompanied by a more frequent appearance of another type of lexical downgrading, a significant increase in external modification as well as changes in the use of modal verbs. Namely, among modal verbs, instances of both linear (*will, would*) and non-linear development (*may, could*) were identified in the Norwegian data set. The expansion of the repertoire evident after age 9 was in agreement with Savić (2015), who found evidence of non-linear development for *could* and *would*, but also a steady decline in the use of *can*, not observed in the present study. Reliance on *can* remained dominant in both groups throughout. The appearance of *could* and *would* to modify requests after age 9 is also in line with L1 developmental trends observed with third and fifth graders in Liebling's (1988) study, indicating the learners' emerging alignment with L1 children's requestive forms. Overall, the range of internal modification devices was rather limited, which aligns with previous research with both young (Barón Parés, 2015; Ellis, 1992) and adult learners (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009, 2011, 2012; Goy et al., 2012; Otcu and Zeyrek, 2008; Trosborg, 1995; Woodfield, 2012), suggesting that this type of modification places higher demands on the language user and requires a higher level of overall proficiency. For instance, Economidou-Kogetsidis (forthcoming) identifies a number of lexical downgraders, such as downtowners, understaters and subjectvisers, that appear only at the C1 level. Interestingly, however, understaters and a very small number of downtoners appeared in our data with learners at much lower proficiency levels, which may indeed be a result of more frequent extramural exposure to English for young learners, or a result of classroom instruction.

In the case of both the GCLs and the NLs, no pragmatic development was revealed in their use of syntactic modification as no significant differences were identified. Apart from the appearance of conditional structures in a small number of older learners' requests, their requests remained largely syntactically unmodified. Indeed, quantitative and/or qualitative differences between learner and native speaker syntactic modification strategies are a common finding in studies on L2 requesting with adults with different L1 backgrounds (e.g. Færch and Kasper, 1989; Goy et al., 2012; Savić, 2014). This also reflects Economidou-Kogetsidis' (forthcoming) findings with adult Greek B1 learners. Namely, she identified hardly any syntactic modification in B1 learners, except for a small number of conditional structures and conditional clauses, which correlates with our findings with 11- and 13-year-old learners in both groups. This finding, therefore, might be regarded as an ILP developmental trend, which could be attributed to the learners' general language proficiency, indicating that the development of such syntactic modification requires the necessary grammatical competence beyond the unpacking stage and into the

pragmatic expansion stage. Previous studies with young learners offer somewhat inconsistent results regarding internal modification (e.g. Achiba, 2003; Barón Parés, 2015), with syntactic modification specifically not having been systematically investigated. Yet, the current finding is hardly surprising given that syntactic downgrading arguably requires a higher level of grammatical sophistication and a more nuanced understanding of the interface between grammatical forms and their pragmatic functions. Thus, a more thorough investigation of this type of downgrading with young learners at different age and proficiency levels, including some qualitative data sources (e.g. verbal protocol data) could shed more light on when in the L2 acquisition process the understanding of this relationship starts to develop and begins to be used strategically.

Another explanation for such sparse use of syntactic modification may lie in the elicitation technique employed (i.e. the VODCT). Ishihara and Chiba (2014:19) found that written responses prompted a larger variety in request strategies than oral ones with 7- to 12-year-old learners, with written responses allowing the learners to "ponder their answers". Whereas different results may have been obtained through written responses, the requests produced orally in this study reflect the modality in which such requests would naturally appear (Bardovi-Harlig, 2018) and the impromptu nature of speech. As such, our results provide insights into the strategies that these learners have internalised and thus had at their immediate disposal.

Finally, supportive moves revealed some differences in the two groups' developmental patterns. Except for a drop in the frequency of requests without supportive moves, no other significant changes were identified in the GLC group, suggesting no overall development. In contrast, a linear development in the use of grounders and sweeteners was found with NLs, accompanied by a decrease in externally unmodified requests. While these results contrast with some previous studies with young learners (e.g. Barón Parés, 2015), in which participants produced requests with quite limited or no external modification, a development from 5.5% over 14.1% to almost 20% of externally modified requests clearly mirrors Savić's (2015) findings in relation to 10- and 12-year-old Norwegian learners, who employed supportive moves in 14.1% and 21.1% of their requests respectively despite differences in the data elicitation instruments. However, in Savić's study, the youngest group was a year younger than our youngest group and did not employ any supportive moves at all. A preference for grounders in both learner groups, although still relatively infrequent, especially with GCLs, mirrors external modification strategy choices of adult L1 English speakers, who resort to grounders considerably more commonly than to other external modification strategies across a range of contexts (e.g. Barron, 2008; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Savić, 2014). Although grounders were the predominant modification strategy in all age groups both with GCLs and NLs, the range of external modifiers expanded with age. Thus, preparators (CGLs and NLs), imposition minimisers (NLs) and combinations of supportive moves (GCLs) started appearing in older groups, signaling the onset of diversification and increasing sophistication of the external modification repertoire typical of the pragmatic expansion stage.

In sum, the two L1 groups in our study were found to converge in their performance as far as their choice of modal verbs was concerned. However, their lexical downgrading and supportive move trajectories were characterised by striking similarities at the age of 9 and by significant differences at age 13. The NLs 13-year-olds' more frequent use of understaters/hegdes and sweeteners proved to be the main source of divergence in the oldest groups. A possible explanation for these differences could perhaps be the status of English in the Norwegian society. English is treated as a first foreign language, with formal instruction commencing much earlier than other foreign languages; extramural exposure, through media and travel, is also significant (Rindal, 2014; Vattøy, 2017). Thus, the NLs may have had an advantage of reaping the fruits of this exposure combined with positive transfer from their L1. However, whether this applies to the learners in this particular study, we can only speculate as extramural exposure was not charted. Despite the differences, however, a broader linguistic repertoire and higher frequency of use were apparent in the older groups' external modification with both GCLs and NLs, indicating the onset of the pragmatic expansion stage.

6. Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the request development of young EFL learners in two language contexts, namely Cyprus and Norway, and to shed light on the (dis)similarities across the two contexts through a cross-sectional design. Greek Cypriot and Norwegian EFL learners were selected for comparison due to substantial linguistic and cultural differences regarding language formulations for requesting and general politeness orientations. The results have painted a complex picture which revealed both areas of convergence (head act strategies and modal verbs) and divergence (lexical downgraders and supportive moves) with increasing age and proficiency, as well as areas that remained similar throughout (syntactic downgraders), suggesting diverse underlying influences on request development.

While the results provide interesting insights into these young learners' pragmatic development, it is important that they are treated with caution due to a number of possible limitations. Firstly, while the groups were homogeneous in terms of age, there may have been differences in the proficiency levels within these age groups. The Greek participants' proficiency levels were assessed through Cambridge Assessment English exams for Young learners, whereas the much less exams-oriented primary school culture in Norway did not allow us to draw on proficiency exam data or even school grades[4]. Therefore, we had to rely on the expected levels for specific grades (Hasselgreen, 2005). Secondly, the participants' exposure to English in school and extramural contexts was not measured in any way and may have varied both within and across the two L1 groups, which could have exerted an additional influence on their language development. The fact that the groups were

[4] Primary school pupils in Norway only receive formative assessment and no grades are awarded before lower secondary school (8th grade).

approached in different educational settings – private language institutes in Cyprus and state schools in Norway – may also have influenced the data. Thirdly, as the data collection was conducted in groups, pupils' request formulations may have been influenced by their peers' responses, so our results do not necessarily reflect each individual participant's pragmalinguistic ability. Rather, they can be taken as an indication of what these learners were capable of constructing as a group in collaborative dialogue and may thus emulate processes occurring in language classrooms (Swain, 1997). Although the learners were organised into groups, and great care was taken to create a non-threatening atmosphere and reduce the power imbalance through the research design and procedures (e.g. Pinter and Zandian, 2014; Punch, 2002a, 2002b), some learners may have been intimidated by the setting and felt less inclined to respond. Next, although over 1000 requests were elicited for the present study, the number of participants was still relatively small and any generalisations thus have to be made with caution. Finally, the present study has solely focused on pragmalinguistic development based on the changes in the types and frequencies of occurrence of specific head act and modification strategies. While building an inventory of request strategies is a necessary step on the path to mastering the request speech act, a broader focus on the contextual appropriateness of the specific strategies would have yielded a more complete understanding of the learners' overall pragmatic development.

While this sample does not warrant generalisations, our results still indicate the aspects of the learners' pragmatic development that may be attributed to their diverse L1 backgrounds and those that appear to be primarily motivated by common L2 developmental trajectories. Including two learner groups corresponding in age and proficiency but not L1 backgrounds has indeed proved instrumental in facilitating such conclusions. Future research involving learners from two or more L1 backgrounds and employing qualitative research methods to accompany production data may further deepen our understanding of early stages of L2 pragmatic development in children while studies with teenagers, also largely underrepresented, could further investigate their developmental trajectories.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that we have no conflicts of interest relevant to or that might compromise this research.

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