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Anne Barron

For a return to the forgotten formula: “Data 1 + Data 2 > Data 1”: The example of learners’ offers and refusals of offers

"Es ist nichts perfekt" – ein Spruch, der auch Datenerhebungsinstrumente betrifft, die alle den einen oder anderen Mangel vorweisen, der die Zuverlässigkeit und Objektivität der daraus resultierenden Ergebnisse in Frage stellt. Trotz dieser wohlbekanntem Tatsache, und trotz der offenkundigen Lösung der Daten-triangulierung (cf. *Neumann* 1995) bleiben solche Angelegenheiten in der Forschung immer noch größtenteils verschwiegen (cf. *Kasper* 1998).

Dieser Artikel hat die Triangulierung von Lernerdaten als Thema, und insbesondere die Kombination von Produkt- und Prozessdaten. Am Beispiel einer Langzeitstudie der Entwicklung der L2 pragmatischen Kompetenz 33 irischer Deutschlerner während eines 2-semesterigen Aufenthalts in der Zielsprachkultur soll die Unerlässlichkeit der Triangulierung verdeutlicht werden, will man sicherstellen, dass Forschungsergebnisse nicht lediglich eine Folge des eingesetzten Datenerhebungsinstrumentes sind. Produktdaten werden mittels eines Diskursergänzungsfragebogens (discourse completion task, DCT) erhoben, Prozessdaten mittels retrospektiver Interviews. Im Mittelpunkt des Interesses stehen die Realisierungen von Angeboten und Ablehnungen auf der Diskursebene.

1. Introductory comments

That different speech communities differ in their use of language is now a well-established fact (cf. *Blum-Kulka et al.* 1989; *Reynolds* 1995, 5ff; *Tannen* 1984; *Wierzbicka* 1985, 1992). Direct, content-oriented, speaker-oriented, explicit and ad hoc are terms associated with the manner in which Germans use language. In contrast, indirect, addressee-oriented, hearer-oriented, implicit and formulaic describe the use of language in an Anglo-Saxon context (cf. *House* 1996a, 164f; 1996b, 358; 1997a, 7ff; 1997b, 82f). *Wierzbicka*, in her (1985) paper, appropriately entitled “Different cultures, different

languages, different speech acts,” on different uses of language in Polish and Australian English, relates such differences in language use to the “different hierarchies of values characteristic of different cultures” (*Wierzbicka* 1985, 173). But, what do foreign language learners know of such pragmatic differences? Very little, it seems. Such linguistic aspects are rarely addressed in foreign language classes,¹ not least because concrete descriptions of pragmatic phenomena in different languages is still a far-off target despite much research in the area of Interlanguage Pragmatics since the early 1980s and in Contrastive Pragmatic analyses prior to this. Time spent in the target speech community, thus, remains the primary opportunity for language learners to acquire pragmatic knowledge.

Given this lack of awareness of cross-cultural differences, there is no doubt but that pragmatic failure may result when learners (L) face the challenge of using language in the target speech community. Anecdotes of such misunderstandings abound – most of which are interpreted as impoliteness by the interactants involved (cf. *Thomas* 1983, 96f, *Reynolds* 1995, 5), especially at higher proficiency levels, as lack of proficiency is then no longer seen as an excuse for impoliteness (cf. *Davies* 1987, 76). Despite the obvious importance of this aspect of second language acquisition, the question, as to what extent learners become “more native” in their use of the L2 over a period in the target speech community, i.e. to what extent their pragmatic competence develops, remains, as yet, largely unanswered, as does the question as to the necessary conditions for or as to the path any such development may take (cf. *Kasper/Schmidt* 1996).² Indeed, this situation can be said to be particularly extreme in the case of German as a Foreign/Second language, where, to my knowledge, no such longitudinal research exists to date.

This paper reports on a longitudinal study of the development of L2 pragmatic competence of a group of thirty-three advanced Irish foreign language learners of German who spent ten months studying in the target speech community within the framework of the ERASMUS program. Due to the confines of this particular paper, I will address only realisations of offers and refusals of offers and concentrate on the discourse level alone.³ After first highlighting Irish-

¹ Cf. *Bardovi-Harlig/Dörnyei* (1997, 26), *House* (1997c, 81), *House-Edmondson* (1986, 283), *House/Kasper* (1981, 184), *Möhl* (1996, 2) and *Thomas* (1983, 97, 109f).

² For an overview of longitudinal and cross-sectional research conducted on the development of pragmatic competence, cf. *Kasper/Rose* (1999).

³ The present longitudinal study also focused on request realisations and examined these and also offers and refusals of offers on the level of the speech act (cf. *Barron* in progress).

German native speaker (NS) cross-cultural differences in this area, and the related potential for pragmatic failure by Irish learners of German, it will be shown how triangulation of data using a Free Discourse Completion Task (FDCT) and retrospective interviews yielded findings showing developments in learners' speech over time spent in the target speech community.

2. Offers and Refusals – a cross-cultural perspective

To illustrate the potential for pragmatic failure which offers encompass in a German-Irish context, let me first take an example of pragmatic failure from my own experience. Memories of refusing offers of coffee on several occasions on my first stay in Germany many years ago remain with me to this day. Why? Because I refused the offer without knowing that I had actually refused! Upon an offer of coffee, I, at that time, automatically said, “no, I’m fine, thanks” – not because I did not want the coffee - quite the contrary in fact. I said I was fine because that is what we do in Ireland. I, of course, fully expected to be asked a second time whether I was sure I would not like a cup, upon which I would, naturally, have graciously said, “okay, so, just the one!”

On a later visit to Germany, I distinctly remember often being made to feel foolish by German NS’ reactions to my innocent polite question, "bist du sicher?" ("are you sure?") in response to their refusal of an offer of coffee which I had made. I was quickly told on several occasions that, yes, they were sure - hadn't they just said no! They, on the other hand, probably felt insulted that I did not seem to believe that they had meant what they said.

Such tales of some of my first lasting memories of life in Germany often cause laughter among German and Irish people alike. However, at the time I did not find them very amusing. On the contrary, I was quite amazed at the differences I found, these never having been addressed in the foreign language context in which I had learned German, and I at first believed the people in question to be rather curt and impolite.

The concept of ritual refusals, defined by *Chen et al.* (1995, 152), as "polite act(s) to indicate the speaker's consideration of the hearer," explains my pragmatic failure in accepting an offer in German (cf. also *Barron* forthcoming). While present in cultures such as the Irish culture, and also in such speech communities as China (cf. *Chen et al.* 1995, 151ff), the Arab World (cf. *Rubin* 1983, 14) and Tenejapa (cf. *Brown/Levinson* 1987, 233), ritual or polite refusals do not represent part of polite behaviour in the German-speaking community. Instead, refusals in German are genuine refusals (cf. *Schneider* forthcoming), also termed substantive refusals (cf.

Chen et al. 1995), - in other words - *Searle*'s sincerity condition for refusals, "S wants H not to do x," is satisfied unlike the case with ritual refusals where it is not satisfied since the speaker, S, merely pretends to refuse the offer in question in the interest of the norms of politeness. In reality, however, S, in a ritual refusal, expects a second offer, which s/he can then either accept or refuse, as s/he wishes. As a result, an offerer, in the Irish culture, largely expects the first refusal to be ritual, and so proceeds to reoffer. A passage from *Hayes'* (1997, 52) *Irish Conversation Guide* highlights the frequency of ritual refusals in the Irish culture:

If tempted with anything, always refuse it first time in the knowledge that a second overture will come... Decline all offers first time ... A good host will wave these protests aside ...

Indeed, so commonplace are ritual refusals in the Irish speech community that the linguistic expression "are you sure?", also realised as "sure?", "if you're sure?", "positive?", "are you positive?", has acquired the status of a pragmatic routine used to realise the second turn of an offer, i.e. in *Coulmas'* (1981, 3) terms, it has become a "highly conventionalised prepatterned expression(s) whose occurrence is tied to more or less standardized communication situations." Indeed, this routine has become so conventional that it has, to a large extent, lost its semantic meaning, as is often the case with pragmatic routines.

The large occurrence of ritual refusals in the Irish culture can be explained with reference to the different hierarchies of values characteristic of the two cultures, and in particular with reference to the direct/ indirect continuum noted earlier. In Ireland, it is more important to make your addressee feel wanted, and to be considerate of his/her wants and feelings than it is to be honest or direct, whereas the opposite is the case in Germany where honesty is a sign of friendship (cf. *Barron* 1999). This basic underlying cultural difference is reflected in initial refusals. In Ireland these are presumed to be ritual – to be motivated by politeness and a concern for one's addressee. Consequently, a ritual reoffer follows in order to attempt to ascertain the true wishes of the hearer (H), politeness aside. Whether the addressee finally refuses or accepts, it is clear that the mere existence of this 'game' reflects the Irish tendency towards indirectness.

As one Irish learner speaking on differences in offering in German and Ireland put it:

Maths, A8F:

... I think, I think in Ireland, they'd be more, you know what I mean, they're more, em, they wouldn't want anyone to think they wouldn't offer, whereas, here, you know, they offer, you both know you've offered, so you don't think any more about it, sort of thing...

In German, as this learner points out, the second turn occurs relatively seldom, given the absence of ritual refusals. If a second offer should occur, there is, therefore, no pragmatic routine available to realise it. Instead, ad hoc realisations are used. This feature of German offers reinforces the view that a focus on content rather than a concern for one's addressee is of primary importance in this culture (cf. introductory comments).

3. Methodological considerations

The investigation of interlanguage (IL) offers and refusals of offers presented a difficult challenge as regards the employment of a research instrument, given the necessity of an analysis at the level of the sequence, rather than, as has long been the norm in Interlanguage Pragmatics, at the level of the single utterance. As a result, the Free Discourse Completion Task (FDCT) (cf. Appendix I for an example), an alternative type of production questionnaire (cf. *Kasper* in press), was developed in order to collect learner productions of offers and refusals of offers (cf. *Barron* forthcoming).

3.1 The free discourse completion task (FDCT)

The FDCT essentially requires respondents to write both sides of an open role-play or dialogue for a range of specified situations, thus, facilitating the investigation of speech act realisations from a discourse perspective. For each item, the initial situation and each participant's communicative goal are explicitly sketched; in the latter case, the actual speech act to be elicited is openly stated, in order to ensure elicitation of the appropriate speech act and, therefore, also, comparability of data. Six items designed to elicit offers and refusals of offers were constructed for the research project, and controlled for social distance and social dominance (cf. *Brown/Levinson* 1978, 81, 1987, 76). (Cf. Appendix II for an outline of the various constellations). Where necessary, the dialogue is already started, in order to focus the elicited

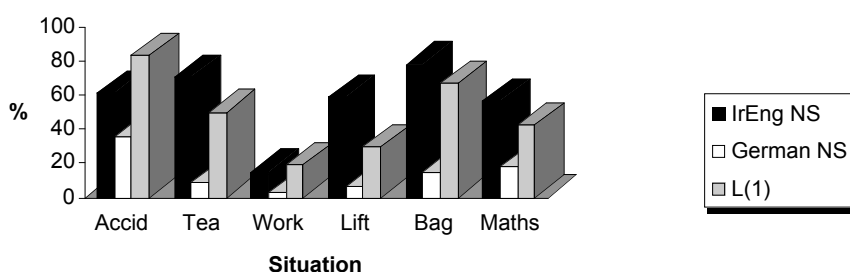
discourse and so aid comparability. At the start of the questionnaire subjects are specifically instructed to write as much as they feel is necessary for each situation. Furthermore, a blank space of eight centimetres after each item ensures that writing space is not a factor to be considered.

Three groups of respectively thirty-four NS of German, twenty-seven NS of Irish English and thirty-three Irish learners of German (L(1)) completed the same task based on the same completion instructions between April 1997 and April 1998 – the learners in April 1997. However, as can be seen in table 1 and figure 1 below, it was only the two groups of Irish informants who involved themselves in complex negotiations, using reoffers, to any extensive degree.

Table 1: Offers realised over more than one turn

| | Accident | Tea | Work | Lift | Bag | Maths | Average |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|--------------|----------------|
| Irish English NS | 61.5% | 70.4% | 15.4% | 59.3% | 77.8% | 55.6% | 56.7% |
| German NS | 35.5% | 8.8% | 3% | 5.9% | 14.7% | 17.6% | 14.2% |
| L(1) | 83.3% | 50% | 18.7% | 30.3% | 66.7% | 41.9% | 48.5% |

Figure 1: Offers realised over more than one turn



In the Irish L(1) data, the percentage of reoffers ranges from a high of 83.3% in the accident situation to a low of 18.7% in the work situation, the most formal of the situations under investigation, with an average level of reoffering at 48.5% of all offers made. In the bag situation, to take one further example, 66.7% of all Irish learners extend the offer at least a second time.

If we compare this data to the German NS data of the same nature, we see that although the lowest level of reoffers (3%) is also to be found in the work situation, and the highest level (35.5%) in the accident situation, considerable differences are apparent, not only in the level of reoffering in both of these situations – the Irish L(1) level being much higher – but also in the overall degree of reoffering. On average, only 14.2% of all offers realised by German

NS included a reoffer. This is in stark contrast to the Irish level of 48.5%. Indeed, apart from the accident situation which yielded 35.5% reoffers, the next highest degree of reoffers was 17.6%. Indeed, this relatively high level of reoffers in the accident situation is to be explained by the severity of the situation rather than to ritual reoffers. In this situation, there is a strong possibility that the refuser may not actually be wise to refuse the priest's offer of a lift to hospital since s/he may have injured him/herself after having been knocked off his/her bicycle. Consequently, it may be seen as the offender's responsibility to try and persuade the injured person to accept the offer as s/he may himself/herself not be aware of any injuries. In this case, the question "are you sure?" represents a genuine reoffer rather than a ritual reoffer motivated primarily by politeness.

An independent samples t-test confirms the statistical significance of the elicited differences between the German NS and L(1) data at the 99% level in five of the six situations – the work situation being the exception.

The overall statistical significance of non-L2-like performance of the group of Irish L(1) in the number of moves employed in realisations of offers can be explained by negative transfer from the L1. In all situations, except the work situation, the most formal situation, where the percentage of reoffers low at 15.4% in the Irish English data, the level is high, with highest employment in the bag situation (77.8%). Average employment of more than one turn to realise an offer was 56.7% - a reflecting of the Irish L(1) data.

The following examples, elicited from the tea/coffee situation are taken from the three individual data sets and serve to further illustrate this feature of the Irish learner data. Here, while the pragmatic routine, "are you sure?"/ "bist du sicher?", is employed to realise a reoffer in both the Irish English NS data and the Irish learners' of German data, no such reoffer occurs in the German data.

E4F, Irish English NS Tea/coffee:

You: Would you like to come in and have a cup of tea. They should be back in an hour or two?

Uncle: Thank you very much but I can't, I'm due back in the office. I was down here on business so I decided to call in.

You: *Are you sure?*

Uncle: Positive. I'll see you again

You: Bye.

A17F, Irish learner of German, Tea/coffee:

- Onkel: Keiner da?
 Du: Kann ich dir eine Tasse Kaffee anbieten.
 Onkel: Nein danke. Ich war nur in der Umgebung und wollte ganz kurz vorbei kommen.
 Du: *Bist du sicher?* Das ist wirklich kein Problem.
 Onkel: Danke. Sag deinen Eltern, daß ich gekommen bin.

- (Uncle: No one there?
 You: Can I offer you a cup of coffee?
 Uncle: No thanks. I was just in the area and wanted to call around for a second.
 You: *Are you sure?* It's really no problem.
 Uncle: No thanks. Tell your parents that I came)

G11F, German NS, Tea/coffee:

- Onkel: Oh, nicht so schlimm. Ich war nur gerade in der Nähe.
 Du: Ja, kein Problem. Setz dich doch, ich koche uns einen Kaffee.
 Onkel: Oh, nein, danke. Ich hatte gerade Kaffee, ich möchte gar nicht.

- (Uncle: Oh, that's okay. I was just nearby.
 You: Yes, no problem. Sit down there, I'll make us a coffee.
 Uncle: Oh, no, thanks. I just had some coffee, I don't want any at all.)

The above learner example shows clear pragmatic failure. A reoffer, if realised at all in this situation by a German NS, would not take the form “bist du sicher?”, but would rather be realised in an ad hoc manner, as in the following example from the present German NS data, where the reoffer is realised by – “Ach komm, Zeit für 'nen Kaffee hast Du doch” (Ah come on, you've time for a coffee).

G15M, German NS, Tea/Coffee:

- Du: Darf ich () 'nen Kaffee anbieten?
 Onkel: Eigentlich wollte ich nur kurz hallo sagen da ich in der Nähe war.
 Du: *Ach komm, Zeit für 'nen Kaffee hast Du doch.*
 Onkel: Nee nee, ich will dann mal wieder. Tschüß und Grüße.

- (You: Can I offer you a cup of coffee?
 Uncle: Actually, I just wanted to say a quick hello since I was nearby.
 You: *Ah come on, you've time for a coffee.*
 Uncle: No, no, I have to go. Bye and say hi to everyone.)

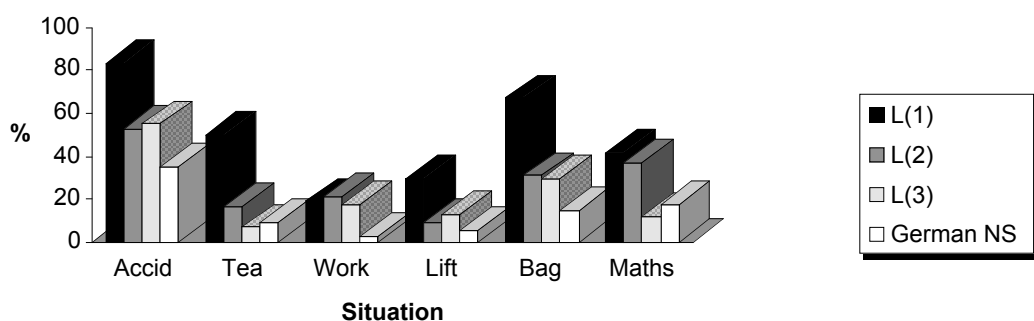
3.1.1 Pragmatic development over time

Seven months after completion of the FDCT described above, these same learners who demonstrated a lack of pragmatic competence in realising offers in the above data, completed the FDCT again (L(2)). At this point in time, they were had already spent two months studying in the target speech community after having completed their second year studying German in University College Dublin. After a further seven months, they once again completed the same task (L(3)). In this way, their pragmatic development in the speech acts offers and refusals of offers was traced over their time abroad. The results are presented in the following table 2 and figure 2.

Table 2: Offers realised over more than one turn

| | Accident | Tea | Work | Lift | Bag | Maths | Average |
|------------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Irish English NS | 61.5% | 70.4% | 15.4% | 59.3% | 77.8% | 55.6% | 56.7% |
| German NS | 35.5% | 8.8% | 3% | 5.9% | 14.7% | 17.6% | 14.2% |
| L(1) | 83.3% | 50% | 18.7% | 30.3% | 66.7% | 41.9% | 48.5% |
| L(2) | 53.3% | 17.2% | 20.7% | 9.4% | 31.2% | 37.5% | 28.2% |
| L(3) | 54.8% | 7.1% | 18.2% | 13.3% | 30.3% | 12.1% | 22.6% |

Figure 2: Offers realised over more than one turn



The figures of more than one turn per offer show a development towards the L2 norm. On average, the number of reoffers decreased from 48.5% in the first learner data set to 28.2% in the second data set and finally to 22.6% in the third data set, which is comparably close to the German NS average value of 14.2%. In the bag situation, for example, the number of reoffers fell from

66.7% in L(1) to 31.2% in L(2), and then to 30.3% in L(3). Only in the accident situation did the number of reoffers remain relatively high, similar to the German NS norm. This lends further evidence to the non-ritualistic nature of this reoffer. Rather than being ritualistic, it is rather motivated by a genuine concern that the refuser should change his/her mind and accept the offer, perhaps, in case of internal injuries, as noted above.

A paired samples t-test reflects this overall view. The recorded differences between L(1) and L(3) were found to be statistically significant at the 99% level in the tea, bag and maths situations, and at the 95% level in the accident and lift situations.⁴

It appears likely, therefore, that given German NS input, the Irish learners' awareness was drawn to the absence of the "polite reoffer" in German over their time abroad, many presumably having found its non-appearance impolite, most likely having also been in the situation I described earlier. A radical decrease in the number of second turns taken to realise offers is the consequence.

3.2 The need for triangulation

But did these learners' pragmatic competence really increase? Did they really adopt the German NS norm in realising offers? Did they become aware of cross-cultural differences in this area or was the significantly significant development charted here simply due to a practice-effect?⁵ It could be maintained, alternatively, that NS motivation in completing the questionnaire decreased over time, and that they, therefore, wrote less – thus the reduction in turns - given that learners' participation during the various stages of research was voluntary, and also since the completion of the relevant questionnaires was rather time-consuming, and possibly tedious as the situations were not changed over time.

A glance at the learner values for the accident situation in table 2 and figure 2 above, however, gives us some initial evidence that neither of these reasons accounted for the improvement reported. In this situation, the number of offers realised in more than one turn remains high at 54.8% in the third learner data

⁴ The work situation was excluded from this analysis as the differences between German NS and L(1) were not found to be significant in this situation (cf. above).

⁵ The practice effect refers to the potentially positive effect the use of similar or identical tasks employed at successive points in time in longitudinal studies may have on the performance of informants. Furthermore, some informants may improve to a greater extent than others, causing confusion in data analysis. The validity of the results may, thus, be effected (cf. *Keeves* 1988, 121).

set. This can be contrasted, for example, with the other situations in which changes did occur. Indeed, table 3 illustrates that the relative decrease was by far the lowest in the accident situation at 34.2% compared to 85.8% in the tea situation where the number of reoffers dropped from a high of 50% to a low of 7.1% in the third learner data set.

Table 3: Relative decreases in reoffers by Irish learners over time

| Accident | Tea | Lift | Bag | Maths |
|----------|-------|------|-----|-------|
| 34.2% | 85.8% | 56% | 54% | 71.1% |

It, thus, appears that the Irish learners continued to see a need for a significant degree of negotiation in this situation given the severity of the offence. In all other situations, the number of reoffers in L(3) was comparatively very low, ranging from 7.1% in the tea situation to 30.3% in the bag situation, with an average of 16.2% compared to the L(1) average of 41.5%.

Despite the indication provided by the accident situation of the reliability of the data gathered, it was necessary to triangulate data, i.e. to use "multiple methods in an investigation so as to overcome the weaknesses or biases of a single method" (*Denzin* 1988, 511) (cf. also *Kasper* (1998, 104f)). This was done primarily via retrospective interviews based on informants' own productions, and also, to a lesser extent, a post-year abroad questionnaire (cf. *Barron* in progress). Both instruments were designed to tap metapragmatic awareness of pragmalinguistic judgements, i.e. Urteile über die Angemessenheit sprachlicher Handlungsstrategien und Redemittel in gegebenen Kontexten (judgements about the appropriateness of linguistic strategies and phrases in given contexts (my translation) (*Kasper* 1998, 86)). Both were administered in the final month of the learners' study abroad period.

The type of retrospective interview employed in the present study (cf. also *Barron* in progress) required informants to participate in a role-play based on two situations which had appeared in the FDCT, to immediately playback the video-recording of these role-plays one by one in order to activate their memories and to retrospect on their performance via probes given by the researcher (cf. Appendix III). The probes were developed and pre-tested prior to the interviews broadly based on the categories designed by *Robinson* (1992) in her evaluation of verbal reports as a means of investigating IL pragmatic knowledge (cf. categories 1-5 in Appendix II).⁶ However, the main focus of

⁶ *Robinson's* probes were originally based on the notion of exploring intentions, cognitions, planning and evaluations put forward by *Ericsson/Simon* (1993, 198), but it was extended to include an exploration of pragmatic knowledge (cf. *Robinson* 1992, 47).

the interviews was, as, indeed is the focus of the present paper, participants' metaknowledge of pragmatic phenomena (category 4).

3.2.1 “No means no!”

Comments elicited from the group of learners in the post-year abroad questionnaire, and, more particularly, in the retrospective interview, clearly support the findings of the FDCT. Retrospection on the lift situation, in which informants role-played refusing a lift offered by a German NS, provided extensive information on learners' perception of differences at the discourse level. Asked by the Irish NS researcher would the role-play of the lift situation which they had just enacted with a German NS have been any different, in their opinion, if the person offering had been a NS of Irish English and in English, several informants referred to differences in the German and Irish way of offering and refusing offers. Some of their comments include:

- (1) Lift, A13F:
They probably would have offered a lot more.
- (2) Lift, A6M:
Yeah, they would have been keep on keep on at you to keep on coming and they would have asked you a couple of times. They wouldn't just ask you once. Would've asked you again.
- (3) Lift, A16F:
em – they probably would have said are your sure? – maybe once or twice ... she just said, okay, goodbye.
- (4) Lift, C5M:
... someone in Ireland would probably ask you again and again.

Responses to a general question posed on the post-year abroad questionnaire as to whether students felt it necessary to adopt a more direct/indirect manner of speaking in German than in English, also reflected the above retrospective data, with some remarks focusing particularly on the case of offers and accepting offers:

- (5) A6M: "If a German offers you a drink and if you refuse out of politeness, he/she won't offer a second time like Irish people"

A further question which focused on how learners would describe the German people in general also addressed this issue:

(6) A1F: "Direct - "no" means "no" and "yes" means "yes.""

There is no doubt, but that the comments from both of these types of metapragmatic data reflect an awareness of cross-cultural differences in offering, and also display the effect of negative reinforcement on learners' acceptance of the German norm. It is evident that these learners have learned from critical incidents with German NS, some of them clearly unpleasant.

The next important issue related to Irish learners' of German's deviation from the target NS norm. In this context, learners were asked whether they thought a German NS would have acted anyway differently to the way they, as learners of German, had acted in offering help in the maths situation. Some admitted deviating from the NS norm.

(7) Maths, A7M:

Yeah, they (Germans) would have offered help, but, em, ... I don't know, they just wouldn't have been so persistent, not persistent, so anxious to give you help.

(8) Maths, A8F:

... I think, I think in Ireland, they'd be more, you know what I mean, they're more, em, they wouldn't want anyone to think they wouldn't offer, whereas, here, you know, they offer, you both know you've offered, so you don't think any more about it, sort of thing... In Ireland, well, unless they don't like you, they're going to kind of say "go on".

On the other hand, other informants highlighted their adherence to L2 pragmatic norms when asked would they have offered in the same way to another Irish person in English as they did in the maths situation in German.

(9) Maths, A6M:

I would have been a bit more, eh, I would would have asked them a couple more times. I would like have said, can I help you there? ... I would have been more adamant, more insistent.

This learner, thus, does not insist as much in German as he would in his mother tongue, English. The following comments elicited to a general

question posed on the post-year abroad questionnaire as to whether students felt it necessary to adopt a more direct/indirect manner of speaking in German than in English, also highlight the need to adopt different norms when acting in a foreign language.

- (10) A15F: "The Germans don't understand you when you say no and mean yes - e.g. refusing an offer of a drink, food, etc. Forget the Irish polite way and say yes as you won't be offered again."
- (11) A17F: "You only get one chance with Germans. If you want something, you have to say so, because they won't offer again."

Further remarks in this context included the following responses to the question as to whether the learners who had identified differences on the discourse level would adopt the Irish rather than the German norm in offering/refusing in German. Here, opinions differed, although most learners agreed that the German NS norm should be followed:

- (12) Lift, A16F:
No (laugh) no you just – no, you don't
- (13) Lift, C1F:
No, not to a German. If they say no, I'd just go, oh, okay..., I think I just find them a bit more like sort of stand-offish or something so when they say no, I think they mean it, you know the way in Ireland when we say no, no, you know we actually do want it
- (14) A21F, Maths:
... you'd know Germans are more direct and they'd say, you know.....They're more direct. You have to switch sometimes and tap in to their mentality and be like them a bit just so they'll understand you.
- (15) Maths, A27F:
Researcher: *Would you do the same (i.e. reoffer) in German?*
A27F: Probably not, no.
Researcher: *Why?*
A27F: They mean what they say and that's it.

(16) Late, A10F:

It's just like, you know, with the cup of tea, like. Like, we're getting different now, like, if somebody comes in here and if we say "do you want a cup of tea" and they say "no," I, that's it like, I won't go, "Oh, of course you will," like. Whereas when we came here first, before I would have gone "Are you sure like?, it's no problem, I can make you a cup of tea. Now I sit down as well (laugh)...

...but, like, my parents noticed it when I went home as well, like If someone came in the door: "Do you want me to make you a cup of tea." "Oh, no" and I bugger off, like. "You should offer a second time" (parents) "you should offer a second time," "We don't do that in Germany"

But you do, you pick it up, like. You know that when a German says no, they mean no, ... and if they say yes, they mean yes ... whereas an Irish person doesn't mean it... They know that if they say no, they know you're going to ask them two or three more times and they'll get a chance to say, "Oh, well, of course I will."

... but like, you see, I'm the same now as well. Before when we were at home, we'd always say, "oh no" and then "oh, okay," but now, if I want it, I'll say "yes," if I don't, I'll say no because you know with the Germans, if you say no the first time, they're not going to ask again..... but I wanted a cup of tea!

Indeed, this latter learner's adherence to L2 norms is so advanced that she has found herself transferring the L2 norms of offering into her L1, an occurrence supporting the view proposed by *Olshtain/Blum-Kulka* (1985, 304), and reflecting research findings for immigrants (cf. *Blum-Kulka/Sheffer* 1993, 197, 220).

Some other learners, on the other hand, despite having noticed cultural differences in this area, gave the Irish way preference, for reasons of politeness and habit, although even these informants did show adoption of German NS norms in their acceptance of offers in German (cf. A4F).

(18) Lift, C5M:

C5M: ... probably ..., the Irish way

Researcher: Why?

C5M: It's more polite.

- (19) Lift, A4F:
 A4F: I'd probably say ah, go on, go on.
 Researcher: *Why? Why, if they don't do it?*
 A4F: I don't know like, it's just habit like.
 Researcher: *So, are you conscious of that?*
 A4F: I probably wouldn't do it as often, but just one time.
 Researcher: *Why not?*
 A4F: I don't know, well, I know for me, if somebody asks you something first, it's, ah, no, and then, if they ask again – okay, but like, I mean, that's, I think, that's just habit.
 Researcher: *Do you think you should stop saying ah, go on, go on?*
 A4F: I'd say it's probably a bit annoying maybe for like people who don't know the way we go on.
 Researcher: *Would you feel uncomfortable, if you didn't say it – if you said it once?*
 A4F: ... I'd feel rude
 Researcher: *And so, if they only ask once, do you feel, oh, they only asked me once, I really wanted that?*
 A4F: An no, I think now, it's like, I'm more inclined to say straight away out.

4. Discussion

The metapragmatic data leaves no doubt but that the findings obtained from the FDCT regarding the development of learners' competence in realising offers are not mere products of the data collection process, but, rather, represented genuine improvements in learners' pragmatic competence over time.

Triangulation of learner production and process data revealed that the majority of informants in the present study did adopt the L2 norm, considering it easier, and more efficient. Apart from an interest in the language, and a desire to speak it well (84.8% of the learners in the study having indicated on a pre-year abroad questionnaire that their primary motivation for going abroad to study was to improve their German), strange responses, funny looks and patronising comments such as “ich habe doch nein gesagt” (I said no, didn't I?) from German NS all combine to convince many Irish learners to adopt the German norm when offering, even though their native intuition may make them want

to do otherwise. Furthermore, pragmatic failure, such as in the case of sitting for hours parched after refusing a drink without meaning to, teach the same learners by negative reinforcement to accept offers when they wish to first time.

The latter comments by learners, C5M and A4F, in the retrospective interview, however, highlighted that, despite recognition of differences between L1 and L2 norms, some learners may prefer to reject the L2 norm, and continue to obey the L1 norm, usually for reasons of politeness. This finding reflects research by *Hinkel* (1996) who investigated learners' perceptions of L2 pragmalinguistic norms and behaviours, and concluded that cross-cultural differences can lead learners to reject L2 norms, and also findings by *Blum-Kulka/Sheffer* (1993) who showed American bilingual immigrants in Israel to have a high, albeit limited, awareness of cross-cultural differences and bilingual usage between the two particular speech communities,⁷ and for learners to adopt an "intercultural style," different to both the L1 and L2. Rejection of L2 norms also calls the view held by *Kasper/Schmidt* (1996, 156) to mind. They problematise the suitability of NS norms as a target for learners' pragmatic development,⁸ pointing out that learners may, as they phrase it, "opt for pragmatic distinctiveness as a strategy of identity assertion," as they may not feel comfortable with L2 strategies, finding them, for example, too impolite or too polite, as the case may be, when compared to their own L1 strategies.⁹ As *Kecskés* (1999, 307) found, individual differences do exist on the level of adoption of norms, as the conscious effort to overcome the barrier of cultural differences depends on individual decisions. Such an awareness of pragmatic differences in offer realisations would not have been identified by the FDCT. It can, therefore, be concluded that triangulation points to even higher levels of awareness of cross-cultural differences in offering than suggested by the FDCT production data since some learners preferred to adhere to L1 norms.

⁷ It should be mentioned at this point that learners are not aware of all cross-cultural differences. The present retrospective interviews, showed, for example, that learners were not aware of differences in the area of mitigation. Differences which trigger critical incidents for the learners, such as the absence of a reoffer, are the most likely to cause a change in linguistic behaviour.

⁸ Cf. also *Pearce/Kang* (1987, 238ff) who suggest that optimal competence consists of a combination of more than one culture.

⁹ Cf. also *Littlewood* (1983), *Kasper* (1995, 82), *Siegal* (1995) and *Hinkel* (1996).

5. Concluding comments

In an Irish/German context, realisations of offers and refusals of offers cause difficulty for Irish learners of German due to the presence of ritual refusals in Irish NS realisations, and their absence from German NS realisations. The hypothesis that time spent in the target speech community would lead to an increase in awareness of this linguistic feature, and more L2-like learner productions was, however, difficult to test as evidence gathered by employing a FDCT production questionnaire alone would have been overshadowed by the possibility that any decreases noted in the number of turns employed by learners to realise an offer in German were triggered by a practice effect or the possibility of declining motivation on the part of the informants.

Triangulation of learner pragmalinguistic with metapragmatic data provided the means of testing this hypothesis, and in this case, confirming it. Both the FDCT production data elicited and also the metapragmatic data from retrospective interviews and a post-year abroad questionnaire confirmed movement of the learners toward the L2-norm. Furthermore, the metapragmatic data suggested that the level of awareness of cross-cultural differences was actually higher than the production data suggested, due to adherence by some learners to L1 norms in their offer speech act productions. It can, thus, be concluded, that at the end of the year abroad, there were very few learners saying in dismay: “but I really wanted that cup of coffee!”

Appendix I

Free Discourse Completion Task (FDCT) - Example

You are alone in the house. Your uncle happens to be in the area and calls in. You invite him in and offer him a cup of tea. He REFUSES.

Uncle: Hello, how are you?

You: Hello Uncle Pat. Come on in. I'm afraid they are all away for the day

Uncle:

:
:
:
:
:

Appendix II

FDCT constellations, where table 1 relates to the person offering, and table 2 to the person refusing.

Table 1: FDCT constellations for offer situations

| No. | <u>Offer Situation</u> | Synopsis of Situation | Social Distance | Social Dominance |
|-----|------------------------|--|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. | Accident | Following accident, priest offers to bring student to hospital | + SD | $x > y$ |
| 2. | Tea/Coffee | Niece/nephew offers uncle tea/coffee | - SD | $x < y$ |
| 3. | Lift | Professor offers students lift home after guest-lecture | - SD | $x > y$ |
| 4. | Work | Trainee offers to help new boss' son with Economics | + SD | $x < y$ |
| 5. | Bag | Stranger offers to help carry suitcase in airport | + SD | $x = y$ |
| 6. | Maths | Friend offers help in Maths | - SD | $x = y$ |

Table 2: FDCT constellations for refusal situations

| No. | <u>Refusal Situation</u> | Synopsis of Situation | Social Distance | Social Dominance |
|-----|--------------------------|--|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. | Accident | Following accident, student refuses priest's offer to be brought to hospital | + SD | $x < y$ |
| 2. | Tea/Coffee | Uncle refuses tea/coffee | - SD | $x > y$ |
| 3. | Lift | Students refuse lift home from Professor after guest-lecture | - SD | $x < y$ |
| 4. | Work | New boss refuses trainee's offer of help for son with economics | + SD | $x > y$ |
| 5. | Bag | Refuse help from stranger to carry suitcase in airport | + SD | $x = y$ |
| 6. | Maths | Friend refuses offer of help in Maths. | - SD | $x = y$ |

Appendix III

Retrospective interview probes

| Categories | Probes employed |
|--|---|
| 1. Noticed or attended features of the research situation: | What went through your mind while you were doing the role-plays? |
| 2. Utterance planning: | How did you decide to say what you did? |
| 3. Evaluation of alternative utterances: | - Did you consider alternatives to what you said? - Why did you reject them? |
| 4. Pragmatic difficulty/pragmatic knowledge: | (a) Do you think a German would have said something different to what you said in this situation? (b) Had you participated in the role-play in English with another Irish person, do you think - you would have acted differently or said anything different? - your partner would have acted differently or said anything different? (c) Did you feel in any way uncomfortable with what you were asked to do in the role-plays? (d) You have enacted this situation three times now in the past year. Is there anything you consciously did different this time? |
| 5. Linguistic difficulty | Did you have to alter what you would have wished to say in any way due to language difficulties? |
| 6. Degree of heightened awareness of pragmatic issues | General question: Did you discuss any of the role-play or questionnaire situations with native speakers during the year? If so, when?, what? |

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