

## A Corpus Study of Internal Modifications in Chinese Request and its Application in CSL Instructional Design (利用語料庫研究結果設計中文請求行為中內部修飾語之教學 材料)

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**Abstract:** A corpus study was conducted to investigate Chinese request in order to design a course for Czech learners of Chinese. The primary goal of the course is to develop learners' pragmatic competence in using appropriate request strategies and employing politeness devices or internal modifications to head act in varies social contexts in a campus setting. In order to ensure the authenticity and rationality of teaching materials, and to avoid potential subjective preferences of teachers when designing pragmatic teaching materials, this study first outlined the steps involved in the process of a self-built corpus study, clarified coding scheme of request utterances and investigated the proper usage of internal modification in Chinese requests. Additionally, it demonstrated how the obtained linguistic knowledge can be effectively applied to language teaching materials and lesson plans.

**摘要:** 本研究旨在利用語料庫研究結果，為捷克學習者的中文語用課程設計教學材料。此語用課程目的在提升捷克中文學習者請求行為的能力，包括面對不同的社交情境，如何選擇較為適當的請求策略和內外部輔助行為。為確保教材的真實性和合理性，且避免教學者在設計語用教材時潛在的主觀偏好，本研究先是列出了使用自製語料庫研究內部輔助行為的步驟，接著釐清在文獻上較不統一的請求行為標記系統，進而根據研究結果設計有效的教材和課程內容。

**Keywords:** Corpus, teaching pragmatics, second language pragmatics, request, internal modification

**關鍵詞:** 語料庫，語用教學，語用標記，請求行為，內部修飾語

## 1. Introduction

The development of learners' pragmatic competence are getting attentions as the purpose of learning a second or foreign language (L2) has shifted to communication-oriented under the influence of globalization (Nunan, 1989; Taguchi, 2021). Pragmatic competence, a subset area of sociolinguistic competence, represents learners' knowledge of knowing and understanding what to say to whom in the various social situations and how to say it properly (Hymes, 1992). Failure to achieve such ability for a L2 learner may cause miscommunication and even lead to an unintended image of the target language learners as insensitive and rude (Thomas, 1983). Therefore, there is the need to raise the awareness of both the teachers' and learners' pragmatic knowledge and to introduce to the development of learners' pragmatic competence in the language classrooms. As L2 learners most likely have difficulty to acquire pragmatic knowledge through osmosis in a foreign language learning context, providing them a means for developing pragmatic ability would be every foreign language instructor's task (Halenko, 2016; Ifantidou, 2013; Sykes & Cohen, 2018).

The target pragmatic function investigated in this study is the request strategies. One part of the pragmatic competence is manifested through the performance of speech acts. Such linguistic behavior are not assessable as correct or incorrect but only as appropriate or inappropriate (Searle, 1969; Austin & Urmson, 2009). The speech act of making a request occurs abandonly in daily life and is considered an imposition to the hearer. The inherent face-threatening attribute of the act requires the speaker to investigate situational, social, and cultural factors before choosing pragmatically appropriate linguistics form. Therefore, it is crucial that learners are informed the knowledge to achieve the speech act and meanwhile maintain a harmonious relationship with the hearer.

To develop a language course aimed at enhancing learners' pragmatic competence, one of the many issues to be considered is determining the course content and instructional approach. Teaching material and a lesson plan are crucial to help L2 learners use socially appropriate language in various social contexts. Teachers, who wish to develop students' pragmatic skills, might consider composing their own materials. Doing so might lead to another concern as pragmatic strategies are complex in nature. Language use in learning materials that is not based on empirical or corpus studies might be subjected to the teachers' own intuitions (which may not be accurate) and anecdotal evidence.

The aim of this paper is to present the development of instructional recourses and a lesson plan designed for effective teaching of request expressions in Chinese based on empirical findings from a corpus analysis. In order to effectively enhance learners' ability to make requests and utilize request strategies and internal modification in a university context, it is crucial to first identify the appropriate usage of the target items in natural language before developing teaching materials and implementing course instruction. This objective will be achieved by collecting natural language use strategies from a small corpus assembled by the researcher. Subsequently, a comprehensive annotation scheme will be applied incorporating the acquired pragmatics knowledge into the teaching materials.

## 2. Background

### *Component of request*

The most widely accepted definition of a request is that a request is a directive speech act whose illocutionary purpose is to get the hearer to do something in circumstances in which it is not obvious that s/he will perform the action in the normal course of events. By initiating a request, the speaker believes that the hearer can perform an action and the speaker is making the request mostly for his/her or a third party's benefit (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1989; Littlewood, 2007; Searle, 1969). A request act is usually composed of three parts, namely head act, internal modification (IM), and external modification (EM). In the following example:

- (1) 你好，打擾 一下，我 能 借 你的 菜單 看 一 下 嗎？  
 Nǐhǎo, dǎrǎo yíxià, wǒ néng jiè nǐde càidān kàn-yíxià ma?  
 hello, interrupt a bit, I can borrow your menu have a look QP<sup>1</sup>  
*Hello, sorry to trouble you. Can I have the menu and take a look?*

我能借你的菜單看看嗎？*Wǒ néng jiè nǐde càidān kàn-yíxià ma?* (Can I borrow your menu to have a look?) is the head act that realizes the main illocutionary force. 你好 *nǐhǎo* (Hello) and 打擾一下 *dǎrǎo yíxià* (excuse me) are not core parts of the whole request act. These two independent sentences are external modifications which constitute supportive moves. In the head act, the main requested action verb is added with 一下 *yíxià* (*yíxià*), which literally denotes the meaning of “a little, for a short while”. V-*yíxià* is considered an IM used to ease imposition.

A head act is an independent minimum unit of a request sequence that delivers the main illocutionary force, here to realize the request intention (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1989). Based on the scale of directness, head act strategies are categorized into direct and conventional indirect and non-conventional indirect (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1989). Directness represents the degree of apparentness of an intent. Direct request strategy includes mood derivable, explicit performatives, hedged performatives, obligation statement and want statement. Conventional indirect request strategies are suggestory formulae and query preparatory. The least direct request strategy (i.e., non-conventional strategy) contains strong and mild hints. Non-conventional strategies were neglected in this study due to its inherent complex and full context-dependent feature. Therefore, it is also excluded from instruction in the teaching course.

IM and EM are, on the other hand, adjuncts to the head act and used to downgrade or mitigate the perceived face threat of the speech act. EMs are independent phrases and sentences that occur before or after head acts. EMs are viewed as discourse level politeness devices. IMs usually are syntactic and lexical or phrasal devices used within a head act

<sup>1</sup> The abbreviation stands for “question particle”.

(Faerch & Kasper, 1989). The current study focuses on the head act strategies and IMs and does not include the research on EMs.

### *Clarification of categorization*

To the best knowledge of the author, the categorization of the head acts and modifications in Chinese is rather inconsistent, not clearly specified or lack of transparency. Therefore, this corpus study saw the necessity for clarification and propose a clear categorization. Issues are discussed in the following:

- This study argues that requests that are realized by 麻煩 *máfan* (to trouble) and 幫 *bāng* (to help) belong to the Explicit Performance strategy category. 麻煩 *máfan* (to trouble) and 幫 *bāng* (to help) are usually treated as IM devices to tone down the illocutionary force of the head act (Dong, 2008; Gao, 1999; Hong, 1996; Lee-Wong, 1994; S. Li, 2019). It is, however, arguable that sentences such as (2) and (3) constitute a Mood Derivable head act attached with an IM. By the definition of the head act category, when a request is realized by the imperative mood, it is considered the highest level of directness and is categorized as Mood Derivable request strategy. An imperative sentence nearly always starts the sentence with an imperative verb which delivers the intention of a request. Sentences (2) and (3) both start with a verb (麻煩 *máfan* (to trouble) or 幫 *bāng* (to help)) simply denoting a request intention, not the expected action from the hearer. Therefore, theoretically, the head acts of this kind cannot be categorized as Mood Derivable.

- (2) 麻煩 打開 窗戶。  
 Máfán dǎkāi chuānghù.  
 To trouble open window  
*May I trouble you for opening the window?*
- (3) 幫 我 打開 窗戶。  
 Bāng wǒ dǎkāi chuānghù.  
 Help me open window  
*Open the window for me.*

Furthermore, the definition of an Explicit Performance states that in this type of head act, request performative verbs are used to operationalize the illocutionary force. In the previous studies (as cited above), illocutionary verbs typically include 請求 *qǐngqǐu* (to request), 求 *qiú* (to beg). However, 麻煩 *máfan* (to trouble) and 幫 *bāng* (to help) have the same linguistic behavior and pragmatic function. In Li and Jiang (2019), 麻煩 *máfan* (to trouble) and 幫 *bāng* (to help) were indeed listed as the Explicit Performative strategies. Therefore, this study tagged requests of such kind as the Explicit Performance strategy.

- This study does not consider an utterance with performative verbs, such as 叫 *jiào* (to ask), 命令 *mìnglìng* (to command), and 要求 *yāoqiú* (to require) a request. These instances were recognized in the previous studies (Gao, 1999; Rue & Zhang, 2008; Wang, 2011) as request head acts. These performative verbs essentially carry out the

illocutionary force of a speech act. However, on the basis of their semantic function, they explicitly convey a demand or an order rather than a request. They do not satisfy the definition of a request performative verbs.

- This study also intended to offer a unified categorization of IM devices in Chinese. In the previous studies (as cited above), different inclusion of IM was presented which might influence the interpretation of linguistic request behavior in Chinese. For example, 請問 *qǐngwèn* (May I ask) has not been consistently categorized as a request modification. This study argues that 請問 *qǐngwèn* (May I ask) is an EM rather than an IM due to its pragmatic function as an alerter used to catch the hearer's attention. It is not obligatorily attached to a head act syntactically.

Given the above considerations, the proposed categorizations of request strategies of head act (excluding non-conventional strategy) and IM are shown in Tables 1 and 2. All the possible examples of each category can also be found in both tables.

**Table 1 Request strategy types**

Request strategy type	Definition and example
<i>Direct strategies</i>	
Mood Derivable	The grammatical mood of the verb in the utterance marks its illocutionary force as a request. The prototypical form of this strategy is imperative sentence.
Explicit Performative	The illocutionary intent is explicitly named by the speaker by using a relevant illocutionary verb. Request illocutionary verbs in Chinese includes 麻煩 <i>máfan</i> (to trouble), 勞駕 <i>láojià</i> (to trouble), 拜托 <i>bàituō</i> (to beg), 求 <i>qiú</i> (to beg), 幫 <i>bāng</i> (to help), 懇請 <i>kěnpǐng</i> (to sincerely ask), 請求 <i>qǐngqiú</i> (to request).
Hedged Performative	The illocutionary verb denoting the requestive intent is modified, e.g., by modal verbs or verbs expressing intention. In Chinese the hedged performative request are executed by the modal verbs “would like”, namely, 想 <i>xiǎng</i> , 想要 <i>xiǎngyào</i> , 想讓 <i>xiǎngràng</i> and 想叫 <i>xiǎngjiào</i> .
Obligation Performative	The use of this strategy, which is also called “locution derivable”, enables the listener to directly derive the illocutionary intent from the semantic meaning of the utterance (locution). This strategy type is manifested by 應該 <i>yīnggāi</i> (should), 必須 <i>bìxū</i> (need to), 得 <i>děi</i> (must), 要 <i>yào</i> (must) and 最好 <i>zuìhǎo</i> (it's best to) together with the second person subject.

Want Statement	The utterance expresses the speakers' desire that the event denoted in the proposition come about. The lease direct direct strategy is realized by using want verbs, such as 希望 <i>xīwàng</i> (to hope) and 需要 <i>xūyào</i> (to need) accompanied with a first person or a third person subject.
<i>Conventional Indirect Strategies</i>	
Suggestory Formula	The illocutionary intent is phrased as a suggestion by means of a framing routine formula. In Chinese, suggestory formula used to convey the request force are, for example, 要不 <i>yàobù</i> (or...) and 還是...吧 <i>háishì ...ba</i> (had better).
Query Preparatory	The utterance contains queries about the conditions for request compliance, such as the hearer's ability, willingness, or possibility to carry out the requested act, or whether the speaker has permission to ask according to his or her wishes. In Chinese, the words used in interrogative sentence to acquire the hearer's intention, willingness, and availability to perform the request include 可以 <i>kěyǐ</i> (can), 能 <i>néng</i> (can), 願意 <i>yuànyì</i> (be willing to), 方便 <i>fāngbiàn</i> (be convenient), 有時間...嗎? <i>yǒu shíjiān ... ma?</i> (Do you have time to...?), 你介意...嗎? <i>nǐ jièyì ... ma?</i> (Do you mind...?)

**Table 2 Internal modification types in Chinese**

Type	example
Polite form of 2 <sup>nd</sup> sig. pron.	您 坐。 <i>Nín zuò</i> You sit (You) Sit down.
Politeness marker	請 坐。 <i>Qǐng zuò.</i> Please sit. <i>Please have a sit.</i>
Verb reduplication	能 不 能 看看 這份 文件? <i>Néng bù néng kànkàn zhèfèn wénjiàn?</i> Can not can look-look this document? <i>Can you have a look at this document?</i>
Conditional clause	如果 沒 問題, 給 我 另外 一份 文件。 <i>Rúguǒ méi wèntí, gěi wǒ lìngwài yífèn wénjiàn</i> If no problem, give me another one document <i>If there is no issue, give me another document.</i>

Hesitation matrix clause	<p>不 知 道 你 能 不 能  <i>Bù zhīdào nǐ néngbùnéng</i>          Not know you can or can't  <i>I am not sure if you can</i>          給 我 另 外 一 份 文 件 ？  <i>gěi wǒ lìngwài yí fèn wénjiàn</i>          give me another one CL<sup>2</sup> document  <i>give me another document.</i></p>
Sentence-final particle	<p>回 我 電 話 吧。  <i>Huí wǒ diànhuà ba</i>          Return my call SP<sup>3</sup>  <i>Please call me back.</i></p>
<hr/> This category also includes: 啊 <i>a</i> , 嘛 <i>ma</i> , 呢 <i>ne</i> and 啲 <i>you</i> .	
Understater	<p>回 我 一 下 電 話。  <i>Huí wǒ yíxià diànhuà</i>          Return me a bit call  <i>Please call me back.</i></p>
<hr/> This category also includes: 一点 <i>yìdiǎn</i> (a little bit), 一些 <i>yìxiē</i> (some)	
Adverbial downtoner	<p>可 能 你 再 給 我 另 外 一 份 文 件。  <i>Kěnéng nǐ zài gěi wǒ lìngwài yí fèn wénjiàn</i>          Maybe you again give me another one CL document  <i>Maybe you give me another document.</i></p>
<hr/> This category also includes: 估 計 <i>gūjì</i> (maybe), 順 便 <i>shùnbìan</i> (in passing, conveniently), 盡 量 <i>jìnliàng</i> (do one's best), 先 <i>xiān</i> (first) 稍 微 <i>shaowei</i> (a little)	
Tag questions	<p>給 我 另 外 一 份 文 件， 好 嗎 ？  <i>Gěi wǒ lìngwài yí fèn wénjiàn, hǎo ma?</i>          Give me another one document, ok QP?  <i>Give me another document, ok?</i></p>
<hr/> This category also includes: 好不好？ <i>hǎo bù hǎo?</i> (ok?), 行 嗎 ？ <i>xíng ma?</i> (ok?! It works?), 行 不 行 ？ <i>xíng bù xíng?</i> (ok?/works?) 怎 麼 樣 ？ <i>zěnmeyàng</i> (how about that?), and 如 何 ？ <i>rúhé?</i> (How does it sound?)	

<sup>2</sup> The abbreviation stands for “classifier”.

<sup>3</sup> The abbreviation stands for “sentence-final particle”.

### 3. Analysis of the internal modification in a corpus of Chinese novels.

#### 3.1 The corpus

The corpus assembled by the researcher consists of 10 Chinese fiction novels (Appendix 1), including romance, young adult, detective and sci-fi. The heterogeneity of novel allows greater generalizability of the data. The collection follows three criteria:

- Availability and accessibility  
Considering the number of novels accessible on the internet, it is fair to question if the 10 novels are representative. However, the collected data contains more than 3.5 million words. Within the research period, this is the best the researcher could handle.
- Contemporariness  
All the novels are published no earlier than before the year 2000. Settings in the novels are also in contemporary time no earlier than the 1980s.
- Turn-taking  
Only highly or moderately interactive novels are included.
- Standard Chinese language  
All the turn-takings are in standard Chinese language. No clear tendency of dialect usage is found.

The reasons of assembling the corpus for the purpose of investigating request strategies and IMs are: First, in the literature, it has rarely been done, and there is a lack of unity and transparency of the coding scheme. Second, most of the data that are used to analyze request behavior are collected through written or oral discourse completion tests (DCTs) (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1989; Littlewood, 2007; Searle, 1969), role play (Han, 2012, 2013), or field study, such as emails (Chang & Hsu, 1998; Kong, 1998; Yao et al., 2021). Data collected through DCTs and role play might be staged language use. Lastly, this research is intended to inform the development of teaching materials. This study was designed to include natural language use in situated discourse (Huang, 2021) in teaching materials.

#### 3.2 Coding

Given the dependence on the context of the request act, similar to the previous corpus-based pragmatic research (Aijmer & Rühlemann, 2019; Caprario et al., 2022; Cheng, 2010; Fernández, 2022), this study integrated both vertical and horizontal reading in the process of coding. First, the researcher read carefully through the text, and then identified and tagged the request strategies of head acts and IM devices according to the revision coding scheme presented in Tables 1 and 2, along with the situational factors.

During head acts identification, other illocutionary forces in disguise were ruled out, such as orders, suggestions, invitations, and warnings which might be occurred with similar sentence patters and language devices. For example:

- (4) 我 希望 你 再 考慮 考慮。 對 你 有 好 處。  
 Wǒ xīwàng nǐ zài kǎolù kǎolù. Duì nǐ yǒu hǎochù  
 I hope you again consider consider. For you has benefit  
*I hope you can reconsider it. It's better for you.*
- (5) 你 快 回 去 吧! 很 晚 了。  
 Nǐ kuài huíqù ba! Hěn wǎn le.  
 You hurry back SP Very late SP  
*Go back now! It's getting late.*

In (4), the utterance might be found similar to the Want Statement used to perform request force. Because the beneficiary of the force goes to the hearer, it is not considered a request. In (5), suggestory formula form might seem to be a request, however, the purpose is for the hearer's own good.

The tagged sentences were recorded in an Excel file. There were two informants involved in this process. They each reviewed 200 tagged sentences and the researcher held a meeting with them to come to a consensus that the tagging results were valid. This screening process yielded 1810 occurrences of head acts in the corpus.

The target situational factors that influence the linguistic request behaviors include social power (P), social distance (D) between interlocutors and rank of imposition (R) of a request force (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Each identified head act was tagged PDR-high (PDR-H) when the hearer is with higher social power and/or social distance to the speaker and/or the request is considered high imposition, while PDR-low (PDR-L) is an opposite situation. The annotation of situational factors was challenging due to the potential subjectivity. For this reason, inter-coder agreement was sought to eliminate such kind of bias. Two native Chinese speakers were recruited and each of them were requested to review 40% of the coding with 20 % overlapped between coders. Three coders did a trial run of tagging PDR for the purpose of finding common ground. All the disagreements were settled during two meetings.

This manual annotation process was then followed by using KWIC (key word in context) function to retrieve all instances of the IM devices from the list (Table 2). Those instances which do not occur in the identified head acts are then weeded out through careful vertical reading. The results were also stored in the same Excel file with the head act.

### 3.3 Results

The distribution data in Table 3 shows that the overall use of head act strategies in Chinese was in line with previous findings (Gao, 1999; Hong, 1996; Kong, 1998; Rue & Zhang, 2008). More than 60 % of the head acts were made by using Mood Derivable and Explicit Performative strategies, which are in the top two position in the ranking of directness. Especially in PDR-L context, almost 80% of the requests were made with imperative sentences. In the PDR-H situations, however, Mood Derivable, Explicit Performative and Query Preparatory are equally distributed.

**Table 3 Distribution of request head act strategies across all social contexts**

	MD		EP		HP		OP		WS		SF		QP	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total	<b>809</b>	<b>44.6</b>	326	18.0	106	5.9	85	4.7	67	3.7	128	7.1	289	16
PRD-H	<b>258</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>21.6</b>	68	5.8	44	5.2	48	6.7	96	9.6	<b>275</b>	<b>25.3</b>
PRD-L	<b>551</b>	<b>78.8</b>	110	13.6	38	2.4	41	6.0	19	4.7	32	3.7	14	1.78

**Table 4 Distribution of request head act strategies with/without IM(s) across PDR-H and PDR-L contexts in percentage**

	contexts in percentage			
	PDR-High		PDR-Low	
	Without IM	With IM(s)	Without IM	With IMs
Mood Derivable	0	<b>100</b>	<b>79.5</b>	20.5
Explicit Performative	15.6	84.4	53.3	46.7
Hedged Performative	54.2	45.8	28.4	71.6
Obligation Performative	29.5	70.5	46.3	53.7
Want Statement	33.9	66.1	50	50
Suggestory Formula	35	65	34.9	65.1
Query Preparatory	29.4	70.6	85.4	14.6

Table 4 presents the interaction between situational factors and IM(s). When PDR is high, almost all head acts regardless of directness are frequently accompanied with IM(s). This result also echoes the declaration in the previous studies (Cai, 2023; Dong, 2008; Gao, 1999; S. Li, 2019). Politeness behaviors are deeply governed by the perception of situation factors, such as social power, social distance and, in the cases of requests, rank of request impositions (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1989; Brown & Levinson, 1978; Deng, 2016; S. Li, 2019; Rue & Zhang, 2008). Bare Mood Derivable was not found in PDR-H contexts and chances of its occurrence in PDR-R contexts were significantly low.

Table 5 provides raw frequency of internal modifications across PDR-H and PDR-L contexts. The result indicates that in PDR-H contexts, the most frequently used combination is Mood Derivable and the politeness marker 請 *qǐng* (please). Want Statement and Suggestory Formula with the examined IM are least preferable request strategies in PDR-H contexts. Final-particle 吧 *ba* is more likely to be employed when PDR is low. Tag questions usually cooccurred with Mood Derivable and Explicit Performative. Conditional clause used to confirm the availability, willingness and validity is not often spotted. However, after carefully examining the cases where conditional questions were added to the head acts, those scenarios were considered high risk of face loss. In other words, such conditional questions were essential when asking complicated or even unreasonable requests or request of a person with high social power. The phenomenon was also observed in instances involving hesitation matrix clause.

Table 5 Raw frequency of internal modifications across PDR-H and PDR-L contexts

		MD	EP	HP	OP	WS	SF	QP
Politeness Marker 請	PDR-H	144	22	35	18	0	0	19
	PDR-L	88	4	3	0	0	0	0
Final-particle 吧	PDR-H	20	0	0	4	0	0	0
	PDR-L	56	6	0	2	0	18	0
Tag Questions	PDR-H	23	7	0	0	0	0	0
	PDR-L	57	5	0	0	1	0	0
Conditional Clause	PDR-H	21	3	6	1	8	1	7
	PDR-L	7	0	2	0	0	0	0
Adverbial Downtoner	PDR-H	14	4	0	2	0	3	9
	PDR-L	22	1	0	0	0	1	2
Hesitation clause	PDR-H	3	0	0	0	0	0	7
	PDR-L	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Based on the results, this study recognized several commonly used sentence patterns with IM(s) for the purpose of instruction. The request strategies that exhibited high frequency occurrences are Mood Derivable, exemplified by sentences (7), (8), and (9), Explicit Performative, demonstrated in sentence (6), and Query Preparatory, illustrated by sentence (10). These strategies are also accompanied by compatible internal modifications, which are shown in Table 5.

- (6) 請/麻煩（你/你們）（先/順便/稍微）...一下（吧）  
 (7) （請）幫忙/幫我..., （行嗎？）  
 (8) 我想請你（幫我）...  
 (9) （如果）方便的話/可能的話/沒問題的話/情況允許的話，請你...  
 (10) 能不能/可不可以請你（幫我）（先/順便）

Low frequency occurrences of request strategies and combinations were only briefly introduced in the class, and no further practice were included in the instruction. For example, Obligatory Performative, Want Statement and Suggestory Formula and their combinations with IM(s) were rarely found. Adverbial downtoners, such as 可能 *kěnéng* (maybe), 估計 *gūjì* (maybe) and 盡量 *jìnliàng* (do one's best) are also infrequent in the corpus and are negligible.

#### **4. Application for the corpus study findings: A mini lesson**

The purpose of the section is to illustrate how the corpus research results can be applied in Chinese language courses that address the development of pragmatic competence. Comparing to teaching material authored by individual instructors based on their own intuition or anecdotal evidence, this teaching package exemplified the viability of corpus linguistics methods for choosing the content of pragmatics focused instruction and offers an inductive-explicit approach, by which learners are directed to engage in an inductive analysis of genuine corpus excerpts.

The course which contains two 50-min sessions that has been designed and presented here incorporates the findings from the corpus analysis, including the internal modification types and the formulaic combination with head acts, along with situational factors. The learning materials include authentic texts from the researcher-assembled corpus and multimedia resources, carefully selected to expose students to a wide range of request situations in the Chinese language. The lesson plan integrates activities and exercises to engage students in practical, real-life conversations, role-plays, and simulations, aiming to enhance their pragmatic competence. The proficiency level of intended learners was set at ACTFL's intermediate-high to advance-low. The following shows course objectives, teaching material and the sequencing of the lesson and purposes of each step:

##### **Teaching materials**

- In-house video clips made by the researcher that demonstrate the request scenarios extracted from the corpus
- Handout includes written request scenarios and vocabulary list
- Handout with seven request strategies of head act and internal modification devices
- Practice handout for homework
- Instructions for role-play
- Role-play cue cards

##### **Course objectives**

- Students will be familiar with seven request strategies of head act and understand how to apply them according to situations.
- Students will be familiar with the listed internal modification devices and understand how to combine them with different types of head act.
- Students will gain perception of what constitute good and bad request utterances.
- Students will be able to produce appropriate request utterances according to situations.

##### **The first session**

###### **Step 1: Warm-up (10 minutes)**

- Instructor groups students into two. Set a timer at 2 minutes for each group. During the first round, give them sentences and ask them to respond with “because...” and second round with “therefore...” The group which has more responses wins the game. (8 mins)

Example:

Instructor: 我 不能 按時 交 我的 功課。

Wǒ bùnéng ànshí jiāo wǒde gōngkè

I can't on time hand in my homework

*I can't hand in my homework on time.*

Student: 因為 我 最近 功課 太多 了。

Yīnwèi wǒ zuìjìn gōngkè tài duō le.

Because I recently homework too much SP

*Because I have too much homework recently.*

所以 我得 問 老師 能不能 晚 一點 交。

Suǒyǐ wǒ děi wèn lǎoshī néngbùnéng wǎn yídiǎn jiāo

So I must ask teacher can or can't late a bit hand in

*So, I must ask the teacher if I can hand in the homework a bit later.*

The purposes:

This warm-up activity is to prepare students for the topic and focus on situations they might raise requests. It is also an opportunity to provide vocabulary resources for later use.

### Step 2: Lead-in (20 minutes)

- Instructor introduces students what they will learn in this session.
- Instructor raises questions to familiarize students with the topic:
  1. Have you ever asked a favor of a stranger/friend/teacher?
  2. What are those situations?
  3. How would you ask in Chinese?
- Instructor plays two videos of request scenarios from corpus excerpts with different social situations and does comprehension check with students (Appendix 2). The excerpts are sufficiently different (one PDR-H and one PDR-L) so that students can observe different request strategies and internal modification devices.
- Instructor leads students to read the written corpus excerpts (Appendix 2) and identify request head acts, the formulaic sentences with internal modification device and the interaction of them with the situational factors.

The purposes:

The inductive learning and explicit instruction are for learners to obtain a clear concept and usage of each frequently used request head act, internal modification, and their combination. The rationale behind the lesson design, which provides learners direct metapragmatic explanation is that several empirical studies have shown the advantages of explicit instruction than implicit (Halenko, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2012; Sykes & Cohen, 2018; Taguchi, 2015).

### Step 3: Practice (15 minutes)

- Students receive handouts (Appendix 3) with all the possible request strategies and internal modification devices with example sentences. Instructor ensures students understand everything on the handouts and under which social circumstances those strategies are usually applied.

#### **Step 4: Warp-up (5 minutes)**

- Students ask questions.
- Instructor gives guidance to students about the homework (last part of Appendix 3) and explains what they are expected to do in the next session. Students receive more written excerpts to read (Appendix 4).

The purposes:

The practice homework was for students to: (1) solidify what they've learned in the classroom and boosts confidence and motivation, (2) prepare themselves for next session activities and (3) self-evaluate their learning.

#### **The second session**

#### **Step 5: Review (15 minutes)**

- Instructor checks the homework with students in class and makes sure all the contextualized grammar drills on head act formulaic sentences and internal modification devices on the handouts are done properly. Instructor provides extra meta-pragmatic instructions if necessary.
- Students watch more videos about request scenarios from the corpus which they have already received the written excerpts (Appendix 4) with guiding questions about the appropriateness of the request strategies according to the situations. Two of them have been adopted to demonstrate pragmatically inappropriate uses. Instructor guides students through these examples and ensures that they comprehend the issues presented in the example. Lastly, instructor goes over answers with students.

The purposes:

This step further leads students to notice the application of request strategies and internal modification devices. Students also notice inappropriate request head acts and ungrammatical combinations of head acts and internal modification devices.

#### **Step 6: Production (20 minutes)**

- Students work in pairs. Each pair is assigned to a specific social relation, such as friends, roommates, mother and daughter, professor and student or employee and employer. Each pair receives a guiding handout of setting double-sided request scenes by themselves, discuss with instructor and act on the scenes.

- Each pair presents their role-play to the class. Instructor leads a discussion with the class on whether the request utterances are appropriate grammatically and pragmatically.

The purposes:

Based on the Comprehensive Output hypothesis (Swain & Lapkin, 1995, 2001), this production step allows students to first notice the gap between what they want to say and what they are able to say. Therefore, they can further test their hypothesis about how requests are made properly in order to gain additional input through make-believe social interaction. The metalinguistic function of the discussion lead by the instructor at the end of this phase plays a role of helping students to reflect on what they have learned and produced with a goal of internalizing the linguistic and pragmatic knowledge.

### **Step 7: Assessment (15 minutes)**

- Students draw random scenarios of request and do role plays. Students justify their choices of request strategy.
- With students' consent, instructor does the recording for grading.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study demonstrated the development of teaching content based on corpus-based metalinguistic analyses of request-making. Making a proper request is context-based and sometimes based on personal experiences. To avoid bias or unreliable intuition when designing and choosing course contents and learning materials for developing learners' pragmatic competence, one viability is to utilize corpus analysis. This study utilized a self-assembled corpus and identified several frequently used request head acts and combinations with the internal modifications. These findings were further cross-referenced with the context information which influenced the choice of requests strategies, namely social power, social distance between interlocuters, and rank of imposition of a request act to the hearer. Findings from this corpus study were then used to inform material production as demonstrated in a lesson plan, providing learners language use in real-world settings.

**Acknowledgements:** This study was sponsored by IGA, the internal student grant provided by Palacky University in Olomouc, Czech Republic.

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### Appendix 1 List of the novels

Title	Genre	Size of novels	Publication year
三体	Sci-fi	886,000	2006
妈妈的复出	Romance	318,000	2021
那些年我们一起追的女孩	Young adult	160,000	2006
草样年华	Young adult	201,000	2004
消失的 13 级台阶	Detective	217,000	2020
流金岁月	Romance, Family	250,000	2018
都挺好	Romance, Family	476,000	2015
乔家的儿女	Romance, Family	307,911	2012
不得往生	Realistic	437,000	2012
致我们终将逝去的青春	Young adult	250,000	2007

### Appendix 2 Lead-in handout

PDR-H situation: a subordinate to her unfamiliar superior

她记得她第一次敲开他办公室的门，将一份周渠要求会签的文件递给他过目。他说过了请进，她推开门的手却不听使唤地犹疑。她说：“陈助理，周经理让我把这份文件交给您过目，如果没有问题的话您请在上面签字，我再交给技术开发部。”

PDR-L situation: a superior to his familiar subordinate

郑微回到自己办公室，刚把二十多份复印文件装订成册，就接到了陈孝正办公室打来的电话，“郑秘书，麻烦你把我要的资料送过来。”郑微暗暗庆幸自己正好将他要的资料文件整理完毕，便急忙抱在手里，走过去敲了敲他办公室的门。

### Appendix 3 Practice handout

日常生活中，我们经常会有需要向别人提出请求的时候，那我们可以使用哪些句子呢？

从最直接到最不直接的用法是：

请别人开门可以说：

1. 开门。
2. 麻烦你开门。

3. 我想请你开门。
4. 你应该开门。
5. 我希望你开门。
6. 要不你还是开门吧。
7. 你能不能开门？

请别人借你钱：

1. 借我钱。
2. 麻烦你借我钱。
3. 我想请你借我钱。
4. 我得跟你借钱。
5. 我希望你借我钱。
6. 你能不能借我钱？

现在请试一试以下情况，用这七种说法怎么说？

- a. 打开窗户
- b. 借一支笔
- c. 小点声说话
- d. 写一封推荐信
- e. 改变会议时间
- f. 提高工资

现在请想一想，我们刚才看到的这些“别人”，如果是：

陌生人

不熟悉的同学

认识十年了的朋友

只见几次面的老师

相处得不错的老板

你会选择哪一种说法呢？哪些说法不合适呢？

其实，这些用法都还能再加上一些词语，来让你的请求更礼貌一点。请看看：

- 把“你”变成“您”  
例如：麻烦**您**开门。
- 加上“一下”，“一点”或者“一些”  
例如：开**一下**门。
- 加上“顺便”，“先”，“稍微”

例如：你顺便开门。

- 加上附加问句“行吗？/行不行”，“好吗？/好不好？”，“如何？”
- 开门，行吗？
- 加上“如果…”
- 加上“不知道…”

练习一下：

请使用以下的句式，搭配上上面列出的请求情况+不同的对象，你会怎么提出请求呢？

请/麻烦（你/你们）（先/顺便/稍微）…一下（吧）

（请）帮忙/帮我…，（行吗？）

我想请你（帮我）…

能不能/可不可以请你（帮我）（先/顺便）

（如果）方便的话/可能的话/没问题/情况允许的话，请你…

#### Appendix 4 Review handout

- PDR-H 情况: 两个警员和两个潜在证人

“如果不用上报总局，我觉得我们应该没必要继续待在这里了吧？”他们互相看了看，然后两人又同时转身背对达之，开始窃窃私语。达之只听到“有用”这个词。两人再次转身面对达之。“很抱歉，能否请两位再多待一会儿？”“为什么？应该已经没我们什么事了吧？”“其实还有。有件事只能拜托请两位。”达之皱着眉说：“拜托我们？什么事？”“这个……到时候再详说吧。”熊谷说得有些结巴。“没事的，两位不用担心，不会给你们添麻烦的。”

- PDR-L 情况: 哥哥和妹妹

四美前两天跟同学特地从近郊采了一大把芦苇插瓶，没想到这东西见风就飘，弄得家里到处都是。乔一成说：四美，你把那个东西扔了吧，到处飞，烦人。四美说：你们不觉得它好飘逸好清雅吗？好美啊！好别致！

- PDR-H 情况: 老板和客人

“怎么了？”老人问我，他似乎就是钟表店的老板。我从口袋里掏出那块手表：“能帮我修一下吗？”也许是没想到撞他的人突然变成了客人，老人的表情看上去很意外，但就在他接过手表的一瞬间，脸上的表情转变为了手工艺人的专业表情，仔仔细细地端详起手表来。

- PDR-L 情况: 妻子和丈夫

康代说：“你给我看看那个吧。”“哪个？”“就是你写的字，刚才你说过会儿给我看的。”“哦，是啊。”达之从坐垫上站起身。两人来到隔壁房间。纸上的字已经干了。两人站着，低头看着那两个字——“诚意”。

请分别就以上四个对话，回答下列问题：

1. 谁对谁提出了请求？
2. 什么请求？他怎么说？
3. 这个请求有礼貌吗？直接吗？为什么？
4. 为什么用这种请求说法？

• PDR-L 情况: 熟悉的朋友 (bad example)

朋友 A: “喂。现在方便说话吗？”

朋友 B: “嗯，怎么了？”

朋友 A: “其实我今晚有件事想对你说。抱歉，如果不是太麻烦的话，能不能请您先来我家一下？”

朋友 B: “现在？”

朋友 A: “我刚才就想说的，但不小心睡着了，所以没说成……”

朋友 B: “不能在电话里说吗？”

朋友 A: “嗯，电话里不太方便。”

朋友 B: “好吧，我想办法过去。”

朋友 A: “谢谢。你到我家门口的时候，麻烦您给我打个电话吧。”

• PDR-H 情况: 一般的同事 (bad example)

阮阮送出了门，她说：“林检，你送微微。”郑微连连摆手，“不用麻烦，不用麻烦。楼下很好打车。”林静朝阮阮笑笑，“你放心吧，交给我。再见，祝你们新婚快乐！”转身就再自然不过地将郑微的包包拿在自己的手中，“走吧，我的车就在楼下。”

请分别就以上两个对话，回答下列问题：

对话中的请求行为是什么？

有没有什么问题？

为什么有问题？

你认为怎么说比较合适？