



Universiteit Leiden

# Dutch Politeness in English

An investigation of Dutch students' pragmatic competence  
in the realisation of politeness strategies in English  
requests

Master's thesis

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## 1. Introduction

The Dutch paper *NRC Handelsblad* has recently published an article about the phenomenon of Dutch-English. The article by Maarten Huygen (2016) mentions Alison Edwards, who has written a book called *English in the Netherlands* (2016), in which she describes this phenomenon. Edwards believes that Dutch-English is becoming a language on its own. She compares this type of English to the types spoken in India and Singapore. Edwards defines Dutch-English as “very good English with a Dutch ‘taste’”. By this she means that speakers of Dutch-English leave a trace of Dutch in their English. One example from her book of a Dutch-English phrase is: ‘Can you please close the window?’, contested to a native speaker’s ‘Could you perhaps close the window?’. The sentence is perfectly understandable for a native speaker, but it is clearly different from native English. The differences between Dutch-English and native English might cause a slight misinterpretation of meaning. These misinterpretations might lead to the fact that Dutch people are often perceived and portrayed as straightforward, direct, or even rude. This perception can be found in culture guides describing the Dutch people and their culture (White and Boucke 2006: p. 111; Vossestein 2001: p. 69).

The fact that the British are always seen as polite and indirect, leads to the conclusion that there is a difference in the way Dutch and English people express themselves. Hendriks (2002) researched the speech of native Dutch, L2 English speakers from the Netherlands and L1 English speakers in requests to discover the exact differences in these speakers’ speech. Hendriks found that there is an obvious difference in the use of pragmalinguistic politeness hedges between Dutch and English speakers. But what exactly do these differences mean for the perception of Dutch learners of English? Does this mean that L1 Dutch speakers of English are actually perceived as impolite? Does the fact that that L1 Dutch speakers of English might use different politeness markers than the natives make them sound direct or impolite? The aim of this thesis is to find out if L1 Dutch speakers of English appear too direct/rude/impolite to L1 English speakers in the use of request strategies and types of request modification. We know how the English language of the L1 Dutch speakers differs from that of L1 English speakers but does the perception of their use of linguistic politeness by native speakers differ as well?

This thesis starts with a theoretical background about the pragmalinguistic theories concerning politeness strategies, with a focus on second language learning. These strategies form a foundation for interpreting the use of politeness by L1 Dutch learners of English. The main politeness theories used in this thesis will come from Brown & Levinson (1987) and more critical and renewed theories like that of Leech (2014), Terfouraki (2005) and Watts (2003). As most politeness strategies are used in requests, the next section introduces the concept of requests with regards to

different requests strategies and how they can be modified. This section is followed by a more detailed interpretation of Hendriks' study of request performance by Dutch learners of English. After that there will be a description of the research methodology, results and discussion of the outcomes. Finally, there will be a section with some thoughts on second language teaching procedures in the Netherlands and a discussion of the idea that politeness, or politeness strategies are teachable.

## 2. Theoretical background

In this chapter the theoretical framework for this thesis will be established. The following sections have the main focus of discussing the term politeness. First, several definitions of politeness will be considered by means of an introduction of the most influential politeness theories. This is done to lay a framework for the second language politeness theories discussed in the later part of this section. The final part of this section will focus on similarities and differences in politeness in English and Dutch, with the use of Hendriks' (2002) study about linguistic difference in requests in English and Dutch.

### 2.1 Defining politeness

At first, it is important to keep in mind that there are two types of politeness; verbal, and non-verbal. This thesis will solely focus on verbal, or linguistic politeness (Watts 2003: p 10).

Scholars have interpreted the concept of (linguistic) politeness in many different ways during the last decades of politeness research. There have been a lot of ways in which the principle of politeness has been explained. This section will introduce the most influential theories trying to grasp the concept of linguistic politeness known so far.

#### 2.1.1 Theory of maxims (Leech 1983)

The first 'wave' of politeness theory was based on maxims. The concept of maxims was designed by Grice (1975) as his Cooperative Principle (CP). The theory of maxims was picked up by Leech (1983) when he introduced his Politeness Principle (PP).

Leech uses Grice's distinction between 'sentence meaning' and 'Speaker meaning'. This distinction separates the semantic meaning of a sentence from its interpretation on the basis of pragmatic principles. These pragmatic principles are important for the PP. Like Grice's CP, the PP can be subdivided into 'subprinciples', called maxims. Leech proposes six maxims that should account for polite linguistic behaviour. In the example below, *S* stands for Speaker and *O* for the other person.

1. Tact	minimize cost to O, [ and maximize benefit to O]
2. Generosity Maxim	minimize benefit to S, [and maximize cost to O]
3. Approbation Maxim	minimize dispraise of O, [and maximize praise of O]
4. Modesty Maxim	minimize praise to S, [and maximize dispraise to S]
5. Agreement Maxim	minimize disagreement between S and O, [and maximize agreement between S and O]
6. Sympathy Maxim	minimize antipathy between S and O, [and maximize sympathy between S and O]

(Leech 2014: p. 35)

Every maxim stands for a specific form of politeness and has a ‘cost-benefit scale’. The Speaker, *S*, can use the maxims to formulate the most profitable utterance in a certain context. The speaker has to find the right way to get his message across to the hearer without jeopardizing his relationship with *O*, the other person. As a means to define politeness, Leech stated: “Polite beliefs expressed by the Speaker *S* are beliefs favorable to the other person *O* (and/or favorable to oneself), whereas impolite beliefs are beliefs unfavorable to *O* (and/or favorable to *S*)” (Leech 20014: p. 34).

According to his General Strategy of Politeness, when *S* is communicating politely to *H* (the Hearer), *S* gives greater value to *O* (possibly the same person as *H*), than to *S*. When *S* is being impolite, *S* is giving greater value to *S* than to *O*. This means that the use of politeness strategy is a means to express value to another person. When using politeness *S* can show *O* that he/she is more important and has more value, while when *S* is impolite, *S* shows that he/she has more value than *O*. According to Leech’s strategy, a greater distance between the value of *S* and *O*, the greater the politeness or impoliteness.

What Leech (2014) also points out is that politeness is not necessarily seen as something positive. “If we say ‘She was (just) being polite,’ we imply that her polite behaviour was superficial, perhaps even insincere” (p. 6-7). This is where Leech’s principle of absolute and relative politeness, or what he later calls pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic politeness, comes in. He begins by pointing out the possible increase in politeness in the example: “Thanks - Thanks a lot - Thank you very much - Thank you very much indeed- etc.” (Leech 2014: p. 12). Leech says that pragmalinguistic politeness is determined by the meaning of the utterance out of context, whereas sociopragmatic politeness is the judgements of politeness in context. This means that the judgement of politeness does not solely depend on the words and their meanings that are used in the utterance, but also on the context in which these words are used.

Leech mentions that all the definitions of politeness try to avoid conflicts and that they all focus on the considerations of the Hearer. In his own attempt to define politeness, Leech states that

politeness research is mostly based on a theory that makes it possible to name a type of politeness or to define a theory of politeness for one country. In the cross-cultural research that has been done, there has not been a lot of focus on European countries, especially not on England and the Netherlands.

### 2.1.2 Theory of face (Brown & Levinson 1987)

The next theory of politeness might be the most influential, most known, and most criticized theory, that is Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory of 'face'. The notion of 'face' was developed by Goffman (1963, 1967). They define 'face' as: "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson: p.61).

The notion of face consists of two types: (1) 'negative face': their claim to freedom of action and freedom from imposition; and (2) 'positive face': the desire to protect their positive consistent self-image or 'personality' claimed by interactants. Certain speech-acts are possibly threatening to both the Speaker's and/or the Hearer's face, and are therefore called face-threatening acts (FTA's). In order to protect their face, Speakers can use politeness strategies to adjust their language. A Speaker can choose between fifteen positive and ten negative politeness strategies. In order to weigh out the potential threat of the FTA the Speaker must calculate the D (distance), P (power), and R (rank or degree of imposition) between themselves and the Hearer. Brown & Levinson have created the following formula to calculate the weightiness of a speech act:

$$W(x) = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R(x)$$

Once one has calculated the weightiness of the speech act, there is the option to either carry out the FTA or not. An FTA can be carried out on and off record. When one opts for the choice to go off record, the Hearer is given the possibility to ignore the Speaker's FTA. When performing an FTA on record, a Speaker has to commit oneself to go through with it. An FTA on record can be done with or without 'redressive action'.

An FTA without redressive action is done baldly and straightforwardly. Redressive action is used as a means of minimizing the threat of the FTA and an attempt to counteract it. In the case of an FTA with redressive action, the Speaker can use negative or positive politeness. Negative politeness can be used to protect the Hearer's negative face, while positive politeness can protect the Hearer's positive face (Hendriks 2012: p. 33).

Brown & Levinson not only define politeness by terms of face, but also by rationality (Brown & Levinson: p 64). Rationality is seen as the second human trait that influences politeness.

Brown & Levinson believe that human communicators, while they are being polite, use rational means to preserve face during FTA's. Politeness, therefore, is seen as the rational use of linguistic strategies to protect one's face.

Brown & Levinson believe their theory of politeness to be universally applicable. According to them, there are positive and negative politeness cultures. This means that some cultures are more addressed to the support of their positive face and others more to the avoidance of threatening the negative face. In other words, some cultures are more focussed on protecting the positive face and their speech acts are often used to show friendliness, whereas negative politeness cultures use their politeness strategies to portray deference or to create distance between interlocutors.

The division of positive and negative politeness cultures, of course, does not mean that a certain culture only uses one type of strategy and an opposite culture the other. It means that the choices concerning politeness strategies by a speaker from any specific culture are deeply ingrained in the value system of that particular society (Sifianou 1992). "Each society agrees that certain forms of behaviour are acceptable and appropriate and for this reason such patterns of politeness are successful in those societies which support them" (p. 84). This means that within these two politeness groups there is a lot of variation between the use of politeness modifiers, etc. "The application of these principles differs systematically across cultures and within cultures across subcultures, categories and groups" (Brown & Levinson 1978: p. 283).

The content of the notion face differs between cultures, but Brown & Levinson believe that the concept of member's public self-image, or face, and the necessity for people to conform oneself to this concept in conversation, is universal. Western cultures are often seen as negative politeness cultures. In Western cultures, like the English, there is a "tendency towards saving distance, reserve and formality" (Watts 2003: p. 15). Negative face consists of derivative politeness of non-imposition and is known as formal politeness.

Western people themselves would define politeness as being considerate, attentive and courteous, notions of negative politeness. As Sifianou (1992) mentioned: "Positive politeness is less obvious, because when we talk or think of politeness, what immediately comes to mind is negative politeness, which is our familiar formal politeness" (p. 37). Negative politeness strategies are defined by Brown & Levinson as "assurances that the Speaker recognizes and respects the addressee's negative face wants and will not (or will only minimally) interfere with the addressee's freedom of action" (1978: p.70). Western cultures are negative politeness cultures because most politeness strategies are used to protect the negative face of the Hearer.

There has been a lot of criticism on Brown & Levinson claim that their theory is universal. One point of critique is the fact that B&L's concept of face is individualistic. Watts (2003) and

Brown (2010) following Terkourafi (2005) mention that an individualistic concept of face is not appropriate for a theory about politeness cultures. In cultures, namely, individuals are defined by their membership in a social group. The notion of face should be collective. The fact that B&L's notion of face is not seen as collective leads to the critiques that their theory is Anglophile and based on Western politeness strategies. Their concept of face works for individualistic societies with a negative politeness culture, but not for collective societies. Because of the criticism, Brown & Levinson's theory of 'universals in language usage' will not be applied as a whole, but as this thesis focusses only on Western politeness strategies, the notion of face (positive and negative) can still be applicable in the rest of this thesis.

### **2.1.3 Theory of the social norm (Watts 2003)**

As a critique against the theory of maxims and face, Watts (2003) has created the politeness theory of the social norm. Watts wanted to propose a model that explains why something is perceived as polite or why people express politeness, instead of a model that predicts the politeness of an utterance, like all the former ones.

Watts distinguishes between two types of politeness: politeness<sub>1</sub> and politeness<sub>2</sub> (Watts 2003: p. 4). Politeness<sub>1</sub> is how laymen would define the concept of politeness in everyday life, and politeness<sub>2</sub> is the technical, or theoretical use of the term. Watts believes that politeness theories should focus on the study of politeness<sub>1</sub>, or what he would call 'real politeness'. The difficulties of politeness as a concept, according to Watts, are that first of all there is a lot of ambiguity in the use of the terms 'polite' and 'politeness' and secondly that the concept of politeness has a slightly different meaning in languages like Chinese, Japanese, French, German and Italian.

Another complication of the concept politeness is the distinction between the terms 'politic behaviour' and 'polite behaviour' (Watts 2003: p. 161). Watts defines politic behaviour as expectable or appropriate behaviour. A certain linguistic structure can be (un)expectable or (un)appropriate in a specific situation or type of interaction. When a type of linguistic behaviour is not part of the political behaviour it is inappropriate and it can be interpreted as impolite. Linguistic politeness is described as linguistic behaviour that surpasses political behaviour and can therefore be interpreted as polite.

The most important aspect of linguistic politeness is that it depends on perception. "The imputation of politeness to a linguistic structure (...) does not automatically mean that it will be given a positive evaluation" (Watts 2003: p. 161). Therefore, the fact that a type of linguistic behaviour is perceived as polite does not mean that it is inappropriate or wrong. This means that when a Dutch Speaker of English is labelled as impolite, his linguistic behaviour does not have to

be faulty either.

All of the things mentioned above, are what causes the term politeness to be difficult to define. Politeness does not have a clear-cut wrong/right structure. This is portrayed as well in Leech's distinction between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic politeness. Leech has shown that politeness has degrees, gradations. Leech illustrates that the perception of politeness might differ within every community, because everybody has their own perception of polite behaviour.

#### **2.1.4 Frame-based view (Terkourafi 2005)**

A less influential, but not less important politeness theory is a theory that is constructed to be more easily applied on politeness in second language is the frame-based view. The frame-based view was created by Terkourafi (2005). This politeness theory sees politeness as a concept that is part of a person's social 'frame'. A social frame is formed by the storage of specific concepts that happen repeatedly in certain social contexts.

Terkourafi explained being polite as meeting expectations of others and being regular. She states that "politeness resides not in linguistic expressions themselves, but in the regularity of this concurrence (between linguistic expressions and context types)" (Terkourafi 2005: p. 251). Certain situations ask for a specific type of politeness. The link between linguistic behaviour and context is also seen in Watt's definition of politic behaviour. The frame-based approach views social norms as being dynamically constructed through repeated social behavior. Certain types of linguistic behaviour and the corresponding social contexts are grouped together in a cultural frame.

Components that influence the social context are "sex, age, social class of the participants, the relationship between them, the setting of the exchange, and whether an act is occurring for the first time or is repeated" (Terkourafi 2005: p. 247). These components of the social context are similar to those used in Brown & Levinson's formula to calculate the weightiness of a speech act.

Terkourafi claims that speakers use these components to in some way calculate the weightiness of the speech act and then use their frames in order to link the right linguistic behaviour to the given social context. This means that every individual can still frame their own interpretation of these components within a certain social context and individually chose the corresponding linguistic behaviour. The reason that the frame-based view is still individual, is caused by the fact that Face constituting and rationality are two premises that are placed on the basis of the frame-based view.

Terkourafi's definition of politeness originates from behaviour that can be judged as polite because it regularly occurs within a certain context and it still remains unchallenged. Therefore, frames can be used to describe the regularities between linguistic expressions and their contexts

(Terkourafi 2005: p. 253) Basically, the frame-based theory argues that polite behaviour is polite because it has been framed as such by social context.

## **2.2 Politeness strategies and requests in English**

In the preceding section, some of the most influential theories of politeness research were introduced. This section will focus on the aspects of these theories that are important for forming politeness strategies in English. Therefore, the usage of politeness strategies will be explained by looking at a certain type of speech act in which politeness strategies are extremely common. This section will introduce the speech act type of requests and will focus on explaining the exact usage and strategies of this specific speech act.

### **2.2.1 Requests and indirectness in English**

Requests are part of the category of speech events called directives (Leech 2014: p. 134). Directives are speech acts that are used by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. A request is a speech event that gives *H* the choice whether to do that something or not. This means that a request has a competitive function. It has to find a way to both benefit *S* or a third party, and to sooth *O*. In order to protect *O*'s negative face, or not to offend *O*, *S* has to use negative politeness strategies (Leech 2014: p. 136).

There exist several types of request: the request for action, information, attention and sympathy (Leech 1983: p.99). The first two are the two most prominent types. Every type of requests consist of a core request and additional peripheral elements (Sifianou 1992: p. 100). The core request contains the request strategy, while the peripheral elements consist of external and internal request modifiers. External modifiers precede or follow the core request and are used to provoke or improve the strength of the request. These modifiers can stand as requests on their own, without the presence of a core request.

The focus in this thesis will be on internal modifiers in request forms. Internal modifiers are modifiers that directly affect the core request, like number, tense and diminutives. Therefore, internal modifiers are syntactic and lexical/phrasal. These internal modifiers can also be decided into upgraders or downgraders. As requests are FTA's, most modifiers in this type of speech act are downgraders. Downgrading modifiers can be regarded as negative politeness strategies because they are used to protect the hearer's negative face (Sifianou 1992: p. 198).

Qualification of the different types of modifiers is a problem because they can coexist within the same sentence. This causes the issue that is not clear how modifiers interfere with the directness level of an utterance and affect its overall politeness value (Hendriks 2002: p. 77). What

we can say is that the more negative politeness strategies a speaker uses, the more polite will their request possibly be.

In English indirectness is a common way to form requests (Sifianou 1992: p.113). English uses indirectness for a lot of purposes: teasing, joking, irony, lack of confidence, sarcasm and rudeness, but overall, indirectness is mostly used as a request strategy.

Of all the utterance types sensitive to politeness, requests are arguably of the most abiding interest and have been most studied, particularly with reference to the English language. English has an amazing range of ways of conveying requests, and it exhibits a tendency to favor indirectness of requests most than other languages, indirectness here being closely connected with politeness.

(Leech 1983: p. 134)

The statements above imply that there is a greater intrinsic face threat in requests than in other speech acts, and that politeness is the most basic motivation for indirectness (Sifianou 1992: p. 110). In fact, requests are regarded as the type of speech acts that are most likely, and most common to threaten the Hearer's negative face, as they could violate the Hearers right of freedom as a means of the Speaker to get the Hearer to do something (Vismans 1991: p.117).

Requests intrude the addressee's territory and limit their freedom of action, therefore, requests are seen as intrinsic face threats that intrude upon the addressee's negative face. However, the performance of a requests implies that one must feel close to someone enough to ask them to do something. This means that positive politeness plays a role in the request strategy, too.

### **2.2.2 Request strategies**

There are six types of request strategies (Leech 2014: p. 147-159). The strategies will be introduced in the order of most to least direct. An overview of the strategies is as follows:

- Imperatives
- Performatives
- Statements
- Questions
- Nonsentential strategies
- Hints

The first two strategies are direct strategies. They are direct because they make no use of any modifiers, or other devices, to reduce the threat of the speech act.

Imperatives are speech acts that have the sole goal of getting the hearer to do something. It is probably the most direct form of request in the sense of the 'means-end analysis', as proposed by Leech (1983). Imperatives are also the most tactless strategy. This does not necessarily mean it is

also the most impolite one, as the perception of politeness depends on the contextual and sociocultural variation of the politeness norms in a society. Imperatives are direct request that are used very little in English as compared to other languages. An imperative request like *Do the dishes* tends to be perceived as quite rude and impolite. The addition of *please* makes the imperative considerably more polite.

Performatives make use of performative verbs. A performative verb is formed by using the progressive form of a speech-act verb. In this strategy the meaning of the request is derived through the semantic meaning of the performative verb. This type of request proclaims that the essential goal has already been achieved. An example of a performative is ‘I ask/demand/beg you to do the dishes’. The politeness perception of a performative depends mostly on the meaning of the performative verb. ‘I demand’ is perceived as less polite than ‘I ask’, or ‘I beg’.

The third strategy, the strategy of statements is an on-record indirect request strategy and the first of the indirect strategies. Statements do not directly impose the speaker’s will on the hearer, but it is fairly easy to understand the force of the directive inside it. Modal verbs are an important type if modifier for the strategy of statements. Like the performative verb in performatives, the force of the modal verb determines the force of the directive just like the addition of other modifiers. With this strategy the speaker refers to the moral codes of the hearer in order to make them carry out the desired action.

The next, and fourth strategy is questions. Questions are another indirect on-record request strategy. Questions are means of asking *O* to make a decision. The strategy of questions is therefore more often perceived as polite than the strategy of statements, even though they are quite similar in some aspects. The next two sentences will show the difference between statements and questions.

1. You can do the shopping
2. Can you do the shopping?

These two sentences show that in the first one, it is already presumed that *O* will do the shopping, whereas in the second sentence *S* gives them a choice. Offering *O* the freedom of action is a strategy of politeness.

The next request strategy is that of the nonsentential strategies. With nonsentential requests the speaker does not use of a full sentence to perform their request. The full meaning of the request should be able to be made clear from the conversational context. As in nonsentential requests the speaker does not use any type of modification to lighten the weight of the request, this strategy is quite direct. However, in certain contexts the perception of the request does not necessarily needs to be impolite or rude. An example of a nonsentential request can be used by a conductor on a train, asking passengers to show him their tickets. The conductor could say “Tickets please” instead of

using a complete sentence to imply: “Could you show me your passport?”. As it is clear from the context what the conductor is implying, he does not have to utter the entire request in a sentence, but the nonsentential request is enough.

The last and most indirect strategy of requests is the strategy of hints. Hints are off-record indirect requests. Hints are off-record and very indirect because they do not actually mention the act that the speaker wants the hearer to do. This is why hints contain a high degree of ambiguity and offer the hearer a lot of ways to ignore the request. Hints can be carried out in the form of statements or questions. With hints it is fairly impossible to identify the core request, because of their ambiguous nature.

These different types of requests are used in different types of situations. For second language learners it is very difficult to acquire all the different types. The most common type of requests are questions, followed by statements (Leech 2014: p. 148). These types are most conventional and most the easiest to use and acquire, because they are both on-record indirect request strategies. Therefore, it is most likely that these two types of requests will be used most by second language learners.

### **2.3 Politeness strategy in second language learning**

For second language learners the concept of politeness is a difficult one. As mentioned above, Watts (2005) noted that the concept of politeness does not have the same meaning in every language. The meaning of the term politeness can be different, but also the politeness strategies might differ amongst cultures. Therefore, Thomas (1983) created the distinction between the concepts pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence in language (as followed by Leech). She advocates that second language learners should gain competence in both in order to ‘reframe’ their politeness strategies from their first into their second language, think about Terkourafi’s (2005) theory of frames.

This section will discuss multiple theories about these pragmatic skills that second language learners should master in order to master politeness strategies in their target language.

#### **2.3.1 Pragmatic competence in second language**

In order to perform a successful speech act, a speaker should have linguistic, social, and pragmatic competence in a language. Harlow (1990) mentions that second language learners have difficulties managing the social constraints of language use. It is, however, very difficult to define these social constraints as they are often found below the level of conscious awareness even for native speakers (Harlow 1990: p. 239).

Thomas (1983) thinks pragmatic failure is most problematic with second language learners. He mentions that while a grammatical error only shows that the speaker is a less proficient language user, a pragmatic error is a bad reflection on the speaker's personality and the speaker's language community. As mentioned above, Thomas believes that second language learners should gain competence in two different types of pragmatic skills -pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic, also discussed above as proposed by Leech (2014).

Pragmalinguistic competence is reflected in the speaker's ability to appropriately utter speech-act strategies. For example, a speaker should be able to converse in language while using several levels of politeness and have the competence to differentiate the different levels (remember the example from Leech in section 2.1.1).

Whereas pragmalinguistics has to do with linguistic means of communication, sociopragmatics has to do with sociocultural and contextual factors of language use (Hendriks 2002). Sociopragmatic skills reflect the speaker's ability to differentiate cross-cultural perceptions of appropriate linguistic behaviour, or speech acts and apply them in the right contexts (Harlow 1990: p. 329). Second language learners should be able to recognize the differences in the politeness strategies of their L1 and L2 and apply them properly in several social contexts.

The social context is where Harlow's concern about the recognition of social constraints comes in. Recognizing the proper social context is difficult for second language learners because there are no textbook examples of social situations from an average foreign language learning environment. As a result, second language learners are prone to wrongly transfer linguistic strategies for their L1 unto their L2 speech act strategies. This L1 transfer can lead to misunderstanding of their L2 utterances. These misunderstandings are what leads to what is known as 'pragmatic failure' (Thomas 1983).

To summarize, according to Thomas, second language learners should not only be taught how to appropriately utter speech-acts in their second language but also how to recognize the different L2 speech-acts and their social context. According to her, the key to successful L2 understanding is to learn the differences in linguistic forms and behaviour between the L1 and the L2.

### **2.3.2 Reframing**

This section falls back to the frame-based view discussed in section 2.1.4. The reframing modal was proposed by Brown (2010) who follows Terkourafi's (2005) frame-based model of politeness. Brown introduces reframing as a model for politeness acquisition. According to Brown, children acquire their 'frames' through a process of storage of repeated actions. The children study

politeness strategies in everyday activities, tasks and language from their experience in the social world. Thus, children learn what is required, appropriate, and expected in certain social contexts and they develop their ‘frame’.

Reframing, of course, is different from the development of an native speaker’s first language frame.

However, when viewing the development of “politeness” in L2 as a process of acquiring “frames”, a key difference between L1 and L2 acquisition need to be recognized. Namely, unlike L1 children, L2 learners do not create such schemata from a void. Rather, L2 learners already possess highly developed frames of knowledge pertaining to their L1 (or other languages), which influence the development of politeness in the L2. The process of “reframing” is thus best seen as one of re-analyzing and enriching existing frames, rather than constructing such frames from scratch.

(Brown 2010: p.250)

In order for second language learners to achieve competence in second language politeness, they need to reframe, or re-analyse their existing frame. Instead of beginning from scratch, like a first language learner, second language learners need to add the missing information of the L2 frames into their existing frames. In order for their linguistic knowledge to become appropriate, the second language learners should learn the sociopragmatic skills belonging to their L2 frames. This means that when a second language learner’s L1 frame is similar to the L2 frame, they are more likely to adapt the L2 politeness strategies more proficiently and quickly than a learner with a very different L1 frame. This also means that a learner with politeness frames encompassing multiple languages is more likely to again very quickly adapt their frame to that of another new language. The more languages a person knows, the bigger their collecting of frames will be.

The fact that the politeness strategies of different languages coexist in the same frames a person owns, means that reframing is not a concept of translating politeness strategies of the L1 into the L2. It means that a person adds new politeness strategies to their existing strategies when a new language calls for it.

The model of reframing provides a way to explain the acquisition of second language politeness strategies by means of creating a theory in which the enhancement of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence is crucial for a learner’s ability to improve their skills in a second language. The fact that reframing is a politeness strategy that is easily adapted into the field second language politeness and can be seen as a very influential theory in the study of second language politeness, means that is a theory that could become very important in this field.

## 2.4 Hendriks' research: Dutch speakers of English

Hendriks (2002) has done research concerning the language use of native English speakers, Dutch learners of English and native Dutch speakers. Her goal was to compare the linguistic behaviour of these speakers in their use of request strategies and types of request modification and to test the production of requests (in the form of a Discourse completion test) in relation to perceptions of situational factors by these Dutch learners of English compared to native English and native Dutch speakers. As this thesis focusses on the perception of politeness of Dutch learners of English, this review of Hendrik's findings will be targeted on the concerning results.

Hendriks found that the use of direct and indirect request strategies by learners and native speakers of English differed only slightly (p.151). Her study showed that in a total of 3060 requests, the natives used an average of 7.9% direct, and the Dutch speakers used 11% direct requests. Compared to other second language speakers of English, the Dutch learners hardly used more direct strategies than native English speakers.

The most significant finding in her study was that the Dutch learners of English used a lot less lexical and syntactic modifier than the native speakers. Their range of modifiers was also much more narrow. Where the natives used more downgraders and subjectivizers, the Dutch learners made a lot of use of 'please' and the modal auxiliary 'could'. The overuse of 'could' can be explained by the fact that the modals 'can/could' are related to the Dutch verb 'kunnen', in requests often formulated as 'zou kunnen'. Hendriks found that native speakers of English more often use 'can', were Dutch learners tend to prefer to translate 'zou kunnen' to 'could' (Hendriks 2002: p. 164). These findings are in complete conflict with the example from Edwards (2016) in which the Dutch-English request was 'Can you please close the window?' was contested to native speaker's request 'Could you perhaps close the window?'. The research done in this thesis can point out whether Dutch learners of English use more 'can' or 'could'.

The abundant use of please is caused by the fact that the learners used 'please' as a multi-purpose lexical modifier. The learners, most likely, prefer the use of politeness marker 'please' because of its explicitness. The marker clearly indicates that the speaker wants to express politeness it also indicates that the uttered speech act is a request. The non-native, Dutch speakers used the politeness markers with an average of 75.5% while the native speakers used it in only 40.2% of the 2726 cases of distributed lexical downgrades (p.170-1). When the Dutch speakers used subjectivizers, phrasal modifiers with which speakers can express personal feelings, opinions, or attitudes with respect to the requested action, they used 'ask if' (Dutch English 28% of subjectivizers, Native English 1.8%) significantly more than the native speakers. Native speakers preferred the use of 'wonder' or 'I don't suppose'.

With regards to modals, the learners made use of negative transfer from their L1. The lack of pragmalinguistic knowledge made them transfer politeness markers from their L1 into their L2. They chose the wrong politeness markers to modify their requests. The learners used relatively more of the verbs ‘will/would’ in their requests, the native speakers chose the use ‘do you mind’ more often. This overuse of the verbs ‘will/would’ might be caused by the Dutch preference for the verb ‘willen’ to form a request. This preference might also have led to the fact that some learners used the verb ‘want’ in their requests. ‘Want’ is a verb that is rarely used in the native speaker data. The overuse of ‘please’ and usage of the English verbs ‘will/would/want’ by the Dutch learners can be interpreted, as does Hendriks, as the lack of pragmatic knowledge of the learners (p. 185-186). This causes the pragmalinguistic strategies of the learners to differ from that of native speakers. The learners did not always chose the right linguistic tools to form their requests. However, the fact that there was almost no difference in the amount of indirect requests and their ability to utter indirect and direct speech-acts between the learners and the native speakers in Hendriks’ research, the pragmalinguistic knowledge of the learners had to be quite sufficient. This might suggest that the pragmalinguistics of Dutch and English are fairly similar.

Apart from a production test, Hendriks also tested the interpretation of social context by the different speakers of English. She found out that the Dutch learners and the native speakers had quite similar perceptions of social situations. However, she did find that the intermediate, secondary school students did sometimes interpret the social situations differently from native speakers where the university students did not. Therefore, the sociopragmatic knowledge of the secondary school students can be said to be less developed than that of the university students.

Hendriks’ conclusion was that the Dutch learners of English in her study were highly competent speakers of English, as they had little trouble with formulating the content of their requests either with the knowledge of sociopragmatic as pragmalinguistic competence. As a suggestion for further study, Hendriks proposed to test whether the few pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic errors that learners of English make, have consequences for the communicative effect of Dutch learners’ request behaviour. Therefore, the findings of Hendrik’s study will be used in the construction of the research for this thesis with the goal to test whether these Dutch second language learners are perceived as impolite by native speakers of English because of their possible non-native like linguistic behaviour in English politeness strategies.

## **2.5 Summary**

In order to summarize and introduce the following chapter, this section will give an overview of the preceding section and highlight the information that will be relevant for the coming research and

discussions.

The research in this thesis will focus on the perception of English speech from L1 Dutch speakers by average native English speakers. This means that the focus will be on the type of politeness that Watts calls politeness<sub>1</sub>. The focus on this type of politeness leads to the fact that the theories from the previous sections are not all fully relevant for the further research in this thesis. Most of the theories focus on the theoretical type of politeness, politeness<sub>2</sub>. However, there are some concepts discussed in this previous sections that can be linked to politeness<sub>1</sub>.

As seen in section 2.1.4. Terkourafi's (2005) definition of politeness is very similar to Watt's politeness behaviour. Terkouraki's frame-based view, therefore does not concern the right type of politeness theory to be fully applicable to the following study, even though the frame-based view is useful for second language politeness studies. The idea of having frames for politeness strategies makes it very easy to believe the concept of reframing these strategies in second language politeness learning.

The earlier mentioned politeness<sub>1</sub> also came back in section 2.3.1 as Leech definition for sociopragmatic politeness. He defined the concept as the speaker's ability to differentiate cross-cultural factors of linguistic behaviour. Leech refers to the laymen's perception of politeness strategies. As discussed in section 2.3, sociopragmatic skills are most important for a second language learner in the process of learning the politeness strategies of a second language.

Sociopragmatic skills were fundamental in the process of reframing. The missing sociopragmatic information should be added to a person's existing politeness frames. However, for the theory of reframing to apply on politeness<sub>1</sub>, the definition of politeness in the frame-based view has to change. The theory should focus in the individual's perception of the factors defining the sociopragmatic context and not necessarily on Terkourafi's (2005) definition concerning cultural perceptions and repetition. This would mean that the concept 'reframing' could be used as a theory for second language politeness learning even for politeness<sub>1</sub> studies. As Terkourafi already discussed the influence of social context on a speaker's use of politeness theories and the concepts existing in a person's politeness frame, politeness<sub>1</sub> could be said to be already the focus of the theory of framing. The theory of framing and reframing could be very valuable for second language politeness, assuming that the definition of politeness used in the theory concerns politeness<sub>1</sub>.

This means that only Watts' theory of politeness<sub>1</sub> is fully applicable for this study. However, even though the perception of politeness might differ for every person, there are factors that could influence their decision. Sociopragmatic skills come from interpreting a social context. There are certain factors that can influence a social context. These factors are described by Brown & Levinson and Terfouraki. Brown & Levinson mention distance, power, and rank or degree of imposition between the speaker and the hearer, Terfouraki adds the setting of the exchange, and

whether an act is occurring for the first time or is repeated. These factors all influence the social context of the request and, therefore, influence the type of politeness strategies used by the speaker. This means that in politeness<sub>1</sub> theory, a speaker uses his personal perception of the social context, or sociopragmatic skills, to choose a politeness strategy.

The focus in this thesis will be on politeness<sub>1</sub>, a laymen's perspective on politeness, or how normal people define the term. This means that there might be a lot of variation between the native speakers' interpretations of the concept. However, within the same culture, speakers will have a similar idea of what can be perceived as polite and what cannot, according to the judgement of the social context in terms of a politeness frame. This suggests, that not only polite behaviour, but also politic behaviour could be important in the study. As the study investigates the perception of politeness in different social contexts, the natives have to evaluate the requests in terms of both politic behaviour (acceptable linguistic behaviour) and politeness.

The following research will focus on finding out how native speakers of English perceive the requests of Dutch learners of English on a scale of politeness. In order to test the pragmatic knowledge of the Dutch learners, the natives are asked to evaluate requests (that were provided by the Dutch learners) regarding to their own perception of polite linguistic behaviour. The following section will describe the research in detail and explain the complete research procedure.

### **3. Methodology**

The aim of this research is to find out if Dutch learners of English are perceived as impolite by native speakers while speaking English. In order for the speech of L1 Dutch speakers of English to be evaluated, data of their L2 English language use and their use of politeness strategies has to be collected. The methodology of the research will be further described in this section.

#### **3.1 Participants**

For this research it was decided to use intermediate learners of English. The learners were secondary school students from Gymnasium Ceeleum in Zwolle in the Netherlands. The students have received at least close to 4 years of English education secondary school and were aged between 14-17, most were 15 or 16 years old. In the Netherlands every secondary school student receives at least 4 years of English education. This means that every person in the Netherlands should eventually have at least an intermediate level of English, as in the Netherlands it is obligatory to follow any type of education until the age of 18. In total there were 42 participants. These intermediate learners should have quite some knowledge of the language and are, therefore, interesting to study on their use of English. These learners should have acquired almost all the basic skills and should be able to produce their learned knowledge in a sufficient way.

#### **3.2 Procedure**

The aim of this research is to test the appreciation of the linguistic politeness of L1 Dutch second language learners of English. The participants were asked to take place in a language production task. In order to collect the best results, it is important that the acquired data are as real and legitimate as possible. The test given to the participants should create a natural framework for their answers and represent real-life situations. This is why all the participants will be asked to perform a DCT.

#### **3.3 The Discourse completion test**

A discourse completion test (or DCT), as designed by Blum-Kulka (1982) is an easy way to make the participants produce a more natural type of speech. A DCT is designed as an unfinished dialogue that has to be completed. The dialogue is constructed in such a way that the participant gets information about the circumstances of the discourse situation. The settings of the conversation and the relationship between the speakers are subtly portrayed. The aim of this test is to see how the participants interpret the discourse situations and how they decide to react to them. Each

dialogue contains a missing turn that the participants have to fill in. The DCT has received a lot of criticism. There were concerns about how representative the collected written data from the test were of natural spontaneous speech in real-time conversations. However, as the DCT is still widely accepted as an effective research tool for cross-cultural speech act data collection, it can still be seen as a good research method for the current study (Billmyer & Varghese, 2000; Turnbull, 2001; Golato, 2003; Yuan, 2001). For this research a modified version of the DCT in The Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) by Blum-Kulka et al. (1986) was used. The CCSARP project was established as a means for cross-cultural investigations of speech act realization. This DCT is especially designed to focus on the linguistic realization of requests and apologies. This means that the participants are urged to incorporate multiple politeness strategies in their responses. For this DCT, 5 discourse situations were sketched. The participants were asked to finish the DCT using just one sentence, to force the participants to answer with a core request. Blum-Kulka's situations were as follows:

1. **In a restaurant**

Dan: What would you like to eat?

Ruth: I don't know let's have a look at the menu.

Dan (to the waiter): Waiter ...?

2. **At a second-hand dress shop**

How much is that dress?

50 pounds

That's expensive. ....?

Sorry, all the prices are fixed

3. **Among students**

Stephen: Dan, I don't know what to do.

Dan: What happened?

Stephen: I failed Philosophy again. It's not that I don't know, it is that a can't answer exam questions well in English.

Dan: Isn't this the second time it happened? I think ... I am sure he'll understand and let you do the Exam in Spanish.

4. **At a student party in New-York**

Dan: Ruth, come on, I'm late and I have got an exam tomorrow.

Ruth: Okay, I'm coming, But Dan, I don't feel like walking all the way home! Wait, Ron is driving.

Dan: I'll ask him if he's going in our direction. Ron ..?

David: Yes, but I'm afraid the car is full

5. **On the streetcar**

Diane: We are going to miss the train. Let's ask somebody how to get to the station.

Robert: I hate asking people in the street. You ask.

Diane: O.K.. I'll do it. Excuse me, ...?

Instead of giving the participants discourse sequence that they had to complete, they were given and adapted version of Blum-Kulka's discourse situations. They were given a short description of the five different situations and had to form a request according to the given information. Hendriks (2002) uses the same method for her research. This was done to make sure the discourse sequence did not affect the participants' answers and as a means to get rid of any clues as to what exactly was expected from recipients, i.e. to make a request.

The situations below have been selected on the criterion that they were as natural as possible for Dutch students residing in the UK. Therefore, the situations that were chosen for this DCT were situations that were most likely to happen to the participants in a study abroad situation. This was done to make sure that the answers given in the test were utterances that native speakers of English could actually encounter in their everyday lives. The situations were picked from a research article by Blum-Kulka & Soshana (1982) in which they tested the speech-act performance of second language learners of Hebrew. The test was modified in order to make it more naturalistic. The resemblance of the DCT to an actual conversation had to make sure that the participants used speech-like answers instead of written speech, but just to point this out the participants were asked to complete the DCT as a spoken rather than a written task.

The situations used in this DCT differ in social context. According to the theories of Brown & Levinson (1987) and Terkourafi (2005), social context determines the strength of the speech act and determines the use of politeness strategies. Using different social context, makes it possible to test if the participants use different types of politeness strategies and if they use these strategies in the right way. These situations are different with relation to distance, power, rank or degree of imposition, setting and likeliness of repetition. All the factors defined by Brown & Levinson and Terfouraki. The situations of the DCT given to the students were all set in different social contexts. The distance, power and rank of imposition between the speaker and hearer were different in each situation. First there was a costumer-waiter relationship, which is a rather informal setting and an often repeated situation. The second context is a costumer-owner relation, in which the distance, power and rank of imposition are greater than the previous situation. The setting is slightly more formal and business-like and does not happen very regularly. The third situation is a teacher-student relation. The power, distance and rank of imposition similar to those in the previous situation, it is, however, less formal and more regular. The last situation is a relation between strangers and, therefore, rather formal. The situation is, however, quite regular. As the social context of the situations are all different, the students will need to use different politeness strategies to form polite requests in all of them. They will need to have enough sociopragmatic knowledge to

interpret each situation in the right way. This is why these different social contexts were used. The final DCT-situations were:

1. **In a restaurant**

You are in a restaurant with a friend. You would like to see the menu before you can order. What do you say to the waiter?

2. **At a second-hand dress shop**

You are in a second-hand dress shop and found something you like. When the owner of the shop tells you the price of the dress, you think it is quite expensive. What do you say to the owner of the shop?

3. **With your teacher**

You have failed Philosophy for the second time. It is not that you do not know the answers, but you have difficulties answering the questions in English. You know you would do much better if the test was in Dutch. What do you say to your teacher?

4. **At a party in London**

You are at a party in London. You want to go home because you have an exam the next morning. Your friend does not want to walk all the way home. She found out that your mutual friend Ron is driving home in the same direction. What do you say to Ron?

5. **In the street**

You are walking to the train station with your friend. You are afraid you are going to miss your train. Your friend suggests to ask someone in the street for directions. There is one man walking next to you. What do you say to the man next to you?

The DCT test was distributed in class and handed out by their regular English teacher.

### 3.4 Evaluation of the DCT

In order to test the perception of the responses given by the L1 Dutch English learners, the results of the DCT were collected and made into a questionnaire. This questionnaire was sent out to 20 native speakers of English from the UK. The participants were between 16 and 59 years of age and lived in different places in the UK. These native speakers were asked to grade each response in terms of politeness.

score	1	2	3	4	5
Perception	impolite	impolite	not polite, not impolite	polite	extremely polite

**Table 1 Evaluation Index translation tasks**

The answers could be graded on a scale of 5, from 1: impolite to 5: extremely polite.

The labels given by the native English speakers are compared in order to determine which responses from the DCT are considered most and least polite in the given situations.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

The data from the DCT were organized per situation and structured. Similar answers were grouped together or excluded from the questionnaire. The native English speakers were asked to each evaluate 3 to 7 different responses per situation, depending on the amount of different answers the students gave for every discourse situation. The average scores for each answer and every different discourse situation were calculated and used for the current thesis. The selected, different answers selected for the evaluation test will be provided in the following chapter grouped together per discourse situation. An example of the evaluation test can be found in Appendix 2.

## 4. Results

The following chapter contains a description and discussion of the results of the research mentioned in the previous section.

### 4.1 Data analysis: DCT

The first test that was done for this research was a Discourse Completion Test. This test was done in order to gather discourse data from Dutch learners of English. In this section, the data from the DCT collected from the Dutch secondary school students will be analysed. The aim of this section is to determine the use of politeness strategies and linguistic markers by the learners and compare these results to those found by Hendriks (2002).

The figure below represents amount of different answers given for each of the five different discourse situations described in the DCT. Most variation was found in the discourse situation ‘in the street’ and least in the ‘in a second-hand dress shop’ situation. The reason that the ‘in a second-hand dress shop’ situation had little variation in the given answers mostly has to do with the fact that only 9 of the 42 participants used the speech act of an appropriate request in their answers. For the ‘with your teacher’ situation, only 21 of the participant answered with an accessible request. For the rest of the discourse situations almost all of the answers were usable.

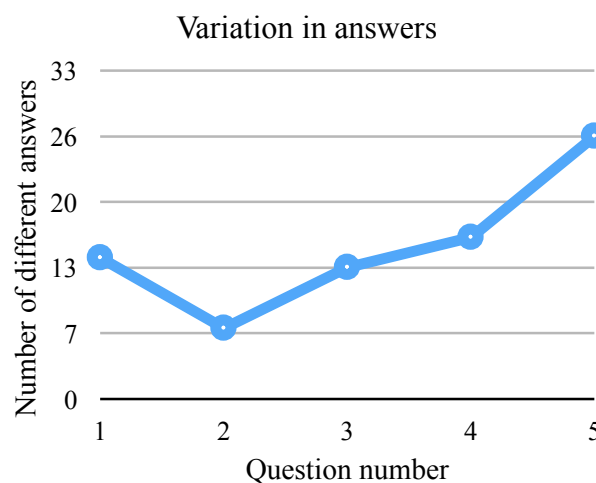


Figure 1 Variation in answers

With regards to types of requests, the students almost exclusively used questions. There was one occurrence of a ‘statement’ in the ‘in a restaurant’ context.

#### 4.1.1 In a restaurant

For this discourse situation the students gave 14 different answers. The answers mostly differed in the use of modal verbs and the usage of the additional politeness markers ‘excuse me’ and ‘please’.

The modal verbs 'can' was used most often, followed by 'could' and 'may'. There was one answer with 'would' in the phrase 'I would like to'. In this case, the student used a request in the form of a statement instead of a question. The great amount of requests formed with 'can' are in line with Hendriks' findings concerning modal verbs in the request type "permission requests" (Hendriks 2002: p.160-1). Hendriks found that both the native speakers as the Dutch learners of English mostly used 'can I' as a modal in their permission requests, in this case produced as questions (section 2.2.1.1), the same rule applies to the past tense equivalent of the modal, 'could'. The use of 'may' in this type of request, has been found by Hendriks to not occur that often because this modal is seen as rather formal in English (Hendriks 2002: p. 162). The formality of 'may' has also been established by Palmer (Palmer 1990: p. 78). Even though the Dutch equivalent 'mogen' is not as formal as English 'may', she found that Dutch learners actually realized the more formal meaning of 'may' in English and therefore they used it only occasionally in their requests. The answers of the Dutch secondary school students in this study also showed that only 6 of the 42 students formed their requests with 'may'. With regards to the 'I would like to' request, Hendriks found that this a very common phrase used by native English speakers to form a "want statement" (Hendriks 2002: p. 155).

Most of the students' answers included 'please', the lexical marker was used in 11 out of 15 different requests and was used by 35 of the 42 students. This abundant use of politeness marker 'please' can be explained with Hendrik's motivation that Dutch L2 English learners used this marker in standard, more informal context. The marker 'excuse me' was used in 3 of the 15 different answers. Another politeness marker, only used once, was 'is it possible'. Almost half of the students answered with the request: "Can I/we have/see the menu, please?". This form was used by 19 of the 42 students.

Can I have the menu?  
 Can we have the menu, please?  
 Excuse me, can I see the menu, please?  
 Could I see the menu, please?  
 Could I/we please have/see the menu?  
 Could you give/bring me/us the menu, please?  
 Could I please have a look at the menu?  
 Excuse me, could we see the menu?  
 Excuse me, could you please get me the menu?  
 May I see the menu?  
 May I /we see the menu, please?  
 I would like to see the menu, please?  
 May I/we have/take a look at the menu, please?  
 Is it possible for me to see the menu?

**Tabel 1 Different answers 'in a restaurant'**

### 4.1.2 In a second-hand dress shop

For this discourse situation there were only 7 different types of answers that contained a request. This came from the fact that only 9 students understood from the situation description that they were supposed to form a request.

The most used modal verb in this situation was ‘can’ and there was one instance of ‘may’. The fact that the majority of the requests was formed with ‘can’ has to do with the fact that almost all answers were permission requests. The students also used the phrase ‘is it okay if’. This phrase also indicated that the student used a permission requests.

The fact that in this discourse situation the students made no use of ‘please’, has to do with the fact that this was not a standard situation. ‘Please’ is a politeness marker that has a request signalling function and therefore might cause the request to be perceived as less polite when used in a non-standard situation. It might also have to do with the fact that the speaker wants this request to be more direct in order to have a bigger influence on the owner of the shop.

Is it okay if I give you ... pounds for it?  
 May I buy it for a lower price?  
 Can I get the dress for less?  
 Can I get a discount on this dress?  
 Can I buy it cheaper?  
 Can you drop the price (a bit)?  
 Can't you bring the price down a little?

**Table 2 Different answers 'in a second-hand dress shop**

### 4.1.3 With your teacher

This situation had answers in the form of requests from 19 of the 42 students and there were 13 different answers.

Use of modal verbs showed the greatest number of requests were formed with ‘can’, followed by ‘could’ and ‘would’. One student used the modal verb ‘may’. Again the use of the modals ‘can/could’ can be explained by the fact that the students used permission requests. The instances where students used ‘would’ or ‘would I be able to’ were mostly indirect requests. Hendriks found that modal verb ‘would’ occurs in requests as a non-obvious strategy (p. 159) and was more often used by the non-native learners than by the native English speakers.

Another politeness marker found in this situation was ‘possibly’ and there were 3 students that used the phrase ‘is it possible’. The marker ‘possibly’ was in Hendriks’ study mostly used by English native speakers (p. 174). This downgrader was in her study only used once by a learner English from the university group. It was also the most frequently used downgrader amongst the

native English speakers. A downtowner is used to make a request less powerful. As this discourse situation describes a student-teacher relationship, the use of the downgrader has an obvious purpose. The use of the indirect phrase ‘is it possible’ can also be explained by the social contexts of the speaker-hearer relationship.

Only 5 students made use of the marker ‘please’. This might indicate that they perceived the situation as to formal or non-standard to use such a request signalling marker. However, the students who did use the marker might have used it as a means to create less distance or found that their relation to the hearer was informal enough to use the signalling marker.

Would I be able to redo the test in Dutch?  
 Would it be a problem if I answered the questions in Dutch?  
 Would you please make the test in Dutch?  
 Could I make/do the test in Dutch?  
 Could I possibly answer in Dutch during the test?  
 Is it possible to make the test in Dutch?  
 Can I make a Dutch version?  
 Can I please have a resit, in which I can answer in Dutch?  
 Can the test be in Dutch?  
 Can I get a test in Dutch next time?  
 Can I make the next test in Dutch?  
 Can the following test be in Dutch, please?  
 May I make the test in Dutch, please?

**Table 3 Different answers ‘with your teacher’**

#### **4.1.4 At a party in London**

The test produced 16 different answers for this discourse situation. The most frequently used modal verbs were, respectively, ‘can’, ‘could’, and ‘would’. These modals are highly frequent in ability requests.

Only 6 students had answers that contained the marker ‘please’. As the situation is informal and standard enough for them to do use the marker, the students must have thought it unnecessary to use a politeness marker as obvious when performing a request to a friend.

Further markers were ‘do you mind’ (once), ‘would you like to’ and ‘I was wondering if’ (twice). ‘Do you mind’ was found by Hendriks to be more frequent in requests formed by native English speakers than those of the Dutch learners. The phrase is the most commonly used one in requests of willingness. The phrase ‘would you like to’ is also used in requests of willingness, but does not occur frequently. The phrase ‘I was wondering if you could’ is an often used phrase in a performative request type but did not occur in Hendriks’ data very often. It did, however, occur both in native English data as in Dutch learner data.

The most frequently used answer in this discourse situation was: ‘can I/we go/drive/come with you?’ and it was used by 11 of 41 students.

Can we go with you?  
 Can you drive me home, please?  
 Could we drive home with you?  
 Would you mind giving me a ride back home?  
 I was wondering if you could give us a ride home?  
 Could you give us a ride home?  
 Can you bring us to my house?  
 Can I get a ride?  
 Can you take my friend to her home?  
 Can you give me a ride home, please?  
 Could you take us home?  
 Could you take me with you?  
 Could you give me a ride home, please?  
 Could you please take me with you?  
 Would it be problem if we come with you?  
 Would you like to drive my friend home?  
 Do you mind giving me a ride home?

**Table 4 Different answers 'at a party in London'**

#### **4.1.5 In the street**

For this discourse situation, 26 different types of requests were produced.

The students made use of the modal verbs 'can', 'could', and 'would'. This time, the students more often used 'could' than 'can'. There was only one instance of 'would' in the phrase 'would you be able to'. The majority of the requests that the students formed were ability requests.

The use of 'please' occurred in only 5 of the 30 different requests. This seems odd, as the situation in the street is not very formal and a request for direction happens quite frequently. The reason that the students did not use the marker 'please' in this situation might have to do with the fact that the situation was not standard enough and the relationship between them and the hearer was not well enough defined (Hendriks 2002: p. 172).

Further used phrases were 'do you know' and 'would you be able to'.

In interesting finding for this discourse situation, was that there were 6 students that made no use of modal verbs or lexical markers to lighten their request. These 5 students did not use any internal politeness markers, at all.

Where is the train station?  
 Excuse me, could you tell me where the train station is?  
 Excuse me, do you know the way to the train station?  
 Do you know the directions to the train station?  
 Can you tell me where the train station is?  
 Excuse me, could you please tell use the way to the train station?  
 Excuse me, could you tell me how to get to the train station?  
 How do we get to the train station?  
 Where can I find the train station?  
 What is the fastest way to the train station?  
 In what direction is the train station?  
 Do you know how to get to the train station?  
 Do you know the fastest way to the train station?  
 Can you tell me where I can find the train station?

Can you tell us how we can get to the train station?  
 Can you explain how to go to the train station?  
 Could you tell me how to find the train station form here, please?  
 Could you tell me how I can find the train station, please?  
 Would you be able to direct us to the train station?  
 Excuse me, can you please tell me how to get to the train station?  
 Excuse me, but could you tell us the directions to the train station?  
 Excuse me, would you give us the directions to the train station?  
 Excuse me sir, do you know how to get to the train station?  
 Excuse me sir, could you show me the way to the train station?  
 Excuse me sir, could you give me the directions to the train station?  
 Excuse me sir, could you please tell us where we can find the train station?

**Table 5 Different answers 'in the street**

#### 4.1.6 Summary

Some obvious similarities between the requests formed in the different situations of this DCT was first of all, the considerate use of the modal verbs 'can/could'. The fact that, overall, the students made more use of the modal 'can' instead of 'could' means that the learners in this study use more native-like modals than predicted.

The lexical marker 'please' was used by a great majority of the students in the restaurant situation. This situation was informal and standard, the perfect situation for the Dutch learners to use it, according to Hendriks (2002: p. 172).

The students exclusively used indirect request forms. There was only instance of a request statement. This statement was a 'want statement' and was made in the first discourse situation 'in a restaurant'. All the other requests used by the students were questions. This is probably also caused by the fact that the 'in a restaurant' discourse situation as the most common situation. A request for the menu happens regularly in this situation and the waiter is used to getting this request. Therefore, the face act of this request will be less threatening than a much less common one. Even though the situation of 'in a restaurant' is regular and because of this the speech act is less threatening, this does not mean that the social context cannot call for an indirect request type. This is why all the students used on-record indirect requests in all their answers. Moreover, as mentioned in section 2.2.1, indirectness is the most used politeness strategy in English. Sifianou (1992) and Leech (2014) found that indirectness in English is more closely related to politeness than in any other language.

The only occurrence of requests without the inclusion of internal modification occurred in the 'in the street' situation. This was also the situation with the most variation in answers. There were also only 6 students in this situation who made use of politeness marker 'please'. This can be explained by the presumption that the relation and distance to the hearer was not clear enough. Ambiguity of a speaker-hearer relation can explain the amount of different answers and the students' reluctant use of the marker 'please'.

Not only in the last discourse situation, but overall, the answers also showed a lot of inter-student variation. The fact that the students showed this much variation in their answers, means that they must have not learned a prescribed model for politeness strategies with regards to the influence of different social contexts. It might also suggest that the students work with their own sociopragmatic knowledge to assess the situation and choose a politeness strategy.

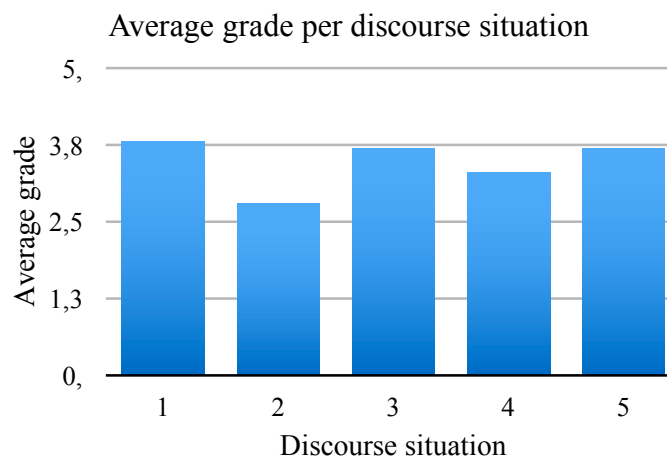
The following section will discuss and analyse the answers of the native speaker evaluation of the requests produced in the DCT. This test was used to test whether the sociopragmatic knowledge of the secondary school students who participated in the DCT is well enough for them to be perceived as polite while speaking English to native speakers.

#### **4.2 Data analysis: Evaluation test**

All the different answers from the DCT were made into an evaluation test. This test was sent out to 20 different native English speakers from the UK.

With regards to the results of the evaluation test, the best possible grade for the answered requests is assumed to be grade 4 'polite'. The intention of the native speakers was to grade the answers in terms of politeness. Of course, depending on the situation, a request can be more or less polite, but still be perceived as appropriate. In formal contexts, for example, it is less harmful to be extremely polite than in informal context. In this case, this type of linguistic behaviour can be regarded as what Watts describes as politic behaviour (Watts 2003: p. 161) and is, therefore, seen as appropriate in this certain context. However, the goal of this study is to test the politeness of Dutch learners of English and not their politic behaviour. As Watts describes it, polite behaviour surpasses politic behaviour. This means that even though the grade 'not polite/not impolite' might be seen as appropriate or politic behaviour in a certain context, it is not polite and therefore not sufficient in this evaluation. This also means that a grade of 5 'extremely polite' is regarded as too polite, which is also not the preferred score. As the grade 4 represents the perfect amount of politeness, the assumption in this study is that grade 4 'polite' is the best possible grade that the students' requests can receive.

The following graph shows the average grade per discourse situation for all 42 students participating in the DCT.



**Figure 2 Average grade per discourse situation**

The grades were given regarding the perceived level of politeness for each request with 1 for ‘impolite and 5 for an ‘extremely polite’ answer.

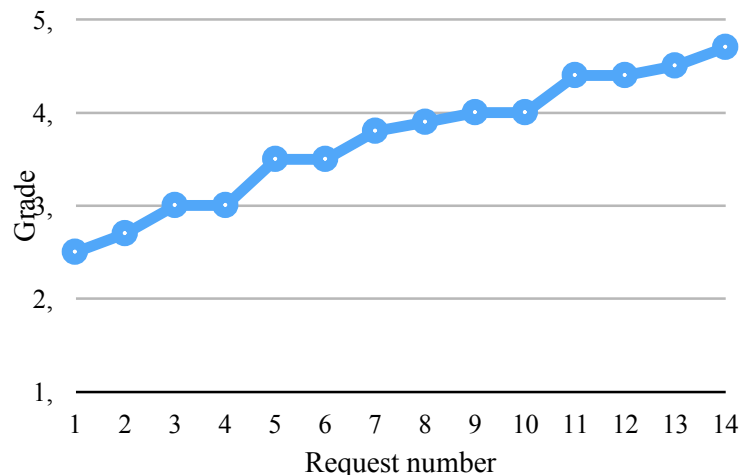
Figure 2 shows that the students’ answers are generally perceived between the range of 2,8 and 3,8. This means that all the average scores are above grade 2 (slightly impolite) and below grade 4 (polite). The lowest scores were given in discourse situation 2 ‘in a second-hand dress shop’, but overall the grades do not vary greatly between the different situations.

All together the average politeness grade given by the native speakers to the Dutch learners was 3.5. The average intermediate Dutch learner of English is perceived in between ‘not polite/not impolite’ and ‘polite’. This means that, overall, the intermediate Dutch learners of English have been able to use some of their knowledge of English politeness strategies to avoid pragmatic failure and be perceived as impolite.

Figure 2 above showed the average grade per discourse situation that the native English speakers provided for the requests made by the students’ participation in the DCT. In the following sections the grades within each different discourse situation will be discussed. The difference in perception of requests given in the same discourse situation will provide an insight in the politeness perception of the native speakers depending on different linguistic choices made by the Dutch students. These different perceptions in terms of politeness will show what linguistic choices are perceived as more, or less, polite than others. It will also show us with which discourse situations the students tend to have more problems with in terms of the perception and interpretation of social context and the use of politeness strategies. In the next sections, the grades will be discussed in further detail in order to find out what politeness strategies the learners used and how these strategies were perceived by the English native speakers

### 4.2.1 In a restaurant

In requests given in the ‘in a restaurant situation’ had an average politeness score of 3.8. As the students answered with 14 different requests in this situation, it is likely there was a lot of variation between the grades given for these answers. The graph below will show the variation of the grades.



**Figure 3 Grades per requests ‘in a restaurant’**

Figure 3 shows that the requests made the first discourse situation were graded between 2,5 and 4,7. The least polite request the students formed was ‘Can I have the menu?’ and the most polite ‘Is it possible for me to see the menu?’. Where the first request was almost perceived as ‘slightly impolite’ the last one was perceived as ‘extremely polite’. As stated above, the optimum grade that a request could get in the evaluation was ‘polite’, a score of 4. In this discourse situation one request got a score of exactly 4, the request ‘Excuse me, could you please get me the menu?’. Other request with a score very close to 4 were ‘Can I/we have/see the menu, please?’ with a score of 3,9 and ‘Could I/we please have/see the menu?’ with a score of 3,8. There were only two requests that scored a grade under 3 ‘not polite/not impolite’ and were therefore perceived as slightly more impolite than polite. One of the requests was the ‘want statement’ in the form of the request ‘I would like to see the menu, please?’. In contrast to the ‘slightly impolite’ requests, there were 4 requests that scored a grade higher than 4 and were therefore perceived as near to ‘extremely polite’. Two request with a score of 4,4 were ‘Excuse me, can I see the menu, please?’ and ‘May I/we have/take a look at the menu, please?’. A request with almost the same score, a score of 4,5, was ‘May I/we see the menu, please?’. The highest score was given to the request ‘Is it possible for me to see the menu, please?’.

The average score of all the students’ answers for this discourse situation was 3,8, which means that the average intermediate Dutch learner of English was perceived as ‘polite’ in this discourse situation. When we look at the request that was most used in this situation, we find that

20 of the 42 students used the request ‘Can I/we have/see the menu, please?’. This request scored a grade of 3.9, even higher than the average score. This results confirms the the majority of the Dutch students was able to produce a requests that was perceived as polite in this discourse situation.

#### 4.2.2 In a second-hand dress shop

The average grade the English native speakers gave for the requests made in this discourse situation was 2,8. As seen above there were 7 different requests formed to complete the discourse in this situation. The graph below shows the variation of the grades given for this discourse.

Apart from the fact that only 9 students were able to produce a relevant request for this discourse,

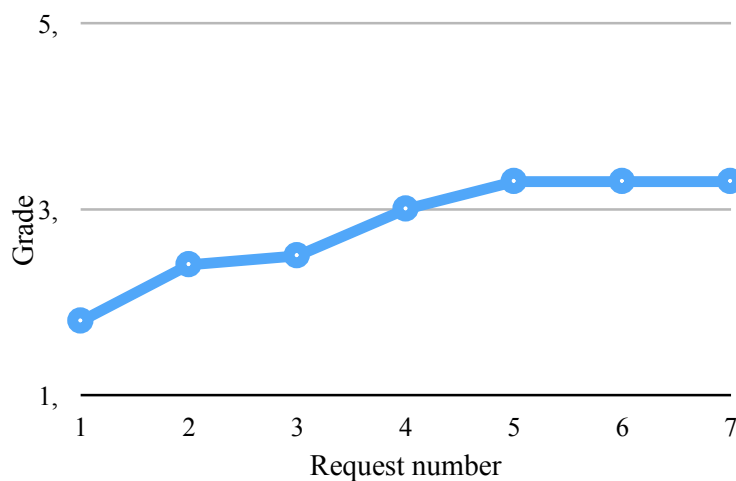


Figure 4 Grades per requests ‘in a second-hand dress shop’

for the most part, the students were also not able to produce requests that were perceived as polite. Figure 4 shows that the highest grade given in this situation was 3,6 for the request ‘May I buy it for a lower price?’. The lowest score was a score lower than 2 ‘slightly impolite’. This grade was given to the request ‘Can I buy it cheaper?’ and the native speakers graded it with a score of 1,8. Two requests were graded with a score in between 2 and 3 (‘Can I get the dress for less?’ and ‘Can you drop the price a bit?’), and one request scored exactly 3 (‘Can’t you bring the price down a little?’). There were two more requests that scored a grade over 3, namely a grade of 3,3, and these requests were ‘Can I get a discount on this dress?’ and ‘Is it okay if I give you ... pounds for it?’.

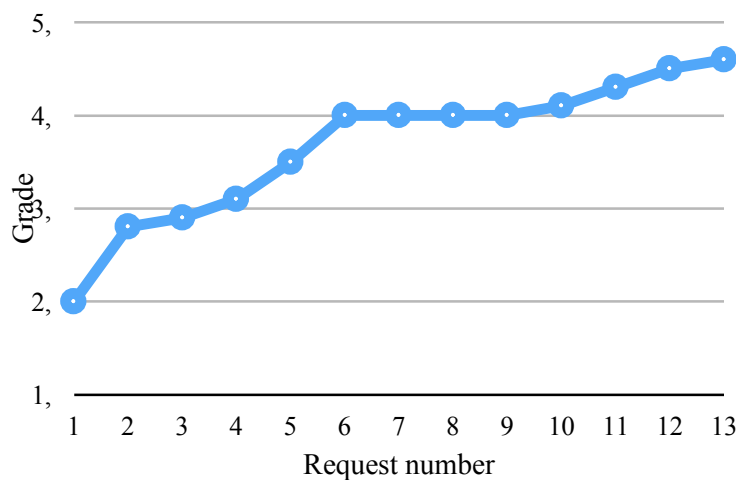
As there were only 9 answers that could be used for the evaluation test, there were only two answers that were used more than once. These were ‘Can I get the dress for less?’ and ‘Can you drop the price a bit?’. These request scored, respectively, a grade of 2,4 and 2,5. As the average score in this discourse situation was 2,8, these were both graded below the average.

The grades given for this discourse situation show that the students had difficulty forming a polite request in this discourse. Only three of the students were able to produce a request with a

score higher than 3, meaning that these requests were perceived more polite than impolite. The average grade for the requests in this situation is below 3, which means that the average answer given in this discourse was perceived as more impolite than polite. This discourse situation was the situation where most instances of the grade 1 ‘impolite’ were found.

### 4.2.3 With your teacher

There were 13 different requests formed for the discourse ‘with your teacher’. The graph below will show each grade given to the different requests.



**Figure 5 Grades per requests ‘with your teacher’**

Figure 5 shows that the grades vary between 2 ‘slightly impolite’ and 4.6, closest to ‘extremely polite’. The average score the students’ requests were given was 3,7. The request scored with the lowest grade was the request ‘Can the test be in Dutch’. The highest grade was given to the request ‘Would it be a problem if I answered the questions in Dutch?’. There were 4 requests that were graded with the exact score of 4 ‘polite’. One request was used by 3 students and scored a grade of 4,1. This request was ‘Is it possible to make the test in Dutch?’. Besides the request with the lowest score, there were only two other requests that scored below the grade of 3. These were ‘Could I made/do the test in Dutch?’ (2,8) and ‘Can I make the next test in Dutch?’ (2,9).

Even though the average score the requests were given was 3,7, the two request that were used the most scored 4,1 and 4,3. Both requests were used three times. These request were ‘Is it possible to make the test in Dutch?’ and ‘Can I please resit the test in Dutch?’.

For this discourse situation, 8 of the 13 different requests, scored a 4 or higher. The fact that the average came out the be below 4, however, is caused by the fact that there also were a few requests that scored below a 3. Altogether, the results of the evaluation of this discourse situation show that the students were able to form requests that were perceived as polite. There were even 4

request in this situation that scored a grade higher than 4 and were perceived as more than polite or close to 'extremely polite'. Only 5 students used a request that was graded with a score that indicated that they were perceived as more impolite than polite, which means that 15 of the 22 students making requests in this situation were perceived as more impolite than polite.

#### 4.2.4 At a party in London

For this discourse, there were 16 different requests formed by the students. The answers given in this discourse scored an average grade of 3,3. The figure below will show the variation in grades given by the native speakers.

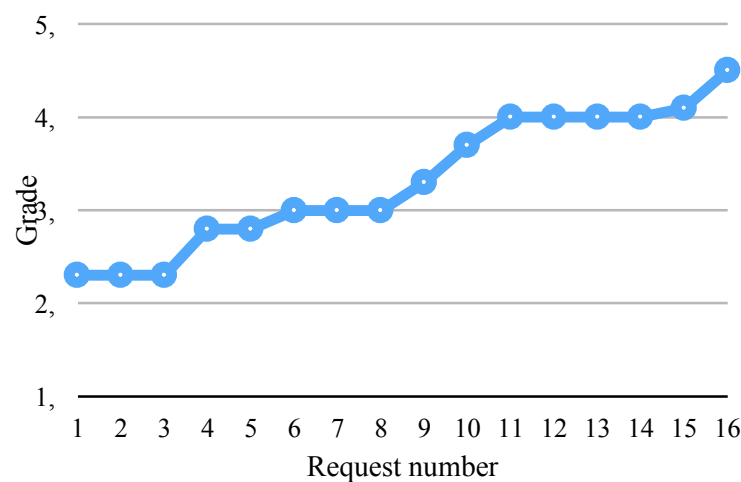


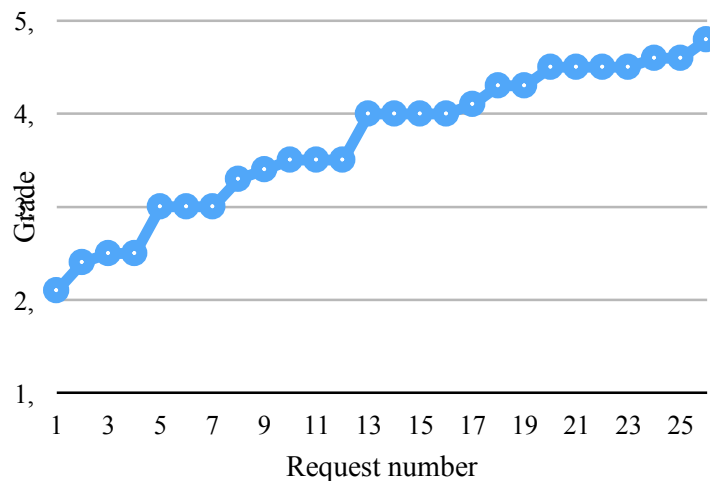
Figure 6 Grades per requests 'at a party in London'

The lowest score given in this situation was a score of 2,3. This score was given to three different requests ('Can I get a ride?', 'Can you drive/bring us to my house?', 'Could you give me/us a ride?'). The highest grade (4,5) was given to the request 'Would it be a problem if we come with you?'. 6 requests, used by 9 of the 42 students scored a grade of exactly, or more than 4. Only 9 more students scored a grade over 3 and formed a request that was perceived as more polite than impolite. The most frequently used request ('Can I/we go with you?') was used by 11 students and scored a grade of 3. There were two more request, of two more students, that scored the exact grade of 3. 11 students scored a grade below 3 and formed a request that was perceived more impolite than polite.

The average score of 3,3 shows that in average the students were able to form requests that were perceived as more polite than impolite. However, the fact only 18 of the 42 students scored a grade higher than 3 also proves that the majority students did have trouble forming a polite request.

#### 4.2.5 In the street

For the last discourse situation, the students used 26 different requests with the average grade of 3.7. The figure below will show the variation in grades given to the requests by the native English speakers.



**Figure 7 Grades per requests ‘in the street’**

The requests for the discourse ‘in the street’ scored grades ranging from 2,1 to 4,8. The request that scored lowest was ‘Where is the train station?’. The request with the highest grade was ‘Excuse me, could you please tell us the way to the train station?’. 7 requests, used by 16 students, scored a grade of 4,5 or higher and were perceived as ‘extremely polite’. As a contrast, 4 requests, used by 8 students were scored with a grade lower than 3 and were perceived more impolite than polite. Of these 4 requests, one used by 4 students was scored with a grade of 2,1 and was, therefore, perceived as ‘slightly impolite’. The variation between the answers is shown in figure 7, and can also be drawn from the fact that the two most frequently used requests were scored with the grades 2,1 and 4,6. The least polite request was used by 4 of the 42 students. The request with the grade 4,6 was used by 5 of the 42 students (‘Excuse me, could you tell me how to get to the train station?’).

Request with the exact score of 4 were the requests ‘Excuse me, but could you tell me where the train station is?’, ‘Could you tell me how I can find the train station, please?’, and ‘Could you tell me how to find the train station from here, please?’.

Only 8 students used a request with a grade lower than 3, while 30 students used a request with a score over 3. This means that a great majority of the students used a request that was perceived as more polite than impolite.

The average score of 3,7 and the fact that 30 of the 42 students formed a request that was perceived as more polite than impolite, means that almost all of the Dutch learner were able to form a polite request in this discourse situation.

The results in the previous section have shown that in most discourse situations, the students were able to score a grade indicating their requests were perceived as more polite than impolite. Only in the ‘in a second-hand dress shop’ situation the students scored a grade indicating slight impoliteness. The students must have had trouble reframing their pragmatic knowledge of this social context into English. As a means to explain this trouble with reframing the students’ knowledge, the following sections will discuss the student’s pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge according to the results found for each discourse situation. The goal of the following sections is to find out whether the students have trouble with their pragmalinguistic knowledge (choosing the right linguistic request strategy) or their sociopragmatic knowledge (choosing the right type of politeness according to one’s perception of the social context).

### **4.3 Pragmalinguistic competence**

This section will focus on an analysis of the pragmalinguistic knowledge of the students. The data from the DCT and the evaluation test will be compared as a means to analyse the results of the linguistic choices made by the Dutch learners. The focus in this section will be on the effect of mistakes like the overuse of ‘may’, ‘will’, ‘would’, and ‘could’. Basically mistakes in modal verb translation.

#### **4.3.1 In a restaurant**

With regards to pragmalinguistic knowledge, the students did quite well in this situation. Most requests were formed with the modal ‘can’ and marked with the lexical marker ‘please’ in order to achieve the right amount of politeness. The average score of 3,8 would have been better, had the students used less instances of the modal ‘could’. Requests with the modal ‘could’ scored a little lower than the same type of requests with the modal ‘can’. This might be caused by the fact that native speakers tend to use ‘can’ more often than ‘could’ and therefore preferred the requests with the use of the modal ‘can’.

The average score would have been lower, if the students had not overused requests forms with the modal ‘may’. Requests forms in which the students made use of the modal verb ‘may’ scored higher than those with ‘can’ or ‘could’. Requests in which the students use both the modal ‘may’ and the lexical politeness marker ‘please’ were scored with grades over 4,5 and these requests were perceived as ‘extremely polite’. This indicates that Hendriks findings were right. Dutch learners tend to overuse the modal verb ‘may’, because they do not know that ‘may’ has a higher grade of politeness than the Dutch equivalent ‘mogen’.

Apart from the use of modal verbs, the biggest variation in grades within this discourse

situation caused by the students' use or lack of use of lexical politeness markers 'please' and 'excuse me'.

The requests in the form of a want statement was graded with a score of 3. Request in the form of a question with any modal verb and the lexical marker 'please' would have been graded with a higher score. This illustrated that the native speakers perceive a want statement as less polite than a question. The exact sentence in Dutch would be a perfectly polite request in the same situation. This indicates an error in pragmalinguistic knowledge.

#### **4.3.2 In a second-hand dress shop**

All the requests were formed as questions and the students mostly used the modal verb 'can' in their request for this situation. In none of the requests there was an instance of any other lexical marker. The request with the highest grade was a request with the modal verb 'may'. In this instance, the use of the more formal modal 'may' and no additional politeness marker, the request turned out to be perceived with a good amount of politeness.

The pragmalinguistic knowledge of the students does not necessarily seem to be the problem in this discourse situation. They formed correctly constituted requests and made no pragmalinguistic errors.

#### **4.3.3 With your teacher**

In this discourse situation, the students used the modal verb 'can' in most of their requests. The few requests with modal verb 'could', were again perceived as less polite than those with 'can'. Requests in which the students used the modal verb 'would' and 'may' were perceived as more polite than those with 'could' or 'can'.

The use of politeness marker 'could' in combination with the downgrader 'possibly' caused a request to be scored with a grade of 4,5. The fact that this request was perceived as 'extremely polite' is most possibly caused by the usage of the downgrader. The student must have known that the downtowner would make the request more polite, but overdid it in this case.

The usage of lexical politeness markers did make the requests in this situation be perceived as too polite but, rather, request without a politeness marker were often perceived as slightly impolite. The pragmalinguistic knowledge of the students seems to be significant for this discourse situation. The students formed the right types of requests and used the correct linguistic tokens to form their requests.

#### **4.3.4 At a party in London**

In this discourse situation, the students overuse the modal verbs ‘could’.

In this discourse situation, the students used more types of requests apart from possibility requests. They used requests of willingness, in which the students used the phrases ‘would you like to’, ‘do you mind’ and ‘would you mind’ and two of the students used a performative request with the phrase ‘I was wondering if you could’. The request with the phrase ‘would it be a problem if’ was perceived as ‘extremely polite’, while the other non-possibility requests without additional lexical marker were all perceived as more polite than the possibility requests.

The most important difference between the requests graded with a low and a high score, next to the choice of modal verb, is the addition of politeness marker ‘please’.

The students’ pragmalinguistic knowledge is high in this discourse situation. They made use of other types of requests than possibility requests and used correct linguistic terms.

#### **4.3.5 In the street**

The use of the modal verb ‘could’ is very high in this discourse situation but it did not necessarily cause them to be perceived as over-polite.

The students also made more use of willingness requests than in any other discourse situation. These willingness requests were perceived as less polite than the possibility requests. This discourse situation is the only situation in which the students used requests without any internal lexical politeness markers. This caused a lot of the request to be perceived as slightly impolite. More highly graded requests had an additional lexical politeness marker ‘please’. The highest graded requests were request formed with a possibility request with an additional marker ‘please’ and the addition of ‘excuse me’.

Overall, the pragmalinguistic knowledge of the students seems to be sufficient for this discourse situation. They used more different types of requests.

#### **4.4 Sociopragmatic competence**

The students’ pragmalinguistic knowledge did not seem to cause any trouble with the way their requests were perceived by the native speakers. There are, however, some requests that the native speakers found to be more polite than impolite, or even slightly impolite. This might be caused by any sociopragmatic mistakes that the Dutch learners made.

The focus in this section will be on mistakes found in the students’ perception of the social context per discourse situation. The aim is to analyse the students’ command of social knowledge that they need in the production of appropriate speech act strategies in English.

The students' sociopragmatic competence was analyzed by looking at the average grades of the requests produced within each one of the discourse situations.

#### **4.4.1 In a restaurant**

The average score of the requests produced in the first discourse situation 'in a restaurant' came out on a score of 3,8. This score indicates that the native speakers perceived the requests produced by the Dutch learners as significantly more polite than impolite and even very close to the perfect score 'polite'. This means that the Dutch learner were able to use their sociopragmatic knowledge to produce polite requests in English. They were able to identify the social context of a restaurant and the relation between them and the waiter and use this in their politeness strategies.

#### **4.4.2 In a second-hand dress shop**

The average of the grades in the 'in a second-hand dress shop situation is very low. The average grade the native speakers gave the requests made by the Dutch students in this discourse was only 2,8. This means that the average student scored below grade 3 'not polite/not impolite' and the native speakers perceived their requests to be a slightly more impolite than polite. The students did not use enough politeness markers in their requests. The fact that a lot of the requests with the modal 'can' were perceived as impolite, could have been avoided, had the students used an additional politeness marker 'please'.

As the students do have the pragmalinguistic knowledge to form the right type of requests, they must have lacked in sociopragmatic knowledge. They lacked the sociopragmatic knowledge to perceive and apply the social context of this specific discourse situation to form a polite request in English. This is caused by the fact that the speaker-hearer relation between a customer and the owner of a second-hand dress shop differs in English for the relation in Dutch. In Dutch the speaker-hearer distance in this situation must be perceived as less threatening than in English. This causes the Dutch learners to use too little politeness markers in this situation. The result is that they are perceived as slightly impolite.

#### **4.4.3 With your teacher**

The request produced in the third discourse situation 'with your teacher' had an average grade of 3,7. An average score of 3,7 indicates that the Dutch learners were able to produce requests that were perceived as considerably more polite than impolite, and, again, very close to perfectly polite. The sociopragmatic knowledge of the students with regard to a student-teacher relation was strong

enough to allow them to use the social context of the situation in a way that they could produce a polite request.

#### **4.4.4 At a party in London**

The average grade of the request in this situation ‘at a party in London’ was only slightly more in the direction of polite than of the direction of impolite. The average grade of the requests in this situation was only 3,3. The fact that the grade was only slightly more polite than impolite could indicate that the students had difficulty translating their politeness strategies for this specific social context in English. However, the lack of politeness of the Dutch learners, more likely, has to do with the fact that this situation concerns the relation between friends. The idea that a request to a friend has to be polite might not be expected in a friend-to-friend relation. Taking this in consideration, an average score of 3,3 could be quite good. However, as stated above, the aim of this research was to test the students’ ability to be perceived as polite. This means that with a score of 3,3, the learners produced requests that were perceived slightly more polite than impolite. The sociopragmatic knowledge of the learners is strong enough to be perceived as slightly polite, but a score of 3,3 could easily be improved.

#### **4.4.5 In the street**

The requests in the discourse situation ‘in the street’ had an average grade of 3,7. This again is quite a good score in terms of sociopragmatic knowledge. The average Dutch students was able to apply the right type of politeness strategy in a speaker-hearer relation between strangers. This caused the average request in this situation to be perceived as significantly more polite than impolite and close to perfectly polite.

Overall, the Dutch learners scored an average grade of 3,5. The native English speakers perceived the learners as quite polite. In most situations, the students were able to express themselves in a polite way. They were able to make polite requests in situations like a restaurant, a student-teacher conversation and asking a stranger for help. They were also able to find the right amount of politeness to converse in a friend-to-friend relationship. Assuming that a request to a friend does not necessarily have to be as polite as a request to a stranger is a sign of strong sociopragmatic knowledge.

The only sign that the students really lacked sociopragmatic knowledge was shown in the ‘in a second-hand dress shop’ situation. The average grade of 2,8 showed that the students’ requests were perceived as slightly impolite. The slight impoliteness in this discourse situation shows that the social context of this situation is perceived differently in Dutch and English. In Dutch a

business-like negotiation like the one in the second discourse situation, asks for more direct language than it does in English. The students must have lacked this knowledge and negatively transferred their Dutch politeness strategies to English, resulting in the fact that they were perceived as slightly impolite.

The students could also have scored better in the ‘at a party in London’ situation. In average, the students were perceived as slightly more polite than impolite, but still their score was quite low. In order for the Dutch learners to be perceived with a grade closer to 4 ‘polite’, other small mistakes concerning the students’ pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge have to be abolished.

As the students in this research were only intermediate learners of English it might also help to further improve their knowledge of English grammar. But most importantly, the students have to become more aware of the sociopragmatic differences between Dutch and English. The following chapter will be used to discuss the findings of this section with the theory discussed in chapter two. The next chapter will also discuss how the teaching of politeness could be improved and consider some possible limitations and improvements for the currently discussed research.

## 5. Discussion

The following chapter will be a discussion of the results given in the previous chapter. First, the results will be discussed in relation to the theories discussed in chapter 2. What theories have shown to be important for Dutch second language politeness learners of English? There will also be a discussion about the consequences of the results concerning English second language politeness teaching in Dutch secondary schools. The last section of this chapter will discuss the research limitations of the study and will provide some possible improvements for further research.

### 5.1 Theory

This thesis started off by mentioning an article in *NRC Handelsblad* about Edwards (2016). Edwards wrote a book about Dutch-English. She had an example of a request of a Dutch speaker of English ('Can you open the window?') and a native speaker of English ('Could you perhaps open the window?'). As mentioned before in section 2.4, her suggestion that Dutch speakers would use more 'can' and natives more 'could' contradicts that of Hendriks (2002). The results from the present study are not completely in line with those of Hendriks. Hendriks found that native speakers are more inclined to use the modal verb 'can' than they would 'could'. She also found that Dutch learners of English tend to overuse the modal 'could'. The results of the present study are in line with Hendriks' findings. Overall, the students still used more 'can' than 'could', but in most occasions, the requests formed with modal 'could' were perceived as too polite. This indicates that the natives perceive the use of 'can' as the most politic behaviour and can be said to be most native-like. Edwards example does show that natives are more likely to use a politeness marker like 'perhaps'. This downgrader was found by Hendriks to be used more often by native speakers than by learners. The present study also showed a significant lack of usages of any type of downgraders. There was only one instance of the use of 'possibly'. Edwards' example was, most likely, constructed to show the prejudice of Dutch directness and, therefore lacked any additional lexical politeness marker. However, Dutch learners have been found to overuse the lexical marker 'please'. The addition of 'please' would have made Edwards' Dutch-English requests more to the point. Hendriks' study as well as the current study have shown the politeness marker 'please' is the most used lexical politeness marker by Dutch learners of English.

The use of 'please', however, did vary between the different discourse situations. The social context of the situations had a lot of impact on the students' strategies. They did not, however, always use the right strategies for every situation. The social context of the 'in a second-hand dress shop' situation seemed to confuse the students. They were not able to choose the right type of politeness strategies in this rather informal, but business-like context. Reframing their knowledge of

this type of situation from Dutch to English seemed to be a problem. The students were perceived as slightly impolite. This means that the students might have wrongly transferred their sociopragmatic knowledge from Dutch into English. This specific type of social context could be interpreted differently in Dutch than it is in English. As the setting and occurrence of the situation are the same in both cultures, the difference must be in the distance, rank or degree of imposition of this situation. In Dutch difference between speaker and hearer must be smaller than in English. This means that in Dutch this type of situation is less formal, and calls for less politeness modification than in English.

The students also had difficulty being perceived as polite in the ‘at a party in London’ situation. The students were still perceived as more polite than impolite, but their grade of 3,3 is rather close to a score of ‘not polite/not impolite’. It could be argued that, as the situation concerned a speaker-hearer relation between friends, a grade of 3,3 can be seen as appropriate and the students showed politic behaviour. A grade indicating politic behaviour could be seen as a grade score in this rather informal social context but for this specific study, as the grade was too far from 4 ‘polite’, the students were too far off to show polite linguistic behaviour in this context.

With regards to their request strategies, the students almost exclusively used the indirect request strategies of questions and only one statement request. All their requests were either requests for action or information, which, as mentioned in section 2.2.1 are the the most prominent types of requests. Concerning the use of upgraders and downgraders, the students only used one instance of a downgraders and no upgraders, at all. As the focus in this thesis was only on internal modification, the modification studied in this research was solely syntactical. The students only used lexical, and phrasal politeness markers.

As mentioned in section 2.2.1, downgraders are used in negative politeness strategies. As said before, English is had a negative politeness culture. The students, therefore, almost exclusively used negative politeness strategies to preserve a distance between themselves and the hearers in each discourse situation. Only in the ‘in the street’ situation, the students produced requests without the use of any internal request modification (‘Where is the train station?’, ‘How do we get to the train station?’). These requests are information requests that only exist of a core request, and are, therefore, on-record indirect requests without modification. The only redressive action in these requests is the use of a request strategy.

Overall, the students were able to reframe their sociopragmatic knowledge form Dutch to English quite well. There is, however, still room for improvement. Second language education in the Netherlands could be improved by increasing the students’ focus on pragmatic abilities. The following section will discuss some improvements for politeness teaching for Dutch learners of English.

## 5.2 Consequences for L2 English politeness teaching

The following section will discuss the notion of politeness education. The aim of this section is to propose a way in which teachers can spend more time on teaching the pragmatic act of politeness in second language, or the concept of reframing. Research has shown that, although it is difficult, politeness (and other pragmatic skills) can indeed be taught (Watts 2003) and that politeness teaching is effective (Alcón & Martines 2008, Kasper 1997, Lightbown & Spada 2013, Rose & Kasper 2001). Lightbown & Spada (2013) explain this by clarifying that pragmatic skills have to be acquired. Students have to be trained to recognize pragmatic rules in a foreign language. Pragmatic skills acquire more knowledge than complete competence in vocabulary and grammar. The rules of pragmatics can cause a sentence to have multiple meanings in different contexts.

In the case of politeness, the context is very important for the strategy that has to be chosen. A request can be perfectly polite in a rather informal context, one with a minimal the speaker-hearer distance. While the same request can be perceived as impolite in a more formal context or a situation with a greater speaker-hearer distance. This element of communicative competence (Trosborg 1995) is what causes the concept of politeness (and pragmatics in general) to be very difficult to teach. Thomas (1983: p. 97) provides two good reasons that support this claim: first of all, he states that pragmatic description is not as precise as grammar with regard to the direct effect that is perceived by enlarging a learner's linguistic competence; and, secondly, he mentions that pragmatics is "a delicate area and it is not immediately obvious how it can be 'taught'".

The students in the current study did not get any specific exercises on politeness strategies in English. Pragmatics are mostly taught by doing listening, reading and speaking exercises. The most important step in teaching pragmatics, as can be concluded from the present study, is the step to make the students aware of the sociopragmatic differences between their native language and the target language, in this case Dutch and English. This means that the teachers should make their students be aware of sociopragmatic differences and the influence of social context on politeness strategies. They should learn the effects of social distance, power and rank of imposition as well as those of the discourse setting the frequency of an utterance.

This awareness raising can be accomplished by comparing pragmatic data from the native language and the target language in a specific social context. There are several ways in which awareness raising of sociopragmatic differences can be accomplished. Alcón & Martines (2008) suggest to give the students oral and written discourse completion tasks, doing role-play, self-assessment, video prompting and conversation analysis. Even giving the students simple translation tasks might raise their sociopragmatic awareness.

The point of these exercises is that the students have to think of the influence of social

context on the use of their politeness strategies. During, or by means of revision of the exercise, the teacher should make the students aware of the effects of social context on the politeness strategies that are used in a specific situation. By doing these exercises, they will find out that a simple word-for-word translation of politeness strategies in their native language, will not be sufficient.

Awareness-raising also is important in order to make the students aware of the difference of politic and polite behaviour in second language. As discussed above, in previous sections, politic behaviour could be perfectly acceptable to native speakers in more informal contexts, while formal contexts call for more polite behaviour. Students should be made aware of these distinctions. As the previous study has shown, Dutch learners of English have difficulty expressing themselves in a polite, or even politic, manner in 'informal, business-like' relations, like the 'in a second-hand dress-shop' discourse situation. As a first step, awareness-raising will help Dutch learners of English understand small pragmatic differences between Dutch and English and expand their sociopragmatic awareness in their second language.

As a complement to awareness-raising, Barron (2003: p.54) suggests giving the students as much input from the target language as possible, because without input, the learning cannot take place. By giving the student input from the target language, the students will become familiar with the pragmalinguistic skills of their target language. They will hear form of request, or other speech acts that native speakers use on a day-to-day basis.

Another thing that is very important, for any type of teaching is that the students and the teacher are motivated. Without motivation to teach the students pragmatic skills, the students will not see the importance and lose interest. The students should know the importance of pragmatic skills in order to remain interested in learning them. Thomas explains the importance of pragmatic skill compared to grammatical skill:

Grammatical errors may be irritating and impede communication, but at least, as a rule, they are apparent in the surface structure, so that H [the hearer] is aware that an error has occurred. Once alerted to the fact that S [the speaker] is not fully grammatically competent, native speakers seem to have little difficulty in making allowances for it. Pragmatic failure, on the other hand, is rarely recognized as such by non-linguists. If a non-native speaker appears to speak fluently (i.e., is grammatically competent), a native speaker is likely to attribute his/her apparent impoliteness or unfriendliness, not to any linguistic deficiency, but to boorishness or ill-will. While grammatical error may reveal a speaker to be a less than proficient language-user, pragmatic failure reflects badly on him/her as a person.

(Thomas 1983: p. 96-97)

Thomas explain that if a language learner wants to achieve a fluent or native-like proficiency in a target language, they do not only have to become fully grammatically competent, but also pragmatically competent. If a learner has only achieved a full grammatical competence, native speakers might still perceive this learner as impolite, unfriendly, or direct. Achieving full pragmatic

competence will help a learner to be perceived as more polite and more native-like.

Please note that the proposal for improvement of politeness education in the Netherlands are merely based on perceptions obtained from this research. The teaching methods discussed in this section are purely constructed as suggestions.

### **5.3 Research limitations**

In this section the research limitations of this study will be discussed in order to give a critical reflection on the research methodology of the study and to propose improvements for possible further research.

One of the greatest limitations of this study was the relatively small range of input data. The DCT was distributed amongst students from only one level of Dutch secondary school education. The learners were all part of the same age group and attended the same school. However, as Dutch schools follow a curriculum that should lead to the same amount of proficiency at the end of every secondary school education, it is possible to suggest that every student at an intermediate level of English education would score similar to the students in this study. Nevertheless, the results of this study cannot be generalized. Further research should conduct a study amongst a larger amount of Dutch learners of multiple levels of proficiency and with different educational backgrounds.

Secondly, this study researched the Dutch learners' spoken English by means of a written DCT. Even though the students were asked to write down their answers as if they were speaking, this might have affected the answers.

Thirdly, the social contexts used in this research were very limited. The study could be broadened by looking at multiple social context, speaker-hearer relationships, etc.

Also, the different answers grouped together according to relative linguistic similarities. The criteria could differ from those of other interpreters and are not binding.

Another limitation would be that this study only tested a relative evaluation of the requests. The evaluators were able to relatively scale the request per discourse situation in terms of politeness and grade them accordingly. Additionally, the perception of the concept politeness could differ from one native speaker to another. As the concept politeness<sub>1</sub> was used for this study, the definition of politeness in this study is the native speakers' own perception of politeness. The native speakers evaluating the requests came from different places and educations. Every evaluator used their own definition of politeness to fill in the scales. Therefore, the evaluations in this study can only said to be relative. In order to be able to generalise the native speaker's answers, the grades used in this thesis were average grades. Even though there were only a few requests for which two

or three native speaker evaluations differed remarkably, it might be interesting to look into the cause of the varying evaluations.

An additional problem with the native evaluations is the fact that the evaluators were asked to grade the requests on a scale of politeness. By asking people to grade unnatural, non-conversational linguistic behaviour on a scale, the natives might have evaluated certain linguistic behaviour as polite in this study, while they would not have perceived the same linguistic behaviour as explicitly polite in real-life conversation.

Last of all, the use of the politeness scale also causes that this research is not a test for the learners' native-like ability of English, but solely to test their ability in terms of politeness and the ability of Dutch learners of English to utter polite request in English. The addition of an acceptability scale could help define whether certain behaviour might not have been perceived as perfectly polite but maybe it would be perceived as politic behaviour. The results from this study cannot be used as means to propose the best way to do a polite request in English. A possible improvement of the study could be to test what requests in which situations are most native-like or appropriate.

## 6. Conclusion

The intermediate Dutch learners in the present research got an absolute average politeness grade of 3,5. This means that they were perceived to be significantly more polite than impolite. The students had pragmalinguist and sociopragmatic knowledge that turned out to be quite significant. Apart from a few mistakes in both types of pragmatic knowledge, the students did as well as Hendriks' (2002) study predicted.

But even though the learners' pragmatic knowledge was respectable, the students were not always perceived as perfectly polite. In average, the students scored grades indicating a reasonable command of politeness in their request for almost all the different discourse situations. In every situation, however, there were requests that were perceived as slightly impolite or requests that were regarded as too (or extremely) polite.

Apart from the inter-student variation, the students were in average perceived as being 'slightly impolite' in a business-like situation, like the price negotiation in the second discourse of the DCT. The fact that Dutch people are sometimes perceived as direct, or impolite in certain situations, might be caused by their lack of sociopragmatic knowledge and an incomplete process of reframing.

This shortage of sociopragmatic knowledge in English indicates that the education of politeness in Dutch secondary schools could be improved. Improvements for politeness teaching should include awareness raising with regards to differences between sociopragmatic rules in Dutch and English.

## Appendix 1: Discourse Completion Test

Age:

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Gender:

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Years of English language education:

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### Imagine yourself in each of the situations given below, what would you say?

*NB: Do not consider this a written task, instead, please write down what you would say in the given situations.*

1. **In a restaurant**

You are in a restaurant with a friend. You would like to see the menu before you order. What do you say to the waiter?

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2. **In a second-hand dress shop**

You are in a second-hand dress shop and find a dress you like. When the owner of the shop tells you the price of the dress, you think it is quite expensive. What do you say to the owner of the shop?

---

3. **With your teacher**

You have failed Philosophy for the second time. It is not that you do not know the answers, but you have difficulty answering the questions in English. You know you would do much better if the test was in Dutch. What do you say to your teacher?

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4. **At a party in London**

You are at a party in London. You want to go home because you have an exam the next morning. Your friend does not want to walk all the way home. She found out that your mutual friend Ron is driving home in the same direction. What do you say to Ron?

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**5. In the street**

You are walking to the train station with your friend. You are afraid you are going to miss your train. Your friend suggests asking someone in the street for directions. There is one man walking next to you. What do you say to the man next to you?

---

**Appendix 2: Evaluation Test**

Read the described situations below. For every situation there are a few answers. Read the answers and grade them in terms of politeness by using the scales.

**In a restaurant**

You are in a restaurant with a friend. You would like to see the menu before you order. What do you say to the waiter?

1. Could we please see the menu?
2. May we take a look at the menu, please?
3. Could I see the menu, please?
4. Could you bring us the menu, please?
5. Excuse me, can I see the menu, please?

**In a second-hand dress shop**

You are in a second-hand dress shop and find a dress you like. When the owner of the shop tells you the price of the dress, you think it is quite expensive. What do you say to the owner of the shop?

1. Can I get the dress for less?
2. Can you drop the price (a bit)?
3. May I buy it for a lower price?

**With your teacher**

You have failed Philosophy for the second time. It is not that you do not know the answers, but you have difficulty answering the questions in English. You know you would do much better if the test was in Dutch. What do you say to your teacher?

1. Can I make the next test in Dutch?
2. Could I do the test in Dutch?

3. Can the test be in Dutch, please?
4. Would it be a problem if I answered the questions in Dutch?

**At a party in London**

You are at a party in London. You want to go home because you have an exam the next morning. Your friend does not want to walk all the way home. She found out that your mutual friend Ron is driving home in the same direction. What do you say to Ron?

1. Would you like to drive my friend home?
2. Could you bring us home?
3. I was wondering if you could give us a ride home?
4. Could you give us a ride home?
5. Can you bring us to my house?

**In the street**

You are walking to the train station with your friend. You are afraid you are going to miss your train. Your friend suggests asking someone in the street for directions. There is one man walking next to you. What do you say to the man next to you?

1. Excuse me, could you please tell us the way to the train station?
2. How do we get to the train station?
3. Can you tell me where the train station is?
4. Excuse me, could you tell me how to get to the train station?
5. Excuse me, would you give us the directions to the train station?
6. Would you be able to direct us to the train station?

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