Perception of Prosodic and Aspectual Cues to Politeness in Teacher Directives in L1 and L2 Russian

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Background: Several studies in interlanguage pragmatics have reported Russian directive speech acts to take a particular position within the dimensions of linguistic politeness and (in) directness, when compared to some Germanic and Romance languages extensively studied in this framework.

Purpose: The present paper aimed to investigate the role of language specific cues to politeness in Russian requests by examining their perception by native speakers and L2 learners in a scenario of teacher-student interaction.

Method: An experiment was conducted in which L1 and L2 groups rated the politeness of teacher directives in Russian on a discrete 7-point scale. Three variables were controlled for in the experimental design: the directness of the speech act (manifested in the choice between an imperative or an interrogative construction), verbal aspect, and the type of nuclear pitch accent.

Results: The obtained data generally corroborate existing studies, demonstrating that both native Russian speakers and learners of Russian with Chinese L1 do not judge as impolite direct imperative strategies employed in teacher requests. Though both groups of participants similarly relied on intonational cues in their judgements, the L2 learners did not perform target-like in evaluating the pragmatics of verbal aspect. Within the native group, the usage of imperfective verbs both in direct and conventionally indirect constructions was perceived as a highly salient indicator of impoliteness. Conversely, the size of this effect in L2 judgements did not reach a significance level, implying that this language specific cue is not acquired through incidental learning at pre-intermediate or intermediate proficiency levels.

Implication: Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of explicit pragmatic instruction even for students who have sufficient experience studying abroad; furthermore, they outline new directions for empirical studies in Russian from the perspective of interlanguage pragmatics.

Keywords: language teaching, interlanguage pragmatics, politeness, verbal aspect, prosody, L2 Russian.

Introduction

Cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics are fields of research that document how native speakers and language learners produce and comprehend various aspects of pragmatic meaning, such as the illocutionary force of speech acts, conversational implicatures, linguistic politeness, and impoliteness (Félix-Brasdefer, 2017). Cross-cultural studies contrast the evidence of L1 speakers' pragmatic behaviours obtained independently in different cultures, while interlanguage pragmatics compare the performances of L1 and L2 speakers and focus on the factors affecting the development of pragmatic competences in language learners, including the role

of formal instruction and study abroad (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013; Ishihara, 2010; Taguchi & Roever, 2017).

Early studies in these fields were dominated by the search of universality in politeness principles which resulted in the creation of Brown and Levinson's influential theory of negative and positive face in face-threatening speech acts (1987). This line of thought has been often criticised (Al-Duleimi et al., 2016; Culpeper, 2011; O'Driscoll, 2007; Song, 2017), partly for basing its main tenets on a small sample of languages biased toward so-called Western languages, primarily Germanic and Romance, and ignoring, for example, Slavic languages (Wierzbicka, 1985, 2003) or the variety of languages spoken in Asia (Ide, 1989).

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However, the scope of studies in pragmatics has widened significantly over recent decades, as typologically different languages are increasingly being investigated; see, for example, a detailed review of pragmatic studies in Eastern languages in (Chen, 2010) and successful application of Brown and Levinson's theory in several recent case studies (Chen et al., 2013; Dickey, 2016; Kiyama et al., 2012). We aim to continue this trend by examining evidence from Russian, a language that is relatively understudied within the mainstream framework of cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics.

As with other languages, the most widely researched topic of pragmatic studies that examine Russian is *the speech act of request* that belongs to the category of directives in Searle's (1975) taxonomy. Research has revealed that, on the one hand, L1 Russian shares with extensively studied languages various mitigation strategies, including internal and external pragmatic modifiers (Formanovskaya, 1984; Grigoriev & Rubtsova, 2021; Iliadi & Larina, 2017; Larina, 2009; McCarthy, 2018; Ogiermann & Bella, 2020). On the other hand, a considerable amount of descriptive literature regarding linguistic politeness discusses the evidence of non-universal, specific linguistic cues for politeness utilised by L1 speakers of Russian (and, in some cases, other Slavic languages). However, knowledge about the actual usage and perception of these language specific features in L1 is largely based on researchers' intuitions and requires empirical testing; moreover, little evidence is available regarding their acquisition in L2. In the present paper, we experimentally examine common notions concerning three specific cues for politeness in Russian directive speech acts; namely, the neutral status of direct imperative constructions, the pragmatic markedness of imperfective verbal aspect, and the degree of politeness conveyed by two phonologically distinct combinations of accents.

One intriguing feature of Russian directive speech acts outlined in the literature is their position according to the notions of politeness and directness. Since Blum-Kulka's seminal work (1987), empirical research has demonstrated that these two dimensions are orthogonal, independent in nature (Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Grainger & Mills, 2016; Haugh, 2015; Ruytenbeek, 2020; Yu, 2011). That is, while some conventionally indirect strategies can be perceived as polite, this does not necessarily stand for the most indirect strategies, such as hints. In fact, several studies argue that, contrary to English, a successful polite request in Russian does not require conventionally indirect strategies (e. g., Bezyaeva, 2002; Dong, 2009; Larina, 2009; Leech & Larina, 2014; Mills, 1992, 1993; Rathmayr, 1994; Wierzbicka, 2010; Zemskaya, 1997). Moreover, some of the studies assume that the imperative is a 'prototypical means of expressing request in Russian' (Kotorova, 2015). Several papers report empirical data partially supporting this claim. Ogiermann (2009) reveals that the data elicited via a written discourse completion task from native speakers of English, German, Polish, and Russian indicate that Russian speakers demonstrate the highest preference for imperative requests (35 of 100 participants utilised imperative constructions in the context of 'asking a fellow student for lecture notes'). Ogiermann's data do not support the claim that interrogative requests in informal conversation are marginal or not preferred; however, the opposite result is revealed in Betsch's corpus study (2003). A more recent follow-up experiment (Ogiermann & Bella, 2020) that focussed primarily on the request perspective in various L1 and L2 conditions reveals that Russian speakers can adapt their request strategies in L2 English, more frequently opting for interrogatives and a speaker-oriented perspective than in their L1.

Existing studies on the choice of direct or indirect strategies in L2 Russian almost exclusively investigate the interlanguage of American learners. Mills (1993) reports that the data elicited from learners of Russian demonstrates that they were generally able to acquire target language request strategies, but only to a moderate degree, e.g., American learners of Russian utilised imperative verbs but only if 'framed by excessive efforts to justify the request'. Owen (2001) analyses requests from oral proficiency interviews by L2 Russian learners but does not find significant differences between native and non-native speakers' usage of direct strategies, as both groups employed them rarely. However, the usage of direct strategies was observed only in requests produced by the students tested after a term of study in Russia, while learners without the experience of language learning abroad avoided direct requests completely. Similarly, Krulatz (2015) reports only a small number of imperative constructions in email requests produced by native and non-native speakers of Russian. Finally, a study of requests for favour elicited through role-play in (Dubinina & Malamud, 2017) demonstrates that both native and heritage speakers of Russian predominantly relied on indirect strategies and interrogatives in formal and informal requests. Only a small number of imperative requests was attested, and these were exclusively in native speakers' data. The tendency to avoid direct strategies as demonstrated by heritage speakers is interpreted by the authors as a possible case of pragmatic transfer from English. Overall, the interlanguage studies indicate a lack of explicit pragmatic instruction concerning the usage of direct request strategies as well as a non-target-like performance from learners with English L1 even at advanced levels. According to

metalinguistic interviews, the learners themselves may be aware of this problem (Frank, 2010, pp. 85–86).

Though the notion of pragmatic neutrality (but not the frequent usage) of direct requests in Russian is generally accepted, this feature alone does not capture the complex picture of pragmatics in imperative mood. The pragmatic meaning of this form in Russian is further enriched by the opposition between two aspectual options: perfective and imperfective verbs. The complexity of pragmatic consequences for the choice of aspect in the Russian imperative (foremost of which are the issues regarding perceived linguistic politeness) has been a recurring topic in literature (Benacchio, 2002; Khrakovskiy, 1988; Lehmann, 1989; Paducheva, 2010; Tyurikova, 2008; Zorikhina-Nilsson, 2012). Researchers have reached a general consensus that in non-negated imperatives of terminative verbs, the perfective aspect is utilised when the action is mentioned for the first time and is seen as new or unexpected for the listener. The imperfective imperative, however, is seen as a form expressing an action that has already been introduced into the context and is self-evident both for the speaker and the listener (Wiemer, 2008). From these differences, a salient pragmatic meaning is derived: while the perfective imperative in Russian is 'the most natural and frequent form' that 'sounds more formal' (Benacchio, 2019), the imperfective counterpart 'does not mitigate, but rather emphasises the impoliteness of the utterance' (ibid.).

The most comprehensive explanatory approach to the pragmatics of aspectual opposition in Russian imperatives is posited by Benacchio (2002). Her proposal is based on Brown and Levinson's theory of negative and positive face (1987). Benacchio treats the choice of the perfective imperative as a form of negative politeness strategy (the apparent avoidance of interfering with the hearer's freedom of action), while the usage of the imperfective aspect is seen as a positive politeness strategy (oriented toward the positive self-image that the hearer personally claims and treating the hearer as a person whose wants are being respected). Consequently, the usage of positive politeness strategy in an inappropriate situation can provoke the effect of perceived impoliteness (Benacchio, 2002). Benacchio's interpretation of communicative strategies in the Russian imperative can further be applied not only to requests, but also to other speech acts, such as permissions, invitations, and wishes.

An important note for the present study is that the choice of aspect in the Russian imperative constitutes an obligatory part of explicit instruction in the practice of teaching L2 Russian and Russian as a foreign language. Educational standards for language certificationlist this topic as obligatory at TORFL-2 level (Test of Russian as a Foreign Language; the second level is equivalent to the B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). However, both the notions of aspect and imperative are separately introduced to learners of Russian at earlier levels of proficiency, starting with A2. Only one empirical study to date has investigated the acquisition of aspect in the imperative mood from the perspective of interlanguage pragmatics. Tsylina (2016) studied the appropriateness judgements of the perfective and imperfective imperatives made by L2 learners and heritage speakers of Russian of comparable proficiency as well as by a control group of native speakers. Her data reveal that in non-negated imperative contexts, the judgements of heritage speakers were generally closer to native than those of L2 learners. As for the aspectual differences, L2 learners' judgements were less target-like in the imperfective condition. Additionally, the group of L2 learners rarely evaluated contexts as enabling both aspectual options as equally acceptable.

The majority of theoretical approaches to pragmatic meaning in the Russian imperative intentionally abstain from considering the role of prosody. However, since the creation of Bryzgunova's influential model of Russian intonation (Bryzgunova, 1980), both academic and instructional literature on the subject have consistently noted two distinct tunes that mark directive speech acts that contain imperatives. In Bryzgunova's model, these prosodic contours are referred to as IK-2 and IK-3 (IK being the abbreviation for *intonational construction*, while 2 and 3 are the index numbers of these tunes in the list of seven Russian tunes that are formally distinguished in the model). To make the present analysis more compatible with the mainstream framework of intonational phonology—the autosegmental metrical model (Beckman & Pierrehumbert, 1986)—we further refer to the two constructions utilising a more transparent autosegmental notation that generally follows the proposals posited by Igarashi (2006) and Rathcke (2017).[1] Namely, we analyse IK-2 as a combination of the nuclear pitch accent H*+L and the edge tone L%; additionally, we analyse IK-3 as a combination of the

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[1] See the cited papers for the details regarding the phonetic differences and the justification of these labels. It should be noted, however, that these studies discuss the distinction between IK-2 and IK-3 in interrogatives (wh-questions and yes-no questions, respectively) rather than requests. In the present study, we accept Bryzgunova's assumption that the two tunes that mark the imperative in Russian are the same phonological entities as those utilised in interrogatives.

nuclear pitch accent L*+H and the edge tone L%.

Considering the pragmatic meaning of these tunes in the Russian imperative, Bryzgunova (1980) argues that IK-2 (H*+L L%) expresses a categorical request or demand, while IK-3 (L*+H L%, with the nuclear accent obligatorily associated with the verb) is utilised to convey a request that she characterises as softened, mitigated, and polite. The researcher emphasises, however, that the usage of this pragmatic cue is limited to the verbs with the meaning 'to do something for somebody' (Bryzgunova, 1973, p. 46). This notion has persisted for decades in academic descriptions of Russian intonation without any modifications. Additionally, Bryzgunova's model is widely utilised in teaching Russian as L2; therefore, various educational books and practical phonetics courses contain this piece of pragmatic instruction, including learning books by Mukhanov, Barkhudarova and Pankov, and Odintsova[2]. Importantly for the present study, these sources contain only perfective imperatives as examples of polite requests.

Similarly to the aspectual opposition, the choice of an interrogative tune in mitigated imperative requests in Russian can be analysed from the perspective of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. The most straightforward interpretation for the usage of L*+H L% is the speaker's decision to redress the hearer's negative face by combining direct grammar with a conventionally indirect yes-no question prosody (cf. the tag questions that often accompany imperatives in English: *Open the door, will you?*). Through this compromise, the speaker undertakes a partially negative politeness strategy. Consequently, the speaker avoids interfering with addressee's freedom of action but still unambiguously delivers the intention. However, despite frequent mentions of this pragmatic strategy in literature, no empirical data exist on how often it is utilised by speakers of Russian in authentic contexts or whether this form of mitigation is salient in native perception. The present paper aims to address the second question as well as investigate whether the adherence to this strategy is perceived by L2 learners.

To investigate the L2 perception of these markers of politeness in Russian directives, a group of Chinese

learners of Russian were tested. Like Russian, Mandarin Chinese[3] was initially characterised in cross-cultural pragmatics as a language that exhibits a strong preference for direct imperative requests (Gao, 1999; Lee-Wong, 1994). However, the majority of subsequent studies report opposite findings and indicate that conventionally indirect strategies, which are primarily query preparatory, are in fact predominant in requests in various Chinese dialects (Dong, 2009; Lee, 2005; Lin, 2009; Ren, 2019; Rue & Zhang, 2008; Zhang, 1995). The experimental data reported in Fernández, Xu, Wang, and Gu's (2019) study are particularly relevant for the present work, as they illustrate that native Mandarin speakers equally rate the politeness in interrogative and imperative directive speech acts. Overall, the existing descriptions of requests in Russian and Chinese have a striking similarity: in both languages, direct imperative requests are demonstrated to be a socially acceptable, pragmatically unmarked strategy, although they are contextually determined and not frequently utilised. We add that contextual parameters, such as social distance between interlocutors and the level of imposition, are claimed to significantly affect the choice of pragmatic strategies in both languages.

Internal pragmatic modifiers utilised to soften the imposition in Chinese imperative constructions include terms of address, attention-getters, lexical politeness markers, verb reduplications, and understaters (Dong, 2009; Li, 2014; Ren, 2019). However, it is safe to say that none of these features correspond directly to the Russian aspectual marker. Similar assumptions can be made with respect to the prosodic marking of politeness that is attested in Russian imperative constructions. As indicated previously, the Russian accentual distinction between the polite request and the impolite demand is presumably manifested in the choice of nuclear pitch accents, which means that meaningful variations of pitch are expressed within prominent syllables. In Chinese, however, pitch variation is reserved for distinguishing lexical meaning and prosodic boundaries but is not normally utilised to convey pragmatic meaning (Peng et al., 2005). Existing research on pragmatic prosodic cues in Chinese (Fan & Gu, 2016; Gu et al., 2011) proves that politeness is

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[2] Mukhanov, I. L. (2006). Intonatsiya v praktike russkoy dialogich-eskoy rechi [Intonation in practice of Russian dialogue] (4th ed.), p. 158. Russkiy yazyk. Kursy. Barkhudarova, E. L., & Pankov, F. I. (2008). Po-russki – s khoroshim proiznosheniyem: Prakticheskiy kurs russkoy zvuchashchey rechi [In Russian – with good pronunciation. A practical course in Russian phonetics], p. 70. Russkiy yazyk. Kursy. Odintsova, I. V. (2018). Zvuki. Ritmika. Intonatsiya: Uchebnoye posobiye [Sounds. Rhythmics. Intonation: A study book] (7th ed.), pp. 189–191. Flinta. Nauka.

[3] We follow Ren (2019)whereas limited research has investigated Chinese, particularly over extended periods of stay. This study cross-sectionally explores the effect of SA on learners' L2 Chinese requests, with a focus on long SA durations. Data were collected through six role plays from 40 learners in China, who were classified into three groups according to their length of stay (LoS in this paper by operationalising the term Chinese as 'Mandarin Chinese and its speakers in Mainland China', if not indicated otherwise. This choice is determined by the demographics of the L2 learners who participated in our experiment.

predominantly marked via speech rate (rude speech is faster than polite speech), while the effects of mean pitch and fundamental frequency (F0) range on perceived politeness are found to be limited or insignificant.

Consequently, no pragmatic transfer—positive or negative, in the sense of Kasper's (1992) study—is expected in the acquisition of these language specific pragmatic features (the aspectual opposition and the distribution of pitch accents H*+L vs. L*+H) by Chinese learners of Russian. Since Chinese learners do not receive relevant explicit instruction until the upper-intermediate level, we hypothesise that, unlike native speakers, they do not comprehend these politeness markers. However, an alternative hypothesis is also viable, predicting the ability of pre-intermediate and intermediate Chinese learners of Russian to perceive language specific cues for politeness despite the lack of explicit pragmatic instruction. Since study abroad has been demonstrated to considerably enhance pragmatic competence, we cannot dismiss the possibility that Chinese learners who are enrolled at a Russian university and receive rich, regular input from their instructors (all of whom are native speakers of Russian with no knowledge of Chinese) can acquire these pragmatic competences through incidental learning and utilise this knowledge in their politeness judgements.

The present study aims to extend the current knowledge regarding L1 Russian speakers' perceptions of linguistic politeness in directives as well as the acquisition of language specific cues for politeness by L2 Russian learners. The hypotheses of the study are formulated as follows:

1. L1 Russian speakers do not perceive imperative constructions as less polite compared to conventionally indirect requests for action that are formulated as interrogatives.
2. Language specific aspectual and prosodic features affect L1 Russian speakers' perceptions of politeness in directive speech acts.
3. Assuming that L2 learners transfer their notions regarding the relative acceptability of direct strategies from their L1, we expect Chinese learners of Russian to behave target-like and not to perceive imperative constructions as less polite compared to interrogative requests for action.
4. Language specific aspectual and prosodic cues do not affect L2 Russian learners' perceptions of politeness in directive speech acts since these features cannot be transferred from L1 and are not provided to them in a form of explicit pragmatic instruction.

Method

Materials

To test the hypotheses, an experiment was conducted in which two groups of participants, native Russian speakers (NSs) and L2 learners of Russian with Chinese L1 (L2Ls), were asked to listen to directives in Russian and evaluate their politeness. Since pragmatic judgements are significantly influenced by contextual factors, the context for the experimental stimuli was set as a constant. Namely, the scenario of ordinary teacher-student interaction in class was chosen since it was presumed to be familiar both to NSs and L2Ls.

The set of *target stimuli* represented a scenario in which a teacher asks a student to perform an ordinary action in class (to read a task, to translate a text, to reveal what they have written, or to speak about themselves). This requires a clarification concerning the term for this type of linguistic action. The speech act that we model in the target items undoubtedly belongs to the category of directives in Searle's (1975) taxonomy ('attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something'); however, it is unclear whether it falls clearly within the group of requests (and not, for example, commands or orders). This terminological confusion is a known issue arising because different languages utilise different words to categorise speech events (Fitch, 2008). To avoid overgeneralisation, we further refer to the target items utilised in the experimental design as *teacher directives*, although we continue utilising the term *request* when speaking about evidence from other studies and the filler items utilised in the present study.

Three independent variables were manipulated in target items (see Table 1). First, the directness of the speech act was manipulated with two levels: direct (an imperative construction) and conventionally indirect (a yes-no question with a verb in the future tense). Second, in both conditions, the verbal aspect was subject to manipulation: both in direct and indirect constructions, the stimuli with imperfective and perfective verbs were tested.[4] Finally, the prosodic realisation of the imperative stimuli was manipulated in accordance with the existing descriptions of this feature: the imperatives with perfective verbs were recorded with both H*+L L% and L*+H L% tunes. The analysis of examples listed in previous descriptive

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4 In contrast to imperative constructions, the pragmatic meaning of aspectual opposition in conventionally indirect requests is not extensively discussed in descriptive literature on Russian aspect. However, occasional examples of such an opposition can be found, for example, in Lehmann (1989) and Mills' (1993) studies. In this paper, we base our approach on Lehmann's observation that 'this functional continuum is not confined to the context of imperative. There is an analogous continuum in the context of tense' (Lehmann, 1989, p. 87).

studies illustrates that the rising tune L*+H L% is not normally utilised in directives with an imperfective imperative; consequently, such stimuli were not included in the experimental materials.

In total, by crossing three independent variables and by excluding presumably ungrammatical or pragmatically unacceptable combinations of variables, five types of target stimuli were obtained: three imperative constructions (with perfective verbs marked by H*+L and L*+H nuclear accents as well as with imperfective verbs marked by H*+L) and two interrogatives (containing imperfective and perfective

verbs; in each case, the phrase is realised with the L*+H L% tune, which is obligatory for unmarked Russian yes-no questions). For each of the five conditions, phrases with four aspectual pairs of Russian verbs were created (in all pairs, imperfective verbs are listed before the perfective verbs): *показывать – показать* 'show', *переводить – перевести* 'translate', *рассказывать – рассказать* 'tell', *читать – прочитать* 'read'. Only the verbs with nonhomonymic forms of plural second person imperatives and plural second person future tense were utilised.

Table 1

*Variables manipulated in target stimuli with examples*

Verbal mood (directness of the speech act)	Tune	Imperfective aspect	Perfective aspect
Imperative (direct)	H*+L L% (IK-2)	Показывайте, что Вы написали! 'Show.Imper.Imperf. what you wrote!'	Покажите, что Вы написали! 'Show.Imper.Perf. what you wrote!'
Imperative (direct)	L*+H L% (IK-3)		Покажите, что Вы написали! 'Show.Imper.Perf. what you wrote!'
Indicative (conventionally indirect)	L*+H L% (IK-3)	Будете показывать, что Вы написали? 'Will you show.Fut.Imperf. what you wrote?'	Покажете, что Вы написали? 'Will you show.Fut.Perf. what you wrote?'

A total of 20 target stimuli (four verbs in five conditions) were elicited from a 30-year-old male native speaker of Standard Russian. The recordings were made in a quiet room with a headset and an omnidirectional DPA 4066 microphone. The presence of acoustic contrast manifested in an F0 peak alignment and scaling was verified via acoustic analysis of pitch contours in *Praat*[5]; see the comparison of the two contours in Figure 1.

In addition to the 20 target stimuli, 20 *filler items* were included in the experimental design. A reverse situation (compared to target items) was modelled in fillers: requests for action and for permission were performed by a female student and addressed to a teacher. Various direct and conditionally indirect request strategies available in Russian were employed in fillers. The requests for the teacher's action (to repeat the rule and to explain something one more

Figure 1.

Spectrograms and F0 contours of target items with H+L L% (left) and L*+H L% (right) tunes*

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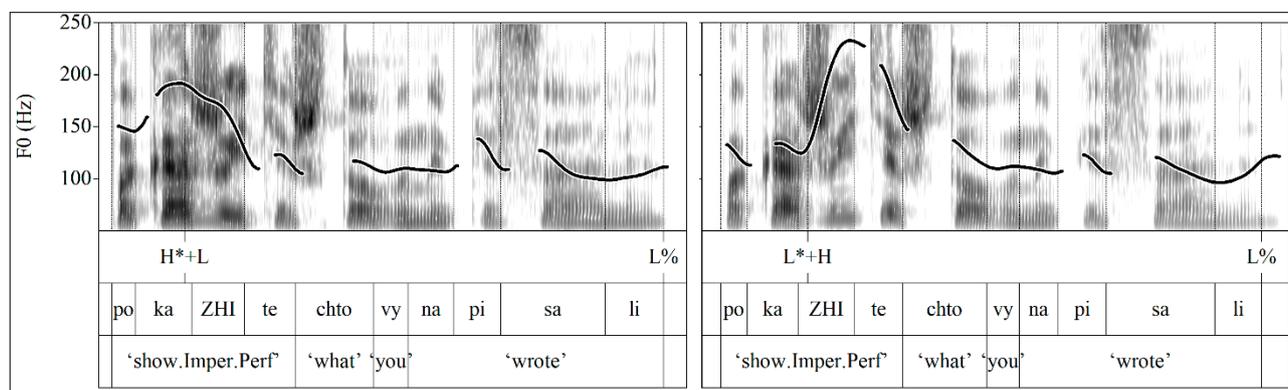
5   Boersma, P., & Weenink, D. (2020). Praat: Doing phonetics by computer [Computer program].

time) were formulated with a *want* statement (*Я хочу, чтобы Вы. . . .*'I want you to. . . .'), a perfective imperative marked with H*+L nuclear accent, an interrogative with *can* in the present tense (*Можете. . . .* 'Can you. . . . ?'), an interrogative with an impersonal predicative adverb (*Можно. . . .* 'Is it possible to. . . . ?'), and a formulaic interrogative with the negated verb *can* in the conditional mood (*Вы не могли бы. . . .* literally, 'Couldn't you. . . . ?'). The requests for the teacher's permission (to go out and to ask a question) were formulated with a *want* statement (*Я хочу. . . .* 'I want to. . . .'), an interrogative with *can* in the present tense (*Я могу. . . .* 'Can I. . . . ?'), an interrogative with an impersonal predicative adverb (*Можно. . . .* 'Is it possible to. . . . ?'), an explicit interrogative request for permission with the verb *разрешить* (literally, 'Will you permit me to. . . . ?'), and a yes-no question with the verb in the future tense (e.g., *Я выйду?* literally, 'Will I go out?').

All 20 filler phrases were elicited from a 28-year-old female native speaker of Standard Russian following a procedure identical to the one utilised for the target items.

Procedure

Due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic emergency, the experiment was conducted online utilising the *PsychoPy* software (Peirce et al., 2019). Forty stimuli (20 target items and 20 fillers) were presented to the participants in pseudo-randomised order. Each experimental session was preceded by written instructions (in Russian for the NS group and in Mandarin for the L2L group) and a short training session in which the participants could familiarise themselves with the procedure.

During the self-paced task, the participants were first presented a picture of a young male teacher standing near a blackboard or a picture of a young female student raising her hand. After a short period of silence, the participants were presented with an aural stimulus: either a directive from the teacher or a request from the student, depending on which picture was displayed on the screen. After listening to the item once, the participants were asked to measure the politeness of the phrase by placing a red marker on a horizontal discrete scale from 1 to 7 in which only the extremes were verbally labelled as *very impolite* (Russian *очень невежливо*, Chinese 非常有礼貌) and *very polite* (Russian *очень вежливо*, Chinese 非常不礼貌), respectively. The participants executed the task at home with their own PCs, and they were not monitored during the experimental procedure. However, they were explicitly asked to complete the

task without any help from others.

Participants

Two groups of participants were recruited for the experiment. The NS group included 30 monolingual speakers of Standard Russian residing in Moscow. One participant's data was excluded from analysis since it differed significantly from other participants' responses. This NS provided identical responses ('3') to 36 of 40 stimuli, while for other NSs, the number of most frequent identical responses ranged from 8 to 23. Consequently, the responses of the 29 NSs were analysed (20 female, mean age 39.7, σ = 15.2).[6]

The L2Ls were 45 students from Mainland China who study in different BA and MA programmes in Moscow. Since a vast majority of them, 43, were enrolled in Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU), the data for two students enrolled in other universities were excluded from the analysis. All students from MSU, according to their Russian language teachers, reached no less than A2 and no higher than B1 levels of proficiency, except for two students whose levels were characterised by their teachers as B2 (their data was also excluded from the analysis). The remaining 41 MSU students had at least 15 months of experience studying Russian at the university: 27 of them were second-year students, and 14 were first-year students who had spent a preparatory year of studying Russian at MSU before being enrolled for their freshman year.

Preliminary analysis of the L2L group responses revealed that five participants (all from the same class) performed the task in an almost identical way, which was different from other students' data. Two responded '7' to all 40 stimuli, and the other three responded '7' to 27–29 stimuli and '6' to the remaining 11–13 stimuli. Their data were excluded from analysis. In total, the responses of 36 L2L participants were analysed (20 female, mean age 20.4, σ = 1.9).

Data Analysis

The data were statistically analysed via generalised linear mixed-effects regression models (GLMMs) utilising *R* packages *lme4*(Bates et al., 2015), *sjPlot*[7],

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6   Since no age restrictions were established during recruitment, the age of NSs varies significantly and ranges from 20 to 70 years of age. No empirical data are available regarding the diachronic changes in the perception of aspectual and prosodic politeness markers in Russian. Consequently, we did not control for age differences in the present experiment and treated the NS group as a random sample of adult speakers of L1 Russian.

7   Lüdecke, D. (2020). sjPlot: Data Visualization for Statistics in Social Science. R package version 2.8.6 (2.8.6). https://cran.r-project.org/package=sjPlot

and *effects*(Fox & Weisberg, 2018). The details for each model are reported in the results section. All models were visually tested for normality and homogeneity of residual distributions and revealed no strong deviations. Following the recommendations in Levshina's (2015) work, the predictors in each model were tested for multicollinearity via *car* package (Fox & Weisberg, 2019); for neither of them the variance inflation factor (VIF) scores reached 5, which means that multicollinearity in the data is not a concern. The *p*-values reported below were calculated via the *sjplot* package and are based on degrees of freedom with Kenward-Roger's approximation. Following the standards of reproducible research, the data are made available and can be accessed online through the following link: https://osf.io/gu5cx/.

Results

Filler Items

Before reporting the results for target items, we briefly consider both groups' responses to the fillers. The main purpose of including filler items in the experimental design was to diversify the input and ensure that the participants did not become aware of the scope of the procedure. However, since some of the participants whose data were excluded illustrated indifferent reactions to the stimuli, we decided to analyse the fillers to ensure that the participants distinguished the most transparent cues for politeness. Separate GLMMs were fitted for both groups with the politeness rating as the dependent variable, random intercepts for participants and lexical words, and participant's gender and type of context (with the seven levels reported in the previous section) as fixed effects. The pairwise comparisons of

various context types indicated several significant differences, while the effect of gender in both models was insignificant (*p* = .47 for NSs and *p* = .36 for L2Ls). Model estimates for the fillers are plotted for compactness in Figure 2 and are briefly reviewed in the discussion section.

Target Items: NS Group

To analyse the responses to the target stimuli elicited from 29 NSs, a GLMM was fitted with the politeness rating as the dependent variable; random intercepts for participants and lexical verbs; gender, verbal aspect ('imperfective' vs. 'perfective'), directness of the speech act ('imperative', i.e., direct vs. 'interrogative', i.e., indirect), tune (H*+L L% vs. L*+H L%) and the interaction between verbal aspect and tune as fixed effects. The descriptive statistics and regression coefficients are summarised in Table 2. Robust effects of aspect (p < .001) and tune (p = .007) were found while no significant effects of other variables were present in the model.

TTarget Items: L2L Group

To analyse how the group of 36 L2Ls evaluated politeness in the target items, a GLMM was fitted with the same fixed and random effects structure utilised for the NS group. The descriptive statistics and regression coefficients are summarised in Table 3. The only significant effect observed in the L2Ls' data was the effect of tune (*p* = .023), while the effect of aspect did not reach the significance level, which was set at 0.05 (*p* = .085). None of the other predictors showed consistent effects on the politeness judgements in the L2L group.

Figure 2

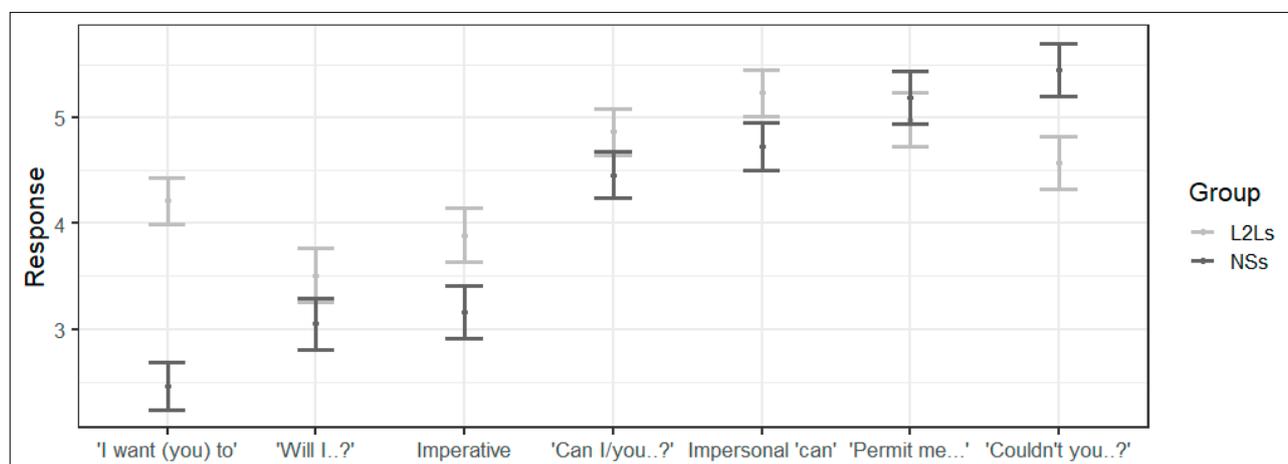*NS and L2L models estimates (means and standard errors) for filler items*

able 2

Regression results for responses to target items in NS group

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI LL – UL	p
Fixed effects				
Intercept	2.73	0.24	2.24 – 3.22	< .001
Aspect: perfective	1.00	0.13	0.75 – 1.26	< .001
Tune: L*+H L%	0.35	0.13	0.10 – 0.61	.007
Speech act: indirect	-0.03	0.18	-0.39 – 0.33	.889
Gender: male	0.09	0.38	-0.70 – 0.88	.818
Aspect: perfective * Speech act: indirect	0.24	0.18	-0.12 – 0.60	.197
Random Effects				
σ^2	0.96			
$\tau_{00 \ participant}$	0.87			
$\tau_{00 \ lexical \ word}$	0.02			
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.163 / 0.565			

Note: Number of participants = 29; number of lexical words = 4; total *N* of observations = 576.
SE = standard error; *CI* = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.

Table 3

Regression results for responses to target items in L2L group

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI LL – UL	p
Fixed effects				
Intercept	5.17	0.17	4.82 – 5.51	**< .001**
Aspect: perfective	0.18	0.10	-0.02 – 0.38	.085
Tune: L*+H L%	0.24	0.10	0.03 – 0.44	**.023**
Speech act: indirect	-0.08	0.15	-0.37 – 0.21	.576
Gender: male	-0.22	0.24	-0.70 – 0.26	.359
Aspect: perfective * Speech act: indirect	-0.08	0.15	-0.37 – 0.21	.582
Random Effects				
σ^2	0.75			
$\tau_{00 \ participant}$	0.46			
$\tau_{00 \ lexical \ word}$	0.00			
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.024 / 0.396			

Note: Number of participants = 36; number of lexical words = 4; total *N* of observations = 709.
SE = standard error; *CI* = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.

Discussion

Fillers

The analysis of filler items does not constitute the scope of the study; however, we illustrate these results briefly and utilise them to discuss the evidence for the general validity of the experimental procedure.

In Figure 2, the estimates for condition means and standard errors for each context type are plotted. As Figure 2 indicates, the NS group distinguished between three 'impolite' and four 'polite' student request strategies with mean model estimates under and over 4, respectively. The L2Ls' judgements generally tilt toward the 'polite' end of the continuum; however, the distribution of responses for the conditions 'Will I. . . . ?', imperative, 'Can I/you. . . . ?', and 'Impersonal can' follow the native pattern.

The largest differences between the two groups are found at the extremes of the native judgements'

continuum. First, while the NSs evaluated the *want* statements as clearly impolite, the L2Ls perceived them as neutral. This finding aligns with the existing data concerning *want* statement request strategies in Chinese (Lin, 2009; Rue & Zhang, 2008) and may be indicative of pragmatic transfer from L1. Second, the two strategies perceived as the politest by the NSs (the interrogative request for permission with the verb разрешите, i.e., 'permit', in the future tense and the ability query preparatory in the conditional mood) were not judged as very polite by L2Ls. A possible explanation of this difference is that these formulae are hyperpolite and rarely utilised in everyday communication (including the university setting). Consequently, they do not form a consistent part of learners' input and are not acquired at the pre-intermediate or intermediate proficiency levels.

Generally, though the results for student requests are to be treated with caution, they indicate that the participants did not respond indifferently to the stimuli and that the NSs and L2Ls employed similar strategies in evaluating some of the most frequent request formulae.

Target Items: NS Group

The data obtained from the NS group support previous findings regarding the language specific aspectual and prosodic cues to perceived politeness in Russian. The evidence we have found confirms the considerable degree of pragmatic markedness of the imperfective aspect in imperative directives. Our data indicates that in the investigated scenario (a teacher asks a student to perform an ordinary action in class), the choice of the imperfective verb is consistently perceived by NSs as impolite, while the choice of the perfective verb is seen as neutral. Adopting the analysis of politeness strategies in Russian imperatives conducted in Benacchio's (2002) study, we confirm that in the teacher directive scenario, NSs perceive the usage of positive politeness as an inappropriate imposition on the listener, while negative politeness conveyed via the perfective imperative is considered to be acceptable and neutral but does not lean toward the *very polite* extreme of the scale.

Our data confirm Lehmann's (1989) claim that the pragmatic markedness of aspect in Russian is not limited to the imperative mood. Since no significant interaction between the aspect and the directness of the speech act was found, we conclude that at least in future tense interrogatives (imperf. *Будете читать нам задание?* compared to the perf. *Прочитаете нам задание?* – both can be translated in English literally as 'Will you read us the task?'), the pragmatic meaning conveyed by the choice of aspect is similar to the one previously reported for the imperative.

The second robust effect observed in the NS data is the effect of tune. The participants perceived the rising L*+H L% tune (Bryzgunova's IK-3) as more polite than the falling one (H*+L L%, Bryzgunova's IK-2). Since no robust effect for the speech act type was found, we suggest that for the NSs, intonation is a more salient cue to politeness than the grammatical mood of the verb (the imperative constructions with L*+H are considered to be equally polite to the indicative mood interrogatives). This lends support to previous studies (e.g., Ogiermann, 2009), which claim that in Russian requests, unlike, for example, in English ones, the imperative mood is not perceived as less polite than the indicative mood *per se*, but rather the choice of the falling tune conveys this piece of pragmatic meaning. Our experimental design cannot be fully balanced due to the presumed unacceptability of some conditions' crossings (namely, the imperfective imperative with L*+H and the falling tune in interrogative requests); therefore, we recommend that further investigations are required to better assess the relative perceived politeness of direct and indirect request strategies in Russian. Future studies should also consider the role of negation in the indicative, as it is a common internal modifier in conventionally indirect requests in Russian (Dubinina & Malamud, 2017; Mills, 1992).

Target Items: L2L Group

Our data provide novel insights into the acquisition of language specific cues for politeness by L2 learners of Russian at the pre-intermediate and intermediate proficiency levels. Before focussing on the linguistic factors, we should note that, as the comparison of model intercepts reported in Tables 3 and 4 reveals, L2Ls generally assigned higher politeness ratings to the teacher directives in absolute values compared to the NSs. Since a similar pattern was attested in a majority of the fillers, we suggest that this difference in absolute ratings concerns general cross-cultural differences. Existing research on the topic indicates that Chinese students have more favourable perceptions of teacher-student relationships compared to American students (Bear et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2013) and tend to express a high degree of involvement and solidarity with the teacher in phatic communication (Ren & Liu, 2021). However, no relevant empirical data comparing Russian and Chinese students is currently available, so we prefer to remain agnostic on this account.

Another possible source of the higher absolute ratings attested in L2Ls' data is the age difference between the two groups of participants. While only a few NSs were university students, all L2Ls were enrolled at a university at the moment of testing and interacted with their language instructors and other university staff on a daily basis. This fact could provoke more favourable and cautious judgements of teachers' politeness on their part. However, since the primary focus of this study is linguistic politeness, we further abstain from evaluating the role of extralinguistic factors and concentrate our analysis on linguistic features that were controlled for in the experimental design as well as on the relative sizes of the linguistic effects attested in the L2L data.

One linguistic source of relatively high politeness ratings in the target items that are identifiable in the L2Ls' data is the size of the effect of verbal aspect. Since it does not reach the significance level (p = .084), we cannot claim that our participants utilised this cue to evaluate the politeness of teacher directives. This finding is expected since we intentionally chose a group of learners who are familiar with the main functions of aspect but have not received explicit instruction on its pragmatic markedness and whose L1 does not provide any relevant basis for the pragmatic transfer. Our expectations that this positive politeness cue can be acquired through incidental input were not met, although all L2L participants had at least 15 months of studying Russian abroad with native instructors. We conclude that aspectual marking of pragmatic meaning is not salient for Chinese learners of Russian at pre-intermediate and intermediate levels and, presumably, is acquired only through explicit instruction in class.

The only significant effect attested in the L2L data is the effect of tune. We note, however, that its size is smaller compared to the corresponding effect of pitch in native data. At first glance, the effects of tune, directness of the speech act, and the interaction of these predictors follow the native pattern. Like NSs, L2Ls relied predominantly on intonation in their evaluation of politeness and ignored the differences in mood when presented with directives pronounced with the rising tune typical of yes-no questions. We suggest two possible interpretations of these findings. First, if we assume that the L2Ls at their proficiency levels have successfully acquired the formal differences between the indicative and imperative moods in Russian and were able to correctly recognise the form of the verb, then we can treat the outcome as a case of positive pragmatic transfer from L1. As discussed in the introduction, in native perception, Chinese and Russian similarly treat direct request strategies as pragmatically unmarked. Our data indicate that L2Ls exhibit similar reactions in their perceptions of L2 stimuli and rate Russian imperative directives as neutral, which is only slightly less polite than the interrogative ones.

However, we note that the lack of effects for directness (and for the interaction between directness and aspect) in L2L data do not necessarily imply that Chinese learners of Russian successfully perceive the mood differences and treat them as pragmatically unmarked. Another viable explanation of the observed pattern is the inability of L2Ls to distinguish the indicative (future tense) and imperative forms of perfective verbs. These forms in Russian have similar grammatical affixes and, in fact, are often homonymic (but not in our data). Both grammatical categories are introduced in L2 class as early as the A2 level; however, they present difficulties to various categories of learners, including students with Chinese L1; see Skvortsova's (2019) study and the literature cited therein. Consequently, we cannot exclude the possibility that some of the L2L participants evaluated direct and conventionally indirect rising tune phrases as equally polite because they did not identify the grammatical mood differences in the target items and therefore based their judgements exclusively on intonational cues for linguistic politeness.

Generally, our data for Chinese learners of Russian corroborate the existing research on L2 learners' acquisition of internal pragmatic modifications in the speech act of request. Numerous previous studies of L2 production demonstrate that even at high proficiency levels, internal modifiers tend to be underproduced and pose greater difficulties than external modifiers (among recent studies, see, e.g., Hassall, 2012; Li, 2014; Ren, 2019; Savić et al., 2021; Woodfield, 2012; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). Since the majority of these studies concentrate on lexical and syntactic modifiers, our study adds to this growing body of literature by examining the acquisition of morphological and prosodic features specific to Russian. It also indicates the necessity to address the pragmatic markedness of the Russian aspectual opposition in class since this marker of impoliteness, highly salient for NSs, may be unnoticed by L2Ls in the absence of explicit instruction, which can potentially cause pragmatic infelicities in production.

Conclusion

In the present exploratory study, we provided novel empirical evidence for the role of aspectual and

prosodic markers of politeness in Russian directive speech acts in native perception. Additionally, the perception of these pragmatic features by Chinese learners of Russian who reached pre-intermediate and intermediate proficiency levels after a considerable period of study abroad was tested, demonstrating that in their judgements, L2 learners predominantly relied on intonational differences and did not demonstrate consistent awareness of morphological cues for politeness. The analysis of participants' responses to filler items suggests that our methodology can be applied to a wider inventory of internal modifiers available in Russian, such as negation, conditionals, and ability modals. Investigating native and non-native perceptions of these linguistic features and their interplay within a speech act presents an interesting direction for future work.

The experimental design of the present study is limited in several ways; some of these shortcomings have been outlined in previous sections. Most importantly, by focussing on one group of L2 learners in a single moment of time, the present work does not provide a comprehensive picture of their pragmatic *development*. The importance of addressing temporal dimension in the acquisition of pragmatic competences by switching from cross-sectional and 'single moment' studies to longitudinal ones has been frequently emphasised in literature. The focus on *learning* and not merely the *usage* of pragmatics in L2 is required to better understand the role of pragmatic instruction in class settings and to identify effective teaching strategies. However, establishing a firm empirical basis for L2 research by examining native patterns as well as documenting the non-native competences at early stages of acquisition is fundamental for interlanguage studies as well, and we hope that our findings are beneficial in this regard.

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Author contributions

Author contributions according to the CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) framework are stated below.

Pavel Duryagin: Conceptualization (lead), Methodology, Software, Formal analysis, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization

Maria Fokina: Conceptualization (supporting), Investigation, Resources

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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