

# SEQUENTIAL ORGANIZATION OF REQUESTS BY LEARNERS OF VIETNAMESE

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## Abstract

The most comprehensively studied speech act in interlanguage pragmatics to date has been requests. However, the body of research on requests by L2 learners has mainly been done on English or European languages, such as Spanish, French or Hebrew as a second language. There have been very few developmental studies published on requests in Asian languages. For a relatively less taught and studied language like Vietnamese, the literature on L2 learners' requests, especially pertaining to Vietnamese pragmatics, is close to non-existent. This study was implemented to gather a better understanding of interlanguage pragmatics of L2 learners of Vietnamese. Elicited data from role-plays of requests were analysed based on Al-Gahtani and Roever's 2012 discursive approach which focuses on the sequential organization of interactions. Findings indicate that compared to higher-level learners, lower-level learners used fewer pre-expansions, and the first pair-parts occurred earlier in the sequence. The interlocutor also accommodated to learners' proficiency level when introducing complications, which resulted in fewer elaborated request sequences from learners with lower proficiency. The findings offer implications for teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language as well as methodological implications for gathering data and analyzing the sequential organization of speech acts in South-East Asian languages, such as Vietnamese.

**Keywords:** interlanguage pragmatics, Vietnamese pragmatics, sequential organization, requests  
**ISO 639-3 codes:** vie

## 1 Introduction

Requests have attracted the most attention from researchers in the field of interlanguage pragmatics (e.g. Al-Gahtani and Roever 2012; Hassall 2001; 2003; Nguyen and Ho 2014; Félix-Brasdefer 2007; Rose 2000; Trosborg 1995). Findings from these studies generally show that learners at higher proficiency levels possess more native-like request strategies and use more mitigations, supportive moves, and complex lexico-syntactical structures. The majority of developmental studies of requests have relied solely on the traditional speech act framework from the Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989). Development of learners' interlanguage pragmatics is usually interpreted through comparison of frequency counts of request strategies among groups of learners at different proficiency levels and native speakers (e.g. Nguyen and Basturkman 2013; Hassall 2003; Trosborg 1995). More recently, researchers have begun to turn to a discursive approach by examining sequential organization of requests (e.g. Al-Gahtani and Roever 2012; Hassall 2013). This approach abandons the previous focus on isolated speech acts and takes into consideration the interactional nature of conversations in which speech acts are embedded.

Most developmental research of requests has focused on English or another European language as the target language, with learners from various L1 backgrounds (e.g. Al-Gahtani and Roever 2012; Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei 1998; Taguchi 2006; Trosborg 1995). There has been very little research done on the pragmatics of Asian languages in general, and requests in particular (e.g. Byon 2004; Hassall 2003; Nguyen and Basturkman 2013). With a less commonly taught and learned language like Vietnamese, pragmatics

studies have been very limited. The majority of Vietnamese researchers, when looking at requests, have examined English requests made by Vietnamese learners (e.g. Ha 2015; Vo 2012). Currently, there is only one published study on requests in Vietnamese as a target language by Nguyen and Basturkmen (2013). The authors have adapted and used the traditional speech act framework, and at the time of this study, nothing is known about the sequential organization of Vietnamese requests made by L2 learners. Therefore, with the motivation of contributing to the understanding of requests in Vietnamese as a target language, the current study aims at investigating the sequential organization of requests made by learners of Vietnamese at different proficiency levels.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Proficiency and development of L2 requests

A considerable number of developmental studies of requests have examined the relationship between learners' linguistic proficiency and L2 pragmatic development (e.g. Al-Gahtani and Roever 2012; Nguyen and Ho 2014; Taguchi 2007). Overall, empirical findings have shown that linguistic proficiency correlates positively with pragmatic performance. Learners at the lower end of their interlanguage pragmatics development often rely on single words, formulaic expressions, and imperatives when making requests (Kasper and Rose 2002). More advanced learners are shown to have higher competence in situational variation and employ more conventionally indirect requests as opposed to direct request strategies (e.g. Félix-Brasdefer 2007). Higher-level learners also are more appropriate in their requests (e.g. Taguchi 2006) and produce more complex discourse (e.g. Al-Gahtani and Roever 2012). Studies on learners in an overseas context also show an improvement in learners' pragmatic awareness due to increased exposure to learning opportunities (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei 1998; Shively 2011). However, higher-level learners do not necessarily outperform lower-level learners, for example, in regard to the ability to adjust according to situational variations (e.g. Al-Gahtani and Roever 2012), or in less challenging request scenarios (e.g. Taguchi 2006). In addition, the learning abroad environment does not always guarantee higher performance. Students in foreign language learning contexts who are highly motivated (Niezgoda and Roever 2001) and receive appropriate instruction (Taguchi 2011) can achieve a high degree of pragmatic awareness.

The majority of developmental studies on requests have employed Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) or role-plays as the main methods of data collection and relied on traditional speech act classification scheme for analysis. Between the two types of data gathering instruments, role-plays are perceived as a better way to elicit interactive data, whereas DCTs only offer an understanding of learners' pragmalinguistics knowledge (Félix-Brasdefer 2010). Regarding data analysis, Blum-Kulka et al.'s 1989 CCSARP taxonomy has provided the main framework for interpreting learners' request production. In this approach, requests are assigned into one of the predetermined categories of request strategies. Learners' requests are classified and tallied, then compared for proficiency levels and with native speakers' speech act production. With this traditional approach, we have gained a better understanding of what types of request strategies learners at different stages of development prefer, but how they are used within an extended discourse has largely been ignored.

Kasper (2006) advocated for a move from this traditional way of examining speech acts in isolation to an approach that takes into consideration the discursive nature of interactions. Al-Gahtani and Roever (2012) answered this call by using Conversation Analysis (CA) to understand from an emic perspective how learners' proficiency affects the sequential organization of their requests. CA regards the core of a request sequence to consist of an adjacency pair, which includes the request itself (first-pair part) and the response (second-pair part) (Schegloff 2007). Pre-expansions, insert expansions or post-expansions are utterances that occur before, in between or after this adjacency pair. Al-Gahtani and Roever (2012) found that lower-level learners tend to produce the first-pair part immediately after the opening sequence without pre-expansions. As proficiency increases, more preliminary moves are observed, and advanced learners demonstrated the use of multiple preliminary moves. The study also discussed a previously neglected aspect: the interlocutor's role. The interlocutor had to support and steer the conversation with lower-level learners, whereas, with high-proficiency learners, they mainly responded to the learners' active initiations. Hassall (2013) believes Al-Gahtani and Roever's 2012 discursive framework allows a clearer way to analyse earlier research findings, specifically hints. By applying the sequential organization approach to earlier studies, Hassall (2013) was able to explain the similarity between previous studies (Hassall 2003; Trosborg 1995) and Al-Gahtani and Roever's research that lower-level learners only performed one of the bipartite set of elements

(either pre-expansion or first pair-part), whereas advanced learners produced both. Hassall (2013) concluded with a suggestion for further research using the sequential organization approach.

## **2.2 Studies of requests in Vietnamese**

Currently, only one book chapter (Nguyen and Basturkmen 2013) and one article (Nguyen and Ho 2014) have been published on requests in Vietnamese as an L2, drawing from the same research project. The study examined 18 learners of Vietnamese and 9 native speakers' request production through role-plays of 6 scenarios with low social distance, low imposition, and low/high power distance. They adapted and utilised the traditional speech act framework to analyse the gathered data. The findings are congruent with previous research that showed higher-level learners made appropriate requests more often, for example, by using more imperative requests like Vietnamese native speakers and using more supportive moves (i.e. alignment markers, emphasis markers, and stance markers) to show politeness rather than relying on indirect strategies.

Although this first attempt at examining requests in Vietnamese as a target language has provided us a better insight into Vietnamese L2 learners' interlanguage pragmatics development, it is not without shortcomings. First of all, as the study employed the traditional speech act approach, there is no information on the sequential organization of learners' requests in Vietnamese. In addition, the native speakers participating in the research were all Northerners. Vietnamese dialects are considerably different from region to region (Ngo and Tran 2001; Srichampa 2004). Therefore, it is important to include research participants from the Central and Southern regions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of interlanguage pragmatics development of learners studying Central and Southern dialects. The study's classification of learners into low- and high-proficiency groups solely relying on the class they are in can also be problematic. Using the Vietnam National 6-Level Proficiency Framework and the Proficiency Test for Foreign Learners of Vietnamese (Ministry of Education and Training 2014) can provide a more reliable way of determining learners' proficiency and thus more trustworthy results.

## **2.3 Research question**

The motivation for this study is to contribute to a better understanding of pragmatics of Vietnamese as a target language. It addresses what has not been looked at in previous research, including the employment of sequential analysis and the inclusion of Vietnamese native-speakers from the Central region. With these issues in mind, the research question for the study is as follows:

How do requests by L2 Vietnamese learners at different proficiency levels differ in their sequential organization?

# **3 Methodology**

## **3.1 Participants**

The participants for this study were three female learners of Vietnamese from different L1 backgrounds (2 Laotians, 1 Korean). Their ages ranged from 22 to 30. Their proficiency levels were rated by two lecturers teaching Vietnamese to speakers of other languages at Hue University in Vietnam, using the Vietnam National 6-Level Proficiency Framework (Ministry of Education and Training 2014). The participants' language proficiency ranged from level 2 to level 5 in the Vietnam National 6-Level Proficiency Framework (equivalent to a level A2 to C1 in the Common European Framework of Reference).

Jakyung (A2 level) was a volunteer Korean language teacher at Hue University. At the time of the study, she had been living in Vietnam for five months. Alysa (B2 level) was a third-year undergraduate student majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT) at Hue University. She had been living in Vietnam and studying the L2 for three years. Manivone (C1 level) completed her Bachelor's degree in Vietnam and had just completed her Master's program in ELT at the university. The language of instruction for courses in ELT is English. The participants did not live with Vietnamese but were exposed to the language in daily life.

Table 1. Summary of participants' background information

Name	Age	L1	Length of study	Length of residence	Proficiency level
Jakyung	30	Korean	5 months	5 months	Level 2 (A2)
Alysa	22	Laos	3 years	3 years	Level 4 (B2)
Manivone	28	Laos	6 years	6 years	Level 5 (C1)

\*pseudonyms used for all participants

Three native speakers were also asked to participate in the study to provide baseline data. The native speakers were all female postgraduate students. Their ages ranged from 24 to 26. They were from Thua Thien Hue and Quang Binh provinces Central Vietnam.

### 3.2 Instruments

Open role-plays were used to collect data. Four scenarios were used to elicit participants' interaction. The scenarios were adapted from the study by Nguyen and Basturkmen (2013) and included: (1) borrowing a laptop from a close friend, (2) borrowing lecture notes from a close classmate, (3) asking a lecturer to write a recommendation letter and (4) asking a supervisor to extend a deadline. The scenarios were similar in social distance: the speaker and hearer had a close relationship with each other. However, in the first two scenarios, the power distance was low, while in the last two scenarios, the power distance was higher. The degree of imposition was low to moderate in the scenarios.

### 3.3 Procedures

The scenarios were piloted with two native speakers to ensure that the instructions and scenario descriptions were clear. To ensure that participants understood the scenarios and instructions, they were provided with translated copies of the documents in their respective first language (Laos and Korean). The participants were asked to read the prompts carefully and ask the interlocutor any clarification questions prior to the role-plays.

The open role-plays were audio-recorded and were carried out with the same trained interlocutor. The interlocutor was a language teacher who had no previous background in pragmatics research. The interlocutor was asked to treat all the participants the same and to elicit requests from participants. However, the researcher did not provide fixed scripts for the interlocutor to allow the interlocutor to accommodate to each participant.

The audio recordings were transcribed and translated. The transcriptions were analysed based on Al-Gahtani and Roever's 2012 approach to examining the sequential organization of interlanguage requests.

## 4 Results and discussion

In the following section, the requests by each participant will be presented and discussed in regard to their sequential organization, particularly the pre-expansions, insert expansions, first and second pair parts, and interlocutor's interaction. Post-expansions do not often occur if the request is accepted (Schegloff 2007). Therefore, since the interlocutor was instructed to accept requests, post-expansions will not be discussed.

### 4.1 Beginner-level participant: Jakyung (level A2)

#### 4.1.1 Pre-expansions

A pre-expansion is an optional sequence that occurs before the first-pair part, or the request itself. For the beginner-level participant, only two out of four scenarios contained a pre-expansion. In excerpt 1, there was no pre-expansion. The participant produced the request immediately in line 3 after successfully getting the listener's attention. The request was not followed by an explanation. In the case that a pre-expansion was produced (Excerpt 2), it was very simple (line 2) and the interlocutor was required to elicit further information (line 3).

#### 4.1.2 Insert expansions

The scenarios required the interlocutor to introduce complicating sequences through insert expansions. In the role-plays with Jakyung, the interlocutor introduced the complicating factor in three scenarios. In excerpt 1, line 4, the interlocutor sought an explanation for the request and stated the conflict in interest that she also needed the laptop. She continued to elicit further clarification in lines 6, 8 and 10 and accepted the participant's short answers.

#### 4.1.3 First and second-pair parts

The first-pair parts, or the actual requests, occurred very early in the participant's request sequences. All of the first-pair parts were *want*-statements. In the three scenarios where the insert expansions were introduced, the participant failed to provide any explanation. In excerpt 1, line 5, the participant failed to give an account of why she needed the laptop and instead used a begging statement.

#### 4.1.4 Interaction with the interlocutor

The interlocutor mainly steered the interactions, while the beginner participant took a largely passive role. In all of the scenarios, the interlocutor elicited explanations and kept the interaction moving. Insert expansions were always accompanied immediately with a question to elicit speech from the participant. For example, in excerpt 1, line 4, along with the complicating factor (that she also needed the laptop) the interlocutor also asked the participant the reason for borrowing the laptop.

#### Excerpt 1: Borrowing a laptop – Beginner level (Jakyung)

1. J: *Trang ơi, xin chào*  
Trang vocative, hello  
'Hello, Trang.'
2. I: *Chào chị*  
Hello older female  
'Hello.'
3. J: *Xin lỗi, tôi muốn máy tính của bạn được không*  
Sorry, I (formal) want laptop of you possible no  
'Sorry, I want your laptop, is that okay?'
4. I: *Để làm gì ạ? Vì mình cũng đang bận dùng máy tính*  
For do what POL\*? Because I (casual) also PROG busy use laptop  
'What do you need it for? Because I am also using the laptop.'
5. J: *Vậy à? Làm ơn giúp tôi*  
Really ah? Please help me (formal)  
'Really? Please help me.'
6. I: *Bạn cần máy tính để làm gì*  
You (casual) need laptop for do what  
'Why do you need the laptop?'
7. J: *Tôi, tôi phải... tôi phải... bài tập*  
I (formal), I must... I have... assignment  
'I have assignments.'

8. I: *Bạn có gấp lắm không? Có cần gấp không*  
You (casual) have urgent much no? Have need urgent no  
'Are you in a hurry? Do you need it right away?'

9. J: *Gấp*  
Urgent  
'Yes.'

10. I: *Bạn lúc nào bạn sẽ nộp bài tập*  
You (casual) when you will submit assignment  
'When do you have to submit your assignment?'

11. J: *Lúc 7 giờ*  
When 7 o'clock  
'At 7 o'clock.'

12. I: *À, lúc 7 giờ. Vâng OK*  
Ah, when 7 o'clock. Yes (Polite) OK  
'Ah, at 7 o'clock. OK.'

13. J: *Cám ơn*  
Thank you  
'Thank you'

**Excerpt 2: Asking for an extension – Beginner level (Jakyung)**

1. I: *Chào em*  
Hello student  
'Hello.'

2. J: *Chào cô. Tôi không soạn... khóa luận... khóa luận*  
Hello teacher. I (formal) not prepare... thesis... thesis  
'Hello teacher. I haven't prepared my thesis.'

3. I: *Vì sao*  
Why  
'Why?'

4. J: *Tôi tôi đã bị bệnh. Vì vậy tôi muốn giúp tôi cho em ba ngày được không*  
I I had got illness. Therefore I want help I give me three days possible no  
'I was sick. Therefore, I want [you] to give me three more days, is that impossible?'

5. I: *Ba ngày để em làm bài*  
Three days for student do assignment  
'Three days for you to finish your paper?'

6. J: *Dạ*  
Yes (Polite)  
'Yes.'

7. I: *Rồi, ba ngày sau nhớ nộp bài cho cô nhé*  
Yes, three days after remember submit assignment for teacher AlignM  
'OK, remember to submit your paper to me in three days.'
8. J: *Dạ. Cám ơn*  
Yes (Polite). Thank you  
'Yes. Thank you.'  
\*AlignM: Alignment marker

#### 4.2 Upper-Intermediate level participant: Alysa (level B2)

##### 4.2.1 Pre-expansions

Three out of four role-plays with the upper-intermediate participant contained a pre-expansion. In the scenario involving borrowing a laptop, Alysa did not use a pre-expansion. She immediately opened the first-pair part in line 3 after getting the interlocutor attention in lines 1 and 2. However, unlike the beginner-level participant, the upper-intermediate level participant followed the request with an account for the request (line 4).

##### 4.2.2 Insert expansions

In all of the scenarios with the upper-intermediate level learner, the interlocutor produced accounts for the refusal of the learners' requests. In Excerpt 3, line 5, the insert expansion by the interlocutor implied a rejection of the participant's request. However, the interlocutor also challenged the premise of the request by eliciting what happened to the participant's laptop. Unlike Jakyung (beginner) who required much prompting, Alysa was able to give an account for the request as soon as the interlocutor asked for it (Excerpt 3, lines 6-7).

##### 4.2.3 First and second-pair parts

The very short pre-extensions meant that the first-pair parts occurred fairly early on in the upper-intermediate level participant's sequence. In all four scenarios, the first request was a *want*-statement. However, after the interlocutor challenged the premise of the request, the participant only used the *want*-statement again in one scenario, and for the other three scenarios, employed the imperative structure (Vietnamese *cho* 'give/let'). For example, in excerpt 4, the first first-pair part in line 5 is a *want*-statement, but the second first-pair part in line 8 is an imperative.

##### 4.2.4 Interaction with the interlocutor

The interlocutor took a less dominant role with Alysa than in the role-plays with the beginner-level learner. Despite occasionally having to elicit accounts for requests (e.g. excerpt 3, line 5), there were cases where the interlocutor only gave the dispreferred second-pair part without any further prompts for the participant (e.g. excerpt 4, line 6). The participant also took a more active role, providing longer and more grammatically complex request sequences.

#### Excerpt 3: Borrowing a laptop – Upper-intermediate level (Alysa)

1. A: *Em ơi*  
Little sibling vocative  
'Hey.'
2. I: *Dạ*  
Yes (Polite)  
'Yes.'

3. A: *À, chị muốn mượn, xin mượn máy của em*  
 Ah, older sister want borrow, beg borrow laptop of younger sibling  
 ‘Ah, I want to borrow, I’d like to borrow your laptop’
4. *để làm bài luận ngày mai nộp cho giáo viên*  
 to do paper tomorrow submit for teacher  
 ‘to do my paper so I can submit it to my teacher tomorrow.’
5. I: *Em đang dùng máy. Chị cũng có máy tính mà*  
 Younger sibling ProgrM use laptop. Older sister also has laptopStanceM  
 ‘I’m using it. But don’t you also have a laptop?’
6. A: *Nhưng mà máy tính của chị bị hỏng rồi*  
 But laptop of older sister (passive) break already  
 ‘But my laptop is broken.’
7. *Chừ làm bài không được nên muốn mượn em*  
 Now do paper not possible so want borrow younger sibling  
 ‘Now I can’t finish my paper so I want to borrow from you.’
8. I: *Chị sẽ mượn trong bao lâu*  
 Older sister will borrow during how long  
 ‘How long will you need it for?’
9. A: *À, một tiếng*  
 Ah, one hour  
 ‘Ah, one hour.’
10. I: *Hmm, một tiếng thôi nhá*  
 Hmm, one hour only AlignM  
 ‘Hmm, just an hour, OK?’
11. A: *Ừ, OK. Một tiếng thôi*  
 Yes. OK. One hour only  
 ‘Yes. OK. Just one hour.’
12. I: *Dạ, đây máy tính đây chị*  
 Yes (polite), here laptop here older sister  
 ‘Yes, here is the laptop.’
13. A: *Cám ơn em*  
 Thank you younger sibling  
 ‘Thank you.’



**Excerpt 4: Borrowing a notebook – Upper-intermediate level (Alysa)**

1. A: *Trang ơi*  
Trang vocative  
'Hey Trang.'
2. I: *Dạ*  
Yes  
'Yes.'
3. A: *Tuần trước chị ốm mà nghỉ học*  
Week before older sister ill StanceM absent study  
'Last week I was sick and didn't go to class.'
4. I: *Dạ*  
Yes  
'Yes.'
5. A: *Chừ chị muốn mượn vở em để đi photo bài học*  
Now older sister want borrow notebook younger sibling for go photocopy lesson  
*được không*  
possible no  
'Now I want to borrow your notebook to go photocopy the lesson.'
6. I: *Nhưng em đang học bài mà*  
But younger sibling PROG study lesson StanceM  
'But I'm studying right now.'
7. A: *Nhưng mà chị sẽ đi photo xíu thôi*  
But older sister will go photocopy a little bit only  
'But it will only take me a few minutes to go photocopy.'
8. *Cho mượn được không*  
Let borrow possible no  
'Can you let me borrow it?'
9. *Bởi vì chị đang... uh... đang học... tiếng gì đó...*  
Because older sister PROG... uh... PROG study... language what there  
'Because I'm... uh.. I'm studying... some language...'
10. *Đang học không kịp*  
PROG study not in time  
'I'm not able to study in time.'
11. I: *Chị sẽ mượn em trong bao lâu*  
Older sister will borrow younger sibling during how long  
'How long will you borrow it?'
12. A: *Chừ đi photo tí nữa quay lại đưa cho em*  
Now go photocopy a little bit return give to you  
'I'll go photocopy it now and return to you in a bit.'

13. I: *Dạ OK*  
Yes OK  
'Yes OK.'
14. A: *Cám ơn nhé*  
Thank you AlignM  
'Thank you.'  
\*StanceM: Stance marker

### 4.3 Advanced-level participant: Manivone (level C1)

#### 4.3.1 Pre-expansions

The advanced-level learner produced pre-expansions in all four role-plays. In one scenario (borrowing laptop), there was an additional appearance of a preliminary to preliminary, or pre-pre: "Can I bother you for a bit?"

#### 4.3.2 Insert expansions

The interlocutor challenged the premise of requests in all of the scenarios. All of the insert expansions implied a rejection of the participant's request, for instance in excerpt 5, line 7. Unlike with the lower-level participants, the interlocutor did not provide additional prompts to elicit what the participant should say next (excerpt 5, line 7). However, the advanced-level participant managed to produce further accounts to support her request (excerpt 5, lines 8-9).

#### 4.3.3 First and second-pair parts

the advanced-level learner, the first-pair parts occurred later in the request sequence compared to lower-level participants. In excerpt 5, the actual request did not occur until line 6. The advanced-level participant also did not use any *want*-statements, but a mixture of imperative structure (*cho - give/let*), conventionally indirect query preparatory (*có thể - could*), and performative structure (*xin - beg*).

#### 4.3.4 Interaction with the interlocutor

The interlocutor took a more passive role, and the advanced-level participant initiated many of the interactions. The participant was able to produce accounts for requests without elicitation from the interlocutor. The sequences produced by the learner were also lexico-syntactically more complex. The request sequences, however, remained less complex compared to native speakers, since the interlocutor was less willing to accept the native speakers' requests. For example, native speakers produced more elaborate reasons, offered different options to persuade the interlocutor, and even guilted the interlocutor into accepting the request.

### Excerpt 5: Asking for a reference letter - Advanced level (Manivone)

1. M: *Em chào cô*  
Student hello teacher  
'Hello.'
2. I: *Cô chào em*  
Teacher hello student  
'Hello.'

3. M: *Dạ cô ơi, em có nghe là hạn nộp đơn xin học bổng*  
POL teacher vocative, student EmphasisM hear is deadline submit application scholarship  
'Teacher, I heard that the deadline for the scholarship application'
4. *là gần hết rồi phải không cô*  
is almost finish already right no teacher  
'is almost over, is that right?'
5. I: *Đúng rồi em. Tuần này là hết rồi đó*  
Right already student. Week this is finish already AlignM  
'Yes that's right. The deadline is this week.'
6. M: *À. Thế là cô có thể giúp em viết thư giới thiệu được không cô*  
Ah. Then teacher can help student write letter introduce possible no teacher  
'Ah, then can you help me write a recommendation letter?'
7. I: *Mình đang rất là bận*  
I (casual) PROG very am busy  
'I am very busy at the moment.'
8. M: *Dạ em rất muốn nộp học bổng này vì em là sinh viên nghèo*  
POL student very want apply scholarship this because student am student poor  
'I really want to apply for this scholarship because I'm a poor student,'
9. *chỉ cần học bổng này ạ*  
now need scholarship this POL  
'and I need this scholarship.'
10. I: *Tuần sau có được không em*  
Week after have possible no student  
'Is next week OK?'
- 11 M: *À dạ mà tuần sau là đã hết hạn rồi cô ạ*  
Ah POL but week after is already finish deadline already teacher POL  
'Ah but next week the deadline will already be over, you know.'
12. I: *À OK. Như thế thì cô sẽ xem xét lại và có thể viết giúp em được*  
Ah OK. If then teacher will examine again and can write help student possible  
'Ah OK. Then I'll reconsider it and write one for you.'
13. M: *À dạ, em cảm ơn cô*  
Ah POL, student thank teacher  
'Ah yes, thank you.'

## 5 Discussion

In line with previous developmental studies on L2 requests (e.g. Kasper and Rose 2002; Nguyen and Basturkmen 2013), lower-level learners produced fewer supportive moves compared to more proficient learners. The A2 level participant produced two pre-expansions, while the B2 level participant produced three and the advanced-level participant produced four. All of the native speakers produced four pre-expansions. However, compared to the drastic difference in the number of pre-expansions between lower-level learners and higher-level learners in Al-Gahtani and Roever's 2012 study, the difference in quantity is

not large. The limited number of participants in this study can be a reason for this dissimilarity in quantity. The quality of these pre-expansions was significantly different according to proficiency, in terms of grammatical accuracy, syntactical complexity, and appropriate formality. These findings suggest that the lower-level learner in this study had sociopragmatic knowledge but was generally unsuccessful in portraying it due to a lack of linguistic capability. The fact that the beginner-level participant was a language teacher could also have had impacts on her sociopragmatic awareness.

The first pair-parts occurred much early on for the beginners. As proficiency increased, the request itself occurred later on in the sequence, mirroring the discursive organization of native speakers. It is noteworthy that the findings are congruent with Nguyen and Basturkmen's 2013 study, that more proficient participants approached native speakers in their employment of request strategies. The interlocutor's interaction was also greatly affected by the request sequence of each participant. With lower-level participants, the interlocutor took a more active role, initiating the interaction and providing prompts for participants. With the advanced-level participant and native speakers, the interlocutor included more insert expansions and was tougher to persuade, requiring the requestee to provide more complex accounts and thus resulting in lengthier request sequences.

The results of the research highlight the value and applicability of the sequential-organization approach by Al-Gahtani and Roever (2012), previously only used for analyzing speech acts of L2 English learners, in analyzing interlanguage pragmatics of learners of Vietnamese in particular, and South-East Asian languages in general. The findings also suggest implications for teaching Vietnamese pragmatics. Speech act sequences and linguistic tools to carry out these sequences should be taught explicitly to learners, even those at the elementary level.

## 6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine request sequences of L2 Vietnamese learners at different proficiency levels. Data was gathered from a total of 24 role-plays with three L2 Vietnamese learners and three native Vietnamese speakers. Careful analysis showed that the beginner participant used fewer pre-expansions, and the first pair-part occurred early in the sequence. The interlocutor did not introduce many complicating factors and was more lenient in accepting the requests. For higher-level participants, there was a higher use of pre-expansions and the participants took a more active role in steering the conversation, with occasional prompting from the interlocutor. The results suggest that even the low-level learners were aware of the sociopragmatic aspect of requests but were unable to produce them effectively due to low linguistic competence. Higher-level learners were more similar to native speakers in their request sequences, but their request sequences were less sophisticated. In addition to the learners' proficiency, another reason for learners' less complicated request sequences was the distinction in the treatment of the interlocutor. The interlocutor accepted the learners' requests more easily and did not create chances for further elaboration; however, she was more demanding with native speakers, fostering the opportunity for very complex request sequences. This finding demonstrates the crucial role interlocutors play in data gathering for interlanguage pragmatics studies.

It is suggested that future studies focus on the validation of interlocutor, as the issue has been ignored in the past. To fully understand the sequential organization of requests, future studies should also include scenarios where the request is rejected to analyze learners' post-expansions. The baseline for this study was data from three native speakers from the central area of Vietnam, it is suggested that research also explore how speakers from different regions in Vietnam organize their request discourse.

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