Performance of face-threatening speech acts such as requests in a foreign language can pose a challenge for non-native speakers because, "linguistic, social, and pragmatic knowledge must all be activated and work together in harmony for a speech act to be successful" (Harlow 1990: 328). Rooted in the tradition of cross-cultural speech act analysis, but also acknowledging that native-speaker performance cannot be established as a norm for measurement of multilingual speakers’ communicative competence, this paper reports the results of an analysis of English requests produced by Norwegian EFL teachers (N=41). The data were collected using a discourse completion task consisting of two scenarios, one with and one without a difference in the social status of the interlocutors. Head acts, and internal and external modifications were analyzed using a framework adapted from Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989). The findings reveal a complex requestive behavior and sensitivity to the social context of the interaction and suggest that advanced non-native speakers of English who can draw upon a wide range of requestive strategies and vary strategy selection depending on the contextual factors are thus capable, expert "language users who really mean what they say" (Harlow 1990: 348).

References:


Keywords: non-native, requests, speech acts.