


# Chapter 3

## Politeness Strategies in Classroom Requests: A Study of Bilingual Preschoolers in Turkey

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter explores the development of request strategies among Turkish–Zazaki bilingual preschool children, focusing on how their pragmatic competence is shaped by linguistic input, social roles, and cultural norms. Drawing on naturalistic classroom data, the study examines the types and purposes of requests used across child–child, child–teacher, and teacher–child interactions. Findings reveal a strong preference for direct strategies among peers and more polite, indirect forms in teacher-directed speech, reflecting an emerging awareness of social hierarchy and communicative appropriateness. The chapter also highlights the influence of bilingualism and the marginalised status of Zazaki on children’s pragmatic development. By integrating frameworks from speech act theory, politeness research, and interlanguage pragmatics, this chapter offers insights into how young bilingual learners navigate complex social dynamics through language use in early educational settings.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In early childhood, children begin to grasp not only the structural aspects of language but also its social functions. Among these, the ability to make requests, i.e., seeking help, permission, or cooperation, is one of the earliest and most socially

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revealing forms of communication. Because requests inherently involve imposition, they are often shaped by strategies that convey respect, manage relationships, and mitigate demands, making them a valuable site for studying politeness.

Preschool classrooms in Turkey offer a particularly rich context for such investigation. Combining structured routines with spontaneous interaction, these environments allow researchers to observe how children navigate power dynamics, express needs, and engage in collaborative play. Language in these settings serves both instructional and relational purposes; teachers guide behaviour not only through directives but also by modelling appropriate ways of speaking. In this light, requests are more than functional speech acts; rather, they are forms of social positioning, revealing how children align with the norms and values of the classroom community. Studies from Turkish preschool settings show a progression from direct, imperative forms (e.g., *Ver!* “Give!”) to more polite, modulated expressions such as modal constructions and conditionally framed queries (e.g., *Alabilir miyim?* “Can I take it?”) (Bayat, 2013; Uçar & Bal, 2015; Zerey, 2014).

For bilingual children, this development is shaped by additional factors. Mastering two languages often means managing two sets of cultural expectations around politeness. What counts as appropriate in one language may not translate easily into the other, requiring children to adapt their request strategies according to both linguistic competence and the norms of the setting (Backus & Yağmur, 2017; Kecskes, 2015).

In immigrant and minority-language contexts, this adaptation is often complicated by limited input in the home language and fewer opportunities for meaningful interaction in either code. Research on Turkish bilinguals in Europe, for example, points to delayed development in areas such as politeness and socio-pragmatic awareness, linked to reduced exposure and practice (Backus & Yağmur, 2017; Verhoeven & Boeschoten, 1986). These findings stress the need to consider not just what children know, but the contexts in which they are supported in using and refining that knowledge.

At the same time, classrooms offer key opportunities for conceptual socialisation, the process by which children internalise culturally valued ways of speaking and behaving (Ortactepe, 2012; Pavlenko, 2000). Through everyday routines, e.g., asking to go out, requesting materials, joining group activities, children are socialised into acceptable communicative behaviours. Teachers, as linguistic models and discourse gatekeepers, play a vital role in this process. By reinforcing some forms of politeness and discouraging others, they actively shape the pragmatic repertoires children carry into their broader social worlds.

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