



# How language teachers can go beyond speech etiquette: Adapting L2 Russian coursebooks to improve pragmatic competence

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## ABSTRACT

Within the field of RKI – *russkij kak inostrannyj* ‘Russian as a Foreign Language/L2 Russian’, so far little attention has been paid to teaching pragmatic competence, as the issues of language in context are traditionally covered by the subject *rečevoj etiket* ‘speech etiquette’, leaving pragmatics an underexplored field.

The present study aims to analyze whether and to what extent current L2 Russian textbooks introduce topics related to pragmatics and, if so, how the existing material can be adapted to improve explicit instruction of pragmatic competence.

The analysis was conducted on two handbooks of Russian *rečevoj etiket* ‘speech etiquette’ for L2 learners and a series of four textbooks designed for L1 Italian learners. Data analysis confirms the global tendency for textbooks to provide scarce to null meta-pragmatic explanations. The coursebooks were then searched for elements related to the speech act of request, and the materials were adapted to fit explicit pragmatic instruction. The material adaptations proposed in the current study are based on previous research on Russian pragmatics and L2 pragmatics and aim to overcome the ethno-nationalistic perspective of speech etiquette toward a more transnational Russophone context. Implications for teacher education are presented.

## 1. Introduction

A reflection on how to improve the teaching of pragmatic competence in the field of RKI – *russkij kak inostrannyj* ‘Russian as a Foreign Language’ – is a difficult task for various reasons. Primarily, considering pragmatics as a branch of linguistics is not very common in the linguistic Russian tradition. The scientific interest in pragmatics arrived in the USSR only in the Eighties (cf. Bulygina, 1981), and studies devoted to pragmatics in the Russian language are still limited (Timofeeva, 2018). It goes without saying, the lack of pragmatics as one of the core levels of linguistic analysis has affected the teaching tradition, too.

Despite that, the objective of pragmatics has not been left unexplored, particularly regarding the concepts of speech act and politeness. Within the Russian linguistic tradition, considerable attention has been paid to *rečevoj etiket* ‘speech etiquette’ – i.e., the rules of speech behaviour defined by the relationships among the speakers (Akišina & Formanovskaja, 1978, p. 3) – and *mežkul’turnaja kommunikacija* ‘intercultural communication’ – i.e., the competence of being understood in a multicultural context (cf. Azimov & Ščukin, 2009), two subjects that investigate the use of language in context, but with a crucial difference with pragmatics: they rely on

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the idea of ‘national cultures’. On the one hand, *rečevoj etiket* ‘speech etiquette’ is a competence that somehow echoes the one of politeness<sup>1</sup> (cf. *Politeness Theory* by Brown & Levinson, 1987) with the difference that it is always portrayed as being inherently attached to a so-called *nacional’nyj karakter* ‘national character’ and its features – as it is assumed that national linguistic habits are shaped by national traditions and rituals (e.g., Formanovskaja, 2008; Kuznecova, 2018; Šćukin, 2003). On the other hand, *mežkul’turnaja komunikacija* ‘intercultural communication’ is committed to facilitating the mutual understanding of people who belong to different national cultures (cf. Vereščagin & Kostomarov, 1973; Sibko, 2014), based on the belief that behind every word in a given language, there is an idea of the world shaped by national consciousness (Ter-Minasova, 2000).

The role of the national aspect in the abovementioned disciplines is so rooted that even in volumes of *rečevoj etiket* ‘speech etiquette’ for learners of L2 Russian, the bond between etiquette and nationality is assumed as a key component. For instance, the introduction of the handbook *Russkij rečevoj etiket: Učebnoe posobie* (Nissen & Karasëva, 2011) reads: *nam chočetsja, čtoby vy počustvovali, čem živet naša strana sejčas* ‘we want that you feel how our country lives now’ (p. 3), as if the primary goal of the handbook were to make the learners experience the Russian cultural environment and its values via its etiquette.

The importance of etiquette in L2 Russian teaching methodology is particularly emphasized in communicative approaches as a set of skills at the interface between the linguistic and the cultural domains. It follows that speech etiquette in L2 Russian focuses more on the (alleged) cultural peculiarities of the Russians rather than on the pragmalinguistic features and the contexts of different speech acts, resulting thus in a narrower and stereotype-oriented teaching of language in context.

In such a peculiar setting, where the study of pragmatics is underrepresented, and the teaching of language in context is intertwined with nationalist discourse, the current study aims to investigate to what extent the current coursebooks and materials used for teaching Russian as a L2 can be useful in developing learners’ pragmatic competence. In order to do that, an analysis of the pragmatic content will be conducted on a sample of coursebooks; the analysis will be followed by suggestions on how to adapt the existing materials for more aware and effective instruction of pragmatic competence.

## 2. Literature review

As the ultimate aim of this study is to provide instructors of L2 Russian with some suggestions on how to improve the teaching of pragmatic competence by adapting the current textbooks, it is important to notice that, in the last thirty years, extensive research has demonstrated that the overt instruction of various aspects of pragmatics is effective (cf. Alcón Soler & Martínez-Flor, 2008; Alcón Soler & Yates, 2015; Rose, 2005; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Taguchi, 2011; Taguchi, 2015; Taguchi & Roever, 2017; Xiao, 2018, among others). However, it seems that there is a gap between research findings and teaching practice, as many teaching instructors doubt the effectiveness of overt teaching of pragmatics and textbooks often fail to develop pragmatic competence (Karatepe & Civelek, 2021; Korkmaz & Karatepe, 2023). Textbooks tend to provide very few meta-pragmatic explanations (Petraki & Bayes, 2013) on a limited range of speech acts (Vellenga, 2004) and usually present speech acts at the level of sentence rather than discourse level (Fernández Guerra & Martínez Flor, 2003). Furthermore, textbooks typically depict pragmatic norms in a manner that is highly stereotypical (McConachy & Hata, 2013).

Some recent studies tried to overcome this gap by proposing strategies to adapt currently available materials in textbooks to address teaching pragmatics more effectively (Ishihara, 2021; Karatepe & Civelek, 2021; Kiyancıçek & Karatepe, 2023; McConachy & Hata, 2013; Ren & Han, 2016). Research on course material adaptation with reference to pragmatic instruction has proven the importance of providing language content in a meaningful context. Siegel (2016) claimed that learners are able to understand pragmatic dimensions only when given contextual information. Currently, research has focused on L2 English textbooks, leaving the area of L2 Russian textbooks unexplored.

The fact that studies of pragmatics in the Russian language are still limited (Timofeeva, 2018) does not entail that Russian has not been analyzed from a pragmatic perspective. On the contrary, numerous studies in pragmatics chose Russian as a target language, especially from a cross-cultural perspective (e.g., Artoni et al., 2021; Dong, 2009; Dorodnych, 1995; Ogiermann, 2009). In particular, the speech act of request in Russian aroused interest for its counterintuitive behaviour. In pragmatic terms, requests are a threat to the hearer’s negative face – in that a request restricts the hearer’s freedom of action (Brown & Levinson, 1987); it follows that requests should opt for a negative politeness strategy like indirectness, which would imply optionality for the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2016). However, Russian relies more on frankness than indirectness, which is likely to be read as a waste of time or even a manipulatory attitude (Rathmayr, 1996; Zenskaja, 1997); it is therefore common that requests in Russian are performed with an imperative mitigated only by the politeness marker *požalujsta* ‘please’ (Berger, 1997; Betsch, 2003; Brehmer, 2006; Larina, 2003; Ogiermann, 2009; Rathmayr, 1996). Furthermore, another element contributing to the politeness effect of the imperative is the aspect of the verb, in that the perfective aspect addresses the negative politeness by keeping the distance between the interlocutors; conversely, the imperfective imperative shortens the distance and thus can either address the positive face – in case of a request that is beneficial for the hearer, too – or create a rude effect (Benacchio, 2002). Such attention on the use of imperative in Russian requests has shadowed the wide variety of constructions that can be used to formulate a request in Russian, like interrogatives and performatives, as

<sup>1</sup> Both *rečevoj etiket* and *politeness* deal with how linguistic features convey appropriateness in a variety of speech acts. However, *politeness* is based on the sociological concept of *face* (Goffman, 1955) and aims to describe how linguistic elements contribute to saving the interlocutors’ faces during communication, especially in the so-called *face threatening acts*. On the other hand, *rečevoj etiket* takes a prescriptive approach, as it aims to tell what is proper and what is not on the basis of natives’ speech and samples from literary language, which serves as a model for the learners of the language.

well as the presence of mitigators like the negative particle *ne*, the interrogative particle *li*, the conditional particle *by*, the combination of *ne* and *li*, and the combination of *ne* and *by* (Mills, 1992), the use of the modal *moč* 'can' with or without the particles *ne* and/or *by* (Betsch, 2003).

Such extensive research within the field of pragmatics on Russian, unfortunately, is not mirrored in studies on the role of pragmatic instruction in L2 Russian, which are usually limited to the suggestion of good practice routines (Archipkina, 2017, pp. 7–9; Karpeeva & Petrova, 2015; Krulatz, 2012, 2015, pp. 52–60). To our knowledge, the only two studies investigating pragmatic instruction in L2 Russian are Achmadi (2016), who has demonstrated the benefits of explicit instruction of request and apology routines in a group of Persian L1 learners of L2 Russian, and Artoni et al. (2020), who showed the positive effects of integrating authentic audiovisual material taken from MURCO – the multimodal sub-corpus of the Russian National Corpus – in teaching the speech acts of advice and request.

The scarcity of research in the field and the fact that the Russian teaching tradition is more oriented toward speech etiquette rather than pragmatics suggest that teaching material for pragmatic competence in L2 Russian would be infrequent. However, an increasing need for a broader pragmatic view of etiquette in Russian language classes has resulted in the demand for more pragmatic-oriented teaching materials (Grekova, 2016; Markova, 2018).

### 3. Research questions

In such a context, where research in teaching pragmatic competence in L2 Russian is an underexplored field and traditional teaching practice in L2 Russian is oriented toward speech etiquette rather than pragmatic awareness, the current study has two major research questions.

RQ1: Do coursebooks of L2 Russian provide explicit pragmatic instruction? If so, is metapragmatic terminology used?

RQ2: Do coursebooks of L2 Russian include materials and activities that can be used to improve the learners' pragmatic competence?

### 4. Method

In order to investigate whether and to what extent coursebooks of L2 Russian integrate pragmatic instruction, the current research focused on two types of teaching materials, with complementary features, namely.

- a. Two handbooks of speech etiquette for learners of L2 Russian
  1. *Russkij rečevoj etiket. Posobie dlja studentov-inostrancev* (Akišina & Formanovskaja, 1978)
  2. *Russkij rečevoj etiket: Učebnoe posobie* (Nissen & Karasëva, 2011)
- b. A series of coursebooks for L1 Italian learners of L2 Russian
  1. *Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 1* (Magnati et al., 2017)
  2. *Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 2* (Legittimo et al., 2017)
  3. *Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 3* (Bejenari et al., 2020)
  4. *Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 4* (Bejenari et al., 2022)

The two volumes by Akišina and Formanovskaja (1978) and by Nissen and Karasëva (2011) are both handbooks that focus exclusively on the *rečevoj etiket* 'speech etiquette'; they were published in Russia, are written in Russian, and aim at developing speech competences related to etiquette among learners of L2 Russian. Because of that, we expect that extensive sections of them would be related to pragmatic competence and the proposed activities may be adapted to that goal. Among the numerous volumes on the topic, they have been chosen for the prestige of their publishing houses and their editorial success.

The series *Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 1–4* (respectively, Magnati et al., 2017; Legittimo et al., 2017; Bejenari et al., 2020; Bejenari et al., 2022) consists of a comprehensive course that aims at developing language competence in L2 Russian from zero to a B2 CEFR level. The four volumes were published in Italy, provide metalinguistic explanations in Italian, and are designed explicitly for L1 Italian learners of L2 Russian. Even if the series was conceived for learners of Russian at the school level – and thus in line with the syllabus for the teaching of Russian in Italian high schools (Pesenti et al., 2018) – the volumes are commonly used in university courses and university language centres across Italy.

Analysis conducted on these coursebooks will allow us to investigate to what extent a comprehensive course of L2 Russian deals with pragmatic competence – among the numerous abilities it addresses. Furthermore, focusing on a series of coursebooks specifically designed for Italian L1 learners of L2 Russian lets us examine whether the volumes introduce elements of cross-cultural pragmatics oriented toward the target culture.

In particular, the study consisted of three steps.

- (i) the detection of any metapragmatic explanation, including the reference to pragmatic terminology;
- (ii) the recognition of elements that could pertain to the field of pragmatics in the abovementioned coursebooks, using both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis (as in Ren & Han, 2016);
- (iii) adaptation and integration of the current teaching material to implement the practice of explicit pragmatic instruction, on the basis of current research on L2 pragmatics and coursebook adaptation (as in Karatepe & Civelek, 2021).

In order to convey an in-depth understanding of the pragmalinguistic features in coursebooks, the analysis will focus primarily on the speech act of requesting and how it is introduced to the learners. On the one hand, the analysis of request is crucial in studies within the field of pragmatics; request is one of the most salient speech acts (Searle, 1969), it is a *Face Threatening Act* to the negative face of the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and it is the most frequently studied act in the fields of cross-cultural and L2 pragmatics (Ogiermann, 2009; Taguchi & Kim, 2016; Trosborg, 2011). On the other hand, the ability to perform a request is a salient aspect of everyday communication, and any L2 coursebook would introduce requesting among the skills to be developed. Given that the way requests are formulated affects politeness, they are also one of the topics that *rečevoj etiket* ‘speech etiquette’ deals with.

## 5. Result and discussion

### 5.1. Metapragmatic terminology

In line with the Russian linguistic tradition, none of the analyzed coursebooks explicitly refers to pragmatic competence. The Russian volumes on speech etiquette mention some critical concepts in pragmatics, such as *vežlivost* ‘politeness’ or *social’NOE položenie* ‘social position’, but as background notions rather than metapragmatic terminology. Similarly, pragmatics is not overtly dealt with in the series of coursebooks for L1 Italian learners of L2 Russian. In the volumes’ introductions, the authors always state they aim to develop the learners’ communicative competence via explanations and practice on topics related to lexicon, morphology, and syntax; pragmatics is not mentioned among the competencies to be learned. However, especially in *Davajte 1* and *Davajte 4*, some pragmatic concepts like *formalita* ‘formality’ and *formule di cortesia* ‘politeness formulae’ are used.

In sum, although textbooks are usually scarce in meta-pragmatic explanations (Petraki & Bayes, 2013), the analyzed textbooks completely lack any overt pragmatic instruction or metapragmatic reflection.

### 5.2. Pragmalinguistic features

Despite the absence of any reference to metapragmatic information, the analyzed coursebooks do provide some information that can be relevant to pragmatic competence, especially in terms of pragmalinguistics, i.e., how different linguistic choices vary according to the context. As already mentioned, in order to provide a thorough insight into the pragmalinguistic features of the coursebooks, the analysis will focus primarily on how requests are presented.

In line with previous studies on the representation of pragmatics in textbooks (Ren & Han, 2016), an overview of the portion of the volumes devoted to requests is summarized in Table 1, which shows the percentage of pages with pragmatic information about requests in each volume considered.

Not surprisingly, the two Russian volumes on *rečevoj etiket* provide extensive sections on the speech act of request (7.78% and 12.5% of the total pages), whereas the series of coursebooks *Davajte*, having to develop the four key language skills, have very limited sections on pragmatic competence, in general, and on request, in particular. However, as noted by Ren and Han (2016, p. 5), the number of pages per se does not provide information about the amount of pragmatic information on each page, or the quality of it. Therefore, a more qualitative-oriented analysis of the content is necessary. In this regard, sections on request for each textbook under consideration are here presented and analyzed.

The volume by Akišina and Formanovskaja (1978) devotes an entire chapter to the speech acts of *pros’ba*, *sovet*, *predloženie* ‘request, advice, invitation’ (p. 69–83). The first pages consist of a two-column table: on the left are listed the *Vyraženija rečevogo etiketa* ‘expressions of speech etiquette’, and on the right *Situacija upotreblenija i komentarii* ‘situations of use and comments’, as exemplified in Table 2.

Akišina and Formanovskaja (1978) have grouped and listed a variety of patterns in which requests can be expressed. However, the explanations of the situations in which the structures can be used are not very informative; for instance, as Table 2 shows, two different patterns – i.e., a polite addressing followed by imperative and a negative question followed by infinitive – are both reported to be *vežlivoe* ‘polite’, without any further comment. Although the expressions of request at the imperative are always in the perfective aspect, no focus on aspect choice is provided in the comments. Furthermore, the statement that imperative is the primary form of expression of requesting in Russian has been challenged by different scholars (cf. Artoni & Rylova, 2021; Ogiermann, 2009).

After having shown the expressions of speech etiquette and their uses, Akišina and Formanovskaja (1978) provide the readers with (i) *primery* ‘examples’, (ii) *dialogi* ‘dialogues’, (iii) *zadanie k risunku* ‘image task’, and (iv) *upražnenija* ‘exercises’. The section *primery*

**Table 1**  
Overview of portions devoted to requests per textbook.

| Textbook                                                                                          | Pages with information on request | Total number of pages | Percentage (%) of pages with information on request |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Russkij rečevoj etiket. Posobie dlja studentov-inostrancev</i> (Akišina & Formanovskaja, 1978) | 14                                | 182                   | 7.78                                                |
| <i>Russkij rečevoj etiket: Učebnoe posobie</i> (Nissen & Karasëva, 2011)                          | 10                                | 80                    | 12.5                                                |
| <i>Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 1</i> (Magnati et al., 2017)                          | 1                                 | 352                   | 0.28                                                |
| <i>Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 2</i> (Legittimo et al., 2017)                        | 1                                 | 242                   | 0.41                                                |
| <i>Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 3</i> (Bejenari et al., 2020)                         | 1                                 | 279                   | 0.36                                                |
| <i>Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 4</i> (Bejenari et al., 2022)                         | 0                                 | 300                   | 0                                                   |

Table 2

Extract of the explanatory tables for request, advice, and invitation in Akišina and Formanovskaja (1978: 69–71).

| Vyraženija rečevogo etiketa [expressions of speech etiquette]                                                                                                                                                          |  | Situacija upotrebljenja i komentarii [situations of use and comments]                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (...)<br>Sdelaj(-te) ...<br>Napiši(-te) ...<br>Prinesi(-te) ... [do.IMP.2SG (-PL) .../write.IMP.2SG (-PL) ... /bring.IMP.2SG (-PL) ...]                                                                                |  | (...)<br>Povelitel'NOE naklonenie glagola javljaetsja osnovnoj formoj vyraženiha pros'by, sověta, predloženiya [the imperative mood of the form is the primary form of expression of request, advice, and invitation] |
| <b>Požalujsta</b><br><b>Bud'te dobry</b> (bud' dobr)<br><b>Bud'te ljubezny</b> (bud' ljubezn)<br>Esli vam (tebe) ne trudno<br>[please/be good.2 PL (2SG)/be nice.2 PL (2SG)/if you.2 PL (2SG) don't find it difficult] |  | + glagol v povelitel'nom naklonenii (pozvonite)<br>[+ verb in the imperative mood (call.IMP.2 PL)]<br>Vežlivoe<br>[polite]                                                                                            |
| (...)<br>Vy ne možete ... ?<br>Vy ne mogli by ... ?<br>Vam ne trudno (budet) ... ?<br>[Can not you.PL ... ?/Could not you.PL ... ?/Is (will be) not difficult for you.PL ... ? ]                                       |  | (...)<br>+ inf. (pozvonit')<br>[+ infinitive (call.INF)]<br>Vežlivoe<br>[polite]                                                                                                                                      |

'examples' consists of different statements or announcements, as in (1), where the learners are required to read them and identify the expressions used.

(1) Prinesi mne, požalujsta, tēplyj šarf. Zdes' choldno.

[bring.IMP.2SG me, please, a warm scarf. It's cold here]

(Akišina & Formanovskaja, 1978: 73)

Whereas the *zadanie k risunku* 'image task' simply requires pairing an image with one of the situations spelled out in the section *dialogi* 'dialogues', the segment *upražnenija* 'exercises' offers a variety of activities, like sentence transformation, speech act recognition, choose the correct option – as the example in (2), sentence combining, and written stimuli response.

(2) Borja, (vyključij/vyključaj) televizor, rabotat' nevozmožno.

[Boris, (switch off.PFV.IMP/switch off.IPFV.IMP) the TV, it's impossible to work]

(Akišina & Formanovskaja, 1978: 78)

The task shown in the example in (2) requires the learner to choose between the perfective and the imperfective aspects of the imperative, despite the fact that the topic was never addressed in the explanatory part.

In sum, the volume by Akišina and Formanovskaja (1978) provides a variety of expressions and examples of the numerous ways a request can be formulated in Russian. However, the explanations are often partial in terms of both pragmalinguistics – for instance, the role of aspect at the imperative is never addressed – and sociopragmatics, as the variables of social distance, power, and degree of imposition of the requests are not taken into consideration.

Similarly, Nissen and Karasëva (2011) – the other Russian handbook dedicated to the Russian *rečevoj etiket* 'speech etiquette' – devoted its chapter 5 *Prošu tebjja* 'I ask you' (pp. 37–49) to requesting. In the introduction of this chapter, it is recommended that request "dolžno byt' delikatnym, vežlivym, no bez izlišnego zaiskivaniya (...) vyražena v vežljivoj forme" 'must be delicate, polite, but without unnecessary flattering (...) must be expressed in a polite form' (Nissen & Karasëva, 2011: 38). However, the only element that is recommended to convey politeness here is the word *požalujsta* 'please'. Unlike Akišina and Formanovskaja (1978), Nissen and Karasëva (2011) do not provide a table for the ways requests can be expressed in Russian; their list goes under the tag *formuly* 'formulae' and consists of linguistic expressions followed by examples. Despite the variety of ways of expressing requests that are introduced, their explanations are not always present, as in (3a), and sometimes they are not comprehensive, as in (3b).

(3) a. Pros'ba, vyražennaja voprositel'nyh predloženiem s glagolom "moč'": Ja mogu porposit' vas pomoč'?

[a request expressed by an interrogative with the verb "can": Can I ask your help?]

(...)

b. Pros'ba, vyražennaja voprositel'nyh predloženiem s časticami "by", "li", "ne": Ne mogli by vy menja podoždat' ? (...) adresuetsja maloznakomym ljudjam, kotorych my choteli by poprosit' ob odolženii

[a request expressed by an interrogative with the particles "BY", "LI", "NE": couldn't you wait for me? (...) addresses unfamiliar people to whom we would like to ask a favor]

(Nissen & Karasëva, 2011: 38–39)

In (3a), there is no explanation about the context of the use of an interrogative with the verb *moč'* 'can'; conversely, the explanation



in (3b) provides the social context in which the expression can be used (i.e., in unfamiliar contexts), but does not present how the particles combine. An even more confusing explanation is provided at the end of the section *formuly* 'formulae', where it is stated that the use of the discourse markers *nu* and *da* is allowed only in child talk:

-“Nu požalujsta, daj na moroženoe.”(...)

esli vy sprosíte nositelja russkogo jazyka, skol'ko let reběniku iz priveděnnogo primera, to vaš znakomyj bezošibočno opredelit v nēm mladšego škol'nika ili doškol'nika. Kak my uže skazali, eti časticy ne upotrebljajutsja v pros'bach vzroslych ljudej.

[-“NU [particle] give [me] ice cream.”

If you ask a native Russian speaker how old the child of the previous example is, your companion will tell you without any error that it is a talk by a preschool child or a child in his first years of school. As we have already mentioned, these particles are not used in the requests of adult people]

(Nissen & Karasěva, 2011: 40)

This statement is not relevant for the target audience of the volume, i.e., adult learners of L2 Russian, and is contradicted by numerous data retrieved in corpora, which are rich in examples of adults using the markers *nu* and *da*. For instance, the example (4) taken from the NKRJa (*Nacional'nyj Korpus Russkogo Jazyka* – Russian National Corpus) displays a request with the marker *nu* uttered by an adult character to his lover.

(4) Nu požalujsta, daj že mne skazat'.

lit.: NU (particle) please give me tell [Oh, please, let me tell you]

[NKRJa: Anna Tkačeva. Privorot (1996)]

The following section *voprosy* 'questions' is interesting from a pragmatic perspective. The learners are given situations in which they must formulate a request. As exemplified in (5), the background provides information about social distance and the degree of imposition of the request.

(5) Vy očen' zanjaty, a vaš chorošij drug mnogo raz predlagal vam svoju pomošč'. Poprosite ego vyguljat' vašu sobaku.

[You are very busy, and a good friend offered his help many times. Ask him to walk your dog.]

(Nissen & Karasěva, 2011: 40)

In their chapter about requests, Nissen and Karasěva (2011) added also a section about *otvet na pros'by* 'answer to requests', which allows a variety of exercises involving dialogic structures of requests and reactions to them.

In sum, Nissen and Karasěva (2011) provide numerous ways of expressing requests by showing the different linguistic variations among them. However, the explanations are not always given, and sometimes, they lack some crucial aspects when provided. The exercises allow for an in-depth reflection on how sociolinguistic variables affect language choice when addressing requests.

With regard to the Italian coursebook series *Davajte!*, it either overtly or covertly deals with requests in almost every volume. In volume 1 (Magnati et al., 2017), requests are found in a box about useful formulae to use in the situation *Kak zakazat' v restorane* 'How to order food at the restaurant' (p. 99). In particular, as shown in (6), two formulae with the imperative in Russian are translated into Italian with 'Mi-X' questions (cf. Rossi, 2012) without further comments.

(6) Prinesite, požalujsta ... (Mi/ci porti, per favore ...)

[RUS: bring-IMP, please ... ITA: to me/to us bring-IND, please ...]

Dajte, požalujsta ... (Mi/Ci dia, per favore ...)

[RUS: give-IMP, please ... ITA: to me/to us give-IND, please ...]

(Magnati et al., 2017: 99)

The second volume of *Davajte* (Legittimo et al., 2017)! overtly mentions requests in an exercise that aims to practice imperative (p. 109). The exercise reads *Completa le frasi formulando delle richieste o degli ordini* 'Complete the sentences by formulating requests or orders', and consists of completing the gaps exercise, as shown in (7).

(7) Segodnja u nas vkusnye banany. \_\_\_\_! (poprobovat' ich)

[today we have tasty bananas. \_\_\_\_! (taste-INF them)]

(...)

Ja ne mogu najti očki. \_\_\_\_! (pomoc' mne)

[I cannot find my glasses. \_\_\_\_! (help-INF me)]

(Legittimo et al., 2017: 109)

However, not only does the exercise not provide any reflection on the use of imperatives in requests and/or orders, but it also fails to identify the target speech act. For instance, the first item in (6) is neither a request nor an order: it is an offer. This mismatch in the

target speech act is likely to confuse the learners.

The third volume of *Davajte* (Bejenari et al., 2020)! provides further insights into the formulation of requests in Russian in a grammar box on the use of aspect at the imperative mood (p. 108). In particular, the coursebook states that the imperfective imperative is used to form requests that focus either on the beginning of the action or on the way the action should be fulfilled. In contrast, the perfective imperative is used to formulate requests that focus on the result of the action. As to examples, no instance of imperfective imperative for requesting is given, whereas the two examples for perfective imperative and the explanations provided are reported in (8a) and (8b).

(8) a. Vera, pomogi mne, požalujsta, najti očki (richiesta insistente di svolgere un'azione con uno scopo)

[RUS: Vera, help-PF.IMP me, please, find my glasses (ITA: pushy request to fulfil an action with a goal)]

b. Skażite, požalujsta, kak projti k stancii metro “Cvetnoj bul’var” (l’interesse è sul risultato da ottenere: giungere alla stazione della metropolitana)

[RUS: Tell-PF.IMP, please, how to reach the metro station “Cvetnoj bul’var” (ITA: the focus is on the result to obtain: to reach the metro station)]

(Bejenari et al., 2020: 108)

Unlike the textbooks for lower levels, the third volume of *Davajte!* provides explanations about how the category of aspect in the imperative interacts with requesting. Unfortunately, the explanations in (8a) and (8b) are partially correct; the request in (8a) is described as “pushy” even if the use of perfective imperative here implies an unmarked/pragmatically neutral reading, and the perfective imperative in (8b) is explained as a focus on the result of reaching the metro station, whereas the verb at the imperative is *skażite* ‘tell’ and not *projti* ‘reach’. Interestingly, the grammar box is followed by a communicative task that aims at practicing the choice of aspect at the imperative according to different contexts – i.e., office, school, home, doctor – as exemplified in (9).

(9) Obrazujte imperativ (poprosite, potrebuje, priglasite, porekomendujte) v predložennych situacijach po modeli

[Form the imperative (ask, require, invite, recommend) in the given situations according to the model]

V ofise

[In the office]

Proverit’ počtu; napisat’ pis’mo partnëram; sdelat’ čaj; zakazat’ konferenc-zal (...)

[To check the mail; to write a letter to partners; to prepare tea; to reserve a conference room (...)]

(Bejenari et al., 2020: 108)

Despite the declared communicative purpose of the exercise, the task shown in (9) requires the learner to conjugate the verb in the infinitive to the imperative form, without choosing the proper aspect, as it was already given in the infinitive form. In fact, this task is just a morphological exercise.

Finally, the fourth volume of *Davajte* (Bejenari et al., 2022)! does not deal with requests at all. Despite this, the volume addresses several issues related to pragmalinguistics, such as interjections intensifiers (p. 41–42), and has an extensive section devoted to how to express doubts, judgments, and impressions (p. 85–86), which though primarily consists of formulae and exercises based on translation.

In sum, the coursebook series *Davajte!* offers limited insights into requesting in Russian, especially regarding the different pragmalinguistic strategies that can be used to express this speech act (only imperative is addressed). Despite its communicative approach, which is indeed effective with reference to numerous skills, pragmatic competence is left unexplored.

**Table 3**

Suggested activities to enhance pragmalinguistic competence in L2 Russian requesting with the volume by Akišina and Formanovskaja (1978).

| Type of activity                                         | Adaptation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Expressions of speech etiquette and comments (pp. 69–73) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide a pragmatic-based definition of politeness (cf. Brown &amp; Levinson, 1987)</li> <li>2. List and group the different expressions according to the CCSARP taxonomy (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989)</li> <li>3. Explain the different pragmatic effects of the aspect of the imperative (cf. Benacchio, 2002)</li> </ol> |
| Examples (pp. 73–77)                                     | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify the head act and modifiers</li> <li>2. Notice how different linguistic strategies vary according to the diverse sociolinguistic context</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                              |
| Exercises (pp. 77–83)                                    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be sure that the exercises can be solved with the explanations provided</li> <li>2. Transform the stimuli response exercises into role plays</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                                          | <p>[further suggestions]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Show some authentic audiovisual materials (cf. Artoni et al., 2020)</li> <li>2. Open a discussion on intercultural pragmatics</li> <li>3. Provide, when possible, examples also from non-Russian Russophone contexts</li> </ol>                                                             |

### 5.3. Adaptation

The previous sections 5.1-5.2 have demonstrated how the textbooks considered in the analysis fail to provide explicit pragmatic instruction and lack any use of metapragmatic terminology, thus suggesting a solid negative answer to RQ1. However, with reference to RQ2, “Do coursebooks of L2 Russian include materials and activities that can be used to improve the learners’ pragmatic competence?” a more elaborated answer is needed. As shown in 5.2, the analyzed coursebooks do have some activities that can be used to improve the learners’ pragmatic competence, especially regarding the speech act of request. In line with previous studies (cf. [Karatepe & Civelek, 2021](#)), this section provides suggestions and ideas to adapt activities in the current textbooks for instructors of L2 Russian to use in their teaching practice.

Table 3 shows the suggested adapted activities for the textbook by [Akišina and Formanovskaja \(1978\)](#).

As mentioned in 5.2, [Akišina and Formanovskaja \(1978\)](#) devote an entire chapter to requests in Russian. The tables listing speech etiquette expressions (pp. 69–73) can be integrated with some metapragmatic awareness activities. As the term *vežlivost’* ‘politeness’ is very frequent across the handbook, it is necessary to present a thorough pragmatic-based definition of politeness in line with the Politeness Theory by [Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#), i.e., connected with the concept of positive and negative faces and the language-specific strategies to save them during the performance of Face Threatening Acts. Furthermore, as the linguistic elements are presented in a sketchy way, it could be helpful to list and group the different expressions according to the CCSARP taxonomy ([Blum-Kulka et al., 1989](#)) in order to identify head acts and different internal and external modifiers. A final but crucial remark consists of explaining the different pragmatic readings triggered by the imperfective and perfective aspects of the imperative and how they interact with politeness (cf. [Benacchio, 2002](#)). In the same volume, the section *primery* ‘examples’ (pp. 73–77) can be effectively used by the learners to practice their ability to identify the different head acts and modifiers and how they vary according to the diverse sociolinguistic contexts. The section *upražnenija* ‘exercises’ (p. 77–83) will benefit from the previous metapragmatic explanations, as now the learners are provided with all the necessary explanations to solve the exercises; in addition, the stimuli-response exercises can be easily transformed into *role plays* (cf. [Félix-Brasdefer, 2018](#)) to practice the learners’ online pragmatic competence, as suggested in [Trubnikova \(2018\)](#). Some additional suggestions that can be integrated into classes are: (i) show some authentic audiovisual materials, which can be easily found in the section of MURCO – Multimodal Russian Corpus that is annotated with different speech acts (cf. [Artoni et al., 2020](#)); (ii) open a discussion on intercultural pragmatics by addressing the students’ L1(s); (iii) when possible, provide examples also from non-Russian Russophone contexts to challenge a nationalistic idea of culture (cf. [Torresin, 2023](#)).

Table 4 shows the suggested adapted activities for the textbook by [Nissen and Karasëva \(2011\)](#).

Similar suggestions to the ones provided in Table 3 can be outlined with reference to [Nissen and Karasëva \(2011\)](#)’s handbook. As explained in 5.2, the introduction to request (p. 37) is problematic in terms of approach and terminology. As a classroom activity, it could be helpful to open a discussion on the terms *delikatnyj* ‘delicate’ and *vežlivyj* ‘polite’ from a cross-cultural perspective, as the volume takes them for granted. After this, you can provide a pragmatic-based definition of politeness in line with the Politeness Theory ([Brown & Levinson, 1987](#)), and challenge the stereotype that *požalujsta* ‘please’ is a mandatory politeness marker. The following section on *formuly* ‘formulae’ (pp. 38–40) was more detailed and could benefit from a restructuring in terms of CCSARP taxonomy ([Blum-Kulka et al., 1989](#)) and by adding overt explanations on the pragmatic role of aspect at the imperative (cf. [Benacchio, 2002](#)). Furthermore, some examples taken from corpora would add to the variety of this section. The following part consists of *voprosy* ‘questions’ (pp. 40–42), which can be easily transformed into *discourse completion tasks* (DCT) to test offline pragmatic competencies (cf. [Félix-Brasdefer, 2010](#)) or *role plays* to enhance learners’ online pragmatic competencies (cf. [Félix-Brasdefer, 2018](#)). As the situations given in [Nissen and Karasëva \(2011\)](#) are diverse in terms of sociolinguistic variables, instructors can ask their learners to identify the degree of social distance, power, and imposition in each situation. Similarly to the previous handbook, the use of [Nissen and Karasëva \(2011\)](#) can be integrated with authentic audiovisual material, could lead to discussion on intercultural pragmatics, and would benefit from examples from non-Russian Russophone contexts.

Table 5 shows the suggested adapted activities for the series of coursebooks *Davajte* ([Bejenari et al., 2020, 2022](#); [Legittimo et al., 2017](#); [Magnati et al., 2017](#)).

A different approach should be taken with the series of coursebooks *Davajte!*, in that the four volumes are meant for learners of L2

**Table 4**

Suggested activities to enhance pragmalinguistic competence in L2 Russian requesting with the volume by [Nissen and Karasëva \(2011\)](#).

| Type of activity      | Adaptation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Introduction (p. 37)  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Open a discussion on the terms ‘delicate’ and ‘polite’ from a cross-cultural perspective</li> <li>2. Provide a pragmatic-based definition of politeness (cf. <a href="#">Brown &amp; Levinson, 1987</a>)</li> <li>3. Challenge the stereotype that <i>požalujsta</i> ‘please’ is a mandatory politeness marker</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Formulae (pp. 38–40)  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. List and group the different expressions according to the CCSARP taxonomy (<a href="#">Blum-Kulka et al., 1989</a>)</li> <li>2. Explain the different pragmatic effects of the aspect of the imperative (cf. <a href="#">Benacchio, 2002</a>)</li> <li>3. Add some examples taken from corpora</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Questions (pp. 40–42) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Transform the questions into role plays and/or discourse completion tasks</li> <li>2. Ask your learners to identify the degree of social distance, power, and imposition in each situation</li> </ol> <p>[further suggestions]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Show some authentic audiovisual materials (cf. <a href="#">Artoni et al., 2020</a>)</li> <li>2. Open a discussion on intercultural pragmatics</li> <li>3. Provide, when possible, examples also from non-Russian Russophone contexts</li> </ol> |



**Table 5**Suggested activities to enhance pragmalinguistic competence in L2 Russian requesting with the coursebook series *Davajte*.

| Volume                                                                     | Type of activity                                                  | Adaptation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 1</i> (Magnati et al., 2017)   | How to order food at the restaurant (p. 99)                       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduce the formulae to order food</li> <li>2. Explain that, unlike Italian, the use of imperative is polite here</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <i>Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 2</i> (Legittimo et al., 2017) | Complete the sentences by formulating requests or orders (p. 109) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduce the different speech acts of requests, orders, suggestions, and invitations</li> <li>2. Ask your learners first to identify the speech act and then use the correct form of imperative</li> <li>3. Compare the pragmatic effect of imperative in Italian and Russian</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <i>Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 3</i> (Bejenari et al., 2020)  | Aspect at the imperative (p. 108)                                 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain the different pragmatic effects of the aspect of the imperative (cf. Benacchio, 2002)</li> <li>2. Transform the exercise about the imperative into role plays</li> <li>3. Ask your students to identify the aspect used at the imperative in the different situations</li> <li>4. Expand the possibilities of expressing a request by introducing the interrogative and the modifiers (the verb <i>moč</i> 'can', and the particles <i>ne</i> and <i>by</i>)</li> </ol> |
| <i>Davajte! Corso di lingua e cultura russa 4</i> (Bejenari et al., 2022)  | How to express doubts, judgments, and impressions (pp. 85–86)     | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pragmatic expansion can be refined via overt explanations on how pragmalinguistic strategies adjust according to the sociolinguistic variables</li> <li>2. Show some authentic audiovisual materials (cf. Artoni et al., 2020)</li> <li>3. Open a discussion on intercultural pragmatics</li> <li>4. Provide, when possible, examples also from non-Russian Russophone contexts</li> </ol>                                                                                      |

Russian at different proficiency levels. It is thus useful to rely on a theory that can account for the progression of pragmatic competence in the learners' interlanguage, such as the proposal by Rose and Kasper (2001), who suggest that L2 pragmatics is acquired in a five-staged path, from (i) pre-basic to (ii) formulaic, (iii) unpacking, (iv) pragmatic expansion, up to (v) fine-tuning.

The first volume (Magnati et al., 2017) implicitly introduces requests in a section about ordering food at the restaurant (p. 99). In line with Rose and Kasper (2001), requesting is presented in a formulaic way; however, at this stage, instructors can explain that, unlike in Italian, the use of the imperative is considered polite in such a context. The second volume (Legittimo et al., 2017) deals with requests in the exercise "complete the sentences by formulating requests or orders" (p. 109) meant to practice imperative morphology. In line with Rose and Kasper (2001) unpacking stage, here teachers can introduce the different speech acts of requests, orders, suggestions, and invitations and ask their learners first to identify the speech act and then use the correct form of the imperative; in a cross-cultural perspective, it can be interesting to compare the pragmatic effect of imperatives in Italian and in Russian. The third volume of *Davajte* (Bejenari et al., 2020)! has a grammar box devoted to the imperfective vs perfective aspects of the imperative (p. 108). As mentioned in 5.2, here the given explanation is problematic; therefore, it is essential to provide a thorough classification of the different pragmatic effects of the imperfective vs perfective aspects of the imperative (cf. Benacchio, 2002), as well as transform the exercise on imperatives into a more partaking activity, such as a *role play*. Any exercise could thus be followed by identifying the aspect (imperfective or perfective) used at the imperative in the given situations. However, in order to push the learners towards the next stage of pragmatic expansion, it could be helpful to increase the possibilities of expressing a request by introducing the interrogative – alongside the imperative – and some modifiers, like the verb *moč* 'can', and the negative particle *ne* and the conditional particle *by*. Finally, the fourth volume of *Davajte* (Bejenari et al., 2022)! does not mention requests at all. In order to proceed with the pragmatic expansion learners would be able to acquire at this stage, it is thus important to introduce overt metapragmatic explanations, like the fundamentals of Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and its application to the Russian language. In terms of input, students should be exposed to samples with sufficient information about the contextual factors (Karatepe & Civelek, 2021); this kind of input can be easily retrieved from corpora, especially audiovisual ones (cf. Artoni et al., 2020), and, when possible, a varied input should include samples from non-Russian Russophone contexts. It would be fruitful to create some *role plays* with different sociolinguistic variables, like social distance, power, and degree of imposition, and hence open a discussion on intercultural pragmatics.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study has shown how the current teaching material of L2 Russian can be adapted to improve the learners' pragmatic competence, with a particular reference to the speech act of request. Although the meta-pragmatic explanations in textbooks of L2 English are usually scarce (Petraki & Bayes, 2013), the situation of L2 Russian textbooks is even worse, as even handbooks of speech etiquette lack entirely any reference to meta-pragmatic terminology. However, material adaptation can help instructors enrich their students' pragmatic awareness and pragmalinguistic repertoire.

Material adaptation was based on the analysis of the potential pragmatic elements already present in the textbook (cf. Karatepe & Civelek, 2021; Ren & Han, 2016). The integration that followed combined both theoretical remarks from the discipline of pragmatics and the implementation of research on Russian in the fields of pragmalinguistics and L2 pragmatics – like, for instance, the progression of pragmatic competencies based on Rose and Kasper's (2001) model. Such dialogue between research in pragmatics and teaching practice is fruitful and should be encouraged.

Other relevant aspects taken into consideration in material adaptation are the theoretical frameworks that L2 Russian textbooks

refer to when dealing with politeness, i.e., *rečevoj etiket* 'speech etiquette' and *mežkul'turnaja komunikacija* 'intercultural communication'. These frameworks rely on the concept of national culture, which is often limited to the ethno-cultural context, and its alleged values and worldview. Such representation of the context fails to represent the complexity of reality and is based on a linguistic and cultural unity of the Russian language that is far from being true. Pragmatic instruction in L2 Russian thus should be able to go beyond the narrow national pattern and address a transnational Russophone context (Torresin, 2023). Alongside this, pragmatic instruction of L2 Russian can benefit from the perspective of studies on Politeness Theory, which allows teachers to go beyond the traditional disciplines and provide a research-driven explanation of language in context.

In sum, the adaptation of the current textbooks allows instructors to have scientific research-based material with a broader scope onto the variety of the Russophone contexts.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Daniele Artoni:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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