

## GRAMMATICALIZATION OF POLITENESS THROUGH THE IMPERFECTIVE PAST IN SPANISH AND POLISH<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Introduction

The correlation between past tense marking and the expression of politeness has been indicated in a number of studies (Fraser 1980, James 1982, Randriamasimanana 1987, Fleischman 1989, King 1992). For Romance languages, there are several studies which point to the use of the Imperfect to express politeness (Bazzanella 1990, Reyes 1990, Haverkate 1994). These studies, however, do not treat such use as a widespread and systematic strategy that is extensively conventionalized. In Polish, to the best of my knowledge, the use of the Imperfective Past has not been related to the expression of politeness, though there are studies which provide lexical phrases and sentences with this form in usages considered to be polite (Ożóg 1990).<sup>2</sup>

This paper compares the non-canonical usage of the imperfective past in natural data gathered in travel agencies in Spain and Poland. The purpose is to establish possible systematic contexts and verb types used to encode speaker's (S's) deferential attitude towards hearer (H) in both languages. Moreover, it is proposed that the Imperfect in Spanish and the Imperfective Past in Polish may be considered grammaticalized devices to encode politeness in impositive<sup>3</sup> situations. In particular, the non-canonical use of the imperfective past seems to address *negative polite-*

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<sup>2</sup> In contrast, it is very well-known that languages use the Conditional form to express politeness, especially in formal conversations. This paper deals with more casual conversations. The analysis of the Conditional forms to encode politeness is presented in Chodorowska-Pilch (1998).

<sup>3</sup> In Brown and Levinson's (1987) approach, impositive acts would be acts that threaten the *negative face*.

ness (Brown and Levinson 1987) and Lakoff's (1973) maxims "Don't impose" and "Give options". It is also suggested that, due to different grammaticalization of aspect in Polish (see Bybee 1985, Bybee and Dahl 1989, Karolak 1994), the encoding of politeness through the Imperfective Past will reveal limitations in the number of verbs affected by the process.

To account for the non-canonical use of the imperfective past in Peninsular Spanish and Polish, I will consider utterances such as the following examples (1a, b) and (2):

- (1a) **Venía** a comprar los billetes para Málaga.  
'I was coming to buy the tickets to Málaga.'
- (1b) **Queríamos** ir a Italia.  
'We wanted to go to Italy.'
- (2) **Chciałem** się dowiedzieć o ceny biletów do Londynu.  
'I wanted to find out the ticket prices to London.'

In examples (1a, b) and (2), Ss are already at the place of conversation. However, they distance themselves from the moment of utterance by the use of the imperfective past, since these utterances may turn out to be impositive for their interlocutors. Less polite statements would be as in examples (3a-b) in Spanish and (4) in Polish:

- (3a) **Vengo** a comprar los billetes para Málaga.  
'I come<sup>4</sup> to buy the tickets to Málaga.'
- (3b) **Queremos** ir a Italia.  
'We want to go to Italy.'
- (4) **Chcę** się dowiedzieć o ceny biletów do Londynu.  
'I want to find out the ticket prices to London.'

Comparing examples in (1) with examples in (3) and (2) with (4) in Spanish and Polish respectively, it appears that the temporal distance (Present → Imperfect in Spanish/Imperfective Past in Polish) allows the Ss to weaken the assertiveness of their statements in both languages, maintaining an S's polite distance towards an H. In what follows, it will be discussed briefly what makes the Imperfect in Spanish more suitable than the Preterite in contexts of politeness. An analogous approach will be adopted for the Imperfective Past in Polish.

In the previous studies (Reyes 1990, King 1992, Haverkate 1994), it is argued here that the Imperfect in Spanish, used non-canonically, is a grammaticalized de-

<sup>4</sup> A better translation of *vengo* would be 'I'm coming', but translations are mainly intended to reflect the use of grammatical forms.

vice to encode politeness towards the H. That is, the meaning of politeness conveyed by the Imperfect in impositive contexts is no longer a conversational but rather a conventionalized implicature. In contrast to conversational implicatures which are sporadic inferences arising in different contexts, conventionalized or conventional implicatures arise systematically in specific contexts, becoming a conventional (grammatical) meaning of a form (Grice 1975). Thus, the Imperfect which encodes the meaning of politeness in specific contexts is considered to be a grammaticalized device of interpersonal distance (politeness). A similar claim can be made for Polish, in which such non-canonical use of the Imperfective Past is limited due to a different grammaticalization of the tense/aspect distinction.

It is also argued that it is the aspectual value in the past of the Imperfect in Spanish or the Imperfective Past in Polish which facilitate a metonymic association of temporal distance with the pragmatic inference of politeness (interpersonal distance). That is, the temporal distance created by the use of the imperfective forms in both languages produces an inference of interpersonal distance between S and H. In addition, it is the imperfective aspect, connected to *irrealis* modality (RAE 1989, Andrés-Suárez 1994, Fleischman 1995), which makes possible the non-canonical use of this form in Spanish and, to an extent, in Polish.

Finally, this paper indicates that the meaning of politeness is activated in specific pragmatic and linguistic contexts. In particular, in contrast to King (1992), Haverkate (1994), and Fleischman (1995), it is shown here that the encoding of politeness through the Imperfect in Spanish is not limited to modal verbs, but includes a wider number of verbs. In the case of Polish, this paper shows that, despite the limited use of the Imperfective Past, the use of *chcieć* 'to want' is comparable to the use of *querer* 'to want' and other verbs in Spanish, employed in analogous contexts.

## 2. Theoretical background

Although the Preterite and the Imperfect in Spanish have the same basic temporal meaning (Comrie 1985), the non-canonical use of the Imperfect is possible due to its aspectual<sup>5</sup> meaning. In particular, the meaning of unboundedness and lack of temporal delimitation, derived from the basic meaning of the imperfective aspect (see e.g. Comrie 1976), permit different pragmatic uses of the imperfective past.

Going beyond Fleischman's (1989) proposal on the metaphorical use of non-Present forms in Romance languages, it is argued here that, in Spanish and Polish, it is not just the past tense, but rather its aspectual value which allows the S to convey politeness towards the H. In addition, the imperfective past, used in speech acts that require manifestation of politeness, seems to be a metaphor grounded in metonymy (Hopper and Traugott 1993, Chodorowska-Pilch 1998) that produces the 'mapping' from the domain of temporal distance (Present → non-Present) to the domain of interpersonal distance (-polite → +polite). This transfer of concepts is char-

<sup>5</sup> "Aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation" (Comrie 1976: 3).

acteristic of grammaticalization (Heine *et al.* 1991: 2). In this case, the abstract domain (politeness), conveyed by means of interpersonal distance, is encoded linguistically through the temporal distance, namely, the choice between the present and the imperfective past forms. Here, it is seen as distance since it involves a cognitive distance in the deixis between the S and the S's activity. Hence the pragmatic dimension together with the cognitive process of metaphor (a result of metonymic association) seems to be able to account for the grammaticalization of the Imperfect and the Imperfective Past as a strategy to express politeness in Spanish and Polish, respectively.

In the present study, grammaticalization is viewed from the synchronic perspective (Levinson 1983, Chodorowska-Pilch 1998), and is considered a synchronic functional extension of certain grammatical forms into other communicative uses (here, politeness) in specific pragmatic contexts. As mentioned above, the association of distance implied by a grammatical category with the interpersonal distance rests on metonymy (see Hopper and Traugott 1993) which is the principal force involved in the grammaticalization of politeness. Although the end-result of this extension may be viewed as a metaphor, it is the metonymy that motivates polysemic use of forms in any given context (Heine *et al.* 1991).

Other phenomena characteristic of grammaticalization and present in politeness encoding are pragmatic strengthening and subjectification. Pragmatic strengthening, developed through the conventionalization of implicatures (see Grice 1975), involves the expression of S's attitude. S's attitude, in turn, is encoded through the non-canonical use of the Imperfect, which is possible thanks to the subjectification (Traugott 1989) of the meaning of the form in particular contexts.

Another feature pertaining to grammaticalization and encoding of politeness is frequency of use of a form (see Heine *et al.* 1991, Hopper and Traugott 1993). Here, it is shown that the Imperfect and the Imperfective Past (to some extent) may be considered a grammaticalized device to encode politeness, since their non-canonical use is observed systematically to convey politeness.

In this paper, linguistic politeness (see also Chodorowska-Pilch 1998) is defined as the linguistic encoding of interpersonal distance (either increasing or decreasing) between the S and the H with the purpose of modifying the force of impositive speech acts (here, the use of verb forms other than the Present). Regarding the encoding of S's polite attitude towards H, the non-canonical use of the Imperfect or the Past Imperfective may be accounted for in at least two ways in the existing literature. One appeals to Lakoff's (1973) politeness maxims "Don't impose" and "Give options" which emphasize the need to attenuate utterances that might be impositive on the H. The second calls on Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of *negative face*. According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 129), negative politeness "performs the function of minimizing the particular imposition that the FTA [face threatening act] unavoidably effects." Since both manners of explaining politeness concentrate on the mitigation of S's impositive utterances towards H, the present analysis will refer to the observation of one or the other. Therefore, this paper proposes that the Imperfect in Spanish and the Imperfective Past in Polish may be used strategically,

addressing either Lakoff's (1973) politeness maxims or Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of negative face.

### 3. Non-canonical uses of the Imperfect in Spanish

#### 3.1. *Querer*

Numerous examples of the use of *querer* 'to want' in the Imperfect form have been found in the available corpus. Consider example (5) which is an illustration of an impositive statement (IS):

- (5) Cm<sup>6</sup> **Quería** reservar un hotel en Londres.  
'I **wanted** to book a hotel in London.'

In (5), the client intends to attenuate the illocutionary force of *querer* and the direct expression of his wish that might be impositive for the agent. The Imperfect of *querer* is a strategy to reduce the imposition of the client's utterance, thereby saving H's 'negative face'.

Examples (6) and (7) are indirect questions (IQ) in which the Imperfect of *querer* precedes a question introduced by a *si* clause.

- (6) Cm **Quería** preguntar si hacéis un descuento.  
'I **wanted** to ask if you give a discount.'
- (7) Cw **Queríamos** saber si es posible hacer un viaje a Tenerife en julio.  
'We wanted to know if it's possible to make a trip to Tenerife in July.'

A very canonical indirect question is in (6), where a client expresses his wish to ask a question through the verb *preguntar* 'to ask' followed by a *si* clause. A similar situation is in (7), where the client distances her impositive question not only through the use of the Imperfect, but also through the use of an interpersonal clause that expresses possibility, *si es posible*. The S leaves an option to the H, since the Imperfect form implies tentativeness on the S's part, and thus less imposition towards the H. The pragmatic inference of respect in (6) and (7) appeals to Lakoff's (1973) politeness maxims "Give options" and "Don't impose".

Examples (8) and (9) illustrate the use of the Imperfect of *querer* in direct questions (DQ):

- (8) Am ¿Adónde **querías** hacer las reservas?  
'Where **did you want** to make reservations to?'
- (9) Aw ¿Dónde **querías**?  
'Where **did you want**?'

<sup>6</sup> For the purpose of this paper, I introduce the following abbreviations: A- agent, C- client, w- woman, m- man.

In (8) and (9), travel agents try to weaken the abruptness of direct questions through the mitigating Imperfect which metaphorically distances them from the directness of the utterances. It should be pointed out that both agents and clients also use the Present form of *querer* in similar situations, when there is less apparent need to be more polite. Thus, this interchangeable use of temporal forms of *querer* indicates that Ss make a selection between a temporally non-distant (Present) and a distant (Imperfect) form.

### 3.2. *Ir*

In addition to the motion verb *venir* 'to come', as in (1a), another motion verb *ir* 'to go' may be used in the Imperfect form in questions, statements, introductions to questions and requests (Chodorowska-Pilch 1998).

- (10) Am Hombre, tú ¿cuándo te **ibas**? Déjame pensar.  
'Well, when **were you going**? Let me think.'

In (10), the agent, in order to displace an impositive tone of the question, uses the Imperfect form of *ir*. We do not have any indication in the context that the agent is asking the client to repeat what the agent has already heard. Therefore, the Imperfect of *ir* may be considered a device to mitigate the imposition of the question, i.e. the less assertive utterance creates an implicature of a polite distance between interlocutors, which calls on Brown and Levinson's (1987) negative politeness strategy.

The Imperfect of *ir* may also be used in the construction *ir a* 'be going to' plus enunciation verbs (e.g. *decir* 'to say') used in introductions to questions and requests, as in (11) and (12):

- (11) Cw ¿Y qué te **iba** a decir? pues, por si acaso ¿tienes algún catálogo de la Península?  
'And what **was I going to** tell you? well, do you have a catalogue about the Peninsula by any chance?'  
(12) Aw ¿Qué te **iba** a decir? Mira, ¿me puedes hacer una reserva, por favor?  
'What **was I going to** tell you? Look, can you make a reservation for me, please?'

In examples (11) and (12), the Imperfect distances 'rhetorical' questions which 'soften' the force of the following direct questions. Example (12) is in fact a request whose force is mitigated through the Imperfect, a modal verb (*poder*), and a lexical expression (*por favor* 'please'). The frequent use of these pseudo-rhetorical expressions with the modal auxiliary verb *ir a* in the Imperfect may give the impression of a fixed expression (Fuentes 1993), a point which will not be further pursued here. Nonetheless, these expressions clearly demonstrate a non-canonical use of the Imperfect of *ir* in utterances which require mitigation.

### 3.3. *Poder*

The modal verb *poder* 'can, may, be able to' can mitigate the illocutionary force of direct and indirect questions (DQ, IQ), offers (OF), promises (PR), and suggestions (SG). Consider examples (13)-(15):

- (13) Am ¿Los del este se **podían** intentar?  
'**Is it possible** to check those in the east?'

The agent in (13) is desperately looking for an apartment in Palma de Mallorca in the busiest season of the year. He makes a request in the form of a question, employing a structure with an impersonal *se* and referring to a current action using the Imperfect of the modal verb *poder*. In this manner, he conveys his deferential attitude towards the H.

- (14) Aw El problema es el vuelo. **Podía** preguntar aquí a ver si hay plaza.  
'The problem is the flight. **I could** ask here let's see if there is a space.'

The agent in (14) is in a difficult situation, on the one hand, there are problems with flights to certain destinations, but on the other hand, she wants to show the client her polite disposition towards him/her. Therefore, she makes a tentative offer, using the modal verb in the Imperfect form.

- (15) Aw Entonces, lo que **podíamos** hacer es coger el avión....  
'So, what we **could** do is to take the plane...'

Similarly to (13) and (14), in (15), the agent tries to avoid the imposition of her suggestion through the distancing Imperfect form of the modal verb *poder* which introduces the meaning of tentativeness. This, in turn, permits the encoding of interpersonal distance between the S and the H.

### 3.4. *Tener* and *tener que*

Another frequent use of the Imperfect form has been observed in the verbs *tener* 'to have' and *tener que* 'to have to' in direct and indirect questions (DQ, IQ), and impositive statements (IS), as in examples (16) and (17):

- (16) Am ¿Llevabas niños? ¿Qué edad **tenían**?  
'Were you taking children? How old **were they**?'

In (16), the agent clearly could have used the Present Indicative of *llevar* and *tener*. He, however, distances himself from the directness of his questions and chooses to employ the Imperfect, thereby mitigating his utterance.

- (17) Aw **Tenían que** volver el día 30. Y ¿se podía hacer la vuelta en turista?  
'They **were supposed to** return on the 30<sup>th</sup>. And could one arrange the return in tourist (class)?'

In (17), the agent reminds the person who is in charge of making reservations that his clients should be back by a certain time. In both sentences, the Ss use the Imperfect of the main verbs to encode S's polite attitude towards H. Similarly to utterances with *poder*, the Imperfect of *tener que* seems to have a double mitigating effect due to the modal meaning of the verb and the distant temporal form.

### 3.5. *Ser*

The use of the Imperfect of *ser* 'to be' in utterances which express deference towards the H has been found in direct questions (DQ), impositive statements (IS), and explanations (E). Consider examples (18) to (21):

- (18) Am Y luego ya tenemos el otro que es, que **era** éste, pero te salía por las cien.  
'And then we already have the other one that is, that **would be** this one, but it would be in the hundreds.'

The agent in (18) starts his sentence using the Present tense forms. But later, he corrects himself, uttering an enunciation which conveys a more polite attitude. To achieve this, he changes the Present into the Imperfect form of *ser*, and continues signaling his polite attitude through the verb *salir*.

- (19) Aw ¿Qué querías? ¿Adónde querías hacer las reservas? ¿Adónde **era**?  
'What did you want? Where did you want to make reservations to? Where **was** it to?'

In example (19), the agent seems to bombard a client with numerous direct questions. She, however, maintains a polite attitude, distancing the illocutionary force of her utterance through the use of the Imperfect form of the verbs *querer* and *ser*.

In (20) and (21), the Imperfect form is used to encode politeness in explanations for the Hs.

- (20) Am **Era** más o menos para saberlo tú.  
'It **was** more or less so that you know it.'
- (21) Aw ¿Te puedo dejar un recado? Soy María. **Era** para decirle que todos los vuelos para Santiago están todos conformes.  
'Can I leave a message? I'm María. I just **wanted** to tell him that all the flights to Santiago are all confirmed.'

The agent in (20) seems to justify his previous impositive statement. He explains politely, trying to attenuate a problematic situation through the distancing Imperfect form of the verb *ser*. The agent in (21) explains to the interlocutor the reason of her request of leaving a message. In both examples (20, 21), the Imperfect creates an inference of mitigation of the imposition S's utterances might cause on the H, which is a strategy to save the H's 'negative face'.

### 3.6. Enunciation verbs

Other verbs participating in the encoding of politeness through the Imperfect are enunciation verbs, such as *decir* 'to say, tell' and *comentar* 'to comment on'.

- (22) Aw Mira, ¿qué te **decía**? Lo de las estancias en Venecia. Las salidas ¿hacia qué horas son? Es que no tengo pantalla. Está todo roto.  
'Look, what **was I telling** you, the thing about staying in Venice. Around what time are the departures? Well, I don't have a screen. Everything is out of order.'

As in (11) and (12), the agent in (22) seems to be reminding herself rhetorically of what she should say. The question with the Imperfect of *decir* does not refer to any previous act of enunciation. This apparently fixed expression mitigates the following question. The Imperfect of *decir* displaces the moment of enunciation of the utterance creating an implicature of politeness.

### 3.7. Other verbs

Examples (1) through (22) represent the most frequently used verbs in contexts of politeness. However, almost any verb may be used in the Imperfect form when used in questions or impositive statements. See examples (23) and (24):

- (23) Am ¿Os **daba igual** Costa Brava que Costa Brava?  
'**Did you care** if it's Costa Brava?'
- (24) Am ¿**Llevabas** niños? ¿Qué edad **tenían**? ¿Cuándo te **ibas**?  
'**Were you taking** children? How old **were** they? When **were** you going?'

The use of the Imperfect in examples (23) and (24) resembles the use of this form in other verbs, previously analyzed in Sections 3.1-3.6. All examples draw on the inference of interpersonal distance that is achieved through the use of the Imperfect. Such use invokes both Lakoff's politeness maxims and Brown and Levinson's notion of 'negative face'.

### 4. Summary of verbs participating in the encoding of politeness

The analysis shows that certain verbs in Spanish participate more than others in the process of politeness encoding by the Imperfect form in specific speech acts. Table 1 summarizes the use of the most frequently occurring verbs in impositive speech acts which are significant for the encoding of politeness. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that what is important for the present analysis is the overall frequency of the grammatical form itself, rather than the frequency of any particular verb.

Table 1. Contexts of the polite use of the Imperfect in Spanish. (Abbreviations: DQ- direct question, IS- impositive or tentative statement, IQ- indirect question, IR- indirect request, OF- offer, PR- promise, SG- suggestion, E- explanation)<sup>7</sup>

Speech acts Verbs	DQ	IS	IQ	IR	OF	PR	SG	E
1. QUERER	+	+	+	+				
2. VENIR		+						
3. IR	+	+	+	+				
4. PODER	+		+		+	+	+	
5. TENER	+	+	+				+	
6. TENER QUE		+						
7. SER	+	+						+
8. DECIR	+							+
9. OTHER	+	+						

The classification in Table 1 combines two levels of representation of speech acts. One refers to the sentence-level and the other to the utterance-level. In summary, Table 1 indicates eight types of speech acts, with illocutionary force: questioning (DQ), imposing (IS), asking (IQ), requesting (IR), offering (OF), promising (PR), suggesting (SG), and explaining (E). Table 1 also includes the most frequently used verbs in the process of politeness encoding. The use of particular verbs varies in different speech acts, for example, *querer* and *poder* clearly stand out with regard to the frequency of their use in speech acts. Perhaps this is the reason why these verbs have already been given some attention by previous research on politeness (Fleischman 1989, King 1992, Haverkate 1994). Another commonplace verb which has been studied in the context of politeness or mitigation is *deber* 'should, ought to, must' (see also Silva-Corvalán 1995) which is not found in the Imperfect in our data. Other verbs, for example *venir*, are limited to the occurrence in only one speech act. It seems to be the case that the use of these verbs depends on their semantic nature, as will be shown by the proposed classification in Section 5.

### 5. Classification of verbs encoding politeness

Based on the analysis of the Spanish data (Chodorowska-Pilch 1998), three general groups of verbs encoding interpersonal distance through the Imperfect form may be proposed, as in the following listing (I-III).

- I. **Desiderative verbs:** *querer* 'to want', *desear* 'to wish', *necesitar* 'to need', *preferir* 'to prefer', *interesar* 'to be interested in'.
- II. **Modal auxiliaries:** *poder* 'can, to be able to', *tener que* 'to have to', *ir a* 'be going to'.
- III. **Transactional-situation verbs:** (a) **motion verbs:** *ir* 'to go', *venir* 'to come', *salir* 'to leave', *volver* 'to return', *pasar* 'to stop by', (b) **enunciation verbs:** *decir* 'to say', *comentar* 'to comment', (c) **stative verbs:** *tener* 'to have', *ser* 'to be'.

Needless to say, this classification does not pretend to provide a complete list of verbs which may participate in the encoding of politeness towards interlocutors. It only gathers the most frequently occurring verbs observed in the analysis. Thus, taking into consideration Hopper and Traugott's (1993: 75) conclusion: *that for inferences to play a significant role in grammaticalization, they must be frequently occurring, since only standard inferences can plausibly be assumed to have a lasting impact on the meaning of an expression or to function cross-linguistically*, it may be proposed that the verbs in groups (I) to (III) participate more actively in the process of grammaticalization of politeness encoded by the Imperfect form.

### 6. Non-canonical uses of the Imperfective Past in Polish

Although Polish, a West Slavic language, marks aspect differently from the Romance languages (Bybee 1985, Bybee and Dahl 1989, Karolak 1994), the perfective/imperfective distinction in the past is comparable in both language families (see Comrie 1976, Włodarczyk 1994). One difference in the Slavic aspect categories is the grammaticalization of 'perfectivity : imperfectivity' on the lexical or derivational level (Dahl 1985, Bybee and Dahl 1989), while the Romance aspect categories are inflectional. Another difference is the fact that "the Slavic opposition is much more independent of tense and time reference than the corresponding categories in other languages" (Dahl 1985: 85).

Despite morphological differences related to the encoding of aspect in Spanish and Polish, the imperfective/perfective opposition in the past for both languages serves to encode the distinction between an unbounded and a bounded event, which is crucial for the present analysis. Therefore, it is appropriate to compare to some extent the canonical or non-canonical use of the imperfective aspect in both languages.

#### 6.1. Imperfective Past of *chcieć*

Regarding Polish, we may observe an extensive use of the **desiderative verb** *chcieć* 'to want'.

<sup>7</sup> See Chodorowska-Pilch (1998) for a detailed description of speech acts discerned here.

- (25) Cm Dzień dobry. Proszę Panią, ja **chciałem** się dowiedzieć o połączenia ze Szwecją, samolot lub prom.  
'Good day<sup>8</sup>. PP.<sup>9</sup>, I **wanted** to find out about the connections with Sweden, a plane or a ferry-boat.'

Example (25) in Polish is similar to examples (1b) and (5) in Spanish. The utterance in example (25) expresses S's wish conveyed by an impositive statement that is mitigated by the use of the Imperfective Past, serving as a strategy to save H's 'negative face'.

- (26) Cw **Chciałam** się w sumie dowiedzieć najpierw, nie kupować tylko dowiedzieć. Chodzi mi o, czy jest taka możliwość, żebym ja kupiła bilet open do Szwecji i do Polski?  
'Well, first I **wanted** to find out, not to buy but only to find out. I'm concerned with, is there a possibility of buying an open ticket to Sweden and to Poland?'

In (26), there are various devices which encode tentativeness in the utterance. First, the Imperfective Past form of *chcieć* pragmatically reduces the assertiveness of the S's statement. Secondly, other constituents encode the tentative force of the utterance, such as a discourse marker *w sumie*, the negation of one purpose, *nie kupować* 'not to buy', and the softened declaration of another purpose, *tylko dowiedzieć* 'just to find out'. In the second part of (26), the client explains her previous impositive statement and specifies her wish asking for the possibility of buying an open ticket.

#### 6.2. Impositive statements followed by direct questions (IS + Q)

- (27) Cw Proszę panią. **Chciałam** się zorientować na 8-ego lipca do Grecji do Aten. Czy jeszcze miejsca są?  
'PP. I **wanted** to find out about July 8th to Greece to Athens. Are there any places left?'

In (27), the mitigating verbal form *chciałam* introduces a question for information. In addition, there is a polite introduction through a respectful expression *proszę panią*.

#### 6.3. Indirect questions (IQs)

There are a large number of indirect questions introduced by the Imperfective Past of *chcieć*, as in (28) and (29).

<sup>8</sup> I will translate 'Dzień dobry' as 'Good day' since this greeting covers the entire day. In Polish, there is no division into 'good morning' and 'good afternoon'.

<sup>9</sup> Literally 'I ask you(P)' and other similar forms will be glossed as PP. PP thus indicates a polite treatment of the H.

- (28) Cw Proszę panią, **chciałam** się zorientować w jakiej cenie są bilety do Nowego Jorku.  
'PP, I **wanted** to find out what is the price for the tickets to New York.'
- (29) Cw Dzień dobry. Przepraszam. **Chciałam** się zapytać czy są przeloty Warszawa-Marsylia.  
'Good day. Excuse me. I **wanted** to ask if there are flights between Warsaw and Marseille.'

Examples (28) and (29) demonstrate a pervasive structure while formulating an indirect question. First, the S addresses the H with a polite expression PP or *Dzień dobry. Przepraszam*. Secondly, he/she introduces his/her desire to ask a question. Here, Ss mitigate their wish by using the Imperfective Past form of *chcieć*, creating an interpersonal distance from the subsequent question. This part is akin to the use of the Imperfect in Spanish in examples (6) and (7).

#### 6.4. Requests (R)

- (30) Aw To **chciałam** prosić na 8-ego lipca do Kopenhagi i **chciałam** prosić tak, no jedno miejsce męskie.  
'So I **wanted** to request Copenhagen on the 8th of July and I **wanted** to request then, well one seat for a man.'

The agent in (30) explicitly enunciates that her utterance is a request through the verb *prosić* 'to ask', to request'. The use of the Imperfective Past form of *chcieć* displaces the moment of the request, thereby reducing the threat to the H's face.

#### 6.5. Direct questions (DQs)

- (31) Aw Ale co pan **chciał** w tej chwili załatwić?  
'But what **did you(P) want** to arrange at this moment?'

In (31), the imperfective seems to reduce the imposition of a direct question. The polite attitude of the agent is also encoded lexically by the polite pronoun *pan*.

#### 6.5. Pseudo-rhetorical questions

An interesting use of the Imperfective Past form of *chcieć* is observed in example (32).

- (32) Cm A co **chciałem** powiedzieć, a na przykład na początku września?  
'And what **did I want** to say, and for example, what about the beginning of September?'

The use of the imperfective in (32) resembles examples (11) and (12) in Spanish. In (32), a client appears to express a 'rhetorical' question that distances him from the following question. Spanish and Polish differ with respect to the type of verbs employed to encode politeness. While in Spanish, it is a modal auxiliary *ir a* 'to go', in Polish, it is the desiderative verb *chcieć* 'to want'. Therefore, in rhetorical questions, the use of *chcieć* in the Imperfective Past form may be considered an extension of the functions which this form may have.

### 6.6. Explanations

Another extension of the polite function of the Imperfective Past form of *chcieć* is illustrated in (33):

- (33) Aw    Za chwilę to będzie, tak? Bo **chciałam** pasażerowi już sprzedać.  
           Tak? Dziękuję bardzo.  
           'Is it going to be in a second? As I already **wanted** to sell it to  
           the client. OK? Thanks a lot.'

The example (33) is an explanation that may be compared to examples (20) and (21) in Spanish. However, while in Spanish it is a stative verb *ser* 'to be' in the Imperfect form, in Polish it is the desiderative verb *chcieć* 'to want' in the Imperfective Past.

### 7. Summary of polite uses of *chcieć* as compared to Spanish

Table 2. Comparison of the polite uses of the Imperfective past in Spanish and Polish. (+ – the Imperfect, x – the Imperfective Past).

Speech acts Verbs	DQ	IS	IQ	IR	OF	PR	SG	E
Spanish: QUERER	+	+	+	+				
Spanish: SER								+
Spanish: IR (aux.)			+					
Polish: CHCIEĆ	x	x	x	x				x

Table 2 illustrates a clear intersection between the Imperfect of *querer*, *ser*, and *ir* in Spanish and the Imperfective Past of *chcieć* in Polish. It shows that *chcieć* in Polish is fully comparable with the Spanish *querer*. First, both verbs are desiderative. Secondly, both encode politeness through the imperfective aspect in the past in similar impositive speech acts, such as impositive statements, direct questions, indirect questions and indirect requests. Also, Table 2 indicates that *chcieć* in the Imperfective Past form may encode politeness in a more numerous group of speech acts than *querer*. Its use may be found in explanations (as *ser* in Spanish) or rhetorical questions introducing direct questions (as *ir a* in Spanish). Furthermore, the Imperfective Past form has not been found in offers, promises, and suggestions. It should be reminded that these types of speech acts (OF, PR, SG) are expressed by

the modal verb *poder* in Spanish, whereas *chcieć* is a desiderative verb. Moreover, data have not revealed any other verbs but *chcieć* in the Imperfective Past form to encode politeness in Polish.<sup>10</sup> One of the possible explanations could be the independence of morphological tense and aspect in Slavic languages. In particular, it seems that the Imperfective Past in Polish is more temporally grammaticalized than the Imperfect in Spanish. Therefore, the temporal meaning of the Imperfective Past cannot be obliterated or displaced as easy as in the case of the Imperfect in Spanish.

### 8. Conclusion

The analysis of Spanish and Polish data corroborates the non-canonical use of the imperfective aspect in the past in situations impositive for the interlocutors. In Spanish, the process of grammaticalization of politeness by the Imperfect form concerns modal auxiliaries and desiderative and transactional-situation verbs with three subgroups in the last group (motion, enunciation, and stative verbs) which are used in direct and indirect questions, impositive statements, indirect requests, offers, promises, suggestions, and explanations. In addition, almost any verb may be in the Imperfect form in questions or impositive statements in order to encode interpersonal distance between interlocutors.

In Polish, the grammaticalization of politeness through the Imperfective Past is limited to only one desiderative verb, *chcieć*, which occurs in direct and indirect questions, impositive statements, indirect requests, and explanations. Despite such reduced use of the Imperfective Past in Polish, the Imperfective Past form of *chcieć* shows similarities to the desiderative verb *querer* 'to want' (its semantic equivalent in Spanish), the stative verb *ser* 'to be', and the auxiliary *ir a* 'be going to'. Thus, in comparison to the Imperfect in Spanish, the Imperfective Past of *chcieć* may operate for almost all significant types of verbs (except motion verbs) determined for Spanish. As mentioned above, a possible explanation for the reduced non-canonical use of the Imperfective Past in Polish is the grammaticalization of tense and aspect in Slavic languages, in particular, the independence of morphological marking of tense and aspect. The comparison of the imperfective past forms in Spanish with Polish strongly suggests that the nature of politeness encoding depends on the nature of grammatical categories in each language.

In conclusion, based on the frequent inference of politeness derived from the non-canonical use of the imperfective aspect in the past, it may be stated that the Imperfect form in particular verbs in Spanish and the Imperfective Past form of *chcieć* in Polish may be considered grammaticalized devices to encode politeness. Future research based on spoken data in Romance and Slavic languages should show non-canonical use of the imperfective aspect in the past, paralleling similar uses in the context established in this paper. The encoding of politeness in natural conversations in languages in general remains a field open to much research.

<sup>10</sup> *Chcieć* is replaced by *życzyć* 'to wish' in some contexts.



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