Towards an understanding of the persuasive profile of teenaged Greek EFL learners

Isaak M. Papadopoulos
PhD Candidate in Applied Linguistics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
isaakpapad@itl.auth.gr

George S. Ypsilandis
Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
ypsi@itl.auth.gr

Abstract

The act of persuasion could be seen as an attempt of one party to change the beliefs, attitudes, values, feelings and intentions, of another by submitting his/her argumentative case. In this working definition (resulting from Simons 1976, Lakoff 1982, Hardin 2010, Mintz et al. 2012) persuasion is understood to be activated through communicative means which involve the use of language. It is deployed through the basic two productive skills of language, i.e. spoken and written although other paralinguistic features may be used (e.g. face grimaces). Research in both fields is being growing.

This research aims at recording the persuasive strategies of Greek teenaged students when producing written discourse in English as a foreign language (L2 persuasive writing). In particular, 60 EFL students (varying from 11, to 13 years of age) were engaged to write to their British pen-friends an informal letter and attempt to persuade them to read a book they had read. Connor and Lauer’s (1985) detailed system of persuasive discourse, was employed to record the persuasive efforts of the participants.

It was found that: a) A1 language level students employed more rational persuasive strategies, b) A2 language level students made use of both rational and credibility persuasive strategies, and c) B1 language level students employed more affective persuasive strategies. It is surprising to notice that the higher the language level the more away the students run from the use of rational strategies. The gender variable did not associate statistically to any of the persuasive strategies selected. In addition, rational strategies were mostly associated with assertive speech acts, credibility strategies with directive speech acts while affective strategies were associated with both assertive and directive speech acts.

It may be concluded that language level contributes to a high extent to the persuasive differentiation (from logical to more ethos and pathos appeals) and does not associate to the variable ‘gender’. The development of the students’ language level
leads to persuasive strategy differentiation as language mechanisms and linguistic elements that foster persuasiveness are improved and enhance the effectiveness of communication or it is evidence that the students attempt to experiment with the L2.

**Keywords:** persuasive strategies, foreign language, communication, Greek education, written discourse

1.0. Introduction

Persuasion and persuasive discourse dates back to Plato, Aristotle and Cicero discussing, practicing and promoting the issue in studies focusing on fostering a good orator in political assemblies. However, the fall of the Roman Empire in 275 BC, deported the attention on Rhetoric until the 16th century with the advent of argumentation studies as an independent field. A number of universities provide courses on debating and argumentation that are based on classical rhetoric (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2005) and at the same time courses on persuasive writing and speaking, inspired by rhetoric, have been reintroduced in North America and Europe (Metsämäki, 2012). The topic has also become of a key issue in several conferences (2017 ENSIDIA conference in Bulgaria and 2017 Krosno conference in Poland, ICPEI Conference in Larissa, Greece, ICELL Conference in Albania, etc.). Every persuasive speech event involves a minimum of two parties (speakers/writers) and a content that is related to the communicative goal of persuasion. As a result, speakers/writers exhibit significant attempts to convey not only well organized, coherent but also persuasive messages as it is the tendency of most people to influence each other. Thereupon, persuasion becomes a feature of everyday communication (Lustig & Koester, 2010). In addition, the rise of mass-media and their function in global understanding encompass some kind of persuasiveness and thus engage this act in every aspect of our social life. As a consequence, persuasive skills and knowledge about persuasion render considerable power to those who possess it. This knowledge is considered of utmost importance, so that it is possible to understand the relational, political, economic and social changes (Dainton, 2004).

In the related literature a number of definitions on the issue of persuasion may be traced (i.e. Simons 1976, Lakoff 1982, Hardin 2010, Mintz et al. 2012), most of which concentrate on an attempt by a party to modify or influence “beliefs, attitudes,
values, feelings and intentions” of another party by ‘communicative means’. Hence, persuasion is understood to be deployed through communicative means which by definition involve the use of a language. When persuasion is achieved through paralinguistic features (i.e. grimaces, body stance) it becomes the target of sociologists to investigate its details. In our side (linguistics), it becomes fundamental to concentrate on the particulars in a language that carry out this area of discourse.

Possessing the details of persuasion may be characterized as a considerable force in the tongue and those who are actually competent to implement it. This force, when implemented, may restrain independence or freedom of an individual from connoisseurs, in particular, those whom the results of persuasion are being implemented to (e.g. populist governments). It should be noted here that it is this freedom which accepts people to have different ‘beliefs, attitudes, values, feelings and intentions’ and show tolerance of the ‘other’.

Several researchers (from both sides, linguistics and sociologists) have systematically dealt with persuasive discourse and the way it is initiated and how one succeeds to reach his/hers communicative goals. More specifically, social judgment theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1961) focuses on people’s evaluation of persuasive messages and in particular, on their anchors and attitudes. Also, according to the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), persuasion is seen as a cognitive event in the sense of the recipient using motivation and rational reasoning to accept or reject a persuasive message. Furthermore, cognitive dissonance theory (Dainton, 2004) sees that, influence of an intrapersonal event, taking place when there is registered incongruence between attitudes and behavior, creates a tension that is resolved by altering either our beliefs or our behaviors, while narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1984; 1987) places special emphasis on storytelling as a tool of persuasion. In this latter case the recipient is provided with no rational facts but with worth reasons for engaging in a particular action or belief. This paradigm works by developing the targeted ethos to the recipient as stories selected withhold hidden ethical messages (Aesop used in his myths the conformity of hidden meaning).

Research with reference to Greek rhetoric with the purpose to investigate persuasiveness in L1 and L2 written and spoken discourse or discussing the topic from a theoretical point of view with implications to teaching and communication can
be found in the following articles (James, Scholfield and Ypsilandis, 1992, 1994, Ypsilandis, 1994; Psaltou-Joycey & Ypsilandis 1999; Theodoropoulou, 2009; Triantari, 2016; Papadopoulos, 2016). Moreover, in the Greek education context, students begin their dealing with argumentation in the 3rd grade of primary school while the Greek National School Curriculum for the Secondary Education promotes students’ engagement in persuasion emphasizing on Aristotle’s taxonomy on Logos, Ethos and Pathos.

1.1. The Thessalian Study

This study aims at providing insights into the persuasive profile of Greek EFL learners by recording the persuasive strategies they use when producing written persuasive discourse in English as a foreign language (L2 persuasive writing). The following hypotheses have been examined:

- The gender of the teenaged Greek EFL students relates to the selection of strategy in their written persuasive discourse.
- The language level of the teenaged Greek EFL students contributes to the strategy differentiation in their written persuasive discourse.

Moreover, the association between the persuasive proofs and a) the speech acts utilized by the students and b) the students’ evaluation elements (Halliday, 1994) were tested. The term evaluation refers to the interference of the sentiments, comments and subjective judgments of the transmitter in the discourse; the speaker/writer shows his approval or disapproval of the subject matter. It is also worth mentioning at this point that various terms have been used in the literature to describe this phenomenon, such as 'evaluation' (Halliday 1994), 'appraisal (Martin, 2000) and 'affect' (Biber & Finegan, 1989) while sometimes, evaluation is treated within the context of modality and is called 'appreciative modality’ (Maingueneau, 1991) or 'desirability' (Fowler, 1991). Among the most commonly used mechanisms of evaluation are the adjectives (eg, interesting, boring), adverbs (eg, unfortunately, luckily), emotional vocabulary (eg ‘problem’, 'miracle') or even punctuation, through which the producer of discourse expresses directly or indirectly his involvement, his judgment and his appreciation to the topic of discussion.
2.0. Persuasive Discourse

The analytical framework of persuasive discourse by Connor and Lauer (1985), with three main persuasive modes – Rational, Credibility & Affective appeals was used with a set of corresponding strategies. Connor and Lauer’s framework was based on Aristotle’s categorization of *logos, ethos and pathos* and the work on rational strategies for the production of persuasive discourse by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s (1969). The authors were also influenced by research from a wide range of rhetoricians, communication theorists, and psychologists on ethical and emotional appeals in modern discourse e.g Karon (1976), Woods and Walton (1974), Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953), Thompson (1967) and Abelson and Karlins (1970), which led them to the creation of their three persuasive appeals construction.

2.1. Rational appeal

The category *rational appeal* reflects, to a great extend, the current methodological use for persuasiveness through logic. This category incorporates three quasilogical appeals, six appeals based on the structure of the real and five appeals that establish the structure of reality. More precisely, Connor and Lauer include the following appeals in the rational mode: *Descriptive example, Descriptive narration, Classification, Definition, Comparison – Contrast, Degree, Authority, Cause/Effect, Model, Stage in process, Means/End, Consequences, Ideal or Principle and Information.*

2.2. Credibility appeal

The credibility appeal refers to the trustworthiness and the authority of the persuader. It clearly matches the Aristotelian *ethos* category with an addition of four mode-appeals that can count for persuasiveness, such as: *Writer’s Good character and/or Judgment, Writer-Audience Shared Interests and Points of View, Writer’s Respect for Audience’s Interest and Points of View, First Hand Experience.*

2.3. Affective appeal

The affective mode refers to the emotional connection between the writer and the audience. More specifically, it appeals to the reader’s own situation by triggering an emotion that has personal relevance such as fear, anger, and joy. This mode of
persuasion corresponds to the Aristotelian *pathos* and it contains a lot of key-appeals that are used to persuade someone emotionally such as: *Audience’s empathy, Audience’s Values, Vivid Picture, Charged Language, Emotion in Audience’s situation.*

3. Speech acts

A *speech act* is often described as an utterance that contains some form of an act or extends the completion of an act in language and communication (a performative function). Speech acts are concerned with speaker’s intentions and the effect these have on the listener or the reader. Consequently, speech acts work also above the sentence level (sentence meaning) and are defined by speaker’s objectives, e.g. the typical Greek expression ‘do you like to go out for coffee’ means a lot more that meeting to drink the extract that comes out from distilling hot water through café. Thus, speech acts constitute a very useful tool for researching interaction between the transmitter of a message and the addressee (the receiver). The theory is attributed to the Oxford philosopher Austin (1975), later developed by Searle (1979) who is primarily responsible for developing speech act theory into the form in which it is now known. The purpose of *Assertive* speech acts is to commit the addressee to the truth of an expressed proposition while *directive* speech acts are exercised by the transmitter who attempts to get the addressee to carry out an action. Further, *expressive* speech acts aim at expressing some sort of psychological state while *commissive* acts commit an addressee to some future action. Finally, *declaration* acts affect an immediate change of affairs. It becomes evident that through speech acts certain roles are placed on the transmitter and the addressee; Assertive, expressive, commissive and declarative acts focus on the transmitter while the role of the addressee is that of someone whom something is said to. On the contrary, directive acts have a highly interactive character, and are directed to the addressee, whose role is someone whom something is being asked from.

4. Method

4.1. Subjects
The participants of this study were 60 EFL students of public primary schools varying from 11 to 13 years of age. All subjects were learning English as a second language for a minimum of 4 years. Their language level varied from A1 to B1 of the Common European Framework of Languages.

Two researchers, both experienced in persuasive discourse, located and analyzed the persuasive strategies employed by the participants in the study. Their recordings were coded in order to be input in the SPSS statistical software.

**Design and Procedure**

This pilot research was conducted in Larissa, a city of Thessaly in Central Greece. More specifically, the operation of data collection was deployed in two major stages:

1st Stage – Production of written persuasive discourse. In the first stage participants were invited to write an informal letter to their British friends. Students were provided with written instructions about the topic that they had to write about. No further instructions were provided as to what or how to proceed in their writing.

2nd Stage – Recording of Persuasive Strategies. At the second stage, two researchers investigated the persuasive strategies used by the students in their scripts, using special record protocols. More specifically, the researchers made use of the Connor and Lauer’s (1985) detailed system of persuasive discourse as it provides an analytical framework in matters of persuasive appeals that correspond to Aristotle’s taxonomy on Logos, Ethos and Pathos. This protocol has been piloted in several studies in the field at national and international level.

**Tools**

Written instructions (“Write a letter to your British pen-friend to persuade him/her to read a book you have read and enjoyed”) were provided as to the purpose of the writing task. No further oral instructions were provided. The SPSS statistical package (version 17) was selected for the analyses presented below.

**Analysis**

Initially a descriptive analysis (frequencies and percentages) of the personal independent variables is presented, i.e. gender, nationality, place of birth and language
Further, frequencies of each group of strategies (dependent variable) are provided. At a second stage crosstab tests are performed to investigate the two hypotheses stated at the Introduction. Concluding remarks are provided in the Discussion.

**Frequencies of independent variables**

**Table 1. Sample Description**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>29 Girls (48.30%)</th>
<th>31 Boys (51.70%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Birth</td>
<td>Larissa, Greece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It becomes apparent that the sample is almost split in half between boys and girls while all participants are of Greek origin and from the same area. Their age is again split in three almost identical groups and the same is true for their level of English. By that respect it may be possible to claim that the sample is sound and concrete.

**Frequencies of dependent variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persuasive Strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

[Charts showing distribution of ages and language levels]
The above frequencies show that rational strategies were the ones that were mostly selected followed by affective and credibility strategies. However, it becomes clear by this distribution that the participants of the study used almost an equal proportion of strategies from all the three categories and by that respect one may call this teenaged sample rich in their strategy selection.

Results on Greek EFL learners’ persuasive discourse

Following the investigation and the record of the persuasive strategies, various findings related to the research hypotheses and goals were obtained.

In particular,

Findings on Research Hypotheses

Regarding the research hypothesis “The gender of the teenaged Greek EFL students relates to the selection of strategy in their written persuasive discourse”, the Crosstab test was employed as it investigates the relationship between two nominal variables. Indeed, the test performed showed that there are not statistically significant associations between gender and strategies employed (Table 2).

Table 2. Gender’s contribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persuasive Modes</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rational Mode</td>
<td>0.680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Mode</td>
<td>0.990</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focusing on the second research hypothesis “The language level of the teenaged Greek EFL students contributes to the strategy differentiation in the use of persuasive strategies”, the Crosstab test was again selected. Statistically significant associations were found among the language level and the strategy employed: a) A1 language level students employed more rational persuasive strategies, b) A2 language level students made use of both rational and credibility persuasive strategies, and c) B1 language level students employed more affective persuasive strategies (Table 3).

Table 3. Persuasive Strategies Use across Language Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Level</th>
<th>Rational Strategies</th>
<th>Credibility Strategies</th>
<th>Affective Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Degree – 31%</td>
<td>Writer’s Respect for Audience’s Interests and Points of View – 40%</td>
<td>Model (20%) &amp; Information (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authority - 27 %</td>
<td>Writer’s Good Character and/or Judgement – 34%</td>
<td>Affectve Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information – 23%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emotion in Audience's Situation, Audience's Empathy – 25%, Audience's Value &amp; Charged Language - 15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is rather difficult to interpret this finding which shows that the better these subjects learn English the more they dissociate from logos arguments. Introspective data by asking participants about their strategy selection would have provided invaluable information to this reaction.

Findings related to Supplementary Research Questions

A. Associations of Speech acts and Persuasive modes
In order to investigate possible associations between speech acts selected by students and the strategy employed to carry out the task, the crosstab test was again used to investigate statistical significance for each persuasive mode. The data below indicate that rational strategies were mostly associated with assertive speech acts both in their direct and in their indirect use (Table 4).

**Table 4. Speech Acts and Rational Persuasive Mode association**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persuasive Modes</th>
<th>Speech Acts</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rational (direct)</td>
<td>Assertives =&gt; Claims</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. 0,000</td>
<td>Directives =&gt; Requests</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rational (indirect)</td>
<td>Assertives =&gt; Claims</td>
<td>91.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. 0,000</td>
<td>Assertives =&gt; Assure</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sample Passages from students’ scripts*

1. Assertive Speech Act- Claims
   - The book was written in the last period of the World War II

   - …read more literature books in your free time…

In the above case the author makes a suggestion using the pure imperative. This may be taken as a friendly advice when the two parties involved are friends, engaged in an informal talk but it could also sound offensive if the above condition does not meet.

Moreover, credibility strategies were mostly associated with directive speech acts both in their direct and in their indirect use (Table 5).

**Table 5. Speech Acts and Credibility Persuasive Mode association**
Sample Passages from students’ scripts

3. Directive Speech  
   Act- Request  
   
   Could you show me again that you are a book-lover like me?

4. Directive Speech  
   Act - Required  
   
   I know that you trust my preferences and you will read the book...

5. Assertive Speech  
   Act – Claim  
   
   Only when I read this particular book, I felt impressed.

The above directive act-required sentence (4) again lies at the cross-line of politeness. Moreover, it sounds egocentric as it holds a personal claim.

As for the affective strategies, they were mostly associated with assertive and directive speech acts both in their direct and in their indirect use (Table 6).

**Table 6. Speech Acts and Affective Persuasive Mode association**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persuasive Modes</th>
<th>Speech Acts</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective Mode (direct)</td>
<td>Assertives =&gt; Claims</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. 0.000</td>
<td>Directives =&gt; Requests</td>
<td>85.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Mode (indirect)</td>
<td>Assertives =&gt; Claims</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. 0.000</td>
<td>Assertives =&gt; Assure</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Directives =&gt; Requests</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Passages from students’ scripts
6. Assertive Speech

Acts - Claim

This is a magical book that will make you cry...

7. Assertive Speech

Act – Assure

...you will be touched and your heart will be broken for sure...

8. Directive Speech

Act – Request

Don’t waste your time and read this book with the beautiful simplicity and the dark humor...

All advice above is expressed in a direct speech mode which in English may sound awfully absolute, leaving little space for individuality. Notice that the English language works mostly with understatements or less direct statements, i.e. ‘it is a waste of time’ rather than ‘don’t waste your time’, ‘it is very kind of you’ rather than ‘you are very kind’.

B. Association of Evaluation elements and Persuasive modes

In order to investigate possible associations between the two evaluation elements used by students and the strategy utilised, the crosstab test was again implemented. It was revealed that this association was also statistically significant for each persuasive mode. As for the rational strategies, the table below presents the most frequently used evaluation elements (Table 7).

Table 7. Evaluation Elements and Rational Persuasive Mode association

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persuasive Modes</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rational Mode (direct)</td>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>71.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>14.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exclamation marks</td>
<td>14.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. 0.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rational Mode (Indirect)</td>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dots</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exclamation marks</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. 0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No evaluation element</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It becomes evident that adjectives were the evaluation elements mostly used in both cases followed by adverbs in the direct case. Exclamation marks follow with a much smaller percentage though significantly different between the direct and the indirect case.

As for the credibility strategies, the table below (Table 8) presents the evaluation elements that were frequently used when credibility strategies were employed by the students.

**Table 8. Evaluation Elements and Credibility Persuasive Mode association**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persuasive Modes</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility Mode (direct)</td>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>38.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exclamation marks</td>
<td>7.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility Mode (indirect)</td>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dots</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exclamation marks</td>
<td>3.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No evaluation element</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly to the previous section findings, adjectives are by far the mostly selected evaluation element in both categories. Adverbs again come second in the direct case and exclamation marks follow with in a much smaller proportion.

As for the affective strategies, the table below (Table 9) presents the most frequently applied evaluation elements in the direct and indirect use of the affective strategies.

**Table 9. Evaluation Elements and Affective Persuasive Mode association**
As it would have been expected the use of affective vocabulary comes first in this category while the other evaluation elements remain in the rank as they were found in the previous sections.

**Discussion**

This pilot research attempted to offer insights into Greek EFL students’ persuasive communication. The two research hypotheses tested revealed that: a) *gender* does not associate to the qualitative differentiation of the use of persuasive strategies in the Greek setting, a finding that is in accordance with Pishghadam & Rasouli (2011), and opposite to Bermúdez & Prater (1994) and Fazeli & Shafiee (2015). It should be noted here that despite the fact that the effect of gender on language use and communication has been thoroughly investigated (Holmes, 1998; Maltz and Borker, 1982; Tannen, 1990; Wardhaugh, 2010) a consensus as to its affect in strategy selection has not been reached as yet, which may imply that gender may be closely seen in relation to culture, b) *language level* contributes to a high extent to the qualitative differentiation in the use of persuasive strategies. This finding is in accordance with previous research (Knudson Ruth E., 1992; Emma Louise Davies, 2008; Bambang Yudi Cahyono, 2000) supporting the effect of language level on strategy use. In fact, students with low language level, made use of simple persuasive strategies that require basic lexico-grammatical and structural abilities. On the other hand, students with higher language level employed more complex strategies which demand better understanding and management of the language. The analogy here
seems to be that the higher the level the more away the students run from logical persuasion. As there are no introspective data collected in this study, this strategy selection can be only hypothesized: a) are the more equipped linguistically students trying to experiment not only with the language structures but also with what can said in an L2?, b) are the students trying to accommodate to what they think the L2 culture is?, c) are the students simply writing more (because they are better linguistically equipped) which exposes them to deep unexplored waters? Future research with introspective data on this may be pursued. Finally, a clear warning which could be added to the L2 syllabus is that pure imperative should be used with caution particularly in informal situations.

Among the shortcomings in this study is that this was only a pilot and low-scale research on persuasion and more secure conclusions could be released through investigating the issue in a larger sample with introspective data which would provide insights on strategy selection.

Several findings have also emerged as far as the supplementary research goals are concerned. In particular, in students’ written persuasive interaction, assertive speech acts were associated with rational strategies in the transmitters’ attempt to commit their pen-friends to reading the literature book. Students also chose directive speech acts that associated to credibility strategies in order to make their pen-friends read their proposed book while it was shown that a combination of assertive and directive speech acts were preferred to persuade the other party through affective strategies showing greater flexibility in their persuading competence. The above too should be used with caution as they can be offensive in several cross-cultural situations. Moreover, students’ persuasive decisions were characterized by various evaluation elements used by the students to express their judgment or indirect comment: a) ‘adjectives’ (i.e interesting, adventurous, exciting, beautiful etc.), b) ‘adverbs’ (i.e luckily, hopefully, quite etc.) and c) ‘exclamation marks’.

Last, it is our view that the results of this low-scale research could provide an incentive for further investigation on persuasive communication particularly in this period in which persuasive discourse is produced within plurilingual contexts where intercultural communication competence becomes of utmost importance. Last, it is our opinion that findings of empirical studies of this type could enrich L2 textbooks in
order to familiarize students with the complexity of discourse and thereupon increase their awareness towards an acceptance of the ‘other’ and a more cautious way of expressing their views.

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