

**Requests, questions and space: evidence from  
Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Finnish and Russian**  
*Lūgumi, jautājumi un vietas nozīme igauņu,  
latviešu, lietuviešu, somu un krievu valodā*

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This study is trying to answer the question of how does requesting differ in Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Finnish and Russian. The data is elicited by written discourse completion tasks (DCT) in which native speakers of Estonian, Finnish, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian were asked to complete the situations described by filling in appropriate requests or questions. Head acts of the sequences have been coded for relevant grammatical categories: syntactic type of the clause, morphological form of the verb (especially considering mood and tense), negation of the main verb, modal constructions and address form. In our data, the most typical head act of request in all studied languages is an interrogative clause containing a modal verb in the conditional mood. The aim of the study is to identify the main politeness strategies which are used in the studied languages to perform a question about location or request to move somewhere. Typical questions, however, have less conditional forms. In addition, in this article we compare these languages with respect to expressing motion events.

**Keywords:** politeness; requests; questions; modality; conditional mood.

## 1. Introduction

This study takes a crosslinguistic approach to two basic phenomena in human interaction – directive speech acts and spatial categorization – seeking similarities and differences in these domains in five languages from the Baltic Sea area, namely: Estonian, Finnish, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian. We have undertaken

to investigate speakers' mental representations of (idealised) request scenarios, including spatial expressions, in each of these languages<sup>1</sup>.

Requests and questions have been widely studied as basic and linguistically significant speech acts (e.g. Searle 1969; Ervin-Tripp 1976; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989; Taleghi-Nikazm 2006; Curl and Drew 2008; Ogiermann 2009; Kendrick & Drew 2014). This speech act is characterised by the intention of the speaker to get his/her interlocutor to do something. Questions can be distinguished from other directives through the intention to make the partner answer, while requests are connected with the intention to make the partner do something non-verbal. Requesting is a linguistic and cultural phenomenon, which constitutes a set of linguistic behaviour and is prone to contact influences.

Requesting and asking questions is closely connected with the field of (im) politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987; Mills 2003; Watts 2003; Curl and Drew 2008). From previous studies, it appears that the main grammatical inventory for formal requesting is the same for the five languages, and includes the use of: interrogatives, the honorific V-form, conditional mood, negation, mitigation, modal verbs and and/or expressions of politeness (e.g. 'please') and apology (e.g. Metslang 2004; Keevallik 2004 on Estonian; VISK 2008, §1661; Tanner 2012 on Finnish; Nītiņa, Grigorjevs 2013 on Latvian; Hilbig 2009; Čepaitienė 2007 on Lithuanian and Ogiermann 2009; Larina 2009 on Russian). However, these lexical and grammatical categories are not used in the same way across all five languages.

Conceptualization of space and motion is fundamental to human communication, and is widely studied, especially in cognitive linguistics (e.g. Talmy 2007). Languages vary in their expression of these categories, and we could assume that this means also their different categorization. The Thinking for Speaking hypothesis (Slobin 1996a) focuses on mental processes that occur during the act of formulating an utterance. This approach needs evidence of the ways in which speakers of different languages depict the same events in words. In this paper we compare spatial categories as expressed in requests and questions in the five languages.

## 2. Data and method

This study involves an analysis of a written discourse completion task (DCT), in which native speakers of Estonian, Finnish, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian were asked to complete the situations described by filling in appropriate requests or questions. In this way we compiled a collection of typical requests and questions comparable across these five languages. Several studies have compared requests elicited by DCT's crosslinguistically (e.g. the classic CCSARP project in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989, but also recent studies comparing Russian and English in Larina 2009; English and Lithuanian in Hilbig 2009; English, German, Polish and Russian in Ogiermann 2009), but these languages of the Baltic Sea

<sup>1</sup> In a previous study (Pajusalu et al. in press), more detailed analysis of Estonian, Finnish, Lithuanian and Russian requests is presented and compared with French data. In this paper, Latvian data is added, as well as the analysis of spatial categories.

Region have not previously been compared in this way (except the part of the data published in Pajusalu et al. *in press*).

A questionnaire was designed to elicit data from native speakers (see Pajusalu et al. *in press* for a more detailed description of the method). The questionnaire consists of 10 scenario prompts. Respondents were asked to write down what they thought they might say in the situation described. The appendix presents the full questionnaire.

The scenarios were chosen to represent different levels of formality and imposition, including communication among friends (4, 6, 8), with strangers who are not obliged to react (3, 7) and with strangers who are obliged by their position to fulfil the request (2, 5, 9, 10). The survey includes scenarios which entail requests in a broader or narrower sense (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10), and those which require questions (7, 8, 9). Some scenarios are written (1, 8, 10), including one text message, but mostly the scenarios as described would elicit oral communication (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9).

Twenty native speakers each of Estonian, Finnish, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian filled out the questionnaires. The Estonian and Russian respondents are students of the University of Tartu; Finnish speakers are students of the University of Helsinki, Latvians are students of the University of Latvia (Rīga), Lithuanians are students of the University of Vytautas Magnus (Kaunas)<sup>2</sup>. Altogether, 200 written sequences were returned for each language. All of the respondents were humanities students, between 20 and 30 years of age. About 80% of the students in each group were female. Thus, the groups were comparable.

We coded the head acts expressing requests and questions (following the definitions of Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989, 275–276) for sentence type, main verb type (modal / lexical), use of conditional mood, the negative particle and other relevant factors. For longer texts with several sentences, we coded the strongest request as the main one, assuming that pre-requests (e.g. *Would you have some time?* or *I have a problem*) are not main request sentences if there is a „real request” (*Could you check my translation?*) in the text as well. In some cases, the pre-request was coded as a main request sentence, but only if the text contained no stronger requests.

For the analysis of spatial categories, we chose scenarios 2 (Library), 3 (Airport) and 7 (Bus Station). All these scenarios have a motion event in their proposition: asking for a book in a library involves the intention to procure the book, asking for a lift to an airport involves the intention to move to the airport, and, similarly, asking for the location of a bus station involves the intention to go there. We therefore use texts from DCT-s as a parallel corpus of texts created for the same purpose. This kind of data should more clearly present differences in „thinking for speaking” than, for example, parallel corpora of translated texts. Methodologically, our approach resembles studies which compare the expression of spatial categories in picture-elicited narratives in different languages (e.g. Slobin 1996b; Pool, Pajusalu 2012), the main difference lying in the situational prompt, and the interactional nature of the elicited target.

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### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Head act sentence type

The head requests in the responses included imperative, interrogative and declarative sentences. Table 1 shows the sentence types used in head speech acts, by language. Taken broadly, the responses are fairly uniform, as interrogatives are the prevailing sentence type in each of the languages. Some differences between the languages are evident in the use of imperatives: as reported in earlier studies, the proportion of imperatives used in requests increases in Europe from west to east (Ogiermann 2009). In our data, the Russian material has the highest proportion of imperatives, and the lowest is in the Finnish material. Hence, this is not a purely geographical phenomenon, but includes a cultural dimension. Finland may share the same east-west longitude as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but its closest cultural connections, especially over the twentieth century, have been with Scandinavia, hence Finland's alignment as more „westward” in the request data should not be surprising.

Language	Interrogative		Imperative	Declarative	Total
	polar question	WH-question			
Estonian	117	36	27	20	200
Latvian	119	36	21	24	200
Lithuanian	108	39	21	32	200
Finnish	117	46	9	28	200
Russian	107	36	36	21	200

**Table 1.** Head acts according to sentence type, by language.

As interrogatives and the grammatical expressions they contain are discussed more thoroughly in the subsequent discussion (see examples 3, 4, 5, 6 below), here we present examples of imperatives (1) and declaratives (2) used with the aim of making a request.

(1) a. Estonian

*Palun võta see raamat endaga kaasa.* (Sc. 4)  
 please take.IMP.2SG this book REFL.COM with  
 ‘Please bring the book along with you.’

b. Latvian

*Paņem, lūdzu, man to grāmatu.* (Sc. 4)  
 take.IMP.2SG please I.DAT this.ACC book.ACC  
 ‘Please bring the book along with you.’

c. Lithuanian

*Prašau, peržiūrėk mano siųstą dokumentą.* (Sc. 6)  
 Please look\_through.IMP.2SG I.GEN send.ACC document.ACC  
 ‘Please look through the document I sent.’

## d. Finnish

*Ota se kirja mukaan.* (Sc. 4)  
 take.IMP this book with  
 ‘Take the book along.’

## e. Russian

*Voz'mi, požalujsta, zavtra s soboj knigu.* (Sc. 4)  
 take.IMP.2SG please tomorrow with REFL.INS book  
 ‘Please bring the book with you tomorrow.’

Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian each have expressions for making polite requests (*palun* (Est), *lūdzu* (Lat), *prašau* (Lith), *požalujsta* (Rus) ‘please’), which can be employed to make an imperative request suitable for various situations. Nevertheless, the imperative construction was not overly frequent in the responses in any of the languages in our study. Finnish does not have a truly analogous expression.

Declaratives were used to formulate requests slightly more often than imperatives. As shown in (2), declarative sentences were usually used semantically for expressing a need and were grammatically mitigated with the conditional mood.

## (2) a. Estonian

*Mul oleks vaja üht raamatut.* (Sc. 2)  
 I.SG.ADE be.COND need one.PRTV book.PRTV  
 ‘I would need a book.’

## b. Latvian

*Es vēlētos nopirkt šos trīs vistas stilbiņus.* (Sc. 5)  
 I.NOM want.COND buy.INF this.ACC.PL three chicken.GEN leg.ACC.PL  
 ‘I would like to buy these three chicken legs.’

## c. Lithuanian

*Norėčiau trijų keptų vištos šlaunelių.* (Sc. 5)  
 want.COND.1SG three.GEN.PL grilled.GEN.PL chicken.GEN leg.GEN.PL  
 ‘I would like three grilled chicken legs.’

## d. Finnish

*Tarvitsisin tätä kirjaa.* (Sc. 2)  
 need.COND.1SG this.PRTV book.PRTV  
 ‘I would need a book.’

## e. Russian

*Ja [...] hotela by polučit' spravku*  
 I.NOM want.PST COND get.PFV confirmation.ACC  
*o tom, ..* (Sc. 10)  
 about that  
 ‘I would like to get written confirmation of ..’

According to previous studies, the clause type used in the head act is one of the most important grammatical features of requests. This is connected to the assumption that indirectness is relevant to the formulation of requests throughout Europe, and hence requests make use of interrogatives often more than imperatives. (see, e.g. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2001; Metslang 2004; Čepaitienė 2007; Hilbig 2009; Ogiermann 2009; Larina 2009; Keevallik 2012; Tanner 2012).

Another important crosslinguistic difference is the extent to which the use of an interrogative on its own can mitigate a request. The languages included in the study at hand seem to all share the need for „supplementary” features in addition to interrogative clauses; Ogiermann (2009) calls them syntactic downgraders (tense, modal verb, negation). In the next section we analyse these.

### 3.2 Means for mitigation in the head act

Our material shows very diverse means used for the mitigation of requests and questions, including lexical means (modal verbs and other modal constructions, requesting and thanking particles, modal particles and others), morphological means (such as the conditional verb form) and negation. We may also tentatively count the plural form of address as a mitigator.

The results are more suggestive if we remove scenario 5 (Supermarket), as it may be considered a routine institutional request. Scenarios 7–9 (Bus station, Title and Engraving) can be distinguished pragmatically from the others, as they all involve a request for information, and hence elicit questions rather than canonical requests. The other six scenarios (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10) elicited more or less creative requests from the respondents, in the sense that they are unlikely to prompt a formulaic, ready-made request. These six scenarios are henceforth called creative request scenarios.

#### 3.2.1 Conditional

While interrogatives are a typical feature of requests in all five languages, the conditional mood shows somewhat more varied usage. The conditional mood and modal verbs are considered to be markers of politeness in the linguistic tradition of all the languages included (for Estonian, see Metslang 1999; Pajusalu & Pajusalu 2004; for Finnish, Kauppinen 1999; for French, Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005; for Lithuanian, Hilbig 2009; for Latvian, Nītiņa, Grigorjevs 2013; for Russian, Larina 2009; Ogiermann 2009).

As expected, the conditional verb form appears in the data from all the languages in the study as a mitigator of requests and questions. In Estonian, Finnish, Latvian and Lithuanian, the present conditional is a synthetic verb form, with a conditional affix added to the verb root or stem (*tee-ksi-n* (do-COND-1SG, Estonian), *tek-isi-n* (do-COND-1SG, Finnish), *darī-tu* (do-COND, Latvian), *norė-čiau* (want-COND.1SG, Lithuanian)). In Russian, the conditional is an analytic construction, formed with the particle *by*. Table 2 presents the numbers of head acts containing a conditional, by language and by scenario. We count each response once, regardless of how many conditionals it contains. We have also tallied conditionals in the scenarios eliciting creative requests separately, as these contain a proportionally greater number.

Amount of conditional verb forms	Creative requests (sc. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, total 120)	Questions (sc. 7, 8, 9, total 60)	Routine institutional request (sc. 5, total 20)	Total (200)
Estonian	74 (62%)	8 (13%)	3 (15%)	87 (44%)
Latvian	60 (50%)	17 (28%)	2 (13%)	79 (40%)
Lithuanian	88 (73%)	17 (28%)	8 (40%)	113 (57%)
Finnish	108 (90%)	13 (22%)	13 (65%)	134 (67%)
Russian	45 (38%)	3 (5%)	0	48 (24%)

**Table 2.** Numbers of requests with conditional mood in either the head act or the superordinate clause.

The main differences between languages can be seen in (a) the frequency of conditional forms overall, (b) which scenarios contain conditionals, and (c) whether the conditional appears only with modals or also with lexical verbs. The Finnish data contains the greatest number of conditionals, and the Russian data has the least. All the languages have more examples of conditionals in the creative request scenarios than in questions and routine requests. However, Russian and Latvian data reveal the lowest proportions (38% and 50% respectively) of conditional mood in creative requests, while Finnish has conditional mode in 90% of them. The Latvian and Estonian data are similar to the Russian data in very rare usage of conditional mood in the Supermarket scenario (5); Latvian and Lithuanian data share a relatively high percentage (28%) in questions (Sc. 7, 8 and 9).

The conditional forms were used primarily in modal constructions in all the languages under investigation. The examples in (3a-e) show interrogative sentences expressing requests with modal verbs in conditional form; these constitute the most frequent request type in each of the five languages.

(3) Interrogative sentences with conditional modal verbs:

a. Estonian

*Kas te saaksite mind aidata?* (Sc. 3)  
 Q 2PL can.COND.2PL 1SG.PRTV help.INF  
 ‘Could you help me?’

b. Latvian

*Vai Jūs varētu aizvest mani līdz lidostai?*  
 Q you.NOM.SG can.COND drive.INF I.ACC to airport.DAT  
 ‘Could you take me to the airport?’

c. Lithuanian

*Gal galėtumėt mane nuvežti į oro uostą?* (Sc. 3)  
 Q.MOD can.COND.2PL I.ACC drive.INF into airport.ACC  
 ‘Could you take me to the airport?’

d. Finnish

*Voisitkohan mitenkään viedä minut lentokentälle?* (Sc. 3)  
 can.COND.2SG.Q.PRTCL somehow bring.INF I.ACC airport.ALL  
 ‘Could you somehow take me to the airport?’

e. Russian

*Ne mogli by vy menja otvezti?* (Sc. 3)

NEG can.PST COND you.NOM.PL I.ACC ride.PFV.INF

‘You couldn’t take me to the airport, could you?’

### 3.2.2 Modal constructions

Modal verbs are regularly used as mitigators of requests presented in interrogative sentences in all five languages included in our study (see examples in 3). We have included both modal verbs and some semantically and pragmatically similar constructions in this count (e.g. ‘be possible’: *olla vöimalik* (Est), *olla mahdollista* (Fin), *byt’vozmožnym* (Rus), *būtu iespējams* (Lat), *būtu galima* (Lith)). Constructions expressing availability in terms of time and a broader disponibility, in terms of willingness, have also been considered modal constructions, as they often appear in the same positions and contexts.

Table 3 shows the numbers of modal constructions in interrogative sentences by language. Here we can see that a rather high proportion of interrogative requests in all five languages also involve a modal construction, Estonian, Finnish and Lithuanian having slightly more (75-78%) and Russian and Latvian slightly fewer (57-61%) modal constructions.

	Estonian	Latvian	Lithuanian	Finnish	Russian
Interrogative sentences	153	155	147	163	143
Modal constructions	120 (78%)	95 (61%)	112 (76%)	122 (75%)	82 (57%)

**Table 3.** Modal verbs and other modal constructions in interrogative requests and questions.

### 3.2.3 Past and future tense in the superordinate clause

One request mitigator used in the languages in our study is the past tense of the verb in the main clause preceding the request (e.g. *I wanted to ask...*). Here, tense is not used to signal the timing of the event, but rather attempts to create distance between the request itself and the presentation of it (example 4). The speaker seems to be showing that she or he has already considered the situation and is not making a request at the spur of the moment. Table 4 gives an overview of the use of the mitigating past tense in the main clause. None of the respondents used the past tense frequently, as the use of superordinate main clauses themselves is not frequent. The Lithuanian data nevertheless contain a considerable number of past-tense, speaker-oriented preceding main clauses.

	Estonian	Latvian	Lithuanian	Finnish	Russian
Past tense in pre-clause	5	2	22	2	2

**Table 4.** Past tense in preceding clauses.



## (4) Past tense in pre-clause:

## a. Estonian

*Tahtsin küsida, et kas te graveerite ka.* (Sc. 9)  
 want.PST ask.INF COMP Q 2PL engrave too  
 ‘I wanted to ask whether you engrave as well.’

## b. Latvian

*Gribēju jautāt, vai būtu iespēja eksāmenu nokārtot citu dienu.* (Sc. 1)  
 want.PST.1SG ask.INF Q be.COND possibility.NOM  
 exam.ACC pass.INF another.ACC day.ACC  
 ‘I wanted to ask whether would it be possible totake the exam another day.’

## c. Lithuanian

*Norėjau paklausti, ar jūs parduotuvėje kartais negraviruoja daiktų?* (Sc. 9)  
 want.PST.1SG ask.INF Q you.GEN.PL shop.LOC  
 sometimes not\_engrave.PRS.3 thing.GEN.PL  
 ‘I wanted to ask whether one doesn’t engrave things..?’

## d. Finnish

*Ajattelin, että voisit-ko mitenkään heittää mua kentälle.* (Sc. 3)  
 I.PRTV airport.ALL  
 think.PST.1SG COMP can.COND.2SG-Q somehow throw  
 ‘I wondered, could you somehow take me to the airport.’

## e. Russian

*Ja hotela sprosit’, v kakom zale možno naiti knigu.* (Sc. 2)  
 I.NOM want.PST.F ask.PFV.INF prep which room  
 may find book.ACC  
 ‘I wanted to ask which room one can find the book in.’

The Latvian data also has 10 uses of future tense in a pre-clause of request (example 5). In our data, this seems to be a special Latvian mitigation device, as there were no pre-clauses of this type in Lithuanian, where they would also be grammatically possible. In Estonian and Finnish there is no future expression of this kind at all, and in Russian the same function could be observed in perfective aspect, which we are not studying here.

## (5) Latvian

*Vai jūs pateiksiet, kur ir autobusa pietura?* (Sc. 7)  
 Q you.NOM.SG say.FUT.2PL where be.PRS.3  
 bus.GEN stop.NOM  
 ‘Would you say where is the bus stop?’

## 3.2.4 Negation

The status of negative polarity varies in the languages under consideration. The total amount of negatives used across all the material is given in Table 5. Finnish respondents did not use negative constructions at all. Estonian and Lithuanian respondents only used the negative in a few instances (see 6a and 6c). Negative polarity can be seen to be important in request formation in Russian, where, in addition to typical requests, respondents used negative constructions in Scenario 7 (Bus station, see 6d), which involved a question to a stranger. The Latvian data has more negative requests than in Estonian and Lithuanian, but much less than the Russian data.

Negative mitigation of requests and questions occurs primarily in interaction among strangers (cf. Mills 1992, 68). A large proportion of the negative constructions in the Russian data occurs in the most typical request construction, *ne mogli by vy* (given above, 3e), but negatives also occur in indicative clauses (as in 6e).

(6) Negative:

a. Estonian

<i>Ega</i>	<i>teiega</i>	<i>ei</i>	<i>oleks</i>	<i>võimalik</i>
Q.NEG	you.PL.COM	NEG	be.COND	POSSIBLE
<i>autoga lennujaama</i>		<i>saada?</i> (Sc. 3)		
car.COM	airport.ILL	get.INF		

‘It wouldn’t be possible to get to the airport by car with you, would it?’

b. Latvian

<i>Vai</i>	<i>jūs,</i>	<i>lūdzu,</i>	<i>mani</i>	<i>neaizvestu</i>
Q	you.NOM.PL	please	I.ACC	not_drive.COND
<i>uz lidostu?</i> (Sc. 3)				
to airport.ACC				

‘Couldn’t you drive off me to the airport?’

c. Lithuanian

<i>Ar</i>	<i>nerastum</i>	<i>man</i>	<i>minutės</i>
Q	not_find.COND.2SG	I.DAT	minute.GEN
<i>peržiūrėti</i>		<i>tezes ... ?</i> (Sc. 6)	
check.INF	abstract.GEN		

‘Couldn’t you find some time to check the abstract?’

d. Russian

<i>Izvinite,</i>	<i>vy</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>podskāžete</i>	<i>gde</i>	<i>nahoditsja</i>
excuse	you.NOM.PL	NEG	tell.PFV.2PL	where	be_situated
<i>avtobusnaja stancija?</i> (Sc. 7)					
bus.ADJ	station				

‘Excuse me, you couldn’t tell me where the bus station is, could you?’

## e. Russian

*Ne*        *možeš'*        *mne*    *eë*        *zavtra*        *prinesti?* (Sc. 4)  
 NEG        can.2SG        I.DAT    this.ACC    tomorrow       bring.PFV.INF  
 'Can't you bring it to me tomorrow?'

	Estonian	Latvian	Lithuanian	Finnish	Russian
Negation in head acts	5	22	4	0	72

**Table 5.** Negation in head acts.

### 3.2.5 Address form

Forms of address have been previously studied using various methods in Estonian, Finnish, Latvian and Russian (e.g. Keevallik 1999, Estonian; Pajusalu et al. 2010, Estonian and Russian; Nyblom 2006; Lappalainen 2006, 2015; Paunonen 2010; Peterson 2010, Finnish; Paegle 2003; Kalnača 2012; Nītiņa & Grigorjevs 2013).

The option of addressing an interlocutor with the formal, honorific V-form (2PL) exists in each of the languages in our study, but the actual use of formal address in our data varies by language. In this subsection we include the entire response, rather than just the head act. It is not possible to detect the form of address for all the answers in the data, as it is sometimes not expressed in the response text – indeed, direct second-person pronouns may be avoided in the service of politeness. Results are shown in Table 6. The V-form was most frequent in Russian (114), and less frequent in Finnish (50)<sup>3</sup>. Estonian (91), Latvian (90) and Lithuanian (100) are positioned in between. In scenarios 7 (Bus Station) and 9 (Engraving), no T-form was used in any language, but probably for different reasons: in 7, the distance between interlocutors is the greatest; in 9, the plural form is probably determined by the „collective” addressee (the whole personnel of the shop).

The amount of informal T-forms is not greatly variable, though Finnish includes the most of these, even in situations which elicited no T-forms in the other languages (e.g. Scenarios 1, 'Exam', 2, 'Library', and 10, 'Insurance'). Moreover, Finnish, Estonian and Latvian respondents gave more responses with no overt addressee at all<sup>4</sup>. Russian included the fewest responses with no form of address. It is clear that Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian respondents are fairly uniform regarding the use of T or V-forms, with the exception of Scenario 3, in which a neighbor is addressed. In Finnish, however, we find the greatest differences between respondents, which seems to indicate greater variability regarding which form of address to use.

<sup>3</sup> For comparison of Estonian and Finnish address forms see Jalli, Pajusalu (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Lindström (2010) presents an overview of the common politeness device of avoiding personal reference in Estonian.

Sc.	Estonian			Finnish			Latvian			Lithuanian			Russian		
	T	V	NI	T	V	NI	T	V	NI	T	V	NI	T	V	NI
1.	0	6	14	1	0	19	6	2	12	0	15	5	0	14	6
2.	0	18	2	4	4	12	0	19	1	0	18	2	0	19	1
3.	6	14	0	18	1	1	3	17	0	8	12	0	6	14	0
4.	20	0	0	20	0	0	20	0	0	20	0	0	20	0	0
5.	0	1	19	0	0	20	0	3	17	0	9	11	0	14	6
6.	20	0	0	20	0	0	20	0	0	20	0	0	20	0	0
7.	0	20	0	0	19	1	0	20	0	0	18	2	0	20	0
8.	11	0	9	2	0	18	5	0	15	13	0	7	14	0	6
9.	0	18	2	0	17	3	0	17	3	0	16	4	0	18	2
10.	0	14	6	4	9	7	0	12	8	0	12	8	0	15	5
Total	57	91	52	69	50	81	54	90	56	61	100	39	60	114	26

**Table 6.** Forms of address, T (singular/informal), V (plural/formal), NI (not indicated).

#### 4. Spatial categories in requests

For spatial categories we analyzed scenarios 2 (Library), 3 (Airport) and 7 (Bus station).

In scenarios 2 and 7, the respondent has the task of finding a book in a library or a bus station in an unfamiliar city. From the point of view of a motion event, the aim is different: in the library, it is the book which moves, and the motion of the person is not relevant, whereas in the case of the bus station, the person needs to get there. People expressed their need for finding a book or a bus station in various ways in DCT-s, but we can find some repeating patterns in the scenarios.

In scenario 2, the dominant pattern contains the verbs ‘find’ and ‘help’, accompanied by mitigating devices (usually a conditional modal verb, as shown in 7). This kind of head act was found in at least half of the responses in every language, but it was especially frequent in Lithuanian (18 times) and Estonian (16 times).

(7) Estonian (16) *Kas saaksite aidata leida see raamat?*  
 Q can.COND.2PL help find this book  
 ‘Could you help me find the book?’

Latvian (11) *Vai Jūs varētu, lūdzu, palīdzēt atrast grāmatu?*  
 Q you.NOM.PL can.COND please help.INF  
 find.INF book.ACC  
 ‘Could you help me find the book?’

Lithuanian (18) *Gal galite padėti surasti man knygą?*  
 Q can.COND.2PL help.INF find.INF I.DAT book.ACC  
 ‘Could you help me find the book?’

Finnish (10) *Tarvitsisin vähän apua, en löydä*  
 need.COND.1SG some help.PRT NEG.1SG find  
*etsimääni kirjaa.*  
 seek.POSS.1SG book.PRT  
 ‘I need some help, couldn’t find the book I’m looking for’

Russian (13) *Ne mogli by vy mne pomoch’ naiti*  
 NEG can COND you.NOM I.DAT help find  
*knigu?*  
 book.ACC  
 ‘Could you help me find a book?’

Scenario 7 revealed two frequent patterns: asking for the location of the bus station (frequent in Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Finnish, as in 8) and asking how to go there (frequent in Russian, as shown in 9). Both patterns lack direct reference to the speaker and are usually preceded by a pre-clause meaning ‘Could you tell...?’.

(8) Where is the bus station?

Estonian (12) *Kus asub bussi-jaam?*  
 where be\_located.3SG bus-station

Latvian (12) *Kur ir / kur atrodas autobusa*  
 where be.PRS.3 / where be\_located.PRS.3 bus.GEN.M  
*pietura?*  
 station.NOM.F

Lithuanian (11) *Kur yra autobusų stotis?*  
 where be.PRS.3 bus.GEN.PL station. NOM

Finnish (18) *Missä on bussi-asema?*  
 where be.3SG bus-station

Russian (6) *gde nahoditsja avtobusnaja stancija?*  
 where be\_located.PRS.3SG bus.ADJ station

(9) How to go to the bus station?

Estonian (3) *Kuidas saab bussi-jaama?*  
 how get.3SG bus-station.ILL

Latvian (3) *Kā nokļūt līdz autobusa pieturai?*  
 how get.INF to bus.GEN station.DAT

Lithuanian (3) *Kaip nueiti iki autobusų stoties?*  
 How get.INF to bus.GEN.PL station.GEN

Finnish (1) *Miten pääsee bussi-asemalle?*  
 how get.3SG bus-station.ALL

Russian (12)	<i>Kak</i>	<i>doiti</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>avtobusnoi</i>	<i>stancii?</i>
	how	get	to	bus.ADJ.GEN	station.GEN

Scenario 3 (Airport) was one of the most complicated for respondents. Some even wrote that they would never ask a neighbour to give them a lift to the airport, if they didn't know the neighbour personally. The responses to this scenario were the longest and the explanations were more diverse than in other scenarios. From the viewpoint of a planned motion event (getting to the airport), we found some differences between respondents in a) mentioning the Airport explicitly or implicitly; b) lexical means (plane or flight) and c) verb-based constructions (*get* or *bring* or *drive*).

While mentioning the airport explicitly or implicitly does not reveal differences between languages, the choice of lexical means to indicate the goal and the action may indicate some important tendencies regarding Thinking-for-Speaking in the languages under investigation.

In the repertoire of constructions used, there seem to be no syntactic patterns common for only some of the languages and infrequent for others. We do nevertheless find some tendencies which may be important in looking for prototypical expressions of motion events in the languages. The clearest difference was between Finnish and the other languages: in Finnish one is late for a flight (*lento*), in the other languages for a plane (Est. *lennukile*, Lat. *lidmašīnu*, Lit. *į lėktuvą*, Rus. *na samolet*). Languages also differed in expressing the GOAL of the planned journey: in Finnish and Estonian only one construction is used (Fin. *lentokentälle* lit. 'onto the airport', Est. *lennujaama* lit. 'into the airport'), while the other languages included two competing constructions: 'on' and 'up to' (Russian *v aeroport* 'to airport', *do aeroporta* 'up to airport', Latvian *uz lidostu* 'to airport', *līdz lidostai* lit. 'up to airport', Lithuanian *į oro uostą* 'to airport' and *iki oro uosto* 'up to airport'). To investigate whether this is coincidental or reflects real differences in processing GOAL-expressions in the five languages, other methods of analysis should be used.

## 5. Conclusion

Some conclusions can be drawn from the data presented above regarding the stereotypical form of making requests in the five languages included in our study. Across all the languages, a typical request would involve an interrogative form and the conditional.

In Estonian, approximately 50% of stereotypical requests involve interrogative sentences (especially with the question particle *kas*) with the modal verb *saama* 'can, get' in conditional form. Negation and past tense forms are very rarely used to minimise imposition in Estonian.

In Finnish, the stereotypical request contains the question particle *-kO* and the conditional form of the modal verb *voida* 'can'. Negation was not used and past tense forms are rare in our Finnish data.

In Latvian, the typical request contains the question particle *vai* and the conditional form of the modal verb *varēt* 'can' + infinitive; the modal verb can

be negated (*ne-varēt*). A special Latvian device of mitigation is future tense in the pre-clause of the request.

In Lithuanian, the typical request again involves the question particle *ar* or the modal verb *galėti*, formed using the question particle *gal*. Conditional and modal constructions are often used to mitigate the request. Lithuanian uses noticeably more past-tense forms in superordinate clauses, and there are very few instances of negation as a mitigating device.

In Russian, the stereotypical requests are interrogative sentences with the conditional particle *by* and the negative particle *ne*. This construction is not as frequent in Russian as the prototypical request construction described above for other languages, but seems to be the most formal („polite”) type of requests in Russian.

Spatial expressions are expressed in DCT-s in a rather uniform way across the data of studied languages. The most prominent differences are the use of the lexeme *lento* ‘flight’ in Finnish instead of ‘plane’, as in the other four languages, and the different means of asking for the location of the bus station in Russian. Once again, our study shows similarities among Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian, with slight differences in the Finnish and Russian data.

The effects of language contacts can be seen most clearly in the „intermediate” positioning of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian between Finnish and Russian, along many of the parameters investigated. Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian were influenced by Western European languages earlier, and by Russian during the Soviet period, and influences from both periods can be seen in the response patterns in our data. The low frequency of formal, plural (V) address forms in the Finnish data, on the other hand, is a clear indicator of the influence of Scandinavian patterns of address on Finnish in particular.

## Abbreviations

1	1st person
2	2nd person
3	3rd person
ACC	accusative
ADE	adessive
ADJ	adjective
ALL	allative
COM	comitative
COMP	complementizer
COND	conditional
DCT	discourse completion task
Est	Estonian
F	feminine
Fin	Finnish
GEN	genitive
IMP	imperative
INF	infinitive

INS	instrumental
IPFV	imperfective
Lith	Lithuanian
LOC	locative
M	masculine
MOD	modal
NEG	negation
OBJ	object
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PREP	preposition
PRTV	partitive
PST	past
PTCL	particle
Q	question marker
Rus	Russian
Sc.	scenario
SG	singular

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## Kopsavilkums

Pētījuma mērķis ir noskaidrot, kā atšķiras lūguma izteikšana igauņu, latviešu, lietuviešu, somu un krievu valodā. Valodas materiāls iegūts, rakstiski ar īpašu diskursa uzdevumu (*discourse completion tasks*) palīdzību aptaujājot igauņu, somu, latviešu, lietuviešu un krievu dzimtās valodas runātājus. Uzdevumos pēc noteikta parauga tika lūgts aprakstīt dažādas lūguma vai jautājuma situācijas. Atbildēs sniegto lūgumu galvenā daļa klasificēta pēc vairākām gramatiskām pazīmēm – teikuma sintaktiskais tips, verba morfoloģiskā forma (t. sk. laiks un izteiksme), izteicēja noliegums, modālo konstrukciju esamība un tips, uzrunas forma. Visās aplūkotajās valodās lūguma galvenā daļa ir jautājuma teikums ar modālu verbu vēlējuma izteiksmē.

Otrs pētījuma mērķis ir noskaidrot, kā tiek izteikti pārvietošanas/-ās lūgumi, kādas pieklājības stratēģijas tiek izmantotas, lai izveidotu jautājumu saistībā ar vietu vai nonākšanu kādā vietā.

## Appendix

Data elicitation questionnaire: English translation of the questionnaire with each scenario, as presented to participants in the Discourse Completion Task

Dear respondent! Below you will find some everyday situations. Try to imagine these and write what you would say/write in such a situation. Your answers are needed for a contrastive linguistic study.

Age: Male/female:

1. You overslept on exam day. Still you hope that the teacher will allow you to take the exam at another time. You write the teacher an e-mail. How do you express your wish?
2. You cannot find the book you need at the library. You go to the desk where the librarian is sitting and typing something at the computer. How do you ask the librarian to help you?
3. You are late for your flight. You cannot get a taxi. Your neighbour has a car and you just saw from your window that (s)he came home. You get an idea that (s)he could give you a lift to the airport. You do not know your neighbour well, you have only exchanged greetings, but (s)he is young and seems very kind. You go next door and ring the doorbell. The neighbour opens the door. What do you say?
4. You would like to read a book that your friend has. You will meet with your friend the next day anyway. You call your friend and ask him/her to bring the book. What do you say?
5. You want to buy three grilled chicken legs from the store. What do you say to the shop assistant behind the counter?
6. You need to send an abstract of your paper to a graduate conference. The deadline is tonight, the abstract should be in English. You doubt your language skills and want to ask a good friend who speaks English well to check your

abstract. But you know that your friend has an important test tomorrow and is probably very busy. You call your friend anyway. What do you say?

7. You are lost in a strange city. You want to ask the first person you meet where the bus station is. You see an older woman approaching. How do you ask her for information?
8. You talked with your friend about a book earlier today. Somehow you have forgotten the title of the book. You send your friend an SMS to ask her/him to remind you what the title was. What will you write?
9. You need to have a name engraved on a spoon you bought for someone's birthday. There is a watchmaker's shop nearby but you do not know whether they provide this service or not. You decide to stop by and ask. What will you say?
10. You need to get a document from your insurance company for the bank to prove that your apartment is insured (everything is in order and the apartment is indeed insured but the bank is worried about loan security). You find the name and e-mail address of your insurance company's employee on the internet. What will you write?