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## A Place for *pliis* in Finnish: A Discourse-Pragmatic Variation Account of Position

Elizabeth Peterson, Turo Hiltunen, and Johanna Vaattovaara

### 13.1 Introduction

*Pliis* 'please', a borrowing from English into Finnish, has become an established part of everyday Finnish discourse. Although first attested in spoken form already in the 1940s ([Paunonen and Paunonen 2000](#)), systematic research on *pliis* – and on pragmatic borrowings in general – is relatively scarce in Finnish. Based on firsthand observations, [Taavitsainen and Pahta \(2012: 200\)](#) suggested that *pliis* is an “in-group identity marker in teen-age peer group talk,” offering initial support to the hypothesis that, in terms of social values, *pliis* is a relatively stigmatized, context-sensitive feature. Subsequent accounts of *pliis*, including [Peterson and Vaattovaara 2014](#), demonstrate that *pliis* is perceived to be used across different social and age groups, though it is typically associated with urban, young, and feminine styles.

Through our previous perceptual research on *pliis* (reported in [Peterson and Vaattovaara 2014](#)), we gained initial understanding of the form's social meaning potentials (see [Eckert 2008](#)). What remains to be accounted for are the grammatical

characteristics of this form, for example how it has been incorporated into Finnish syntax and morphology and how the borrowed form relates to other forms of Finnish politeness, especially the heritage lexical politeness marker *kiitos* (see Andersen, [Chapter 12](#), this volume).

Our aims with the current investigation are twofold. First, we wish to reassess the findings of our previous study, which suggest that, unlike the heritage lexical politeness marker *kiitos*, *pliis* is preferred in a clause-internal position. Like several chapters in this volume, the present chapter addresses one of the main challenges of discourse-pragmatic variation studies: the question of accountability when dealing with linguistic variables that are by definition functionally ambiguous (see [Wiltschko et al. 2018](#)). In our treatment of this challenge, we wish to explore and underscore the need for studies of discourse-pragmatic variables to make use of multiple datasets (data triangulation), even when addressing what appears to be a straightforward question – such as that of clausal position. This question is especially pertinent for a language like Finnish, which, due to its structural properties, in principle has a relatively free word order compared to languages such as English.

The second aim is to contribute to the research on Finnish requests. We limit our exploration to requests for two reasons. First, although *pliis*, like *please* in English, can be found in a number of linguistic constructions, we need to limit our dataset within a comparable set of parameters. In addition, *pliis*, like *please*, is naturally connected to requests. As pointed out in some of the earlier work of [House \(1989\)](#), for example, *please* is associated with requests, prompting House even to use the term *requestive marker* to refer to *please*.

Finally, our chapter contributes to the work on what has been called “opportunistic data,” or in other words data that is not collected per se, nor is it part of a corpus, but is there for the taking ([McEnery and Hardie 2011: 11](#)). We return to methodological concerns with this type of data at the end of the chapter.

## 13.2 Discourse-Pragmatic Variation and Pragmatic Borrowing

There are two central research areas informing our investigation of *plii*s in Finnish. One is *pragmatic borrowing*, understood as the phenomenon whereby pragmatic elements are incorporated from one language (in this case, English) into another (in this case, Finnish). Other chapters in this volume investigating pragmatic borrowing include Kern ([Chapter 11](#)) and Andersen ([Chapter 12](#)). Pragmatic borrowings have only recently begun to attract scholarly interest as a language contact phenomenon. This is surprising, because, as [Andersen \(2014: 19\)](#) observes, borrowed pragmatic features are highly noticeable (i.e., *salient*) and are frequently incorporated into everyday speech. Following what has been termed a “pragmatic turn” (cf. [Andersen et al. 2017](#); Andersen, [Chapter 12](#)) in language borrowing research, we focus on how the borrowed form enters into the recipient language, where it takes on specific meanings, patterns, and social functions (cf. [Andersen 2014](#)). The process of borrowing politeness markers tends to follow a common path of evolution, where the borrowed markers are “gradually bleached of their speech-act signaling potential” [Terkourafi \(2011: 218\)](#) and instead function as discourse markers.

The second main research area informing our perspective is the main theme of this volume, *discourse-pragmatic variation*. Methodologically, our investigation has

benefited from recent contributions to discourse-pragmatic variation analysis (e.g., [Levey et al. 2013](#); [Pichler 2013](#); [Andersen 2014](#); [Pichler 2016a](#); [D'Arcy 2017](#); [Wiltschko et al. 2018](#)). Of relevance to us are previous studies on other discourse markers (e.g., *just, like*) and intensifiers (e.g., *so*), as they provide information about functions and preferred clausal positions. Our investigation offers information on Finnish and serves as a relatively rare example of an investigation of the variation of a lexical politeness marker.

It is well established in the study of discourse-pragmatic variation that the variables we work with are context-sensitive (Degand, Broisson, Crible, and Grzech, [Chapter 4](#); Eiswirth, [Chapter 8](#); Schleef and Mackay, [Chapter 2](#), this volume). With this in mind, it is clear that any one method is unlikely to offer representative and accountable findings to justify claims of any one principal function of *pliiis*. This is because discourse-pragmatic variation analysis is confronted with several issues related to the complexity of the forms in question, which are summarized in [Pichler \(2013: 21\)](#): discourse-pragmatic features eschew easy definition as linguistic variables, identifying all contexts and competing variants for discourse-pragmatic features is difficult, and discourse-pragmatic features are variable and changeable with respect to both form and function. These issues have remained relevant as the field of inquiry has grown during the past decade or so.

[Wiltschko et al. \(2018: 570\)](#) present three main challenges confronting researchers of discourse-pragmatic variation: (1) How do discourse-pragmatic researchers handle the question of equivalency? (2) In the face of functional ambiguity, how can accountability be maintained? (3) How can the principal function of a form be determined? With *pliiis*, which as a lexical politeness marker has a rather limited range

of functions compared to other discourse-pragmatic variables (e.g., *like*, *you know*, *innit*) our main concern lies with issue (2), accountability, although clearly the three issues overlap.

An overarching question driving our investigation of *pliis* has been: Why borrow the English form *pliis* when a functional equivalent, *kiitos*, also a lexical politeness marker, already exists in Finnish? Our basic premise is that *pliis* accomplishes pragmatic and social functions that *kiitos* and other heritage forms in Finnish do not.

Our previous research investigated the preferred clausal position of *pliis* in *conventionally indirect requests* ([Blum-Kulka et al. 1989](#)), here meaning request clauses containing the modal verb *voida* 'to be able/can'. The findings indicated that *pliis* was preferred between the modal verb and the main verb, while the preferred position for *kiitos* in the same sentence was at the end of the clause ([Peterson and Vaattovaara 2014: 257–258](#)). This initial finding raised the question of impenetrability of the clause: Why would a pragmatic borrowing, a politeness marker, behave differently in the clause than a heritage politeness marker?

Our aim to address issues of accountability has been informed by the principle of triangulation: building on a pilot study for the current study, establishing baseline data, and exploring multiple related datasets. In this chapter, we first offer an overview of the linguistic situation in Finland ([Section 13.3](#)) and the system of requests and politeness of Finnish ([Section 13.4](#)). [Section 13.5](#) presents our analysis of the preferred clausal positions in different sentence configurations, drawing on the “transit data” ([Section 13.5.1](#)) and the computer-mediated communication (CMC) data ([Section 13.5.2](#)). Finally, in [Section 13.6](#), we discuss the complementary and conflicting findings

suggested by each dataset. In the conclusion, we address the aims of the study in the light of our findings.

## 13.3 Contact with English

The relationship between English and Finnish is one of unidirectional “weak” language contact (see Andersen, [Chapter 12](#)), one where the influence of English does not stem from so-called “strong” contact between native speakers of the two languages. For the majority of the Finnish population, English is introduced through formal means and as a consecutive or third language. English does not have official status in Finland in the same sense as the two national languages, Finnish and Swedish (see, e.g., [Leppänen et al. 2008](#)). However, between formal and informal input, the end result is that, in the present day, the average Finn has a reasonable command of English. English is the first foreign language of the majority of Finnish students ([OSF 2015, 2016](#)), and approximately 70 percent of the population are able to carry on a conversation in English (self-reported, [European Commission 2012](#)). The domains of use for English range from entertainment to academia, and the attitudes towards it are generally positive ([Leppänen et al. 2011](#)). In [Thøgersen’s \(2004: 25\)](#) comparison of the “linguistic climate” in the Nordic societies, Finland occupies a middle position between the Faroe Islands and Norway (most purist) and Sweden and Denmark (most open to outside influence) (see also [Svavarsdóttir et al. 2010](#)).

Following [Hickey \(2010\)](#) and a tradition dating back to [Bloomfield \(1933\)](#), we refer to the type of borrowing stemming from such contact situations as *cultural*; the key factor in the modern era is the hegemony of English in (perceived) cultural influence and international communication. Discourse-pragmatic markers are a

recognized borrowing phenomenon in such language contact situations, and there are plenty of English-sourced features in contemporary Finnish (see [Peterson 2017](#)). Along with *pliis*, the forms *jees* 'yes', *okei* 'ok', *kamoon* 'c'mon', and *all right* are used in colloquial Finnish, among many others ([Taavitsainen and Pahta 2012](#)).

## 13.4 Finnish Politeness and Earlier Work on *Pliis*

The Finnish politeness system has been described as “withdrawing and evasive” ([Yli-Vakkuri 2005](#): 191), which is manifested, for example, in the tendency for direct reference to the addressee to be avoided in favor of other syntactic perspectives. In general, it has been said that less is more when it comes to Finnish politeness ([Sorjonen et al. 2017](#); [Isosävi 2020](#)), although this is not meant to imply that Finnish lacks resources when it comes to demonstrating linguistic politeness (see [Lappalainen 2008](#); [Tanner 2010](#)). For example, while both Finnish and English make use of conventionally indirect requests ([Blum-Kulka et al. 1989](#)), Finnish is unlike English when it comes to the use of lexical politeness markers in requests. In English, the lexical politeness marker *please* is commonly used to mitigate requests. While Finnish has the lexical politeness marker *kiitos* 'please/thank you', it is relatively infrequent in everyday language ([Yli-Vakkuri 2005](#); [Markkanen 1985](#)) and tends to mark formality in discourse ([VISK](#), the online version of *Iso suomen kielioppi* 'The Big Finnish Grammar'; see also [Peterson and Vaattovaara, 2014](#)). Rather than lexical politeness markers, Finnish commonly utilizes grammatical resources to mitigate the force of a request, including question particles, negation, clitics, and the use of specific cases, tenses, and moods ([Yli-Vakkuri 2005](#): 199–200). This general tendency makes for an interesting question

regarding the borrowing of the lexical politeness marker *pliis*. If Finnish speakers tend to disprefer lexical politeness markers, why have they borrowed *pliis* into Finnish discourse?

Our initial investigation of *pliis* ([Peterson and Vaattovaara 2014](#)) set out to address this question: How is *pliis* perceived to behave in variation with other lexical politeness markers in Finnish, in particular *kiitos* ‘please/thank you’, which, as part of Standard Finnish, is the default, unmarked variant? As *kiitos* is a multifunctional politeness marker, used for both thanking and requesting, we tested the possibility that *pliis* could be taking on some of the requesting functions of *kiitos*. To this end, we conducted a grammatical acceptability test and a joint attitude and perception test on *pliis* compared to *kiitos*, which showed that our initial hypothesis was too simplistic: we did not find evidence that *pliis* was overtaking the requesting functions of *kiitos*. Rather, *pliis* appears to be associated with specific contexts or types of social relations, social groups, and styles, notably young, urban females. As a social group, it is young (urban) women who often lead linguistic change, but this change likely carries social stigma ([Labov 2001b](#); [Peterson 2017](#)). The findings of [Peterson and Vaattovaara \(2014\)](#) suggested that *pliis* fills a pragmatic gap in Finnish: it serves as a lexical politeness marker that offers the possibility to index informality, solidarity, and intimacy (cf. *positive politeness*).

In the same survey we also asked respondents to assess where in a conventionally indirect request the alternative politeness markers *pliis* or *kiitos* would seem “most natural.” The findings are presented in [Table 13.1](#). Example (1) offers a gloss of the base sentence shown in [Table 13.1](#).



Table 13.1

Preferred position of *pliis* and *kiitos* on a Likert scale of 0 to 3: Can you give me that?

	mean		mean
<i>Pliis</i> <i>voitko antaa sen?</i>	1.43	<i>Kiitos</i> <i>voitko antaa sen?</i>	1.98
<i>Voitko pliis antaa sen?</i>	1.67	<i>Voitko kiitos antaa sen?</i>	1.9
<i>Voitko antaa sen, pliis?</i>	1.5	<i>Voitko antaa sen, kiitos kiitos?</i>	2.71

Adapted from Peterson and Vaattovaara (2014)

- (1) *Voitko antaa sen*  
 Can-2SG-CON-Q give-INF it-GEN  
 'Can you give me that?'

The results in [Table 13.1](#) emphasize that *pliis* is a dispreferred form in Finnish: in no syntactic position does it rate as high as *kiitos*. That said, the preferred slots to emerge for the respective forms are after the modal *voitko* 'can you (2SG)' for *pliis* and in clause-final position for *kiitos*. In light of previous accounts of Finnish, this finding for *kiitos* was expected, but it muddies the waters for *pliis*: the borrowed politeness marker appears to behave grammatically in a way that distinguishes it from the heritage form.

Because our initial investigation of *pliis* was limited to testing only one type of request through an acceptability test, the findings had to be treated with caution, with an obvious need for further, non-elicited empirical data. What follows is an overview of request types in Finnish and our continued investigation for possible positions of *pliis* in Finnish requests.

Within the context of cross-cultural pragmatic studies, it has been pointed out that, in Finnish, the request that seems neither too formal nor too impolite contains a



Obviously, there is no feasible means of listing every possible request type in Finnish, but [Table 13.2](#) presents an overview of seven representative request types in Finnish and those that we deal with in this study. The list is compiled based on Finnish grammars (e.g., VISK) based on research on Finnish requests. The request types presented here in numbered order are used as labels throughout the remainder of the chapter.<sup>2</sup>

Table 13.2  
 Representative request types in Finnish (non-comprehensive)

	Explanation	Example + gloss
<i>request type 1</i>	elliptical; noun phrase	<i>Suolaa!</i> salt-PAR 'Salt!'
<i>request type 2</i>	imperative	<i>Heitä suolaa!</i> throw-2SG-IMP salt-PART 'Give me the salt!'
<i>request type 3</i>	interrogative	<i>Annatko suolaa?</i> Give-2SG-Q salt-PAR? 'Will you give me the salt?'
<i>request type 4</i>	negative imperative	<i>Älä huuda!</i> Don't-2SG shout-CONEG 'Don't shout!'
<i>request type 5</i>	negative present indicative	<i>Ethän huuda.</i> NEG-2SG-hAn shout-CONEG '(You) don't shout.'
<i>request type 6</i>	conventionally indirect	<i>Voisitko antaa suolaa?</i> can-CON-2SG give-INF salt-PAR 'Could you give the salt?'
<i>request type 7</i>	third-person statement	<i>Täällä ei saa huutaa.</i> here NEG-3SG can-CONEG shout-INF 'No yelling here.'

*Note.* In fact, the possible directive types in Finnish would be difficult to describe in one list, including passive, zero-person constructions, both positive and negatives indicatives, and so on (see VISK; [Jokela 2012](#)).

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<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, we use the term *request type* to refer chiefly to a grammatical structure that forms a request. We use the term *request strategy* to refer to the pragmatic function of a request, as found in the discourse that comprises our empirical data.

Request type 1, consisting of a noun phrase, is the minimum amount of linguistic material that can be interpreted in our datasets as a request (equivalent to English verbless directives; see [Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 945](#)). Request type 2 is a classic unmitigated imperative, whereas the request type 3 is already minimally mitigated through the use of question marker *-ko*. Request types 4 and 5 offer a contrast in how negative commands can be formed in Finnish, with form 4 containing the Finnish equivalent of ‘don’t’ and form 5 containing a negated verb in the present indicative. Both of these request types are best translated into English as ‘Don’t –’ but the grammatical distinction in Finnish is meaningful, as demonstrated further in [Section 13.5.1](#). Request type 6 shows the Finnish means of expressing a conventionally indirect request ([Blum-Kulka et al. 1989](#)), in this example with a verb in the conditional mood. The ‘can’ verb could also occur in the present indicative. Finally, request type 7 is an example of a zero-person clause expressed in a third-person perspective.

These request types offer a number of possible positions for lexical politeness markers. This is not to say that all positions are equally idiomatic or carry the same pragmatic weight and (social) meaning. To establish a baseline for comparison to our non-elicited datasets, we gained grammatical acceptability input on *pliis* and *kiitos* from five different groups of university students ( $N=135$ ), who were instructed to add the target politeness marker (*pliis* or *kiitos*) to sample requests like those shown in [Table 13.2](#). Following [Wiltschko et al. \(2018\)](#), our aim was first to establish the envelope of variation through baseline data, which we saw as a necessary step to lend a lens of interpretation to our eventual quantitative observations. After establishing the envelope of variation, we then wanted to determine how people actually use these

lexical politeness markers. [Tables 13.3](#) and [13.4](#) show the positional preferences of *kiitos* and *pliis* in the baseline tests.

Table 13.3

Baseline (elicited) positions for KIITOS in seven request types. The symbol × indicates a position where lexical politeness marker (*pliis/kiitos*) would be ungrammatical

	PM1	adv	PM2	neg	PM3	aux	PM4	verb	PM5	obj	PM6	Total
<i>RT1</i>	0	—	×	—	×	—	×	—	×	<i>Suolaa!</i>	57	57
<i>RT2</i>	0	—	×	—	×	—	×	<i>Heitä</i>	12	<i>suolaa!</i>	38	50
<i>RT3</i>	2	—	×	—	×	—	×	<i>Annatko</i>	8	<i>suolaa?</i>	49	59
<i>RT4</i>	13	—	×	<i>Älä</i>	8	—	×	<i>huuda!</i>	×	—	41	59
<i>RT5</i>	7	—	×	<i>Ethän</i>	12	—	×	<i>huuda.</i>	×	—	38	57
<i>RT6</i>	2	—	×	—	×	<i>Voisitko</i>	8	<i>antaa</i>	1	<i>suolaa?</i>	49	60
<i>RT7</i>	10	<i>Täällä</i>	0	<i>ei</i>	3	<i>saa</i>	3	<i>huutaa.</i>	×	—	41	57

*Note.* The positions indicated for *pliis* are most likely possible slots for adverbials in Finnish. To our knowledge, a study of types of adverbials and placement in Finnish clauses is yet to be conducted. RT=request type.

Table 13.4

Baseline (elicited) positions for PLIIS in seven request types. The symbol × indicates a position where lexical politeness marker (*pliis/kiitos*) would be unavailable in the construction

	PM1	ADV	PM2	NEG	PM3	AUX	PM4	V	PM5	OBJ	PM6	Total
<i>RT1</i>	13	—	×	—	×	—	×	—	×	<i>Suolaa!</i>	73	86
<i>RT2</i>	11	—	×	—	×	—	×	<i>Heitä</i>	41	<i>suolaa!</i>	35	87
<i>RT3</i>	17	—	×	—	×	—	×	<i>Annatko</i>	42	<i>suolaa?</i>	28	87
<i>RT4</i>	27	—	×	<i>Älä</i>	50	—	×	<i>huuda!</i>	×	—	11	88
<i>RT5</i>	23	—	×	<i>Ethän</i>	51	—	×	<i>huuda.</i>	×	—	14	87
<i>RT6</i>	6	—	×	—	×	<i>Voisitko</i>	38	<i>antaa</i>	2	<i>suolaa?</i>	39	85
<i>RT7</i>	53	<i>Täällä</i>	2	<i>ei</i>	10	<i>saa</i>	6	<i>huutaa.</i>	×	—	14	85

*Note.* The information in this table is meant to be a heuristic/illustrative device to help illustrate our request prototypes and the clausal positions available in them; it is not intended in any way as a theory-bound syntactic description of Finnish requests.

RT=request type.

The Finnish examples in [Tables 13.3](#) and [13.4](#), numbered 1–7, are the same as in the representative request types presented in [Table 13.2](#). In [Tables 13.3](#) and [13.4](#), the columns headed with the notation “PM” (standing for *politeness marker*, shaded in gray) refer to possible slots for a lexical politeness marker. The numbers offered in each of these PM columns represent the total number of responses from the baseline tests. The respondents to the baseline tests were instructed to fill in one example of either *kiitos* or *pliis* in the request types 1–7. Opting out of using a lexical politeness marker was not an option. In some cases, respondents either did not answer a question or answered the same question more than once, which is why the numbers in the “total” column are not equal. This further baseline data partially overlaps with our previous survey data (presented in [Table 13.1](#)), namely that *kiitos* is preferred in final position, whereas the preferred position for *pliis* is more mixed.

With baseline data offering us some hypotheses for consideration, the next stage is to attest these findings in quantitative fashion by looking at empirical, unelicited data. Specifically, the hypotheses in place for our naturalistic, unelicited data are that *pliis* is dispreferred in clause-final position, *kiitos* is preferred in clause-final position, and *pliis* is more likely than *kiitos* to be used clause-medially or at least as a clause-internal element. The two datasets used to test our claims comprise the remainder of the chapter.

## 13.5 Analysis

Discourse-pragmatic features are notoriously difficult to observe in adequate number in spoken language corpora to allow for variationist analysis, yet the aims of this study call for a variationist approach. A politeness marker like *pliis* is even further limited due to its narrow set of functions compared to more ubiquitous discourse-pragmatic features such as *like*, *you know*, and *innit*. Indeed, our investigations of the wide breadth of currently available collections of Finnish speech data revealed there are far too few instances of *pliis* to provide a basis for any type of quantitative analysis. To circumvent the issue of availability, yet with a need to use data featuring informal language use, we turned to CMC. Although it varies widely, depending on the format and users, CMC is characterized as blurring the division between written and spoken language (see, e.g., [Herring et al. 2013](#)).

Two different CMC datasets were used in the investigations. The first is an opportunistic, experimental collection, while the second is a corpus compiled from web-scraped text. In addition to being empirical, non-elicited, and quantitative, the two datasets present other assets, as well. The opportunistic dataset was a boon for our purposes in that it was a large set of data comprised almost exclusively of requests, as well as thousands of tokens of the lexical politeness markers *kiitos* and *pliis*, presenting a unique opportunity for obtaining quantitative data about the variation in the use of these elusive discourse-pragmatic features of Finnish. As such, we were able to analyze the entire dataset as examples of requests. With the web-scraped text, our method was necessarily different: owing to the sheer magnitude of the data, it was impossible to delineate only requests for analysis, so our tactic was to retrieve stretches of discourse that included the lexical politeness markers *kiitos* or *pliis*. There is thus a different type





### ‘Please don’t’

The construction in (5) consists of the verbal negator *et* ‘you don’t’.<sup>6</sup> The inflected negator can occur without a verb, as seen in (5), or it can co-occur with a verb in the connegative form, as seen in request type 5. The clitic particle *-han/hän* co-occurs in (5) with the verbal negator *et*. The *-han/hän* clitic particle, widespread in Finnish discourse, mostly occurs with second-person constructions. It has a number of functions, which include addressing a social equal or someone of lower social power, or emphasizing known information (VISK §1673). The second-person singular form, along with *-han/hän*, highlights the quest for solidarity (see [Yli-Vakkuri 2005](#)) and appeal to shared local norms in the advertising campaign.

The expected outcome with the transit dataset was that the respondents would show orientation toward perceived Helsinki style, demonstrated through content but also through localized variants of verbs, nicknames for public transportation, and through use of the word *pliis*, which our studies have shown to be associated with Helsinki via particular styles (see also [Lehtonen 2015](#): 134, 294). In feedback from native speakers of Finnish, the *ethän pliis* slogan has been characterized for us as clearly targeting a local Helsinki audience and as somewhat contrived or unnatural, clearly made for advertising purposes. Indeed, in ordinary signage about how to behave on Helsinki public transport, requests are expressed using the lexical politeness marker *kiitos kun* ‘thanks when’, which, as demonstrated in this section, was also the preferred choice among respondents to the 2012 Travel Peace campaign.

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<sup>6</sup> Verbal negation is inflected in Finnish according to person and number, rendering the negator an auxiliary verb (VISK §108). The complete verbal negator paradigm is as follows: *en* ‘I don’t’, *et* ‘you sg. don’t’, *ei* ‘he/she/it doesn’t’, *emme* ‘we don’t’, *ette* ‘you pl. don’t’, *eivät* ‘they don’t’.

The entries in the transit data ranged in length from three to approximately thirty words. The entries were downloaded from the transit company website, saved in a spreadsheet format, and categorized according to syntactic structure, positive or negative verbs, the presence or absence of a politeness marker, and the verbs used in the main clause. Obvious duplicate entries were removed, and entries in languages other than Finnish were not included in the analysis. After pruning, the transit data comprise 5,319 requests, of which 736 featured *pliiis* and 1,054 the heritage politeness marker *kiitos*.

There were seven main request types apparent in the transit data, listed in [Table 13.5](#), demonstrating a range of directness and grammatical composition.

Table 13.5

**Most frequent request strategies in transit data + lexical politeness markers**

	<b>Transit data request strategy</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><i>kiitos</i></b>	<b><i>pliiis</i></b>
1.	<i>Kiva kun / Mukava kun ...</i> * 'It's nice/great when ...'	1,551	0/1,551	0/1,551
2.	<i>Ethän / Ethän kiitos / Ethän pliiis ...</i> {Please} don't' [present indic.]**	944	14/944	712/944
3.	<i>Älä / Älä kiitos / Älä pliiis</i> '(Please) don't ...' [imperative]	828	679/828	22/828
4.	<i>Toivon / Toiveeni on / Toivoisin ...</i> 'I wish / My wish is / I would wish ...'	623	1/623	0/623
5.	<i>Tykkään ettei ...</i> 'I like when there is no ...'	515	0/515	0/515
6.	<i>Kiitos kun / Kiitos että ...</i> 'Thank you when / Thank you that ...'	344	344/344	0/3
7.	an imperative inflected with a positive verb, e.g., <i>Ole hiljaa</i> 'Be quiet'	226	6/226	0/226

*Note.* \* Other adjectives were also used in this general pattern, although *mukava* 'pleasant' and *kiva* 'nice' were the overwhelming majority. Other examples are *hieno* 'fine' and *kliffa* 'pleasant, chill'. \*\* In both request strategies 2 and 3 the position of *pliiis* is fixed in the transit data.

A number of points emerge in [Table 13.5](#). First, this data does not, for the most part, feature the request types presented in our baseline data in [Tables 13.3](#) and [13.4](#), based on previous research on Finnish requests. Further, the most frequent strategy was not the phrase *ethän pliis*, primed by the ad campaign, but a declarative statement, like example 1) in [Table 13.4](#), mirroring our request type 7. A full example of this request type is demonstrated in example (6).

( *On mukav kun kukaan ei Meuhkaa tai uhkaile bussissa*  
 be great when nobody NEG-3SG make-CONNEG or threaten bus-SG-INE  
 -  
 - CONNEG  
 ~  
 ~  
 ‘It’s great when no one gets upset or threatens on the bus.’

In the baseline data, the preferred slot for the statement request type *Täällä ei saa huutaa* ‘No yelling here’ was clause-final for *kiitos* and clause-initial for *pliis*. The results from the transit data offer a reality check in terms of lexical politeness markers and their relation to this request type: despite having been prompted to use a lexical politeness marker (specifically *pliis*) by the campaign, in 1,507 user-generated instances of this type of request, there was not a single use of either *kiitos* or *pliis*.

The formula supplied through the ad campaign, *ethän pliis*, was, however, the second most preferred strategy, appearing in 713 of the responses (see example (7)). *Ethän pliis* accounts for 75 percent of the responses where the clitic particle is used; *kiitos* only occurs fourteen times in this construction.

( *Ethän pliis ahdistel tai huuda bussissa*  
 NEG-SG2-hAn PM harass or shout-CONNNEG-2SG bus-SG-INE  
 ~  
 ~  
 ‘Please don’t harass others or shout on the bus.’

There is little doubt that this type of request would not, in fact, be preferred in more naturalistic (i.e., non-primed) conditions. Notwithstanding, when it comes to position of *pliiis*, example (7) seems accurate: when forced to choose for the baseline data, a majority of the respondents (57 percent) chose the same position for our sample request type 5, as shown in [Section 13.4](#). *Kiitos*, on the other hand, was clearly preferred in clause-final position in this type of request.

The third most frequent request type in the transit data was the negative imperative form *älä*, as shown in example (8) and as reflected in our baseline request type 4.

(8) *Älä*                    *kiitos*    *straidaa*                    *tai*    *skragaa*                    *metrossa*  
       don't-2SG            PM            urinate (colloq.)    or            fight (colloq.)    metro-SG-INE

'Please don't urinate or fight in the metro.'

In the transit data, moreover, 81 percent of the tokens of *kiitos* appeared in the position shown in (8), directly after *Älä* 'don't'. *Pliis* appeared only twelve times in this construction, underlining the fact that, unless prompted to do otherwise, *kiitos* is clearly a more natural or preferred choice than *pliiis*. The position of *kiitos* in this construction casts doubt, however, on our previous assumptions about *kiitos* and its position in a clause. With (8), we see clear evidence that *kiitos* is, in this data sample, overwhelmingly preferred in a clause-internal position. This outcome is addressed further in [Section 13.6](#).

Finally, it should be noted that the imperative (request type 2) was moderately frequent in the transit data, occurring a total of 380 times. What is interesting from the perspective of this chapter is that neither of the lexical politeness markers in focus were particularly common in imperatives: twelve imperatives contained *kiitos* (all in clause-

final position) and only three contained *pliis* (all positions). Further, conventionally indirect requests (*Voisitko ...?’Could you ...?’*), a canonical request type in the literature on requests – and the request type used as a prime in our previous studies – appeared only three times in the transit data.

In sum, there are three main findings from the transit data. First, the data demonstrate that requests or directives made from a neutral, third-person perspective seem to be an unmarked or natural choice for native speakers of Finnish (see also Yli-Vakkuri 2005; Peterson 2010). Second, there is a seeming contradiction in that the transit data shows a preference for *ethän pliis* but also for *älä kiitos*, indicating that position is not a telling enough factor on its own – a topic returned to in [Section 13.6](#). A further curious point is the seeming conflict between the findings in the baseline data, where *kiitos* was routinely favored in clause-final position, and the transit data, where *kiitos* was favored within a clause.

## 13.5.2 Corpus Data

The corpus data comes from the 112 million-word FinnishWAC corpus, currently subsumed under the larger FiTenTen corpus and available through the SketchEngine platform (Kilgarriff et al. 2014). The corpus consists of web-scraped text, which has been cleaned up by removing boilerplate and duplicate texts and annotated for parts of speech (for details, see Kilgarriff et al. 2010). Like the transit data, the FinnishWAC corpus derives from CMC but is not prompted by any ad campaign or slogan and as such offers balance to address some of the shortcomings of the transit data.

Owing to the breadth of this data, the method of data retrieval necessarily differed from the transit data: we narrowed the scope of our analysis to just the

elements that contained tokens of *pliis* and *kiitos*. To this end, we carried out an exhaustive retrieval of all instances of *pliis*, including spelling variants such as *pliiis* (where the elongated vowel shows emphasis). The total number of instances of *pliis* in FinnishWaC was 559. By contrast, *kiitos* is functionally and socially more versatile, occurring some 25,000 times in the corpus, the majority of tokens being used for thanking. To obtain a comparable dataset, we extracted a randomly selected sample of 2,500 instances of *kiitos*, from which we manually selected those occurring in requests, for a total of 106 tokens.<sup>9</sup> Finally, we classified the request strategies containing *pliis* and *kiitos* according to the criteria laid out in [Section 13.4](#). The distribution of different request strategies co-occurring with *pliis* and *kiitos* in the FinnishWaC is shown in [Table 13.6](#).

Table 13.6  
**Distribution of request types for *pliis* and *kiitos* in FinnishWaC**

request strategy	<i>pliis</i>	<i>kiitos</i>
<b>Imperative</b>	261	18
<b>NP</b>	183	66
<b>As the only sentence element</b>	51	0
<b>Interrogative</b>	30	8
<b>Declarative sentence (indicative mood)</b>	14	6
<i>toivon että</i> ('I wish that')	3	5
<b>other</b>	17	3
<b>Total</b>	559	106

*Note.* NP=noun phrase.

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<sup>9</sup> This sample can be used for analyzing the co-occurrence preferences of the markers but not their raw frequency in the data.

The most distinct outcome of the corpus analysis is that the repertoire of patterns differs from the transit data. In the FinnishWAC data, the main request type for *pliiis* is an imperative, baseline request type 2, as illustrated in example (9).

- (9) *Pliis keksikää jotain uutta*  
PM invent-IMP-2PL something new-PAR

‘Please, come up with something new.’

The 261 occurrences of this strategy make up almost half of all the occurrences of *pliiis* in the corpus data (46.7 percent), but it only occurs 18 times in the transit data (3.0 percent of the total). Moreover, the corpus data exhibits a significantly ( $\chi^2=95.5$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<.001$ ) higher proportion of clause-initial *pliiis* (43 percent) than either our baseline data (12 percent) or transit data (22 percent).

The second most frequent pattern in the corpus data was *pliiis* in conjunction with a verbless elliptical request consisting of a noun phrase, as in (10), which mirrors our baseline request type 1:

- (10) *Silti, kmoon, vähän tilannetajua, pliiis.*  
Still come on a little discretion-PAR PM

‘Still, come on, (show) a little discretion, please.’

With 183 occurrences (32.8 percent of the total number of occurrences of *pliiis*), this pattern is only slightly less frequent than the imperative construction in the transit data. As predicted by the baseline data, the final position is also clearly preferred in this construction.

Given the frequent occurrence of these two request types in FinnishWAC, it is surprising that neither is common in the transit data, as shown in the [previous section](#). The request type in (11) is attested in the transit data but is only marginal, whereas the type illustrated in (12) does not occur at all. Further, the FinnishWAC data does not show that *pliis* is primarily used clause-internally.

From the 106 applicable tokens of *kiitos*, two similar patterns emerged: an imperative (request type 2) and a verbless construction with a noun phrase (request type 1) as shown in example (11).

(11). *Hieman perusteluja, kiitos!*  
some reason-PL-PAR PM

‘(Give) some reasons, please/thank you!’

There were sixty-six instances of this request strategy in the corpus data, in which *kiitos* occurred in clause-final position. Our data show, then, that both *pliis* and *kiitos* are preferred clause-finally in this request type.

The second most frequent request type in the corpus data containing *kiitos* likewise mirrors the findings with *pliis*. Here, as shown in (12), an imperative request type occurs with *kiitos* in final position.

(12). *Kerro minull tiedätkö mitä käsite meioosi tarkoittaa, kiitos.*  
tell-IMP-2SG me-ALL know-2SG-Q what-PAR concept meiosis mean-3SG PM

‘Tell me if you know what the concept meiosis means, please/thank you.’

In the corpus data, *pliis* tended to occur in initial position in the same type of request as shown in example (12). This seeming contradiction points towards a pragmatic



distinction that exists aside from – or in addition to – request type, a topic that is addressed in the [next section](#).

## 13.6 Discussion

Our focus in this chapter has been on the clausal position of lexical politeness markers in Finnish requests, in an effort to shed light on the properties of the pragmatic borrowing *pliis* in Finnish. There are several reasons for the seemingly narrow focus on clausal position. First, an unanswered question remained from an earlier phase of our research, which we needed to reassess. Second, position was a reasonable question we could explore from the data types we have, given the challenges of obtaining adequate numbers of this type of variables for quantitative analysis. In addition, to maintain a measure of accountability, we needed a narrow focus to ensure that the research questions we pursued were valid for the type of data available to us.

The results are telling in that they contradict each other. Phase one of our study (Peterson and Vaattovaara 2014), as well as our elicited baseline data, demonstrated that *pliis* could be expected in a clause-internal position in requests, whereas *kiitos* would likely occur at the end of a clause. This expectation was not borne out in the data investigated for this chapter. Rather, we have opened up questions about Finnish that are probably best addressed through a formal syntactic overview – our main questions no longer appear to be a matter of variation based on a borrowed form versus a heritage form. For example, it would be crucial to address the relationship of *pliis* to other adverbial forms and their clausal behavior. In addition, an uninvestigated question here is that of word order: as a morphologically rich language, Finnish word order is relatively free compared to, for example, English, a factor which must be

addressed. At the moment the relationship of these structural properties and the observations of Terkourafi (2011) about the bleaching of borrowed politeness markers remain somewhat ambiguous, although our findings do point in this general direction.

There are a number of lessons learned from this study and our application of multiple datasets on one small area of variation. Foremost, it is critical that we followed up on our initial perceptual data findings concerning *pliis* and its apparent infiltration of the Finnish clause. Such a claim was in no way borne out in our subsequent datasets, which showed that the same kinds of clause-internal slots are available for *kiitos* as for *pliis*, as evidenced by the request type 4 *älä huuda* 'don't shout'.

A point to emerge from the data is that length of utterance may be a critical feature to explore when it comes to position of lexical politeness markers. This possibility came about by accident from our data: shorter requests, like those tested in our baseline data, appear to attract lexical politeness markers in a final position, whereas longer and more complex utterances seem to invite such features in the left periphery. This possibility needs to be tested with further research.

A final and important point is not surprising, considering the type of variable in focus. Our study has demonstrated the overall challenges of disambiguating the structural versus interpersonal functions of discourse-pragmatic particles. We chose to focus on clausal properties, because, given the data we had to work with, this was the only possibility; social and pragmatic information was not available to us. However, the outcome of our study clearly shows that position and pragmatic function cannot (and should not) be treated in isolation (see Crible and Degand in press; see also Degand, Broisson, Crible, and Grzech, [Chapter 4](#), this volume). While the analysis presented in this chapter was a necessary stage of our overall work on the nativization of *pliis* in

Finnish, it clearly demonstrated that an investigation of discourse-pragmatic variables needs to view syntax and pragmatics as intertwined features. For this reason, the next stage of our study is set to explore the pragmatic function of lexical politeness markers in relation to placement within in a clause (as per [Sato 2008](#) on the pragmatic meaning of different positions of *please* in English requests).

## 13.7 Conclusion

This chapter offers a perspective on foreign language contact and pragmatic borrowing (Kern, [Chapter 11](#); Andersen, [Chapter 12](#), this volume). The chapter offers an account of how a borrowed politeness marker, *pliis*, interacts with the heritage Finnish form, *kiitos*, as well as how an English-sourced pragmatic particle interacts with the grammatical structure of Finnish, namely Finnish requests. We wished to offer an optimally disciplined account of this question, keeping in mind that accountability in such studies is a challenge that must be built in from the design stage (Wiltschko et al. 2018).

As mentioned numerous times in this volume, one of the inherent challenges of working with discourse-pragmatic variables is their functional diversity. In addition, because these highly interactive elements are context-sensitive, we are bound to gain a different set of outcomes for each dataset we explore. For this reason, researchers are obliged to explore multiple datasets with the expectation that those datasets can and will contradict each other. For us, establishing the boundaries of claims we could make about language contact were especially important. Our initial investigations of *pliis* in Finnish requests led us to believe that, as a borrowing from English, *pliis* behaved in the

clause in a different fashion than the heritage form *kiitos*. As demonstrated through our further investigations, this does not appear to be the case.

With the aim of achieving optimal accountability, our starting point for this analysis was to gain elicited baseline data. We were then able to contrast the baseline data with non-elicited CMC data. Our choices with regard to the CMC data were twofold. First, we found an opportunity in an unusual dataset that was gathered for advertising purposes. A challenge with this data was restructuring it for analysis: this so-called opportunistic data took an enormous amount of time to transfer and clean up, and in the end, it was not satisfactorily naturalistic for our purposes. A related point is that embarking on a quantitative research study with a data-driven approach presented numerous challenges. The challenges we faced offered good support to starting a quantitative investigation with a sound study design. Still, the opportunistic data proved useful in demonstrating general tendencies of Finnish requests, and it offered insights into the behavior of *kiitos* and *pliis*. To counter the inadequacies of the opportunistic data, we turned to more naturalistic, non-elicited corpus data. The main problem with this dataset was its sheer breadth, which provided challenges in narrowing in on structures we could compare to our baseline and opportunistic data.

The investigation of the data in this chapter lent credibility to our initial findings that *pliis* is associated with certain style(s) that are perceptually connected with urban Helsinki as well as related issues such as solidarity, community, and positive politeness. It is clear also from the transit data that *pliis* is context-sensitive; it belongs only with a specific style – no speaker of Finnish would consistently use *pliis* as the default lexical politeness marker (Peterson and Vaattovaara 2014). In terms of clausal position, *pliis* might be more variable than *kiitos*, but our findings indicate that variation is not

satisfactorily described by request type and clausal position. Further investigations must explore the relationship of position, request type, and pragmatic meaning.

## *Appendix*

### **Key for Glossing Symbols (Adapted from Sorjonen 2001)**

- 1 1st person ending
- 2 2nd person ending
- 3 3rd person ending

<b>Case</b>	<b>Ending</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Approximate meaning</b>
ablative	-lt(a/ä)	ABL	'from'
accusative	no ending, -n, -t	ACC	object
adessive	-ll(a/ä)	ADE	'at, on'
allative	-ll(e)	ALL	'to'
essive	-n(a/ä)	ESS	'as'
genitive	-n, -den, -tten	GEN	possession
elative	-st(a/ä)	ELA	'out of'
illative	-Vn, -seen, -siin	ILL	'into'
inessive	-ss(a/ä)	INE	'in'
instructive	-n	INS	(various)
nominative	no ending	NOM	subject
partitive	-a/ä, -ta/ä, -tta/ä	PAR	partitiveness
translative	-ks(i)	TRA	'to,' 'becoming'

## Other Abbreviations

colloq	colloquial, informal
CON	conditional
CONEG	connegative
INF	infinitive
PL	plural
PM	lexical politeness marker
POS	possessive
PRO	pronoun
Q	interrogative
SG	singular