

Manual of Standardization in the Romance Languages



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5 Linguistic Norm in Linguistic Pragmatics

Abstract: In linguistic pragmatics norms can be seen as traditions that guide verbal interaction. In order to pin down the notion of tradition, we use a model of linguistic pragmatics that goes back to Eugenio Coseriu's system of linguistic competence and to the concept of tradition elaborated by Ramón Menéndez Pidal, thus bringing together linguistics and philology. The functioning of norms as traditions is illustrated with two examples: with a routine of verbal politeness and with a narration style that is based on the aspect system of Romance languages and functions as a cultural tradition.

Keywords: tradition, linguistic tradition, discourse tradition, polite request, question, verbal politeness, narration, tense, aspect, *imparfait narratif*

1 Linguistic pragmatics

From the standpoint of linguistic pragmatics, norms guide verbal interaction. The definition of these norms depends largely on the model that is chosen as a blueprint. In the following, linguistic pragmatics is understood as a culture-oriented discipline that is fundamentally based on traditions and norms, both linguistic and cultural.

1.1 Linguistic pragmatics as a culture-oriented discipline

Language and language use play an important part in the creation of norms and traditions. This dynamic point of view is central to linguistic pragmatics that can be understood as a perspective which explains linguistic structures and patterns through the dynamics of language use.¹ Following Coseriu (1988, 69), language is to be seen as an activity (*energeia*) that follows traditions and norms and at the same time continually generates new structures. If these innovations are successful, they can be integrated into the already existing system of traditions and therefore may change the norms of language use. The cultural nature of language lies in its traditionality: language is a cultural activity because it produces something new that can be learned and passed on as a tradition (Coseriu 1974, 92; 1988, 69). The essential idea is that culture generates traditions and accordingly a competence based on traditions is *per se* cultural or culture-oriented (Coseriu 1988, 65; Gardt

¹ For the idea of the pragmatic perspective see Fetzer (2012, 25s.) and Verschuereen (1995, 11, 13s.).

2003, 271). From this point of view, language use is based not only on linguistic norms but also on cultural norms and traditions. Language use and verbal interactions are situated at the interface of language and cultural traditions, and it is therefore an essential task for linguistic pragmatics to establish a clear-cut analytical distinction between linguistic traditions and cultural traditions.

1.2 Linguistic pragmatics as a tripartite system

In what follows, I propose a tripartite system of linguistic pragmatics that differentiates between three types of norms and goes back to Eugenio Coseriu's system of linguistic competence (1988). According to Coseriu (1988, 70), language use is a universal activity achieved by individuals with a specific language. Hence, linguistic competence can be analyzed on three levels: (1) the universal level of language use in general, (2) the historical level of speaking different languages, and (3) the individual level of context-dependent individual speech in specific communicative situations; discourse, texts, and speech acts as verbal interactions in context are situated on this level.

Tab. 1: Rules and traditions of speech (adapted from Coseriu 1988, 75).

<i>level</i>	universal level	historical level of languages	individual level of discourse and text
<i>rules and traditions</i>	universal principles and rules	linguistic traditions	discourse traditions

Following Coseriu, language use is guided by three types of knowledge that are located on three different levels: the universal, the historical and the individual level. On the universal level, we find universal principles and rules of verbal interaction that function as general guidelines of language use in all languages, e.g. the Gricean cooperative principle and its maxims (Grice 1989, 26–28). The historical level is related to specific languages and comprises the linguistic traditions of language, i.e. the linguistic knowledge that enables us to communicate in a particular language like Spanish, English or German. On the individual level, we find discourse traditions like cultural knowledge that guide verbal interactions in individual situations of communication. Discourse traditions play a key role in the selection of adequate linguistic expressions which allow the speakers to successfully perform a communicative task. Speakers follow cultural discourse traditions when they open up a conversation, ask a favor or tell a story. Considering that we speak of general rules or principles on the universal level, we use the term *tradition* in reference to the historical and individual level. The reason is that the norms located on the historical and individual level are both subject to change in time and are passed on

from generation to generation as traditions.² Linguistic rules of speaking a language – the syntax and the lexicon, both of which speakers have to be proficient in if they want to speak a certain language – are traditional in the sense that they remain stable to a certain degree but are at the same time open to variations and language change. On that basis, a language is a system of traditions that is passed down from one generation of speakers to the next. In a similar way, discourse traditions are a cultural knowledge that undergoes change in time from one generation to the other. The changes are mostly gradual and are realized in a continuum of family resemblances (Koch 1997, 43–45). Discourse traditions of asking a favor, greeting or telling a story are not only variable in different cultural communities, they are also subject to historical change. The tripartite system shows that the competence of language use comprises linguistic and cultural knowledge and is shaped by traditionality.

All three types of knowledge are omnipresent in verbal interactions where the speakers respect universal principles, follow the linguistic traditions of the specific language they use and follow the discourse traditions that seem appropriate to them. Therefore, linguistic pragmatics can be seen as a discipline with three fields (Schrott 2014, 9–12; 2015, 120–123):

Tab. 2: The three fields of pragmatics, adapted from Schrott (2014, 10).

<i>level</i>	universal level	historical level of languages	individual level of discourse and text
<i>rules and traditions</i>	universal principles and rules	linguistic traditions	discourse traditions
<i>fields of pragmatics</i>	universal pragmatics	pragmatics of linguistic traditions	pragmatics of discourse traditions

From a universal perspective, general pragmatics is concerned with general rules and principles of language use that are valid for all languages. From a perspective focused on particular languages and their linguistic traditions, the pragmatics of linguistic traditions studies linguistic structures and their functions. Finally, the pragmatics of discourse traditions explores the cultural knowledge that governs verbal interactions. In an analytical approach based on traditionality and normativity, it is important to clearly separate the three types. At the same time, the linguist has to be aware that all three knowledge types are closely interwoven in language use

² For the discussion of Coseriu's system in Romance linguistics see Schlieben-Lange (1983, 13–16, 138–140), Koch (1997, 45–47; 2008, 53s.), Oesterreicher (1997, 20, 23s.), Lebsanft (2005, 30; 2015, 100–104), Lebsanft/Schrott (2015, 19–24), Kabatek (2015, 49s., 57–59), and Schrott (2014, 8–10; 2015, 120–125).

to the effect that the three fields of pragmatics are, to a certain extent, a matter of focus. Therefore, all three levels, norms and fields have to be considered simultaneously, and it is the interaction of the three types of rules and traditions that has to be accepted as the focus of linguistic pragmatics.

The model elaborated by Coseriu not only gives a clear-cut distinction between the three types of rules and traditions, but it also offers a characterization of those norms and shows that each type of knowledge is linked to a different judgment type and rated according to a different category.

Tab. 3: Traditions and judgment types, adapted from Coseriu (1988, 8).

<i>level</i>	universal level	historical level of languages	individual level of discourse and text
<i>rules and traditions</i>	universal principles and rules	linguistic traditions	discourse traditions
<i>judgment types</i>	congruency	correctness	appropriateness

The principles of language use located on the universal level are assessed according to the category of *congruency* that includes e.g. the principles of cooperation, logical coherence and communicative trust. In contrast to this, linguistic traditions are evaluated according to the category of *correctness*. Every language can be used correctly when users comply with the traditions of the linguistic system or incorrectly when the language use does not conform to the traditions of the language, e.g. when a speaker is still learning a language and does not fully master the linguistic system. Finally, on the individual level, language use is judged according to its appropriateness: one and the same tradition of asking for help, greeting or making a joke can be completely acceptable in one situation but inappropriate in another communicative activity. These three categories are an important tool when describing and separating different types of norms.

However, the three verdicts not only distinguish different sets of norms between language and culture, they also form a hierarchical model. First of all, the three types of norms are independent of each other (Coseriu 1988, 86s.). This autonomy means that a linguistically correct utterance can be incongruent or inappropriate for a specific situation or discourse whereas linguistic incorrectness does not prevent an utterance from being congruent or appropriate. More important still, the three judgments form a unidirectional hierarchy. Thus, a lack of congruency can be overcome by linguistic traditions or by discourse traditions as the following examples show (Coseriu 1988, 117). Whereas in logic the negation of a negation corresponds to an affirmative assertion, some languages can cancel out that rule and use double negations as expressive affirmations (“We don’t need no education”). Some discourse traditions can have the same effect and override logical fallacies. This

effect can be achieved by the discourse tradition of quoting. In this vein, the utterance “The left horn of the unicorn is black” is illogical, but the utterance “Eugene says that the left horn of the unicorn is black” is congruent as the speaker merely quotes the opinion without asserting it (Coseriu 1988, 78, 117). In regards to the norms of linguistic correctness, these norms can be overruled by discourse, too. A popular example is the imitation of a foreign language, e.g. when the Britons in *Astérix* speak French using English syntax: the incorrectness of “Une romaine patrouille!” is, in this case, overruled by the discourse tradition of mockery (Coseriu 1988, 176s., quoting *Astérix chez les Bretons*). The only complex of norms that cannot be overruled are the norms of appropriateness. Congruency on the universal level cannot save a lack of appropriateness on the individual level, neither can linguistic correctness compensate the use of a flouted discourse tradition.

1.3 Rules, traditions and speech acts

The tripartite system of rules and traditions, functioning as norms of language use, can be connected to well-known models of linguistic pragmatics. The concept of language as an activity (*energeia*), and the model of the three fields of linguistic pragmatics already embrace the idea of the speech act.

The definition of speech act elaborated by Searle includes the idea of norms and rules from the very beginning (Searle 1969, 54–71). The successful performance of a speech act is linked to a set of conditions that have to be fulfilled and to norms that can be extracted from those conditions (Searle 1969, 54). A speech act, such as making a request or making a promise, demands not only that both interlocutors speak the same language and can understand each other, but also requires the fulfilment of social and communicative conditions (Searle 1969, 66s.; 2010, 9s., 73–76). These conditions refer to the propositional content of the utterance, to the state of mind of the speaker and his relation to the interlocutor, and these conditions further include that the speech act is well adapted to the speech situation and functions as a meaningful act (Searle 1969, 66s.). The conditions that have to be satisfied can be seen as the identifiers of different illocutionary types: each speech act type has its specific set of conditions (Searle 1969, 64–71). As a model, speech act theory is based on the default case of fulfilled conditions and respected norms, but the fact that language as an activity depends on norms also allows for the idea of failure or deception.³ So far, speech act theory elicits norms of language use mostly from the different dimensions of the speech situation, but this focus can be embedded in a broader social setting by including more complex social and cultural contexts and

³ The bending and breaking of norms is an important subject in linguistic pragmatics from the beginning; see Searle (1969, 62) on “insincere promises”, Grice (1989, 30s.) on violations of the maxims, and Lebsanft (2005, 30s.) on the historicity and flexibility of maxims.

their norms of action (Goffman 2010 [1971], 95–100, 103–105). This approach has the merit of not only describing the many ways in which norms of interaction can be violated but also the variety of sanctions that may follow and the possible “remedial interchanges” that can be started in order to re-establish cooperation (Goffman 2010 [1971], 108–112).

Turning back to the tripartite system of linguistic pragmatics, the conditions and norms linked to the different speech act types can be classified either as general rules or as discourse traditions. As Searle is mostly interested in universal pragmatics and in a universal system of speech acts, the listed norms are, for the most part, general rules and can be subsumed under the label of cooperation and communicative trust, e.g. the “sincerity condition” that implies that the speaker has the intention and will to perform a certain speech act. Yet this general character does not apply to all the conditions mentioned by Searle (1969, 66s.). In this way, conditions that specify a speech act like giving advice, greeting or asking questions strongly depend on cultural norms. Whether a piece of advice can count as an obligation or whether a knowledge deficit justifies a question is a matter that differs considerably in different cultural communities of the present and past. Following our blueprint of linguistic pragmatics, we can establish that speech acts follow general rules, linguistic traditions and discourse traditions. Furthermore, the successful performance of speech acts has to satisfy the judgment of congruency on the universal level, the norms of correctness on the level of specific languages and the norms of appropriateness on the individual level of texts and discourse.

2 Norms and traditions

2.1 Norms as traditions

In light of the model of linguistic pragmatics presented above, norms can be understood as general rules, as linguistic traditions and as discourse traditions. These three types are the three layers that form the norms of linguistic interaction.

The understanding of norms as traditions adopted in this pragmalinguistic approach is influenced by the concept of norm described by Coseriu (1974). Embedded in the triad of system, norm and speech (↗3), Coseriu underlines the traditionality of the norm. Following Coseriu, the norm encompasses the socially and culturally fixed patterns of speech which function as traditions of speech and mold verbal interaction in a speaker community (Coseriu 1974, 47s.). These traditions can be stronger or weaker: The weaker a tradition is, the bigger the chance that a new structure becomes an accepted variation that can modify an already existing tradition. On the contrary, the stronger a tradition is, the more it can resist innovations and variations (Coseriu 1974, 117). Thus, strong traditions have little room for variations whereas weaker traditions impose less constraint on the speakers and offer more room for variations.

In a perspective that focuses on the dynamics of language and language use, it becomes clear that norms can be conceived as traditions. The norms that shape a language have a history; they have been passed down from generation to generation, put into practice, adapted and changed. In that process, the norms have acquired traditional value and are respected by the speakers as traditions that are part of their identity. Norms are dynamic knowledge that continues to change and constantly produces new norms of verbal interaction. Norms are not only shaped by traditions, they *are* the traditions that speakers use at present. In that perception, norms can be seen as traditions in a *synchronic* perspective, and traditions are simply the other side of the coin. They underline the historicity of norms. Norms of language use are the historical result of language changes and have the prospect of changing again in the future. In that way, the concept of tradition allows us to capture the dynamic nature of norms.⁴ Therefore, norms will be interpreted as traditions in order to pin down their historical and dynamic character and to do justice to the concept of language as an activity in the sense of *energeia*.

2.2 Language, culture and tradition

The system of the three fields and perspectives of pragmatics introduced above shows that the concept of tradition is essential for language use. This is most obvious in the field of the pragmatics of discourse traditions. Discourse traditions are in a constant process of cultural evolution which is often much more visible than changes in the language system. Most speakers are very aware that traditions of greeting or asking for a favor are changing, but they are less aware of changes in the language system. However, the concept of tradition is equally important for the linguistic traditions that form language as a system. Following Coseriu (1974, 184), language as a system and tradition are intrinsically tied to each other:

“Die Sprache ist nicht zuerst System und dann Tradition oder umgekehrt, sondern sie ist gleichzeitig und in jedem Augenblick ‘systematische Tradition’ und ‘traditionelles System’” (Coseriu 1974, 184).

Paraphrasing Coseriu, there is no opposition between language as a system and language as a tradition. On the contrary: language is to be seen and understood at each moment in time simultaneously as a *systematic tradition* and as a *traditional system*. Linguistic traditions and discourse traditions have in common that the transition from innovation to tradition goes hand in hand with a process of integration into the already existing language system or configuration of discourse traditions. While linguistic traditions are integrated into the language system, discourse tradi-

⁴ For the concept of traditionality in linguistics and philology see also Lebsanft/Schrott (2015, 24–29).

tions are integrated into cultural configurations, into discourse domains and into the communicative repertoire of cultural communities.

Linguistic change in the language system and cultural change in the domain of discourse traditions can be understood as updating and as a continuation of traditions. Both tradition types are in a constant process of change. Therefore, neither changes on the level of linguistic traditions that form the language system nor changes on the level of discourse traditions are to be seen as a deviation from a fixed system. Quite the contrary: language change on the linguistic and cultural level is to be understood as a universal process where innovations form (new) traditions which can become more and more stable over time. In that perspective, tradition is a counterbalance to the plethora of variations that speakers constantly produce (Coseriu 1974, 91). From a pragmalinguistic point of view, the normative force of the discourse traditions is the most important one, since they shape verbal interactions in communication and thus are responsible for the linguistic patterns and structures that are selected in different types of interaction.

Linguistic traditions, as well as discourse traditions, can be characterized as historical, social and collective knowledge. This social characteristic implies that a tradition is currently being used in a community. Traditions therefore unite past and present; they mark not only the history of a speech community but also its actuality (Coseriu 1974, 52). Furthermore, traditions are a concept that link individuals and collectives because individual speakers learn and practice traditions as members of a linguistic or cultural community (Coseriu 1974, 38). Speakers use the traditions of their community due to the fact that they consider these traditions as their very own and as part of their identity. Linguistic traditions and discourse traditions together constitute the identity of the speakers (Coseriu 1974, 41, 59). As traditions of verbal interaction link past and present, they also generate identity in two ways by virtue of their double reference to past and presence. First, speakers consider the history of linguistic traditions and of the discourse traditions they use as part of their own history. Second, the experience of making oneself understood and of being understood, owing to the traditions of speaking, reinforces the feeling of belonging to a linguistic and cultural community: speakers consider the present practice of those traditions as an activity that strengthens a community and in the process their own identity as group members.

2.3 Central features of traditions

The concept of the norm as a tradition can be enriched by the features of traditionality that have been elaborated in Romance linguistics and philology (Lebsanft/Schrott 2015, 24–26, 29–31). In general, traditions convey cultural knowledge and practices; they are shaped by the interplay between individual innovations and the acceptance of cultural communities. In the context of Romance linguistics, the works of Ramón Menéndez Pidal offer a still topical and relevant view of traditions

and traditionality. Menéndez Pidal defines tradition as “*transmisión de conocimientos y prácticas con interés social o colectivo*” (1991 [1942], 458) and understands language use as the most traditional activity of human beings (Lebsanft/Schrott 2015, 24s.). For Menéndez Pidal, the concept of tradition explains changes in the language system as well as changes in the cultural traditions of speaking. In his view, language change is a social and cultural process molded by individual speakers. Individual acts of innovation at first exist as variations with optional character, i.e. the speakers can choose freely between them. If the speakers prefer one variation, this preference becomes a collective tendency that can turn into a tradition (Menéndez Pidal 1976 [1926], 526, 532, 544). It depends on historical and cultural contexts which option is chosen and finally becomes a norm, so that each tradition has its own history of interaction.

For Menéndez Pidal, the concept of traditionality cannot only be applied to language but also to particular text genres like the oral poetry of the Middle Ages (Lebsanft/Schrott 2015, 25–27). The texts of oral poetry go back to individual creations that are constantly modified and enriched with variations and transmitted as traditions by the cultural community (Menéndez Pidal 1991 [1942], 457). While the “fluid” traditionality of text types is valid only for specific literary genres, it holds true for many (non-literary) types of text and discourse like telling a story, telling a joke or making a compliment. Those types of discourse evolve in the interplay of individual innovation and adoption and are characterized by a richness of variation that gives them fluidity. The philological approach of Menéndez Pidal has the merit to distinguish the central features of traditions: the tension between individual creativity and the community that functions as an emergent system that constantly stabilizes and modifies traditions. Hence, the most relevant categories for the description of traditions are stability and conspicuousness, variation and the fact of being part of a more comprehensive structure.

The stability of a norm largely depends on the size of the community that applies a certain tradition. In general, traditions performed by a large number of speakers change gradually and slowly, whereas in smaller communities, an innovation is more easily adopted and leads to more variation and change in traditions (Menéndez Pidal 1991 [1942], 459). This is a general guideline for all types of tradition, however, there is a substantial difference between linguistic traditions and discourse traditions. Linguistic communities – the speakers of Spanish, German or English – normally encompass more members than the communities that are held together by the performance of certain discourse traditions. Therefore, discourse traditions are usually more accessible to variation and change as innovations can make their way more easily in the smaller groups that practice a specific discourse tradition.

Furthermore, the degree of firmness is closely linked to the number of variations a certain tradition offers: the more stable a tradition is, the smaller the number of variations. Variations that become accepted by a majority of speakers can change

a tradition. The acceptance of a variation depends on its status in the community. In the case of linguistic traditions, what counts is the status of a variety in the architecture of a language, e.g. the prestige of a diatopic, diastratic, diaphasic, or diamesic variety (Koch/Oesterreicher ²2011, 15–18). In the case of discourse traditions, the status is defined inside the cultural system of norms, e.g. in the system of verbal politeness or in the “communicative household” of a society (Luckmann 1988, 282; 1997, 12–14).

A third feature of traditions is the fact that they are often part of a bigger structure. It is evident that linguistic traditions are part of the language system as a complex unit of structures and paradigms. However, many discourse traditions are also part of a bigger unit, even if this relatedness is not as systematically traceable as the language system. Thus, discourse traditions can be seen as part of the “communicative household” of a cultural community and are structured and ordered by that household (Luckmann 1997, 12–14). The different degree of systematicity between the linguistic traditions of a language and the cultural traditions of a certain domain of discourse can be illustrated by the following example. If a German businesswoman wants to negotiate a contract with partners in Argentina in Spanish, she has to master a large part of the linguistic traditions of the Spanish language system in order to obtain a successful negotiation. She must have the language system, at least a large part of this system, at her disposal. If she has only rudimentary knowledge of the linguistic traditions, the conversation will not take place. On the other hand, if the businesswoman has a solid knowledge of Spanish but is not familiar with the discourse traditions that guide verbal interaction in Argentina, she may encounter difficulties. Nonetheless, it is still likely that she will be able to entertain a conversation and negotiate successfully with her partners. In order to fulfill the judgment of correctness on the level of the language system, the speaker needs a profound knowledge of the language system and has to master a large part of the linguistic traditions (Coseriu 1988, 89). On the level of discourse traditions, it is certainly helpful if a speaker is able to master with confidence the communicative household of discourse traditions as a whole. However, more often than not, it is sufficient to master the discourse traditions that apply in a specific situation in order to act according to the judgment of adequacy (Coseriu 1988, 89). In other words: linguistic knowledge is a linguistic competence defined by the traditions of a linguistic community, whereas discourse traditions are a competence that is defined by the different communicative situations and the competences they require.

3 Norms and traditions of verbal politeness

Many techniques of verbal politeness can be explained in the context of linguistic and cultural traditionality. A classic example in the field of linguistic pragmatics are utterances of the type *Could you please pass the bread?* which function as a

polite request. The core question is how this well-known communicative routine can be described in the meshing of language and culture. Based on Eugenio Coseriu's concept of the system of a language as a form of cultural competence, we raise the question whether such routines belong to the linguistic traditions of a language or whether this technique is to be seen as a cultural discourse tradition.

3.1 Questions as polite requests

Questions of the type *Could you please pass the bread?* function in many languages and cultures as polite requests. They are realized with interrogative structures, i.e. with the structure that is most closely linked with the speech act of asking a question. The use of questions as polite requests can be explained by the illocutionary profile of the question act. A question like *Who is the next plenary speaker?* implies a knowledge deficit on the part of the speaker and sends a signal to the interlocutor that the speaker expects them to fill the epistemic gap. A central feature of questions is that they are highly activating – the speaker wants the addressee to do something for him. But at the same time, questions do not name the action that is expected. The speaker does not verbalize the action, he simply lays open his knowledge deficit in the hope or expectation that the cooperative partner will fill the gap (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2001, 84–86). If we look at directives or volitions, which are often attained by imperatives, the technique is different. A volition like *Please tell me who the next plenary speaker is* explicitly names the desired action. Thus, questions and volitions both possess a highly activating illocutionary force but have a different degree of explicitness (Schrott 2014, 13–16, 18s.).⁵

Questions functioning as polite requests are frequently used in many languages and cultures, for example in German, Spanish, French and English.⁶ In these languages, questions functioning as polite requests are a communicative routine that is highly conventionalized (Coulmas 1981, 13). Utterances like *¿Puedes pasarme el pan, por favor?* or *Tu pourrais me passer le pain, s'il te plaît?* are questions that function as requests. These requests have an attenuated, polite character. In the following, we refer to polite requests that are accomplished with question acts as “directive questions”, i.e. as questions that have an affinity to the speech act type of the directive or volition (Escandell Vidal 1999, 3375–3376). Directive questions seem to give options between a positive and a negative answer (Lakoff 1973, 298;

⁵ For the discussion concerning the relation between questions and volitions see Searle (1969, 66s.) who categorizes the question as a subtype of the directive, and Schrott (2014, 14–16) who gives arguments in favor of a clearer distinction between questions and volitions. For the concept of the indirect speech act used in order to explain directive questions, see Searle (1979, 43–48).

⁶ See Brown/Levinson (1987, 132–142) for directive questions as a technique of verbal politeness in English, Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2001, 33–52, 85) for the polite request in French; the use of “preguntas directivas” in Spanish is discussed by Escandell Vidal (1999, 3975–3978) and Briz (2004, 76).

Leech 1983, 108, 132). It is clear that in the case of the conventionalized polite request, the option given is more fiction than fact. Nevertheless, a question like *Kannst du mir (bitte) das Brot geben?* does not explicitly impose the action on the interlocutors but suggests that they themselves will infer the illocutionary value of the request. In spite of the conventionalized character, the optionality of the question is not entirely lost, as questions of this type are exclusively realized with interrogative structures that have the strongest elective affinity to the speech act of question. The implicitness of the volition expresses respect for the addressee's autonomy and therefore functions as a technique of verbal politeness.⁷ This optionality does not exist in volitions like *Pásame el pan* that explicitly name the desired action and refer to the addressee as a person who has to execute the speaker's will.

3.2 Polite requests as a discourse tradition

After presenting directive questions as a communicative routine, the next step takes us to the tripartite model of linguistic pragmatics: the aim is to get a precise idea of the rules or traditions that characterize this routine. As we find this routine in a lot of languages, it may seem plausible that this is a universal rule or principle of language use. However, studies in intercultural pragmatics have shown that directive questions are not used as routines of verbal politeness in all languages,⁸ and we can exclude the status of a universal rule that would exist in all languages and cultures.⁹ Therefore, the central question is to decide whether the type *Could you bring us some coffee?* is a linguistic tradition that exists in different languages or a discourse tradition that exists as a norm of politeness in several cultural communities.

Polite requests like *¿Puedes pasarme el pan?* consist of linguistic structures that form part of the linguistic traditions of various languages: the interrogative structures are the linguistic material on which the routine is based. However, the selection of this material is guided by cultural norms. With respect to our model of linguistic pragmatics and its subdivision into two types of traditionality, we can conclude that the directive question does not belong to the linguistic traditions of specific languages but is to be seen as a widespread discourse tradition that is used in several languages. The directive question is a discourse tradition and a norm that selects specific linguistic structures – namely, interrogative structures. As a routine, the polite request is culturally determined and belongs to a set of discourse tradi-

⁷ For the functioning of polite requests in the context of face and face-work see Brown/Levinson (1987, 61–63, 65–74, 102, 130–132).

⁸ Wierzbicka (2003, 32–37; 2010, 50–52) points out that polite requests of the type *Can you pass the salt?* are significantly less used in Polish and Russian, as optionality is a less important value in these speaker communities. On Polish see also Ogiermann (2012, 43–45).

⁹ Wierzbicka (2003, 203s.; 2010, 50–52), Schrott (2014, 14–16).

tions that constitute the techniques of verbal politeness in a cultural space that encompasses various languages.

How can we link the directive question to the system of norms and judgments (Table 2) that distinguishes general rules, linguistic traditions and discourse traditions and, along with them, the judgments of congruency, correctness and appropriateness? As a cultural technique, the directive question is exclusively achieved with interrogative structures and thus specializes in a very specific set of linguistic traditions. The usage of the interrogative structures respects the norms of linguistic correctness, and there is no conflict or tension between discourse traditions and linguistic traditions. However, the concept of realizing a request with a question that supports the fiction of a free choice between different options could be seen as a violation of the cooperative principle and its maxims, especially with the *Maxim of Manner* and its norms of perspicacity that banish ambiguity (Grice 1989, 27). If we consider fictional optionality as a possible source of ambiguity, the discourse tradition of the polite request could be in conflict with the general rules of language use. The fact that directive questions are rarely ambiguous is due to the extreme conventionalization of this technique which ensures the clarity of the speech act: Here, conventionality is the antidote to ambiguity.

4 Norms and traditions of narration

The passing of time and actions in the past are extralinguistic phenomena which are expressed in texts through linguistic structures. In many ways, the linguistic structures of different languages – their tense and aspect systems – are not only a reflection of real events, but also an interpretation of the events: speakers can choose between different tenses and aspects and can form the past in different ways. At the same time, speakers can also opt for different techniques of narrating the past: they can depict events in their chronological order or change the sequence of events. Therefore, narrations are a domain where linguistic traditions – like tenses and aspects – and discourse traditions – in this case: cultural techniques of narration – are closely interwoven. The following case study refers to different traditions of narration in French that make use of the tense-aspect system in a creative way.

4.1 *Passé simple* and *imparfait* in narrative structures

On the level of linguistic traditions the French past tense system is characterized by the opposition between perfective and imperfective aspect. The perfective aspect presents actions as limited in time with a clear beginning and/or ending. For this reason, the perfective aspect is the ideal form when it comes to expressing sequen-

tial events. In contrast to this, the imperfective aspect presents a past event as being in progress in a past situation. The event belongs to the past, it clearly has a beginning and an end but those limits in time are blanked out and the focus is on the action in progress. In French, the imperfective aspect is conveyed by the *imparfait*, whereas the perfective aspect is expressed by the *passé simple* and in some contexts by the *passé composé*. In written literary texts, which we analyze here, the *passé simple* and the *imparfait* are used as aspectually marked forms that represent the opposition between perfective and imperfective aspect. In light of our model of linguistic pragmatics, the perfective and imperfective aspect are to be considered as linguistic traditions of the French language. In order to comply with the judgment of correctness, the speakers have to use the verbal forms according to their aspectual profiles.¹⁰ The following example illustrates how temporal outlines are shaped and transformed by both forms:

“Après un peu d’attente au bout d’un couloir, un vieillard bien mis, frais comme un gardon, s’était présenté au bras d’une nurse. Gloire l’avait embrassé. Mademoiselle, avait dit le vieillard, vous êtes absolument charmante mais je ne crois pas que nous ayons encore été présentés. La nurse en arrière-plan *secouait* la tête. Tiens, papa, avait dit Gloire, je t’ai apporté du cognac. La nurse en arrière-plan *secoua* la tête dans l’autre sens” (Jean Echenoz, *Les grandes blondes*, Paris, Minuit 1995, p. 85).

Gloire pays a visit to her father who lives in a retirement home. The text describes how the nurse shakes her head two times: the first time, the shaking of the head is expressed with imperfective aspect, the second time with perfective aspect. Both actions are not identical. The imperfective aspect expresses that the nurse is already shaking her head when the old man welcomes Gloire without recognizing her. In contrast to that relation of simultaneousness, the use of the perfective aspect works out a different temporal setting: when the nurse hears Gloire say that she brought her father cognac, her reaction is to shake her head in disapproval. The perfective aspect, its nuance of a starting action, makes all the difference and demonstrates that we have a succession of events. The shaking of the head is a reaction that follows Gloire’s words.

After illustrating the different temporal contours of perfective and imperfective aspect, the follow-up question is how both aspects function in narration. First of all, narrative structures can be defined as text units that express a sequence of events in time: one event happens after the other in chronological order. Analyses of narrative texts clearly show that the perfective aspect is the ideal candidate for expressing sequences in time whereas the imperfective *imparfait* cannot establish chronological order. The reason is that the perfective aspect presents actions as limited in time and these limits offer the basis for a consecutive sequence of events.

¹⁰ The opposition of perfective and imperfective aspect is commented upon by Togeby (1982, 318–320), Becker (2010a, 83–86, 92), and Schrott (2011, 140–142, 145–147).

The following text offers a typical example of a narrative sequence built by perfective forms:

“Kastner *s’endormit* assez rapidement. Il *s’éveilla* très vite aussi, deux heures plus tard, se *tourna* deux fois dans son lit sans trouver le sommeil, *ralluma* le plafonnier puis *tenta* de reprendre un ouvrage de science fiction dont les tenants lui échappaient encore plus que les aboutissants” (Jean Echenoz, *Les grandes blondes*, Paris, Minuit 1995, p. 13).

The example shows that the linguistic tradition used for narration in French is the perfective aspect and that the *passé simple* is the right choice if we want to express sequence in time.

4.2 The *imparfait narratif* as a discourse tradition

However, the tradition that the perfective aspect and hence the *passé simple* is used to establish sequences of actions in time is contradicted by narrative texts in which we have good reason to expect the *passé simple* but are confronted with the *imparfait* instead:

“Cela fait il *retira* d’un placard une couverture qu’il *étendit* sur le canapé avant de se glisser dessous en compagnie d’un ouvrage intitulé *How to disappear completely and never be found* (Doug Richmond, Citadel Press, New York, 1994). Mais à peine avait-il ouvert ce livre qu’il le *refermait*, *pressait* l’interrupteur, et six secondes plus tard il *dormait*” (Jean Echenoz, *Les grandes blondes*, Paris, Minuit 1995, p. 48).

At the beginning of this example, the subsequent actions are expressed by the *passé simple*, as is to be expected.¹¹ Yet, at the end of the text, three actions that make sense only as sequential actions are realized with the imperfective *imparfait* (*refermait*, *pressait*, *dormait*): Salvador closes the book, switches off the light and falls asleep. This interpretation as a sequence is contrary to the aspectual semantics of the *imparfait* that cannot be used for sequences in time. At first glance, the use of the *imparfait* could be understood as an incorrect use of the imperfective form that violates the linguistic traditions of the language system. However, this is not the case. The explanation is that the *imparfait* in the last example represents a technique invented in the early 19th century that consists of using the *imparfait* in narrative sequences in which it was hitherto not accepted. This use provokes an effect of semantic collision that changed the routines of narration in the 19th century. The so-called *imparfait narratif* had – and still has – the effect of creating a contrast between an imperfective aspect that suppresses the temporal limits of an action and

¹¹ For the characterization of the *passé simple* and its use in narration see Togeby (1982, 319), Becker (2010b, 19–21), and Schrott (2011, 145–147).

a context dominated by a chronological structure that claims a perfective form.¹² Therefore, the *imparfait narratif* bares no change in the aspectual system but in the technique of narration (Blumenthal 1986, 102; Bres 2005, 9, 31–49; Schrott 2011, 160s.). Instead of reinforcing the given chronological structure with a perfective form, the text structure is revolutionized with an imperfective form that dissolves the chronological order and creates a new technique of narration.

The case study of the *imparfait narratif* shows how linguistic and discourse traditions interact and how this interaction changes the norms of narration. The *imparfait narratif* is a discourse tradition that uses the imperfective aspect in a way that contradicts the norms of the aspect system and the opposition of the perfective and imperfective aspect. However, this violation of the aspect system is justified by the produced effect, which helps to create a new technique of narration. On a more abstract level, the case of the *imparfait narratif* shows that in the system of norms – general rules, discourse traditions and linguistic traditions – the correctness of the linguistic traditions can be overruled by discourse traditions as a cultural technique. Thus, the *imparfait narratif* confirms the finding that discourse traditions can override linguistic correctness by creating new traditions of language use.

5 Conclusion

The concept of tradition is essential for linguistic pragmatics as language use follows two traditions: the linguistic traditions of languages and the discourse traditions that characterize the cultural groups in which interactions take place. If we understand language as a dynamic system and as an activity, the norms of language and language use are essentially dynamic. In this light, norms are not only rooted in traditions or shaped by traditions, they *are* the traditions that guide verbal interaction. The concept of tradition has the advantage of widening the conceptional scope of norms, and it also shows that norms can have very different degrees of complexity, ranging from a simple communicative routine to a complex narrative structure.

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¹² This effect is described by Togeby (1982, 341–345), Blumenthal (1986, 49–51), Pollak (²1988, 124–144), and Weinrich (⁶2001, 135–140, 144–146).

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