The French request formula "s'il vous plait" is a formulaic sequence of conventionalized indirectness. Its literal reading would be actually ungrammatical in a great many instances, since the pronoun "il" can only be an impersonal pronoun that requires a "logical subject" as in "il est interdit de fumer" 'it is forbidden to smoke'. However, the phrase has been very common since early Old French, where it was used with or without the impersonal pronoun "il". Mathieu's (2006) proposal that Old French had quirky subjects, i.e. subject with non-nominative case, may explain the relevant difference between Old French and Modern French grammar. In other words, the Modern French formula has preserved a surface string whose internal structure isn't grammatical any more.

A broader point I wish to make here, adumbrated in Hansen & Waltereit (2006), is that conventionalized indirectness can turn into literal meaning if (and only if) the phrase becomes ungrammatical due to independent changes occurring in the language.