



A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Making Request Among Sudanese learners at Sudan University for Science and Technology

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Abstract

This study aims to understand how advanced English language learners in Sudan employ request strategies. The study's individuals are university-level English language learners. The testing instrument used is "discourse completion tasks". Following Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) classification of request methods, the participants' replies were examined. Based on the data, conventional indirect techniques are the most utilised type of tactics in both formal and informal cases. The study recommends that advanced English language students know the sociolinguistic aspects of communicative competence, and teachers and lecturers should educate their students that Sentence forming alone cannot establish a conversation. Still, they need to know the social and cultural aspects of communication and other recommendations.

Introduction

Today, the main goal of language learning and instruction is to increase students' communicative ability. Being able to

speak and understand a language requires language proficiency and the capacity to use language proficiency in social and cultural contexts. Learners must apply their vocabulary and grammatical skills correctly based on the situation and the audience they are addressing to communicate in the target language effectively. This pragmatic skill is described as an activity using words like requests, excuses, grievances, invites, etc.

Statement of the Problem

Effectively expressing requests is important and calls for politeness tactics influenced by some variables. Since executing requests is difficult for language learners, students' proficiency indicates how well their society, languages, manners, and culture have been ingrained. A pragmatic mistake might result in serious issues ranging from straightforward miscommunication to complete breakdowns.

Theoretical Framework

Definition

among the most studied aspects in the areas of cross-cultural pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics has been the speech act of requesting. More specifically, an illocutionary act whenever the speaker requests that the hearer do a certain action to assist the speaker (Sifianou 1999; Trosborg 1995). Reiter (2000) claims that a directed speech act is an attempt by the speaker to persuade the hearer to act, i.e., to steer the hearer towards the pursuit of a goal, usually the speaker's objective.

Request and Politeness

A request attempts to impose something on the addressee, as stated by Yong-jue (2008); hence, politeness is pertinent to this research. A vast quantity of writing has been written about politeness over the years. In general, courtesy comes in several forms. Two types of politeness were identified by Levinson and Brown (1987), depending on which face people want to save:

positive politeness, this maintains the hearer's good image and shows support from the audience. People demonstrate good politeness by employing conversational techniques like slang words, indirect requests, and casual accents.

Negative politeness, this shows respect, keeps the hearer from seeming bad, and emphasises the needs and desires of others. When the speaker and the listener are socially apart, negative politeness happens. As mentioned in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), direct requests are detected under “CCSARP (Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project)”

Request Strategies

The speaker violates the recipient's right to be free from imposition by making a request. The requester can perceive it as a power play or an infringement of their right to free will. According to Blum (1989), using indirect tactics instead of direct ones is one approach for the speaker to lessen the imposition. A more straightforward request will be more transparent and need less work for the recipient to comprehend. The two approaches listed above can be used to characterise the directness scale; The speech act hypothesis states that the same speech act may be accomplished via the use of either direct or indirect Strategy.

Direct Strategy: according to Holtgraves (1986) it is defined as statements when the speaker's intention (speaker meaning) and the propositional substance (sentence meaning) of the statement are consistent.

Indirect Strategy: It is a statement in which the propositional content and the speaker's meaning are not the same, according to Clark (1979). As a result, indirect methods have several meanings, whereas direct strategies only have one meaning or illocutionary force.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study presented here is to evaluate the English language learner's pragmatic competence at both the tertiary and postgraduate levels in relation to the speech acts of requests.

The study attempts to achieve the following aims:

- Shedding light on the importance of knowing how to use polite requests for advanced learners of English
- Stating that women are more likely than men to employ indirect requests to lower-power people.

Questions of the study

The study attempts to answer questions such as:

- Is developing pragmatic competence in learners of “English as a foreign” learner important?
- Do the subjects make request politely with satisfied knowledge about the pragmatics of English language requests?
- Are the subjects’ responses in formal situations differ in comparison with those used in informal contexts?
- Are there significant differences in making requests between males and females of the study population?

Materials and Methods

The data were collected in October 2021. A group of eighty-six students were recruited from two faculties of Education. The students were divided into the above mentioned three groups. All of the subjects are English major students. They are all Sudanese natives. Their ages are between seventeen and thirty-nine and have all studied English as a school subject for at least six years before college. They have all been taught the same syllabus before college. The researcher had twelve different situations with different power and social distance given to eighty-six students learning English as a foreign language. The researcher commented on each table of percentages shedding lights on observations and differences between the groups’ scores which has been analyzed by using the Microsoft Excel Statistical Analysis Package for the data.

Tools

The discourse completion test (DCT) is the main technique to collect the data of the study. The main advantage of this technique is that it is an appropriate data collection instrument and provides clearly defined instructions for their correct use in reducing the probability of errors occurrence and subjective judgement of these errors by the examiner. The female students are forty-one in Bachelor program from the Gazera university, and the males are twenty-six from Sudan University beside 9 Master students from Sudan university.

The Results

Using the request techniques put forward by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and the CCSARP (“Cross-Cultural Speech Acts Realization Project”) coding scheme, the data analysis approach was carried out qualitatively. Three levels of directness were identified by the coding scheme: direct, traditionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect. Request strategy categories were recognised as created by the participants using this scale.

The Inferential Hypotheses

The inferential hypotheses of the study can be stated as the data collected in DCT is treated statistically through the analytical inferential statistics.

Hypotheses of the Study

The study is conducted to test the following hypotheses:

- Developing pragmatic competence in learners of English as a foreign learner is important.
- The subject's knowledge about the pragmatics of English language requests is limited.
- There is a significant difference in the use of request between males and females of the study population.

Descriptive Statistics

According to (Blum-Kulka et al.,1989) categories, "D" stands for direct request, "CI" is for conventionally indirect request and "NCI" is for non-conventionally indirect request.

A: Female Bachelor Responses to Prompts

Table 1 below shows the results of the subjects' responses to prompt one in which they were asked to make a request spontaneously according to the situation. It is clear that the participants favor conventionally indirect request to non-conventionally indirect one (hints) and direct request. They prefer indirect use of request which can be recognized by making suggestions or inquiries and it is the most dominant feature within columns 77%. No one makes the request using the politest strategy (non-conventionally indirect request) and those who use direct request are representing 18% and there is 5% of the whole number give no response.

Table 1: Female subjects' responses to prompt 1

F/R BA	CI	D	NCI	NA	TOTAL
P1	30	7	0	2	39
	77%	18%	0%	5%	100%

In the second situation, all participants' response to the prompt. Those who use the non-conventionally indirect request represents 5%, the same as who response directly to the situation. In the column of the conventionally indirect request, it is obvious that most of the subjects prefer using suggestions or questions in requesting since the percentage is 90%.

Table 2: Female subjects' responses to prompt 2

F/R BA	CI	D	NCI	NA	TOTAL
P2	35	2	2	0	39
	90%	5%	5%	0%	100%

All subjects in the third situation show how they can make request freely accept only one who represents 3% from the total number. The largest percentage is of the share of the conventionally indirect request which is 62%. 8% use the politest way whereas 28% regarded as they are direct in making request.

Table 3: Female subjects' responses to prompt 3

FR BA	CI	D	NCI	NA	TOTAL
P3	24	11	3	1	39
	62%	28%	8%	3%	100%

In the fourth situation, most of the participants have great tendency towards using direct strategy (59%). Those who follow the strategies of use inquiries or proposals are 15 ones out of 39, (38%) beside only one from the whole who use the politest category "non-conventionally indirect request" (3%).

Table 4: Female subjects' responses to prompt 4

F/R BA	CI	D	NCI	NA	TOTAL
P4	15	23	1	0	39
	38%	59%	3%	0%	100%

5% of the participants give no response for the situation. The CI column takes the lions share 51% the next column is the(D). 10% use hints to express the request and the usage of the direct strategy is regarded as the second one after CI, (33%).

Table 5: Female subjects' responses to prompt 5

F/R BA	CI	D	NCI	NA	TOTAL
P5	20	13	4	2	39
	51%	33%	10%	5%	100%

The table below shows the results of the subjects' responses to the sixth prompt which explains that all subject's response to it. 15% who request directly, concerning indirect strategies, there 3% in the NCI and majority is in CI one.

Table 6: Female subjects' responses to prompt 6

F/R BA	CI	D	NCI	NA	TOTAL
P6	32	6	1	0	39
	82%	15%	3%	0%	100%

In the below seventh prompt, there is only one who doesn't respond to the situation, and it is 3% of the total. The biggest percentage is for the first column of the polite request strategy CI, it is 74%. The second column of the direct request has the second statistic within the rest, 23%.

Table 7: Female subjects' responses to prompt 7

F/R BA	CI	D	NCI	NA	TOTAL
P7	29	9	0	1	39
	74%	23%	0%	3%	100%

The number of those who use hints, or the politest way of requesting is the same as of those don't give response (13%). Those who ask or request directly are 6 out of 39, It means 15% of the total. The first column of those who use suggestions or questions to construct the request (CI) reflects that they are the majority between the three column (59%).

Table 8: Female subjects' responses to prompt 8

F/R BA	CI	D	NCI	NA	TOTAL
P8	23	6	5	5	39
	59%	15%	13%	13%	100%

In the ninth situation, 10% of the participants give no response. Most of them form the request following the polite way CI 59%. It means that they prefer using a suggestion or inquiry. Those who are direct in requesting come on the second- ranking 28% whereas using hints represent by the lowest number of the subjects, 3%.

Table 9: Female subjects' responses to prompt 9

F/R BA	CI	D	NCI	NA	TOTAL
P9	23	11	1	4	39
	59%	28%	3%	10%	100%

3% of the subjects in the below tenth table give no response in the situation. The great preference is in CI classification; it is 69% out of the total. Direct request strategy is in the second level 23%. Using the most in direct third type of classification is the fewest 5%.

Table 10: Female subjects' responses to prompt 10

F/R BA	CI	D	NCI	NA	TOTAL
P10	27	9	2	1	39
	69%	23%	5%	3%	100%

The table below shows the classification of the subjects' responses to prompt eleven. There is only one who does not respond to this situation and only one who use a clue in responding to it, they are each 3% in the statistic. Those who use the direct way are less than those using CI strategy. 64% in the first indirect column and 31% in the direct one.

Table 11: Female subjects' responses to prompt 11

F/R BA	CI	D	NCI	NA	TOTAL
P11	25	12	1	1	39
	64%	31%	3%	3%	100%

In the last, twelfth situation, the highest percentage is in the CI column, the indirect request in which the requester use a suggestion or inquiry to achieve his goal (67%), then the direct way in requesting which means that they request directly without using suggestions, questions, or hints (23%). The lowest preferable strategy is NCI (8%). 3% of the total give no response.

Table 12: Female subjects' responses to prompt 12

F/R BA	CI	D	NCI	NA	TOTAL
P12	26	9	3	1	39
	67%	23%	8%	3%	100%

B: Male Bachelor to Prompts

In the first situation, in which the participants were asked to write down their responding to it freely and spontaneously, those who followed the polite way and avoid face threatening in their style are 64% ,56% use CI strategy and 8% use NCI. The rest of the subjects who are asking directly to represent 36% of the whole.

Table 1: Male subjects' responses to prompt 1

M/R BA	CI	D	NCI	TOTAL
P1	14	9	2	25
	56%	36%	8%	100%

In the second situation in the below table, the number of those who prefer being direct or using hints are equal (8%). Almost all subjects' requests are under the CI column, using questions or suggestions is the most obvious feature in the below table (84%).

Table 2: Male subjects' responses to prompt 2

M/R BA	CI	D	NCI	TOTAL
P2	21	2	2	25
	84%	8%	8%	100%

No use of hints or clues in requesting in the third situation. All subjects' responses are between CI and D columns. Most of the participants use the conventionally indirect request strategy when requesting in such situation (80%). The rest of the subjects' request directly without awareness of any face threatening (20%).

Table 3: Male subjects' responses to prompt 3

M/R BA	CI	D	NCI	TOTAL
P3	20	5	0	25
	80%	20%	0%	100%

In the fourth prompt, all responses are under the classification of the two columns of the direct request or the conventionally indirect request. 60% of them request in an impolite way, directly without any kind of introduction and 40% use the polite way of using suggestions or questions.

Table 4: Male subjects' responses to prompt 4

M/R BA	CI	D	NCI	TOTAL
P4	10	15	0	25
	40%	60%	0%	100%

The fifth table below shows that participants' great desire of using indirect strategy in requesting. 56% is the result of the responses' statistics is in the CI column. The table also shows that 32% of them ask or request directly or impolitely any one of polite, indirect methods. Those in NCI column are 32%.

Table 5: Male subjects' responses to prompt 5

M/R BA	CI	D	NCI	TOTAL
P5	14	8	3	25
	56%	32%	12%	100%

80% in CI column. It means that there is a tendency toward using the type of polite request conventionally in direct one. Using questions or inquiries is the most desirable style within the participants. The remaining students use the directness in their request, and no one use hints or clues.

Table 6: Male subjects' responses to prompt 6

M/R BA	CI	D	NCI	TOTAL
P6	20	5	0	25
	80%	20%	0%	100%

All responses in the seventh prompt are classified between CI and D columns. It means that there is using of hints in making the appropriate request. Subjects who request politely represent 64% and those who don't aware of making the requested embarrassed represent 36%.

Table 7: Male subjects' responses to prompt 7

M/R BA	CI	D	NCI	TOTAL
P7	16	9	0	25
	64%	36%	0%	100%

The eightieth situation shows that most of the subjects use the polite, indirect strategy which displayed by suggesting or making questions (56%). The impolite direct strategy is adapted by 28% of the participants and the share of NCI column is 16%.

Table 8: Male subjects' responses to prompt 8

M/R BA	CI	D	NCI	TOTAL
P8	14	7	4	25
	56%	28%	16%	100%

Responses are divided between the three types of requesting responses in the below situation. Most of the participants use indirect polite way in making the request. 52% use the conventionally indirect way which is displayed by suggesting and making questions. 12% use non-conventionally indirect request which is shown by using hints or clues. The remaining 36% is of the share of the impolite direct strategy.

Table 9: Male subjects' responses to prompt 9

M/R BA	CI	D	NCI	TOTAL
P1	13	9	3	25
	52%	36%	12%	100%

There is no use of hints in the below tenth situation. The two strategies that used are the polite conventionally indirect request and the impolite type one direct request. 80% is in the CI column and 20% is in the direct one.

Table 10: Male subjects' responses to prompt 10

M/R BA	CI	D	NCI	TOTAL
P10	20	5	0	25
	80%	20%	0%	100%

The table below shows the results of the subjects' responses to prompt eleven. All of them respond to it. The fewest usage of indirectness is in the NCI column (4%). CI requests represents 64% and the direct strategy 32%.

Table 11: Male subjects' responses to prompt 11

M/R BA	CI	D	NCI	TOTAL
P11	16	8	1	25
	64%	32%	4%	100%

The subjects in the below table do not use hints or clue to display their request. 56% of them request politely using suggestions and questions. 44% request directly without using any of the three different ways "hints, suggestions or questions".

Table 12: Male subjects' responses to prompt 12

M/R BA	CI	D	NCI	TOTAL
P12	14	11	0	25
	56%	44%	0%	100%

Discussion

The findings of the data analysis came to light that comparing and contrasting the results obtained with Request on the subject area, The students' request' forms of the situations. The results displayed that the majority of the participants tend to request politely using conventionally indirect request strategies "CI" with different formulas within genders. Using suggestions and questions in requesting is more frequently within female in comparison with the whole males, but males who are doing MA use non-conventionally indirect "NCI" request which is by using hints in order to avoid requestee imposition. Therefore, and the direct "D" form is rarely used. Students need to develop pragmatic competence in real English situations as they are obviously affected by their religion and the culture.

Findings

The study concluded with the following findings:

- The research found that the Within the twelve different situations, dominant forms of request within Sudanese students were unbound and displayed in different semantic formulas. there are different methods among participants' levels with different gender. It means that developing pragmatic competence in learners of English as a foreign learner is of great importance.

- The influence of the cultural background and religious belief of the students is clear in their pragmatic knowledge, consequently, the subjects haven't got enough knowledge about the pragmatics of English language requests.
- Females are more polite in requesting than males as they use suggestions and questions more, but it is different case when comparing with those males who are doing their M.A, males use the politest way "NCI" when they use "hints" to avoid imposing the requestee.

Conclusion

This study investigates the linguistic resources that are available to students of the “Sudan University for science and Technology and The Gazera University”, an ESL environment, in making request. the study has shown that the subjects prefer using indirect request strategy more than other types., particularly by using the Appreciation Token ‘please’. It has been shown that the choice of request approach types was not significantly influenced by the interlocutors' gender or educational background. The results in respect of the former variable have been attributed to the fact that pragmatic competence need to be developed in Sudanese universities as they the students strongly affected with their local culture.

Recommendation

Further comparative research is needed to increase the level of understanding and responding request in Sudanese context so the research suggests that Advanced English language learners should be aware of the sociolinguistics' aspects of communicative competence. Teachers and lecturers should enlighten their students those conversations can't be built up only with good structure of sentences, but they need to know the sociocultural aspects of communication. Book writers of English curriculums at all levels should also be aware of phenomena of sociolinguistic aspects of request and strategy realizations.

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