

Iraqi Postgraduates' Production and Perception of Requests: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

In the last two decades, many studies have been conducted to investigate speech act performance by native speakers of Arabic in general, and the speech act of requests in particular. This genus of research has focused on particular speakers of Arabic variety and comparing their performance of requests in English with native speakers. El-Shazly (1993) cited in Al-Eryani (2007:23), Al-Ammar (2000), Al-Tayib Umar (2004). However, in the Iraqi context, the study of request has yet to be ventured, be it to focus its manifestation in the people's mother tongues, nor to focus on how it is manifested in English. This study provides a preliminary analysis from a pragmatic and sociolinguistic point of view, of requests in English language as they are used by Iraqi postgraduates. It focuses upon both the production and the perception. The choice for English is made out due to the fact that more and more Iraqi students are going to English-speaking countries to further their studies. Thus, it is important to encourage them to become competent speakers of English, the world's lingua franca. The choice for request is due to its popularity as a study of speech act and being an illocutionary force so common to take place in daily context. The corpus consists of responses to a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and a Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) that consisted of eight different situations in addition to a rating scale. The informants were 10 Iraqi Arabic native speakers studying at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia. The survey was written in English language to elicit responses that approximate verbal requests that might be given in these situations. The corpus was analyzed and categorized according to Blum- Kulka et al (1989), Byon (2004) and Lin (2009) to determine the strategies used and the frequencies of their use. Results showed variation in the frequency and the content of semantic formulas used by the group in relation to the situation given to them.

Keywords: *speech act, request, semantic formula, production and perception*

Introduction

The focus of early second language instruction has been on the accuracy of language use. It was not until the 1970s, when Hymes introduced the notion of "communicative competence" (1967, 1971, 1972) covering both the speaker's knowledge of linguistic rules and sociocultural rules of speaking, that the trends of second language teaching and learning began to shift from the focus of grammatical competence to communicative competence. Within this paradigm, the goal of language instruction involves teaching learners to use language appropriately, as well as accurately.

To use language accurately, mastery of the formal properties of phonological, lexical and grammatical systems is required. The accuracy of language form, however, does not guarantee the appropriateness of the language use. Learners need to acquire competence as to when to speak, and what to talk about with whom, where and in what manner – i.e., the sociolinguistic rules of speaking (Wolfson, 1989) or sociolinguistic competence (Canale and Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983) in order to use language appropriately.

The need for empirical study of cross-cultural communication has been recognized in the field of second language acquisition as vital to enhance cross-cultural understanding, and provide information helpful for language instruction and language acquisition.

The speech act of request is a directive that embodies an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something, generally for a speaker's goal. In addition, requests are "face-threatening acts

(FTAs)" (Brown and Levinson, 1987), which call for considerable cultural and linguistic expertise on the part of the learner. Moreover, requests differ cross culturally and linguistically in that they require a high level of appropriateness for their successful completion; very often, they are realized by means of clearly identifiable formulae.

In Iraq, English is taught as a foreign language. Robson (1995) stated that most educated Iraqis have at least a limited ability to speak English, although it might turn out that they read much more than they can speak or understand. Those who have studied English in Iraq would gain conversational English relatively quickly if they are given opportunities to use the English they have learned. Learning the language in an EFL environment may not be an advantage to the learners because of two important reasons: being surrounded with their own native language culture and lack of opportunities for the social use of the English. Learners of English in Iraq learn it in their own cultural context with few immediate opportunities to use it. Moreover, because a language is so much associated with its culture and there may be some difficulties in acquiring the nuances in language that are culturally-bounded.

This study provides a preliminary analysis from a pragmatic and sociolinguistic point of view, of requests in English language as they are used by Iraqi postgraduates. It focuses upon both the production and the perception.

Rationale for the study

A number of studies on native speakers of Arabic have indicated that they face difficulties when speaking in English. These difficulties are the result of Arab non-native speakers' errors in morphology or syntax, or their inaccurate pronunciation in English language, but the result of ignorance of the appropriate use of linguistic forms in different situations. The inappropriate use of linguistic forms may evoke impressions of rudeness and awkwardness with whom they are communicating.

Studies on native speakers of Arabic have shown that Arabs do indeed have problems when speaking English. They find it extremely difficult to produce or sometimes understand a speech act. This is because of their inability to use English language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand it in context which in turn may lead to pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983).

In short, studies have indicated that they are likely to encounter problems in handling the speech act of requesting. This is due to the degree of directness in request making strategies, their sensitivity to social variables that affect the requests realization, and their performance in terms of the content of strategies which might vary cross culturally. El-Shazly (1993) cited in Al-Eryani (2007, p.23), Al-Ammar (2000). For example, Al-Tayib Umar (2004) demonstrated that Arab students of English, even at advanced levels, may fall back on their cultural background when formulating their requests strategies. It is suggested that Arab learners of English are not aware of the pragmatic differences between Arabic and English and that an appropriate Arabic request scheme in a given situation might not be appropriate in English in the same situation.

Thus, the present study is a continuation of this line of research. It focuses on one single NNSs of English group, in a non-native English speaking country in this case Malaysia where there is a widespread use of English in all areas. It is an investigation of the way native speakers of Arabic, in this case "Iraqi international students" at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), make requests. As they come to study to a university abroad to obtain a degree in a specific field, and to work in that field, they do not focus on the pragmatic function of English language but on the use of that language to access knowledge in their respective academic fields. Yet, these students encounter situations in real life in which pragmatic competence comes into play. Making requests is one of these situations. This speech act is very situation dependent in that speakers should know how to perform the speech act considering such aspects as the hearer, the relationship with the hearer, the topic, the purpose of the speech, and the appropriate linguistic forms for the speech act. There is a greater chance of misunderstanding, miscommunication and mismanagement since there are differences in the ways people from different cultural backgrounds when they perform requests even while using the same linguistic code (i.e. English). As mentioned before, the study of request as performed by Iraqis has yet to be ventured, be it to focus its manifestation in the people's mother tongues, nor to focus on how it is manifested in English. One would wonder then at how requests were manifested by the Arabic native speakers of other unstudied speech community like Iraqis. Would they be influenced by their cultural upbringings, or would they be sociopragmatically competent in producing requests in English.

The communicative Act of Request

Making requests, as a directive which involves the speaker's effort to get the assistance of the hearer, is one of the most difficult speech acts for learners, especially second language (L2) learners, because it "call[s] for considerable cultural and linguistic expertise on the part of the learner", and "requires a high level of appropriateness for their successful completion" (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984:206). While the major concern of other speech acts, like apology, is "maximizing the apology vs. minimizing the complainable" in order to "show sincerity" and "reduce face loss" (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984; Holmes, 1989; Trosborg, 1995), when making a request, effort should be made to "minimize the imposition involved in the act itself" (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984:206) As suggested by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) in their pioneer study on requests, one of the techniques to minimize the imposition is to make use of indirect strategies. As such, three levels of directness for request strategies were distinguished in the Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989a,b) coding scheme (Table 1) which has become the most preferred model in later request studies.

The speech act of request is composed of two parts: the head act and the modifiers. The head act is the main utterance which performs the function of requesting and can be used on its own without any modifiers in order to convey the request. In most cases, however, the head act is preceded and/or followed by modifiers that mitigate or aggravate the impact of the request on the addressee (Reiter, 2000).

Studies on Request

A review of literature reveals that requests are among the most widely investigated speech acts, especially for L2 studies (e.g. Blum-Kulka, 1991, Trosborg, 1995). One large study is the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP). As Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989:1 point out, speech acts are "one of the most compelling notions in the study of language use". The *Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP)* (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984) analyses two speech acts: requests and apologies across a range of languages and cultures to investigate whether there are universal pragmatic principles in speech act realisation, and what the characteristics of those universals might be. These speech acts are generally described in terms of features of their core elements or head acts (e.g. perspectives and request strategy) and modifying elements, such as the use of conditionals or the past tense to mitigate or the use of hedges or supportive moves to modulate the impact of the speech act. In addition to the structural features that define them, requests have also been described in terms of situational parameters that form the context around the head act (e.g. social distance, social status, location where the exchange took place, or age and sex of the interlocutors). The results of these studies reveal marked cross-cultural differences.

There are few empirical studies on speech act behavior of requesting involving native speakers of Arabic. From these are the following:

- One of the first studies that looked at the realization of speech acts by native speakers of Arabic was conducted by Scarcella and Brunak (1981) who examined the requesting performance in beginning and advanced Arabic learners of English and in native speakers of English. In their study, subjects were asked to answer role playing situations including superiors, familiars, equals, and subordinates interlocutors. The results indicated that advance learners used imperatives mainly with familiar equals and subordinates and declarative statements to superiors, while beginning learners used imperatives to all addresses regardless of social distance and power difference.
- Another study that studied the request strategies in American English, Egyptian Arabic, and English as spoken by Egyptian second language learners was conducted by El-Shazly (1993). The results of her study have indicated that there are differences in the requesting strategies used by these groups. The Arab speakers of English demonstrate a high tendency towards using conventional indirectness which depended on the use of interrogatives. Modifiers are also examined among the groups. No differences are found with respect to use of "upgraders". "Downgraders", however, are found to be more frequently used by native Arabic speak-

ers. They display a noticeable tendency to use more than one downgrader in a single utterance. This group is also found to be unique in using religious expressions as downgraders.

- Similarly, Al-Ammar (2000), cited Umar (2004), has studied the linguistic strategies and realizations of request behavior in spoken English and Arabic. The subjects used in this study are forty-five Saudi female students enrolled in the English department at university level. The instrument used for data collection is the "Discourse-Completion-Test". The result reveals that the subjects vary their requestive behavior according to the social situations. Directness increases with decreases in social distance and power.
- Umar (2004) conducted a sociolinguistic investigation into the request strategies used by advanced Arab learners of English as compared to those strategies used by native speakers of English. The sample involves 20 Arab students enrolled in graduate English courses in four Arabic universities and 20 British students perusing graduate programs in three British universities. A Discourse-Completion-Test is used to generate data related to the request strategies used by each group. Results indicate that the two groups adopt similar strategies when addressing their request to equals or people in higher positions. In such cases, the subjects rely heavily on conventionally indirect strategies. When requests are addressed to people in lower positions the Arabic sample shows a marked tendency towards using more direct request strategies in performing their request than the British sample. A further test of the data reveals some significant differences between the two groups in the way they modify their request strategies. It is found that the native speakers of English use more semantic and syntactic modifiers than their Arabic counterparts due to the linguistic superiority of the native speakers group. Moreover, the study demonstrated that Arab students of English, even at advanced levels, may fall back on their cultural background when formulating their requests strategies. On the pedagogical level, Arab learners of English should always be made aware of the pragmatic differences between Arabic and English and that an appropriate Arabic request scheme in a given situation might not be appropriate in English in the same situation.

All the studies mentioned above highlight the significance of the speech act of requesting. It is demonstrated that speech acts of requesting are governed by a systematic set of community-specific rules. Violation or ignorance of these rules is bound to create some serious communication problems and widen the social gaps between the interacting individuals and groups. Miscommunication may have negative impact on human relation. Thus, it is felt necessary to analyze second language learners' pragmatic competence to see to what extent they adhere to the rules that govern the use of requests appropriately. Along this line comes this current study to deal with the speech act of requesting of Iraqis.

In short, these studies have stress the point that the only way to minimize pragmatic failure in communication is by acquiring pragmatic competence, that is, "the ability to use language effectively in order to understand language in context" (El Samaty 2005, p. 341). Then, native speakers of Arabic to become competent in English language, they need more knowledge not only about the use of linguistic forms as far as grammar, morphology, phonology are concerned but also about the sociolinguistic rules of the use of these forms.

The Study

The study looked at both production and perception of requests. In our study of production, the study examined Iraqis' realization of requests with a wide range of linguistic forms that is socially and culturally appropriate. It examined their degree of directness in strategies, and their performance in terms of the content of strategies which might vary cross culturally.

In our study of perception, the main aim was to look at the extent to which the subjects were aware of the social and situational rules governing request making. It examined their sensitivity to social and situational factors such as characteristics of the participants and the content of the request that affect variations in the speech act of requesting that determine people's choice of request forms in English. Accordingly, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do Iraqis linguistically realize request speech acts in English?
2. How do Iraqis perceive the speech act of requesting in terms of social and situational variables?

Subjects

(10) Iraqis served as the subjects for this study. The whole group consisted of males, aged between 25 and 39. The subjects were confined to postgraduates at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), both master and doctoral degree for the year 2007\2008. They were pursuing studies in a subject not related to languages or linguistics.

The subjects have been staying in Malaysia for a period of time between 6 months to one year. They all had studied English for 12 years in government schools in Iraq before joining the university. They all were Iraqi native speakers of Arabic. None of the group ever travelled to any English-speaking country other than Malaysia.

For the sake of homogeneity, the subjects were confined to both pure science and applied science field of studies. This is because the number of the students is relatively high in these two fields at USM and to achieve a homogenous group as these students have studied English at university level.

Instruments

Discourse completion test

The DCT used in the present study is adapted from Rose (1994). Rose (1994), in her investigation of the validity of DCTs in a non-western setting, she compared requests made by Japanese students and American students in an American university through the data elicited with DCT. Then, she used a multiple-choice questionnaire (MCQ) in the second study with female Japanese students in Japan. The DCT contains eight request situations for each combination variable. In all situations subjects are placed in the role of a student making a request.

1. Music: A student asks another student in nearby room whom s/he does not know to turn his/her music down.
2. Notes: A student asks to borrow a friend's notes from a class that s/he misses.
3. Test: A student asks a professor to be allowed take on another day a test that s/he must miss due to an out-of- town wedding.
4. Photo: A student asks a man whom s/he does not know wearing a suit and carrying a brief-case to take a photo of the student and his /her friend.
5. Study: a student asks a friend to help him/her study for an upcoming test.
6. Bus: a student asks another student whom s/he does not know to move over on the bus.
7. Food: a student asks a friends' mother for more food during dinner at the friend house.
8. Door: a student asks a professor whom s/he does not know to open a door which the student cannot open because his/her hands are full.

Rating Scale

The present study used a rating scale adopted from Barron (2003) for the perception of requests situations and responses by the sample of the study.

It included a series of Likert-scale items designed to record students' evaluation of questions, asked about subjects' perceptions of the situational factors: (i.e. familiarity, social power, and degree of imposition, obligation, right, likelihood, difficulty, politeness, appropriateness and level of directness) in a given situation. That is, after completing response to all situations in DCT, subjects were asked to rate those factors in each situations in terms of 1-5 scale answering the questions.

Multiple choice written questions

The MCQ situations were identical to those described for the DCT. The MCQ contained as possible choices three level of directness (direct, conventionally indirect and hints), as well as an option of not performing the request.

Data analysis

Coding schemes

The present study data were analyzed using Blum- Kulka et al (1989) taxonomy for the cross-linguistic analysis of request strategies, Byon's(2004) semantic formulas and Lin's (2009) sub-strategies of query preparatory strategies.

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) stated that there have been several attempts to establish a classification of request strategies that would form a universally valid scale of directness (see Searle, 1975, 1979; Ervin-Tripp, 1976; House and Kasper, 1981). According to Blum- Kulka and Olshtain (1984), three major levels of directness for requests can be identified cross-linguistically on theoretical grounds: impositives, conventionally indirect requests, and nonconventionally indirect requests. A finer scale of nine directness categories, based on these three major levels, was used in the CCSARP, with nine categories ranging from most direct to least direct (or most indirect). Examples from the Blum-Kulka et al. (1989:279–280) coding scheme are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) directness categories (from direct to indirect)

- 1. MOOD DERIVABLE:** utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force (e.g., 'Leave me alone', 'Clean up that mess.')
- 2. PERFORMATIVES:** utterances in which the illocutionary force is explicitly named (e.g., 'I am asking you to clean up the mess.')
- 3. HEDGED PERFORMATIVES:** utterances in which the naming of the illocutionary force is modified by hedging expressions (e.g., 'I would like to ask you to give your presentation a week earlier than scheduled.')
- 4. OBLIGATION STATEMENTS:** utterances which state the obligation of the hearer to carry out the act (e.g., 'You'll have to move that car.')
- 5. WANT STATEMENTS:** utterances which state the speaker's desire that the hearer carries out the act (e.g., 'I really want you to stop bothering me.')
- 6. SUGGESTORY FORMULAE:** utterances which contain a suggestion to do X (e.g., 'How about cleaning up?')
- 7. QUERY PREPARATORY:** utterances containing reference to preparatory conditions (e.g., ability, willingness) as conventionalized in any specific language (e.g., 'Could you clean up the kitchen, please?', 'Would you mind moving your car?')
- 8. STRONG HINTS:** utterances containing partial reference to object of element needed for the implementation of the act (e.g., 'You have left the kitchen in a right mess.')
- 9. MILD HINTS:** utterances that make no reference to the request proper (or any of its elements) but are interpretable as requests by context (e.g., 'I am a nun.' in response to a persistent hassler).

As for the modification of requests, the study followed the request supportive move strategies. (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Hudson et al., 1995) (Byon, 2004)

1. Grounder: Reasons, justifications (I forgot my notebook).
2. Disarmer: Remove potential objections (I know you are very busy . . .)
3. Imposition minimizer: Reduce imposition (It shouldn't take long).
4. Preparator: Announcement of request, asking about the availability of something, permission of hearer (I'd like to ask you something).
5. Getting a pre-commitment (Would you do me a favor?).

Query Preparatory, as defined by CCSARP, is an utterance that contains references to such preconditions as the ability, willingness, and permission on the part of the hearer and the feasibility or possibility of the act being done. Lin (2009) compares the use of query preparatory modals in conventionally indirect requests made by native speakers of English (NS-Es), native speakers of Chinese (NS-Cs),

and Chinese learners of English-as-a-Foreign Language (EFLs). An in-depth comparison of the use of the requestive modals, substrategies, and the actual pragmalinguistic expressions among the three participant groups across different situations revealed cross-linguistic and interlanguage patterns which cannot be captured by considering only the main strategies used to perform the speech act.

The present study analyzed the conventionalized linguistic forms or query preparatory strategies based on Lin's (2009) categories according to the function of the modals used in the formula as follows with examples from the study:

Table 2: the sub-strategies of query preparatory strategies

<p>I. Can/could</p> <p>(a) Can/could I/you</p> <p><i>Can I postpone the exam? I have to participate in wedding at that time.</i></p> <p><i>Could you please turn off your recorder because I can't study</i></p> <p>(b) Do you think (that) I/you can/could</p> <p>II. Will/would</p> <p>(a) Will/would I/you</p> <p><i>Oh, I missed the last class; will you please lend me your notes?</i></p> <p><i>Would you slow down the music please? I'm studying.</i></p> <p>(b) I would appreciate it if</p> <p>III. May</p> <p><i>Professor, may I have the test another day?</i></p> <p><i>May I sit here, please?</i></p> <p>IV. Mind (Do/Would you mind)</p> <p><i>Excuse me Sir, would you mind taking a picture for us</i></p> <p><i>Excuse me would you like to take a photo for us, if you don't mind</i></p> <p><i>Excuse me Sir, would you mind talking a picture for us?</i></p> <p>V. Possibility</p> <p><i>It is possible for you to take one picture for us</i></p> <p>VI. I was wondering...</p>

Results

Production

One of main goal of this study was to analyze realization of the speech act of request and described in terms of semantic formulas or features of their core elements or head acts (e.g. perspectives and request strategy) and modifying elements, such as the use of conditionals or the past tense to mitigate or the use of hedges or supportive moves to modulate the impact of the speech act.

Realization of main strategy types

As can be noted, for the entire group, the preference of the three main strategies was conventionally indirect requests, which conformed the findings of previous studies on requests (Blum-Kulka and House, 1989; Byon, 2004). Conventional requests were generally realized by question forms, and the modals used are those that manifest ability (can/could), willingness (will/would), and mind (would you mind).

The types of modals were used by the group; they exhibited different preference orders for the types of modal expressions used to make indirect requests. As illustrated in Table 3, while the most preferred modal was the ability modal (“can/could”) followed by the willingness modal (“will/would”), which was in turn followed by the mind modal (“would you mind”)

Table 3: the sub-strategies of query preparatory strategies

sub-strategies of query preparatory	N	%
Can I/you	37	57%
Could I/you	5	8%
Will I/you	2	3%
Would I/you	7	11%
May I/you	2	6%
Mind (Do/Would you mind)	8	13%
Possibility	1	2%

Table 2 displayed the numbers and frequencies of the use of the conventionally indirect query preparatory sub-strategies by the groups respectively. They used the sub-strategies of the ability modals “can/could”, willingness modals “will/would”, and mind “would” followed by pronouns, i.e., the first person “I” and second person “you”.

It was clear that “can/could” (57%) was the prominent modal used to make requests. This indicated that the Iraqi postgraduates have acquired the basic principle in making requests in English.

The most obvious issue in making request by Iraqis was the lack of tense marking on the modals. As indicated in Blum-Kulka (1989), the shift of the ability modal “can” to past tense in questions like “Can you open the door?” will deprive the question of its “pragmatic duality”. That is, while “Can you. . .?” is ambiguous and can be used either to ask about the hearer’s ability (the literal meaning) or to make a request (the conventionalized meaning), its past tense equivalent “Could you. . .?” bears only the requestive function. Besides, past tense modals soften the coerciveness of the request and therefore make the requests sound more polite than when the present tense form is used. Such a lack of tense distinction might be the reason why the patterns of use of the most prominent English modal “can/could” by the group.

Willingness modals were also recoded in the data for example, “Would I. . .?” is another expression that was used by the group 11%. “Would you mind” was also used (13%).

Realization of requests (Semantic formulas and contents)

Semantic formulae represent the means by which a particular speech act is accomplished, such as a reason, an explanation, or an alternative (Fraser, 1981; Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Beebe et al., 1990). Semantic formulae for the speech act of request in English have been extensively studied (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Hudson et al., 1995; Byon 2004). The researchers started out with the previously established categories: “request head act strategies” and “request supportive move strategies” (Hudson et al., 1995: 79–80) as two major components of “semantic formulae for request behavior.”

Semantic formula Request + Grounder

In situation one, the tendency to make a request first and give a grounder later (e.g., explanation or justification) was apparent in the responses of Iraqis.

Opener self introduction request minimize reason

Hi, I am your colleague, I live upstairs can you get your music down a little bit cause I can't study.

Reason

Hi, I'm your neighbor but lives above your room. Actually the music is too loud would you please reduce the voice. I'll be very grateful if you do so. Gratitude

Semantic formula Grounder + request

In situation two,

Reason request

Oh, I missed the last class; *will you please lend me your notes?*

Reason request

As you know I missed the last class *can you please give me the lecture notes?*

Apology

In situation three, Apology was the preferred formula for Iraqis. Based on the data, it can be speculated that the L1 transfer effect has created these results. The frequent use of apology by Iraqis in this situation can be explained by the power difference which is embedded in the interlocutors' social status, often denoted by his/her occupational title (e.g., 'professor'). From an Iraqi speaker's standpoint, making a request to someone in authority may impose heavier psychological burdens than making a request to someone of lower status. As a means of mitigating the face-threatening effect of the request, Iraqis employed Apology.

Examples situation 4:

Apology reason

I am really sorry for not attending the class as I had to go to an out of town wedding.

Apology negative ability reason

Sorry, I can't make test class because I have to go town wedding

Examples 6:

Apology request reason

Sorry if I disturb you but *can I seat beside you* because I carrying heavy books

Apology

Sorry, but is this seat taken?

Examples 8:

Apology request

Sorry for inconvenience, *can you help me please?*

Apology negative ability

Sorry, but I cannot open the door, as you see.

Openers (Alerters)

Openers were defined as linguistic elements that are used to attract the hearer's attention to the speech act (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). In this study, Openers were divided into four categories: greeting, title, name, and attention getter. For instance, a speaker normally used an Opener (title), when s/he was aware of the social status of the addressee, and an Opener (name) when s/he knew the addressee personally. In addition, a speaker may index 'distance' (Brown and Levinson, 1987), as felt by him/herself toward the addressee, by using an Opener (attention getter). The fact that the speaker and the addressee have not established appropriate addressee terms to address each other indicates that they have not formed an interpersonal relationship. Examples:

Excuse me Sir, could you take a picture for me and my friend, please (attention getter)

+ (Title)

Excuse me Mr., could you please take a picture for me and my friend. (attention getter)

+ (Title)

Professor, may I have the test another day? (Title)

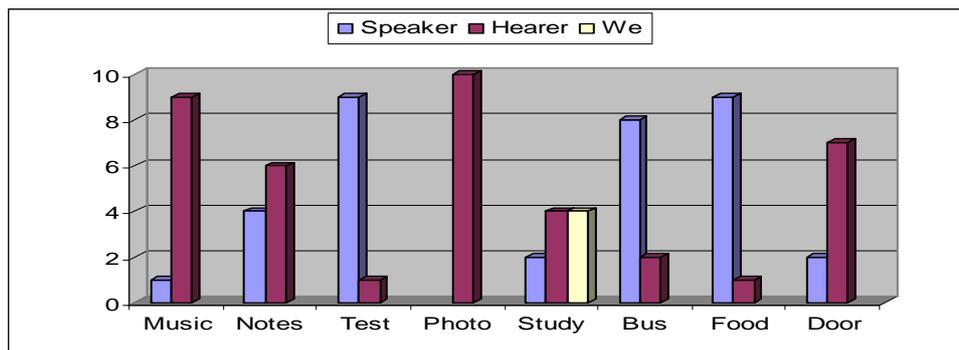


Figure 1: Request Perspectives

As a directive the force of which was to make the hearer do something or at least acquiesce, requests were by definition “hearer-oriented”. This tendency toward a “hearer-oriented” perspective in which the noun phrase (NP) used is the second person pronoun ‘you’ was clearly indicated in the subjects’ responses in four situations: music, notes, photo, and door (See figure 1). Examples:

Could you please turn off your recorder because I can’t study?

Can you please open the door for me?

Moreover, “speaker-oriented” requests in which the NP is the first person pronoun ‘I’ was also used by subjects in all situations except the “photo” situation. Examples:

Wow, very delicious, can I have some more?

Professor, may I have the test another day?

However, as also indicated by Blum-Kulka (1989), since requests were face-threatening and inherently imposing, avoiding directly naming the hearer as the doer of the requested task can reduce the degree of coerciveness borne from the requests uttered like in situation 5. Examples:

Can we study together for the exam?

I don’t feel that I can pass the test easily, so can we study together for the test?

Perception

In our study of perception, we looked at the extent to which respondents were aware of the social and situational rules governing request making. It examined their sensitivity to social and situational factors such as characteristics of the participants and the content of the request that affect variations in the speech act of requesting that determine people’s choice of request forms in English.

Perception of requests (social and situational variables)

Requests have also been described in terms of situational parameters that form the context around the head act (e.g. social distance, social status, etc.). Another goal of the analysis was to systematically examine how social variables, Power (social status) and Distance (social familiarity), Imposition, obligation, right, difficulty, politeness, appropriateness and directness affected the subjects in the use of semantic formulae.

Table 5: Evaluation of the Factors x= Weighted Means of Each Scale (N=10)

Factors	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Distance	2.5	3.7	2.9	2.7	3.8	2.2	3.4	2.4
Power	3.1	3.3	2.0	2.8	3.1	2.9	2.6	2.6
Imposition	3.2	3.1	2.9	2.7	3.0	2.8	3.3	2.8
Obligation	3.0	3.3	2.7	2.5	2.6	2.6	3.0	2.6
Right	3.5	3.5	3.1	3.3	3.4	4.1	3.3	3.5
Difficulty	2.6	1.9	3.4	2.0	2.0	1.8	2.4	3.0
Politeness	3.5	3.8	3.5	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.9	3.7
Appropriateness	3.2	3.6	3.2	3.6	3.3	3.8	3.4	3.5
Directness	2.4	2.1	2.3	2.0	2.4	2.1	2.4	2.2

Subjects showed a great deviation from what is expected as far as their perception of social factors is concerned. Subjects did not have any difficulty in their production of requests yet they show an indication of pragmatic failure in particular “sociolinguistic failure”, which is closely related to cultures defined by Thomas (1983:99) as ‘...social conditions placed on language use’ stemming from ‘...cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour.’ It involves lack of awareness of the conventions and the socio-cultural norms of the target language, such as not knowing the appropriate registers and topics or taboos governing the target language community. Thomas (1983) pointed out that ‘sociopragmatic’ judgements concern the size of imposition, cost/benefit, social distance, and relative rights and obligations.

The data presented in Table 1 indicates the following points:

1. The evaluation of the level of social distance (familiarity) between S and H varied from a high of 3.8 in S5 (a student ask a friend for a help for a test) to a low of 2.4 in S8 (a student asks a professor to open the door), where it was clear that the interactors were totally strangers.
2. The perception of power i.e., the degree to which H can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of S’s plans and self evaluation” (Brown & Levinson, 1987:77) between interactors varied from a high of 3.3 in S2 to a low of 2.0 in S3.
3. Imposition is perceived highly in situations 1, 2, 5, 7. Subjects felt that they were imposing themselves on the hearer and it was a big deal they were asking for. Thus the degree to which the hearer welcomed the imposition was perceived highly.
4. Right and obligation, according to Blum-Kulka & House (1989:146), estimates of the right the speaker has to issue the request and the relative degree of obligation for the H to comply with the particular request are considered to affect request realization, i.e. level of directness in a correlation relationships: the greater the right of the speaker to ask and the greater the obligation of the hearer to comply, the less the motivation for the use of indirectness. This was not implemented in the data obtained as right was perceived highly 4.1 in S7 whereas obligation is perceived low in the same situation.
5. Appropriateness and politeness are also considered to affect request realization. Subjects perceived these two concepts equally related to each other. This can be validated by the fact that investigation of request or directness in speech act realizations have been closely tied to politeness, and studies of politeness often delve into appropriateness of speech act forms (Blum-kulka et al,1989).
6. Subjects perceived their style of communication as being very direct.

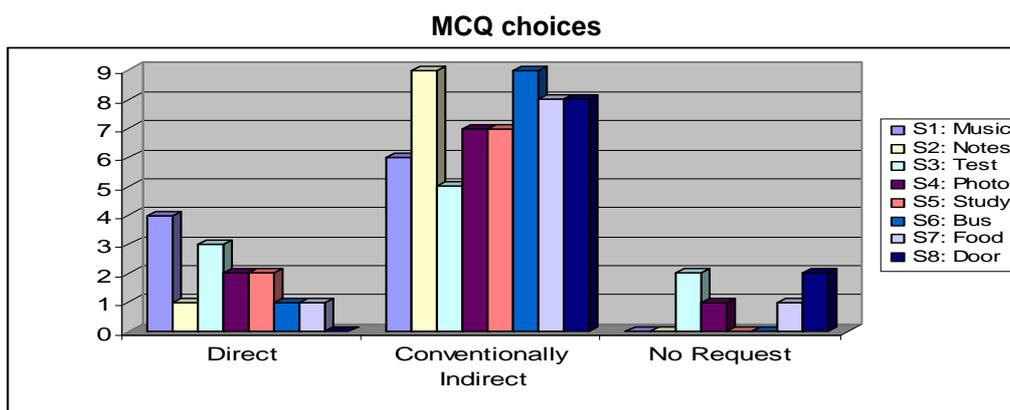


Figure 2: Main Strategy Types in MCQ

Figure 2 showed the frequency distribution of requests for the MCQ. There are some differences. Subjects choose to opt out more than DCT. This was clearly obvious in situations where the speaker:

- asked for a postpone for the day of test. This is due to the effect of the social factors on the perception of requests. The subjects perceive the social power of the hearer. In addition to the fact that the student is asking for an exception here thus he/she prefers to choose I wouldn't go to the wedding.

- asked a stranger to take a photo. This is due to their perception of social distance between the speaker and the hearer. In addition to the appearance of the man (wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase) whom he was talking to. The speaker preferred to ask someone else.
- asked for more food. Subjects in this situation fell back to their cultural background. Asking for more food is not a polite behavior according to the Arab cultural values. It also has a great imposition on the speaker according to Arab culture. Waiting until the mother saw the empty plate and offered more is more appropriate behavior in such cases.
- asked for help to open the door. This is due to the effect of the social factors on the perception of requests. The subjects perceive the social power of the hearer as being a professor. In addition to the fact that the student is asking the professor to open the door. Though the student did not know the professor yet this would cause a great imposition and that's why subjects preferred to ask someone else, like another student

As for the request strategy types, results showed that most of the direct strategies were in situation one (Music): *Please turn the music down*, whereas conventionally indirect was chosen by the subjects in all situations.

Comparing the present results and previous studies

The present study validates the results of previous studies on requests done by Blum-kulka et al (1989), Rose (1994), Byon (2004), Lin (2009).

1. Conventionally requests were the most frequent strategy. This seems to substantiate the CCSARP findings, where conventionally indirect request were the most frequent in all languages studied, and would also support the notion that conventional indirectness is a universal category for requests.
2. The use of both MCQ and DCT to show the production and the perception of requests by Iraqi postgraduates revealed a similarity in the choice of conventionally indirect strategies and also some variation in the use of direct strategies mostly situation one (Music). This also validated the results obtained by Rose (1994) as American subjects used direct requests in only one situation (Music).
3. The present results indicate some equivalence regarding the realization of requests in terms of semantic formulas including the head act and its modification with the study conducted by Byon (2004). Subjects realized some similar supportive moves included in Byon (2004) like: apology (I'm sorry to bother you), Gratitude (Thanks for your work last week). This indicate that subjects resort to their own socio-cultural background to reformulate their strategies. Such realizations were not the production of native speakers of English in Byon's (2004).
4. Subjects showed a variation in the use of query preparatory modals in conventionally indirect requests. This goes along with Lin'(2009) study. They exhibited different preference orders for the types of modal expressions used to make indirect requests. While the most preferred modal was the ability modal ("can/could") followed by the willingness modal ("will/would"), which was in turn followed by the mind modal ("would you mind").

Conclusion

This study investigated the perception and the realization patterns of requests among Iraqi postgraduates. With the small sample of subjects, I cannot generalize the results I have mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, this study contributes to cross-cultural understanding in that it identified the way Iraqis produced the speech act of request. Without knowledge of the request patterns of respective culture, may be perceived by other as impolite or insincere whenever they were engaged in this face-threatening act.

An overall view of the request data made available by the subjects revealed that conventional indirectness was the strategy widely chosen by subjects in almost all situations. The preference for this strategy, said Reiter (2000:173), "could be explained by the fact that in uttering a conventionally indirect request the speaker is balancing clarity and non-coerciveness, hence ensuring that his/her utter-

ance will have the correct interpretation and the right impact, thus leading to success". It is clear that "can/could" was the prominent modal used to make requests. This indicates that the Iraqi postgraduates have acquired the basic principle in making requests in English.

As for their production, there were some socio-linguistic deviations which characterize the performance of Iraqi postgraduates in terms of semantic formulas including both "request head act strategies" and "request supportive move strategies". It was also found that Iraqi postgraduates produced more components of the semantic formulas for making the target speech act of requests. This implied that it is not always the target language norms that decide the choice of certain speech act strategies.

A similar case can be seen in their perception as well. Subjects were not aware of the social and situational rules governing request making. It was found that Iraqi postgraduates, in spite of the so many years they spend in learning English, were yet not capable of performing adequate requests in English. Their utterances were not always consistent with native speakers in terms of appropriateness to the situation.

Implication

This study may have some important theoretical and pedagogical implications. Theoretically, this study together with the few investigations involving Arabic samples provide salient data on the requestive behavior of Arab learners of English. It is demonstrated that the Arabic sample may, sometimes, fall back on their cultural back-ground when formulating their requestive strategies. In other words, it is not always the norms of the target language that determine the choice of the requestive strategy.

On the pedagogical level, the results of this study support the importance of the cultural dimension of communicative competence. The major pitfall of the existing programs of teaching English in Iraq is the overemphasis on grammar. Learners of English in Iraq learn it in their own cultural context and few immediate opportunities to use it. Thus they lack sociolinguistic ability which is one of the most important strategies that language learners should acquire.

Foreign language syllabus designers as well as teachers should sensitize their students to issues of cultural differences. More specifically, Arab learners of English should be made aware of the pragmatic differences between Arabic and English. An appropriate Arabic requestive scheme in a given situation might not be appropriate in English in the same situation. This awareness can only be attained through a variety of classroom drills and exercises that involve realization of the speech act of request in different situations.

Learners should be given enough chance to practice these drills of pragmatic competence until they become part of their linguistic repertoire. Role play may be recommended as a class room procedure to enhance linguistic and cultural appropriateness of different speech acts. In the same time, students should be implicitly and explicitly instructed to observe the role of social distance and social power and other factors in performing request. Learners of English should also be taught the proper syntactic and semantic techniques to modify their requestive acts.

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