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The Speech Act of Request: A Contrastive Study between EFL and ESL Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

This study explores the English request strategies and modifiers used by ESL and EFL undergraduates. It also investigates the influence of social power and social distance on their choice of those strategies. Fifty Malaysian ESL and fifty Saudi EFL undergraduates participate in it. A discourse completion task is used to collect the data. Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) taxonomy is used to analyse request strategies and Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan's (2006) taxonomy is used to analyse request modifiers. Data are collected and analyzed quantitatively. The findings reveal that Malaysian students in an English language environment as a second language used more Conventionally Indirect request strategies than Saudi students do in an English language environment as a foreign language. Non-conventionally indirect strategies are not used by Malaysians and are employed least often by Saudis. Social status and social distance had no significant influence on their use of request strategies. The study concluded by providing implications for English teachers to foster pragmatic competence among undergraduate students.

Keywords: Malaysian student, power, request modifier, request strategy, Saudi student, social distance

1. Introduction

The concept of speech acts has attracted the attention of researchers and academicians in learning English as a second or foreign language. Mastering a language means having the ability to communicate successfully by using its speech acts appropriately. Speech acts refer to a set of utterances used to perform certain functions.

Barron (2003) defines pragmatic competence in a language as "the knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular languages' linguistic resources" (p.10). In other words, pragmatic competence is connected with the form and function of speech acts and appropriate usage in different contexts.

A lack of pragmatic competence may result in communication breakdowns (Lee, 2011). Therefore, various speech acts have recently received much attention in different contexts (Heidari, 2013; Melati & Triyana, 2016). Among them is the speech act of requests (Zhu, 2012; Taguchi, 2014; Yassin & Abdul Razak, 2018). Students' proper use of requests would contribute to developing their pragmatic competence in both second and foreign language contexts. When speakers make requests, they utter words in a language and perform social acts of culture to communicate successfully; speakers need to comprehend both the cultural and linguistic elements of making requests.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Most previous studies on the speech act of request compare peoples' use of the speech act of request with that of native English speakers, but a few of them made a comparison between ESL and EFL students in using it. Accordingly, exposure to the target language differs for both types of learners. EFL learners' exposure to the target language is confined to classroom settings; their opportunities to make proper requests are limited. On the other hand, ESL learners are very frequently exposed to the target language in different contexts. The speech act of making a request is the focus of this study. People use the speech act of request regularly in daily life situations. Failure to make a request properly could cause a breakdown in communication and be face-threatening to both the speaker and the hearer. Teaching a language requires providing knowledge of the structure of the language as well as its social and

cultural aspects. In doing so, students will be able to use pragmatically and structurally appropriate language.

1.2 Objectives

This study aims to explore the similarities and differences in the use of request strategies and request strategy modifiers by second and foreign language learners and examine whether these request strategies and modifiers vary according to power and social distance.

The current study aims to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the request strategies and modifiers utilized by ESL and EFL learners at both the category and individual levels?
2. What are the similarities and differences in ESL and EFL learners' use of request strategies and modifiers in relation to power and social distance?

The speech act of request is used quite often in everyday speech. Therefore, Students' ability to use it has been examined in first, second, and foreign language contexts (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012; Abdul Sattar & Farnia, 2014; AlOtaibi, 2015; Daskalovska, Lvanovskaa, Kusevskaa & Ulanska, 2016).

Concerning the face-threatening perspective of the speech act of request, two of the proponents of speech acts, Brown and Levinson (1987), state that requests are face-threatening acts. The inappropriate use of speech acts leads to miscommunication and pragmatic failure. Therefore, students need to develop pragmatic competence in the target language to succeed in their communication and become aware of what they utter. The findings of this study could help academicians be aware of their students' English socio-pragmatic ability in using the speech act of request. They could then take appropriate steps in teaching them and improving the level of their pragmatic competence in making requests.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Speech Act of Request

The concept of speech acts was first introduced by Austin (1965) to utterances used by the speaker to perform actions. On the other hand, Searle (1975) divides speech acts into two types, direct and indirect. Brown and Levinson

(1987) state that “People tend to choose indirect forms over direct ones to show politeness since being direct is face-threatening” (p. 78). Hatch (1992) adds that speech acts have communicative functions by using a word or words, a sentence or sentences, a gesture and a body movement. Trosberg (1995) defines the speech act or request as " an illocutionary act whereby a speaker (requester) conveys to a hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act which is for the benefit of the speaker" (p.187).

The theoretical background of this study includes Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) model, “Cross-Cultural Speech Act of Realization Pattern (CCSARP),” and Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan’s (2006) taxonomy of internal and external modifiers used in the request.

Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) model CCSARP classifies request strategies into three major levels of directness.

1. Direct strategies marked by imperatives or a verb that names the act as a request. They are divided into five strategies: Mode Derivable, Explicit Performatives, Hedged Performatives, Obligation Statement and Want Statement.
2. Conventionally Indirect strategies are divided into Suggestory Formula and Query Preparatory. They assert change of plans and the ability to comply. They include two interpretations, requestive and literal.
3. Non-Conventionally Indirect strategies consist of two strategies: Strong Hint and Mild Hint. They are pragmatically vague. They indicate a partial reference to the elements needed to perform an act depending on contextual clues.

Sifianou (1999) states that requests have two main components: core request or head act and optional peripheral modifiers. Core request is the main utterance that has the function of a request. Optional peripheral modifiers modify the illocutionary force. They serve to soften and decrease the degree of imposition. They are classified into two types: internal peripheral modifications and external peripheral modifications. Internal peripheral modifications are the linguistic elements that appear in the core request. External peripheral modifications are the devices that occur in the immediate linguistic context. Either initiate or follow the core request.

Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan (2006) divided internal modifiers into three types: Openers, Hedges and Fillers as follows:

The first type is labeled as Openers. They refer to opening words that ask for the hearer's cooperation. They function as questions (Do you think you could open the window?), consultative device (Would you mind opening the window?), negation (I don't suppose you would mind closing the window.) and conditional (I would be grateful if you could open the window.).

The second type is called Hedges. They contain intensifiers and softeners. Intensifiers "aggravate the impact of the request indicating instances of impolite behavior" (Sifianou, 1999, p.179). An example of an intensifier is (You really must open the window). On the other hand, Softeners help soften the request's force. Softeners are classified into three categories. They are diminutives, e. g. abbreviation (info for information), Tag Questions (You could open the window, couldn't you?) and miscellaneous (Could you possibly open the window for a moment?).

The third and last type is called Fillers. They serve to fill in the gaps in the interaction situations. They consist of hesitators (I er, em, er-I wonder if you could open the window), cajolers (You know, you see, I mean), appealers (OK?, right?, yeah), and Attention Getters (Excuse me, Hello, Look).

Alternatively, the external modifiers are divided into seven forms as follows:

The first form is Preparators. They consist of the expressions the requester uses to prepare the addressee to respond positively (May I ask you a favour?).

The second form is Grounders; they are reasons and justifications to make the request more polite (It seems it is quite hot here. Could you open the window?).

The third form is Disarmers, in which speakers are aware of a potential offence; therefore, they remove any possibility for objection to a request from the side of the addressee (I hate bothering you, but could you open the window?).

The fourth form is Expanders. They are used to show tentativeness by repetition or addition of elements (Would you mind opening the window? Once again, could you open it?).

The fifth form, Cost Minimizing, is used to minimize the imposition of the request on the hearer (Could you open the window? I'll close it after the class session).

The sixth form, Promise of Reward, offers the addresses a reward after fulfilling the request (Could you open the window? If you open it, I promise to take you to the cinema).

The seventh and last form that refers to the politeness marker, "Please", serves to soften the imposition carried out by the request (Would you mind opening the window, please?).

On the other hand, Scollon, Scollon and Jones (2012) presented a framework of politeness depending on the interlocutors' social power and social distance. It consists of three systems: Deference, Solidarity and Hierarchical. The interlocutors in the Deference politeness system have an equal social level but with a distant social relationship. The interlocutors respect each other by using appropriate expressions to avoid losing face. A clear example of this system is the relationship between two professionals who do not know each other. In the Solidarity politeness system, the interlocutors have equal social status with a close relationship. A good example of this system is the relationship of two friends. In the Hierarchical politeness system, the interlocutors have different social statuses with close or distant social relationships. A clear example is the relationship between professors and their students.

2.2 Previous Studies

Many studies examine learners' awareness and production of different speech acts across cultures, including the speech act of request. The majority of studies have focused on comparing native speakers' use of request with non-native speakers. A few studies investigated the use of request strategies among ESL and EFL learners.

When comparing the request of native and non-native speakers of English, results indicated that there were differences in employing specific strategies. Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012) stated that American students used Conventionally Indirect strategies most frequently, even when they spoke with friends. On the other hand, Saudi students used Direct strategies with their friends and Conventionally Indirect strategies when they spoke to people who were superior to them. Al-Otaibi (2015) investigated the pragmatic awareness of Saudi undergraduate students when making requests and compared their performances with native English speakers. Results indicated that both Saudi students and native English speakers used the Conventionally Indirect form of request despite their different cultural backgrounds. Another finding indicated differences in employing specific Direct strategies and Lexical and in employing Syntactic modifiers between Saudi and native English speakers.

On the other hand, when comparing the requests of ESL and EFL students, the results revealed similarities and differences. Konakahara(2011) investigated the use of request strategies by Japanese learners of English as a second language and British English speakers. Forty-six graduates participated in the study. The tools used in the collection of data were a questionnaire and a discourse completion task. The results revealed that there is a dominant use of conventional indirect strategies between the language groups. Concerning the use of modifiers, the results showed that Japanese learners of English tend to rely on external rather than internal modifiers, while British English Speakers use both of them equally frequently.

Abdul Sattar and Farnia (2014) conducted a cross-cultural study to examine the request behaviour and the social-cultural norms of undergraduate students. The sample comprised 30 EFL Iraqi and 30 ESL Malaysian undergraduate students at the University of Science Malaysia. A discourse completion test was used to collect the data. Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) taxonomy was used to analyse the data. The findings indicated that there were significant differences in the perception of obligation and imposition between Iraqi and Malaysian students. Another finding showed that Iraqi and Malay students used the external modifier "Grounder" most. Besides, the results showed similarities between both groups in terms of using Mitigation devices.

Wachuku,(2017) conducted a study to investigate the use of request strategies by Nigerian learners of English as a second language. A discourse completion

task was used to collect the data. The findings indicated that Nigerian students use direct strategies more than indirect ones. Another findings showed that social power and social distance influenced the use of request strategies as people were more direct when they spoke to people of higher and equal status.

Finally, Yassin and AbdulRazak (2018) investigated the request strategies used by EFL Yemeni and ESL Malay secondary school students. The participants were 20 Yemeni and 20 Malay secondary school students. The tool used to collect the data was a discourse completion test. Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) taxonomy was used to analyse the data. The results indicated that there was no difference in the use of strategies as both used Non-Conventionally Indirect request strategies. Another finding showed that both social power and social distance did not affect the choice of the request strategies.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The current study used a quantitative research design to investigate the request strategies and modifiers used by ESL and EFL students for the speech act of request.

3.2. Participants

A total of 100 undergraduate students participated in this study. They were divided into two groups. Fifty were selected from King Khalid University to represent Saudi EFL undergraduates, and another fifty were selected from Malaya University to represent Malaysian ESL undergraduates. Convenience sampling was used for data collection. Students who were free at the English department were asked to fill in the discourse completion task and did so voluntarily. The students' ages ranged between 18-25 years.

3.3. Instruments

Nurani (2009) states that discourse completion tasks are widely used in pragmatics research studies as they provide rich data in a short time. A discourse completion task was used as the tool to collect the data. It was designed by the researcher. The task aimed to identify the students' performance in the speech act of request. The task consisted of six situations. The first was a request related to the deference politeness system in which the

interlocutors have equal social status with a distant social relationship. The second was a request related to the solidarity politeness system in which the interlocutors have equal social status with a close relationship. The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth were requests related to the hierarchical politeness system in which the interlocutors have different social statuses with close or distant social relationships. Students were asked to provide written data to express requests in situations involving friends, university, professors, secretaries, and librarians.

The data collected from participants were coded based on a classification of request strategies designed by Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) Cross-Cultural Speech Acts Realization Patterns (CCSARP), which is one of the most widely used taxonomies for request studies. This taxonomy divides request strategies into three major levels of directness.

1. Direct strategies are five. They are Mode Derivable, Explicit Performatives, Hedged Performatives, Obligation Statement, and Want Statement.
2. Conventionally Indirect strategies are two. They are Suggestory Formula and Query Preparatory.
3. Non-Conventionally Indirect strategies are two. They are Strong Hint and Mild Hint.

In addition to Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) Cross-Cultural Speech Acts Realization Patterns (CCSARP), Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan's (2006) taxonomy was used to analyse internal and external modifiers used for requests. The taxonomy consists of two types of modifiers, internal modifiers that are divided into three kinds, Openers, Hedges, and Fillers.

Openers function as questions, consultative devices, negation, and conditional. Hedges function as intensifiers and softeners. Softeners are divided into three categories. They are diminutives, Tag Questions, and miscellaneous. Fillers consist of hesitators, cajolers, appealers, and attention-getters. Alternatively, the external modifiers are divided into seven forms. They are Preparators, Grounders, Disarmers, Expanders, Cost Minimizing, Promise of Reward, and "Please".

The data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages to provide factual findings regarding Malaysian

ESL undergraduates and Saudi EFL undergraduates' implementation of request strategies.

4. Results

This section provides a holistic description of the request strategies and modifiers used by Malaysian ESL and Saudi EFL undergraduate students. First, data were coded and analyzed quantitatively by the researcher. Next, descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentages were computed and noted.

4.1 Use of request strategies

This section describes the similarities and differences in the use of request strategies among ESL and EFL learners at two levels:

(a) *At the category level*

The findings from analyzing data collected from 100 undergraduate students at King Khalid University and Malaya University through a discourse completion task revealed that the students used a total of 600 request strategies. These strategies were divided according to the level of directness into three categories: Direct, Conventionally Indirect and Non-Conventionally Indirect. Table 1 shows the frequency of these request strategy categories and their percentages. Results showed similarities and differences in the use of request strategies by Malaysians and Saudis, as illustrated in Table 1.

TABLE 1
REQUEST STRATEGY CATEGORIES USED BY MALAYSIAN AND SAUDI STUDENTS

Request Strategy Category	Malaysians		Saudis		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Direct	62	20. 67	71	23. 67	133	22. 17
Conventionally Indirect	238	79. 33	224	74. 67	462	77
Non-Conventionally Indirect	0	0	5	1. 67	5	0. 83
Total	300	100	300	100	600	100

Table 1 above shows that undergraduate students used Conventionally Indirect strategies most frequently (77%), followed by Direct ones (22. 17%), and the

least used were Non-Conventionally Indirect strategies (0. 83%). Regarding similarities and differences, results show that both Malaysians and Saudis used Conventionally Indirect strategies most often, though Malaysian students used them (79.33%) more often than Saudi students did (74.67%), followed by Direct strategies, which were used more by Saudi students (23. 67%). Finally, whereas, Non-Conventionally Indirect strategies (1. 67%) were used least often by Saudis, they were not used at all by Malaysians. In other words, both ESL and EFL students used Conventionally Indirect strategies most often as they prefer to save their faces from threats to carry out the communication process.

(b) At the Individual Level

At the individual level, descriptive statistical analysis of the data obtained revealed similarities and variations in using several request strategies used by Malaysians and Saudis, as illustrated in Table 2.

TABLE 2
INDIVIDUAL REQUEST STRATEGIES USED BY MALAYSIAN AND SAUDI STUDENTS

Level of Directness	Strategy Type	Malaysians		Saudis	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Direct	Mode Derivable	10	3. 33	33	11
	Explicit Performatives	4	1. 33	2	0. 67
	Hedged Performatives	22	7. 33	0	0
	Obligation Statement	0	0	1	0. 33
	Want Statement	26	8. 67	35	11. 67
Conventionally indirect	Suggestory Formula	0	0	2	0. 67
	Query Preparatory	238	79. 33	222	74
Non-Conventionally Indirect	Strong Hint	0	0	0	0
	Mild Hint	0	0	5	1. 67
Total		300	100	300	100

Table 2 shows that Malaysians and Saudis' most frequent request strategy was Query Preparatory followed by Want Statement. Mode Derivable was preferred by Saudi students more than by Malaysian students. Hedged Performative was preferred by Malaysian students but not by Saudi students. Suggestory Formula, Explicit Performative and Obligation Statements were used at a minimum level by one group but were never used at all by the other group. On the other hand, the Non-Conventionally Indirect strategies were not used by Malaysian students and were used at a minimum level by Saudi students.

4.2. Use of Request Internal Modifiers

This section describes the similarities and differences in the use of modifiers among ESL and EFL learners at the following two levels.

(a) *At the Category Level*

The data analysis conducted on undergraduate students' usage of internal modifiers indicated that both groups utilized an aggregate of 533 internal modifiers.

These internal modifiers were divided into three types: Openers, Hedges and Fillers. Description of the similarities and differences in the use of these internal modifiers between Malaysians and Saudis are illustrated in Table 3

TABLE 3
INTERNAL MODIFIER CATEGORIES USED BY MALAYSIAN AND SAUDI STUDENTS

Internal Modifier Type	Malaysians		Saudis		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Openers	23	7.12	4	1.90	27	5.07
Hedges	51	15.79	20	9.52	71	13.32
Fillers	249	77.09	186	88.57	435	81.61
Total	323	100	210	100	533	100

Table 3 shows that Malaysian ESL learners employed a higher number of internal modifiers when making requests than EFL learners. Among the 323 internal modifiers used by Malaysian students, Fillers were used most frequently (77.09%), followed by Hedges (15.79%) and finally, Openers were used least often (7.12%).

On the other hand, among the 210 internal modifiers used by Saudi students, Fillers were used most frequently (88.57%), followed by Hedges (9.52%), and the least used were Openers (1.9%). In general, both Malaysian ESL and EFL students used Fillers most frequently, followed by Hedges and finally, Openers were used least often.

(b) *At the Individual Level*

Data analysis revealed that there are similarities and differences with regard to individual internal modifiers, as illustrated in Table 4.

TABLE 4
INDIVIDUAL INTERNAL MODIFIERS USED BY MALAYSIAN AND SAUDI STUDENTS

Internal Modifier	Strategy Type		Malaysians		Saudis	
			Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Openers	Questions		1	0.31	1	0.48
	Consultative Devices		6	1.86	0	0
	Negation		1	0.31	1	0.48
	Conditional		15	4.64	2	0.95
Hedges	Softeners	Diminutives	1	0.31	0	0
		Tag Questions	2	0.62	11	5.24
		Miscellaneous	44	13.62	9	4.29
	Intensifiers		4	1.24	0	0
Fillers	Hesitators		2	0.62	0	0
	Cajolers		0	0	0	0
	Appealers		0	0	0	0
	Attention getter		247	76.47	186	88.57
Total			323	100	210	100

Table 4 shows that the most frequent internal modifier used by Malaysian students was Attention Getters (76.47%), followed by Miscellaneous (13.62%), and then Conditional (4.64%). The rest of the modifiers Consultative Devices, Intensifiers, Tag Questions, Hesitators, Questions, Negation, Diminutives, Cajolers, and Appealers were used least often or never.

On the other hand, the most frequent internal modifier used by Saudi students were Attention Getters (88.57%), followed by Tag Questions (5.24%), and then Miscellaneous (4.29%). The rest of the internal modifiers Conditional, Questions, Negation, Consultative Device, Diminutives, Intensifiers, Hesitators, Cajolers, and Appealers were used least frequently or never used.

In general, the most frequent internal modifier used by both Malaysian and Saudi students was the Filler Attention Getters and the internal modifiers which were not used by both groups were Cajolers and Appealers.

4.3. Use of External Request Modifiers

Concerning external modifiers, results revealed that both groups used a total of 580 external modifiers. These external modifiers were divided into seven types. Description of the similarities and variations in using these external modifiers by Malaysians and Saudis are illustrated in Table 5.

TABLE 5
EXTERNAL MODIFIERS USED BY MALAYSIAN AND SAUDI STUDENTS

External Modifier	Malaysians		Saudis		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Preparators	23	6.44	8	3.59	31	5.34
Grounders	140	39.22	103	46.19	243	41.90
Disarmers	30	8.40	4	1.79	34	5.86
Expanders	55	15.41	30	13.45	85	14.66
Promise of Reward	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cost Minimizing	16	4.48	5	2.24	21	3.62
Please	93	26.05	73	32.74	166	28.62
Total	357	100	223	100	580	100

Table 5 shows that Malaysian students used Grounders (39.22%) most often, followed by the politeness marker 'Please' (26.05%) and then Expanders (15.41%). The rest of the external modifiers were used at a minimum level or not used. Similarly, Saudi students used Grounders (46.19%) most frequently, followed by the politeness marker 'Please' (32.74%) and then Expanders (13.45%). The rest of the external modifiers were used at a minimal level or never used.

In general, ESL Malaysian learners employed more internal and external modifiers in terms of type and number to soften the requesting act and make it appropriate. This could be due to the amount of exposure to English by ESL students, which is larger than EFL students whose exposure was limited to the classroom.

4.4. Use of Request Strategies and Modifiers in Relation to Power and Social Distance

In the sub-sections that follow request strategies and modifiers will be analyzed on the basis of the following six situation types.

1. The first involved an equal status relationship between the interlocutors but a different social distance relationship.

2. The second situation involved an equal status relationship between the interlocutors and a close social relationship.
3. The third situation involved a lower to higher status relationship between the interlocutors and a close social relationship.
4. The fourth situation involved a lower to higher status relationship between the interlocutors and a distant social relationship.
5. The fifth situation involved a higher to lower status relationship between interlocutors and a close social relationship.
6. The sixth situation involved a higher to lower status relationship between interlocutors and a distant social relationship.

4.4.1 Use of request strategies in relation to power and social distance

Table 6 illustrates the use of request strategies in the six situations.

TABLE 6

USE OF REQUEST STRATEGIES IN RELATION TO POWER AND SOCIAL DISTANCE

Strategy Type		Sit. 1		Sit. 2		Sit. 3		Sit. 4		Sit. 5		Sit. 6		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Direct	Malaysians	3	3.00	3	3.00	22	22.00	5	5.00	13	13.00	16	16.00	62	10.33
	Saudis	1	1.00	23	23.00	9	9.00	2	2.00	19	19.00	17	17.00	71	11.83
	Both	4	4.00	26	26.00	31	31.00	7	7.00	32	32.00	33	33.00	133	22.17
Conventionally Indirect	Malaysians	47	47.00	47	47.00	28	28.00	45	45.00	37	37.00	34	34.00	238	39.67
	Saudis	48	48.00	27	27.00	38	38.00	48	48.00	30	30.00	33	33.00	224	37.33
	Both	95	95.00	74	74.00	66	66.00	93	93.00	67	67.00	67	67.00	462	77
Non-Conventionally Indirect	Malaysians	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Saudis	1	1.00	0	0.00	3	3.00	0	0.00	1	1.00	0	0.00	5	0.83
	Both	1	1.00	0	0.00	3	3.00	0	0.00	1	1.00	0	0.00	5	0.83
Total		100	100.00	100	100.00	100	100.00	100	100.00	100	100.00	100	100.00	600	100

The first situation belongs to the deference politeness system in which the interlocutors have equal social status with a social distance between them. Table 6 shows that Malaysian (47.00 %) and Saudi (48.00 %) students used Conventionally Indirect strategy most frequently when requesting from people of equal status and a distant social relationship. Direct and Non-Conventionally Indirect strategies were used least often by both groups.

The second situation belongs to the solidarity politeness system. The interlocutors have equal social status with no social distance between them. Table

6 illustrates that Conventionally Indirect strategy was used most often by Malaysian students (47.00%). Results are somewhat different with regard to Saudi students as they used both Conventionally Indirect strategies (27.00%) as well as Direct ones (23.00%) when requesting from people of equal status and a close relationship.

The third and fourth situations belong to the hierarchical politeness system in which the relationship between the interlocutors is unequal as the speaker is of lower status with a close relationship (situation 3) or a distant social relationship (situation 4) from the hearer. In the third situation, Saudi students used the strategy Conventionally Indirect (38.00%) when speaking to people of higher status most often followed by the Direct one (9.00%). On the other hand, Malaysians used both Conventionally Indirect strategy (28.00%) as well as the Direct one (22.00%) when speaking to people of higher status. In the fourth situation, Malaysian (45.00%) and Saudi students (48.00%) used Conventionally Indirect strategies when requesting from people of a higher status and a distant social relationship. Direct and Non-Conventionally Indirect strategies were used least frequently or never by both groups.

The fifth and sixth situations also belong to a hierarchical politeness system in which the relationship between the interlocutors is unequal as the speaker is of higher status with a close relationship (situation 5) or with a distant social relationship (situation 6) from the hearer. In the fifth situation, both Saudis (30.00%) and Malaysians (37.00%) used Conventionally Indirect strategy most often when speaking to people of a lower status and close relationship, followed by Direct ones which were used by both Saudi students (19.00%) and Malaysians (13.00%) in a less amount.

In the sixth situation, both Saudi students (33.00%) and Malaysians (34.00%) used Conventionally Indirect strategies most often followed by Direct strategies which were used by Saudi students (17.00%) and Malaysians (16.00%) when requesting from people of a lower status and a distant social relationship.

In general, both Malaysians and Saudi students used Conventionally Indirect strategies (77%) most frequently in all six situations with regard to power or social distance differences between the interlocutors. The Direct strategy was used most often by Saudi students when requesting from people of equal and a close relationship or people of lower status, whereas it was used by Malaysian

students when requesting from people of a higher or lower status. Non-Conventionally Indirect strategies were used least often by Saudi students (0.83%) and never by Malaysians.

4.4.2. Use of internal modifiers in relation to power and social distance

Regarding the employment of internal modifiers in requests based on power and social distance by Malaysian ESL and Saudi EFL students, Table 7 illustrates the use of internal modifiers in the six situations.

TABLE 7
USE OF INTERNAL MODIFIERS IN RELATION TO POWER AND SOCIAL DISTANCE

Strategy Type		Sit. 1		Sit. 2		Sit. 3		Sit. 4		Sit. 5		Sit. 6		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Openers	Malaysians	5	3.94	9	12.5	5	5.15	0	0.00	3	4.17	1	1.33	23	4.32
	Saudis	0	0.00	2	2.78	2	2.06	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	0.75
	Both	5	3.94	11	15.28	7	7.22	0	0.00	3	4.17	1	1.33	27	5.07
Hedges	Malaysians	28	22.05	9	12.5	3	3.09	2	2.22	8	11.11	1	1.33	51	9.57
	Saudis	9	7.09	1	1.39	7	7.22	3	3.33	0	0.00	0	0.00	20	3.75
	Both	37	29.13	10	13.89	10	10.31	5	5.56	8	11.11	1	1.33	71	13.32
Fillers	Malaysians	51	40.16	33	45.83	46	47.42	48	53.33	33	45.83	38	50.67	249	46.72
	Saudis	34	26.77	18	25	34	35.05	37	41.11	28	38.89	35	46.67	186	34.90
	Both	85	66.93	51	70.83	80	82.47	85	94.44	61	84.72	73	97.33	435	81.61
Total	Malaysians	84	66.14	51	70.83	54	55.67	50	55.56	44	61.11	40	53.33	323	60.60
	Saudis	43	33.86	21	29.17	43	44.33	40	44.44	28	38.89	35	46.67	210	39.40
	Both	127	100	72	100	97	100	90	100	72	100	75	100	533	100

In the first situation, Table 7 shows that Malaysian (40.16%) and Saudi students (26.77) used Fillers most frequently when requesting from people of equal status and a distant social relationship. Hedges were used next by both Malaysian (22.05%) and Saudi students (7.09%). Finally, Openers were used least often by Malaysian students (3.94%) and never used by Saudi students.

In the second situation, Table 7 illustrates that Malaysians (45.83%) and Saudi students (25%) used Fillers most often when requesting from a person of equal status but a close relationship. Hedges and Openers were used equally by Malaysian students (12.5%). Results were somewhat different with Saudi Students as they used Openers (2.78%) and Hedges (1.39%) least often.

In the third situation where the speaker is of a lower status than the hearer and of close relationship, both Malaysian (47.42%) and Saudi students

(35.05%) used Fillers higher than the other internal modifiers. Saudi students used Hedges (7.22%) next whereas, Malaysians (5.15%) used Openers. Hedges were used least often by Malaysians (3.09%) as were Openers by Saudi students (2.06%).

In the fourth situation, where the speaker is of a lower status than the hearer and with a distant social relationship, both Malaysians (53.33%) and Saudis (41.11%) used Fillers more than the other internal modifiers. Hedges and Openers were used least often or never used by both groups.

In the fifth situation where the speaker is of a higher status than the hearer and the relationship is close between the interlocutors, both Malaysians (45.83%) and Saudis (38.89%) used Fillers most frequently. Whereas Malaysian students (11.11%) used Hedges next and followed by Openers (4.17%), Saudi students never used Hedges and Openers modifiers when requesting from a person of a lower status.

In the sixth situation, where the speaker is of a higher status than the hearer and the relationship is distant between the interlocutors, both Malaysians (50.67%) and Saudis (46.67%) used Fillers most often but they differ in the amount. The rest of the internal modifiers were used at a minimum level by both Malaysian ESL and Saudi EFL students.

In general, both Malaysians and Saudi students used Fillers (81.61%) most often in all six situations with no regard to power or social distance differences between the interlocutors. According to situations, Hedges and Openers were used differently by Malaysians and Saudis, but still, the two groups used them least often.

4.4.3 Use of external modifiers in relation to power and social distance

Regarding the employment of external modifiers in requests based on power and social distance by Malaysian ESL and Saudi EFL students, Table 8 illustrates the use of external modifiers in the six situations.

TABLE 8
USE OF EXTERNAL MODIFIERS IN RELATION TO POWER AND SOCIAL DISTANCE

Strategy Type		Sit. 1		Sit. 2		Sit. 3		Sit. 4		Sit. 5		Sit. 6		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
External Modifiers	Malaysians	47	51.09	51	53.68	105	58.66	72	54.55	50	100.00	32	100.00	357	61.55
	Saudis	45	48.91	44	46.32	74	41.34	60	45.45	0	0.00	0	0.00	223	38.45
	Both	92	100	95	100	179	100	132	100	50	100	32	100	580	100

Table 8 shows that both Malaysian and Saudi students used nearly a similar number of external modifiers when requesting from people of equal status and close or distant social relationship. On the other hand, they used different amounts of them when requesting from people of a higher status and a close or distant social relationship. Finally, Malaysian students were observed using external modifiers when requesting from people of lower status, while Saudi students never used any external modifier in this situation.

To sum up, Malaysians used more external modifiers than Saudi students in all situations. Saudi students never used external modifiers when requesting from people of a lower status and a close or distant social relationship.

5. Discussion

The findings indicated that both groups showed great sensitivity to the use of politeness strategies in requesting. They both preferred to express their requests by using Conventionally Indirect strategies to mitigate the force of request. They used Query Preparatory most often. In other words, students used questions that referred to the ability and possibility to perform requests. These results were in line with previous studies which revealed that ESL and EFL students used Conventionally Indirect request strategies regardless of cultural differences (Konakahara, 2011; Al-Otaibi, 2015; Yassin & Abdul Razak, 2018). On the other hand, the findings contradict Wachuku 's (2017) study showed that Nigerian ESL learners used more direct strategies than the indirect ones. Some investigation is needed here to see the influence of the first language pragmatic knowledge on the use of request in the target language.

The analysis also revealed that Saudi Students used a higher number of Direct strategies than Malaysian students did. However, the two groups, when using Direct strategies in requesting, precede or follow their requests with modifiers to soften the imposition nature of request. In other words, when students used

Direct strategies, they exerted the least effort to make their request but showed concern by using more internal and external modifiers.

In addition, both groups preferred to use Direct strategies of Want Statement and Mode Derivable. In other words, they used utterances in which the verb showed the illocutionary force for example, (make an appointment for me, give me one more chance, resend the assignment) or used utterances that stated the desire to carry out the act by the hearer for example, (I want you to call her, I want another chance to submit the assignment, I want you to take an appointment for me, I want to meet the dean). On the contrary, they differed in terms of the amount used. While Saudi students used Mode Derivable and Want Statement most often, Malaysian students used only Want Statement most often followed by Hedged Performatives and then Mode Derivable.

Malaysian students never used hints in requesting, as did Saudi students, who used them least often. Students underused this complex strategy as they probably were not sufficiently competent in using it. Another reason might be the feeling of burden that this strategy arouses in the hearer when deducing the speakers' intention as affirmed by (Weizman, 1993).

With regard to the students' use of internal modifiers when requesting, the findings revealed that Malaysian and Saudi students used Fillers in the form of Attention Getters most frequently when requesting. They used expressions to attract attention such as (Excuse me, hello, miss, hi, dear, sorry). Furthermore, Malaysian students preferred to start their request by using the softener Miscellaneous "could you possibly". On the other hand, a smaller number of Saudi students used the same softener.

In addition, regarding external modifiers, both Malaysian and Saudi students used Grounders most often and this result is in agreement with Abdul Sattar and Farnia's (2014) study which showed that ESL and EFL learners used reasons and justification most frequently in requesting to lower the imposition involved. The analysis also showed that the politeness marker Please was commonly used preceding or following the request of both Malaysian and Saudi students. This could be explained by students' care to be polite, modern, and sophisticated when requesting.

Concerning the use of request strategies and modifiers based on power and social distance by Malaysian and Saudi students. The analysis showed that both Malaysian and Saudi students used Conventionally Indirect strategies more than Direct ones in all the situations, even when there were power and social distance differences between the interlocutors. This situation of insensitivity to the social power and social distance between the interlocutors showed that students do not have sufficient pragmatic competence to handle request properly. On the other hand, the findings revealed that Malaysian and Saudi students used the Direct strategies, but the number is low compared to the Conventionally Indirect strategies. Saudi students used Direct strategies when the hearer is in a close relationship, and this is supported by Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily's (2012) study. In addition, Saudi students used Direct strategies with some people of equal or lower status and with a few people of higher status but a close relationship. On the contrary, Malaysian students used Direct strategies when the hearer was of a higher status. This could be because they want to be more formal when requesting from people of a higher status. To soften the use of Direct request strategies and increase the degree of politeness, both Malaysian and Saudi students used a high amount of internal and external modifiers.

Regarding the use of internal modifiers when requesting, Malaysian and Saudi students used internal modifiers in the first, third and fourth situations more often than the rest of the situations. Thus, they employ more strategies with strangers and people of higher status than with close friends and this is affirmed by Brown and Levinson's (1987) study which stated that people use more strategies when requesting from others of a distant social relationship and of a higher status.

Among the internal modifiers used were Fillers. ESL and EFL students used Fillers in the form of Attention Getters most frequently in all situations. For example, they used Attention Getters to fill in the gaps in interactions such as Hello, Excuse me, Hi, Hey.

Hedges were used by Malaysian students more often than by Saudi students to soften the force of request and make it less direct. For example, Malaysian students used Hedges in the form of Miscellaneous such as using the expression "could you possibly" before the request to give a sense of respect to

the hearer. On the other hand, both Malaysian and Saudi students used opening words such as “Would you mind” or “Do you think you could” to ask for cooperation, least often, or not used at all in some situations.

In addition, both groups of students did not rely on internal modifiers only as request mitigators; instead, they used external modifiers too. Malaysian and Saudi students used external modifiers most frequently with people of higher status to show respect. This finding is confirmed by Brown and Levinson (1987), who state that people of lower status use more modifiers with those of a higher status. On the other hand, Saudi students never used external modifiers with people of lower status, unlike Malaysian students, who used them to some extent. This result may be linked to a belief that people of lower status are performing their social obligations.

6. Conclusions

As request strategies differ from culture to culture, identifying cross-culture request strategies is important to avoid miscommunication and face-threatening acts. The current study aimed to investigate the use of request strategies and modifiers in the contexts of English as a second and a foreign language. Addressing the first research question concerning the request strategies and modifiers utilized by ESL and EFL learners at both the category and individual levels. The findings revealed that although Malaysian ESL students outperformed the Saudi EFL students with regard to Indirect strategies, both groups used Conventionally Indirect strategies most frequently, followed by Direct ones, and the least used were Non-Conventionally Indirect strategies. All students like to be polite by using Indirect strategies in the form of Questioning when requesting. The Direct strategies were used in the form of Want Statements and Mode Derivable by both groups, unlike Hedged Performatives which were used only by Malaysian students. Both groups do not like to use Hints when requesting.

Regarding modifiers, Malaysian students used more internal and external modifiers than Saudi students. This result may be related to using English as a means of communication in the ESL context rather than using it in the classroom where students cover a specific number of vocabulary items like in the EFL context. The internal modifiers, Fillers, were used most frequently by both Malaysian and Saudi students using Attention Getters, followed by Hedges, and the least used were Openers. On the other hand, both groups used

the external modifiers, Grounders most often followed by the politeness marker Please and then by Expanders. In other words, students like to give reasons when requesting to make it more polite, they also like to use the politeness marker Please before or after the request, and they like to use repetition and addition elements to show tentativeness.

Finally, Regarding the answer to the second research question, concerning using request strategies and modifiers based on power and social distance by Malaysian and Saudi students. The findings indicated that both groups used the same strategies in all situations, even when there was power and social distance between interlocutors. In addition, both groups used Conventionally Indirect strategies in all situations most frequently.

In general, the findings of the current study highlight some implications for ESL and EFL teachers and those interested in the results with regard to the speech act of request. Teachers could raise their students' pragmatic awareness of the proper use of request strategies in different ways. One resource is to introduce students to the pragmatic features of native English speakers to help them communicate successfully. Teachers may include reading and listening practices for a variety of speech acts. They could make students watch videos or read passages about requesting, and then ask them to apply the request strategies viewed or read appropriately. Another way is to give students role-play activities or discourse completion tasks in various contexts and social settings. They can be given roles where the interlocutors are of the same status and a higher or lower status than the requestees. Teachers could also give their students practice on grammar and vocabulary that fulfill their need to master the speech act of request in English. Finally, teachers could highlight the pragmatic differences between the student's native language request strategies and the target language. This could help avoid negative pragmatic transfer when students request in the target language.

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فعل انجاز الطلب: دراسة تقابلية بين طالبات المرحلة الجامعية المتكلمات للغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية والمتكلمات للغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية

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المستخلص

تسعى هذه الدراسة لمعرفة الاستراتيجيات والصفات التعريفية للطلب باللغة الانجليزية التي يستخدمها الطلاب الجامعيون المتكلمون باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية وكذلك المتكلمون باللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية. كما تبحث الدراسة في تأثير القوة الاجتماعية والمسافة الاجتماعية على اختيار الطلاب لتلك الاستراتيجيات. تشارك في الدراسة خمسون طالبة جامعية ماليزية تتكلم الانجليزية كلغة ثانية وخمسون طالبة سعودية تتكلم الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تُستخدم وسيلة إكمال الخطاب لجمع البيانات. كما يتم استخدام تصنيفا بلوم كولكا وآخرون (1989) لتحليل استراتيجيات الطلب و تصنيف مارتينز فلور واوسو جون (2006) لتحليل الصفات التعريفية للطلب. تُجمع البيانات لهذه الدراسة وتُحلل كمياً. تُظهر النتائج بأن الطلاب الماليزيون يستخدمون استراتيجيات طلب غير مباشرة وتقليدية في بيئة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية أكثر من الطلاب السعوديون في بيئة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالإضافة لذلك فإن استراتيجيات الطلب الغير المباشرة وغير التقليدية لا تستخدم من قبل الماليزيين وتستخدم بشكل قليل جدا من قبل السعوديين. لا يوجد تأثير كبير للحالة الاجتماعية والمسافة الاجتماعية على استخدام الطالبات لاستراتيجيات الطلب. وتخلص الدراسة إلى تقديم توصيات لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لتعزيز الكفاءة التداولية (البراجماتية) بين طلاب المرحلة الجامعية.

الكلمات الدالة: الطالب الماليزي، القوة الاجتماعية، مُعدل الطلب، استراتيجية الطلب، الطالب السعودي، المسافة الاجتماعية