POLITE REQUEST STRATEGIES BY MALE AND FEMALE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

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Abstract

The present study investigated request strategy by non-native English speakers. The study focused at the rank of imposition in the choice of request and politeness strategy between twenty five males and females of postgraduate English students Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. The data were collected by discourse completion tests (DCT) which consisted of six situations. Their responses were categorized using the scale of Trosborg request theory and Brown and Levinson politeness. The findings showed that the students utilized hearer oriented conditions strategy when uttered to the hearer with higher status. However, the male students tended to use direct request strategy in the situation when they had high position status. The combination request strategy was used to pressure the intention of request utterance. The male and female students also used some supportive moves in their utterance.

Keywords: Request, Male and Female.

1. INTRODUCTION

Every day, as human beings we communicate with each other to convey information, share our thoughts and feelings, and maintain relationships. Depending on the nature of a situation, we may use linguistic or non-linguistic (e.g. facial expression, body language) modes of communication.

Successful communication entails not only the knowledge of grammar and text organization but also the pragmatic aspects of the target language and an understanding of social and cultural factors in a situation.

The evolution of human communication has taken shape over a period of thousands of years, and both men and women all over the world have contributed to the way we communicate today. Therefore, it is natural to expect that the way we communicate is

influenced by our cultural norms and gender differences.

Women tend to be more polite than men, and contrary to common belief, men talk more than women do, men pursue a style of interaction based on power, while women pursue a style based on solidarity and support (Coates, 2004).

A successful request requires some degree of linguistic perception that often varies across languages, thus the transfer of strategies from one language to another may result in inappropriate or nonconventional speech. English students also should know how to communicate politely in requesting.

From a structural perspective, requests may vary in terms of the number of utterances they have. Where there are several utterances, one of them is usually known as the nucleus of the speech act, referred to as the head act. The head act is the unit that can make up the speech act on its own, while the other elements are supportive.

Given such worldwide importance, an individual's English ability needs to be at least at a comprehensible level. To use English successfully in international communication, people who have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds truly need communicative competence. Communicative competence is the ability to use grammatically-correct sentences in appropriate contexts according to Canale and Swain (Bachman, L, 1990). Communicative competence subsumes linguistic competence and pragmatic competence. While the former refers to the ability to recognize language rules in order to form grammatically-correct sentences, the latter is the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts.

In concurrence with (Delahaie, 2011), points out that many advanced language learners are able to utilize complex linguistic systems, but are unable to express and interpret meaning in order to perform language functions (examples; apologies, requests) appropriately. The writer interest to study the request strategy since it is the component of directive speech act of pragmatics.

Pragmatic skills, the use of language in context, may be one of the most challenging tasks for nonnative speakers to master as they require both linguistic abilities and communicative competence that must fit in the target culture. According to (Brown and Levinson, 1987), the bigger the face threat (distance, power, and imposition) the higher the number of the strategy to be used in the use of different speech acts.

Requests, along with the speech acts of apology and refusal, have received substantial attention in second language acquisition research (Ellis, 1994). In another study conducted by (Economidou, 2010), her findings showed that participants' variation of requesting in regards to power, familiarity and imposition interact with cultural and other situational factors.

Her findings agreed with Blum-Kulka finding whose study of Australian English, German, French, Hebrew and Argentinian Spanish speakers' requests showed that ''while the overall distribution along the scale of indirectness follows similar patterns in all languages, the specific proportions in the choices between the more direct and less direct strategies are culture-specific'' (Blum, 1989). This study will analyze the level communicate of English students in requesting.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

25 male learners of English and 25 female learners of English took part in this study. The subjects are taken using the technique of stratified random sampling which means that the learners were selected randomly from among the senior students majoring in English. They were of intermediate level. They were majoring in English and had passed a considerable amount of time in courses run in English. The data can be discourse, sentences, clauses, phrases or words. The data of this research is the student result of Discourse Completion Test (DCT) in written form. It will be taken from all sample of this research.

The DCT outlined sixth written situations that the respondents may counter. They were asked to read a short description for each situation carefully and write their responses based on the situations. The writer made the Indonesian situation so that it would be suitable and more real.

Table 1 The Classification Category of DCT

Status		DCT Items
Lower to Higher	Close	DCT 1
	Familiar	DCT 2
	Unfamiliar	DCT 3
Higher to Lower	Close	DCT 4
	Familiar	DCT 5
	Unfamiliar	DCT 6

The DCT used in this study involves sixth written situation. In each situation there was a brief description that illustrated the status of participants (higher or lower) and their dominance over each other (close, familiar or unfamiliar). Participants were then asked

to write the expression of request to complete the DCT.

After collecting data, the researcher analyzed them by doing some activities. They are as follow:

1. Categorizing each data based on the category of requests strategies on the theory of Trosborg. They are as follows:
   a. Category 1: Indirect Request
   b. Category 2: Hearer-oriented condition
   c. Category 3: Speaker-based condition
   d. Category 4: Direct Request
2. Analyzing the request strategies applied by the characters based on Trosborg's theory.
3. Analyzing the politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson theory (1987: 92) which consisted four strategies.

The first three situations with higher status social consisted three situations; asking some books and files to the lecturer, asking to explain the thesis and asking someone come to the class. It was exposed that the students showed a preference for conventionally indirect request (hearer-oriented condition) in the form of ability/willingness/permission with modality *"would, may, can"*.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The request utterances could be seen that the male and female students had a difference in choosing the request strategies between higher and lower status. The choice of request strategy of male students was almost same with the female students in the first three situations with higher status; they use ability/willingness/permission strategy. But in the second three situations with lower status, the male students tended to apply Category-IV Direct Request and female students use Category-II Hearer oriented conditions with ability/willingness/permission.

Research has shown that women asked more questions than men. Fishman (in Coates 2004: 92) explains that questions and answers are linked together in conversation. A question, instead of a statement, gives the speaker power. The research found that women used interrogative forms more than men and that this may reflect women´s relative weakness in interactive situations (Coates, 2004: 93). The only time when men ask more questions than women is when the hearer has high status.

Based on the first and the second three situations, it proved that the students applied all request strategies in the different situations. Conventionally

indirect in the form of ability/willingness/permission strategy was applied by the students the most often. The second mostly used by the students was imperatives strategy and followed by obligation strategy and the next 5 strategies are more and less similar used by the students.

In the first and second three situations, the writer also found some students who applied some supportive moves in their utterance of requesting strategies. Supportive moves was additional statements whose function is merely to support the request properly and set context for the requesting as the head act. The supportive moves can be found after and before the head act or request form for softening their request. The writer found some supportive moves of preparing the content (*Mr, actually I have some tasks*) when asking some books and files, checking on availability *"may I disturb you?"*, marker *"please"* and apology *"I'm sorry".*

The speaker who used this supportive move knew the condition that the hearer looks busy with his time. So that he started his utterance by checking on availability. Checking on availability was to ensure that the hearer did not refuse because the requester came at an unfortunate time (Brown and Levinson,

1987: 210). In the second three situations, they did not utilize any kinds of supportivemoves in their utterance of request. They did not apply politeness device mostly in situation when the hearer has lower status mostly in situation VI.

The first situation was from lower to higher status with close relationship. This situation was about asking a lecturer to give some books and files. In this situation, most of the respondents used positive politeness and negative politeness as their utterance some combinations strategy in their utterances.

The last situation, the writer found also all kinds of politeness strategy and combination politeness, they were Bald on record, Positive politeness, Negative politeness, Off record and Combination politeness. In (1) (2) (3) the respondents uttered directly what they need with Bald on record. In Negative politeness, the respondents tended to use Be pessimistic (NP1) strategy with interrogative form of modality (4) *can,* (5) *could* and (6) *would.* In applying Off record, the respondents uttered Hint strategy (OR1) where the respondents told the request implicitly to the hearer (7) (8). The last was combination politeness, mostly, they just used negative politeness in combining the strategy. In (9) the Apology (NP4) with *sorry* was combined with Bald record, in

(10) the respondent used Bald then combined with Impersonalize S and H (NP5). Then, in (11) the respondent used Apology (NP4) also with *sorry* and Bald record.

In the first situation, there were difference choice of request strategy between male and female in this situation. The male and female respondents tended to use ability/willingness/permission strategy with difference percentage; there were 64% used by male respondents and 32% used by female respondents. Then, the second choice in this situation was wishes and desires strategy. That strategy mostly used by female with 28% compared with male respondents just 12%. The next strategy chosen by respondents was needs and demands strategy; both male and female respondents used the strategy with 8% respondents by male and 4% by female respondents. In the performatives strategy, the male respondents only used it with 4%. In this situation, there were two kinds of strategy; suggestory and obligations which just used by female with total 8% and 4% respondents. The writer also found combination strategy which use two and more strategy in one utterance. The combination strategy consist by male and female respondents

with compared; 12% by male respondents and 24% by female respondents.

In this second situation, the writer found four kinds of request strategies used by male and female respondents in asking their lecturer's explanation about their thesis, they were: (a) hint, (b) ability/willingness/permission and (c) wish and (d) needs/demands strategy.

The second situation male and female respondents almost same in the choice of request strategies. The first choice of request strategy was same in this situation. They used ability/willingness/permission strategy and needs/demands as the first choice and the second choice with difference frequency. The difference frequency was also found in hint strategy with 8% used by male respondents and 4% used by female respondents. The difference of request strategy in this situation was 4% female respondents used wishes/desires strategies while the male respondents did not use it. But, there was 8% respondents use only by male respondents.

In this section, the writer also found five kinds strategy used by male and female, they were (a) Hint, (b) ability/willingness/permission, (c) suggestory, (d) wishes/desires and (e) imperatives. Difference with two last situations, both of male and female

respondents used all the strategy with different frequency.

As the previous situation, in this situation also the ability/ willingness/ permission strategy was mostly used by the male and female with different frequency, 84% by male respondents and 80% by female respondents. Then followed with hint strategy, it was used mostly by male respondents with 8% while female with 4% respondents. The other strategy which was used by male respondents was need strategy with 8% respondents. And the strategy was wishes/desires strategy which was used just by female with 4% respondents. This situation was found that there was modification strategy used only by female respondents with total 12% respondents.

The male respondents used imperatives strategy as the first choice with 44% respondents, and the female respondents used ability/willingness/permission as their first choice with 60% respondents. Then, the second choice of male respondents was ability/willingness/permission strategy with 32% respondents while the female respondents use hint strategy as their second choice with 20% respondents. Other strategy followed was suggestory strategy, it used with 4% male respondents and 12% female respondents.

And the wishes/desires strategy was the fourth choice of respondents with 4% by male respondents and 8% by female respondents.

The situation showed that, in this situation, male respondents tended to use direct category as their first choice while female respondents tended to use indirect category to express their utterance to someone whit unfamiliar relationship.

The first three situations with higher status social consists three situations; asking some books and files to the lecturer, asking to explain the thesis and asking someone come to the class. It was exposed that the respondents show a preference for conventionally indirect request (hearer-oriented condition) in the form of ability/willingness/permission with modality *"would, may, can"*. Then it followed by wishes/desires strategy in uttering the request especially in situation II.

In the second three situations with lower status: asking the students to collect their photos, asking the university students to collect their lesson plans on teaching practice and asking the new students to collect their graduation letter. They also tended to use ability/willingness/permission mostly as the requesting strategy. The writer also found when the respondents request to the

hearers in lower status but familiar and unfamiliar relationship, they prefer using Category IV-Direct Request with needs/demands strategy, obligation/ necessity strategy and performatives strategy.

The request utterances can be seen that the male and female respondents had different in choosing the request strategies between higher and lower status. The choice of request strategy of male respondents was almost same with the female respondents in the first three situations with higher status; they used ability/willingness/permission strategy. But in the second three situations with lower status, the male respondents tend to apply Category-IV Direct Request and female respondents use Category-II Hearer oriented conditions with ability/willingness/permission.

Based on the first and the second three situations, it proves that the respondents applied all request strategies in the different situations. Conventionally indirect in the form of ability/willingness/permission strategy was applied by the respondents the most often. The second mostly uses by the respondents was imperatives strategy and followed by obligation strategy and the next 5 strategies were more and less similar used by the respondents.

In this first three situations the respondents tend to use mostly negative politeness of be pessimistic (NP1) started with "*would, may?*", apology (NP4) with "*sorry*, *excuse me, pardon me*" and deference (NP3) with "*Sir, Mr. and Mrs*". to the hearer with higher status social. But in the second three situations with lower social status, the respondents tended to use Bald on record as their politeness strategy especially in situation VI with unfamiliar relationship.

In the first and second three situations, the writer also found some respondents who applied some supportive moves in their utterance of requesting strategies. Supportive moves was additional statements whose function was merely to support the request properly and set context for the requesting as the head act. The supportive moves can be found after and before the head act or request form for softening their request. The writer found some supportive moves of preparing the content (*Mr, actually I have some tasks*) when asking some books and files, checking on availability "*may I disturb you?*", marker "*please*" and apology "*I'm sorry*".

The writer also found some respondents who tend to use some utterance with combination strategy of request. They used some combination to

the people with higher status in the first three situations. The combinations consisted with some request strategies of ability/willingness/permission strategy and needs/demands strategy. In the second three situations with lower status, the respondents use combination strategy with Category-IV which was needs/demands strategy, obligation/ necessity and performatives strategy.

Also, in the politeness strategies, the respondents in the first three situation and the second three situations tended to use modification politeness strategy which combines some politeness strategies in their utterance. Most of the combinations were Bald on Record Strategy, Positive Politeness Strategy with *Use in Group Identify markers* (PP4) *Be Optimistic* (PP11), *Include Both S and H in the activity* (PP12) and *Give Gift to H* (PP15), Negative Politeness Strategy with *Be Pessimistic* (NP1) *Deference* (NP3), *Apology* (NP4), Off Record Strategy with *Hint* (OR1).

It can be concluded that, in the first and second three situations, the male and female respondents tended to use ability/ willingness/ permission strategy then followed by imperatives strategy and obligation strategy. The male and female respondents made a difference in the choice of request strategy in difference

situation of higher and lower status. The male respondents used Direct Category in the second three conditions with lower social status while the female respondents used Hearer Oriented Category in the same social status. Some respondents uttered their request form with two or more request strategy. All the respondents used some supportive moves before and after the head acts in their utterance for softening their request utterance.

Based on the findings above, there were six situations that the writer find when respondents request to hearer. The respondents tended to use ability/ willingness/ permission strategy of Conventionally Indirect. It could be this strategy was the easiest and the most familiar form they ever use in everyday activity. While the suggestory strategy which was also part of hearer oriented conditions just used by ten respondents. The reason might be the respondents hardly advise someone else. They preferred using modality *"would, can, may could, etc"* for their simplicity.

In situation where the hearer as the lower status, the male respondents tended to use direct category and the female respondents prefer which use conventionally indirect request with interrogative form of modality *"would, may, can"* although they have imposition

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than the hearers. Research has shown that women ask more questions than men. Fishman (in Coates 2004: 92) explained that questions and answers were linked together in conversation. A question, instead of a statement, gave the speaker power. The research found that women used interrogative forms more than men and that this may reflect women´s relative weakness in interactive situations (Coates, 2004: 93).The only time when men asked more questions than women was when the hearer has high status.

In this study, the combination request strategy was used by some respondents. The combination means that they uttered two or more request strategies in one utterance. Mostly, it was aimed to emphasize the speaker that the respondents really need in requesting. The previous research shows that the respondents used one strategy in their utterance, in fact the study here the respondents can use some strategies in one utterance.

The writer also found that the respondents apply some supportive moves before and after the head act for softening their request and politeness strategies when they uttered their request to the hearer with higher social status in first three situations. The supportive moves of checking on availability "*may I disturb you?*" can be found in the first three situations. The speaker who used this supportive move knows the condition that the hearer looks busy with his time. So that he starts his utterance by checking on availability. Checking on availability was to ensure that the hearer doesn't refuse because the request comes at an unfortunate time (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 210). In the second three situations, they tended also did not utilize any kinds of supportive moves in their utterance of request. They did not apply politeness device mostly in situation when the hearer has lower status mostly in situation VI.

In this study, the writer also found some respondents used the politeness strategy in uttering the request. Most of female respondents apply Be Pessimistic (NP1), Deference (NP3) and Apology (NP4). While the male respondents use Bald on Record, Be Optimistic (PP11), Deference (NP3) and Apology (NP4). It can be known that the male respondents more efficiency and clarity in requesting the hearer. And also, the writer found the combination politeness. It occurred when the respondents combined the different category in one utterance, mostly they combined between positive politeness and negative politeness, then between positive politeness and bald on record.

This study found that the female respondents seemed to be more polite than male in using politeness strategies. The male respondents used politeness strategies a little bit more frequently than female respondents. It could be the ability of respondents to how utters the request. Because in using the request and politeness strategy, it depends on their knowledge of politeness and requests itself.

It can be concluded that, in the first and second three situations, the male and female students tended to use ability/willingness/permission strategy then followed by imperatives strategy and obligation strategy. The male and female students made a difference in the choice of request strategy in difference situation of higher and lower status. The male students used Direct Category in the second three conditions with lower social status while the female students use Hearer Oriented Category in the same social status. Some students uttered their request form with two or more request strategy. All the students used some supportive moves before and after the head acts in their utterance for softening their request utterance.

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students can use some strategies in one utterance. In this study the writer also found some students who tended to use some utterance with combination strategy of request. The combination meant that they uttered two or more request strategies in one utterance. Mostly, it was aimed to emphasize the speaker that the students really need in requesting. They used some combination request to the people with higher status in the first three situations. The combinations consisted with some request strategies of ability/willingness/permission strategy and needs/demands strategy. In the second three situations with lower status, the students used combination strategy with Category-IV which as the needs/demands strategy, obligation/ necessity and performatives strategy.

This study also found that the male students seemed to be more polite than female in using politeness strategies.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the male students used politeness strategies a little bit more frequently than female students. It could be the ability of students to how utters the request. Because in using the request and politeness strategy, it depended on their knowledge of politeness and requests itself.

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Also, it can be known the female students tend to more impolite in requesting than male students.

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