

The Impact of Social Power and Social Distance on the Request Strategies Employed by Saudi Learners and Teachers of English as a Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of the social power and distance on the strategies employed by Saudi learners and teachers of EFL in performing the speech act of requests. The participants of this study are twenty-five students and nine teachers at the university of Jeddah. All of them are Saudi females. The instrument of data collection was a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The results of the study revealed that the conventional indirect strategies are the most used ones by the participants followed by the direct strategies. The results also showed that the choice of the request strategies was based on the relationships between the interlocutors as most of the requests were influenced by the social power and social distance factors. It is hoped that this study will facilitate the acquisition of English pragmatics by Arab learners of English and ease communication not only inside the English classrooms but also with native speakers of English.

Keywords: Speech acts, Requests, Saudi EFL learners, Social power, Social distance.



1 Introduction

Acquisition of a foreign language requires having knowledge of the phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical systems of the target language. However, it is no less important for learners to acquire the target language sociopragmatic rules because good knowledge of these rules makes it easy for them to use the language and interact appropriately with native speakers, especially in the use of speech acts which are governed by the social or cultural norms in most societies. Acquiring the speech acts of the target language may be described as one of the difficult areas in the acquisition process. This is true and clear when the cultural norms of the learner's first and target language cultures are different. In this situation, learners usually rely on their L1 knowledge and make a variety of transfers into their target language. Doing so, it is necessary for them first to understand and have a clear idea about the rules governing the use of speech acts and whatever culture-bound features in order to decide on what is transferable to the new language. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), English is taught as an obligatory course in schools and universities. However, there is a little focus on the sociopragmatic rules of English for which reason Saudi students and graduates commit sociopragmatic mistakes when conversing with native speakers whose social and cultural backgrounds are different from those of the Saudi speakers. As a result of this gap in the pragmatic competence of the Saudi EFL learners, native speakers of English may misunderstand and view them as impolite. Encountering this difficulty of being unaware of the way speech acts are performed in the target language may hinder communication with native speakers of that language, as Rubin (1989) said "lack of knowledge of speech act realization patterns and strategies across culture can lead to [communication] breakdowns" (p. 12). Furthermore, the pragmatic research on the impact of the sociocultural norms on language has focused on the ways these rules are acquired in order to facilitate communication (Al-Adaileh, 2007). Having this gap, there is a need for the teachers of English in KSA to pay attention this aspect of pragmatics by giving more time and emphasis in their lectures on how to perform speech acts in the target language. Few studies in the Saudi context have tackled this issue which makes a gap in the existing literature on teaching pragmatics. Hence, the necessity for the current study surfaces.

While semantics is the study of the meaning of the individual words and sentences, pragmatics is the study of the speaker's meaning regardless of the dictionary meaning of the individual words used in the utterance. What the term 'pragmatics' means and refers to has been made clear by Crystal (2008) who said,

it [pragmatics] has come to be applied to the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on the other participants in an act of communication (p. 379).

In other words, pragmatics is concerned with the meanings intended by the speaker, what he or she wants to convey by using such a string of words. Pragmatics covers three areas, as divided by Leech (1983), general pragmatics, pragmalinguistics and



sociopragmatics. While general pragmatics refers to “the general conditions of the communicative use of language” (Leech, 1983, p. 10), pragmalinguistics focuses on “the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions” (ibid, p. 11). Sociopragmatics studies the viewpoints of the interlocutors according to the sociocultural rules of their community. The third category is sociopragmatics in which the focus is on “more specific ‘local’ conditions on language use” (ibid, p. 10). Similarly, Crystal (2008) said that the term ‘sociopragmatics’ is used in pragmatics “to refer to the way conditions on language use derive from the social situation” (p. 441). In this area of pragmatics, the different kinds of relationships between the language aspects and the socio-cultural norms and practices of the speech community of that language are investigated.

Most communications involve some utterances used to accomplish certain communicative actions; these utterances are called speech acts. Searle (1976) defined the term as “the basic minimal units of linguistic communication” (p. 16), whereas Crystal (2008) described the speech act as a term used in linguistics “to refer to a theory which analyses the role of utterances in relation to the behaviour of speaker and hearer in interpersonal communication” (p. 446). The study of speech acts of a language provides information about the social and linguistic rules of the speech community of that language (Meier, 1997) in which requests, apologies, suggestions, refusals, complaints and other speech acts are investigated. The present study focuses on the speech act of requests as performed by Saudi teachers and learners of English as a foreign language.

In requests, one person (the requester) asks another (the requestee) to take some kind of action. Searle (1969) classified requests under the class of ‘directives’ and considered the request as an attempt to get the hearer do an act which the speaker wants the hearer to do, and “it is not obvious to both *S* and *H* that *H* will do *A* in the normal course of events of his own accord” (p. 66) where *S* is the speaker, *H* is the hearer and *A* is the act. Searle (1979, p. 44) proposed a set of conditions necessary to be considered in order for a request to be successfully performed:

- 1- preparatory condition: *H* is able to perform *A*;
- 2- sincerity condition: *S* wants *H* to do *A*;
- 3- propositional content condition: *S* predicates a future *A* of *H*; and
- 4- essential condition: counts as an attempt by *S* to get *H* to do *A*.

In language acquisition research in general and foreign language acquisition in particular, the speech act of requests has attracted the attention of researchers because they are inevitable in any target language communication, so learners cannot avoid them being an important aspect of daily interactions. Recent studies on requests related to the present study include Scarcella and Brunak (1981), Al-Ammar (2000), Al-Gahtani and Alkahtani (2012), Kuhi and Jadidi (2012), Al-Otaibi (2015), Krish and



Salman (2016), Karimkhanlooei and Vaezi (2017), Qari (2017), Megaiab et al. (2019), Fitriyani and Andriyanti (2020), Qari (2021), among others. These studies are discussed in the literature review section.

The present study is an intralingual one as it explores the speech act performance in a single language, English. More precisely, it investigates the request strategies used by Saudi learners and teachers of EFL in an attempt to find out the degree of directness in their performance of this speech act and the impact of the social distance and social power on their choices of strategies. To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher posits the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are the request strategies employed by Saudi students and teachers of EFL?

RQ2: What is the impact of social power on their request strategies?

RQ3: What is the impact of social distance on their request strategies?

2 Literature review

Surveying the literature on speech acts in general and requests on particular, one finds that it is a rich area of research. However, for the purpose of the present study, a few relevant studies have been included in this section. For example, Kuhi and Jadidi (2012) investigated the Iranian EFL learners' perception and production of politeness in requests, refusals and apologies. The authors used Discourse Completion Test (DCT) to gather data from 63 MA ELT students. The results of the study revealed that participants have enough knowledge of speech acts and politeness strategies. The results also revealed that the participants preferred using indirect strategies in requesting and refusing, whereas direct strategies were used in apologizing. Similarly, Karimkhanlooei and Vaezi (2017) studied the relationships of the proficiency level of the Iranian EFL learners with the politeness strategies and external/internal modifications they employed in their written communication skills in making requests. The data were collected from 60 upper-intermediate and 60 intermediate male and female participants using the same instrument used by Kuhi and Jadidi (2012), DCT. The results revealed that the politeness strategies employed by the upper-intermediate group were more appropriate and fitting in the given situations when compared with those of the intermediate group as the former group used more negative politeness strategies. As for the gender variation, the female participants used more negative strategies than males, so the requests of the females were more polite compared to those of the males.

Fitriyani and Andriyanti (2020) investigated the communication between 30 high school Indonesian students and their English teacher in order to explore the use of politeness strategies. The authors video-recorded a 90-minute English lesson to gather the required data. The results of the study showed that participants employed positive strategies, negative strategies and bald-on-record strategies. The choice of strategies



was influenced by some factors including power and social distance. Among the three strategies employed by the students, the negative politeness was the most frequent one which indicates that Indonesian students were aware of the differences between them and their teacher.

Request strategies used by Arab learners of English have attracted the attention of researchers (e.g., Scarcella & Brunak, 1981; Krish & Salman, 2016; Megaiab et al., 2019, among others.

One of the earliest studies of requests performed by Arab ESL learners was Scarcella and Brunak (1981). In their study, they compared the requests made by beginners and advanced learners of English with those performed by American English native speakers using a role-play questionnaire. The focus of the study was on the directness of the requests. The results of the study showed that the learners group used more direct strategies than the native speakers group. Moreover, when the directness is compared between the two groups of learners, it is found that the beginners group used more direct strategies than the advanced one. The beginners used imperatives, the mood derivable strategy, regardless of the social status of the requestee, whereas the advanced group used imperatives only with addressees of equal or lower social status and used declarative statements with those of higher social status.

Krish and Salman (2016) studied the communication between Arab students with their lecturers via emails in a public Malaysian university. They analysed fifty emails written by male and female students in order to identify their politeness strategies, directness level and syntactic and lexical choice. The results of the study showed that the female participants employed indirect strategies in requests that involved high level of imposition, whereas the male participants employed direct strategies using some lexical politeness markers such as 'apologies' and 'please' to soften their direct requests.

Megaiab et al. (2019) conducted a study on the classroom communication between Libyan students and their lecturers in order to find out the types of politeness strategies of requests and the factors that influence their choice of these strategies. The results of the study showed that both groups, students and teachers, used query preparatory subtype of conventional indirect strategies more frequently than the direct and non-conventional indirect strategies. Based on this finding, the authors concluded that it is the quality of the relationship between the interlocutors that determines the choice of the request strategy. The results of the study also showed that the choice of the politeness strategies by both groups is influenced by the social power and social distance, the higher the level of indirectness is, the higher level of politeness is used. Direct strategies were used between speakers of close relationships softened by the use of some formulaic expressions including politeness markers and attention getters.

In the Saudi context, there are a number of studies that have been conducted on speech acts in general and requests in particular. In relation to the speech act investigated in the present study, the studies of Al-Ammar (2000), Al-Gahtani and



Alkahtani (2012), Al-Otaibi (2015), Qari (2017 and 2021) will be reviewed.

Al-Ammar (2000) conducted a study on the requests made by 45 Saudi female learners of English. Using DCT, the analysis showed that the directness of the speech act of requests influenced by the social distance and social power in which directness decreases as these variables are higher. Similar results were reported by Al-Gahtani and Alkahtani (2012) who conducted a study on the request strategies employed by Saudi learners of Australian English. Obtaining data from the participants through role-plays, the result of the analysis showed that social power played a significant role in the degree of directness of the request strategies chosen by the Saudi learners of English. Participants use of mild hint strategy increased as the hearer's power increased, whereas positive strategies including the use of the first name increased with decrease in hearer's power. Especially when addressing their professors, participants overused the 'title' strategy.

Al-Otaibi (2015) studied the request strategies of final-year Saudi students of English and compared their strategies to those of the native speakers in order to find out the amount of pragmatics knowledge that the Saudi students have about making appropriate requests. In terms of the level of directness, the results showed similarity in the performance of the two groups: native speakers and Saudi learners. However, especially for the use of the direct strategies including mood derivable and want statement and the use of lexical and syntactic modifiers, the results showed that the Saudi learners have limited awareness in using these two aspects of English pragmatics as compared to the native speakers'.

Qari (2017) investigated the speech acts of apologies and requests performed by Saudi Arabic speakers, EFL learners and British English university students in order to compare the politeness strategies used by these groups. She used a DCT to gather data from 160 male and female university students. Using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and Cross Cultural Speech Act Research Project (CCSARP) coding systems of request and apology for data analysis, the results of the study revealed that the Saudi Arabic group used more direct strategies in their requests when compared with the EFL and British groups who were more indirect. Moreover, the strategies employed by the EFL group were influenced by their L1 as they reflected a negative pragmatic transfer. The results also showed that the politeness strategies were based, to some extent, on the gender of the interlocutors but most prominent in the group of the Saudi Arabic native speakers.

Qari (2021) used a pre-test and post-test approach to investigate the role of explicit instruction of requests on Saudi EFL learners studying at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The results of the pre-test were similar to the findings of Al-Otaibi's (2015) study as the Saudi EFL learners were unaware of some of request strategies used by English native speakers. However, the result of the post-test showed a great improvement in the Saudi EFL learners' understanding of request forms in English as indicated by their recognition of request function names and their ability to assign correct functions to linguistic realization.



3 Methodology

3.1 Site and participants

The present study has been conducted at the University of Jeddah, it is the place where the researcher works, so this makes getting the permission to conduct the study easy as well as getting access to the participants. All the participants are female Arabic native speakers and English is their major and first foreign language. The study included 25 students and 9 teachers as participants. Student-participants are enrolled in an M.A programme at the department of English, university of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

3.2 Data collection

Data collection was carried out by using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). In pragmatics research, DCTs are employed to investigate the different speech acts and are used as a way to represent naturally occurring speech in scripted speech acts (Golato, 2003). This instrument of data collection was introduced by Blum-Kulka (1982a, 1982b); it involves either written or spoken situations which are designed with accordance to the objectives of the target study. Researchers employ DCTs in their research to obtain information from their participants expecting them to respond to the situations in what they consider appropriate in each designed situation. The usefulness of using DCTs is that data can be collected from a large number of participants in different imaginary situations with a kind of control over the desired variables (Kasper, 2000).

In politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), speakers choose their strategies in line with three social variables. These variables are the social distance, the social power and rank of imposition. These variables are basically based on the existing relationship between the interlocutors and the kind of speech act involved. In this study, there are 10 different situations: six of them were designed for the student-participants in which the student plays the role of the requester who asks a requestee, a classmate or the teacher, to perform an act. The other four situations were designed to obtain information from the teachers: the strategies they employ when requesting their students to do an act. The situations were designed to collect information about the request strategies in relation to the social variables of power and distance that may exist between the two interlocutors. By social power (P), it is meant the social status of the requester in relation to the requestee, so in situations where the former has a higher status than the latter, power is +P, when the social status is less, -P, and when the same, =P. Similarly, social distance (D) refers to the extent to which both interlocutors know each other. It is +D if they are unfamiliar to each other and -D is used to indicate that they are familiar to each other.



3.3 Data analysis

For data analysis, the researcher used the taxonomy introduced by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) in which requests are grouped under three main categories, viz., direct, conventional indirect, and nonconventional indirect strategies.

In this taxonomy, direct strategies category has five subcategories (1) *Mood derivable* in which the request is indicated by the grammatical mood of the verb as in 'clean up the mess'; (2) *Performative* in which the request is explicitly named as in 'I am asking you to move this chair'; (3) *Hedged performative* where the request is modified by hedging, for example, 'I would like to ask you to give me more time to submit my assignment'; (4) *Obligation statement* which explicitly states the hearer's obligation to carry out the task as when someone says 'you must move your car'; and (5) *Want statement* which indicates the speaker's desire that the hearer will perform the task as in 'I really wish you'd postpone the exam'. Indirect strategies are first divided into conventional and nonconventional categories then each is divided into two subcategories. The conventional indirect strategy can be *Suggestory formulae* in which the speaker makes a suggestion for the hearer to perform the task such as 'how about cleaning the mess?' or a *Query preparatory* which indicates an inquiry from the speaker about the possibility of carrying out the request by the hearer as in 'can you lend me your computer?'. The second indirect strategy is a nonconventional one in which request strategies are classified either *Strong hints* which involves an explicit reference to an object necessary for completing the task is made as in 'you left the door open', or *Mild hints* where no reference is made to any needed object, but it can be interpreted as a request according to the context, for example, 'I am a nun' - in response to a persistent hassle.

4 Analysis of Data

Relying on the data collected from the ten situations of this study, the researcher established four different categories according to the distance and power relationships that existed between the participants: (1) power variable is present on the part of the requestee and distance variable is present, so it is shortened as -P and +D; (2) participants have the same power but the distance variable is present, =P and +D; (3) neither power nor distance is present, =P and -D; and (4) both variables are present, but the power variable is present on the part of the speaker, +P and +D.

4.1 Less power with social distance (-P & +D)

This category is based on Situations 5 and 6 which were designed to elicit information about the politeness strategies used by students requesting their teachers. In Situation 5, each student is asked to imagine that she has an attendance shortage in one of the courses and performs a request to the teacher of that course to consider her case. The



required request from the students in Situation 6 is to ask the teacher to extend the deadline for submitting the assignment paper for a few days. The student-teacher relationships implies that the situation is formal where social distance exists between the two parties and the power variable is there; students have no power over their teachers, but teachers have some power over their students, being their teachers. So, when the student is the speaker, the situation is -P and +D.

Requesting the teacher to perform an activity, the students used the conventional indirect strategies. For example, they preferred using the strategy of *Query preparatory* in which they inquired about the possibility of carrying out their requests by the teacher. Using this indirect strategy, they are giving an option to the teacher to refuse doing the activity. Politely, they began their requests using 'would/could you' or 'can I' followed by 'please' to soften the request and add more politeness to it. For example, student (S) 2, S4, S9 and S10 (Situation 5) and S8 and S20 (Situation 6) used the structure "would you please" and S22 and S23 (Situation 5) used "could you please help". Another way students used to give the hearer, their teacher in this situation, the option not to do the act is the use of 'if' in their request to ask for whether such an act is possible or can be done by the teacher modified by 'please' or 'kindly'. For instance, S4, S6 and S9 (Situation 5) said "if you would please give me" and S15 (Situation 5) said "if you would kindly reconsider my circumstances".

Students also employed direct strategies in their requests for solutions of their attendance shortage problem and their not being able to submit the assignment on time. First, the *Want statement* direct strategy in which they indicated their desire for carrying out their request by the teacher. They used the verbs 'hope' or 'wish' to soften the request. For example, in Situation 5, S5 said "I hope for your understanding and help in this regard" and in Situation 6, S15 said "I really wish if you would kindly extend the deadlines". The second direct strategy used by the students is *Performative* in which they name their request using the verb 'ask'. For example, in Situation 5, S16 said "I am here to ask you for special consideration for my case" and in Situation 6, S3 said "I kindly ask you to postpone the submission deadline just for two more days". A third direct strategy is *Mood derivable* in which case the request is indicated by the grammatical mood of the verb. In Situation 5, the student-participants used the imperative mood of the verb to directly indicate their request. For example, in Situation 5, they used the verb 'reconsider' as in "please reconsider my situation" (S7), "please reconsider my case" (S8) and "please reconsider my situation and allow me to attend" (S17). On the other hand, Situation 6 lacks this direct strategy of *Mood derivable*. No single student used this strategy. The strategies used in Situations 5 and 6 are summarized in table 1 below.

**Table 1: strategies used in Situations 5 and 6**

Strategy		Example	Frequency	
			Situation 5	Situation 6
Conventional indirect strategies	Query preparatory	Would/could you please; If you would/could/can	15 (60%)	17 (68%)
	Direct strategies			
	Want statement	I hope/wish	4 (16%)	2 (8%)
	Performative	I am here to ask you for; I kindly ask you to	1 (4%)	3 (12%)
	Mood derivable	please reconsider my situation	3 (12%)	0
Other strategies			2 (8%)	3 (12%)
Total			25 (100%)	25 (100%)

4.2 Equal power with social distance (=P & +D)

This category is based on Situations 7 and 8. In these situations, each student is asked to imagine the possibility to refuse doing the request. For instance, in Situation 7, S18 said “could you please allow me to photocopy your notes” and S15 “if you could give me your notes of the previous lectures”. Examples from Situation 8 include S11 “could I borrow yours [laptop] for that she is interacting with another student who is not a close friend of her, unfamiliar to her, requesting something. In Situation 7, the request is to borrow somebody’s notes whereas in Situation 8, it is to borrow the laptop of a student.

In this category, the students employed the conventional indirect strategy of *Query preparatory* to request unfamiliar students; they used ‘would/could/can you please’, ‘if you would/could/can’ and ‘if I use/borrow’ to make their requests optional in the sense that the requestee has just one hour?” and S6 “if I use your laptop for my presentation”. Moreover, two sub-types of the direct strategies were employed in these situations, i. e, *Want statement* and *Performative*. The first one is indicated by the use of the verbs ‘need’ and ‘want’, whereas the second is indicated explicitly by the verb ‘ask’. In Situation 7, S22 and S23 said “I really need your notes” and S12 said “I am here to ask you”. Similarly, responses to Situation 8 involved such subtypes of the direct strategies such as S20’s request “I need to borrow your laptop” and S16 who said, “I am here to ask you for your laptop”. Table 2, below, shows the strategies used in Situations 7 and 8.

**Table 2: strategies used in Situations 7 and 8**

Strategy		Example	Frequency	
			Situation 7	Situation 8
Conventional indirect strategies:	Query preparatory	Would/could/can you please; If you would/could/can if I use/borrow	15 (60%)	18 (72%)
	Want statement	I need/wanted	2 (8%)	5 (20%)
Direct strategies	Performative	I am here to ask you	3 (12%)	2 (8%)
	Other strategies		5 (20%)	0
Total			25 (100%)	25 (100%)

4.3 Equal power with no social distance (=P & -D)

This category describes the speech act of requests being negotiated between friends where the power factor is equal, and the social distance is absent. It is based on Situations 9 and 10. As in the previous category, two strategies were employed: indirect conventional and direct strategies. They used the *Query preparatory* subtype of the indirect strategies to request the audio files and an explanation of some grammar lessons from their friends. In both situations, the *Query preparatory* was highlighted by the use of 'would/could/can you'. Under direct strategies, two types are found: *Want statement* and *Mood derivable*. The first one was indicated by the use of the verb 'need', whereas the second one was indicated by the verb 'send'. For example, in Situation 10, S13 said "I need you to explain some missed lessons", and in Situation 9, S5 said "please send me the listening tracks for the exam" and S10 said "Please send me your listening files I lost mine". The strategies used in Situations 9 and 10 are summarized in table 3 below.

Table 3: strategies used in Situations 9 and 10

Strategy		Example	Frequency	
			Situation 9	Situation 10
Conventional indirect strategies	Query preparatory	Would/could/can you please	12 (48%)	14 (56%)
	Want statement	I need	6 (24%)	7 (28%)
Direct strategies	Mood	Send me	4 (16%)	3 (12%)



	derivable		
Other strategies		3 (12%)	1 (4%)
Total		25 (100%)	25 (100%)

4.4 More power with social distance (+P & +D)

In this category, the analysis involves communications between teachers as requesters and students as requestees in academic context. So, the requester has more power over the requestee, and the social distance factor is present. It is based on data collected from Situations 1, 2, 3 and 4. In these situations, the teacher requests a student to carry books to the classroom, to switch the lights of the laboratory, to bring a cup of coffee and to return a book to the library, respectively. Like the previous categories, the strategies employed by teachers are indirect conventional and direct strategies. The teachers used *Query preparatory* sub-strategy of the indirect conventional strategies in the four situations using 'would/could/can you please' and 'if you'. However, the use of 'if' is found only in Situations 1 and 3. The direct strategies in this category involve two types: *Mood derivable* indicated by the imperative verbs 'switch, make, rush, bring and take'. It is found in Situations 2, 3 and 4. The other direct strategy is the *Hedged performative* which was used only in Situation 1 by teacher (T) 7 who said, "hey dear, looks like you felt that I needed your help". Table 4 summarizes the strategies used in Situations 1-4 with their frequency.

Table 4: strategies used in Situations 1-4

Strategy		Example	Frequency			
			Situation 1	Situation 2	Situation 3	Situation 4
Conventional indirect strategies	Query preparatory	Would/could/can you please; If you	6 (66.7%)	6 (66.7%)	5 (55.6%)	6 (66.7%)
Direct strategies	Mood derivable	Switch/make/rush/bring/take	2 (22.2%)	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)
	Hedged performative	looks like you felt that I needed your help (p7)	1 (11.1%)	0	0	0
Other strategies			0	0	1 (11.1%)	0
Total			9 (100%)	9 (100%)	9 (100%)	9 (100%)



5 Discussion

Having in mind the objectives and research questions of the study, it is noticed that in the four categories that encompass the different types of communication between students and teachers, two broad strategies are used, i. e., the conventional indirect strategies and the direct strategies. In the ten different situations, participants preferred to be indirect as they use the *Query preparatory* indirect conventional strategy in most of their requests regardless of the power and/or social distance that may exist. This indicates their desire to be polite in their communication and more precisely in making requests in whatever situation. This can be attributed to their cultural beliefs in how to request a person to do an act even if this person is a close friend as in Situations 9 and 10 of this study or in cases in which the requester has a kind of power over the requestee as in teacher-student communications discussed under the category of +P & +D in Situations 1-4 above. In these two cases, the requesters could directly make their requests without employing any politeness strategy, but, as said earlier, being bound by their cultural norms and beliefs, they employed certain request strategies to show politeness.

However, for research questions 2 and 3, the power and distance variable, to some extent, played a role in the participants' choice of the politeness strategies. This can be seen in the use of the direct strategies. As for the student-participants, in Situations 9 and 10 in which the social distance does not exist, the direct strategies use is more than the same in Situations 7 and 8 where distance exists; this goes in line with findings of the previous studies such as Al-Ammar (2000), Al-Gahtani and Alkahtani (2012) and Qari (2017). In Situations 9 and 10, ten participants used the direct strategies, *Want statement* and *Mood derivable* in each situation, whereas in Situations 7 and 8, the *Want statement* direct strategy was used by two and five participants respectively. In comparison with Situations 9 and 10, we find that the *Mood derivable* strategy was not used in Situations 7 and 8. Instead, the *Performative* direct strategy was used by three participants in Situation 7 and two participants in Situation 8. The difference in the frequency of the use of the direct strategies in these two groups of situations is attributed to the presence of the social distance in Situations 7 and 8.

Situations in which teachers are involved whether as requesters or requestees indicated the influence of the power and distance on the part of the requesters. In student-teacher situations (Situations 5 & 6), we find that the indirect strategies are used more than in student-student communication (Situations 7-10). Moreover, the teacher-participants data collected from Situations 1-4 clearly indicated the influence of power and distance on the request strategies used by the teachers. Although they are bound by the cultural norms of the Saudi society, they employed direct strategies in their communication with their students in more than one third of their requests.



This indicates that considering the social variables of power and distance seems to be a part of the communication norms at least in the academic context as in the finding of Megaiab et al. (2019) study that social power and distance considerations are embedded in the participants' socio-cultural background, so the higher the power or distance is, the more indirect the requests are and the other way round.

6 Conclusion

This study examines the effects of the social power and distance on the strategies employed by Saudi learners and teachers of EFL in performing the speech act of requests. It sheds light on the importance of pragmatic and communicative characteristics of EFL interactions in the Saudi context which are usually not paid enough attention in the Saudi educational settings. The results of the study showed that the conventional indirect strategies are most frequent than the direct strategies. Moreover, the choice of the request strategies was based on the relationships between the conversers since the majority of the strategies employed by the participants of this study were influenced by the social power and distance factors. It is hoped that this study will facilitate the acquisition of English pragmatics by Arab learners of English and ease communication not only inside the English classrooms but also with native speakers of English. Awareness of such strategies also may tell teachers of EFL in general that they need to pay more attention to what may influence the choice of learners' request strategies to get them acclimatized to native speakers' norms. The study recommends further research on other speech acts in the Saudi academic context such as apologies, compliments, refusals, etc. in relation to social and other factors that may influence speakers' strategies in order to have a panoramic view of the nature of the academic communication in this context.

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