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# The Effects of Social Distance, Power, Gender, and Imposition on the Request Behavior of Saudi EFL Learners and English Native Speakers

Abdulaziz Altamimi

Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU),
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

aitamimi@imamu.edu.sa
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0663-4242

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**الملخص**

يقارن هذا البحث أساليب الطلب المستخدمة باللغة الإنجليزية بين متحدثيها الأصليين ومتحدثيها كلغة ثانية. كشفت نتائج اختبار إكمال الخطاب (DCT) أن كلًا من المتحدثين الأصليين وغير الأصليين يستخدمون الاستراتيجيات غير المباشرة التقليدية بصورة أكثر من غيرها. بين البحث عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين المجموعتين في استراتيجيات الطلب المستخدمة. كشفت الدراسة تأثيرا مباشرا للمتغيرات الاجتماعية على أساليب الطلب المستخدمة.

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## Abstract

Little research has examined the production of L2 requests by Arabic second language learners of English. The present study aims to compare the request strategies employed by Saudi Arabian learners of English and English native speakers. It investigates the effects of social distance, power, and level of imposition on the production of requests in both groups. Results from the Discourse Completion Task revealed that Conventional Indirect strategies (CI) were the most frequently used request strategies by both native and non-native speakers, with no significant differences between the two groups. There was an effect of social power on request strategies, with Direct strategy being used more frequently in low-power than in high-power situations. Non-native speakers used Supportive Moves more frequently than native speakers, and high-proficiency learners used Supportive Moves more frequently than their low-proficiency counterparts. There was a positive association between all the social variables and the number of Supportive Moves used by both native and non-native speakers.

**Keywords:** DCT, L2 requests, level of imposition, power, speech acts, social distance

## Introduction

The study of speech acts has become a central focus in Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) research, as demonstrated by recent studies that highlight its role in understanding pragmatic competence in second language acquisition (e.g., Budeng & Merza, 2023; El-Dakhs et al., 2019; Omar & Razı, 2022; Taguchi, 2019). The notion of speech acts refers to "the basic minimal units of linguistic communication" (Searle, 1976, p. 16). Previous studies on speech acts have focused on requests (Taguchi, 2006), apologies (Trosborg, 2011), complaints (Ellwood, 2008), and compliments (Wu & Takahashi, 2016).

The study of requests, which is the focus of the present study, has received by far the most attention in ILP research (Ren, 2022). Requests are directive acts defined as "attempts on the part of a speaker to get the hearer to perform or to stop performing some kind of action" (Ellis, 1994, p.167). Based on this definition, requests are face-threatening acts because "the speaker impinges on the hearer's claims to freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, 201). Thus, in order to mitigate the degree of face-threatening acts of requests, speakers employ different request strategies that are constrained by three contextual factors: social distance, power, and level of imposition.

Research has shown that realizations of requests are different across cultures. A seminal work on requests was conducted by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) who compared how requests are performed differently in eight languages: British English, Australian English, German, Danish, Canadian French Argentinean Spanish, Russian, and Hebrew. The authors classified request strategies into three types based on the level of directness: direct requests (e.g., "*leave me alone*"), conventionally indirect requests ("*how about cleaning up?*"), and non-conventionally indirect requests ("*the game is boring*"). The study revealed cross-cultural differences in how request strategies were employed across different languages. For example, more direct strategies were employed in Argentinean Spanish than in British English.

Inspired by the Blum-Kulka and House and Kasper (1989) study, many studies have been conducted comparing how request realizations differ among English native (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) (e.g., Abdul-Sattar et al., 2009; Francis, 1997; Kim, 1995; Lee, 2005; Parent, 2002; Reiter, 2000). Although the speech act of L2 request has been widely studied, little research has been conducted in investigating the production of L2 requests by Arabic second language learners of English from Saudi Arabia. The cultural specificity of Saudi Arabic may provide important insights into L1 influence on L2 request production. The

aim of the present study is to compare request realization strategies between Saudi Arabian learners of English and English NS and to examine whether request strategies are influenced differently by social distance, power, and level of imposition.

## Literature Review

### *Speech Acts*

According to Yazdanfar and Bonyadi (2016), speech acts involve three aspects: locutionary (i.e., an actual utterance), illocutionary (i.e., the intention in making an utterance); and perlocutionary (i.e., the consequential effect of the illocutionary force of an utterance). Requests are directive illocutionary acts (Searle, 1975). Since requests are fundamental in everyday communication, they receive special attention in politeness research (Uso-Juan, 2010). They are considered face-threatening acts (FTAs) because they pose a threat to the interlocutors' faces (Yule, 1996). Searle (1979) proposed two types of requests: direct and indirect. Direct requests are 'locutionary acts' that can be understood clearly by interlocutors as they do not require any inference; indirect requests are 'illocutionary acts' because they need inference in order to comprehend the implied meaning of the request (Austin, 1962). Speakers tend to use indirect requests to avoid impoliteness by mitigating the illocutionary imposition of the utterance.

### *Politeness Theory*

When performing any speech acts, interlocutors need to be sensitive to what Goffman (1967) called 'face', defined as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 5). According to Goffman, face can be saved or lost during any interactions with others. Goffman's notion of face was developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) in their politeness theory. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 312) proposed two components of face:

1. negative face: the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others.
2. positive face: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.

The reason why requests are considered FTAs is because they involve the speaker (S) asking the hearer (H) to do or refrain from doing a particular act (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 319) identified three sociological variables based on which individuals vary their request strategies:

1. The 'social distance' (D) of S and H (a symmetric relation).

2. The relative 'power' (P) of S and H (an asymmetric relation).

3. The absolute ranking (R) of impositions in the particular culture.

These variables (D, P, and R) determine the degree of directness of requests (from more direct such as '*leave me alone*' to less direct such as '*the game is boring*'). However, Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) showed that speech acts are realized differently across cultures. This suggests that individuals from different cultures or languages may opt for different request strategies, or that they may be influenced differently by the sociological variables. Many interlanguage researchers have studied how these cross-linguistics/cultural differences might affect L2 requests. A representative summary of these studies is provided in the next section.

***Previous Studies***

Previous studies on cross-cultural pragmatics have mostly relied on either Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT) or role-plays as the two main data collection methods. DCT, in particular, has been widely employed in previous research. In this task, participants respond to situations eliciting a particular speech act.

Using DCT, Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) compared the request strategies made by advanced learners of English (from different L1 backgrounds) and English NS. Results showed significant differences between the two groups in the request strategies they used. For example, NS employed more mitigating strategies. Wang (2011) used DCT to compare the request strategies made by intermediate Chinese learners of English, highly proficient Chinese learners of English, and English NS. Results showed that there was a significant difference in the use of non-conventionally and conventionally indirect requests between NS and the L2 learner groups. Similarly, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2009) compared the request strategies between English NS and Greek NNS of English. She found that NNS employed more external modification strategies (e.g., *was wondering if*) and fewer lexical downgrades (e.g., *please*) than NS.

Few studies have focused on requests made by Arabic NS. Abdul Sattar, Lah, and Suleiman (2009) investigated the production of English requests by Iraqi learners of English using DCT. Results showed a strong tendency to use conventionally indirect request strategies (i.e., modals). However, the low sample size may render these findings ungeneralizable. Al-Marrani and Sazalie (2010) studied the effect of the gender of the hearer

on the requests made by Yemeni Arabic NS. The study showed that Yemeni Arabic tended to employ more direct request strategies in male-male interactions in comparison to male-female interactions where they employed more indirect strategies. Cultural and religious factors accounted for the preference for indirect strategies in male-female interactions. More recently, Alshraah and Daradkeh (2021) investigated the effect of L2 environment on request strategies by comparing Arabic EFL and ESL participants. Using DCT, the study found that both groups preferred Conventional Indirect strategies, as they used them more frequently than direct strategies.

Most studies on Saudi Arabian participants have focused on cross-cultural perspectives, particularly through the analysis of politeness formulas within regional dialects (e.g., Al Mufarreh, 2024). Although research on L2 requests by Saudi Arabian NS remains limited, few studies have explored this area. For example, Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012) compared the realization of request strategies made in American English and Saudi Arabic. The results of the DCT showed that while American participants preferred using the request strategy of conventional indirectness, Saudi Arabian participants preferred directness. Similarly, Alshammari (2015) compared how requests were realized in American English and Saudi Arabic. The results were consistent with those reported by Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily, showing that indirect request strategies were preferred by American participants, whereas direct strategies were preferred by Saudi participants. A comparable pattern was later reported by Qari (2017), who examined request realization strategies between Saudi EFL learners and British NS. DCT results revealed that Saudi participants showed a greater preference for employing direct strategies than British NS who preferred indirect strategies. An interesting finding is that Saudi participants included a greater number of religious modifiers in their requests (i.e., softeners and prayers). The study also showed that the gender of the speakers influenced the request strategies among the Saudi participants, with males showing a greater tendency toward direct strategies than females.

Other studies have studied the effect of social variables on the realization of requests by Saudi participants. For example, Almathkuri (2021) examined whether power and social distance influenced the request strategies of Saudi Arabic participants. The DCT results showed a stronger preference for the directness strategy in most situations compared to the nonconventional indirect strategy. However, participants preferred using a nonconventional indirect strategy when the requestee had a higher social status (i.e., power) than the requester. The conventional indirect strategy was used more frequently than the direct one when there

was a social distance between the requester and the requestee. The author concluded that the strategy of directness does not seem to reflect impoliteness in Saudi Arabic, as participants used it frequently in situations where social distance was absent.

Al-Aqeel (2016) employed role-playing to investigate if power, social distance, and gender of the hearer influenced the requests made by Saudi females. Results showed that the strategy of directness was the most preferred one. Social distance had the greatest influence on the requests realized by Saudi females. Similarly, Alqahtani (2022) employed DCT and modified the degree of imposition to examine its effects on favour-asking strategies. Results showed that imposition predicted the strategies used by Saudi participants, with higher imposition leading to more indirect strategies and increased use of supportive moves, aligning with politeness theory predictions (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987). Along similar lines, Alzahrani (2022) investigated how the gender of the requestee influences the request strategies employed by female speakers of Saudi Arabic. DCT results showed that the gender of the requestee significantly influenced strategy choice: more direct strategies were used when addressing female requestees, while more indirect strategies were used when addressing male requestees.

Although there were some studies on the effects of social variables on the production of L2 requests, little attention has been paid to the role of L2 proficiency. Recently, AlTameemy, Alshraah, and Alshammari (2024) investigated the effect of L2 proficiency on supportive moves (i.e., mitigating strategies used in requests) by Saudi Arabic learners. Results showed that in their request strategies high-proficiency learners employed a wider range of supportive moves and demonstrated greater sensitivity to social variables (power and social distance) than low-proficiency learners.

### *The Present Study*

There are two main limitations in literature. Although previous studies have examined Arabic learners' request strategies (e.g., Almathkuri, 2021; Alqahtani, 2022; Alzahrani, 2022), little is known about how Saudi EFL learners manage requests in relation to social distance, power, gender, and imposition. The Saudi context is particularly significant because English is primarily learned as a foreign language in formal educational settings, with limited opportunities for authentic interaction, which may influence pragmatic development. By comparing Saudi learners with native speakers, this study contributes to ongoing research in L2 pragmatics by providing empirical evidence on how sociocultural norms and proficiency

levels shape request behavior, thereby extending our understanding of interlanguage pragmatics.

Second, although previous research has investigated several social variables – such as social distance, power, and gender – and their influence on request strategies (e.g., Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Félix-Brasdefer, 2007; Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010; Dashti Khavidaki, 2023), the role of ranking of impositions – a core component of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework – remains comparatively underexplored. Furthermore, few studies have considered both situation-based variables and learner-based variables (i.e., L2 proficiency) within a single design. Previous research has shown that learners vary their request strategies in response to these social variables, yet a more comprehensive analysis that controls all these social variables is still lacking.

To address these gaps, the present study aims to achieve two main objectives: 1) to compare English request strategies employed by Saudi Arabic L2 learners and American native speakers and 2) to examine how situation-based variables (distance, power, ranking of impositions, and gender of the hearer) and L2 proficiency influence the request strategies used by participants. Accordingly, the present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the request strategies used by Saudi Arabic L2 learners, and how do they differ from those used by English NS?

2. What is the effect of distance, power, ranking of impositions, and gender of the hearer on the request strategies used by the two language groups?

3. How does L2 proficiency impact the L2 request strategies used by Arabic learners?

## Methods

### *Participants*

70 Saudi learners of English (L1 = Saudi Arabic) and 58 American English NS were selected for this study. All participants were males between 18 to 26 years old. The Arabic participants were undergraduate students studying English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. The NS participants had either completed their BA studies or were still studying. The English proficiency level of the Arabic group was estimated using an objective test: the 1,000 (1k) and 5,000 (5k) levels of the updated Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT), Version A (Webb, Sasao, & Ballance, 2017). Participants were also asked to complete a language background

questionnaire. Table 1 summarizes data related to the demographic and language proficiency of the NNS.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Data from the Language Background Questionnaire*

| Item from the questionnaire | NNS |
|---|---|
| Age of first contact with the L2 | 8.37 |
| VLT score (a 65-point scale) | 52.48 |
| Self-rating of Overall proficiency in English (a 7-point scale) | 5.02 |
| Self-rating of proficiency in speaking (a 7-point scale) | 5.01 |
| Self-rating of proficiency in understanding (a 7-point scale) | 5.75 |
| Self-rating of proficiency in reading (a 7-point scale) | 5.50 |
| Self-rating of proficiency in writing (a 7-point scale) | 4.37 |

**Data Collection Method**

Data were collected using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). DCT is an effective tool for collecting data on speech acts (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981) that has been commonly used in interlanguage pragmatics research. The DCT in the present study was adapted from established instruments in previous interlanguage pragmatics studies and designed based on the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) framework (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), which has been widely validated for analyzing request strategies. The DCT consisted of 16 situations intended to elicit request responses in English. Participants were instructed to respond to these situations as they would in real life. The situations varied based on the following social variables: social distance (+/–), power (+/–), ranking of impositions (+/–). The situations were counterbalanced for gender, such that there were two versions for the same situation differing only on the gender of the requestee. That is, half of the situations in the DCT had a male requestee and the other half had a female requestee, with the order of appearance for each half being counterbalanced in two lists (i.e., in list 1, the situations with male requestees appeared first, and in list 2 the situations with female requestees appeared first). Table 2 provides four examples of situations that varied based on gender and other social variables.

**Table 2**

*Examples of Situations Used in the DCT*

| Situation | Gender | Power | Distance | Imposition |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Before the class starts, you realize that you did not bring your pen. Sitting next to you, is a male classmate that you are very close to, and you can see that he has more than one pen. You turn to your friend and ask him to borrow his pen. You say: | Male | – | – | – |
| You need to ask a professor to participate in your class project by filling out a long questionnaire, which takes around 40 minutes to complete. You plan to ask a male professor who is teaching you the first time and you don't know him well. You are aware that he is too busy at the moment and may not have time to participate. After the class dismisses, you approach him and ask him to participate. You say: | Male | + | + | + |
| Before the class starts, you realize that you did not bring your pen. Sitting next to you, is a female classmate you are very close to, and you can see that she has more than one pen. You turn to your friend and ask her to borrow her pen. You say: | Female | – | – | – |
| You need to ask a female professor to participate in your class project by filling out a long questionnaire, which takes around 40 minutes to complete. You plan to ask a female professor who is teaching you the first time and you don't know her well. You are aware that she is too busy at the moment and may not | Female | + | + | + |

have time to participate. After the class dismisses, you approach her and ask her to participate. You say:

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DCT data were analyzed using the coding scheme developed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989, p. 18) to analyze request strategies. To ensure reliability, the same coding procedures were applied consistently throughout the dataset following the CCSARP categorization scheme. According to this coding scheme, the head act of requests, "the minimal unit which can realize a request", is the main unit of analysis (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 275). Based on the analysis of the head act, this approach distinguishes three main request strategies of different levels of directness: 1) direct strategies, in which request is conveyed grammatically by the head act (e.g., imperatives); 2) conventional indirect strategies, in which request is implied contextually; and 3) nonconventional indirect strategies, in which inference is required to interpret the intent of a request. Table 3 presents Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's (1989) request strategies as well as their subcategories and examples.

**Table 3**

*Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's (1989) Request Strategies*

| **Strategy** | **Illustration** | **Example** |
|---|---|---|
| Direct strategies | | |
| 1. Mood derivable/imperatives | Request is conveyed explicitly and grammatically by the verb. | Open the window. |
| 2. Performatives | The illocutionary force of request is directly named. | I am asking you to open the window. |
| 3. Hedged performatives | The illocutionary force of request is hedged. | I would like to ask you to postpone the due dates for this assignment. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4. Obligation statements | The request is indicated by stating the hearers' obligation to fulfill it. | You will have to clean up the room. |
| 5. Want statements | It expresses the speaker's desire for the request to be fulfilled. | I really wish you would postpone the due dates for this assignment. |
| Conventional indirect strategies | | |
| 1. Suggestory formulae | It contains a suggestion to do something. | How about cleaning up the room? |
| 2. Query preparatory | The illocutionary force of request is hedged by making a reference to preparatory conditions (e.g., ability or willingness). | Can you clean up the room? |
| Nonconventional indirect strategies | | |
| 1. Strong hints | The act of request is implied directly from the context. | You have left the room in a complete mess. |
| 2. Mild hints | The act of request is interpreted by making an indirect contextual inference. | *I'm a nun* as a response to a hassler. |

Following Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), head acts were also analyzed according to their external modifications – supportive moves. Supportive moves can appear before or after the head act and they function to mitigate the illocutionary force of requests. The most common supportive moves include preparator, grounder, disarmer, promise of reward, and imposition minimizer. Table 4 illustrates these supportive moves with some examples.

**Table 4**

*Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's (1989) supportive moves for head acts*

*of a request**

| **Type** | **Illustration** | **Example** |
|---|---|---|
| Preparator | "the speaker prepares her or his hearer for the ensuing request /. . . / by asking about the potential availability of the hearer for carrying out the request, or by asking for the hearer's permission to make the request'' | *You had this class before, right?* |
| Grounder | ''The speaker gives reasons, explanations, or justifications for his or her request, which may either precede or follow it" | *I didn't attend yesterday's class because I was sick.* |
| Disarmer | ''The speaker tries to remove any potential objection the hearer might raise upon being confronted with the request''. | "*So I know that you will need my presence on Friday*". |
| Promise of reward | ''increase the likelihood of the hearer's compliance with the speaker's request, a reward due on fulfillment of the request, is announced''. | *I will buy you lunch.* |
| Imposition minimizer | "The speaker tries to reduce the imposition placed on the hearer by his request''. | *.. if that's fine with you.* |
| Appreciation | The speaker shows his appreciation for the hearer. | *I would greatly appreciate it if you can do X for me.* |
| Apology | The speaker provides an apology to reduce the imposition of the request. | *I am sorry but I can not be there tomorrow, so could you do X.* |

**Note.* All citations in the table are from Blum-Kulka et al. (1989, p. 273-289).

## Procedure

The study was conducted in a quiet room at a university in Saudi Arabia. The study was carried out in one session, lasting approximately 45 minutes. Upon arrival, the study was explained briefly, and participants signed an informed consent form. Then participants took part in the DCT. At the end of this task, participants were asked to complete the proficiency test (the updated VLT, Webb, Sasao, & Ballance, 2017). Lastly, they filled out the language background questionnaire.

## Data Analysis and Results

Each response was coded based on Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) classification of request strategies and supportive moves. Two models were fitted in R (Version 3.6.1;R Core Team, 2019) for the two outcome variables: Request Strategy (a multinominal variable with three levels) and Supportive Moves (a count variable). For Request Strategy, multinomial logistic regression models were fitted using the *nnet* package (Venables & Ripley, 2002). For Supportive Moves, generalized linear models with *poisson* distributions were fitted using the MASS (Venables and B. D. Ripley, 2002) and stats packages (R Core Team, 2023). The *p*-values were estimated using the *broom* package (Robinson, Hayes, & Couch, 2023). Post-hoc tests were performed using the *emmeans* package (Lenth, 2019), with *Tukey* adjustment for multiple comparisons.

The tested models included one main predictor: Group (NS versus NNS). The following predictors and their interactions were included only if they significantly improved the fit of the final models: Distance (i.e., social distance), Power (i.e., professor vs., classmate), Imposition (i.e., ranking of impositions), Gender (i.e., requestee's gender), and Proficiency (for NNS). The variables in Distance, Power, and Imposition were binary: 1 = +, 0 = –.

The final reported models for Request Strategy and Supportive Moves were the best fits with predictors that made significant contributions (as shown by likelihood-ratio chi-squared tests). For the Request Strategy model, only Group, Distance, and Power made a significant improvement, $p < .05$. For the Supportive Moves model, Group, Distance, Power, and Imposition made a significant improvement, $p < .05$.

Table 5 reports the number of request strategies used by NS and NNS. Table 6 presents a summary of the model output for Request Strategy, and Table 7 presents a summary of the pairwise comparison results between NS and NNS in their choices of

Request Strategy. Table 5 shows that Conventional Indirect strategies (CI) were the most commonly used request strategies by both NS and NNS, followed by Direct (D) and then Nonconventional Indirect (NI) strategies (the least commonly used strategy). Table 6 and 7 indicate that the differences between the strategies were significant for NNS. However, the difference between Direct and Nonconventional Indirect strategies among NS was not statistically significant. Pairwise comparison tests (Table 7) revealed no significant differences between NS and NNS in the request strategies they chose.

Tables 8 and 9 summarize the pairwise comparison results examining the effects of Distance and Power. The tables show that Distance was not a significant predictor of Request Strategy. Power had a significant effect but only on the Direct strategy, with participants choosing more Direct strategies with power (–) than with power (+) (see Table 9). Likelihood-ratio chi-squared tests showed that neither Gender ($p$ = 0.746) nor Imposition ($p$ =0.563) improved the fit of the model. There was no interaction between any of the predictors in the model, $p < .05$.

In order to examine whether the English proficiency level of the NNS participants modulated Request Strategy, Proficiency was included in a model of only the NNS data. However, proficiency scores did not predict Request Strategy, $ps > .05$.

**Table 5**

*Count and Percentages of Request Strategy used by NS and NNS*

| Group | Request Strategy | count | percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| NNS | Nonconventional indirect strategies (NI) | 3 | 0.28 % |
| NNS | Conventional indirect strategies (CI) | 1030 | 96.10 % |
| NNS | Direct strategies (D) | 39 | 3.64 % |
| NS | Nonconventional indirect strategies (NI) | 5 | 1.36 % |
| NS | Conventional indirect strategies (CI) | 357 | 97.00 % |
| NS | Direct strategies (D) | 6 | 1.63 % |

**Table 6**

*Multinomial Logistic Regression Model Output for Request Strategy*

| | Request Strategy |
|---|---|

| *Predictors* | *Odds Ratios* | *CI* | *p* | *Response* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 450.58 | 89.85 – 2259.59 | **<0.001** | Conventional indirect strategies |
| Group [NS] | 0.21 | 0.05 – 0.87 | **0.032** | Conventional indirect strategies |
| Distance [1] | 1.01 | 0.25 – 4.09 | 0.984 | Conventional indirect strategies |
| Power [1] | 0.61 | 0.15 – 2.58 | 0.504 | Conventional indirect strategies |
| (Intercept) | 35.57 | 6.74 – 187.79 | **<0.001** | Direct strategies |
| Group [NS] | 0.09 | 0.02 – 0.49 | **0.005** | Direct strategies |
| Distance [1] | 0.49 | 0.11 – 2.27 | 0.363 | Direct strategies |
| Power [1] | 0.19 | 0.04 – 0.94 | **0.041** | Direct strategies |
| Observations | 1440 | | | |
| $R^2$ / $R^2$ adjusted | 0.055 / 0.051 | | | |

**Table 7**

*Summary of the Pairwise Comparison Results between Group and Request Strategy*

| **Group** | **Request Strategy** | **Contrast** | **estimate** | ***t*.ratio** | ***p*.value** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **NNS** | . | Nonconventional indirect strategies - Conventional indirect strategies | -0.958 | -147.379 | 0.000 |
| **NNS** | . | Nonconventional indirect strategies - Direct strategies | -0.033 | -5.684 | 0.001 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **NNS** | . | Conventional indirect strategies - Direct strategies | 0.924 | 80.803 | 0.000 |
| **NS** | . | Nonconventional indirect strategies - Conventional indirect strategies | -0.956 | -69.987 | 0.000 |
| **NS** | . | Nonconventional indirect strategies - Direct strategies | -0.003 | -0.303 | 0.996 |
| **NS** | . | Conventional indirect strategies - Direct strategies | 0.953 | 66.221 | 0.000 |
| **.** | Nonconventional indirect strategies | NNS – NS | -0.010 | -1.728 | 0.389 |
| **.** | Conventional indirect strategies | NNS – NS | -0.009 | -0.872 | 0.857 |
| **.** | Direct strategies | NNS – NS | 0.020 | 2.311 | 0.175 |

**Table 8**

*Summary of the Pairwise Comparison Results between Distance and Request Strategy*

| Request Strategy | Distance | Contrast | estimate | t.ratio | p.value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NI | . | Distance0 - Distance1 | 0.000 | 0.003 | 1.000 |
| CI | . | Distance0 - Distance1 | -0.017 | -1.829 | 0.389 |
| D | . | Distance0 - Distance1 | 0.017 | 2.255 | 0.227 |
| . | 0 | NI – CI | -0.948 | -87.630 | 0.000 |
| . | 0 | NI – D | -0.027 | -3.335 | 0.051 |
| . | 0 | CI – D | 0.921 | 64.747 | 0.000 |
| . | 1 | NI – CI | -0.966 | -100.187 | 0.000 |
| . | 1 | NI – D | -0.009 | -1.475 | 0.570 |
| . | 1 | CI – D | 0.957 | 93.588 | 0.000 |

**Table 9**

*Summary of the Pairwise Comparison Results between Power and Request Strategy*

| | **Request Strategy** | **Power** | **contrast** | **estimate** | **t.ratio** | **p.value** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | NI | . | Power0 - Power1 | -0.004 | -0.70 | 0.938 |
| 2 | CI | . | Power0 - Power1 | -0.023 | -2.35 | 0.196 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | D | . | Power0 - Power1 | 0.03 | 3.39 | 0.046 |
| 4 | . | 0 | NI - CI | -0.95 | -92.16 | 0.000 |
| 5 | . | 0 | NI - D | -0.03 | -4.08 | 0.018 |
| 6 | . | 0 | CI - D | 0.91 | 60.65 | 0.000 |
| 7 | . | 1 | NI - CI | -0.97 | -93.76 | 0.000 |
| 8 | . | 1 | NI - D | -0.00 | -0.42 | 0.989 |
| 9 | . | 1 | CI - D | 0.96 | 104.62 | 0.000 |

**Supportive Moves**

The second outcome variable, Supportive Moves, was fitted in generalized linear models with *poisson* distributions. Table 10 summarizes the number of Supportive Moves used across all conditions. Table 11 presents the model output for the analyses of Supportive Moves. The table shows that all variables were significant predictors of Supportive Moves. Group was significant, with NNS ($M = 1.12$) producing a greater proportion of Supportive Moves than NS ($M = 0.94$). Distance, Power, and Imposition had significant effects on Supportive Moves, with participants employing more Supportive Moves in situations where these variables were high (+) than when they were low (–).

A final separate analysis was conducted to investigate the effect of NNS's proficiency on Supportive Moves (in a model of only the NNS data). The model output is summarized in Table 12. Proficiency scores significantly predicted the number of Supportive Moves, with higher proficiency scores eliciting a greater number of Supportive Moves.

**Table 10**

*Summary of the Number of Supportive Moves Used across Different Conditions*

| Group | Distance | Power | Imposition | Supportive Moves (Means) | Supportive Moves (SD) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NNS | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.60 | 0.72 |
| NNS | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1.03 | 1.16 |
| NNS | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0.77 | 0.75 |
| NNS | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1.32 | 1.32 |
| NNS | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0.88 | 0.93 |
| NNS | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1.39 | 1.37 |
| NNS | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1.12 | 1.11 |
| NNS | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1.81 | 1.45 |
| NS | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.39 | 0.49 |
| NS | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.80 | 1.02 |
| NS | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0.65 | 0.60 |
| NS | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1.15 | 1.19 |
| NS | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0.83 | 0.74 |
| NS | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1.39 | 1.54 |
| NS | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0.98 | 0.77 |
| NS | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1.37 | 1.27 |

**Table 11**

*Generalized Linear Model Output for Supportive Moves*

| | **Supportive Moves** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Predictors* | *Log-Mean* | *std. Error* | *Statistic* | *p* |
| (Intercept) | -0.49 | 0.06 | -8.17 | **<0.001** |
| Group [NS] | -0.17 | 0.06 | -2.71 | **0.007** |
| Distance [1] | 0.36 | 0.05 | 6.89 | **<0.001** |
| Power [1] | 0.24 | 0.05 | 4.67 | **<0.001** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Imposition [1] | 0.50 | 0.05 | 9.57 | **<0.001** |
| Observations | 1440 | | | |
| $R^2$ | 0.153 | | | |

**Table 12**

*Effect of Proficiency on Supportive Moves*

| | **Supportive Moves** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Predictors* | *Log-Mean* | *std. Error* | *Statistic* | *P* |
| (Intercept) | -1.61 | 0.24 | -6.62 | **<0.001** |
| Distance [1] | 0.34 | 0.06 | 5.76 | **<0.001** |
| Power [1] | 0.25 | 0.06 | 4.33 | **<0.001** |
| Imp [1] | 0.50 | 0.06 | 8.41 | **<0.001** |
| Total score | 0.02 | 0.00 | 4.83 | **<0.001** |
| Observations | 1072 | | | |
| $R^2$ | 0.176 | | | |

## Discussion

Little research has considered the combined effects of social distance, power, ranking of impositions, and the gender of the hearer on L2 request strategies. The present study aimed to compare the production of English request strategies between NS and NNS and to investigate the effects of these situation-based variables on the request strategies used by participants.

The main findings of the current study are summarized as follows. Conventional Indirect strategies were the most frequently used request strategies by both NS and NNS, and Direct strategies were more frequently used than Nonconventional Indirect strategies by NNS (although this difference was not significant for NS). There were no differences in request strategies between NS and NNS, with no effects of Distance on their responses. However, there was an effect of Power on responses, whereby Direct strategy was employed more frequently when an addressee held a lower (–) position rather than a (+) one. Proficiency of L2 learners did not influence learners' request strategies.

As for Supportive Moves, the study showed that NNS used a greater number of Supportive Moves than NS. Distance, Power, and Imposition were all significant predictors of Supportive Moves, with participants producing a greater number of Supportive Moves when these predictors were in a (+) than in a (–) status. Proficiency also predicted Supportive Moves: higher proficiency scores were associated with a greater number of Supportive Moves.

The first research question compared the request strategies produced by Saudi Arabic L2 learners and English native speakers. The findings revealed no major differences between NS and NNS in the request strategies they chose. Both NS and NNS showed a stronger preference to use Conventional Indirect strategies (CI) than any other strategies. Direct strategies (D) were more frequently used than Nonconventional Indirect (NI) strategies by NNS while NS showed no difference in their use of the two strategies. The finding that Conventional Indirect strategies were the most frequently used strategy by NS supports previous studies (e.g., Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). The preference of Saudi Arabic L2 learners for using Conventional Indirect strategies was supported by Abdul Sattar, Lah, and Suleiman (2009) who found that Iraqi L2 learners preferred to use Conventionally Indirect request strategies.

The results indicated that Saudi Arabic L2 learners used the Direct strategies (D) more frequently than the Nonconventional Indirect (NI) strategies, in comparison to NS who showed no difference in their use of the two strategies. This pattern is consistent with previous findings, showing that direct request strategies were the most preferred by Saudi Arabian participants (Al-Aqeel, 2016; Almathkuri, 2021; Alshammari, 2015; Qari, 2017; Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). However, in contrast to these studies, the present study showed that Conventional Indirect strategies (CI) were used more frequently than direct request strategies by Saudi Arabic L2 learners. One explanation is that participants in the current study were highly proficient in English. This view suggests a progression towards more native-like request strategies (i.e., indirect) with increased L2 proficiency.

There was a difference between NS and NNS in the number of Supportive Moves used. The study indicated that NNS used a greater number of Supportive Moves than NS. One explanation is that NNS showed a greater tendency to use direct strategies than NS, which might have led them to overuse Supportive Moves in order to mitigate the imposition of the direct strategies they employed. The greater use of Supportive Moves by NNS suggests that they utilized these moves as a strategy to enhance politeness, consistent with previous studies on L2 pragmatic development (Taguchi, 2011).

The second research question addressed the effects of social variables on the request strategies used by NS and NNS. The results showed no effects of distance, ranking of impositions, and gender of the requestee on their responses. There was an effect of Power on responses: low-power situations elicited a greater number of direct strategies than high-power situations. The significant effect of Power on Direct strategies supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, as participants mitigated imposition in high-power contexts. This supports the findings of Almathkuri (2021), which showed that Saudi Arabian participants preferred a nonconventional indirect strategy in high-power situations. However, in contrast to the present study, Almathkuri (2021) and Al-Aqeel (2016) found an effect of social distance on request responses.

The results of this study contrast with those of Alzahrani (2022), where Saudi participants used more direct request strategies when addressing females and more indirect request strategies when addressing males. The discrepancy in the two studies' findings could be attributed to the gender of participants: in Alzahrani's study, all participants were females while the participants in the present study were all males.

The study found an effect of social variables on the number of Supportive Moves used by both NS and NNS. Participants used a greater number of Supportive Moves in +Distance, +Power, and +Imposition situations than in situations that were marked (–) in these variables. This was supported by Alqahtani's (2022) findings, which showed that greater use of Supportive Moves was associated with highly imposing situations. One explanation is that participants employed more Supportive Moves to mitigate the illocutionary force of their requests in such contexts.

The third research question addressed the effects of L2 proficiency on the L2 request strategies used by Saudi Arabic learners. The study did not find an effect of proficiency on learners' request strategies. The lack of a proficiency effect might be due to the limited variation in participants' proficiency scores, thus reducing statistical power. However, there was an effect of proficiency on Supportive Moves, with higher proficiency scores being associated with a greater number of Supportive Moves. The positive association between proficiency and Supportive Moves indicates that pragmatic competence develops alongside linguistic proficiency. This finding is consistent with the study by AlTameemy, Alshraah, and Alshammari (2024), suggesting that increased L2 competence allowed learners to use a wider range of lexical items in their requests. Another explanation is that advanced L2 learners intentionally overused Supportive Moves to demonstrate their competence in the L2 (Hassall, 2001). Conversely, the limited proficiency in English of low-proficiency learners may account for their reduced use of Supportive Moves.

**Limitations and Recommendation for Future Research**

It is important to note that the present study had several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study used DCT as the main data elicitation method. DCTs have been widely used in literature to elicit requests because they allow the manipulation of social variables (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2013). However, they do not directly tap into natural language production. As a result, DCTs may only capture participants' explicit pragmatic knowledge rather than their actual performance in real-life situations. Future research is thus suggested to employ methods that allow for a more natural form of interaction such as role-plays. Second, the present study has focused exclusively on the speech act of requests by male participants in male-to-male and male-to-female interactions. This restricts the generalizability of the findings across genders. Future research should explore the production of requests across both male and female participants, which would enhance our understanding of the effects of gender on request strategies. It would also be interesting to

compare the production of requests in the L1 and the L2 by the same participants in a within-subject design, as this comparison could help assess whether the L1 influences the request strategies used in the L2. Finally, the present study is cross-sectional, which does not allow for examining the development of request strategies and supportive moves over time. Future research employing longitudinal designs could provide valuable insights into the development of pragmatic competence in EFL learners.

## Conclusion

The present study compared the request strategies used by Saudi Arabic L2 learners and English NS across different social situations. Results indicated that the Conventional Indirect strategies (CI) were the most frequently used request strategies by both NS and NNS, with no significant differences between the two language groups. Power influenced the request strategies: Direct strategy was used more frequently in low-power than in high-power situations. The study showed that both NS and NNS used a higher number of Supportive Moves when addressing requestees who were socially distant, held higher power over them, or when the imposition of the request was high. NNS used more Supportive Moves than NS, and high-proficiency learners used more Supportive Moves than their low-proficiency counterparts.

## Author Biography

Abdulaziz Altamimi is an assistant professor at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU). He completed his PhD studies in applied linguistics at the University of Nottingham. He specializes in language acquisition and psycholinguistics studies, with an interest in socio-pragmatics research.

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