Request Strategies by Second Language Learners of English: Pre- and Post-Head Act Strategies

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Abstract

This study investigates the speech act of request by Saudi high- and low-level learners of Australian English. All participants were asked to take part in three different role plays, which varied according to the relative power relationship between the informant and the conductor. We found that high-level learners did not considerably differ from low-level learners in terms of pre- and post-head act strategies, and request strategies; thereby indicating that proficiency level does not have a significant impact on L2 learners' choice of pre- and post-head act strategies and request strategies. However, both groups of learners deviated from Australian English native speakers in terms of post-head act and request strategies. In light of the social variable (power) influence, it was found that power affected both groups of learners, along with the native speaking group, in terms of pre- and post-head act strategies. However, power did not have an impact on the SLL group, while it did have an effect on the high-level group, along with the native speaking group, in terms of request strategies. Thus, there is no apparent correlation between the social variable (power) and L2 learners' use of pre- and post-head act strategies, while power positively correlates with L2 learners' proficiency level regarding their use of request strategies.

Key words: Inter language pragmatics; Speech act of requests; L2 learners

Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) has become an increasingly popular area of study for second language researchers, reflected in the large number of publications to appear over the past three decades (see Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Kasper & Rose, 1999, for review). Nevertheless, the majority of these studies adopt a contrastive framework rather than a developmental one (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 1999), focusing either on how native speakers (NSs) of a given language differ from NSs of another language, or how second language (L2) learners vary from NSs of the target language. What has been underemphasized so far in ILP research has been the investigation of pragmatic development amongst L2 learners. As Kasper and Dahl (1991) have pointed out, more work needs to be done in order to establish how learners' pragmatic competence develops over a period of time and the extent to which social factors (e.g. age and exposure) impact upon the development of learners' pragmatic repertoire.

In response to this gap in the literature, a small, but growing body of research has been undertaken in developmental pragmatics. Most studies, however, tend to be based on Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs), calling into question the validity of their findings. As a result, there is still a need for more research on developmental pragmatics which the current study intends to fulfill by examining requests made Saudi learners of Australian English.

SPEECH ACT OF REQUESTS

Searle (1969) defined a request as a directive act by the speaker, who directs the hearer to perform a task of which the latter is capable. Brown and Levinson (1987) identified the speech act of request as one of the "face-threatening acts" (FTAs). Furthermore, requests vary from one culture and language to another (Hassall, 2003). Moreover, requests, in addition to refusals and apologies, have been given enormous attention in second language acquisition (SLA) research (Ellis, 1992).

According to the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) coding scheme (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989), requests comprise two parts: the head act and the peripheral constituents. The former is deemed as an utterance that can stand by itself and be perceived as a request independently of any peripheral constituents. The latter refers to the utterances that either precede and/or follow the head act; instances of these utterances are alerters, supportive moves, etc. These kinds of utterances have nothing to do with the propositional content, however they can affect the illocutionary force by mitigating and/or aggravating the propositional content of an act.

In addition, speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) shows that there are two ways of performing the same act: directly and indirectly. Holtgraves (1986) defined a direct strategy as an utterance in which the speaker's intent and the propositional content are identical. This clearly indicates that a direct strategy has one illocutionary force or meaning as well as the speaker explicitly conveying his/her intention (Clark, 1979). When considering direct strategies in requests (Blum-Kulka *et al.,* 1989) identified four direct strategies. These strategies are mood derivable (imperatives), performatives (hedged and explicit), obligation, and want statements.

In contrast, an indirect strategy is defined as an utterance in which the speaker's intent is at odds with the propositional content (Achiba, 2003). This is to say that an indirect strategy entails more than one illocutionary force or meaning as well as the speaker implicitly conveying his/her intention (Clark, 1979). Two types of indirectness have been further defined within the literature: conventionally indirect strategies and non-conventionally indirect strategies (also known as hints). Firstly, a conventionally indirect strategy refers to the illocutionary force of the speech act by employing the conventions of language (Blum-Kulka, 1989; Stemmer, 1994). In requests, conventionally indirect requests include *suggestory* formulas, and *preparatory* formulas (Blum-Kulka *et al.*, 1989). When the speaker asks the hearer to do something for him/her by using a conventionally indirect request, the hearer can perceive the utterance as either a question or a request (Blum-Kulka, 1989). For instance, a teacher asks a student to read a particular text aloud in the classroom saying: "Can you read this text aloud?" The student may interpret this utterance as an inquiry about his/her ability of performing what the teacher wants, and then responding "I can't read it aloud because I've got a cold." As a result, a conventionally indirect request relies heavily on the hearer's interpretation of the request.

Secondly, a non-conventionally indirect strategy refers to the illocutionary force of the utterance in parts by using "grammatical, lexical or semantic means" (Ruzickova, 2007, p.1176). Put simply, the speaker indicates his/her intent implicitly and the hearer has to make an effort in order to infer what the speaker intends (Weizman,1989).

For example, within the following utterance a student uses a non-conventionally indirect request in order to get the handouts for the previous lecture from his/her teacher: "I was sick last week and unfortunately I missed the lecture. And I've heard that you gave my classmates handouts." As a result, the teacher should infer what the student intended and hence hand him/her the handouts. Linking to this, Kasper (1989) distinguished two types of hints, namely, mild and strong hints. The former refers to the requestive force which has to be elicited from the context, and no mention of any components pertinent to the proposition is made (e.g. we don't want any crowding); while the latter refers to the requestive force which has to be inferred from the context as well, however "at least one element pertaining to the proposition is explicitly mentioned (e.g. your car is in the way)" (Kasper, 1989, p.46). Traditionally, non-conventionally indirect strategies have been deemed more polite than conventionally indirect counterparts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Nonetheless, some empirical studies (e.g. Blum-Kulka, 1987; Walters, 1979) have found that non-conventionally indirect strategies have been regarded as less polite and have thereby been used only infrequently among participants.

For the last three decades, longitudinal request studies (e.g. Achiba, 2002; Ellis, 1992; Schmidt, 1983) and cross-sectional request studies (e.g. Hill, 1997; Rose, 2000, 2009; Scarcella, 1979; Trosborg, 1995) have been conducted with the aim of gaining insight into the development of L2 request.

In a longitudinal study, Ellis (1992) investigated request development in a pedagogical setting by two beginner learners. He suggested three stages for the development of request. At the first stage, learners display their intent dependent highly on the context, devoid of syntax and relational goals. At the second stage, their utterances rely on unanalyzed formulas and imperatives. At the third stage, they become able to use conventional indirect strategies. However, these second and third stages were identified as first and second stages in Achiba's (2002) work when she studied the acquisition of English requests by her daughter, Yao. Achiba came up with two new stages, pragmatic expansion and fine tuning. With respect to Ellis's second stage (unanalyzed formulas and imperatives) which corresponds to Achiba's first stage, Yao employed other strategies such as hints at this stage. However, unanalyzed formulas and imperatives were utilized more frequently.

Kasper and Rose (2002) point out that there are some explanations for the deviations between Ellis's learners and Achiba's learner at the second stage. One explanation is the lack of pragmalinguistic competence; i.e. Ellis's learners lacked the required competence at this stage, and, accordingly, couldn't make different request strategies. Also, deviations in learning context may account for such differences; Achiba's learner was more exposed to

L2 (English) and various settings than Ellis' learners. Moreover, Schmidt (1983) argues that the effect of Achiba learner's L1 (Japanese) played a key role in producing a range of request strategies such as hints.

Based on longitudinal studies completed by Achiba (2002) and Ellis (1992), Kasper and Rose (2002) identified five stages of L2 request development. These stages are shown in Table 1.

Table1
Five Stages of L2 Request Development (Based on Achiba, 2002, and Ellis, 1992, as Cited in Kasper & Rose, 2002, p.140)

Stage	Characteristics	Examples
1: Pre-basic	Highly context-dependent, no syntax, no relational goals	"Me no blue", "Sir"
2: Formulaic	Reliance on unanalyzed formulas and imperatives	"Let's play the game" "Lets eat breakfast" "Don't look"
3: Unpacking	Formulas incorporated into productive language use, shift to conventional indirectness	"Can you pass the pencil please?", "Can you do another one for me?"
4: Pragmatic expansion	Addition of new forms to pragmalinguistic repertoire, increased use of mitigation, more complex syntax	"Could I have another chocolate because my children- I have five children.", "Can I see it so I can copy it?"
5: Fine-turning	Fine-turning of requestive force to participants, goals, and contexts	"You could put some blue tack down there", "Is there any more white?"

Cross-sectional studies are required in SLA in order to provide support for longitudinal studies due to the fact that cross-sectional studies are conducted upon a large number of participants; these cross-sectional studies make the findings of longitudinal studies possibly generalized. While studying requests by Japanese university learners, Hill (1997) discovered that the proportion of direct requests declined, and the proportion of conventionally indirect requests increased, when the proficiency level improved; and where advanced learners approximated NSs by using the conventionally indirect requests. Likewise, Rose's (2000) findings show that conventionally indirect requests and proficiency level were significantly correlated in Cantonese-speaking primary-school students; with an increasing proficiency level, the frequency of conventionally indirect requests enhanced, while the lowest proficiency group used direct requests most frequently.

Trosborg (1995) studied English requests made by Danish learners at three proficiency levels. The results of this study revealed that conventionally indirect requests were used most frequently among the three groups

with increasing proficiency level, and there was also a small move from hearer-oriented (ability/willingness and suggestory formula) to speaker-based conditions (wishes and desires/needs). Inconsistent with most studies, these results show that direct requests increased with proficiency, whereas the use of hints had the opposite effect. Trosborg argues that direct requests were uncommon among low-proficiency learners, believing that they might think they would be impolite by doing so. However, this explanation does not seem robust since advanced learners did not avoid using direct strategies (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

MITIGATION IN REQUESTING

When it comes to the peripheral elements, it has been established that the speaker can use various devices in order to mitigate his/her request. These devices are called modification strategies (see Blum-Kulka *et al.*, 1989, for detail). Two types of modification have been distinguished: internal and external modification (Faerch& Kasper, 1989; House & Kasper, 1981)[1]. Internal modification refers to the markers employed to soften the impositive force of a request strategy. External modification, however, refers to the strategies used outside the request head act that serve to mitigate the influence of the request upon the hearer, or that support the head act in order to achieve compliance from the hearer (Achiba, 2003; Blum-Kulka *et al.*, 1989; Trosborg, 1995).

Within internal modification, there are three distinct strategies: syntactic downgraders, lexical/phrasal downgraders, and upgraders. Syntactic downgraders refer to the syntactic choices used by the speaker in order to soften the impositive force of a request (Blum-Kulka *et al.*, 1989). Lexical downgraders are defined as the lexical devices available to the speaker (e.g. please) that are used in order to lower the speaker's expectations to the result of the request (Blum-Kulka *et al.*, 1989; Trosborg, 1995). Unlike downgraders, upgraders refer to the devices used by the requester in order to increase the effect of the request on the requestee (Trosborg, 1995). External modification, on the other hand, encompasses preparator, getting a pre-commitment, checking for availability, grounder, disarmer, imposition minimizer, apology, sweeteners, gratitude, and promise of reward (Blum-Kulka *et al.*, 1989; Hudson, Detmer, & Brown, 1995; Trosborg, 1995).

Some studies have found developmental patterns in terms of the use of modification strategies by L2 learners. For instance, Ellis's (1992) learners and Achiba's (2002) learner used little internal and external modification at the first stage. However, *please* was utilized as a mitigating device. Learners consider *please* as, instead of a politeness

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[1] It should be noted that external modifications and supportive moves have been used interchangeably in the literature. In the present study, the term external modifications will be utilized for the sake of clarity.

marker, a requestive marker (Kasper & Rose, 2002). In Achiba's (2002) work, when the learner employed more supportive moves at stages four and five, there was an increase of the frequency of mitigating devices. Also, even though the frequency of using *can* and *will* was quite considerable, the learner preferentially employed *could* and *would*.

Trosborg (1995) also found that although there were no significant differences among groups, the percentage of internal and external modification was enhanced with increasing proficiency level. It was noted that there was a gap between advanced learners and NSs, particularly in terms of external modification. Moreover, Hill (1997) found that the frequency of downgraders increased according to their improving proficiency level. Analogous to Trosborg's findings, advanced learners fell fairly short of NSs. Hill attributed these results to the considerable use of downgraders by Japanese NSs rather than to the effect of learners' L1. Surprisingly, want strategies were used more frequently as the proficiency level increased; and syntactic downgraders, along with apology moves, were overused by learners, rather than lexical/phrasal ones which were favored by NSs. From a different perspective, Rose (2000) reported that only advanced learners minimally used supportive moves (mostly grounder).

EFFECT OF SOCIAL VARIABLES

Brown and Levinson (1978) posit that the social distance (D) of the speaker and the hearer, the relative power (P) between the participants, and the degree of imposition (R) in a particular culture are independent variables that have a systematic impact on the choice of requestand mitigation strategies. The supposed universality of these factors, claimed by Brown and Levinson, has been questioned, particularly from non-western perspectives (e.g. Gu, 1990; Nwoye, 1992).

The literature shows contrastive findings in terms of the influence of the social variables on the production of request and modification strategies. Scarcella (1979), for example, found that NSs' use of indirect requests varied according to the status of the hearer, whereas there were minimal differences according to the status of the hearer across two proficiency groups of learners in terms of the use of indirect requests. Ellis (1992) also found that the learners' requests did not differ according to the hearer's status. In addition, Hill's (1997) findings show that participants (including advanced learners) varied minimally, in terms of the status of the hearer, in their use of direct and conventionally indirect requests, as well as regarding internal modification. However, the frequency of external modification use was more with the hearer of equal-status than the hearer of high-status. No differences in request strategy, according to addressee, were found in studies of Trosborg (1995) and Rose (2000).

However, there are some studies that found variations in the use of request strategies made by L2 learners according to the status of the hearer. Achiba (2002) reported that the learner's requests were varied when the status of the hearer differed; *want* statements were performed with adults, *let's* with peers and *please* with her mother. Hassall (2003) also observed that there were no significant differences between learners and NSs in terms of their use of request strategy according to the status of the hearer; in other words, L2 learners, as well as NSs, used different request strategies when the status of the hearer varied. Moreover, Byon (2004) studied requests by American female learners of Korean; his results show that the status of the hearer had a significant influence on their use of semantic formulas.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study investigates the speech act of request made by Saudi Arabic learners of Australian English; and at two different proficiency levels (high and low). Based on the literature, we will answer the following questions:

Do Saudi high- and low-level learners of Australian English differ in terms of pre-head act strategies? If yes, to what extent do they differ from Australian English NSs?

Do Saudi high- and low-level learners of Australian English vary in terms of request strategies? If yes, to what extent do they differ from Australian English NSs?

Do Saudi high- and low-level learners of Australian English differ in respect of post-head act strategies? If yes, to what extent do they differ from Australian English NSs?

Does the social context variable of power have an impact on the participants' use of pre-head act strategies, request strategies and post-head act strategies? If yes, does the proficiency level of the learner have an effect on their perception of the social context variable?

METHODS

Participants

The 24 participants included in this study comprised Australian English NSs and two groups of Saudi learners of Australian English; all were males living in Melbourne, Australia, most were university students, the majority being postgraduates. We restricted our research to exclusively male participants for two principal reasons. Firstly, there are very few Saudi female students residing in Melbourne. Secondly, there are various practical difficulties within Saudi culture for a woman to be interviewed by a man unless he is her husband or close relative.

Participants were divided into three groups:

A group of 8 NSs of Australian English (AE group): their ages ranged from nineteen to forty-two years (mean age = 30). The purpose of including Australian English

NSs (AENS) was to provide baseline data on requests in Australian English.

A group of 8 Saudi high-level learners of Australian English (SHL group). All of them have been classified as high-level learners according to two criteria. First, all have achieved a total proficiency score of either 580 and above in TOEFL, or 6.5 and above in IELTS. Second, a further proficiency test was conducted in order to ensure the reliability of these proficiency classifications. A three-paragraph C-test that includes 75 gaps developed by Klein-Braley (1997) was administered to all learners. A score of 40 had been set as the lowest figure for high-level learners. Learners' scores in this group ranged from 40 to 51 (mean score = 45). Their ages ranged from twenty-seven to thirty-six years (mean age = 29.7).

A group of 8 Saudi low-level learners of Australian English (SLL group). Similar to the SHL group, they have been classified as low-level learners according to two criteria. First, all of them achieved a total proficiency score of 5.5 or less in IELTS. Second, the same C-test was administered to the learners in this group and a score of 30 set as the highest figure for lower-level learners. Learners' scores in this group ranged from 16 to 30 (mean score = 24.6). Their ages ranged from twenty-five to thirty-nine years (mean age = 31.5).

Instruments

We have chosen to collect data for this study by means of open role plays; this methodology provides data more representative of real-life conversation, and can be collected in a relatively short period of time (Mackay & Gass, 2005; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989). The role plays for the present study included three English request situations (see appendix D). This study solely investigates the influence of social status (power). All situations were at the same level of imposition which was low (–imposition), and at the same level of social distance (–distance). In Situation 1, a person asks his housemate to go to the supermarket and buy some bread; the role play informant (the participant) and conductor (the researcher) were at the same level of social status (= power). In Situation 2, a student asks his professor to give him the lecture notes from the last lecture; the role play conductor in this situation had a higher social status (+ power) than the role play informant. In Situation 3, a tutor asks his student to inform the other classmates that there is no seminar that day; the role play conductor in this situation had a lower social status (- power) than the role play informant (see Table 2). In an attempt to discover any design problems with these role play situations, they were piloted by two Saudi learners of English.

Table 2
The Social Status (Power) Variable Embedded in the Scenario

Role play situations	The role of informant (participant)	The role of the conductor	The level of social status (power)
Situation 1	Housemate	Housemate	Equal (=)
Situation 2	Student	Professor	Higher (+)
Situation 3	Tutor	Student	Lower (-)

Procedure

The three role play cards were administered to the participants one at a time. For each situation, they were given five minutes to read the scenario carefully in order to absorb the role they would subsequently play. Before the role play commenced, the researcher asked the participant if the role play scenario was clear, or if they had any further questions they wished to ask. In an attempt to ensure the clarity of the scenario, one of the researchers also explained the scenario to the participant in his own words. All role plays were audio taped. In all role plays, one of the researchers played the role of conductor in order to eliminate potential variables. The role play conductor tried his best to treat all participants equally.

Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, there will be four main analysis steps for the corpus of this study. Based on Hudson et al.'s (1995) taxonomy of "request supportive move strategies", the present study, apart from request strategies, proposes two further categories: pre-head act strategies and post-head act strategies. The former refers to the utterances that occur before the request formula, while the latter refers to the utterances that occur after the request formula. The first analysis step will focus on pre-head act strategies. Hudson et al.'s (1995) taxonomy of request supportive move strategies includes seven strategies: grounder, disarmer, imposition minimizer, preparator, getting a pre-commitment, apology and gratitude. Grounder and gratitude strategies were deleted due to the fact that they were not used by the participants as pre-head act strategies. Three strategies of Hudson's (1995) taxonomy of "alerter strategies" (attention getter, first name and title) were also added. Moreover, "endearment terms" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) and "politeness marker" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Hudson et al., 1995; Trosborg, 1995) strategies were added. Although mild hint, strong hint and statement of fact strategies are considered as "request head act strategies" (Hudson et al., 1995), or "request strategies" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Trosborg, 1995), they appeared,

and were further added in the data as pre-head act strategies. In addition, eleven further strategies were identified, and added as pre-head act strategies: greeting, warm-up, checking for availability, emotional expression, empathy, introduction, compliment, religious formula, wrap-up, primer, and getting permission. As a result, twenty-four strategies constitute pre-head act strategies (see appendix A). Due to the limited size of this study and the considerable number of pre-head act strategies, this study highlights only the eight most popular pre-head act strategies for each group. A comparison will be run across all groups in light of pre-head act strategies.

The second main analysis step will be to investigate the request strategies based on Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy. This includes four main categories: indirect request, conventional indirect request (CID) (hearer-oriented conditions), CID (speaker-based conditions), and direct request (see appendix B). Mild hint, obligation, hedged and unhedged performatives and elliptical phrases strategies were deleted due to the fact that they were not used by the participants in the data as request strategies. A comparison will be run across the four groups with regard to request strategies.

The third main analysis step will focus on post-head act strategies. Ten pre-head act strategies also appeared as post-head act strategies: first name, title, endearment terms, apology, politeness marker, compliment, religious formula, wrap-up, empathy and imposition minimizer. Gratitude and grounder (Hudson *et al*., 1995), together with promise of future and repetition of the request (Blum-Kulka *et al*., 1989), were also added. Furthermore, four additional strategies were identified, and added

as post-head act strategies: wish, distract with humor, farewell and reminder. Thus, eighteen strategies constitute post-head act strategies (see appendix C). Due to the limited size of this study and the considerable number of post-head act strategies, this study highlights only the five most popular post-head act strategies for each group. A comparison will be run across all groups with regard to post-head-act strategies.

The fourth main analysis step is to examine the influence of the social status (power) variable on participants' pre-head act strategies, request strategies and post-head act strategies.

RESULTS

Pre-Head Act Strategies
As shown in Table 3, there were minor differences across all groups in terms of the eight most popular pre-head act strategies. Five pre-head act strategies were commonly favored by all groups: mild hint, attention getter, strong hint, first name and greeting. The title strategy was frequently used by the SLL and AE groups (4.6% and 2.9%, respectively). In addition, the politeness marker strategy was commonly employed by the SLL and SHL groups (8.0% and 4.4%, respectively). However, there were some minor variations among groups due to the eight most popular pre-head act strategies. Primer and preparator strategies were solely utilized by the AE group. Moreover, warm-up and getting a pre-commitment strategies were only used by the SHL group while checking for availability strategy was employed by the SLL group.

Table 3
The Eight Most Popular Pre-Head Act Strategies Among Groups

	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth	Seventh	Eighth
AE group	Mild hint 29(21.6)	Attention getter 23(17.1)	Strong hint 22(16.4)	First name 16(11.9)	Greeting 10(7.4)	Primer 8(5.9)	Preparator 6(4.4)	Title 4(2.9)
SHL Group	Mild hint 37(20.7)	Attention getter 27(15.1)	Strong hint 25(14.0)	First name 18(10.1)	Greeting 15(8.4)	Warm-up 11(6.1)	Getting a pre-commitment 10(5.6)	Politeness marker 8(4.4)
SLL group	Mild hint 30(20.1)	Attention getter 29(19.4)	Strong hint 24(16.1)	First name 17(11.4)	Politeness marker 12(8.0)	Greeting 11(7.3)	Title 7(4.6)	Checking for availability 7(4.6)

N = raw score; ( ) = percentage.

The SHL and SLL groups employed the same six strategies: mild hint, attention getter, strong hint, first name, greeting and politeness marker; furthermore, they utilized the first four strategies in the same order and with nearly the same frequency. Therefore, they did not significantly vary from each other. However there were some minor variations between the two groups. The SLL group used the politeness marker strategy more frequently than did the SHL group. Also, title and checking for availability strategies were preferred by the SLL group, while warm-up and getting a pre-commitment strategies were favored by the SHL group. Compared to the AE group, the SHL and SLL groups did not also substantially

deviate from the AE group. However, there were some minor differences: the SHL and SLL groups did not utilize primer and preparator strategies which were most favored by the AE group; furthermore, the SHL group did not use the title strategy which was preferred by the AE group, whereas the SLL group employed this strategy more frequently than the AE group.

Request Strategies
Substantial differences were found across all groups in terms of request strategies. Table 4 illustrates that indirect request was the least favored category for all groups; it was employed by the AE group (4.1%), while the SHL

and SLL groups did not use this strategy. Hearer-oriented CID was the most commonly used request category for the AE, SHL and SLL groups (87.3%, 83.2% and 74.9%, respectively). SHL and SLL groups used speaker-based CID with a frequency of 12.4% and 20.8%, respectively. In contrast, this category was not used by the AE group. Direct request category was only minimally utilized by all groups.

Indirect Request

This strategy was not utilized by either group of learner (i.e., SHL and SLL), and was only marginally used by AENSs (4.1%).

Hearer-oriented CID. This category contains four strategies: ability, willingness, permission and suggestory formulas. The most common strategy for AE group was the permission strategy (66.6%). On the other hand, the most favored strategy for SHL and SLL groups was the ability strategy (45.8% and 70.8%, respectively). SLL learners used *Can/could* formula more often than SHL learners. The willingness strategy was only used by the AE group, with a frequency of 4.1%; and the suggestory formulae strategy was only utilized by the AE group (8.3%).

Table 4
Request Strategies Among Groups

Category	I. Indirect requests	II. CID (hearer-oriented conditions)			III. CID (speaker-based conditions)			IV. Direct requests
Strategy	Strong hint	Permission	Willingness	Ability	Suggestory formulae	Wishes	Desires/needs	Imperatives
AE group	1(4.1)	16(66.6)	1(4.1)	2(8.3)	2(8.3)	-	-	2(8.3)
SHL group	-	8(33.3)	-	11(45.8)	1(4.1)	2(8.3)	1(4.1)	1(4.1)
SLL group	-	1(4.1)	-	17(70.8)	-	-	5(20.8)	1(4.1)

N= raw score; ( ) = percentage.

Overall, the use of the hearer-oriented CID category indicates that both groups of learners approximated AENSs. However, strategies of hearer-oriented CID indicate the opposite by considerably varying from AENSs; both groups of learners preferred the ability strategy, while the AE group preferred the permission strategy, but SHL learners were closer than SLL learners to AENSs through using this strategy more frequently than SLL learners (33.3% and 4.1%, respectively).

Speaker-based CID. This category contains two strategies: wishes, and desires/needs. AENSs did not utilize this category. In contrast, both groups of learners employed this category; SHL learners used wishes more than desires/needs (8.3% and 4.1%, respectively). Meanwhile, SLL learners employed solely desires/needs, with a frequency of 20.8%. Therefore, both groups of learners deviated from AENSs in this category.

Direct request. This category was minimally used by all groups; AENSs with the frequency of 8.3%, and both groups of learners with the same frequency of 4.1%.

To sum up, the SHL group did not significantly deviate from the SLL group in terms of request strategies. Both groups of learners approximated AENSs in terms of request strategies by using hearer-oriented CID. However, strategies of this category indicate that they differed from AENSs by preferring the ability strategy at the expense of the permission strategy (which was the most favored strategy for AENSs). Furthermore, both groups of learners employed the speaker-based CID category which AENSs did not utilize this category.

POST-HEAD ACT STRATEGIES

As Table 5 illustrates, all three groups showed differences in terms of the five most common post-head act strategies.

Three post-head act strategies were favored by all groups: gratitude, farewell and grounder. Gratitude and farewell strategies were used more frequently by the SHL group (46.4% and 18.1%, respectively) and the SLL group (45.2% and 16.6%, respectively), in contrast to the AE group (30.8% and 11.1%, respectively). There were no significant differences among groups in terms of using the grounder strategy.

Table 5
The Five Most Popular Post-Head Act Strategies Among Groups

	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
AE group	Gratitude 25(30.8)	Wrap-up 12(14.8)	Farewell 9(11.1)	Repetition of the request 7(8.6)	Grounder 7(8.6)
SHL group	Gratitude 46(46.4)	Farewell 18(18.1)	Grounder 7(7.0)	Politeness marker 6(6.0)	First name 5(5.0)
SLL group	Gratitude 38(45.2)	Farewell 14(16.6)	Politeness marker 8(9.5)	Grounder 6(7.1)	Repetition of the request 5(5.9)

N= raw score; ( ) = percentage.

The politeness marker strategy was not frequently used by the AE group, although it was commonly used by the SLL group (9.5%), and the SHL group (6.0%). Repetition of

the request strategy was favored by the AE group (8.6%) and the SHL group (5.9%). However, the wrap-up strategy was frequently used only by the AE group. Moreover, the first name strategy was only favored by the SHL group.

Overall, the SHL group did not substantially differ from the SLL group in terms of the most popular post-

head act strategies due to the fact that both groups of learners employed the same four of five strategies with approximately the same frequency; also, both groups of learners varied from AENSs through the considerable use of gratitude and farewell strategies; and disfavoring the wrap-up strategy.

Table 6
Power Influence on the Eight Most Popular Pre-Head Act Strategie

		First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth	Seventh	Eighth
AE group	Total	Mild hin	Attention getter	Strong hint	First name	Greeting	Primer	Preparator	Title
	P=	11(23.9)	8(17.3)	8(17.3)	6(13.0)	3(6.5)	4(8.7)	-	-
	P+	12(30.8)	8(20.5)	4(10.3)	4(10.3)	2(5.1)	-	1(2.6)	4(10.3)
	P-	6(12.2)	7(14.3)	10(20.4)	6(12.2)	5(10.2)	4(8.2)	5(10.2)	-
SHL Group	Total	Mild hint	Attention getter	Strong hint	First name	Greeting	Warm up	Getting a pre-commitment	Politeness marker
	P=	14(17.9)	8(10.3)	10(12.8)	8(10.3)	7(9.0)	8(10.3)	6(7.7)	4(5.1)
	P+	16(28.1)	9(15.8)	9(15.8)	3(5.3)	5(8.8)	-	1(1.8)	1(1.8)
	P-	7(16.3)	10(23.3)	6(14.0)	7(16.3)	3(7.0)	3(7.0)	3(7.0)	3(7.0)
SLL group	Total	Mild hint	Attention getter	Strong hint	First name	Politeness marker	Greeting	Title	Checking for availability
	P=	11(18.3)	9(15.0)	11(18.3)	7(11.7)	6(10.0)	5(8.3)	1(1.7)	5(8.3)
	P+	10(21.7)	9(19.6)	8(17.4)	2(4.3)	4(8.7)	3(6.5)	6(13.0)	2(4.3)
	P-	9(20.9)	11(25.6)	5(11.6)	8(18.6)	2(4.7)	3(7.0)	-	-

N= raw score; ( ) = percentage; P= equal social status; P+ high social status; P- low social status.

POWER INFLUENCE ON PRE-HEAD ACT STRATEGIES

The social variable (power) had an effect across all groups in light of the eight most common pre-head act strategies (see Table 6). For the AE group, the use of mild hint and attention getter strategies increased with the increase of power. In contrast, the use of strong hint and greeting strategies decreased with the increase of power. AENSs avoided using the primer strategy with the professor; and the preparator strategy was overused with the student, while the title strategy was solely employed with the professor. For the SHL group, the mild hint strategy increased with the increase of power. On the other hand,

the use of first name and politeness marker strategies increased with the decrease of power. The attention getter strategy was overused with the student; also, the warm-up strategy was not employed with the professor, whereas it was employed with the housemate more than with the student. The getting a pre-commitment strategy was least preferred with the professor. For the SLL group, the use of the first name strategy decreased with the increase of power. The title strategy was overused with the professor. Moreover, the attention getter strategy was commonly employed with the student. The checking for availability strategy was overused with the housemate, while it was not used with the student.

Table 7
Power Influence on Request Strategies

Category		I. Indirect requests	II. CID (hearer-oriented conditions)				III. CID (speaker-based conditions)		IV. Direct requests
Strategy		Strong hint	Ability	Willingness	Permission	Suggestory formulae	Wishes	Desires/needs	Imperatives
AE group	P=	-	1(12.5)	1(12.5)	4(50.0)	2(25.0)	-	-	-
	P+	-	1(12.5)	-	7(87.5)	-	-	-	-
	P-	1 (12.5)	-	-	5(62.5)	-	-	-	2(25.0)
SHL group	P=	-	3(37.5)	-	2(25.0)	1(12.5)	1(12.5)	-	1(12.5)
	P+	-	3(37.5)	-	4(50.0)	-	-	1(12.5)	-
	P-	-	5(62.5)	-	2(25.0)	-	1(12.5)	-	-
SLL group	P=	-	5(62.5)	-	1 (12.5)	-	-	1(12.5)	1(12.5)
	P+	-	6(75.0)	-	-	-	-	2(25.0)	-
	P-	-	6(75.0)	-	-	-	-	2(25.0)	-

N= raw score; ( ) = percentage; P= equal social status; P+ high social status; P- low social status

Power Influence on Request Strategies

Table 7 exhibits the effect of power on request strategies across all groups. In general, it shows that request strategies made by the AE and SHL groups have been influenced by the social variable (power). However, power did not have an impact on request strategies made by SLL group.

The AE and SHL groups used the permission strategy with the professor more frequently than with the housemate or with the student. The SHL group commonly employed the ability strategy with the student. The AE group used the imperative strategy only with the student

Power Influence on Post-Head Act Strategies

The social variable (power) had an effect across all groups according to the five most common post-head

act strategies (see Table 8). For the AE group, the use of gratitude and wrap-up strategies increased with the increase of power. However, the use of repetition of the request strategy increased with the decrease of power. The grounder strategy was not employed with the professor. In addition, the farewell strategy was overused with the professor. For the SHL group, SHL learners used gratitude strategy more frequently with the professor and the housemate than with the student. They overused the farewell strategy with the professor. Grounder and politeness strategies were more frequently used with the student, whereas the first name strategy was not utilized with the professor. For the SLL group, the gratitude strategy was more frequently used with the professor and the housemate. The use of the politeness marker strategy increased with the increase of power.

Table 8
Power Influence on the Five Most Popular Post-Head Act Strategies

		First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
AE group		Gratitude	Wrap up	Farewell	Repetition of the request	Grounder
	P=	6(30.0)	3(15.0)	1(5.0)	2(10.0)	4(20.0)
	P+	13(46.4)	5(17.9)	4(14.3)	1(3.6)	-
	P-	6(18.2)	4(12.1)	4(12.1)	4(12.1)	3(9.1)
SHL Group		Gratitude	Farewell	Grounder	Politeness marker	First name
	P=	14(53.8)	4(15.4)	-	1(3.8)	2(7.7)
	P+	21(61.8)	8(23.5)	1(2.9)	1(2.9)	-
	P-	11(28.2)	6(15.4)	6(15.4)	4(10.3)	3(7.7)
SLL group		Gratitude	Farewell	Politeness marker	Grounder	Repetition of the request
	P=	15(50.0)	2(6.7)	3(10.0)	4(13.3)	1(3.3)
	P+	12(48.0)	6(24.0)	3(12.0)	1(4.0)	1(4.0)
	P-	11(37.9)	6(20.7)	2(6.9)	1(3.4)	3(10.3)

N= raw score; ( ) = percentage; P= equal social status; P+ high social status; P- low social status.

DISCUSSION

We found that the SHL group did not considerably deviate from the SLL group in terms of the production of pre-head act strategies. Also, both groups of learners did not substantially vary from the AE group; this contradicts Byon's (2004) study who found that there were differences between American learners of Korean and Korean NSs in terms of the most popular supportive move strategies. Five strategies were shared by all four groups; these strategies are mild hint, attention getter, strong hint, first name and greeting. This perhaps indicates that there are some similarities between Arabic and English in terms of pre-head act strategies.

In addition, the findings of this study show that the SHL group did not considerably differ from the SLL group; this finding is inconsistent with the studies of Hill (1997) and Rose (2000) who found there were variations between low proficiency learners and high proficiency learners in terms of request strategies. Neither group used the indirect request category; this contradicts Trosborg's (1995) study, which found the opposite, and that the use of hints reduced according to the decrease of the

proficiency level. The most favored category for both groups of learners was hearer-oriented CID, which was also favored by AENSs. In this sense, both groups of learners did not deviate from AENSs, lending support to Trosborg's (1995) work which found that conventionally indirect requests were employed most frequently among the three groups. However, simply comparing amongst groups solely in terms of request categories is insufficient. The present study finds that both groups of learners markedly differed from AENSs according to hearer-oriented CID strategies. The ability strategy was the most favored strategy for both groups of learners. In contrast, the permission strategy was the most favored strategy for AENSs. These findings show that it is very important that strategies of each category be taken into consideration, which gives full support to Kasper and Roses' (2002) argument that "without examining more closely the use of specific substrategies within a given strategy category, analysts may arrive at incorrect conclusions" (p.144). Although SHL learners favored the ability strategy, they used the permission strategy more than SLL learners (33.3% and 4.1 %, respectively). Consequently, the use

of the hearer-oriented CID category, in general, and the permission strategy, in particular, grew with the increase in proficiency level. This supports the findings of previous studies such as Hill (1997) and Rose (2000), which reported that conventionally indirect requests increased with improving proficiency level.

The SHL and SLL groups used the speaker-based CID category with a frequency of 12.4% and 20.8 %, respectively. On the other hand, this category was not employed by AENSs, indicating that both groups of learners have probably been influenced by L1. It is very important here to mention that Trosborg's (1995) work is a great contribution to the field of ILP due to the fact that she divided conventionally indirect request category into two further categories: hearer-oriented conditions and speaker-based conditions. This division helps researchers to precisely differentiate between participants, and to further draw accurate conclusions in terms of conventionally indirect requests.

By and large, the SHL group did not significantly differ from the SLL group; and both groups of learners varied from the AE group in terms of the use of request strategies. However, there was an obvious indication that SHL learners were closer than SLL learners to AENSs. Importantly, examining strategies in each category is a prerequisite for drawing a correct conclusion, however, the findings of this study suggest that there is a need to divide the hearer-oriented conditions category into two further categories, due to the fact that a category of four strategies may confuse researchers and thereby weak or incorrect conclusions may be drawn.

Regarding the use of post-head act strategies, the SHL group did not significantly differ from the SLL group. Additionally, both groups of learners deviated from the AE group; this supports the findings of Byon's (2004) study. Three post-head act strategies were shared by all groups; these strategies are farewell, gratitude and grounder. However, both groups of learners differed from the AE group in terms of the frequency of using the gratitude strategy.

SHL and SLL learners also differed from AENSs through the utilization of the politeness marker strategy. The most likely explanation for this finding is that there is a common belief in Saudi Arabia that western people are more polite than Arabs. Therefore, both groups of learners increased the use of the politeness marker strategy in the hope of being as polite as AENSs, thereby falling into the trap of pragmatic transfer. Moreover, AENSs favored the wrap-up strategy, while the other two groups did not favor this strategy. This indicates that both groups of learners were not aware of the wrap-up strategy even though it is used in everyday conversations.

The social variable (power) had an effect across all groups in terms of pre-head act strategies, request strategies and post-head act strategies. Power has influenced all groups in their use of pre- and post-head act strategies more than request strategies. This suggests that when examining the influence of social variables, the focus should be on pre- and post-head act strategies, along with request strategies. However, in the field of ILP, most studies have primarily focused on request strategies in terms of the impact of social variables, and with little attention given to supportive moves or internal and external modification. We believe that this can be attributed to the use of DCTs as a means of data collection in ILP research. As a result, the fundamental focus of previous studies has been given to request strategies rather than to supportive moves or internal and external modification.

The findings of the power influence on both groups of learners in light of pre- and post-head act strategies support Byon's (2004) study, where he reported that the status of the hearer had a significant impact on the use of semantic formulas by American female learners of Korean. Also, it can be concluded that there is no correlation between the proficiency level and the influence of social variables.

With respect to request strategies, the social variable did not have an influence on the SLL group, while it did have an impact on the other two groups. One possible explanation for this is that SLL learners lack the linguistic competence to use different request formulas; SLL learners employed ability and desires/needs strategies with a frequency of 91.6% of the total. In contrast, power has affected the SHL group in terms of the request strategies. This finding, anomalous to earlier findings, indicates that there exists a correlation between social variables and proficiency level. In other words, the influence of social variables increases with an increase of proficiency level. Admittedly, this finding contradicts other studies such as Ellis (1992), Rose (2000), Scarcella (1979) and Trosborg (1995) who found that social variables did not have an effect on L2 learners' use of request strategies; and so that this finding would therefore merit further investigation at a future date.

We would conclude that the social variable affected learners' use of pre- and post-head act strategies more than their use of request strategies due to the fact that in each situation learners utilized one request strategy, while they utilized numerous pre- and post-head act strategies. Thus, the use of pre- and post-head act strategies are more likely to be influenced by social variables than request strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the speech act of request made by Saudi learners of Australian English. It examined pre-head act strategies, request strategies, post-head act strategies, and the influence of the social variable (power). We found that SHL learners did not considerably differ from SLL learners in terms of pre- and post-head act strategies, and

request strategies; thereby indicating that proficiency level does not have a significant impact on L2 learners' choice of pre- and post-head act strategies and request strategies. However, both groups of learners deviated from AENSs in terms of post-head act and request strategies. In light of the social variable (power) influence, it was found that power affected both groups of learners, along with the AE group, in terms of pre- and post-head act strategies. However, power did not have an impact on the SLL group, while it did have an effect on the SHL group, along with the AE group, in terms of request strategies. Thus, there is no apparent correlation between the social variable (power) and L2 learners' use of pre- and post-head act strategies, while power positively correlates with L2 learners' proficiency level regarding their use of request strategies.

We hope this study will have contributed to the field of ILP through identifying two new approaches for examining utterances occurring before and after the request formulae, and which will hopefully help researchers to investigate the speech act of requests as a whole process rather than in segmented form. We believe that it is helpful to pay attention to the conversation or dialogue from its beginning to its end, since it helps researchers to find out the exact differences between L2 learners and NSs. In addition, we hope this study will have made a contribution to ILP research by investigating the speech act of request made by Saudi learners of Australian English, a topic that is currently underrepresented in the literature, and which, accordingly, may provide valuable insights into cultural and linguistic differences between Arabic and English linguistic practices.

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APPENDIX A

Pre-head Act Strategies Based on Hudson et al. (1995)

Strategy	Definition / Example
1. Attention getter	The speaker tries to get the attention of the hearer, e.g. "Hello".
2. First Name	The speaker addresses the hearer by his/her first name, e.g. "John".
3. Title	The speaker addresses the hearer by his/her title, e.g. "Professor".
4. Endearment terms	The speaker addresses the hearer by using endearment words, e.g. "Mate", "My precious brother".
5. Greeting	The speaker greets the hearer, e.g. "How are you".
6. Warm-up	The speaker attempts to avoid getting instantly to the request, e.g. "What is on TV?".
7. Checking for availability	The speaker attempts to ensure the availability of the hearer, e.g. "Are you free at the moment?".
8. Preparator	The speaker prepares for his/her request, e.g. "I just wanna ask you one question?".
9. Politeness marker	The speaker tries to make his/her speech polite, e.g. "please".
10. Mild hint	The speaker gives the hearer a mild indication regarding his/her request, e.g. "I'm busy now".
11. Strong hint	The speaker gives the hearer a strong indication about his/her request, e.g. "I'm running out of bread".
12. Getting a pre-commitment	The speaker attempts to commit the hearer before making a request, e.g. "Can you do me a favour?".
13. Emotional expression	The speaker uses some expressions to express his/her feeling or exclamation, e.g. "Oh, my God".
14. Apology	The speaker apologises to the hearer, e.g. "sorry".
15. Empathy	The speaker shows his empathy towards the hearer, e.g. "I don't want anyone to miss out on their tuition".
16. Introduction	The speaker introduces him/herself to the hearer, e.g. "My name is Dean".
17. Compliment	The speaker compliments the hearer on something, e.g. "Good on you".
18. Disarmer	The speaker attempts to remove any potential objection, e.g. "I know you are watching the match at the moment".
19. Religious formula	The speaker uses religious expressions, e.g. "May God increase your bounty".
20. Imposition minimizer	The speaker attempts to reduce the imposition placed on the hearer, e.g. "You know the supermarket is not really far".
21. Wrap-up	The speaker attempts to soften and direct the conversation towards the end, e.g. "That's great".
22. Primer	The speaker attempts to make the hearer ready for his/her request, e.g. "Look".
23. Getting a permission	The speaker attempts to get permission from the hearer, e.g. "Can I come in?".
24. Statement of fact	The speaker states a fact to the hearer, e.g. "I'm going to cancel the class today".

APPENDIX B

Request Strategies with Increasing Levels of Directness (From Trosborg, 1995)

Category I: Indirect request

Strategy 1. Hints: **Mild:** I have to be at the airport in half an hour. **Strong:** Will you be using your car tonight?

Category II: CID (hearer-oriented conditions)

Strategy 2. **Ability**: Could you lend me your car? **Willingness**: Would you lend me your car? **Permission**: May I borrow your car?

Strategy 3. Suggestory formulae: How about lending me your car?

Category III: CID (speaker-based conditions)

Strategy 4. Wishes: I would like to borrow your car.

Strategy 5. Desires/needs: I want/need to borrow your car.

Category IV: Direct request

Strategy 6. Obligation: You must/have to lend me your car.

Strategy 7. Performatives **Hedged**: I would like to ask you to lend me your car. **Unhedged**: I ask/require you to lend me your car.

APPENDIX C

Post-head Act Strategies (Based on Hudson *et al.*, 1995)

Strategy	Definition / Example
1. First name	The speaker addresses the hearer by his/her first name, e.g. "John".
2. Title	The speaker addresses the hearer by his/her title, e.g. "Professor".
3. Endearment terms	The speaker addresses the hearer using endearment words, e.g. "Mate", "My precious brother".
4. Apology	The speaker apologises to the hearer, e.g. "sorry".
5. Politeness marker	The speaker tries to make his/her speech polite, e.g. "please".
6. Repetition of the request	The speaker repeats the request literally or by paraphrase, e.g. "Could you tell your friend about that?".
7. Grounder	The speaker explains to the hearer the reason of his/her request, e.g. "Because I'm very busy".
8. Wish	The speaker expresses the wish for a good outcome to the hearer, e.g. "Good luck".
9. Farewell	The speaker attempts to end the conversation and leave the hearer, e.g. "Goodbye".
10. Gratitude	The speaker expresses his/her gratitude to the hearer, e.g. "Thank you".
11. Reminder	The speaker reminds the hearer of the request, e.g. "Don't forget to tell them that there is no class today".
12. Distract with humour	The speaker attempts to divert the hearer's attention with some jokes, e.g. "You are free now."
13. Compliment	The speaker compliments the hearer on something, e.g. "You are very nice ".
14. Promise of future	The speaker promises the hearer to do something in the future, e.g. "We will catch up next week".
15. Religious formula	The speaker uses religious expressions, e.g. "May God grant you health".
16. Wrap-up	The speaker attempts to soften and direct the conversation towards the end, e.g. "That's fabulous".
17. Empathy	The speaker shows his empathy towards the hearer, e.g. "I don't want them to come and find out that there is no lecture".
18. Imposition minimizer	The speaker attempts to reduce the imposition placed on the hearer, e.g. "You know the supermarket is not really far".

APPENDIX D

Role-Play Situations

Please make the conversation as natural as possible. Speak as you would in real life. Feel free to use your own words.

Situation 1: (=power)

You have several assignments due this week and have been so busy working on them that you haven't had time to do the shopping. You are currently running out of bread. Your housemate is watching TV and drinking coffee.

- Imagine yourself in this position and how would you ask him in real life to get some bread from the bakery for you.

Situation 2: (+power)

Last week you were sick and missed class. Now you don't have the lecture notes you need to study for the coming test. You are at the university at the moment and you remember that your teacher has an office hour. You decide to go to his office.

- Imagine yourself in this position and how would you ask him in real life to give you the notes for last week.

Situation3: (-power)

You are a postgraduate student who tutors undergraduate students part time for extra income . You have a class this afternoon and realize you have forgotten about a very important meeting with the head of the department and another visiting academic. Missing the meeting is not an option so you need to let the class know there will be no seminar today. Luckily, you meet one of your students in the corridor.

- Imagine yourself in this position and how would you ask him in real life to tell his classmates there will be no class today.