# REQUEST STRATEGIES USED BY MALE AND FEMALE ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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## Abstract

This research aims to investigate following questions; (1) to identify the types of request strategies used by male and female EFL learners, (2) to identify the types of politeness strategies used by male and female EFL learners, (3) to describe the similarities and the differences of the request strategies used by male and female EFL learners, (4) to define the factors contribute in choosing the politeness strategies of request used by male and female EFL learners.

This research was a qualitative case study focuses on single case, request strategies phenomenon. Data were obtained through Discourse Completion Test (DCT) consisted of nine request strategies. Forty eleventh graders of MAN 1 Sragen were selected as participants. The data were analyzed by determining the request strategies based on Trosborg's theory (1995), politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's theory (1989), and factors contribute in choosing politeness based on Leech's theory (2014).

Results showed there were four types of request strategies conducted by male and female learners; indirect request, hearer oriented conditions, speaker oriented conditions, and direct request. There were four types of politeness strategies conducted by male and female learners; bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off record. In performing request strategy, male and female learners tended to be not imposing the request, the factors in choosing politeness depended on level of intimacy (close, familiar, unfamiliar) instead of gender. The data showed, gender does not give much impact on influencing the chosen of politeness strategy.

Keywords: pragmatic competence, politeness strategies, request strategies

## Introduction

"*Do you speak this language fluently*?" It is definitely a common question that most language learners may ask. Coming as foreign language, most people expect that "speak" is the main concern in learning language as a means of being able to communicate. Indeed, for some reasons people believe that "speak" appears as the one English 'skill that represents all the English competence. It is proven by investigation done by writer through the teachers that had been interviewed by writer. It is showed that they are more focusing on learners' spoken competence rather than other competences. At the end of the day, it may provoke learners' failure in developing communicative competence in real-life situation.

Zayed (2014, p. 1) believed that they need to focus on communicative competence which is the ultimate goal for learning a foreign language. It is reasonable to assume that communicative language teaching (CLT) should be based on implicitly or explicitly on some models of communicative competence (*Murcia et al.*,1995). Communicative Competence is defined as learners' ability to express their messages in target language in form of real-life situation communication. Regards to its importance (Larsari, 2011: 161) pointed that without sufficient exposure needed for learners to notice and acquire the language input and chances to use the new knowledge, communication competence is not likely to be promoted.

According to Celce-Murcia, Dornyei & Thurrel (1995) further proposed model of communicative competence as a pyramid enclosing a circle surrounded by another circle. The circle within the pyramid is discourse competence, and the three points

of the triangle are sociocultural competence, linguistic competence, and actional competence. Then, the circle surrounding the pyramid represents strategic competence. Linguistic competence comprises basic elements of communication, such as sentence patterns and types, the constituent structure, the morphological inflections, and the lexical resources, as well as the phonological and orthographic systems needed to realize communication as speech or writing. Actional competence is defined as competence in conveying and understanding communicative intent, that is, matching actional intent with linguistic form based on the knowledge of an inventory of verbal schemata that carry illocutionary force (speech acts and speech act sects). Discourse competence, concerns on the selection, sequencing, and arrangement of words, structures, sentences, and utterances to achieve a unified spoken or written text (Murcia et al.,1995, p. 13). Sociocultural competence refers to the speaker's knowledge of how to express messages appropriately within the overall social and cultural context of communication, in accordance with the pragmatic factors related to variation in language use. strategic competence as knowledge of communication strategies and how to use them. it can be summed up that language is not only means of communication coding system but also part of individual's identity followed with culture of the communities where it is used.

In addition, another thing to be concerned in achieving successfull communication in target language is pragmatic competence and knowledge of target culture (Aliakbari & Gheitasi, 2014, p. 10). There are two types of pragmatics competence which learners must notice in order to achieve appropriate communication, those are pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Pragmalingustics deals with the resources/ linguistics realization for conveying specific communicative or speech acts. Sociopragmatics deals with the appropriate use of those linguistic form/ realizations be learners based on the context, the special roles of the participants in the context and the politeness factors of social distance, power, and distance of imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1978; 1987) as cited in (Hua Tan & Farashaiyan, 2012, p. 189).

Related to communication, request appears as one of speech acts which learners must be aware of. The reason is that its successfulness or failure may determine the positive or negative outcomes. Achiba (2003: 3) conveyed that request is useful and occur frequently, especially among learners of a new language. In Indonesia, it can be proven that request is regularly occur in daily communication in EFL classroom. For example "*Can you clean the whiteboard, please?, Refill the marker's ink please?*. Trosborg (1995, p. 189) believed that request is an illocutionary act whereby a speaker conveys to hearer that he/ she wants the hearer to perform an act which is for the benefit of the speaker and, sometimes, for the hearer. There are four classifications of request strategies proposed by Trosborg (1995), those are: idirect request, hearer-oriented condition, speaker- oriented conditions, direct request. In its utilization, performing request is indivisible from politeness strategies because it asks for favour and supposed to be not to threaten anybody. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987, p. 65) politeness theory, stated that requests are considered as the Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) as a speaker is imposing her/ his will on the hearer.

They suggested that when individuals are required to perform a face threatening act and they want to do it in a direct way; they should attempt to mitigate its threatening effect on the hearer's face. In doing so, they proposed three terms of socio-cultural variables of Face Threatening Acts, those are Power (P), Distance (D), and Rating of Imposition (R). It can be summed up that politeness strategies must be taken into account within request. Politeness strategies in request are addressed to soften or modify the politeness level of the request

appropriately based on the situation given. There are four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson, those are bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. So that in expressing request, speaker may decrease its directness. For example if the speaker would like to have request by decreasing its directness, the speaker must increase the level of request's politeness by adding certain words such as 'please, would you mind, do you mind, and etc'.

In scrutinizing its factors contribute, the theory that will be employed is theory of Geoffrey Leech's (2014). the maxims of Leech (2014) will be explained as follows:
1. Give a high value to O's wants (Generosity Maxim)
2. Give a low value to S's wants (Tact Maxim)
3. Give a high value to O's qualities (Approbation Maxim)
4. Give a low value to S's qualities (Modesty Maxim)
5. Give a high value to S's obligation to O (Obligation of S to O Maxim)
6. Give a low value to O's obligation to S (Obligation of O to S Maxim)
7. Give a high value to O's opinion (Agreement Maxim).
8. Give a low value to S's opinions (Opinion-reticence Maxim)
9. Give a high value on O's feelings (Sympathy Maxim)
10. Give a low value to S's feelings (Feeling-reticence Maxim)

It has been a debate that in defining direct and indirect form of request is influenced by gender. Robin Lakoff was interested in the issue of gender discrimination which was led her to investigate women and men's speech in American English. she pointed out that females used conversational politeness, especially forms that mark respect for addressee, hypercorrect grammar (consistent use of standard verb form), super polite forms, indirect request, avoidance of strong swear words (fudge, my goodness), and emphatic stress (it was brilliant

performance) (Fauziati, 2009, p. 202). Nevertheless, recalling to the idea that politeness cooperates with culture, it encourages researcher to sucritinize request strategies used by male and female learners who live in Central Java, with regards English as foreign language. There are four research questions proposed, such as 1) What are the request strategies used by male and female EFL learners in MAN 1 Sragen?; 2) What are the politeness strategies in request used by male and female EFL learners in MAN 1 Sragen?; 3) What are the similarities and the differences of the request strategies used by male and female EFL learners in MAN 1 Sragen? and; 3) What factors contribute in choosing the politeness strategies in request used by male and female EFL learners in MAN 1 Sragen?

**Methodology**

The researcher adopted qualitative case study as an approach of the research as it provides the readers with sufficient details of request strategies. Qualitative case study happens to be investigating and developing in depth the cases in natural setting which is tended to focus on process, while researcher emerged to be the key instrument whereas the data is described descriptively.

1. Participant

The respondents observed were eleventh graders of MAN 1 Sragen. In selecting the respondents, the writer took three to five learners for each class by purposive sampling. In total, there were forty learners chosen to be observed in this research.

2. Instrument

The instrument used in this research was DCT (Discourse Completion Test) adapted by Blum Kulka (1982) and later formulated by Rose (1992). It embeds on the situational prompt information on requestive goal, social distance, and social dominance. DCT can be represented as a questionnaire containing a set of very briefly described

situation designed to elicit a particular speech act. Subjects read the situations and respond in writing to a prompt (Billmyer and Varghese: 2000: 517).

Table 1. The Category Classification of Discourse Complication Test (DCT)

| Category | Status | DCT Forms |
|---|---|---|
| Close | Higher | DCT 1 |
| | Equal | DCT 2 |
| | Lower | DCT 3 |
| Familiar | Higher | DCT 4 |
| | Equal | DCT 5 |
| | Lower | DCT 6 |
| Unfamiliar | Higher | DCT 7 |
| | Equal | DCT 8 |
| | Lower | DCT 9 |

Table 2. Variable distribution in the nine situation from Written Discourse Test

| DCT | Requestee | Requester | Pragmatic Situations | P | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Daughter/ Son | Mother | Asking for buying new luggage | + | - |
| 2 | An older sister | A younger sister | Asking for bringing some books back to the library | - | - |
| 3 | An uncle | A niece | Asking for fixing the computer problem | - | - |
| 4 | A student | A vice principle | Asking for making list of farewell party' schedule | + | + |
| 5 | Class mate | Classmate | Asking for giving a ride | - | - |
| 6 | Teacher | A student | Asking for explaining the lesson once more | - | + |
| 7 | A conte stant | A committee | Asking a contestant for taking permission from administration | | |
| 8 | A contestant | A contestant | Asking for help to complete the administration form | - | + |
| 9 | A committee of administration | A student | Asking for information to register yourself in this university | - | + |

## 3. Procedure

**Step 1**

Adapting DCT as the instrument allows researcher to create DCT's situation by herself. In doing so, she adjusted the situation to learners' environment.

**Step 2**

Each learners was given a written DCT, consist of nine situations that learners must respond to. Learners must be able to make utterances to express request in written based on situation given on DCT.

**Step 3**

Researcher received the DCT from learners. In analyzing the data, data coding was used. In doing so, there were three hundred and sixty numbers of DCT that she typed and coded it manually. For example,
DCT 1/ M/ 18
DCT 1 : The DCT 1
M/ F : Learners (male-female)
18 : number of learners

**Step 4**

Through the data coding enable researcher to classified the DCT into some proposed research questions.

## Findings and Discussion

It can be concluded that the request strategy that mostly used by male and female learners was ability/ willingness. In concern of its directness, male learners appeared to be more direct rather than female learners. Suggestory formulae appeared to be strategy that equally used by male and female learners. Hints appeared to be least used. At last, it can be concluded that related to its directiveness, male learners appeared to be more direct rather than female learners. In addition, it once more proved that theory of Robin Lakoff was correct. He believes that at the syntactic level women use more tag questions, hedges than men.

Related to politeness, the data figured out that learners employed four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1989). Those were: non-minimization of the face threat, notice attend to H (his interest, wants, needs, goods), intensify interest to H, use in group identity markers, be optimistic, be conventionally indirect, question hedge, be pessimistic, give deference, apologize. To be siginifcant, the data showed that the politeness strategy that mostly emloyed by learners was be conventionally indirect, while give hints appeared to be least used.

In expressing request both male and female learners conducted directness if power belongs to them so that they were allowed to be explicit or even impose the requestee. In contrast, male and female learners conducted indirectness if they happened to be less power. Besides that, in certain cases there were other aspects involved which was may influence in the choosing the level of directness. For example, given same situation male learners tended to be direct while female learners tended to be indirect. These differences may emerge because there were some aspects influenced, such as rank of imposition and relationship between requestee-requester.

It can be concluded that in defining the factors contribute in choosing politeness, the relationship/ level of intimacy between requestee-requester must be highly involved. It can be proven from three different categories proposed. When male and female involved in such close relationship with requestee, they tended to be polite. In contrast, the request tended to be less polite when they involved in familiar relationship. In doing so, there were a lot numbers found to be confident and clear in uttering the request. At last, when male and female learners involved into unfamiliar relationship, the result showed very significant. Both male and female learners tended to be very polite when they met someone whose higher power than him/ her. Meanwhile, they happened to be less polite or even direct, when they meet someone who has less power than him/ her.

## Conclusion

Request and politeness are like two sides of coin. It can be seen that request deals with directness while politeness deals with being polite. Through the discussion, can be concluded that being direct and less polite are correlated each other. It can be proved from the DCT clearly showed that the more learners tended to be direct, the more less polite they would be. At the same time, there were some aspects correlated each other in defining both its directness and its politeness. Those were power, distance, and rank of imposititon conducted within level of intimacy (close, familiar, unfamiliar)

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