

# Investigation into Strategies of Requests and Mitigation Used by Palestinian English Language Learners

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## Abstract

This study investigates the strategies of request speech act used by Palestinian EFL learners at the school level and the effect of the gender variable on strategy use. Moreover, strategies used to mitigate requests were investigated. Data was collected for this study through completion of Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT). A DCT was designed, consisting of (8) situations, with different social status levels between the participants. The DCT was completed by a sample of (69) EFL learners at the American School in Beit Jala. The researchers adopted Blum-Kulka's (1989) method in coding and analyzing the data. The findings revealed that some strategies were employed more often than the other strategies. Furthermore, the learners used few strategies to mitigate requests. The findings revealed gaps in learners' pragmatic competence that call for remediation through designing extra materials that expose the learners to the different strategies that realize speech acts. Finally the findings showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the employment of the strategies due to gender. Further research should be conducted on other English speech acts besides requests, taking into account the effect of social variables, such as social power and distance, on strategy use.

**Keywords:** pragmatic competence, strategies, mitigation, requests, discourse completion task

## 1. Introduction

The overarching goal of teaching English as a second/foreign language is to help learners acquire communicative competence. A key component of communicative competence is pragmatic competence, which is the ability to appropriately use language in meaningful, appropriate social interactions. This competence involves use of the different strategies that realize speech acts available in the language. Learning English as a foreign rather than a second language is difficult because the learners learn it in isolation. They need to learn about the culture and how the language is used when communicating with others. Moreover, they need to acquire the language and how to use it in socially appropriate contexts. In order to communicate effectively, they need to have communicative competence that helps them perform speech acts, such as requesting, apologizing, offering, complimenting, inviting, among others. Speech acts fall within what researchers describe as Interlanguage Pragmatic Competence (ILP), which is a part of Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) (Abuarrah, 2014). This research focuses on one of the communicative acts (speech acts) that are employed by a sample of Palestinian EFL school students, namely requests.

Throughout their EFL teaching experience, the researchers noticed how students produced direct, blunt requests and apologies devoid of the various politeness markers associated with these two speech acts. Furthermore, they utilized a limited number of strategies for conveying, which hindered successful intercultural communication. This study aims at providing objective evidence for such impressionistic remarks. Moreover, the literature on requests and apologies produced by Palestinian EFL learners at the school level is non-existent. So, this study seeks to contribute to this field of applied pragmatics research by filling this gap.

This study aims at answering the following research questions:

- 1) What strategies do Palestinian EFL learners use in performing the speech act of requests and is there statistically significant differences due to gender?
- 2) To what extent are the request strategies used direct?

3) What strategies do the learners employ to mitigate requests, i.e., soften their imposition on the hearer?

Very few research studies have been conducted on the speech acts produced by Palestinian EFL learners. These studies focused on university rather than school students. This study fills a gap in the research literature on the production of apologies by Palestinian EFL learners at the school level. It helps teachers to understand how learners employ requests and what strategies they use. The findings may motivate teachers to systematically evaluate the pragmatic component in the textbooks used at school. Moreover, the findings have pedagogical implications for teaching, assessing students' pragmatic abilities and evaluating materials in use at the school level.

Definitions of relevant terms are presented below:

#### *Speech Act Theory*

The speech act theory was first introduced by the philosopher J. Austin, in *How to do Things with Words*. It was later developed by the philosopher J. Searle. The speech act theory is a subfield of pragmatics which shows how words are used not only to give information but also how words carry out actions (Nordquist, 2013).

#### *Speech Acts*

A speech characterized by the speaker's aim and its effect on the listener (Nordquist, 2019).

#### *Requests*

A request is a directive speech act that aims to persuade the listener to take an action when it is not immediately evident that they would in the regular run of events (Searle, 1969).

#### *Mitigation Strategies*

They are used by the speaker to soften the effect of request imposition on the hearer (e.g., politeness).

#### *Upgraders*

"Elements whose functions is to increase the impact of the request." (Blum- Kulka et al., 1989, p. 285).

## **2. Theoretical Preliminaries and Literature Review**

### *2.1 Theoretical Preliminaries*

This study falls under Applied Pragmatics, Interlanguage Pragmatics, Sociopragmatics and Speech Act Theory. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that deals with language used in context. There are four pragmatic processes: assignment of reference, assignment of meaning, interpretation of the implicated meaning, and interpretation of the illocutionary force. This study deals with the illocutionary force, the purpose of saying something. It will investigate the requests and apologies produced by a sample of Palestinian EFL learners.

Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) mentioned that several types of speech acts have been studied within interlanguage pragmatics. In previous research that was conducted on interlanguage the importance of the research has been attached to the learners' linguistic errors. Most of the information collected about interlanguage pragmatics is related to communication not to learning. The focus in interlanguage pragmatics has been on the learners' inappropriate speech act realizations; that is, to uncover students' pragmatics knowledge at a certain point in their learning process.

Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) added that sociopragmatics is the way pragmatic performance is subjected to specific social situations. Two of the most important factors of sociopragmatics are social distance and social power between the participants. They stated that "Directness tends to rise with increase in familiarity, as well as with the transition from public to private domain" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 4). Studies in this field showed that the directness of requests, especially between children and a higher power, tends to be more direct.

### *2.2 Literature Review*

#### *2.2.1 Studies of Requests Performed by EFL Learners*

Kurniawan et al. (2024) investigated the request strategies employed by EFL university students at Jambi University. The data were collected via a DCT that consisted of five scenarios that were completed by 6 participants. The results showed that conventionally indirect request strategies were mostly used by the participants.

El-Dakhs (2023) investigated how Saudi EFL learners realized the speech act of request. The data was collected from 240 Saudi undergraduate students via a DCT that consisted of 12 situations. The results revealed that the conventionally indirect strategy of query preparatory was the most frequently used by the respondents.

Alqurashi (2022) investigated the impact of social power and social distance on the request strategies used by Saudi learners and teachers of English as a foreign language. Data was collected via a DCT consisting of 10

situations that were completed by 25 students and 9 teachers at Jeddah University. The results revealed that query preparatory (conventionally indirect strategy) was the most frequently used by the respondents.

De Pablos-Ortega (2020) conducted a study on the directive Speech Acts in English and Spanish Filmspeak. The purpose of the study was to investigate the representation of directive speech acts in film discourse. The researcher extracted and analyzed 24 films, 12 English and 12 Spanish. The results showed that indirectness of the speech acts was widely performed in the English movies unlike the Spanish movies that performed more direct directives.

Alakrash and Bustan (2020) investigated the politeness strategies used by Arab EFL and Malaysian ESL students in performing requests. Data was collected via interviews with six post-graduate students, 3 Arab and 3 Malaysian. The results showed that Arab respondents used direct strategies (want statements and hints) whereas Malaysian respondents used more indirect strategies (hints, query preparatory and hedged performative).

Magaiab et al. (2019) investigated the politeness strategy of request used between Libyan students and their Lecturers using English as a foreign language. Data was collected from emails written by four students and four lecturers. Results revealed that “query preparatory” (conventionally indirect request) was most frequently used by the participants.

Alzebaree and Yavuz (2017) conducted a study that focused on the realization of the speech acts of request and apology by Middle Eastern ESL learners. It investigated learners’ pragmatic competences in making requests and apologies by Kurdish students. The sample targeted two groups, Kurdish speaking students and English speaking students. The subjects were 97, 14 of whom were English native speakers and the other 83 were undergraduate students. The researcher collected the data using a Discourse Completion Task. The researcher coded and analyzed the data collected according to the taxonomy of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). The results showed difference between the two groups and between the private and state universities; however, there was no significant difference between males and females.

Haddad (2017) investigated the use of request strategies by L2 learners. Data was collected from 30 upper secondary-school in Sweden, using DCT that consisted of 9 contexts. Results showed that conventionally indirect request was used by the majority of respondents.

Dendenne (2014) conducted a study that investigated pragmatic transfer in interlanguage requests performed by Algerian students. The researcher collected the data using a Discourse Completion Task. The sample targeted two groups. The researcher compared between English speaking and Arabic speaking students. The results exhibited two different types of politeness system (positive-based and negative-based). Two types of pragmatic transfer were evident. “The pragmalinguistic type was operative in the employment of linguistic structures inspired by the mother language and word by word translation. The sociopragmatic type was extant in the employment of the request strategies and the perception of the situational variables that were in line with the learners’ mother language” (p. 29).

Rešetar (2014) conducted a study that investigated request modification in the pragmatic production of (37) intermediate ESP learners. The researcher collected the data through a Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT), which contained six situations with different social powers. The results revealed that “the request production of intermediate ESP learners will show very limited variation both with respect to the type of modifications (both external and internal) and the frequency of their usage. The pragmatic production of the intermediate ESP learners who participated in this research is thus shown to be the result of pedagogical instruction and is clearly at a significantly lower level than their linguistic development” (p. 29).

Macaulay (2001) conducted a study on the indirectness and gender in requests for information. 23 interviews were conducted by four participants, two females and two males. Three of the participants were Canadian and one American. The researcher examined the differences between the interviews of males and females on radio and television. The results of this study showed that, “While the male interviewers favour indirect forms that foster attunement, the female interviewers favour indirect forms that engage their interviewees analytically. The female interviewers employ indirect requests for information to ask ‘tough’ questions, maintain a line of questioning, and maintain their position as speakers who have power” (p. 293).

Almost all the previous studies reviewed above focused on samples learning English at the university level. Only Haddad (2017) collecting requests from school learners of English. That motivated the researchers to collect requests from the American school in Bei-Jala (Palestine).

### 2.2.2 Studies of Request Speech Act Performed by Palestinian EFL Learners

Abuarrah (2014) conducted a study that investigated the request strategies used by 145 students at two Palestinian universities, namely Al-Quds Open University (QOP) and The Arab American University (AAU). The sample

consisted of 145 participants who were divided into four groups, two native speaker groups and two language learner groups. Data was collected by a Discourse Completion Task. The results revealed that based on the different methods of instruction in both universities and language learning policies, there were differences in performing request strategies.

The above literature review clearly reveals the scarcity of research into interlanguage pragmatics of Arabic-speaking EFL learners, especially speech acts realization strategies. Gender was not a variable in any of the previous studies that focused on speech acts. Moreover, the previous studies focused on learners at universities, or those who are MA students. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there was only one study done in Palestine about the request speech act. The research done in Palestine targets older subjects (MA students, and EFL university learners). The present study looks into the performance of young learners (school level), taking into consideration gender as the main variable, and investigates the strategies used by the learners in realizing request speech act as well as the strategies used to mitigate the request.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Study Design and Sampling

Population of the study consisted of all EFL learners at the American School in Beit-Jala. A sample of (69) male and female EFL learners was selected from 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades at the American School. Grade classes were chosen randomly. Students in the American school acquire their communicative competence through not only the curriculum but also through daily interacting with native speakers. That was one of the factors that motivated the researcher to investigate students' pragmatic competence, focusing on their realization of the request speech act. The following table presents the distribution of the request sample by grade and gender.

Table 1. Subjects by grade and gender

Grade	Male	Female	Total
9th	19	17	26 (36)
10th	15	18	33
Total	34	35	69

#### 3.2 Variable of the Study

One variable was targeted in the study: Gender (Male vs female).

#### 3.3 Study Instrument

Data was collected via a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). It consisted of real-life scenarios with a missing part, which the learner is asked to complete. The DCT included (8) situation scenarios, and the apology DCT (8). DCT is the only data gathering device known that provides a sufficiently huge corpus of similar systematically varied speech act data. Ogiermann (2018) mentions that "since DCTs can be translated into any language and distributed to large groups of informants within a short period of time, they are the ideal instrument for the study of speech acts" (p. 229).

Validation of the DCT instrument was conducted in two stages. First, it was sent to two experts in the field of Applied Linguistics to provide feedback on appropriateness of the description of situation scenarios. The experts' comments helped the researcher improve the scenarios before piloting the instrument. Two scenarios were rewritten upon the recommendation of one of the experts. The experts' feedback helped the researchers improve the scenarios before piloting.

Second, the DCT was piloted by asking a small sample of EFL learners to complete it. Learners were asked if they had encountered difficulty in understanding what the situation scenarios targeted. Moreover, the pilot helped the researcher determine how long completion of the DCT would take.

#### 3.4 Data Analysis

Data collected was analyzed and coded using CCSARP coding system (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Moreover, frequency and percentage of strategy use and request mitigation strategies were calculated by SPSS. Finally, chi-square test was used to test the significance of the relationship between strategy use and learner gender.

The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) coding scheme, one of the well-known pioneer studies on pragmatics by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), specified the strategies employed in realizing the speech acts of requests and apologies, besides three levels of directness for requests: direct requests, conventionally indirect

requests, and non-conventionally indirect requests. The CCSARP has become the most popular scheme for coding requests and apologies (Panahzadeh & Asadi, 2019). A number of strategies were proposed for the mitigation of the request speech act.

#### *Request strategies*

- 1) Mood derivable: Leave me alone/ clean up the kitchen
- 2) Explicit performative: I am asking you to move your car.
- 3) Hedge performative: I must/have to ask you to clean the kitchen right now.
- 4) Locution derivable: Madam I'll have to/should/ must/ought to move your car.
- 5) Want statement: I'd like to borrow your notes for a little while.
- 6) Query Suggestory formula: How about cleaning up the kitchen/Why don't you get lost.
- 7) Preparatory: Can I borrow your notes?
- 8) Strong hint: Will we be going home now?
- 9) Mild hint: You've been busy here haven't you?

#### *Request mitigation (downgraders) strategies*

- 1) Interrogative: Can I borrow your notes?
- 2) Negation of a preparatory condition: You couldn't give me a lift could you?
- 3) Subjunctive: Might be better if you were to leave now.
- 4) Conditional: I would suggest you leave now.
- 5) Aspect: I'm wondering if I could get a lift home with you?
- 6) Tense: I wanted to ask you to present your paper a week earlier.
- 7) Conditional clause: I was wondering if you could present your paper a week earlier than planned.
- 8) Combinations of the above: I was wondering if I couldn't get a lift home with you.
- 9) Politeness marker: Please/ clean up the kitchen, please.
- 10) Understate: Could you tidy up a bit?
- 11) Hedge: It would fit much better somehow if you did your paper next week.
- 12) Subjectivizer: I'm afraid you're going to have to move your car.
- 13) Downtoner: Could you possibly/ perhaps lend me your notes?
- 14) Cajoler: You know, I'd really like you to present your paper next week.
- 15) Appealer: Clean up the kitchen, dear, will you? / okay?
- 16) Preparator: I'd like to ask you something....
- 17) Getting a precommitment: Could you do me a favor?
- 18) Grounder: Judith, I missed class yesterday. Could I borrow your notes?
- 19) Disarmer: I know you don't like lending out your notes, but could you make an exception this time?
- 20) Promise of reward: Could you give me a lift home? I'll pitch in on some gas.
- 21) Imposition minimizer: Would you give me a lift, but only if you're going my way.
- 22) Neutral: Excuse me, could you give me a lift home?
- 23) Marked: Could I humbly beg to scrounge a lift home?

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

This section presents and discusses the results of the study according to the research questions. The first question asks about the strategies that Palestinian EFL learners use in performing the speech act of requests and the effect of the gender variable on strategy use. The second question asks about the level of directness of the strategies used while performing requests. The third question asks about the strategies that the learners employ to mitigate requests, i.e., soften their imposition on the hearer.

#### 4.1 First Question

“What strategies do Palestinian EFL learners use in realizing the speech act of requests and is there a statistically significant difference due to gender?”

Results of the analysis of the DCT responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of request strategy use

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1	11	8%
2	0	0%
3	2	2%
4	3	2%
5	14	11%
6	2	2%
7	87	65%
8	6	5%
9	8	6%
<b>Total</b>	133	

#### Key:

- 1) Mood derivable      2) Explicit performative      3) Hedged performative  
 4) Locution derivable      5) Want statement      6) Suggestory formula  
 7) Query Preparatory      8) Strong hint      9) Mild hint

The table above displays the frequency and percentage of the request strategies used by the EFL learners according to the data analyzed. To answer the first part of the question, the strategies used most by the learners are: *query preparatory*, with a frequency of 87 (65%). This strategy depends on being polite. This shows that the learners are using polite strategies while performing requests, even though the situations in the DCT have different social status levels. Strategy number five, *want statement*, with a frequency of 14 (11%). This strategy is based on stating what you want while requesting. The last strategy is *mood derivable*, with a frequency of 11 (8%). This strategy is based on the mood of the speaker, where the speaker can be somewhat rude or direct when requesting. The least used strategies were: *explicit performative*, with a frequency of 0. This shows that none of the learners used this strategy in requesting, number 3, *hedged performative*, with a frequency of 2 (2%) and finally *suggestory formula*, with a frequency of 2 (2%).

As for the second part of this question, which concerns the effect of gender, results of the analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency and percentage of request strategy use by gender

Strategies	Frequency & % (Male)	Frequency & % (Female)
1	9 (12)	2 (4)
2	0	0%
3	2 (2.7)	0
4	3 (4)	0
5	6 (8)	8 (14)
6	0	2 (4)
7	47 (62.7)	40 (69)
8	3 (4)	3 (5)
9	5 (6.7)	3 (5)
<b>Total</b>	75	58

#### KEY:

- 1) Mood derivable      2) Explicit performative      3) Hedged performative  
 4) Locution derivable      5) Want statement      6) Suggestory formula  
 7) Query Preparatory      8) Strong hint      9) Mild hint

To find out if there is a statistically significant difference between the frequencies, the Chi-square test was used.

Results of the test are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Chi-square for strategy use by gender

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.807 <sup>a</sup>	7	.147
Likelihood Ratio	13.699	7	.057
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.883	1	.090
N of Valid Cases	133		

a. 11 cells (68.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .87.

The analysis revealed that there is no significant difference at the level of significance ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) in request strategy use with respect to gender since p- value is 0.147, greater than 0.05. The insignificant effect of gender on request strategy use may be due to the fact that the learners are exposed to similar materials and learning environment. This finding is similar to what Alzeebaree and Yafuz found in their (2017) study.

Example on the strategies used most frequently in the first part of the question:

*Strategy number 7: Query Preparatory*

*Scenario 1: You go grocery shopping with your mom and find a strange fruit that you want to try.*

*You: Mom look at this fruit.*

*Mom: Yeah it looks good.*

*You: \_\_\_\_\_ Can I buy some to try it? \_\_\_\_\_ [learner's answer]*

As seen in the example above the learner used a *query preparatory* strategy while completing the scenario. He/ She was being polite while talking to the mom in this scenario by using "Can I" while requesting to buy something he would like to try.

*Scenario 2: You go to a restaurant with your family. As you sit down, the waiter comes and asks if you need anything. You tell him "NO, I will call you back when I do."*

*You: (Calling the waiter).*

*Waiter: Yes.*

*You: \_\_\_\_\_ Could I please get water and spaghetti. \_\_\_\_\_ [leaner's answer]*

In the example above, the learner used a *query preparatory* strategy while completing the scenario. The learner was being polite while talking to the waiter in this scenario; he/she used "could I" while requesting to buy something to eat.

*Strategy number 5: want statement.*

*Situation 1: You go to a restaurant with your family. As you sit down, the waiter comes and asks if you need anything. You tell him "NO, I will call you back when I do."*

*You: (Calling the waiter).*

*Waiter: Yes.*

*You: \_\_\_\_\_ I would like to order something. \_\_\_\_\_ [learner's answer]*

As seen in the example above, the learner used a *want statement* strategy while completing this scenario. He/She was telling the waiter what he/she would like to order and completed the sentence.

*Situation 2: You are trying to fix the fence by yourself when you see your neighbor walking by.*

*Neighbor: Hi what are you doing?*

*You: Trying to fix the fence.*

*You: \_\_\_\_\_ I'd like a helping hand if you don't mind. \_\_\_\_\_ [learner's answer]*

As seen in this example the learner used a *want statement* strategy to complete the scenario. He/ She used "I would/ I'd like" in order to request help from the neighbor.

*Strategy number 1: mood derivable.*

*Situation 1: The weather is freezing and you are sitting in the living room with your sister. You look at the window and find it cracked open.*

*You: The weather is freezing.*

*Sister: It is.*

*You: \_\_\_\_\_ Close the window. \_\_\_\_\_ [learner's answer]*

In the above example, the learner used a *mood derivable* strategy to complete this scenario. He/ She was direct in requesting, without being nice or polite. He/ She ordered the sister to “close the window” without any indirect strategies.

#### 4.2 Second Question

*“To what extent are the request strategies direct?”*

As shown in Table 3 above, the request strategies are ordered from direct to indirect: the first strategy (*mood derivable*), was the most direct request strategy with a frequency of 8%, while (*mild hint*) was the most indirect request strategy with a frequency of 6%.

##### *Strategy 1: Mood derivable*

*Situation 1: You go with your friend to a restaurant in your car. When you are almost done, you call your mom to come pick you up, but your mom is running late.*

*You: Mom is running late.*

*Friend: Oh no what are you going to do?*

*You: \_\_\_ call a taxi \_\_\_ [learner's answer]*

As seen in this example, the learner used a *mood derivable* strategy while talking to a friend. He/ She did not use a polite request. They ordered a friend to call a taxi so that both could leave the restaurant.

##### *Strategy 9: Mild hints*

*Situation 1: The weather is freezing and you are sitting in the living room with your sister. You look at the window and find it cracked open.*

*You: the weather is freezing.*

*Sister: it is.*

*You: \_\_\_ I am shivering \_\_\_ [student's answer]*

As seen in the example the learner used *Mild hint* in completing the scenario. Where the learner used “I am Shivering” instead of directly telling her/ his sister to get up and close the window.

#### 4.3 Third Question

*“What strategies do the learners employ to mitigate requests, i.e., soften their imposition on the hearer?”*

Table 5 presents the frequency and percentage of request mitigation strategies



Table 5. Frequency and percentage of request mitigation strategies

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1	84	50
2	0	0
3	0	0
4	6	4
5	1	1
6	0	0
7	1	1
8	0	0
9	62	37
10	0	0
11	0	0
12	1	1
13	2	1
14	0	0
15	0	0
16	7	4
17	2	1
18	1	1
19	0	0
20	0	0
21	2	1
22	0	0
23	0	0

**KEY:**

- 1) Interrogative: e.g. Can I borrow your notes?
- 2) Negation of a preparatory condition e.g. You couldn't give me a lift could you?
- 3) Subjunctive: eg. Might be better if you were to leave now.
- 4) Conditional: e.g. I would suggest you leave now.
- 5) Aspect: e.g. I'm wondering if I could get a lift home with you?
- 6) Tense: e.g. I wanted to ask you to present your paper a week earlier.
- 7) Conditional clause: e.g. I was wondering if you could present your paper a week earlier than planned.
- 8) Combinations of the above: e.g. I was wondering if I couldn't get a lift home with you.
- 9) Politeness marker: e.g. Please/ clean up the kitchen, please.
- 10) Understate: e.g. Could you tidy up a bit?
- 11) Hedge: e.g. It would fit much better somehow if you did your paper next week.
- 12) Subjectivizer: e.g. I'm afraid you're going to have to move your car.
- 13) Downtoner: e.g. Could you possibly/ perhaps lend me your notes?
- 14) Cajoler: e.g. You know, I'd really like you to present your paper next week.
- 15) Appealer: e.g. Clean up the kitchen, dear, will you? / okay?
- 16) Preparator: e.g. I'd like to ask you something....
- 17) Getting a precommitment: e.g. Could you do me a favor?
- 18) Grounder: e.g. Judith, I missed class yesterday. Could I borrow your notes?
- 19) Disarmer: e.g. I know you don't like lending out your notes, but could you make an exception this time?
- 20) Promise of reward e.g. Could you give me a lift home? I'll pitch in on some gas.
- 21) Imposition minimizer: e.g. Would you give me a lift, but only if you're going my way.
- 22) Neutral: e.g. Excuse me, could you give me a lift home?
- 23) Marked: e.g. Could I humbly beg to scrounge a lift home?

Mitigation reduces the harshness of requesting. Based on the data collected from the different level situations in the DCTs, the learners did not use most of the mitigation strategies. The above figures revealed that the learners mostly employed two mitigation strategies, which are *interrogative*, *asking permission before requesting*, with a frequency of 84 (50%) and *politeness markers*, being polite when requesting with a frequency of 62 (37%). This indicates that the learners prefer to use non-mitigated strategies when addressing the hearer despite the different social differences among the participants. Furthermore twelve (12) of the mitigation strategies were not used at all.

*Examples on the mitigation strategies used most frequently*

*Strategy number 1: Interrogative.*

*Scenario 1: You are trying to fix the fence by yourself when you see your neighbor walking by.*

*Neighbor: Hi what are you doing?*

*You: Trying to fix the fence.*

*You: \_\_\_ Can you help me? If it's not a bother. \_\_\_ [learner's answer]*

In this example the learner is being polite while asking for help from the neighbor. He/ She used a modal verb “can you” when requesting as a sign of politeness.

*Scenario 2: You are watching your favorite series before finishing your homework. It is the last episode. Your dad comes in.*

*Dad: Are you still watching TV?*

*You: Yes.*

*Dad: Turn it off right now!*

*You: \_\_\_ But dad, it's the last episode and there is 10 mins left for it, can I please watch the episode and then do my homework? \_\_\_\_\_ [learner's answer]*

As seen in the example above, the learner is being polite while talking to the dad. As a sign of politeness, he/she used “Can I” then continued to be polite by adding a politeness marker “please”.

*Strategy number 9: Politeness markers.*

*Scenario 1: You go to the library to check out an important book for your English class. You try looking for it by yourself but cannot find it, so you go back to the librarian.*

*You: \_\_\_ can you help me real quick please? \_\_\_*

As seen in this example, the learner was being polite while asking for help from the librarian by using the politeness marker “please”.

*Scenario 2: The weather is freezing and you are sitting in the living room with your sister. You look at the window and find it cracked open.*

*You: The weather is freezing.*

*Sister: It is.*

*You: \_\_\_ May you please close the window? \_\_\_ [learner's answer]*

In the example above, the learner was being polite while talking to the sister. Using a modal verb “may you” and “please” are politeness markers.

## 5. Conclusions and Implications

The first research question addressed the frequency of request strategy use and if there is any statistically significant difference in the use of strategies due to gender. Analysis of the data has revealed that the most frequently used request strategies are: *Preparatory*, *Want Statement*, and *Mood Derivable*. On the other hand, the least frequently used request strategies are: *Hedged Performative*, *Suggestory Formula* and *Locution Derivable*. The chi-square test analysis shows that there is no statistically significant difference between strategy use due to gender.

The second research question addressed the level of directness of request strategies. The findings revealed that the most direct strategy is *Mood Derivable*, and the most indirect strategy is *Mild Hint*.

The third research question addresses the strategies used to mitigate requests. The findings show that only (11) out of the (23) strategies were used by the learners. Only two strategies scored high frequency, namely *interrogative*, *asking permission before requesting*, with a frequency of 84 (50%) and *politeness markers*, being polite when

requesting with a frequency of 62 (37%).

The study findings have practical implications for EFL instruction and assessment of learners' pragmatic abilities, with special emphasis on the strategies used in realization of request and apology speech acts. They identified some gaps in learners' production of request and apology strategies as well as the use of mitigation strategies. First, the findings may draw the attention of school EFL instructors to these gaps which need remediation. Put differently, the findings provide them with feedback on students' pragmatic abilities, which can motivate them to reselect on and examine the pragmatic component in the ELT materials in use at school. Such constructive reselection might shed light on the adequacy of the instructional materials and activities available for developing the students' pragmatic competence. In case the instructors identify inadequacy in the materials, they could design supplementary materials that target pragmatic competence. Another area that needs worthwhile, critical reselection is the assessment component. Do the methods used to assess students' abilities and skills include the pragmatic aspects of English? If the answer is in the negative, then assessment should target not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic competence. This sends a positive message to the students that mastery of the pragmatic component is part and parcel of overall mastery of the language.

In addition to these implications, the researchers suggest the following recommendations. First, EFL teachers should pay more attention to integrating speech acts realization into their interactions, using a variety of request and mitigation strategies and mitigation. This would encourage learners to practice using such strategies in their daily communication with the teachers and peers. Furthermore, EFL teachers should assess the availability of speech act realization in the textbooks in use. Second, researchers into speech act realization among EFL learners should target realization of speech acts other than requests, e.g., inviting, agreeing, complimenting, thanking and promising, among others. Third, materials writers should ensure that pragmatic competence receive, should explore the impact of social variables, such as social power and distance, on the speech act realization and mitigation strategies used.

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Both authors contributed equally to all stages of the study.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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### **Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

### **Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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