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The Manifestation of Interlanguage Pragmatics in Direct and Indirect Request Strategies Used by International Students

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Abstract

This study focused on how interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) is manifested in a multicultural environment. Learners' ability to make requests has received considerable attention in ILP research because requests are intrinsic face-threatening acts. The question this study aimed to address was to what extent a culture has an impact on the direct and indirect level of request strategies. The data were collected from thirty participants (fifteen males and fifteen females) representing five nationalities (Russian, Indonesian, Pakistani, Jordanian, and Hungarian) and studying at the University of Pannonia. The Discourse Completion Test (DCT) developed

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by Hendriks (2002) was used as an instrument, containing different situations to which the participants had to respond. The linguistic and cultural background of the participants was identified using an online tool, namely the Language History Questionnaire. The participants' responses were then recorded and transcribed. The direct and indirect levels of the requests were analyzed by categorizing the head act and the internal (syntactic and lexical) and external modifiers. The data showed that the participants generally used more indirect strategies in making requests (86.2% indirect, 13.8% direct), especially those from Indonesia. Participants from Pakistan were the most direct in making requests. Moreover, they used more external modifiers than other participants to compensate for their directness.

Keywords: Interlanguage pragmatics, mother tongue, pragmatics, second language acquisition.

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union has been encouraging its citizens to learn two or more languages besides their mother tongue (Katsarova, 2022). Many exchange programs have been launched to facilitate the process through formal education. As an EU member state since 2004, Hungary has supported these programs in terms of outgoing and incoming students in higher education. Thousands of students from all over the world apply for higher educational studies in Hungary every year. Besides the Erasmus, Campus Mundi, and Makovecz programs, the Hungarian government opened educational cooperation with 51 countries around the world in 2013 as part of the Hungarian Government's Global Opening Policy introducing the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship program (Tempus Public Foundation, 2017a). Now there are more than 2.929 international students listed as active students in Hungary within the Stipendium Hungaricum program (Tempus Public Foundation, 2017b). From this number, 112 students are enrolled in one of the B.A., M.A., or Ph.D. programs at the University of Pannonia, Veszprém.

The growth of the international student population in Veszprém affects the city, more precisely the university student community, making it more multilingual and multicultural. Incoming students face challenges and problems during their lives in the multilingual and multicultural society, both in their academic activities and in their daily lives. This mix of languages and cultures builds an acculturative experience for international and local students including their academic environment, language(s), rules, norms, lifestyles, routines, and physical, and socio-cultural environments (Mukminin, 2012; Mukminin, & McMahan, 2013; Mukminin, 2019). This phenomenon highly affects the integration of students into the community.

Due to (mainly) historical reasons, the linguistic and cultural composition of Hungary is quite homogeneous, which makes it even more challenging for international students to integrate. English is the main medium of communication between the students at the university, either in daily communication or communication in the academic field. However, since the students are non-native English speakers, their languages and cultures are assumed to influence their English

language use, including the pragmatics of their speech. As a consequence, linguistic misunderstanding may happen during the communication, especially when the politeness level is concerned (Nursanti et al., 2023). There are different norms of politeness and impoliteness in each country which greatly contributes to the success or failure of communication. Likewise, speech performances, such as requests, apologies, refusals, invitations, thanking, and complaints, are performed based on different rules in different cultures, often resulting in pragmatic transfer from the first language (L1) to the second language (L2). The degree to which strategies in making requests are employed, they vary from culture to culture (Jia & Huang, 2008), even in the same culture, people can request in various ways depending on education, socio-economic status, etc. Therefore, non-native English speakers from different countries have their own ways of using English.

Furthermore, learners' ability to make requests has received considerable attention in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) research, as requests are intrinsic face-threatening acts and how they apply the rules of 'politeness' language in formulating requests in English in their daily communication. This study focused on how ILP is manifested in a multicultural environment. The target group of the study was composed of international students studying at the University of Pannonia in Hungary. The study aimed to address the following research question:

- To what extent do language proficiency and culture have an impact on the politeness level of request strategies?

Regarding the research question, three hypotheses were set up:

- (i) language proficiency has a bigger impact on the way request strategies are expressed than the cultural background,
- (ii) participants generally use more indirect strategies than direct ones, and
- (iii) Indonesians are the most indirect participants in making requests compared to those from the other nations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP)

The area of ILP is categorized as a second-generation hybrid; it is a combination of second-language acquisition and pragmatics (Kasper, 2022; Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). Therefore, this field is a study of pragmatic competence acquisition in a foreign language by non-native speakers. It is about the way non-native speakers express something in a foreign language (Kasper, 2022; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). This pragmatic study is related to the speech act performances, such as apologies, asking questions, giving directions, thanking, admiring, making requests, etc. Sometimes, the same word or utterance expressed by different persons does not have the same meaning. For example, when a person says "I don't have time", it can convey several pragmatic meanings: (i) he/she does not have time, (ii) he or she wants to stop the conversation, (iii) he or she wants to leave, etc. Speech acts are difficult to study because there can be a lot of interpretations and implications behind them.

People from different cultural and educational backgrounds are assumed to show different types of language pragmatic acquisition patterns in a foreign language. There are a number of factors playing roles in this acquisition, including L1 pragmatics. L1

pragmatic transfer is a phenomenon when people transfer their L1 pragmatics to their LX pragmatics (Kasper, 1992; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Besides, some studies found that language exposure or the experience of living abroad can have an impact on the acquisition of pragmatics (e.g., Barron, 2000; Cohen & Shively, 2007; Hassall, 2006). In their studies, Hassall (2006) as well as Cohen and Shively (2007) found that the experience of living abroad helped learners achieve pragmatic competence toward the native speaker's norms.

2.2 Request Strategies

There are individual differences in expressing requests. These are acts in which the speaker attempts to create a message in a way that he/she gets the hearer's intention to do the requested favor (Balman et al., 2020; Searle, 1979). Meanwhile, directness and indirectness are two separate strategies in communication (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Linh, 2015). A number of studies found various and sometimes contradictory results about using the directness and politeness levels in making requests by foreign language learners compared to native speakers. For example, English learners from different first-language backgrounds were more direct in making requests in English than native speakers of English (Billmyer & Varghese, 2000).

Directness and indirectness are assumed to have a massive relationship with politeness level; the more indirect the request is, the more polite it will be (Byon, 2006). Likewise, based on the levels of directness and indirectness in the request strategy, Hendriks (2002) classified the request strategies into seven categories. This classification ranges from the most direct to the most indirect strategy.

Table 1. Classification of request strategy (Hendriks, 2002).

No.	Strategies	Examples
1.	Imperative	Give me your seat.
2.	Performative verb	I ask you to give me your seat.
3.	Obligation statement	You must give me your seat.
4.	Statement of want or wish	I want you to give your seat.
5.	Suggestion	Why don't you give me your seat?
6.	Reference to preconditions non-obviousness willingness ability	Will you give me your seat? Are you willing to give up your seat? Can you give me your seat?
7.	Hint	I can't stand up...

These classifications of request strategies are measured in the 'head act' of the request. Furthermore, to mitigate the imposition of the request, some speakers modify their request internally and externally (by using internal and external modifiers) to emphasize or to enlighten the request. Therefore, they are able to get the hearers' intention in fulfilling their request, make it more acceptable, or remove the expression of force that can appear in the request, especially in the imperative strategy.

External modifiers involve one or more sentences before or after the head act of the request. The head act is the main part of a request where the act of request is conveyed. External modifiers are also used to persuade the hearer to perform the request. According to Hendriks (2002), there are seven categories of external modifiers. As described in the examples, external modifiers may come before and after the head acts. Table 2 provides the classification of external modifiers.

Table 2. External modifiers (Hendriks, 2002).

No.	External modifiers	Examples
1.	Preparator; signaling devices	Could I ask you a question?
2.	Getting precommitment; elements that try to secure pre-commitment before the request is made	Could you help me?
3.	Grounders; reasons, explanations, or justifications for the request.	Hey, I have an important meeting, ...
4.	Disarmer; elements indicating that the speaker realizes the imposition of the request	I know it's too late, but...
5.	Rewards	I'll pay for the lunch.
6.	Expressions of thanks/appreciation	I'll be so grateful
7.	Cost minimizer	It will not take a long time.

Internal modifiers refer to the linguistic means by which the head act is expressed. Hendriks (2002) categorized two types of internal modifiers: syntactic modifiers and lexical modifiers. Syntactic modifier uses the syntax to modify the head act, such as the interrogative sentence, past tense, negation, modal, tag question, embedding, aspect, and subjunctive, while lexical/phrasal modifier consists of politeness markers (e.g. please), downtoners (e.g., maybe, possibility), understarters, subjectivizers, consultative device, hedges, and interpersonal markers (Færch & Kasper, 1989; Trosbog, 1995). Hendriks (2002) found that participants who used more direct request strategies also used more modifiers to compensate for their directness.

2.3 The Role of Culture and Politeness Level in Speech Act Performances

In learning and using a second language, it is often found that cultures, communication behaviors, and language backgrounds influence the learners' performance. Therefore, pragmatic transfer is a common phenomenon when people are speaking in their second language. Pragmatic transfer is when the speakers use the rules and behaviors of their native language in the target language (Takahashi, 2020; Wolfson, 1989). Due to the failure of pragmatic competence, second language learners might fail to communicate in the target language effectively although they have excellent grammatical and lexical competence.

Motivation, acculturation, and other affective factors are crucial in the development of pragmatic competence (Sánchez-Hernández, 2017; Schmidt, 1993; Santos, & Mukminin, 2022). Culture influences people's language behavior and may lead to a misunderstanding between two speakers of different languages. Different cultures have different standards of politeness in communication. Even when someone transfers the speech acts from their first language to their second language, it might be interpreted differently in terms of politeness. For example, when Jordanian Arabic speakers transfer their request strategy from Arabic to another language, such as English or Malay by saying, for example, "I want your pen for a moment", it can lead to misunderstanding because it sounds aggressive and demanding to the hearer. As such, it might be seen as an unacceptable request in many cultures (Al-Natour et al., 2015).

2.3.1 Indonesian

In the southeast part of Asia lies Indonesia, a country that consists of many islands and regions and is known for its cultural diversity. The cultures of this country

are assumed to influence the ways people express themselves in their daily communication. In Indonesia, there is an etiquette in communication called *tata krama*. This ethics is related to cultural norms; it includes the ways of communication, the customs of communication, and the habits of communication formed by society and based on societal agreement (Alfiati, 2015). This communication etiquette requires the speaker to take into account the age and gender of the hearer, the social distance between the conversation partners, and the situation of the communication (formal or informal) (Hassall, 1999; Hassall, 2006).

In the Indonesian community, intonation and the volume of voice are generally considered essential factors in communication. In terms of intonation, the origin of the speaker is decisive; people from Sumatera tend to have a higher tone in speaking than those from Java. In Javanese culture, there are the levels of politeness in communication, *ngoko* (the lowest level), *krama madya* (the middle level), and *krama inggil* (the highest level) (Sukarno, 2013). *Ngoko* expresses the least polite and *krama inggil* indicates the politest. In addition, each level is different from one to another in their lexical items. Based on the norms, these three levels of politeness are used in different situations based on the above-mentioned characteristics of the hearer (age, gender, status) and the level of familiarity between the interlocutors. These norms are applied in all types of speech acts in daily communication, including requests. In making requests, most Indonesians prefer using indirect strategies to direct ones.

2.3.2 Jordanian

A number of studies have been conducted to compare Arab learners of English and American English native speakers. Umar (2004) found that Arab learners of English from Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Bahrain used more direct requests than the American English speakers. However, Arabic speakers tend to use more internal modifiers to compensate for their directness and make their requests more polite and tactful. Arab culture is classified as high-context (less direct) and American culture as low-context (more direct) (Al-Shboul & Maros, 2020). In the Arabic culture, sometimes a hidden message of an expression is more important than what is said. Meanwhile, on the other hand, for Americans, words represent the truth; hence, they prefer expressing what they want more directly.

In Jordan, social distance, and power play significant roles in daily communication. Some studies about speech acts focusing on the Jordanian Arabic language found that most Jordanians prefer expressing themselves directly and less politely when addressing the hearers of lower power. Al-Omari (2007) discovered that, in situations where speakers have high power and low social distance, they tend to warn hearers of low authority using very direct and impolite strategies without giving any reasons. However, in situations where the speakers have low authority, they always give a reason for the warnings they made and use more indirect strategies. Their communication is also more polite, protective, and justified. In the equal power situations, the participants use direct and indirect, polite, and impolite strategies depending on the levels of their familiarity (friends or strangers). Al-Omari (2007) also found that Jordanian Arabic speakers are more indirect compared to American English speakers, but are also more emotional than American English speakers in terms of swearing, frightening, blaming, etc. Al-Natour et al. (2015) revealed that Jordanians

tend to use indirect strategies in making requests; most of them used “الممكنههل, ممكنه” [*Momkin, Hal mnalmomkin*] which means ‘can’ or ‘could’ (337 out of 700 requests).

In contrast to the previous results, [Al-Momani \(2009\)](#) who compared the production and perception knowledge of Jordanian learners of English (JEFL), Jordanian Arabic (JA) speakers, and American English (AE) speakers found that Jordanian learners of English used more direct strategies than American English. Even though, most of the participants preferred using the conventional indirect strategies (AE 80%, JEFL 64.6%, and JA 53.8%), the JEFL used more direct strategies than the AE speakers, such as “I want to postpone my appointment with you till Wednesday evening”. He concluded that they were influenced by their native language and did pragmatic transfer. There were no statistically significant differences between the JA speakers and JEFL.

2.3.3 *Pakistani*

Pakistanis are known for their directness. In their culture, the age, and the levels of authority in the society are very important in communication. Pakistani society is non-egalitarian ([Kousar, 2015](#)); they believe in hierarchy and social status. For example, [Harry \(2012\)](#) noted that in Pakistani society, men have higher power than women in the family. Therefore, men tend to use more direct ways of speaking to women than vice versa. However, he also pointed out that this directness is not performed in an apology because most Pakistanis consider an apology as a shameful and embracing act of their self-pride in society.

In Pakistan, besides Urdu, there are some regional languages spoken, such as Pashto, Siraiki, Punjabi, Kashmir, etc. There are some differences in the culture and behavior of the speakers of these regional languages. [Alam and Gill \(2016\)](#) conducted a study about the Siraiki and Pashto learners of English. Based on the interviews with the participants, they found that the linguistic resources and cultural norms of their first languages affect them in using the speech acts in English. However, Pashto learners of English perform the requests in a more polite way than they perform apologies. In the requests, they used dominantly indirect strategies. However, in apologies, they preferred using direct strategies and keeping their distance and cultural egotism. Meanwhile, Siraiki learners of English used indirect strategies in performing speech acts (request and apology). Due to colonialism, English is spoken as a second language in Pakistan. Besides Urdu, English is also an official language used in educational institutes, government, official documents, etc. People speak English in official and non-official settings (home, family, and neighborhood). Most people acquired it in early childhood. Hence, the language behavior of English has an impact on their behavior in using Urdu because English is more prestigious, sophisticated, and powerful ([Shamim, 2017](#)).

2.3.4 *Russian*

[Rathmayr \(2008\)](#) found that Russian people interpret directness as honesty. Mostly they prefer speaking directly without hiding any intention in their conversation. Furthermore, indirectness is mostly thought of as a waste of time for the hearers. According to [Rathmayr \(2008\)](#), the Russians usually use indirect requests only in a high-level formality of conversation. Furthermore, [Ogiermann \(2009\)](#) in her study

about politeness and indirectness of British, German, Russian, and Polish discovered that even though all participants preferred using interrogative requests which are categorized as an indirect strategy, German, Russian, and Polish were more direct than English speakers.

Furthermore, [Dubinina et al. \(2010\)](#) in their research about heritage Russian (diaspora) pragmatic competence in the Russian language revealed that most participants from Russian native speakers and Russian heritage speakers used conventional indirect requests by using ‘can’ or *можно*. It was found that 70% were native speakers and 80% were heritage Russian speakers. However, Russian speakers did not use a lexical politeness marker *пожалуйста* or ‘please’ in the indirect head act, only in some imperative requests to compensate for their directness, whereas the heritage speakers used more lexical politeness markers. Therefore, this study provided a brief description that basically Russians prefer asking a favor indirectly; however, they do not use any lexical markers or modifiers.

2.3.5 Hungarian

Hungary is located in the center of Europe. The official language of the country is Hungarian. The country is often considered monolingual. Hungary has 13 official minorities and other linguistic and national minorities ([Ethnologue, n.d.](#)). [Szili \(2016\)](#) conducted a research on making requests in Hungarian which involved two groups: adult workers and students. She reported that adult Hungarian workers used more direct requests than the students. The results also showed that social distance and power played a role in the ways they made requests. Both adult and student groups used less direct strategies when the requests were addressed to strangers.

Furthermore, [Bátyi \(2020\)](#) in her study on the language attrition of Hungarians in the Netherlands discovered that the majority of requests were formulated with the conventionally indirect strategies, the ‘ability’ strategy was found as the dominant strategy, while the number of direct strategies and hints was low. She also revealed that they dominantly used grounders to modify their requests. Furthermore, she also reported that the participants used a more direct strategy when they addressed the requests to strangers or people with high power than to people who have a close relationship (such as family, or friends) and people with low power. Interestingly, the results showed that the participants did not compensate for their directness by using more external modifiers.

2.4 The Impact of Situational Variants on Making Request Strategy

In this study, this situational variant includes power, social distance, and context. Power means the status of the speaker in the society, whether he or she has superior/high authority or inferior/low authority. In the present study, power is divided into low power (P1), equal power (P2), and high power (P3) ([Hendriks, 2002](#)). Meanwhile, social distance relates to the relationship between the speaker and the hearer (level of familiarity). Social distance is classified as acquainted (S1) and unacquainted (S2) ([Hendriks, 2002](#)). The last is the context of communication which concerns the types of conversation, whether it is formal conversation or informal conversation. Based on the context, the situation is categorized into two types: institutional situation (C1) and non-institutional situation (C2). For example:

Situation 1: In the living room (Hendriks, 2002)

You were in your room upstairs doing your math homework, but you could not do the sums. You need some help. You go down to the living room where your dad is watching a documentary on television. What do you say to your dad?

In this situation, the situation describes the speaker as having lower authority than the hearer (P1). Furthermore, there is a closed social distance between the speaker and hearer as a son and father (S1). This conversation is categorized as a non-institution context because they were talking about the son's homework between the family members (C2).

Situation 2: In the bus (Hendriks, 2002)

You are a pensioner. You have been out shopping all day, and you are now on your way home. You have just got onto the bus to find that there are no free seats left. In a seat near you, a young man is reading a magazine. What do you say to the young man?

The second situation describes the speaker as having higher authority or superior power than the hearer (P3). However, the speaker and hearer do not know each other (unacquainted social distance), thus categorized as S2. Besides, the situation is a non-formal or non-institutional situation (C2). These situations and contexts are very crucial in communication. They encourage different behaviors and different interpretations in communication. In some situations, for example, when a superior person makes a request to a person with a lower power than her/his, she or he tends to use a direct request strategy. Contradictorily, when a speaker has lower power than the hearer, she or he tends to use an indirect request strategy. Furthermore, as Hornberger and McKay (2010) said, social context is one of the essential components of learning a language. It precisely explains that different contexts might give different meanings in a speech.

3. METHODS

In order to answer the research question, this research was conducted using a quantitative method. The data were collected from 30 participants studying at the University of Pannonia, Veszprém, Hungary, through the Language History Questionnaire (LHQ) and Discourse Completion Test (DCT). They were enrolled in different programs, faculties, and majors. Four of the participants were doing their bachelor's, 19 of them were doing their Master's, and 7 were in the Ph.D. program. They come from five different countries where English is not spoken as the native language: Russia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Hungary, and Jordan. The starting age of learning English varied across the group; 14 of them started learning English early under the age of 10, and the rest were late starters (after the age of 10).

Furthermore, 24 participants acquired English as a second language while others acquired English as a third language after German and other languages. The participants were bilingual and multilingual speakers. Besides English, they also speak some other languages, such as German, Italian, Arabic, Hungarian, French, Spanish, Kalmyk, and Urdu. The following table gives us further information about the participants' backgrounds.

Table 3. Information of participants' background.

Nationality	Male	Female	Mean Age	English Language Exposure	Language Proficiency (Mean)
Hungary	1	5	25	14	4.6
Jordanian	3	3	25	16	5.6
Indonesian	3	3	29	19	5.0
Pakistan	6	-	24	13	6.0
Russian	2	4	23	13	6.0

Furthermore, as they come from different home countries, they have different cultural backgrounds. Some of the participants have been living in Hungary for more than one year while some others just started their first year here, which means they had been in Veszprém for four months. Regarding their experience of living abroad, some participants had lived in other countries for a short time before coming to Hungary (e.g., USA, United Arab Emirates, Great Britain, Spain, Finland, Italy, Great Britain, South Korea, China, the Philippines, Germany, Bosnia, and Canada). The participants were invited to participate in this research by using the snowball or chain approach, that is, the participants helped to recruit other participants (Creswell, 2007).

3.1 Instruments

To collect the required data, this research used two instruments: The Language History Questionnaire (LHQ) and the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The linguistic background of the participants was identified using an online tool: the Language History Questionnaire (Li et al., 2013). This questionnaire consisted of 23 questions about the participants' background information: language history and background, language proficiency in each of their languages, length of exposure to the language, and experience of living abroad. The participants needed to fill in the questionnaire with information about their ID, and the answers were directly transferred to the authors' research account. The DCT was used as the instrument to check the directness and indirectness levels (Hendriks, 2002). It consisted of 21 situations with three different speech act categories: request strategy, apology strategy, and refusal strategy. These twelve situations required the participants to make requests, while the rest were used as distractions. Participants were presented with a situation on a screen and they were asked to respond to them orally with no time restriction. In this test, three factors were manipulated in the situations: social distance (level of familiarity between speaker and addressee), power (authority relation between speaker and the addressee), and context (setting of the request).

Each participant was asked to read the situations and give their verbal responses to the situations. This test was conducted individually in English. Then, the responses were recorded and transcribed. Before the test began, each participant was asked to imagine themselves in the given situations and respond to them as they would naturally do. There was no time limitation for the participants to read and respond to the situations.

The transcripts of participants' responses were analyzed carefully utterance by utterance to code schemes (Stuckey, 2015), based on the classification of request strategies as well as the classification of external and internal modifiers. The analysis was continued in Excel sheets to find out the numbers of each category of request types and modifiers. The SPSS was run to find the correlation between the dependent

variables and independent variables. These analyses were also conducted to figure out the impacts of situational variants (power, social distance, and context).

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Request Strategies: Head Act-Direct and Indirect Strategies

Figure 1 shows the data on the number of request strategies produced by the participants in each category. Based on the results, it can be seen that most participants preferred using indirect strategies to direct strategies when making requests, with 86.2% (306 out of 355) of all requests being indirect and 13.8% (49 out of 355) being direct.

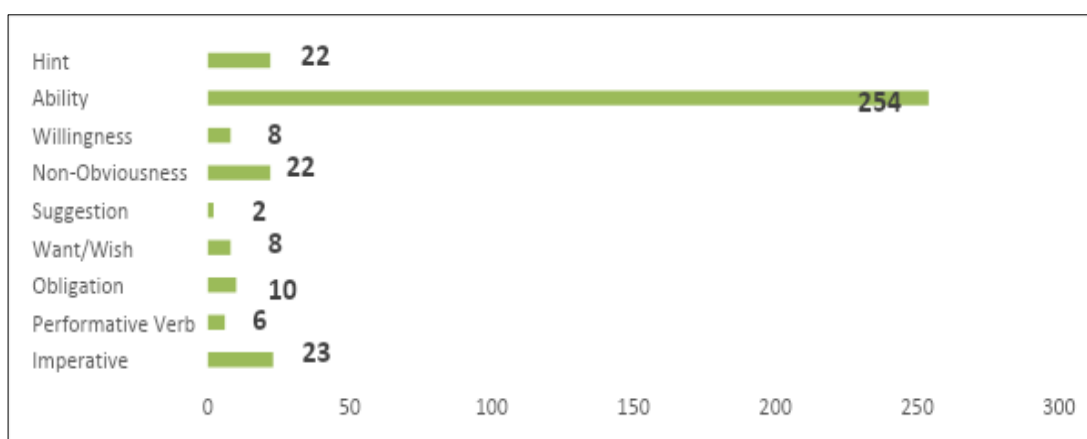


Figure 1. Number of request strategies by type.

From the indirect strategies, the most often used strategy was ‘ability’, accounting for 71.54% (254 of 355) of all requests. For example:

- (1) “Can you please help me for a moment?” (Indonesian; Female)
- (2) “Could you please help me to finish the campaign?” (Female; Jordanian)
- (3) “Please, if you can change my ticket.” (Male; Pakistani)

The next two categories, ‘hint’ and ‘non-obviousness’, were used equally, namely 6.19% (22 of 355) of all requests in each of the two categories.

From the non-obviousness, the data are as follows:

- (4) “Would you please check and approve if you don’t mind?” (Female; Russian)
- (5) “Would it be possible could give it a look, please, tonight?” (Male; Pakistani)
- (6) “Would you be so kind to take over your seat for me?” (Female; Hungarian)

From ‘hints’, the data are as follows:

- (7) “I’m old, I’m tired, and I need to have a seat.” (Male; Jordanian)
- (8) “John, this project is so sick. Definitely, you get the mark for it and you will go up in the carrier later.” (Male; Russian)

- (9) “Brown, I’m asking for your apology. As I mentioned I need to pick up both of you and your children from the football practice, but I couldn’t make it, because I have an urgent meeting to do.” (Male; Indonesian)

Examples of ‘hints’ show that the requests remain implicit since there is no head act in these sentences. This type of request requires extra effort from the hearer to understand what is asked. Hints are the least face-threatening acts for both the hearer and speaker, as it is well demonstrated by the last example of hints.

‘Imperative’ was the most commonly used direct strategy. For example:

- (10) “Mallory, please clean up the mess!” (Female; Jordanian)
(11) “You, please summarize and approve my report for tomorrow’s submission.” (Male; Pakistani)
(12) “Please open your bag, and let me see it myself.” (Female; Hungarian)

4.2 The Impact of Culture on the Politeness Level

One of the main questions of the study was whether culture has any impact on the directness level employed by the participants. A two-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine the effects of culture on the directness level of the head act. None of the variables showed a significant effect.

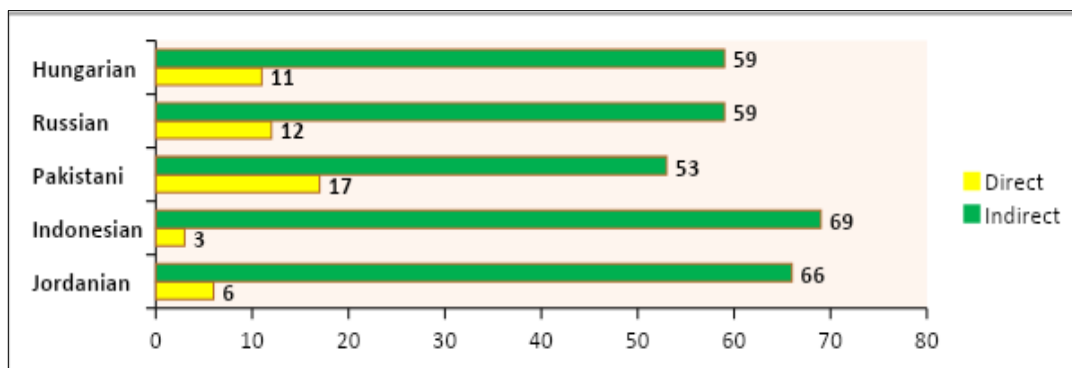


Figure 2. The directness level of the head acts as expressed by different cultures.

As displayed in Figure 2, all of the five groups employed indirect strategies dominantly, with Indonesians and Jordanians exceeding the other groups. Participants from Pakistan were the most direct in making requests (17 direct strategies out of 70 requests (24.28%)). They were followed by Russians with 12 direct strategies out of 71 requests (16.9%) and Hungarians who used 11 direct strategies out of 70 requests (15.71%) with the imperative strategy being the most favorable. For examples:

- (13) “Please stay a half an hour more to finish this paper.” (Russian)
(14) “Please open your bag, and let me see it myself.” (Hungarian)
(15) “Please give me the chance to pay the bill and to be in the meeting on time.” (Pakistani)

4.3 The Impact of Power, Context, and Social Status on the Politeness Level

Following Hendriks (2002), the researchers would also like to see whether factors, such as the level of familiarity between the speakers and hearers, power/authority and the context of the request have any effect on the politeness level of the request. As described earlier, in the DCT, the participants were placed into

different situations in which they had low or high authority; they were acquainted or unacquainted with the hearer, and the context was either institutional or non-institutional. A Multivariate Regression analysis was run to see whether social distance, power, and context predict the number of direct and indirect strategies. None of the variables had considerable predictive power (direct strategies $F(3,8)=.177$, $p>.05$, $R^2=.062$; indirect strategies $F(3,8)=.133$, $p>.05$, $R^2=.047$).

Table 4 shows the percentage of the use of direct and indirect strategies by the different nationalities according to the power of authority.

Table 4. Request strategies based on the level of power.

No.	Nationalities	P1		P2		P3	
		Low power (%)		Equal power (%)		High power (%)	
		Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
1.	Jordanian	4.16	95.83	0	100	20.80	79.10
2.	Indonesian	4.16	95.83	0	100	8.33	91.60
3.	Pakistani	22.72	72.27	16.66	83.33	33.33	66.66
4.	Russian	17.39	82.60	12.50	87.50	20.83	79.10
5.	Hungarian	30.43	69.56	8.69	91.30	8.33	91.66

It was assumed that participants would use more direct strategies when they had higher power than the hearer. However, as shown in Table 3, there are cultural differences. Jordanians and Indonesians hardly used any direct strategies in low-authority situations and none in situations when they had equal power with the hearer. Meanwhile, both groups showed more directness in high-power authority situations, as was assumed. Pakistanis and Russians were more direct with more power. Surprisingly, Hungarians were more indirect with high power authority. Overall, based on these findings, we can see that most groups preferred asking for indirect requests regardless of the authority level. For example:

Situation 5: At customs (Hendriks, 2002)

You are a customs official at Heathrow Airport. You suspect that the young woman who is about to walk through customs has bought too many duty-free goods. You feel you had better check her luggage. What do you say to the woman?

In this situation, the speaker has higher power than the hearer. Even though most participants used indirect strategies in this situation, the data shows this situation has the biggest number of direct strategies: 10 direct strategies out of 30 requests. Most of them were obligation and imperative strategies.

(16) "I must check your luggage." (Pakistan; Obligation statement)

(17) "You, please open your luggage." (Indonesian; Imperative)

(18) "Let's check your luggage baggage." (Russian; Suggestion)

The second factor was the level of familiarity between the speaker and the hearer; whether they were acquainted or unacquainted. It was expected that in close relationships, participants would use more direct strategies than with strangers. Table 4 includes the data in each situation produced by the groups. Each group in both situations used more indirect strategies.

Table 5. Request strategy based on the level of familiarity (social distance).

No.	Nationalities	S1		S2	
		Acquainted (%)		Unacquainted (%)	
		Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
1.	Jordanian	10	90	7.14	92.85
2.	Indonesian	3.33	96.66	4.76	95.23
3.	Pakistani	35.71	64.28	21.42	78.57
4.	Russian	17.24	82.75	16.66	83.33
5.	Hungarian	10	90	20	80

Participants from Jordan, Pakistan, and Russia were more direct when talking to people with whom they had close relationships (acquaintances) than to strangers (un-acquaintance). For example:

Situation 1: Living room (Hendriks, 2002)

You were in your room upstairs doing your math homework but you could not do the sums. You need some help. You go down to the living room where your dad is watching a documentary on television. What do you say to your dad?

The situation above describes the speaker and hearer as having a close relationship as a son and father. This situation encouraged some participants from Jordan, Pakistan, and Russia to use direct requests.

(19) “I want you to help me with my math homework.” (Jordanian; Statement of wish/want)

(20) “Help me solve the sum.” (Pakistani; Imperative)

(21) “Please help me with this math homework.” (Russian; Imperative)

Regarding the participants from Indonesia and Hungary, the number of direct strategies increased when dealing with people who were not close to them. There was a slight difference in the Indonesian groups in the two situations; they used 4.76% of direct strategies in unacquainted situations and 3.33% of direct strategies in acquainted situations. The difference was more significant in the Hungarian group, in which they used 20% direct strategies in unacquainted situations and 10% direct strategy in acquainted situations.

The next factor is related to the context of the situation. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Request strategies based on the context of situations.

No.	Nationalities	C1		C2	
		Institutional (%)		Non-institutional (%)	
		Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
1.	Jordanian	8	92	8	92
2.	Indonesian	2.77	97.22	5.55	94.44
3.	Pakistani	25.70	74.28	22.85	77.14
4.	Russian	13.88	86.11	20	80
5.	Hungarian	11	89	20.58	79.41

It was expected that in a non-institutional situation, the participants would use more direct strategies than indirect ones. Indonesians, Russians, and Hungarians confirmed the hypotheses. However, Pakistani, and Indonesian participants showed the opposite. In Table 6, we can see that the Indonesian participants had 5.55% of

direct request strategies in institutional situations and 2.77% of direct strategies in non-institutional situations. Meanwhile, Russian, and Hungarian participants showed a significant difference. Nonetheless, there were different results regarding the Jordanian and Pakistani participants. The Jordanians were found to use an equal number of direct and indirect strategies in both institutional and non-institutional situations. Meanwhile, the Pakistanis used more direct strategies in the non-institutional situations (20.58%) than the institutional situations (11%).

Situation 6: The advertising department (Hendriks, 2002)

You and your colleague, John Martin, are advertising managers and are at present working for the same client. You were supposed to have finished an advertising campaign for this client by next week. Although you were assigned to do this particular campaign on your own, you now realize that you will be too busy with another client and will therefore not be able to work on the campaign next week. You would like John to finish the campaign for you. What do you say to your colleague?

In this example, the institutional situation was set where the student was talking about the report of work experience with his/her supervisor. The following responses contained the request strategies used by the participants:

- (22) "I would kindly ask you to finish this campaign for me." (Russian; Performative verb, direct)
 (23) "Can you please help me out with this one?" (Jordanian; Ability, indirect)

4.4 Request Strategies: External Modifiers

To decrease the directness, participants involved the external modifiers in their requests. As explained in the previous section, external modifiers are classified to be some categories, such as preparatory, getting a pre-commitment, grounders, disarmer, rewards, expressions of thanks/appreciation, and cost minimizing. In Figure 3, the participants from Pakistan used more external modifiers than participants from other nationalities. Generally, they used more than two external modifiers in each request.

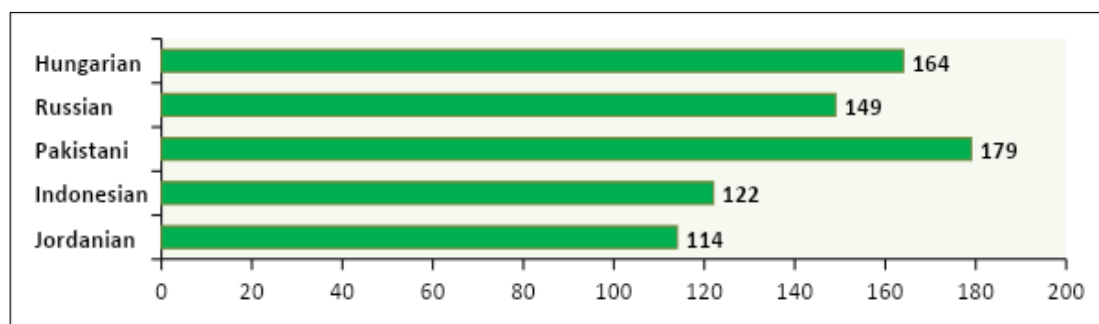


Figure 3. The number of external modifiers by culture groups.

- (24) Good evening, mom. How are you? E...this is a random security check, **could it be possible for you could open your luggage for us?** And we will go through your luggage. This is just a random check; you are not to be pointed out for this. Thank you.

This request consists of a head act and some modifiers. If we decompose it, we can see that the bold sentence is the head act of the request while the rest are the external modifiers. The participant used the external modifiers before and after the head act.

Figure 4 shows that the Pakistanis are followed by the Hungarians who used 155 external modifiers and the Russians who utilized 149 external modifiers. For Indonesian and Jordanian participants, even though they were the most indirect nationalities in this study, they used fewer external modifiers than the others. The Indonesian participants were found to use 122 external modifiers while the Jordanians used 114 external modifiers in their requests. If we compare these results with the directness and indirectness of the head act, we can see in Figure 4 that the more indirect the group, the fewer external modifiers used by them.

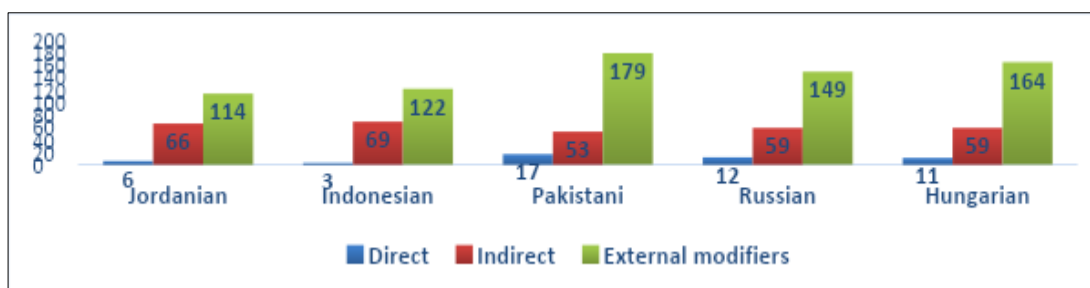


Figure 4. The number of direct-indirect strategies and external modifiers.

Figure 5 shows the number of external modifiers in each category used by the participants in each nationality group. It can be seen that grounders were employed by all groups the most frequently. It should be mentioned that most participants varied their requests by using grounders and other modifiers within the same request. Cost minimizer modifiers had the lowest number of uses.

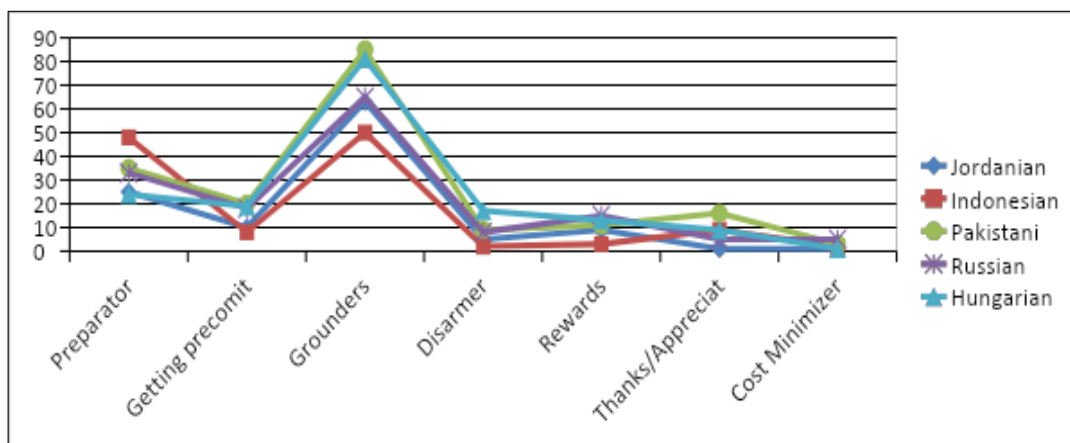


Figure 5. The number of external modifiers in each category.

4.5 Request Strategies: Internal Modifiers

Internal modifiers are included in the head act of request. In this study, there were two classifications of internal modifiers: syntactic modifiers and lexical modifiers. Based on the data, the participants preferred using the syntactical modifier to the lexical modifier. Sometimes, they mixed the syntactic and lexical modifiers in the head act. This happened because most participants used indirect strategies expressed through interrogatives. The participants used the internal modifiers to

downgrade their directness in making requests. Figure 6 shows the frequency of the syntactic and lexical modifier use in general.

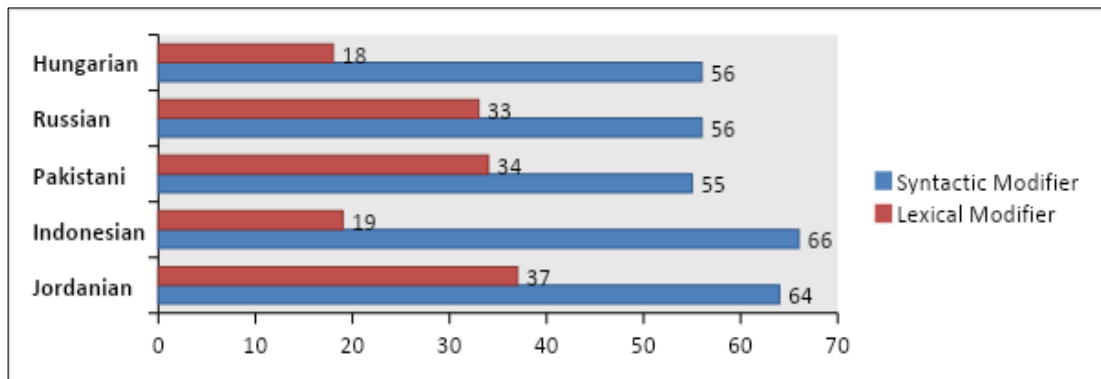


Figure 6. Internal modifiers.

From this general result, we can subdivide the syntactic and lexical modifiers in a more detailed manner through categorizations. Figure 7 presents the syntactic modifiers categorized as subjunctive, aspect, embedding, modal, tag question, negation, past tense, and interrogative, where the interrogative modifier was the most favorable. Figure 8 presents the lexical modifiers which consist of seven categorizations: interpersonal markers, hedges, consultative devise, subjectivizer, understarters, downtoners, and politeness markers. In the lexical modifier group, the politeness marker is used more frequently.

- (25) “Could you give me a hand?” (Syntactic modifier; Interrogative)
 (26) “Would you just stay for half an hour to re-correct it?” (Syntactic modifier; Interrogative)
 (27) “Could you give me your seat?” (Syntactic modifier)
 (28) “**Please** clean up the mess.” (Lexical modifier; Politeness marker)
 (29) “**Please** open your luggage” (Lexical modifier; Politeness marker)
 (30) “**Could** you help me, **please?**” (Syntactic and lexical modifiers)

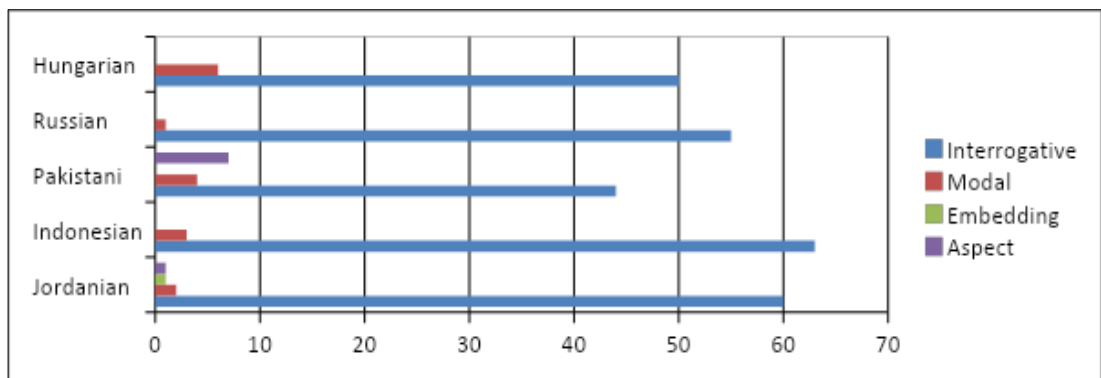


Figure 7. Syntactic modifier of each nationality.

In Figure 7, we can see that most participants overused the politeness marker ‘please’ in their requests, with the Jordanian and Russian groups exceeding the others.

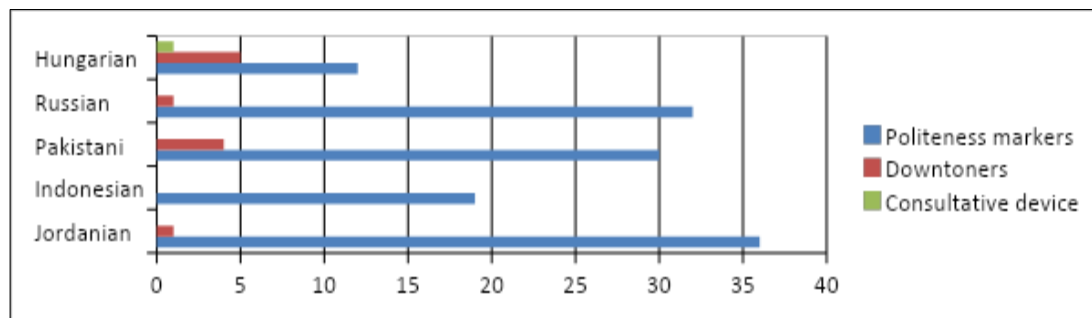


Figure 8. The number of lexical modifiers produced by each nationality.

5. DISCUSSION

A request is a directive speech act expressed by a speaker to get the hearer to do what he or she wants. Researchers in the field of ILP found that people from different cultural backgrounds produce requests in different ways (e.g., [Jia & Huang, 2008](#)). In addition to culture, other factors, such as education or situational context, were also proven to be influential. Directness and indirectness in communication have a strong correlation with culture ([Al-Shboul & Maros, 2020](#)). In the case of bi- and multilingual speakers, a phenomenon known as L1 transfer often occurs in each language dimension, including pragmatics. As shown in some previous studies, transferring the pragmatic rules from the first language to the second language is a common phenomenon in second language acquisition (e.g., [Takahashi, 2020](#); [Wolfson, 1989](#)).

Regarding the cultural background, in this study, we found that there is no statistically significant effect of culture on using direct and indirect request strategies. Most participants preferred using indirect strategies in making requests, with Indonesian and Jordanian being the most indirect groups in the study. These findings are in line with previous findings in which Indonesians used a range of request strategies with indirect strategies being the most frequently used ([Akmal et al., 2022](#); [Hassall, 1999](#)). They followed the widely accepted etiquette of communication in Indonesia. [Alfiati \(2015\)](#) also noted that in Indonesia, some cultural norms manage people's behavior and the ways they speak to each other in daily conversation.

Speaking of Jordanians, there were two contradictory findings in the previous studies about the level of directness in their communication. On one hand, Jordanians were found to express what they want or wish directly (e.g., [Al-Momani, 2009](#)). On the other hand, in another study, they were labeled as indirect and vague as Arabic speakers (e.g., [Al-Shboul & Maros, 2020](#); [Zaharna, 1995](#)). In the present study, we found that most Jordanians used indirect strategies in their requests. The results showed that 91.6% of the requests by Jordanian participants were formulated with indirect strategies.

Even though all participants in this study performed mostly indirect strategies, the Pakistanis were the most direct participants, followed by the Russians and Hungarians. [Rathmayr \(2008\)](#) reported that Russian people associate directness with honesty. They prefer talking directly without hiding any intention. These findings are reflected in the findings of the present study as well, in which they used slightly different direct and indirect strategies. Nevertheless, the Russian participants were the second most direct group. Russian participants also used more direct request strategies

in higher-power situations than in lower-power situations. Moreover, they paid attention to social distance in their conversations.

Very few studies focused on the politeness of Hungarians in the literature. In this study, the results showed that Hungarians were the third most direct participants. Following a similar research design to the present study, Szili (2016) discovered that social distance and power influenced the ways Hungarians made requests. However, regarding social distance, this is similar to Bányi (2020), where Hungarian participants used more direct strategies when they addressed the requests to strangers or people with high power than to people with close relation (such as family, or friends) to them. Furthermore, the results of this study showed that the participants used more direct strategies in lower-power situations than in higher-power situations, yet they used more external modifiers in lower-power situations than in the higher-power ones.

Even though some participants were concerned about the situational variant (power, social distance, and context), the statistical results showed no significant effect of power, social distance, and context despite the existing slight differences between the cultural groups. As shown in the findings, Jordanian participants delivered their requests more directly when they had a close relationship with the hearers and indirectly when talking to strangers. As Al-Momani (2009) claimed, Jordanians are concerned about the power and social distance in their conversation which is in accordance with the present study findings that Jordanians performed more direct requests in the higher-power situations than in lower-power situations. For Pakistanis, for example, the power or level of authority is also one of the core factors in communication. As Kousar (2015) claimed, Pakistanis are a non-egalitarian society that believes in the hierarchy of social status. We found that Pakistani participants paid attention to social distance by using more indirect strategies when they had an unacquainted relationship with the hearers. However, they employed more external modifiers than the others to minimize the imposition of their requests. Besides, they also utilized a lexical modifier 'please' to downgrade the directness of their requests.

However, there was a correlation between the number of direct strategies and external modifiers used by the cultural groups. The statistical analyses showed that the more direct a cultural group in making requests, the more they used external modifiers to compensate for their directness. It was shown that the most direct participants overused the external modifiers by using more than two external modifiers in each request. Moreover, the Hungarians and Russians were the second and third groups in terms of using external modifiers the most. These findings were in accordance with previous results in Hendriks (2002) that non-native speakers vary the directness strategy by modifying their requests, both externally and internally (Færch & Kasper, 1989; Hendriks, 2002; Trosbog, 1995). The analyses of the external modifiers showed that grounders were used most frequently, followed by preparators. Even, the Pakistani participants used grounders dominantly in their requests. These findings were also in line with Soler et al. (2005) that grounders and preparators were overused by both English native speakers and German learners of English. Besides external modifiers, the participants also varied their requests by involving internal modifiers in the head act of requests. The most frequent internal modifiers in this study were syntactic modifiers, especially interrogative modifiers. This phenomenon might occur because most of them used indirect strategies with interrogative sentences. Moreover, the participants also used internal modifiers in their requests. The use of the politeness marker 'please' was also found to be dominant.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of this study, we can see that most participants were dominantly indirect in making requests. There was no significant impact of culture on the request strategies as there was no observable L1 pragmatic transfer. However, in terms of indirectness, the participants used a range of strategies to express their requests. There were three situational variants assumed to have impacts on making requests, such as power, social distance, and context. In this study, some cultures are concerned about power and social distance (e.g., Jordanian, and Russian) while some other cultures only consider power when using direct and indirect strategies (e.g., Pakistani). Furthermore, differences existed in the ways they used external modifiers; some participants overused them in requests while others only used one or two, or none. It became clear that the more direct the participants, the more the modifiers were used to alleviate the imposition of their requests. Furthermore, language proficiency influenced the number of external modifiers. The statistics showed that the speakers with a higher level of proficiency in English used more external modifiers to vary their requests.

In future related to studies, to obtain more comprehensive and deeper results, it is suggested that researchers focus on a larger group of international students from other countries as well. More cross-cultural and politeness-focused empirical studies are required to explain a wide range of language behaviors in general, and of directness and indirectness in particular.

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