

**Realizing the Speech Act of Requeston pragmatic
competence task performance The case of third year
students at the department of English Batna2 University**

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Received in: 27/12/2019

Accepted in: 07/03/2020

Introduction

The present paper is an attempt to investigate EFL students' performance on pragmatic competence task in terms of request realization. It is meant to extend our understanding of the factors that affect their performance including using their first language principles when communicating with the target language and over generalizing the target language patterns in different contexts. This study can contribute to the conceptualization of pragmatic competence regarding speech act and politeness constructs in an Algerian EFL context. Students' performance on pragmatic competence tasks is studied depending on BLUM-KULKA and OLSHTAIN (1984); Blum-Kulka and all (1989) request realization patterns, as well as Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) politeness theory. The study aims at finding out whether third year EFL students are able to form a request in a culturally accepted way, using politeness strategies. The paper uses an

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adapted written discourse completion test (Birjandi& Rezai, 2010) and a group interview to assess third year EFL students' level of pragmatic competence.

I- Literature Review:

I.1- Pragmatic competence

Generally speaking, pragmatics is “the study of language from the perspective of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication Crystal (1997): 301 cited in Compernelle (2014). The main interest of pragmatics from that perspective is on how actions are performed through words Kasper and Rose (2002)..Pragmatic competence, or the ability to do things with words (Austin, 1962), the ability to communicate in a culturally accepted manner by the target language community, or the ability to interact without causing any misunderstanding or pragmatic failure (Brown and Levinson, 1987) is currently considered as the most important goal in learning a foreign language. Yet, developing EFL students' pragmatic competence should be the central focus of EFL teachers so as to help them intelligibly receive and produce any target language discourse. Here, EFL learners are required to have a cover range of the pragmatic aspects among which: speech acts, and politeness strategies.

I.2- The Speech Act of Request:

Amongst the different speech acts, request represents a highly needed one, especially between the teacher and the learner in the academic setting. Taking into account Searle's (1969) illocutionary acts' categorization which includes representatives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declarations, request is considered to be a directive speech act. It is rather defined as “an attempt to get

===== **Realizing the Speech Act of Requeston pragmatic...**

hearer to do an act which speaker wants hearer to do, and which it is not obvious that hearer will do in the normal course of events or of hearer's own accord" (p. 66). In this respect, request is regarded as a Face Threatening Act (FTA) as imposing the speaker's desire on the hearer requires enough cultural and linguistic expertise from the one performing the request (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987).

According to Leech (2014), realizing a request requires the speaker to have a sense of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge through using the linguistic forms (pragmalinguistics) and paying attention to the contextual variables (sociopragmatics). Requests can be made by different linguistic structures such as: declaratives, interrogatives or imperatives. The requester has to deploy some strategies to minimize causing offence and to protect the requestee's face (Achiba, 2003).

Depending on Austin (1962) speech act theory, request can be realized directly and indirectly. Therefore, direct strategies involve only one meaning or illocutionary force. Whereas, indirect strategies carry more than one meaning (Clark, 1979). The request strategies based on earlier research, primarily on that of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) and reviewed by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), were classified by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984); Blum-Kulka and all (1989). In this study however, we will rely on the latter classification proposed by Blum-Kulka and all (1989), see appendix two.

I.3- Politeness strategies:

In any culture, politeness is believed to be that fixed concept, referring to the conventionally recognized action as a polite social behaviour. It would then be possible to predetermine a set of different principles to consider someone polite in a social interaction within a

particular culture. Some of these behaviours might include being thoughtful, modest and sympathetic toward others Compernelle (2014).

Brown and Levinson (1978) theory of politeness is based on the premise that many speech acts are basically face threatening in that they do not support the face wants of the speaker and / or that of the hearer. They identified face-threatening acts (FTAs) in terms of two main principles: whose face is being threatened (the speaker's or the hearer's) and which type of face is being threatened (positive or negative). Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model measured the significance of a FTA according to the following factors: The social distance (D), The social power (P), and The absolute ranking (R) of imposition of the speaker and the hearer in a particular culture. They furthermore asserted that the three wants have to be considered if the speaker aims to protect the hearer's face. Whereas, if the speaker intends to do a FTA, he/she can do it using off-record and on-record strategies. The former is usually realized encompassing indirect linguistic forms while the latter can be performed without redress (baldly) and with redress paying attention to Positive and Negative politeness. In this respect, positive politeness addresses positive face, as Negative politeness fulfils negative face. Brown and Levinson's major argument (1978, 1987) is that the social variables of D, P and R are the most significant and key factors which can affect speakers' linguistic choices.

Modern pragmatic studies are focusing more on the speech acts performance. A very outstanding study in the field was carried out by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). It used Discourse Completion Tests to scrutinize the issue of universality in pragmatics through cross-cultural perspectives. This investigation discovered

===== **Realizing the Speech Act of Requeston pragmatic...**

major differences between the native and non native speakers of English in constructing the speech act of request and apology.

More recently, Zarepour (2016) conducted a study of requesting strategies, mitigating elements and supportive moves used in 61 e-mails sent by Iranian EFL learners to their professors. This study found out that Iranian students tended to use more direct strategies than indirect ones due to the influence of their first language principles and culture norms. They are also used to deploy mitigating elements and pre-request supportive moves to minimize the force of requests. As conclusion, there was a lack of pragmatic knowledge among Iranian EFL learners, and thus, they need to have a thorough view of the norms of requestive e-mails written by native speakers of English.

II- Methodology:

This paper is meant to examine the way third year EFL students perform on pragmatic competence tasks. In order to meet this objective, we try to answer the following research questions:

How do third year EFL students construct the speech act of request in terms of strategy frequency and typology?

To what extent do the social variables of social distance, social power, and imposition influence students' linguistic choices and politeness strategies in realizing the speech act of request?

What difficulties do third year EFL students face on performing a pragmatic competence task?

II.1.The study sample:

The study sample involves one group of third year EFL students at the department of English/Batna2 University. Students were asked to voluntarily take part in this study, therefore 35 students have completed the written discourse completion test (WDCT), and only seven of them accepted to participate in the group interview. Assuming that completing a WDCT is a relatively difficult task and requires a certain level of pragmatic competence, we have decided to work on third year EFL students. Depending on their third year level, they are expected to have developed a minimum level of pragmatic competence through their previous learning experience. Leech (2014) affirms that advanced EFL learners may have enough pragmatic knowledge and be more sensitive to sociopragmatic requirements.

II.2. Instruments:

II.2.1. The written discourse completion test:

In order to evaluate students' performance on pragmatic competence task, a written discourse completion test was used with a particular focus on realizing the speech act of request. The chosen WDCT was first developed on the basis of multiple choices in the study of Birjandi & Rezai (2010). Yet, as the main aim in this investigation is to analyse students' own performance, it was mandatory to give them the chance to produce a language of their choice. The adapted test then consisted of incomplete discourse sequences that represent various scenes which might take place in the classroom. Each piece of discourse provides the students with a clear picture of the given situation focusing on the setting, the interlocutor status, and an enough space to complete the dialogue with their own answers, see appendix one.

===== **Realizing the Speech Act of Request on pragmatic...**

II.2.2. The group interview:

In order to explore the factors that affect students' production of the speech act of request, a group interview was conducted. This interview was meant to gain some qualitative insights of students' perceptions concerning the difficulties of performing a pragmatic competence task. Only seven students participated in this interview, which is considered as a supplementary tool to help us better analyse the DCT data. The interviewees were asked to quickly read their copies of the completed tests so as to remember the situations and their own responses. Then, they were asked to comment on the difficulties they encountered in the comprehension and the production of the pragmatic task in general and the speech act of request in particular.

II.3. Procedure:

This research is carried out through a mixed method procedure which encompasses both qualitative and quantitative designs (Dörnyei, 2007). EFL students' performance on pragmatic competence task was quantitatively and qualitatively analysed based on Blum-Kulka and Olshtein (1984) and Blum-Kulka and Olshtein (1989) request realization taxonomy as well as Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) politeness theory. For this purpose, participants were asked to complete a WDCT which mainly focuses on the speech act of request realization. For a better understanding of the WDCT results, we focused more on the qualitative analysis depending on another tool. Assuming that understanding students' difficulties in performing a pragmatic competence task is far from possible, we decided to ask them directly using a group interview which is considered to be a useful tool to access students' perceptions. Ibid The interviewees were asked to elaborate on the way they completed the WDCT to find out

the difficulties they encountered in constructing the speech act of request.

The coding Scheme:

The scheme adopted in this study represents the requests taxonomy realization presented in Blum-Kulka and Olshtein 1989 CCSAR project, see appendix two. It involves three key aspects of request: the address term, the Head act, and the Supportive move. These three elements indicate the request level of directness. However, in this study, we did not focus on the other different modifying linguistic devices (upgrader and downgrader modifiers) presented in the scheme.

Data analysis and interpretation:

The main purpose of the current study was to investigate EFL students' performance on pragmatic competence task with a particular focus on the speech act of request realization. Data collected from both the discourse completion test and the group interview were examined based on Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) Blum-Kulka and all (1989) frame work of request realization and Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) politeness strategy respectively. The speech act of request coding scheme used in this study consists of three main segments (Address Term, Head Act, Supportive Move) with different levels of influence on the realization of the request Blum-Kulka and all (1989), see appendix two.

III.1. First Research Question: How do third year EFL students produce the speech act of request in terms of strategy frequency and typology?

To answer this question, we focused only on analyzing the head act part which is the heart of the request. It involves nine

===== Realizing the Speech Act of Requeston pragmatic...

strategies classified in three main types: direct, conventionally indirect, non-conventionally indirect.

A direct request shows an identical connection between the language structure and its function (e.g, ‘Please lend me your book’). A conventional indirect request refers to the pragmalinguistic elements that the society members conventionally agreed on as a precondition to perform a request Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) (e.g, ‘Could you lend me your book’). A non conv entional indirect request is unconditionally performed with no particular reference to illocutionary force (e.g, ‘I have to do a summary of the book’).

Table1: Request Strategies use by students in all request situations

Request Situation		One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	All Situations	
Head Act	Direct Strategies	Mood Derivable	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.86%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.29%
		Explicit Performatives	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
		Hedged Performative	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.86%	0.00%	0.00%	2.86%	2.86%	0.00%	0.86%
		Obligation Statement	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
		Want Statement	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.86%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	14.29%	1.71%
	Conventionally Indirect Strategies	Suggestory Formulae	0.00%	2.86%	0.00%	0.00%	5.71%	0.00%	2.86%	0.00%	2.86%	0.00%	1.43%
		Query Preparatory	65.71%	94.29%	94.29%	88.57%	80.00%	71.43%	65.71%	48.57%	85.71%	62.86%	78.29%
		None	2.86%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.86%	2.86%	5.71%	2.86%	0.00%	2.86%	2.00%
	Conventional Indirect Strategies	Mild Hints	2.86%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.86%	0.00%	2.86%	0.86%
		No Strategy	2.86%	2.86%	5.71%	11.43%	5.71%	22.86%	25.71%	42.86%	8.57%	17.14%	14.57%

Table 1 illustrates the results of the strategy used by students in all the requestive situations. Concerning the direct strategies and the non-conventional indirect strategies, almost all students didn’t use them in the ten situations (0.29% for the mood derivable, 0.0% for the explicit performatives, 0.86% for the hedged performatives, 0.0% for the obligation statement, 1.71% for the want statement, 2% for the strong hints, 0.86% for the mild hints). The students’ highly limited

use of the direct strategies as well as the non-conventional indirect strategies indicates that students took into consideration their teachers' social power and social imposition in constructing the request. It also shows that they don't have enough expressions to use the former strategies while protecting the social distance. Yet, some students managed to apply the direct strategy (want statement) to deliver their request especially in situation ten (e.g., 'I want to have an appointment with you this weekend').

Regarding the conventionally indirect strategies, we distinguished a very low use of the suggestory formulae strategy (1.43%) and a very high use of the query preparatory strategy (78.29%). The findings identify the students' restricted use of a unique type of strategy (the query preparatory) while formulating a request, which makes it a standard like image for requesting ('Can/Could/Would you ...').

Finally, some students didn't manage to use any of the strategies to formulate their requests (14.57%). Three main reasons might stand behind such failure. One is that students didn't understand the given request situation at all, for example, ('Sir, I have an urgent recommendation from you so I can teach tomorrow'). Another one, students refused to request their teachers mainly to save their face ('I don't say anything because I know the teacher will not accept.'). One last reason, some students confused between forming a request and complaining especially in situation seven ('This can't be my mark. Sorry. It can't be.').

The above discussion helped us to answer the first research question (How do third year EFL students produce the speech act of request in terms of strategy frequency and typology?) indicating that the students performed their request depending almost on one strategy type (the query preparatory) across all the situations. This could be

===== Realizing the Speech Act of Requeston pragmatic...

explained as the following: most students know only one way of requesting, using the conventional indirect strategy) can, could, would you). This strategy is a common one among native speakers of English, representing the most famous pragmalinguistic element of request. For this reason, this study supports the universality of pragmatics proposed by Austin (1962), (Brown and Levinson (1987) and BLUM-KULKA and OLSHTAIN (1984).

III.2. Second Research Question: To what extent do the social variables of social distance, social power, and imposition influence students' linguistic choices and politeness strategies in realizing the speech act of request?

To answer this question, we examined students' use of adjuncts as a supportive move to the head act which consists of six different elements (checking availability, precommitment, grounder, sweetener, disarmer, cost-minimizer) for further details see appendix two.

As an illustration, this example (Excuse me sir, but could we have an appointment to discuss the project you gave me, if you have free time this weekend, as I have some questions to ask.) contains (a cost minimize 'if you have free time this weekend' and a grounder 'as I have some questions to ask'). Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984).

Table 2: Supportive Move use by students in all request situations

Request Situation	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	All Situations
Supportive Move	Availability	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Precommitment	5.71%	5.71%	5.71%	14.29%	8.57%	11.43%	2.86%	8.57%	22.86%	14.29%
	Grounder	42.86%	71.43%	77.14%	60.00%	77.14%	5.71%	28.57%	11.43%	60.00%	37.14%
	Sweetener	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.86%	0.00%	5.71%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Disarmer	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.86%	0.00%
	Cost minimizer	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.86%	2.86%	2.86%	0.00%	5.71%	0.00%	34.29%

Table 2 illustrates the results of the adjuncts used by students in all the speech acts of request. Concerning the availability (0.0%), the sweetner (0.86%) and the disarmer (0.29%), almost all students didn't use them as a supportive move to their requests. The findings signified that either students prioritized saving their face as to the teacher's face by avoiding the use of the sweeteners and the disarmers or they were restrained by the request situation itself where the teacher was available. Regarding the precommitment (10%) and the cost minimize (4.86%), only few students managed to use them to support their request which explains that students' accounts were speaker oriented giving a little importance to the listener's face. For the grounders (47.14%), the results represented the most used supportive move among students mainly to protect their face.

The above research question also analysed the students' use of the address term that alerts the requestee either with an attention getter (Sorry sir, Excuse me sir) or without an attention getter (Sir).

Table 3: Address Term use by students in all request situations

Request Situation	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	All Situations
Address Term With Attention Getter	22.86%	28.57%	25.71%	20.00%	17.14%	20.00%	25.71%	14.29%	20.00%	14.29%	36.57%
Address Term Without Attention Getter	48.57%	45.71%	54.29%	54.29%	40.00%	31.43%	48.57%	37.14%	28.57%	37.14%	42.57%
Address Term No Address Term	28.57%	25.71%	20.00%	25.71%	42.86%	48.57%	25.71%	48.57%	51.43%	48.57%	20.86%

Table 3 illustrates the results of the students use of the address term with or without an attention getter while formulating a request in the ten provided situations. The students' use of the address term with the attention getter (36.57%) was nearly similar to that without an attention getter (42.57%), while (20.86%) presented no use of the address term. This indicates mainly three things. One, only a third of the study sample are aware of how to alert the requestee and prepare him/her for receiving the request and therefore saving his/her face. One second thing, nearly half of the study sample used the habitual

===== **Realizing the Speech Act of Requeston pragmatic...**

address term pattern (Sir) not mainly to address the hearer's face but rather referring to the Algerian culture equivalent expression (Echikh). One last thing, almost a fifth of the study sample are not aware of the way they should address a requestee, they focus only on the request realization interrupting the teacher directly.

It is worth mentioning that students used other external devices to soften their requests such as please. The latter represents the most frequently used mitigating strategy across all the situations. This points out that it (please) is the most common and clearest marker of politeness House (1989). It is also noticeable that some students used this device (please) twice in the same situation. The display of this overuse expressed the effect of the students' own culture on their way of constructing a request in the foreign language. The use of such device confirms an other time the universality of pragmatics.

The former discussion helped us in answering the second Research Question: (To what extent do the social variables of social distance, social power, and imposition influence students' linguistic choices and politeness strategies in realizing the speech act of request?) the social variables of social distance, social power, and imposition did not affect students choices of pragma linguistic elements, especially in selecting the supportive move to their requests. They rather had a slight effect on their use of the politeness strategies. **This result differs from** Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) belief that the social factors have a strong influence on the speaker's choices of linguistic forms.

III.3. Third Research Question: What difficulties do third year EFL students face on performing a pragmatic competence task?

In answering this research question, we examined students' answers to the interview questions. After expending on their own WDCT answers, the interviewees were asked to state the difficulties they faced during their performance. First, all the respondents agreed that their main problem in performing the task is addressing the teacher as all the situations were formal. In this study we deliberately selected formal situations (with the teacher) with which students are supposed to be familiar. Yet, these students still find it difficult to make a simple request to their teacher. Some of the participants further added that they did not understand all the situations especially situation six and seven regardless of their clear explanation. Moreover, most of them claimed that they did not have the exact words and the right expressions to form their requests. They also noticed that they made a lot of grammatical and spelling mistakes, which were not taken into consideration in this study.

More importantly, these interviewees were asked why performing a pragmatic competence task is that difficult? To answer this question, students made reference to the following reasons: One, they do not have sufficient vocabulary. Two, the task itself is difficult. Three, they do not practice enough. The analysis of students' answers indicated that the major problems in performing a pragmatic competence task from their perceptions are: the lack of vocabulary, the deficiency in grammar, and the lack of practice. It should be noted that the majority of respondents are not aware of what is required to perform a pragmatic competence task. They rather hold external factors responsible for their failure.

The discussion of the interview findings helped us in answering the third research question (What difficulties do third year EFL students face on performing a pragmatic competence task?) The main difficulties that students faced in performing a pragmatic competence

===== **Realizing the Speech Act of Requeston pragmatic...**

task from their own perspectives are the lack of vocabulary and the deficiency in grammar. The WDCT findings also proved that they depended almost on one strategy type in performing the request, and they did not pay enough attention to the social factors in selecting the linguistic forms. Therefore, it can be determined that most students lack enough pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge. This finding is in line with Zarepour (2016) study.

Conclusion:

The paper at hand mainly aimed at investigating third year EFL students' performance on pragmatic competence tasks, focusing more on realizing the speech act of request. To this end, we analysed the request strategies used by students in terms of frequency and typology, studied the effect of the social factors on their choices of the linguistic forms and politeness norms, and identified the difficulties they face in performing a pragmatic competence task. We collected data from a total of thirty-five third year EFL students at the department of English Batna2 university using an adapted written discourse completion test and a group interview. The gathered data were analysed on the basis of BLUM-KULKA and OLSHTAIN, (1984) and BLUM-KULKA and all (1989) request realization patterns, as well as Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) politeness theory. The WDCT results indicated that the conventionally indirect request strategy, the query preparatory represented the most predominant among all the other used strategies, which means that students have only one strategy type to make a request. Moreover, the social factors of social distance, power and imposition did not affect the students' choice of pragma linguistic elements but rather had a slight effect on

the use of politeness strategies. Lastly, the group interview results indicated that the difficulties that students encountered on the pragmatic competence task performance referred to the deficiency in grammar and vocabulary (structure and expression) which prove their lack of unawareness of the pragmatic competence requirements.

All in all, it should be noted that the manifestation of the three request strategy types followed a typical tendency across all most all the situations. More importantly, the frequent use of the conventional indirect request strategies in all the situations amongst students can be attributed to Austin's (1962), Searle's (1969), and Blum-kulka (1989) universal pragmatic principles. Furthermore, It can be argued that the contextual variables of power, distance, and imposition have a very slight effect on students' performance of the speech act of request. This finding contrasts Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) assumption that the contextual variables of power, distance, and imposition are the most influencing factors on speakers' linguistic choices. Adding to that, students faced many difficulties when performing the pragmatic competence task. These perceived difficulties are the lack of grammar and vocabulary, which are not the main pragmatic competence requirements. Yet, the students' performance on pragmatic competence task lacks some pragmalinguistic knowledge and sociopragmatic competence. This result is in similar vein with Ellis (1994). Study which claimed that lower proficiency EFL learners don't possess enough pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge to formulate a different request for a different situation. Depending on the results of the study, a number of other ideas for further research is needed including examining the factors affecting students' performance on pragmatic competence task.

===== **Realizing the Speech Act of Requeston pragmatic...**

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===== **Realizing the Speech Act of Requeston pragmatic...**

Appendix One: The Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT)

The speech act of request realization

Please read each of the following situations. Write how you would react in each one.

Situation 1

Suppose you have not understood what the teacher has just explained about “simple past tense”. How do you ask for explanations about the structure of this tense?

You:

Situation 2

Suppose you have a listening class and you cannot hear what is played on T.V. How would you ask your teacher to turn it up?

You:

Situation 3

Suppose the teacher is writing with a red marker on the board, and the color really disturbs your eyes. How would you ask the teacher to use a different color?

You:

Situation 4

Suppose you have been absent the previous session, and you have not understood a specific part on your own. How would you ask your teacher to give a brief explanation about that part?

You:

Situation 5

The teacher has announced the date of the first term exam but you have another exam on that same day. How would you ask your teacher to change the date of the exam?

You:

Situation 6

Suppose the teacher is using power point for teaching writing in the class. How would you ask your teacher for the power point file?

You:

Situation 7

Suppose you have got 14 on your reading test and you are sure that your score must have been higher. How would you ask your teacher to check your paper again?

You:

Situation 8

Suppose you need a recommendation letter for teaching at an English language institute very urgently for tomorrow. How would you ask your teacher to do that?

You:

Situation 9

Suppose that you need to have your teacher's phone number in case you might have some questions while studying. How would you ask for his/her phone number?

You:

===== Realizing the Speech Act of Requeston pragmatic...

Situation 10

Suppose you want to have an appointment with the teacher this week for asking some questions about your term project. How do you ask him for an appointment?

You:

Appendix Two: Coding Scheme

The requests coding scheme, designed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) in their Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP).

Alerters Prior The Head Act

Address Term	With Attention Getter	Excuse me plus title
		Sorry plus title
	Without Attention Getter Title	

**Core (Head act) Strategies Used in Making Requests
(Blum-Kulka, p.18)**

Type	Strategy	Definition
Direct Strategies	Mood derivable	The grammatical mood of the verb indicates the illocutionary act.
	Explicit performatives	The illocutionary act is explicitly named.
	Hedged performative	The naming of the illocutionary act is modified by hedges
	Obligation	The obligation of the

	statement	hearer to carry out the act is stated.
	Want statement	The speaker states his/her desire that the hearer carries out the act.
Conventionally Indirect Strategies	Suggestory formulae	A suggestion is made to carry out the act.
	Query preparatory	A reference to ability or willingness is made using a modal verb.
Nonconventionally Indirect Strategies	Strong hints	Partial reference to object needed for completing the act.
	Mild hints	No reference to the object of the act is made. But it is interpreted as a request by context.

Supportive Moves (Blum-Kulka, p.287)

Supportive move	Definition
Checking availability	A phrase preparing the hearer for the request by checking his/her availability or asking his/her permission
Getting a precommitment	An attempt to get the hearer's commitment
Grounder	Giving reasons, explanations or justifications that either precede or follow for a request
Sweetner	Announcing a reward due on fulfillment of the request