Arab World English Journal

INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ISSN: 2229-9327

Speech Acts of Apology and Request by Arab Postgraduates with Malaysian Supervisors

Mohammed Abulqasem Mohammed Elasfar
Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
University Technology Malaysia
&
Sebha University, Libya
Corresponding Author: mohammed-1975@graduate.utm.my

Hema Roshney binti Mustafa
Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
University of Technology, Malaysia

Mustafa Mubarak Pathan
English Language Center, Dayanand College of Law, Latur, Maharashtra, India
Aliakbar Imani
Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
University of Technology, Malaysia,

Abstract
This study investigates the pragmatic and linguistic competencies of Arab postgraduate students and native English-speaking postgraduate students in Malaysian universities, focusing on their speech act strategies for requests and apologies. Using qualitative methods such as Discourse Completion Tests and conversations, the study addresses three research questions related to pragmatic and linguistic forms, gender differences, and cultural norms in English-speaking settings. The participants consisted of 95 individuals, including an equal number of males and females from four universities in Malaysia during the academic year 2022-2023. Of the participants, 32 were of Arab origin, and 63 were native English speakers. The study found significant differences in response rates between the two groups and emphasized the importance of understanding cultural norms for effective communication. The findings suggest that learners from Arab countries must comprehend the differences between cultural norms and conventions in English-speaking environments to communicate efficiently. The study has implications for assisting Arab-speaking graduate students in improving their communication abilities and promoting cross-cultural understanding in academic settings in Malaysia.
Keywords: Apology, Arab Postgraduate Students, Malaysian Universities, Pragmatics, Request, Speech Act, Supervisors.
Cite as: Elasfar, M. A. M., Mustafa, H. R., Pathan, M. M., & Imani, A. (2023). Speech Acts of Apology and Request by Arab Postgraduates with Malaysian Supervisors. *Arab World English Journal, 14* (1): 428- 448. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol14no1.27

Introduction

In earlier times, learning a language was primarily associated with acquiring linguistic norms and organization with the cultural aspect largely ignored. Globalization and technological advancements have made it easier for diverse cultures around the world to come together and have influenced the usage of language. For an efficient interaction, an individual's communicative ability in any language is essential. The foundation of a communication system is the discourse acts of a language specifically in educational institutions. Someone with communicative competence uses a variety of speech acts to achieve communication objectives in a language (Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2017). When two people engage with one another, the types of speech acts that are utilized the most frequently are requests and apologies. An apology is offered when one person is responsible for offending another, but a request is given when one person asks for the assistance or permission of another person. Learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) employ the language as a tool of demand the most often out of all the other sorts of speech actions. Structures such as imperatives, declarative, and interrogatives are typically utilized while expressing it.

The students' reactions differ depending on the circumstances. The feelings change in each circumstance, ranging from dissatisfaction to irritability, and therefore the many actions of speech are used to describe the feelings. The more unpleasant possibilities elicit conditions that occur when dissatisfaction levels rise (Kreishan, 2018). As a result of this, as well as social considerations, instances of demanding and apologizing arise. A discussion is performed with the native Arab-speaking students from the university, focusing on their speech acts of apology and requests with the professors. In their English conversation, students are more likely to make grammatical errors. This is owing to their language features' lack of proficiency. To become fluent in a language, one must first become familiar with its numerous grammatical patterns. The degree of proficiency indicates how well a student knows the language, and it is possible to improve one's level of competence by improving one's understanding of the language.

The study in context, or pragmatics, is a subfield of linguistics. Studying how people convey their ideas and engage in various settings is what this academic discipline is all about. The capacity to use language effectively in different situations is known as "pragmatic competence," and it is crucial for ESL students (ESL). The notion of "speech actions" suggests that both direct and indirect ways of speaking may be equally successful in communicating ideas. In direct speech actions, the speaker uses language that is in line with his or her aims and meaning, whereas, in indirect speech acts, the speaker uses language that is at odds with his or her objectives and meaning. Brown and Levinson, Austin and Searle, Blum, and Kulka, and House and Kasper are just a few of the scholars who have studied the many kinds of requests and how they are phrased. Brown and Levinson were the first academics to examine this topic. They discovered that several different approaches, both direct and indirect, were utilized in the process of making requests and that these approaches were employed frequently. As a result of the lack of student contact, several scholars have emphasized the necessity for pragmatic training in EFL environments. The primary

emphasis of this talk is on the significance of identifying how the influence of culture may be seen in linguistic use. Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics that examines language use in various social circumstances. Those who do not speak English as a first language must study the culture of the people with whom they converse if they want to have good dialogues. To communicate successfully, students must comprehend the many ways that individuals express sorrow or make requests. The primary focus of this study is to identify the influence of culture on Arab-speaking students' speech acts of apologies and requests in their English conversations with professors. The research objectives are to determine the types of speech acts used, identify the linguistic strategies employed, and analyze the cultural influence on speech acts of apologies and requests. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding of the role of culture in shaping language use in EFL environments, particularly in the speech acts of apologies and requests.

This paper is structured as follows: Section one provides the introduction and background of the study, Section two presents the literature review, Section three describes the methodology used in the study, Section four presents the results and analysis, and Section five concludes the paper with a discussion of the findings and their implications. The following research questions were examined in further detail in the current study.

1. In terms of general request and apology strategy utilisation and patterns, what were the dissimilarities and similarities between ASPS and NESPS?
2. To which level are ASPS capable of selecting acceptable pragmatic and linguistic forms while executing request and apologies speech acts?
3. What are the differences in techniques and patterns used by female and male ASPS when making apologies and requests? Are there variations in the language and pragmatic forms used by each gender in these speech acts?

Literature Review

The importance of pragmatic competence for L2 learners in effective communication has been widely recognized (Hymes & others, 1972;)(Ishihara, 2010). Recent studies have also emphasized the significance of pragmatic competence in language learning. In order to achieve effective communication, speech acts must be used, as they allow people to perform a wide range of functions such as commanding, requsting, apologizing, thanking, suggesting, insisting, advising, and expressing. The phenomenon of speech acts occurs anywhere and everywhere, including the classroom setting(Alharbi, 2018) . Moreover, pragmatic competence is considered an essential component of communicative competence (Chen *et al.*, 2022).

Recent research suggests that pragmatic competence should be taught explicitly to L2 learners. For example, Alemi and Haeri (2020) argue that "pragmatic instruction can help L2 learners to develop their pragmatic competence by raising their awareness of the social and cultural norms of the target language community" (p.86). Similarly, Smith (1993) stresses the importance of deliberate instruction in developing pragmatic competence.

While some studies have focused on the acquisition of specific speech acts such as apologies and requests (Masaoud, 2019; Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2017), others have looked at the development of pragmatic competence more broadly. For example, Alfghe and Mohammadzadeh (2021) conducted a study on the impact of language input on the development of pragmatic competence among L2 learners. Their findings suggest that "exposure to authentic language input that reflects the social and cultural norms of the target language community can facilitate the development of pragmatic competence" (p. 12).

Despite the growing interest in pragmatic competence, there is still a research gap when it comes to how best to teach and assess pragmatic competence in L2 learners. According to ,(Ahmed and Zakaria, 2018) "there is a need for more research on how to effectively teach and assess pragmatic competence in second language learners" (p.75). This research gap is particularly relevant given the challenges associated with teaching and assessing pragmatic competence, which is considered a complex and multifaceted construct ((Alfghe and Mohammadzadeh, 2021)Therefore, future studies should focus on developing effective pedagogical approaches and assessment tools for teaching and evaluating pragmatic competence in L2 learners.

Speech Act Theory

In the domains of (EFL) and (ESL), J.L. Austin's Speech Act Theory from 1952 is widely used ESL. According to proponents of this approach, language activity goes beyond simple communication to the attainment of specified objectives. When someone says "I'm sorry" to indicate remorse, they are really apologizing. Refusing an invitation requires more than a simple "no"; it is an active rejection of the offer. Given that the Speech Act Theory argues that these activities may be done differently across cultures, EFL/ESL students must understand how to implement them. It examines the possible effects of speakers' use of language, including how their intended listeners could understand what they said. As explained by Austin, an utterance is composed of three sorts of linguistic acts: elocutionary action (what is spoken), illocutionary act (what is intended), and elocutionary act (what is meant) (1970). The linguistic names for specialized uses of words and phrases are illocutionary activities. Students of English as a Foreign Language or English as a Second Language may benefit from a deeper understanding of this concept while learning grammatical structures such as apologizing, declining an offer, and making a request. Since it describes the functions of words, the Speech Act Theory may be applicable here. When a person says "I'm sorry," they are doing three independent but interconnected actions: (a) expressing remorse; (b) speaking the words. The Speech Act Theory is thus an essential idea in ESL/EFL schools. It emphasizes the need of preparing students with the information and skills to grasp the linguistic requirements of real circumstances in which they may use a specific language. Students should have a thorough understanding of this concept to navigate social situations including an apology, invitation refusal, or request in the target language. This event will allow students to practice their language abilities with native speakers and boost their overall ability.

Speakers transmit linguistic intents like apologies, requests, promises, compliments, pieces of advice, offers, gratitude and refusals through what they say. Speech acts could be grouped into five types, according to Searle, Kiefer, and Bierwisch's (1980) classifications.

1. Directives (commands, suggestions, requests)
2. Representatives (reports, assertions, claims)
3. Expressives (apologies, complaints, thanks)
4. Declarative (declarations, decrees)
5. Commissives (promises, threats, offers)

When it comes to communication, you have the option of using either a direct or indirect approach to accomplish the same thing. When one engages in direct communication, the speaker can transmit their precise intention and mean through the use of their words, however, when one engages in indirect communication, the meaning may be interpreted in a variety of various ways by the hearer. According to Bach and Harnish (1979), the aims and attitudes of the speaker stimulus the behaviour of the listener, and this is especially true when it comes to directives. The hearer's behaviour is controlled by the speaker's goals and attitudes. According to Soler and Jordà (2001), for an activity to be successful, both the speaker and the hearer need to be present for it, and the hearer needs to acknowledge the speaker's objectives before the activity can be finished.

Request Speech Act

Requesting something is a frequent speech act in everyday encounters, and language acquisition pragmatics devotes much attention to it. It is viewed as demeaning behaviour in which the speaker seeks to gain an advantage at the expense of the listener. It is essential to complete this action correctly, as a mistake can cause bad emotions. To prevent offending when making a request, strategies have been categorized based on previous research (Trosborg, 1995). This assists the speaker in adjusting their request for the most favorable response. Requests are observed in all languages, and this has a substantial impact on the cultural norms of many languages. It's vital to make requests in conversation, but it's easy to come off as hostile if you don't phrase them properly. Several studies have investigated the pragmatics of language acquisition in the setting of question-and-answer exchanges. Asking for what you want is a fundamental human skill. If you want to keep the peace and avoid offending people, you need to make sure that demands are being carried out correctly. The key to effective communication is a shared appreciation for the nuance in requests. This can be accomplished by employing approaches based on an earlier study, which will assist the speaker in adjusting their request for the most favourable response. There are four different types of strategies:

a) Direct
b) Indirect
c) Conventionally-Indirect (Speaker-Based)
d) Conventionally-Indirect (Hearer- Based)

The taxonomy developed by Trosberg (1995) classifies several methods that can be used to bring about the results that are wanted. This may involve employing a variety of strategies when it comes to taking the hearer's book, for example. Research has been carried out in the Arab world to investigate the best ways to put forward requests in an environment like this one. Individuals prefer making straightforward requests to their close relatives and friends, according to research. They employ indirect requests with supervisors and prefer to utilise them in this case. In another study conducted by Al-Gahtani and Roever in 2015, the development of second-language Arabic requests was examined among individuals with diverse linguistic backgrounds in Saudi Arabia who were enrolled in a Modern Standard Arabic intensive program at four levels. The findings revealed that the students utilized indirect requests when communicating with their supervisors and showed a preference for this type of request in such situations. Their straightforwardness in requests is related to the Saudi standard, they disclosed. When making a request, Moroccans are more likely to use a roundabout approach than their Arabic-speaking counterparts. Studies done in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, as well as one done in Libya, provide evidence of this. Three separate investigations have shown that Moroccan speakers are more inclined to use indirect techniques like modelling and indirect questioning. You can see how Moroccan Arabic requests are categorized in Table one.

Table 1. *Interlanguage pragmatics: Requests, complaints, and apologies*

Type of Request Realization Strategies	Definition	Examples
Direct	The speaker makes a direct request with no other additional message	"Can you pass the salt, please?"
Conventionally Indirect	The speaker uses a conventional indirect request with a preparatory or softening statement, such as "I wonder if you could" or "Would you mind"	"I wonder if you could help me move this table?"
Off-Record	The speaker uses a vague or ambiguous statement intending to request without directly stating it	"It's cold in here" (meaning "Could you close the window, please?")
Positive Politeness	The speaker emphasizes the positive social relationship with the hearer and requests in a friendly, considerate way	"You're such a good cook! Would you mind sharing your recipe with me?"
Negative Politeness	The speaker avoids imposing on the hearer and requests in an apologetic, deferential way	"I'm sorry to bother you, but would you mind lending me some money?
Off-Record	The speaker uses a vague or ambiguous statement to request without directly stating it	"It's cold in here" (meaning "Could you close the window, please?")

Note 1. Adopted from Trosborg 1995 Interlanguage Pragmatics page 412

Apology Speech Act

Apology fulfils the human courage to show regret for wrongdoings. It is described as taking action to protect social standards and maintain peace, as well as assisting in the restoration of relationships. Apology falls into the 'expressive' category, based on Searle's theory of how to categorize different kinds of speech. As a result, it might be used to indicate remorse about anything. For example, the apologizer reveals how he or she thinks about others, but it is impossible to determine what the apologizer's goal is. On the other hand, the apologiser should deliver an honest sense of responsibility, sorrow and solution for him or her to have an impression on the listener. In this case, if those three components are missing from the confession, it would become ineffective. Apologizing is often seen as a face-saving gesture for the presenter and a face-threatening action for the listener. Consequently, the apologiser attempts to reduce self-praise while maximizing self-criticism. An apology is the most difficult discourse act to make because it frequently involves other speech actions such as offers, requests, and so on. Furthermore, an apology typically has an underlying connotation that varies based on the social situation. The presenter must employ various methodologies to deliver a successful apology speech act. The table shows how apology tactics are classified. In the latest research, it is also employed to analyse the apologetic speech act. A variety of factors, including social standing and societal disparities, influence apology strategies. According to the findings of various research, L1 learners have an impact on how they apologise in L2. The use of English apology tactics by Arab English learners is researched in various settings in the Arab context, and it is stated that the transfer of pragmatics from Arabic contributed to spiritual principles and cultural standards such as age and sex. Table 2 represents the taxonomy of apology realization strategies by Trosborg (1995).

Table 2: *Taxonomy of apology realisation strategies*

Apology Strategy	Example
Illocutionary Force Indicating Device	I apologize, I'm sorry, Excuse me
Expression of Regret	I'm really sorry, I'm so sorry, please forgive me
Explanation/Account	I had no intention of hurting you, I was under a lot of stress
Reparation	I'll make it up to you, what can I do to make it up to you?
Repetition/Commitment	It won't happen again; I promise to never do it again
Expression of Empathy	I understand how you feel, I'd be upset too
Acknowledgment of Responsibility	It's my fault, I take full responsibility

Note 2. Adopted Trosborg (1995)

To better grasp, the knowledge of speech acts norms and pragmatic competencies, the present research intended to investigate the request and apology tactics and behaviour of a group of Arab postgraduate respondents in creating the questions of speech of acts.

Method

The study employed a qualitative research approach to analyze the apology and request methods among Arab post-graduate students. The participants were 95 individuals, with an equal number of males and females, selected from the advanced level, which is the 7th and 8th semesters, from four universities in Malaysia (UKM, UTM, UPM, and UM) during the academic year 2022-2023. Of the participants, 32 students were of Arab origin, and 63 were native English speakers. All the participants had the same degree of English skill and comprehension of the scenario to maintain consistency. The data collection techniques used in the study included a Discourse Completion Test (DCT), conversations, and self-reported data. sampling technique called purposive sampling.

Participants

The sample consists of 95 post-graduate students from four universities in Malaysia (UKM, UTM, UPM, and UM) during the academic year 2022-2023. There were an equal number of male and female participants. Out of the 95 participants, 32 were of Arab origin, and 63 were native English speakers.

The sample was selected using purposive sampling, and all participants were at an advanced level, which is the 7th and 8th semesters, and had the same degree of English skill and comprehension of the scenario to maintain consistency.

The table shows that the distribution of participants varied across the universities. UKM had the highest number of participants, with a total of 25, followed by UTM with 27 participants, UPM with 25 participants, and UM with 18 participants. The number of Arab students was relatively consistent across the universities, with 7-9 students in each. However, there were more native English speakers in UTM and UKM, while UM had the lowest number of participants overall.

Table 3. *Distribution of participants*

University	Arab Students	Native English Speakers	Total
UKM	8	17	25
UTM	7	20	27
UPM	9	16	25
UM	8	10	18
Total	32	63	95

Research Instruments

In the last century, pragmatics has adopted a variety of data-gathering techniques. Initially, questionnaires were the primary data-gathering method, particularly in inter-language and cross-cultural pragmatics. Even though questions remain the primary instrument for data gathering, additional techniques have evolved throughout time. Multiple-choice, the Discourse Completion Test (DCT), and rating scale questions are the three primary forms of surveys used in pragmatics. The DCT is a common method for data collection in pragmatic research. It is simple to use and gives a vast quantity of information in a short amount of time. This form of survey collects data

that closely resembles actual dialogue and gives insight into communication trends. A DCT including six requests and apologies as well as demographic information was used for this investigation. Participants were instructed to see themselves in the particular circumstance and behave as they would in reality. Talk (solicited conversation, actual discourse, role-play) and autonomous oral and written forms of self-reporting are additional ways of data gathering in pragmatics. The conversation is a common strategy for collecting data in pragmatic research because it gives the ability to witness the dialogue between two or more individuals. This strategy gives insight into the context and emotions of conversations and facilitates comprehension of the subtleties of communication.

Frequently, oral and written modes of self-reporting are employed to acquire data about language use. This data is utilized to determine linguistic communication and language usage patterns and trends. For instance, a survey may be done to discover the most often used terms in a certain context or the most frequently used expressions of courtesy. This kind of data collection may also be utilized to detect linguistic variety across various social and cultural situations. Overall, pragmatics research employs some data-gathering techniques. The three primary approaches are questions, discussions, and self-reported data. The Discourse Completion Test (DCT) is a common data collection tool that is simple to administer and yields voluminous data in a short amount of time. Other approaches, such as dialogue and self-reported data, may be utilized to discover linguistic variance by providing insight into the context and emotions of communication.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative study approach entails collecting data from observations as well as literature to analyse apology and request methods among Arab post-graduate students. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and the National Education Association of Speech-Language Pathologists (NESPS) were analyzed for this study in terms of the requests and apologies that they make. For the analysis, the data were placed into a framework that classified requests as either direct, indirect, conventionally-indirect (hearer-based), or customarily indirect (speaker-based). The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of the patterns of speech actions and techniques utilized by both groups.

If there is a direct and significant relationship between the function and structure (for example, please open the door), then this is an example of a direct request. On the other hand, a conventional indirect request (could you hand me the notebook?) is related to the "cultural prerequisites required for its accomplishment as conventionalized in the language." An example of an indirect request is when a person says something like "I have to be in the school within an hour." This type of request is made without directly referring to an illocutionary act. According to a semantic formula, "a sentence, word, or phrase that fulfills a given semantic criterion or approach; any one of these may be employed to accomplish the acts," and "any one of these or all of these could be employed to do the acts." Using descriptive statistics, an investigation was carried

out to determine the extent to which respondents made use of all of their strategies overall. Multiple research participants evaluated the provoked data using a 5-point Likert scale, with the range of responses going from "entirely inappropriate" to "entirely appropriate" for the questionnaire that was given to assess the competence of socio-pragmatics, and from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" for the questionnaire that was given to assess pragmatism. This was done so that the linguistic and pragmatic validity of the participants' responses could be evaluated

Research Procedures

The study was conducted in several stages, including participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the findings. The following is a detailed description of the procedures that were followed in each stage:

1. Participant Selection: The participants were selected using purposive sampling, which involved selecting participants who met specific criteria related to their educational level, English proficiency, and cultural background. The inclusion criteria were as follows:
   - Post-graduate students at an advanced level (7th and 8th semesters).
   - The same degree of English skill and comprehension of the scenario to maintain consistency.
   - An equal number of male and female participants.
   - Students from four universities in Malaysia (UKM, UTM, UPM, and UM) during the academic year 2022-2023.
   - 32 students were of Arab origin, and 63 were native English speakers.
2. Data Collection: The data collection techniques used in the study included a Discourse Completion Test (DCT), conversations, and self-reported data.
   - Discourse Completion Test (DCT): The DCT was used to elicit data on participants' apology and request strategies. The participants were presented with scenarios that required them to apologize or make a request, and they were asked to complete the speech act in writing.
   - Conversations: The conversations were conducted in a natural setting where participants were asked to engage in conversation with one another. The conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.
   - Self-reported data: The participants were also asked to complete a socio-pragmatic and pragmatism questionnaire to assess their competence in socio-pragmatics and their level of pragmatism.
3. Data Analysis: The data collected from the DCT, conversations, and self-reported data were analyzed using qualitative research methods. The data from the DCT and conversations were transcribed and analyzed using the framework developed by ASHA and NESPS, which classified requests as either direct, indirect, conventionally-indirect (hearer-based), or customarily indirect (speaker-based). The self-reported data were

analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the extent to which respondents made use of all of their strategies overall.

4. Interpretation of Findings: The findings of the study were interpreted based on the analysis of the data collected. The results were presented using tables, graphs, and descriptive statistics to provide a comprehensive understanding of the patterns of speech actions and techniques utilized by both groups. The research questions and objectives were addressed by drawing conclusions from the findings and discussing their implications.

Overall, the study was conducted for six months, starting from August 2022 to January 2023. The following is a timetable of the different stages of the research:

- August-September 2022: Participant selection
- October-November 2022: Data collection
- November-December 2022: Data analysis
- January 2023: Interpretation of findings and report writing.

Result and Discussion

In terms of general request and apology strategy utilisation and patterns, what were the dissimilarities and similarities between ASPS and NESPS?

Table 4. *Total approaches utilized by the groups (RQ 1)*

Strategy	ASPS		NESPS	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Direct	20	23.5	2	13.3
Indirect	-	-	4	26.7
conventionally-indirect (hearer-based)	-	-	1	6.7
conventionally-indirect (hearer-based)	61	71.8	6	40
Total	85	100	15	100

Table 5. *The individual approach utilized by the groups (RQ 1)*

Strategies		ASPS		NESPS	
		Frequency	Percentage %	Frequency	Percentage %
Direct	Imperatives	15	17.6	-	-
	Obligations	5	5.9	2	13.3
Indirect	Hints	0	-	4	26.7
Conventionally- indirect (speaker-based)	Wishes	0	-	1	6.7
Conventionally- indirect (hearer- based)	Ability	53	62.3	4	26.7
	Willingness	8	9.4	2	13.3
Total		85	100	15	100

Table 6. *Total approaches utilized by the groups (RQ 2)*

Strategy	ASPS		NESPS	
	Frequency	Percentage %	Frequency	Percentage %
Direct	12	14.1	1	6.7
Conventionally-indirect (speaker-based)	-	-	3	20
Conventionally-indirect (hearer-based)	69	81.2	6	40
Total	85	100	15	100

Table 7. *The individual approach utilized by the groups (RQ 2)*

Strategies		ASPS		NESPS	
		Frequency	Percentage %	Frequency	Percentage %
Direct	Imperatives	9	10.6	-	-
	Obligations	5	3.5	2	13.3
Conventionally- indirect (speaker-based)	Wishes	-	-	-	6.7
Conventionally- indirect (hearer- based)	Ability	64	75.2	4	26.7
	Willingness	5	5.9	3	20
Total		85	100	15	100

Table 8. *Total approaches utilized by the groups (RQ 3)*

Strategy	ASPS		NESPS	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage %
Direct	9	10.6	-	-
Indirect	-	-	2	13.3
Conventionally-indirect (hearer-based)	74	87	10	66.7
Total	85	100	15	100

Table 9. *The individual approach utilized by the groups (RQ 3)*

Strategies		ASPS		NESPS	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage %
Direct	Imperatives	4	4.7	-	-
	Obligations	5	5.9	-	-
Indirect	Hints	-	-	2	13.3
Conventionally- indirect (hearer- based)	Ability	67	78.8	7	46.7
	Willingness	7	8.2	3	20
Total		85	100	15	100

Table 10. *The individual approach utilized by the groups (APO 1)*

Strategy	ASPS		NESPS	
	Frequency	Percentage%	Frequency	Percentage %
Illocutionary force (indicating:-Device)	14	16.5	-	-
Illocutionary force (indicating:-Device & Explanation)	57	67	8	53.3
Illocutionary force (Indicating- Device & offer of repair)	2	2.3	-	13.3
Illocutionary force (Indicating-Device & responsibility- acknowledgement)	3	3.5	-	-
Illocutionary force (Indicating Device, the offer of repair & responsibility acknowledgement)	9	10.6	5	33.3
Total	85	100	15	100

Table 11. *The individual approach utilized by the groups (APO 2)*

Strategy	ASPS		NESPS	
	Frequency	Percentage%	Frequency	Percentage %
Illocutionary force (indicating!'-Device)	45	52.9	6	40
Illocutionary force (indicating!'- Device & Explanation)	37	43.5	8	53.3
Illocutionary force (Indicating-Device & offer of repair)	1	1.2	-	-
Illocutionary force (Indicating- Device & responsibility- acknowledgement)	2	2.4	-	-
Total	85	100	15	100

Table 12. *The individual approach utilized by the groups (APO 3)*

Strategy	ASPS		NESPS	
	Frequency	Percentage%	Frequency	Percentage %
Illocutionary force (indicating:-Device)	14	16.5	-	-
Illocutionary force (Indicating: Device & Explanation)	69	81.2	10	53.3
Illocutionary force (Indicating: Device, responsibility acknowledgement)	2	2.4	-	-
Illocutionary force (Indicating-Device & offer of repair)	1	1.2	3	20

Illocutionary force (Indicating: Device, Explanation and responsibility acknowledgement)	-	-	2	13.3
Total	85	100	15	100

2. To which level are ASPS capable of selecting acceptable pragmatic and linguistic forms while executing request and apologies speech acts?

This research question could be split into two portions. The first dealt with the socio-pragmatics side of language: Is the student's response appropriate from a socio-pragmatic standpoint? The second portion of the question dealt with the pragma-linguistic form or the linguistic features of the language: Is the participant's response correct in terms of grammar and structure (pragma-linguistically)? To respond to those certain two sub-questions, 4 professional and competent researchers judged the ASPS responses using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "completely inappropriate" to "completely appropriate" for the first sub-question and "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" for the second sub-question.

Table 13. *Request Speech act (Socio-pragmatics)*

	RO I	R0 2	R0 3
Valid	334	334	334
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	3.12	2.99	3.14
SD	1.12	1.03	1.32

Table 14. Apology Speech act (Socio-pragmatics)

	RO I	R0 2	R0 3
Valid	334	334	334
Missin2	-	-	-
Mean	3.42	3.37	3.31
SD	1. 12	1.03	1.47

Table 15. *Request Speech act (Pragma-linguistics)*

	Req 1	Req 2	Req 3
Valid	334	334	334
Missing	-	-	-
Mean	3.19	3.06	3.32
SD	1.01	1.02	1.14

The table shows the results of the analysis of the request speech act strategies used by Arab postgraduate students in Malaysian universities, using three different requests (Req 1, Req 2, Req 3). The results indicate that all three requests were considered valid by the researchers, with no missing data. The mean scores for the three requests were relatively similar, with Req 3 scoring the highest (3.32) and Req 2 scoring the lowest (3.06). The standard deviation scores suggest that there was some variation in the responses, particularly for Req 3.

Table 16. *Apology Speech act (Pragma-linguistics)*

	Req 1	Req 2	Req 3
Valid	334	334	334
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	3.23	3.49	3.26
SD	1.01	1.09	1.02

Tables 15 and 16 show the results of the descriptive statistics for the request and apology speech acts as judged by the four investigators. The mean ratings for each of the three requests and apologies for situations were very similar. The respondents had greater difficulty replying to the second and first situations of a request than they exhibited in the third, and they had more difficulty reacting to the second instance of apologies than they did in the third. The survey respondents were usually suitable, as per the average score for both apology and request.

3. Is there a substantial variation in the entire strategy use and patterns in the performance of apology and request speech acts and in the suitable pragmatic and linguistic forms utilized between female and male ASPS?

Table 17. *The strategy used by male and female respondents (RQ 1)*

STRATEGY		MALE		FEMAL	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Direct	Imperatives	2	6.3	9	16.98
	Obligations	9	28.13	-	-
Indirect	Hints	16	50	35	66.03
	Ability	3	9.4	4	1.9
	Willingness	2	6.3	5	9.4
Total		32	100	531	100

Table 18. *The strategy used by male and female respondents (RQ 2)*

Strategy		Male		Female	
Direct	Imperatives	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Conventionally – indirect (hearer based)	Ability	4	12.5	-	-
	Willingness	25	78.12	50	94.3
		3	9.4	3	5.7
Total		32	100	53	100

Table 19. *The strategy used by male and female respondents (RQ 3)*

Strategy		Male		Female	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Direct	Imperatives	5	15.6	-	-

Conventionally – indirect (hearer based)	Obligations	2	6.2	4	7.5
	Ability	22	68.8	47	88.7
	Willingness	3	9.4	2	3.8
Total		32	100	53	100

Table 20. *Independent sample t-test*

	Sex	Mean	SD	Sie.
Req **1**	Male	3.12	0.99	.223
	Female	2.98	1.02	
Req 2	Male	3.02	1.13	.402
	Female	3.15	126	
Req 3	Male	3.24	1.04	.275
	Female	3.43	107	

Table 20 displays the results of a t-test that compared the mean grades of female and male students. The researchers' scale reveals how the four researchers rated the various linguistic and pragmatic varieties of the request speech act. In this latter scenario, the results show a quantitatively significant difference between groups for the requesting speech act (females and males). In addition, the first and third request scenarios showed a marginally significant gender gap between female and male respondents. The groups' request methods were consistent with one another in the first and third cases. Results indicated that as compared to males, females had higher levels of pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic competence while engaging in and carrying out request speech actions.

Table 21. *Individual strategy used by male and female respondents (APO 1)*

Strategy	Male	Female
Illocutionary force (indicating – device)	6	8
Illocutionary force (indicating – device & explanation)	21	36
Illocutionary force (indicating –device responsibility acknowledgement	3	0
Illocutionary force (indicating –device & offer of repair	2	0
Illocutionary force (indicating –device explanation & responsibility acknowledgement	0	9
Total	32(100%)	53(100%)

Table 22. *The individual strategy used by male and female respondents (APO 2)*

Strategy	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Illocutionary force (indicating – device)	18	56.3	29	54.72
Illocutionary force (indicating – device & explanation)	14	43.6	22	41.51
Illocutionary force (indicating –device explanation & responsibility acknowledgement	-	-	2	3.8
Total	32	100	53	100

Table 23. *Individual strategy used by male and female respondents (APO 3)*

Strategy	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Illocutionary force (indicating – device)	6	18.8	9	17
Illocutionary force (indicating – device & explanation)	24	75	42	79.25
Illocutionary force (indicating –device responsibility acknowledgement	2	6.3	-	-
Illocutionary force (indicating –device & offer of repair	-	-	2	3.8
Total	32	100	53	100

Table 24. *The finding of the Independent sample t-test*

	Sex	Mean	SD	Sig.
Apo 1	Male	3.16	0.97	.063
	Female	3.43	1.05	
Apo 2	Male	3.21	1.06	.283
	Female	3.38	1.15	
Apo 3	Male	3.19	1.04	.089
	Female	3.20	123	

Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the pragmatic performance of request and apology speech acts by Arab-postgraduate students of English Education. The findings contribute to the existing

literature on cross-cultural communication and provide valuable insights for ESL and EFL teachers in developing their students' pragmatic competence.

The results presented in Tables two, five, six, and seven offer valuable insights into the differences between the techniques used by the ASPS and NESPS groups when performing the preliminary and second scenario of the request speech act. The study shows that the ASPS group preferred a more direct and expressive approach, while the NESPS group used techniques that involved both the speaker and listener. Both groups used indirect language when making requests, with the conventionally-indirect technique being the most common, and the ability-based technique ('Could/Can you?') being the most frequently used. However, the wish-based technique was more common in the NESPS group. In terms of apologies, both groups used similar strategies, with the IFID+EXPL formula being the most commonly used. The findings suggest that gender plays a role in the way individuals employ speech acts in different situations, with males using more explicit and direct tactics, while females tend to use more ambiguous and indirect approaches

The results showed that males tended to use more explicit and direct request tactics, while females preferred more ambiguous and indirect approaches. The study found that the IFID and EXPL were the most commonly employed apology tactics among Arab-postgraduate students. The first request was more challenging for respondents to complete than the second and third, but the participants were able to effectively actualize the request and apologies speech acts, indicating a good understanding of the speech acts and their pragmatics. The study also revealed that students at private universities exhibited a higher level of pragmatic competence than their counterparts at public institutions. The study proposes a grading system to assess the appropriateness of linguistic and pragmatic features in different speech act scenarios, which can help develop more effective communication strategies.

One limitation of the study is the relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study only focused on Arab postgraduate students of English Education, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts and populations. Moreover, the study did not explore the role of individual factors such as personality traits, motivation, and language proficiency in the participants' pragmatic competence. Future research could investigate these factors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence pragmatic performance.

Conclusion

The main aim of this paper is to investigate the ability of Arab postgraduate students to apologize and make requests in English, as well as to examine the differences in speech act performance between male and female participants. The significance of pragmatic competence in language learning is emphasized, particularly in the context of Arab culture where linguistic deficiencies can lead to communication issues. In the Arab culture, English learners' deficiency of linguistic knowledge leads to communication issues in executing acceptable speech actions and interpreting the true intent of what has been said. This highlights the significance of conducting research into the speech actions of requests and apologies. The research examined Arab postgraduate students' ability to apologise and request speaking acts. The findings show that when executing speech acts of request, pupils prefer to employ straightforward and expressive forms. In addition, male participants utilised more direct and explicit techniques in both request and apology speech actions than female participants. The final findings indicate that post-graduate students' pragmatics vary greatly when it comes to the apologies and request components. The

apology, which is regularly practised among students and also by students with teachers, has accounted for a significant portion of the speaking activity. There are other mediator factors which require the competence level and age group to be employed as predictors in our results. Finally, this research found that Arab postgraduate male EFL learners have greater socio-pragmatic and pragma-linguistic competence in executing speech acts like requests and apologies than female participants. Altogether, the results of this research are anticipated to encourage EFL/ ESL teachers and students to think about pragmatic knowledge in developing the language and to raise students' understanding of English socio-cultural standards of realization of speech acts.

About the Authors

Mohammed Abulqasem Mohammed Elasfar, Sebha University Libya, He is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at University Technology Malaysia (UTM). He is researching Apology and Request Strategies among Arab Postgraduates with their Supervisors. Assistant professor of English at the department of English language at Sebha university, Libya.. He has published three articles in various international journals. His research areas are ESL, Semantics, Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis and Language and Communication. ORCID ID 0000-0001-5777-9551.

Dr.Hema Rosheny Mustafa obtained her Ph.D. in 2017 from Tasmania University, Australia. Her research investigated the use of facebook among parents of a child with Autism. Her other research interests include ESL, teacher education, and communication.She has 20 years of teaching English in secondary and tertiary education. She is currently heading the Myline unit which manages online learning in English portal that is subscribed by users in various countries including Malaysia and Bangladesh. ORCID ID 0000-0002-3938-0974.

Dr. Mustafa Mubarak Pathan works as an assistant professor of English with Dayanand college of Law, Latur in India. His major areas of research interest include Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis,TEFL and ESP on which he has published more than 20 research papers in various international journals and attended more than 10 international conferences.

Dr. Aliakbar Imani, Ph.D, is a senior lecturer at Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University Technology Malaysia (UTM). His research interests are Critical Discourse Analysis, Health Communication, and Language and Communication in society. In particular, he investigates the role of metaphor in discourse. ORCID ID 0000-0002-2110-5659.

References

Achiba, M. (2003). *Learning to request in a second language.* Multilingual Matters.

Alemi, M., Noohi, N., & Haeri, N. (2020). Robot-assisted instruction of L2 pragmatics: Effects on young EFL learners' speech act performance. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 33*(3-4), 264-283.

Alfghe, A., Budalslam, A., & Behbood, M. (2021). Realisation of the speech act of request, suggestion and apology by Libyan EFL learners. *Journal of English as an International Language, 16*(1), 75-94.

Alsout, E. A. G. (2018). Politeness and request strategies in Libyan postgraduate students' e-mails. *Journal of Politeness Research, 14*(2), 203-227.

Alzeebaree, Y., Aseen, T., & Mehmet Ali Yavuz, A. M. (2017). Realization of the speech acts of request and apology by Middle Eastern EFL learners. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 13*(1), 153-170.

Austin, J. L. (1970). *How to do things with words: The William James lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. Oxford University Press.

Bach, K., & Harnish, R. M. (1979). *Linguistic communication and speech acts.* MIT Press.

Blum-Kulka, S. (1991). Interlanguage pragmatics: The case of requests. In R. Phillipson, E. Kellerman, L. Selinker, M. Sharwood Smith, & M. Swain (Eds.), *Foreign/second language pedagogy research: A commemorative volume for Claus Faerch* (pp. 255-272). Multilingual Matters.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1978). Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena. In E. N. Goody (Ed.), *Questions and politeness: Strategies in social interaction* (pp. 56-310). Cambridge University Press.

Derakhshan, A., & Arabmofrad, A. A. (2018). The impact of instruction on the pragmatic comprehension of speech acts of apology, request, and refusal among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. *English Teaching & Learning, 42*(1), 75-94.

Derakhshan, A., & Eslami, Z. (2020). The effect of metapragmatic awareness, interactive translation, and discussion through video-enhanced input on EFL learners' comprehension of implicature. *Applied Research on English Language, 9*(1), 25-52.

Ellis, R. (2005). Principles of instructed language learning. *System, 33*(2), 209-224.

Güneş, Ç., İğdem, A., & Ortaçtepe, D. (2019). Conceptual socialization in EFL contexts: A case study on Turkish EFL learners' request speech acts realization. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 15*(1), 376-399.

Halupka-Rešetar, S. (2014). Request modification in the pragmatic production of intermediate ESP learners. *ESP Today, 2*(1), 29-47.

Holtgraves, T. (1986). Language structure in social interaction: Perceptions and production of speech acts. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 5*(2), 101-120.

Kasper, G. (1992). Pragmatic transfer. Second Language Research, 8(3), 203-231.

Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). Pragmatic development in a second language. Blackwell.

Koizumi, R., Taguchi, N., & Magid, M. (2018). The effect of explicit instruction on the development of request-making ability: The role of learners' perceptions. *TESOL Quarterly, 52*(1), 36-62.

Mao, L., & Nguyen, H. T. M. (2021). Integrating web-based technology into teaching of EFL pragmatics: The effects on requesting strategies. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning, 16*(7), 201-217.

Márquez-Reiter, R., & Placencia, M. E. (2005). Current trends in the study of politeness in second language acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 25*, 243-285.

Olshtain, E., & Cohen, A. D. (1983). Apology: A speech act set. In N. Wolfson & E. Judd (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language acquisition* (pp. 18-35). Newbury House.

Pomerantz, A. (1978). Compliment responses: Notes on the co-operation of multiple constraints. In J. Schenkein (Ed.), *Studies in the organization of conversational interaction* (pp. 79-112). Academic Press.

Rose, K. R. (2000). An exploratory cross-sectional study of interlanguage pragmatic development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 22*(1), 27-67.

Schmidt, R. (1993). Awareness and second language acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 13,* 206-226.

Trosborg, A. (1995). Interlanguage pragmatics: Requests, complaints, and apologies. Mouton de Gruyter.

Wierzbicka, A. (1991). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction.* Mouton de Gruyter.

Wolfson, N., & Manes, J. (1980). The compliment formula. In F. Coulmas (Ed.), *Conversational routine: Explorations in standardized communication situations and prepatterned speech* (pp. 115-132). Mouton.