



An Exploration of the Effect of Social Power and Social Distance on the Realization of the English Speech Act of Request Among Yemeni Doctoral Students at Aligarh Muslim University

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of social power and social distance on Yemeni doctoral students when realizing the English speech act of request. It also examined the types of request strategies, head modifications and the semantic formulas most frequently used by Yemeni doctoral students when making requests. The study discussed the Yemeni students' formation of requests strategies from a purely socio-pragmatic perspective. Two groups of Yemeni doctoral students in India participated in the study. The first group consisted of 20 Arts students, and the second group comprised 20 Non-Arts students. The whole sample was taken from Aligarh Muslim University, India. The data of the study were collected using two instruments—Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and Multiple-Choice Questionnaire (MCQ). The data were analysed by calculating the frequency and percentage of students' requests in each situation. However, the findings of the study obtained from the DCT indicated that the Arts students were more influenced by the social power and social distance of the addressee when realizing the request strategies than Non-Arts students. Because of their awareness of the social power and social distance parameters, Arts students used various appropriate request strategies with every addressee according to their social status and distance. On the other hand, Non-Arts students were less aware of these two social parameters as they almost used the same request strategies with every hearer. Similarly, the results of the MCQ showed that, unlike Non-Arts students who were consistent in their choices of the same request strategies used in the DCT, Arts students tended either to opt-out of some requests or choose non-conventional indirect strategies whenever the hearer was dominant or unfamiliar. The findings of the study also revealed that conventional indirect request strategies were the most frequently used by the two groups. More accurately, unlike Arts students who used direct requests very little with unimpressive hearers, Non-Arts students were more inclined to use direct strategies across situations and with dominant hearers as well. Besides, the findings displayed that the Arts group used modifications with the head requests more than the Non-Arts group. The findings exhibited that the most frequently semantic formulas used by the two groups were: Explanation-Request; Request-Reason; Apology-Request. The study concluded with some pedagogical implications to teachers and syllabus designers.

Keywords: Social power; Social distance; Socio-pragmatics; Request strategies; Semantic formulas, Yemeni doctoral students, Arts, Non-Arts

1. Introduction

Using the language in a socio-culturally appropriate manner is the core principle of pragmatic competence. Of many language competencies, pragmatic competence seems to be the most important for second language (L2) learners to master so as “to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context” (Thomas, 1983, p. 92). Pragmatic competence is the ability of learners to use the language appropriately in suitable situations (Taguchi, 2012; Schauer, 2009). Thus, maintaining the norms and conventions and selecting the most acceptable stylistic forms of the target language is essential for L2 learners in order to communicate appropriately in L2 contexts.

L2 learners need to maintain two aspects of pragmatics—pragmatics and socio-pragmatics. Whereas pragmatics deals with the selectivity of the suitable syntactic forms, socio-pragmatics deals with selecting the most appropriate form that suits the situation (Taguchi, 2009). However, the present study deals with the socio-pragmatic aspect which is the ability of learners to perform linguistic actions taking into consideration the situational settings and social factors such as gender, social distance and power. Socio-pragmatics is a fundamental component of pragmatics and is highly needed for making effective communication. However, if the socio-pragmatic rules are not well maintained by L2 speakers, misunderstanding will inevitably occur which will ultimately affect the sequence of conversations and lead to negative communication consequences.

L2 learners need to use the language to perform real functions: to request, apologize, refuse, etc. Request act, however, seems to be most frequently used in our daily communication. Nonetheless, most students are still unable to make appropriate requests to others, taking into consideration the social power and the social distance parameters. Brown and Levinson (1987) viewed the request act as face-threatening for both the hearer and the speaker. So, speakers should be more polite and selective when making requests in order to avoid negative faces. Request act is usually influenced by situational variables like social power and social distance.

1.2 Background of the Study

Recently, the number of non-native English speakers has been increasing enormously in many countries. The English language has surpassed its native-speaking countries to be widely used in many non-native English countries and; nowadays, most conversations between L2 speakers occur in the absence of the actual native speakers of English. Therefore, L2 speakers need to be competent in interlanguage pragmatics being very important for making effective communication. Research shows that making linguistic mistakes is recognized as less serious than making pragmatic mistakes. Breaking the pragmatic norms, even unconsciously, might indicate the impoliteness of the speaker (Yates, 2010, p. 288). However, one of the essential questions in the field of interlanguage pragmatics is how L2 students realize requests and other speech acts in the target language (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984).

The realization of the request act in Arabic is asymmetrical to that of English. Umar (2004) pointed out that “an appropriate Arabic request scheme in a given situation might not be appropriate in English in the same situation” (p. 42). Al-Marani and Sazalie (2010a) pointed out that Yemeni Arabic male-male speakers use direct requests or imperatives with close friends. Such speakers, without fear of losing face, consider the use of direct requests as a sign of solidarity and intimacy (p. 63). However, while these strategies are acceptable in Arabic, they can be offensive in English. Arab EFL speakers tend to use direct requests with their interlocutors, especially, when the speaker has the power over the hearer (Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010a; Umar, 2004).

The use of direct requests can often be offensive in English. English speakers seem to prefer the use of non-conventionally indirect requests. Further, the use of the interrogative form with English speakers is regarded as an unpleasant request as well, especially when the addressee is superior. If, for instance, an L2 learner asks his professor “could you give me some notes about the exam?” Such a request, in such a situation, would be regarded as offensive and might affect the relationship between the learner and his professor. But using this form of request: “actually sir I did not attend the last lecture, so I would be so much grateful to you

if you could give me some notes about the exam”, might appear to be more polite and acceptable to the professor.

The request act can be sometimes formulated in an intricate manner that bears implicit request. Only competent learners can comprehend it as a request just from the context. If, for instance, two people are sitting at a dining table and one asks the other: Have you finished with the saltcellar? The speaker here does not mean to ask a direct question to be answered by *Yes* or *No*, rather, it is as an indirect request to the other person to pass the saltcellar. If also two people are sitting in a room and one said to the other: “it is quite hot inside”, this expression is not, however, a declarative sentence, but can be functioned as an indirect request to the other person to switch on the fan or to open the windows. However, the incompetence to realize the request acts properly occurs usually due to cross-cultural differences between two languages. Brown (2000) refers to the difference between the cultures of two languages as the social distance.

Much research has investigated the effect of social power and social distance on different speech acts of language. These studies found that these two variables have an effect on request (AlRefai, 2010; Al-Momani, 2009; Abdul Sattar, Lar & Suleiman, 2009), apology (Al-Khaza'leh & Ariff, 2015) and indirect complaints (Boxer, 1993). Levinson and Brown (1987) highlighted the effect of social power and social distance on the speech act of request. The choice of the speech act of request to be the subject of the study stems from its usefulness and frequent occurrence among L2 learners. According to Achiba (2003), “requests provide insights into many different aspects of a learner’s acquisition of pragmatic skills” (p. 3). So, the present study investigates the effect of social power and social distance on the realization of the English speech act of request by Yemeni doctoral students. It also sheds light on the strategies, modifications and semantic formulas used when realizing the request act. It provides an interpretation from a socio-pragmatic perspective of the request act strategies realized by Yemeni doctoral students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Intercultural Competence

The majority of L2 learners demonstrate their inability to recognize some English words or comprehend most English idioms which often lead to communication breakdown. Saville-Troike (1996) clarified that interpreting the meanings of English words in thoroughly different ways is the result of students’ intercultural incompetence. He introduced an example of cross-cultural misunderstanding of a Turkish visitor to the United States who denied eating hot dog which is a type of food eaten by Americans, thinking that it was made of dog’s meat as it is prohibited in his religion to eat the meat of dogs (p. 360). However, EFL teachers should focus on the importance of teaching the culture of the target language in order to develop an “intercultural communicative competence” among L2 learners (Byram, 1997). Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002) define intercultural competence as “the ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and the ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality” (p. 10). Bennett (1993) describes an L2 learner learning a foreign language without knowing its culture as a fluent fool. The lack of intercultural competence leads also to serious misinterpretation between interlocutors.

2.2 Inter-language Pragmatics

Interlanguage pragmatics is the concept that deals particularly with non-native speakers of a language. Kasper (1996) defined interlanguage pragmatics as “the study of non-native speakers’ use and acquisition of L2 pragmatics knowledge” (p. 145). Felix-Brasdefer (2012) refers to interlanguage pragmatics as the learners’ ability to use the L2 functionally such as making offers, requests, complaints, etc. SLA researchers have recently devoted great importance to interlanguage pragmatics because it is found that even advanced L2 students who are living in the target language contexts make mistakes in communication due to their incompetence of L2 pragmatics (Taguchi, 2012). Interlanguage pragmatic studies are concerned with

comparing the difference between the L2 students' production of speech acts and those of the native speakers. However, the speech acts theory remains the most influential domain in the field of interlanguage pragmatics.

2.3 Speech Act Theory

The theory of speech acts views communication as the ultimate goal of language learning. Bayley (2005) explains that in order to communicate successfully and interpret the speech of others clearly, learners need first to know the use of the speech acts within a community (p. 8). Searle et al. (1980) explain that there are three main significant components of speech situations which are "a speaker, a hearer and an utterance by a speaker, and there are many kinds of acts associated with the speaker's utterance" (p. 1). So, each utterance is produced with a specific target and to achieve a particular goal. In other words, the speeches that we always utter represent many acts like requests, apologies, refusals, complaints, compliments, etc. Clark (2006) expounds that "people coordinate their individual actions by using a variety of communicative acts" (p. 366). Further, Austin (1962) argued that any utterance or verbal statement is produced for intended purposes. Similarly, Malinowski (1946, p. 307) highlighted that any produced utterance "has the aim and function of expressing some thought or feeling actual at that moment and in that situation ... in order to serve purposes of common action or to establish ties of purely social communion" (cited in Eggins, 2004, p. 88).

Austin (1962) argued that utterances have three types of meaning: *locutionary act*, *illocutionary act* and *perlocutionary act*. Locutionary act represents the production of meaningful linguistic expression. An illocutionary act refers to the intention of the speaker to accomplish an act through speaking. Examples of this type of act include making accuses, apologies, blames, congratulations (cited in Huang (2006), p. 1003-4), and "requests, apologies, promises, advice, compliments, offers, refusals, complaints and thanking" (Achiba, 2003, p. 2). Searle et al. (1980) define the illocutionary act as "the production of the sentence token under certain conditions, and the minimal unit of the linguistic communication" (p. 2). The last type is the perlocutionary act which refers to the effect of the utterance on the addressee.

2.4 Request Act

The request act is defined as "attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something" (Searle, 1967, p. 11, cited in Achiba, 2003, p. 7). A request is likely to threaten the face of both the speaker and the hearer (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 76). A request is a sociolinguistic variable that poses face threat. The face is often expressive of the type of speech that will be held between two interlocutors. Goffman (1990) defined face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the lines others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 222). However, Brown and Levinson (1987) emphasize the use of politeness strategies when formulating requests because this kind of speech act makes the hearer more threatened. The more the act threatens a speaker or an addressee's face, the more the speakers use a high rank of mitigation strategies to soften the situation.

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) identified nine types of request strategies. These nine strategies are combined under three major levels of directness: direct request, conventionally indirect request and non-conventionally indirect request. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), a direct request is usually used when formulating a small request; often with a speaker and a hearer with the same social class. A conventionally indirect request is used when the request is quite bigger; it is formulated in a polite manner. This is the type of request that is most frequently used universally. Non-conventionally indirect request often entails using hints or implicatures; particularly, "when making the sort of request that it is doubtful one should make it at all" (p. 57). Thus, the difference between these types of requests is not just in the syntactic structure they are formed but in the meaning that they convey. Further, the speech act of request consists of two components: the head act and the modifications. The head act is "the part of the sequence which might serve to realize the act independently of other elements" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 200). The use of request varies from one situation to another, and according to the status of the addressee.

2.5 The Social Power

The concept of “power” coincides with the social distance variable in influencing speech acts. Brown and Levinson (1987) pointed out that the more powerful and distant the hearer is, the more indirect and polite the speaker will be. Power is a social variable that impacts request strategies. It is the degree of control that one person can have over the other. Brown and Gilman (1970) pointed out that “power is a relationship between at least two persons, and it is nonreciprocal in the sense that both cannot have power in the same area of behaviour” (p. 255). Brown and Levinson (1987) refer to power as “the degree to which hearer can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of speaker’s plans and self-evaluation” (p. 77). Power distance or inequality exists in many societies. Hofstede (2010) defines power distance as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (p. 61). Examples of social power can be represented by the relationship between a professor and his/her candidate, a boss and his/her employee, or a father and his son.

2.6 The Social Distance

The social distance is concerned with revealing the impact of differences/similarities between two languages/cultures on L2 students, or the degree of proximity and acceptance between two different groups. Research indicates that social distance lays much emphasis on the role of culture teaching in second language teaching/learning. The social distance concept was first developed by Bogardus in 1924 “to measure attitudes towards a variety of groups” (Wark & Galliher, 2007, p. 383). Brown (2000) defines social distance as “the cognitive and affective proximity of two cultures that came into contact within an individual” (p. 185). Further, Brown and Levinson (1987) define distance as an “asymmetric social dimension of similarity/difference within which speaker and hearer stand for the purposes of this act” (p. 76).

3. Statement of the Problem

Most Yemeni doctoral students in India confront communication problems in the English language. They frequently run the risk of using the English language unacceptably or awkwardly. This is not to say that they are impolite, but it is often the result of their incompetence in pragmatics. Students mostly use a certain type of request similarly with all interlocutors with different social statuses (high-equal-low) and different distances (familiar-unfamiliar) which often exposes them to serious communication problems. They often do not pay attention to the social power and social distance of the hearer. The improper use of request acts in real social contexts indicates the impoliteness of the interlocutor. Using impolite and direct requests may affect the mainstream of communication, and in most cases leads to misunderstanding between interlocutors which often results in communication breakdown.

4. Research Questions

1. What types of strategies and modifications do Yemeni doctoral students of Arts and Non-Arts use when they realize the English speech act of request?
2. Do social power and social distance have an impact on Yemeni doctoral students’ realization of the English speech act of request?
3. What are the semantic formulas used by Yemeni doctoral students when they realize the speech act of request?

5. Significance of the Study

The research paper is significant as there are recently a great number of Yemeni students entering Indian universities, in which English is the medium of instruction and communication. The study highlights the appropriate use of the request act being the most important speech act that students use in daily conversations, getting feedback from teachers, deciding an appointment, asking about assignments, etc. The doctoral students

should use the speech acts in a culturally appropriate way. The study is also significant in showing the effect, if any, of the social power and social distance on Yemeni doctoral students' choice of the requests' strategies.

6. Methods

6.1. Participants

The sample of the study is Yemeni male doctoral students studying at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), India. The sample consisted of two groups; each group consisted of 20 students. The first group is represented by 20 Yemeni Arts students, and the second group consisted of 20 Non-Arts students. These students are studying in various departments at AMU. All of them are native speakers of Arabic. The doctoral students have mainly been chosen to be the subjects of the study being the advanced learners who are supposed to communicate effectively in English.

6.2 Instruments of the Study

The study employed two instruments—Discourse Completion Test (DCT), and Multiple-Choice Questionnaire (MCQ). The description of the implementation of these two tools are given below.

6.2.1. Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

The first tool for collecting the data of the study is a written Discourse Completion Test (DCT). This method is popularly used in pragmatics studies. Mackey and Gass (2005) highlighted the usefulness of DCT in investigating all types of speech acts (p. 89). However, the DCT consists of 6 written situations, in which participants have to respond to each one. They were given clear instructions on how to respond and instructed to imagine that these situations were real that happened to them and they had to respond to. The six situations maintain the effect of social power and social distance between the speaker and the hearer. The situations focused on the effect of social power (high-equal-low) and social distance (familiar-unfamiliar) on request strategies. The position of the speaker in each situation is explained in the following table.

No.	Listener	Situation	Power	Distance
1.	Dean	Asking a dean for a recommendation letter	-P	+D
2.	Manager	Asking a manager for a one-day leave	-P	-D
3.	Gentleman	Asking a gentleman for directions at airport	=P	+D
4.	Scholar	Asking a senior scholar to proofread a thesis	=P	-D
5.	Classmate	Asking a new classmate for help	+P	+D
6.	Friend	Asking a close friend to take a picture	+P	-D

For reliability and validity purposes, the researcher has first shown the DCT to four ELT experts to take their views and opinions regarding the clarity of situations. The researcher has also piloted the questionnaire to seven students in order to see if there is any ambiguity. The researcher has, then, taken the feedback from both teachers and experts and designed the last version of this DCT.

6.2.2. Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ)

Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) is a method that was used by Rose (1994) to collect data on request strategies. The situations of the MCQ are the same situations used in the DCT. The MCQ consisted of six situations followed by four multiple choices. The four choices represent the three strategies of request directness (direct request, conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect), and the last choice expresses an abstention from doing the request. The purpose of using the MCQ is to make a comparison between students' responses in this questionnaire and those of the DCT. In other words, to see whether students were consistent in their choices of requests in both instruments.

6.3 Procedure of the Study

The data were collected by two main tools: Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and Multiple-Choice Questionnaire (MCQ). Firstly, the researcher distributed the DCT to students. The DCT was distributed in the form of written situations, and students were asked to respond in written forms as well. The researcher distributed the DCT to the participants individually at students' halls of residence. They were given the written test to be answered and to be given back after some time. The second tool was MCQ. After collecting the DCT, students were immediately given the MCQ to be filled out. The MCQ was distributed face-to-face and collected back at the same time because students were familiar with the situations.

7. Coding Strategy

The scale used to analyse the participants' responses was Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) CCSARP coding scheme. The analysis focused on the strategies and the modifications used in the request. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) classified the request strategies in terms of directness into three types: the most direct, conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect which have been manifested in nine request strategies (p. 202). The study further focused on analysing the semantic formulas used by students when formulating the speech act of request.

8. Data Analysis

The data of the study were analysed qualitatively by showing the frequencies and percentages of all the responses collected from the two groups.

Analysis of Results of Situation One, Two and Three of Arts and Non-Arts Students

The results of the study are summarized in the following Figures. To answer the first research question: *What types of strategies and modifications do Yemeni doctoral students use when they realize the English speech act of request?*

Figure 1: Frequency of request strategies used by Arts and Non-Arts groups for situations one and two.

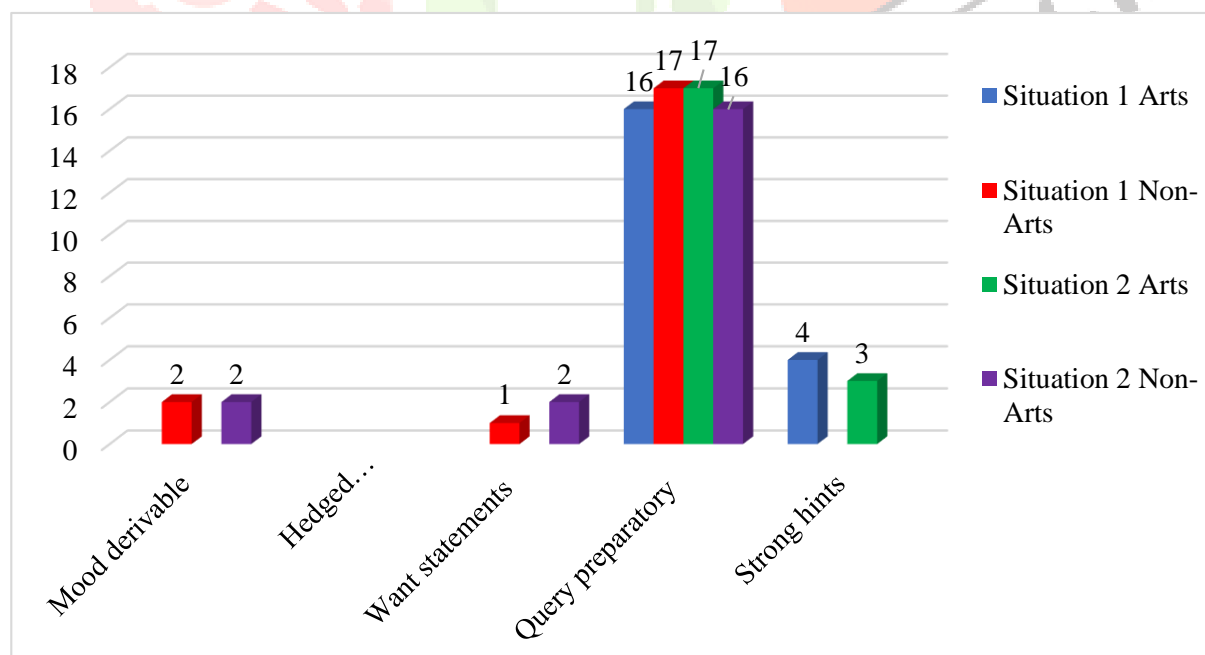


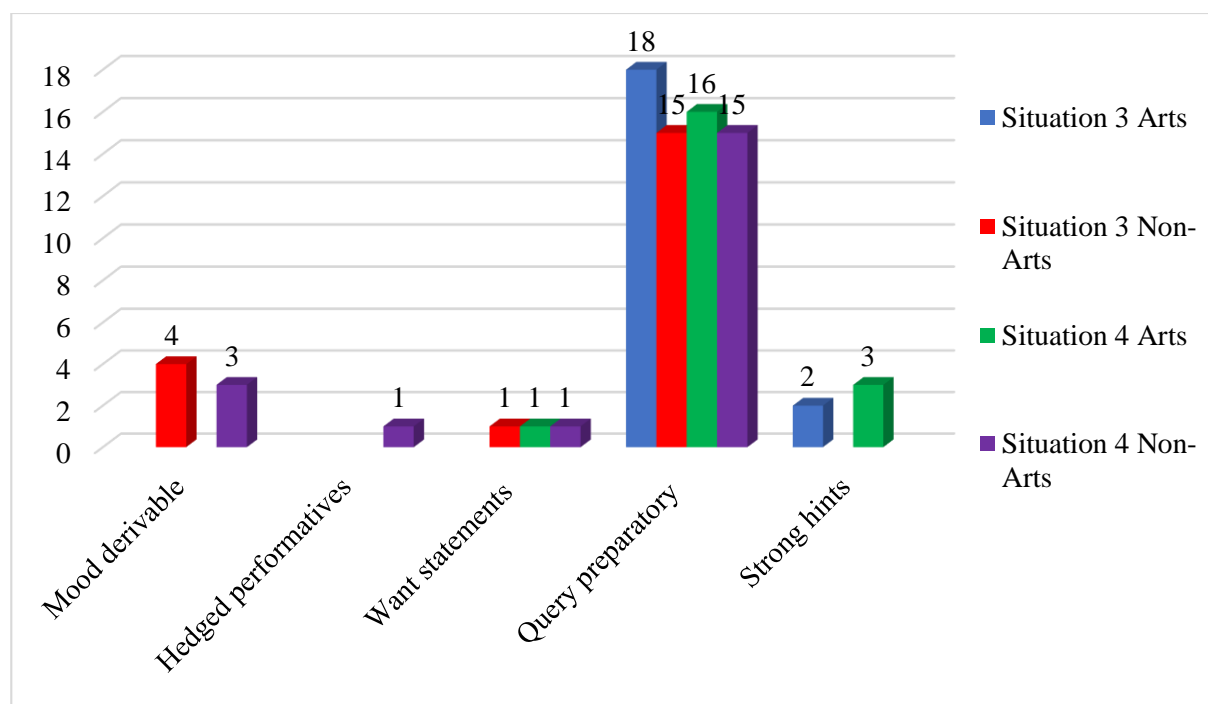
Figure 1 displays the strategies used by the Arts and Non-Arts groups in realizing the speech act of request for situations one and two. In the first situation, as it is clear in Figure 1 that the Arts students were more inclined to use conventionally indirect strategies by means of query preparatory (80%), followed by non-conventionally indirect requests by means of strong hints (20%). Direct requests were not used in the first

situation. On the other hand, Non-Arts students were predisposed to be conventionally indirect in making a request to a high-status person like a dean of a college. Conventional indirect strategies recorded the highest level (85%) by means of query preparatory. Direct strategies scored a degree of (10%) by means of mood derivable, (5%) by means of want statements. Non-conventionally indirect strategies were not used in this situation.

In the second situation, Arts students tended to use more conventionally indirect requests by means of query preparatory (85%). Non-conventionally indirect strategies scored (15%) by means of strong hints. As the first situation, Arts students did not use direct requests with dominant hearers. Similarly, Non-Arts students chose conventional indirect request strategies in the second situation as the most favourable requests in addressing the manager. However, conventional indirect strategies recorded (80%) as the highest level by means of query preparatory. Direct strategies scored (10%) by means of mood derivable and (10%) by means of want statement. Non-conventional indirect strategies were not used in this situation.

8.1.2 Analysis of Results of Situation Five and Six of Arts and Non-Arts Students

Figure 2: Frequency of request strategies used by Arts and Non-Arts groups for situations three and four

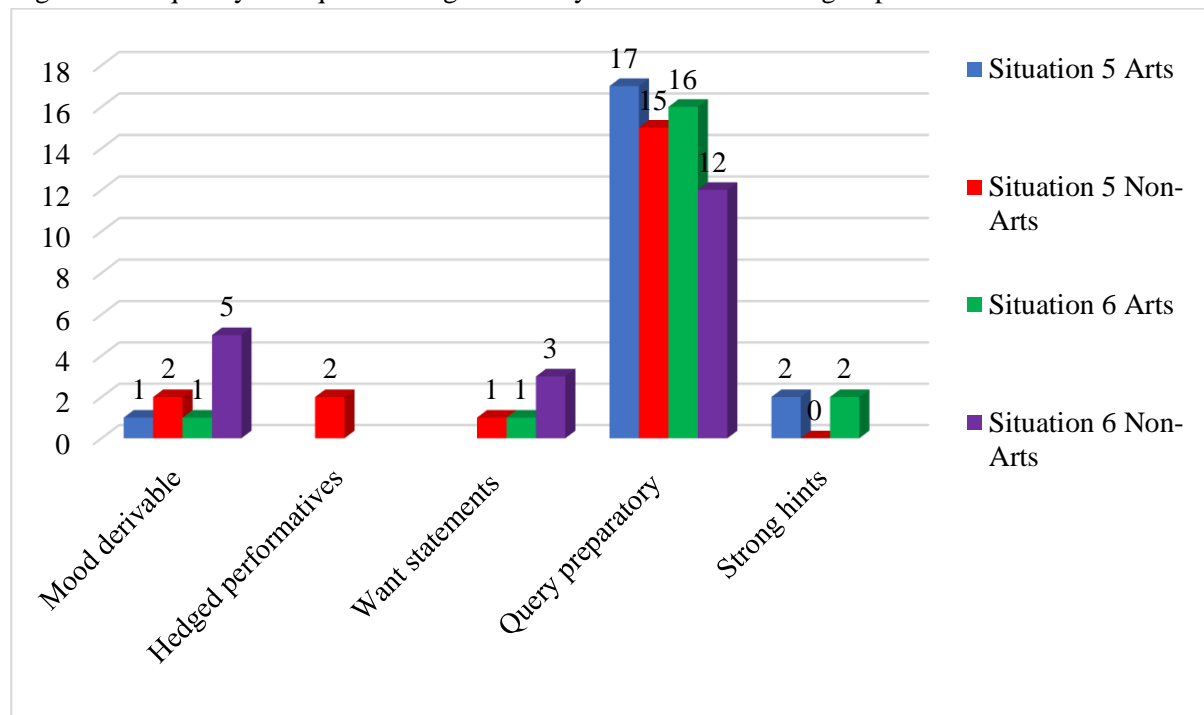


In the third situation, as is shown in Figure 2, Non-Arts students used conventional indirect requests more frequently by means of query preparatory (90%). Direct strategies were not used in this situation. Non-conventionally indirect strategies recorded (10%) by means of strong hints. Similarly, as is shown in Figure 2, Non-Arts students tended to use also conventionally indirect strategies in requesting strangers, i.e., the gentleman. Conventional indirect strategies by means of query preparatory scored the highest (75%), followed by direct strategies (10%) by means of mood derivable and (5%) by want statement. Non-conventional indirect requests were not used in this situation.

In the fourth situation, Arts students tended to use conventional indirect requests. This type of request occupied the highest level with (80%) by means of query preparatory. Direct requests scored (5%) by means of want statement. The non-conventional indirect requests got a score of (15%) by means of strong hints. Likewise, students of the non-Arts group had the tendency to use more conventional indirect strategies in the fourth situation, i.e., when making requests to people with equal power and low distance, as the case with the familiar senior scholar. However, conventionally indirect strategies were favourable in this situation as about (75%) of query preparatory were recorded. Direct request strategies occupied a score of (15%) by means of mood derivable, (5%) by means of hedged performatives and (5%) by means of want statements. Non-conventionally indirect strategies by means of strong hints were not used.

8.1.3 Analysis of Results of Situation Five and Six of Arts and Non-Arts Students

Figure 2: Frequency of request strategies used by Arts and Non-Arts group for situations five and six.



In the fifth situation, Arts students had the tendency to use conventionally indirect requests. Arts students tended to use more polite requests especially when they talk with unfamiliar people. They used conventionally indirect requests with an unfamiliar classmate with a high level (80%) by means of query preparatory. Direct requests were little used with about (5%) by means of mood derivable. Non-conventionally indirect requests scored a degree of (10%) by means of strong hints. On the other side, the findings revealed that Non-Arts students were also more predisposed to be indirect in requesting the unfamiliar classmate, but the use of direct requests also increased a little bit. However, conventionally indirect strategies scored (75%) by means of query preparatory. Direct strategies got a degree of (10%) by means of mood derivable, (10%) by means of hedged performatives, and (5%) by means of want statements. Non-conventionally indirect strategies were not used in this situation by Non-Arts students.

Figure 3 showed that Arts students were disposed to use indirect strategies in requesting their close friends. Conventional indirect requests recorded (80%) by means of query preparatory. Direct requests scored (5%) by means of mood derivable, and (5%) by means of want statements. Non-conventional indirect strategies scored (10%) by means of strong hints. On the other hand, Non-Arts students were inclined to use direct and indirect strategies in making requests to their close friends. The use of direct requests in this situation was the highest. Thus, conventional indirect strategies recorded about (60%) by means of query preparatory. The level of directness, however, increased in this situation. Direct strategies scored a level of (25%) by means of mood derivable and (15%) by means of want statements.

9. Semantic Formulas

To answer the second research question: *What are the semantic formulas used by Yemeni doctoral students when they realize the speech act of request?* the researcher has analysed the results qualitatively by grouping each semantic formula together.

9.1 Samples of the requests strategies used by the two groups for the whole situations, with the most semantic formulas used.

The results obtained from students' responses indicated that the most semantic formulas used are (*request-reason; explanation-request; apology-request*). Students used various modifications to soften the intensity of requests in most situations. The most modifications frequently used by students are "politeness markers" such as using 'excuse me', 'please'; "Appreciation" such as 'I would be grateful'; "Address alerter" such as 'sir', 'dear', and 'brother'; "Small talk" as 'how are you, sir?'; "Conditional clause" as 'if you have

time', 'if you don't mind' 'if you have any notes'; "Greeting alerter" as 'hi', 'hey'; "Apology" as 'I am sorry', 'sorry for disturbing you'; "Sweetner" as 'you are very good at taking pictures', 'you better do it well'; "Softeners" as 'it is good to be in the same department'. Below are some sample responses of request strategies and modifications given by the two groups to all situations. Two examples are given for each situation.

9.1.1 Sample responses from situation one

Request

1. Excuse me sir, would you mind giving me a recommendation letter *because it is important for completing the scholarship requirements*

Explanation

2. Sir, I got a scholarship to study abroad, could you please give me a recommendation letter?

Reason

Request

9.2. Sample responses from situation two

Request

1. Could you give me a permission to leave *because I have an important work?*

Explanation

2. My friend invited me to attend his graduation function, can you give a permission for two hours to attend his graduation?

Reason

Request

9.1.3 Sample responses from situation three

Request

1. Can you tell me the directions to the exit *because it is the first time I travel to this place.*

Apology

Reason

2. Excuse me, *I want to go outside*, can you help me?

Request

Reason

9.1.4 Sample responses from situation four

Request

1. Brother, can you help me to proofread my thesis. *I want to benefit from your experience.*

Explanation

Request

2. *I have done my thesis*, can you get a copy of the thesis and read it?

Apology

Request

3. *Sorry for disturbing you*, I really want you to proofread my thesis.

9.1.5 Sample responses from situation five

Explanation

1. *I have urgent business on admission section.* Could you help me to do the admission process?

Apology

Request

2. *Excuse me*, I want you to help me do the admission process.

Request

Reason

4. Brother, can you help me to do the procedures of the admission *because it is the first time I came to this university*

9.1.6 Sample responses from situation six

Explanation

Request

This is a wonderful scene and I wish to have a picture in front of it, so please take a picture of me.

Explanation

Request

This is really very amazing place. Please take a picture of me.

Apology

Request

Excuse me brother, can you take a picture of me?

10. Results of the Multiple-Choice Questionnaire (MCQ)

Figure 3: Results of Multiple-Choice Questionnaire from both Arts and Non-Arts Students

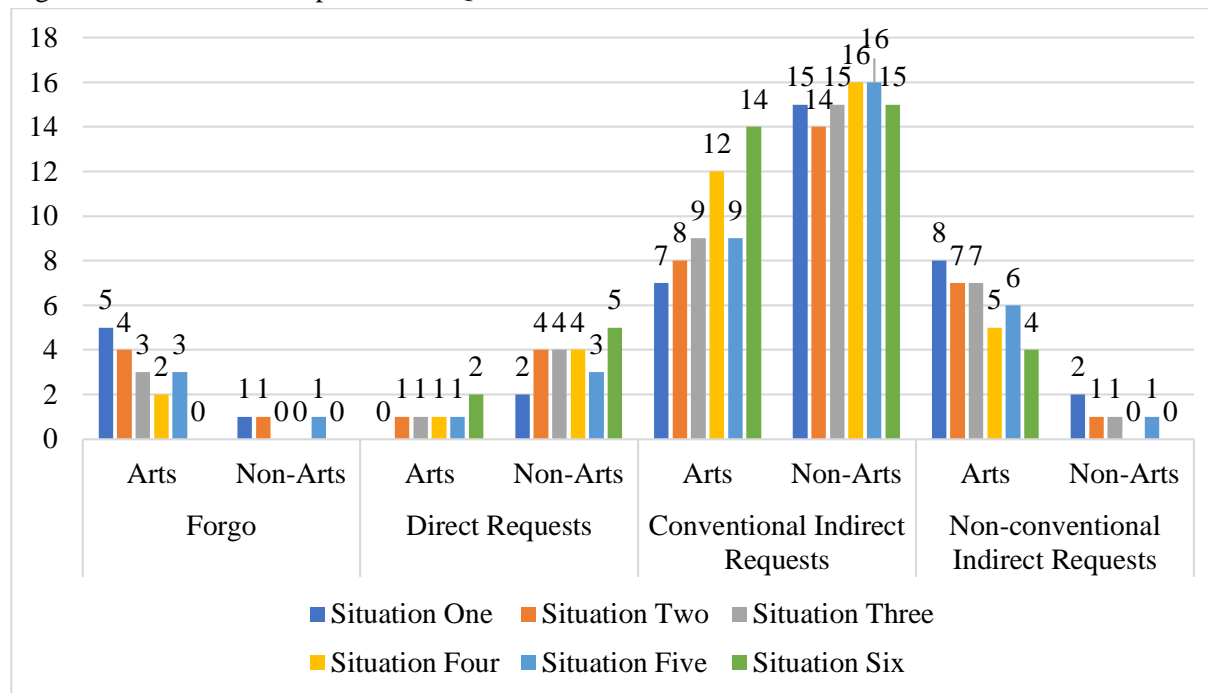


Figure 4 shows the results of the two groups obtained from the MCQ. The purpose of the MCQ was to compare the responses of the two groups to this questionnaire with their responses to the DCT. The results revealed that five Arts students' representing (25%) chose to opt out of making the request to the dean in the first situation. On the other hand, only one student of Non-Arts chose to refrain from making the request to the dean. In the second situation, four Arts students representing (20%) forwent making the request to the manager while only one Non-Arts student abstained to make the request to the same hearer. In the third situation, three Arts students representing about (15%) refrained from making the request to the gentleman. Non-Arts students did not forgo this situation. In the fourth situation, two Arts students representing about (10%) opted out of making the request to the senior scholar while no one of Non-Arts students forwent this situation. Finally, in the fifth situation, three Arts students abstained from making the request to the unfamiliar classmate, and only one student (5%) of Non-Arts abstained from making the request. No one of Arts and Non-Arts students refrained from making the request to the close friend in the sixth situation.

Direct requests were scarcely used in some situations by Arts students. In the first situation, no one of the Arts students chose direct requests with the dean. In the second situation, only one student representing (5%) chose direct request with the manager, one (5%) with the gentleman in the third situation, one (5%) with the senior scholar in the fourth situation, one (5%) with the unfamiliar friend in the fifth situation, and finally two (10%) with the close friend in the sixth situation. On the other hand, Non-Arts students maintained using direct requests in almost all situations. The students' choice of direct strategies with the dean in the first situation, for example, scored about (10%). The level of directness increased in some situations including low impressive hearers. As displayed in Figure 4 that Non-Arts students chose to use direct strategies in the second situation in about (20%), (20%) in the third situation with the gentleman, (20%) with the senior scholar in the

fourth situation. The choice of direct strategies decreased a little bit in the fifth situation with the unfamiliar classmate (15%), and increased again in the sixth situation (25%) with the close friend.

Arts students' choice of conventional indirect requests decreased in the MCQ in comparison with their responses in the DCT. However, Arts students chose conventional indirect strategies by a percentage of (35%) in the first situation with the dean, (40%) in the second situation with the manager, (45%) in the third situation with the gentleman, (60%) in the fourth situation senior scholar, (45%) in the fifth situation with the unfamiliar classmate, and (70%) in the sixth situation with the close friend. However, unlike Arts students, Non-Arts students consistently chose conventional indirect request strategies in all situations almost the same as in the DCT. They chose conventional indirect strategies in about (75%) with the dean in the first situation, (70%) with the manager, (75%) with the gentleman, (80%) with the senior scholar, (80%) with the unfamiliar classmate, and finally (75%) with the close friend.

Arts students chose to use non-conventionally indirect requests in all situations while Non-Arts students chose this type of request very little and in some situations. Arts students chose non-conventional indirect requests in about (40%) in the first situation, followed by (35%) in the second situation, (35%) in the third situation, (25%) in the fourth situation, (30%) in the fifth situation, and finally (20%) in the sixth situation. Non-conventionally indirect requests were not chosen in the sixth situation. On the other hand, Non-Arts students used non-conventional indirect strategies very little as displayed in Figure 3 that only two students representing (10%) chose this type of request with the dean in the first situation, followed by (5%) with the manager in the second situation, (5%) with the gentleman in the third situation and finally (5%) with the unfamiliar classmate in the fifth situation. Non-conventional indirect requests were not used in the fourth and sixth situations.

10. Findings

10.1 Findings of Discourse Completion Test

This section introduces the findings obtained from the DCT. The first situation showed that the speaker was in the position of having low power and high distance over the dean. The findings of the first situation indicated that the social power and the social distance of the dean had influenced Arts students' realization of the request act as direct requests were not used with the dean. All students were more predisposed to use conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect requests with the dean. Likewise, Non-Arts students favoured the use of conventionally indirect requests in addressing the dean, but they also used few direct strategies with this dominant hearer. It seems that some Non-Arts students were a little bit unaware of the dominance of the hearer. The second situation denoted that the speaker was in a position of low power and low distance over the manager. The findings of the second situation showed that Arts students were mindful of the power of the hearer, the manager. Therefore, they preferred to use conventional indirect strategies most in requesting the manager for a one-day leave. Though there was no distance between students and the manager, the power of the manager, however, had influenced Arts students' formation of requests. Thus, direct strategies were not used in this situation by Arts students. Instead, conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect requests were used. In the same way, the majority of Non-Arts students used conventional indirect requests in addressing the manager. Some students also used little direct requests with this impressive hearer, which denoted the inattention of students of the social power of the manager. It was observed that, while using direct strategies, Non-Arts students used some mitigating phrases in their requests to alleviate the intensity of the request directness such as "excuse me sir", "please", "how are you, sir?", and "I am sorry". They thought that adding such softeners would make the requests more polite.

The third situation indicated that the speaker was in a position of having equal power and high social distance with the gentleman. The findings of the third situation showed that social distance has an impact on Arts students' realization of requests. Arts students tended to use conventional indirect strategies but very few students used direct requests with the gentleman. Non-conventional indirect strategies were also used by students in addressing the gentleman. Correspondingly, the findings of the third situation revealed that Non-Arts students used conventional indirect requests largely with the gentleman. The level of directness increased

in the fourth situation onwards. As the hearer was not imposing, students used many direct requests with him. Non-conventional indirect strategies were not used in the fourth situation.

In the fourth situation, the speaker was in the position of having equal power and low distance over the hearer, i.e. the senior scholar. However, similar to the previous situations, the findings of the fourth situation exhibited that Arts students preferred to use conventional indirect requests in addressing the senior scholar to proofread their thesis. Direct and non-conventionally indirect requests were very little used in this situation. Consistently, Non-Arts students used more conventional indirect requests with the senior scholar. The results indicated that the degree of directness augmented in this situation. The power between the speakers and the hearer was equal; therefore, Non-Arts students used more direct requests with him.

In the fifth situation, the speaker was in a position of having high power and high distance with the unfamiliar classmate. However, the findings of this situation revealed that Arts students favoured the use of conventional indirect requests with people who were unfamiliar with them. The direct and non-conventional indirect requests were used a little bit. Though the interlocutor was not having power over the speakers, the social distance of the hearer seemed to influence Arts students' realization of the requests. On the other hand, the findings of the fifth situation displayed that Non-Arts students used conventional indirect request strategies with their unfamiliar classmates. The direct strategies used in this situation also increased slightly than the fourth situation. Non-Arts students overused direct strategies whenever the hearer was not impressive. Finally, the sixth situation denoted that the speaker was in a position of having high power and low distance over the hearer, i.e. the close friend. Thus, the findings of the sixth situation indicated that Arts students maintained using conventional indirect strategies with the close friend. In this situation, Arts students used few direct and non-conventional indirect requests. The Arts students used direct requests in this situation because the requestee was a close friend who had neither power nor distance effect on them. Similarly, the findings of the sixth situation revealed that Non-Arts students tended to be more conventionally indirect in addressing their close friend who had no power or distance over them. However, the direct strategies in the sixth situation were, similar to those of the fifth situation, highly used. This might indicate the effect of students' cultural background knowledge as requests to close and familiar friends in Yemeni Arabic were realized in a direct form and were also considered as a type of solidarity and closeness (Al-Marani & Sazalie, 2010a).

10.2 Findings of Multiple Choice Questionnaire

The findings obtained from the MCQ showed some contradictory results with that of the DCT. The results of the MCQ indicated that Arts students decided to forgo making requests in every situation, except the last one. In other words, due to the high power and distance of the addressee, for example with the dean in the first situation, Arts students preferred to opt-out of making the request. They never chose direct request strategies in the first situation. Similarly in the second situation, some Arts students perceived the high power of the manager; thus, they refrained from making the requests. Besides, due to the high distance of the gentleman, some Arts students also abstained from making the request. In the fourth situation, some students abstained from making requests to the senior scholar. Despite having equal power and low distance with the scholar, few Arts students refrained from requesting the scholar to proofread their theses. They perhaps preferred to ask someone else. In the fifth situation, few Arts students opted out of making the requests to the unfamiliar classmate. Because of the high distance of the new classmate, Non-Arts students refrained from asking for help. They probably preferred to do the job themselves or asked someone else. Nobody, however, abstained from making the requests in the last situation containing low distance and low power of the hearer. The hearer in the sixth situation, a close friend, was not threatening. Therefore, students did not forgo making the request. On the other hand, only one student of the Non-Arts group refrained from requesting the dean in the first situation, and another one in the second situation. No one opted out of making requests in the other situations. These results indicated that, unlike Arts students, Non-Arts students were not much aware of the social power and distance of other interlocutors. Similar to the results of the DCT, the results of the MCQ indicated that the Arts students did not choose direct requests with impressive and dominant hearer like the dean. Moreover, the choices of direct request strategies were very few in all other situations containing dominant hearers like the manager, gentleman, senior scholar and unfamiliar classmate. These results revealed

that Arts students were more aware of the social status of the interlocutors. On the other hand, Non-Arts students were a little bit consistent in using direct strategies in the MCQ. They chose direct strategies in the MCQ with every hearer. The level of directness decreased slightly in the MCQ. However, like the results of the DCT, Non-Arts students were found to use the same direct requests with every interlocutor. These results also indicated that the Non-Arts students were not mindful of the social power and distance of others. Such results might also refer to the interference of the learners' mother tongue as well as learners' low competence of pragmatics.

The results also showed that the Arts students' use of conventional indirect requests decreased somewhat in the MCQ if compared with their responses in the DCT, especially in the first, second, third and fifth situations because they contain dominant hearers. In other words, due to the high awareness of the hearer's social power and distance, Arts students tended either to refrain from making requests or to choose non-conventionally indirect strategies to be more polite which conversely decreased the level of choosing conventional indirect requests. On the other hand, the findings of the MCQ did not show much difference between Non-Arts students' responses to the DCT and the MCQ. Non-Arts students did neither opt out of many requests nor chose non-conventional indirect requests, therefore, their responses in choosing conventional indirect requests were almost identical with those of the DCT. Their consistency in using the same request strategies with every interlocutor without the ability to vary the use of appropriate requests strategies according to the social status of the interlocutor indicates the students' incompetence in socio-pragmatics. Further, using direct requests with dominant hearers might indicate the influence of the mother tongue.

Finally, unlike their responses in the DCT which revealed little use of non-conventional indirect strategies, Arts students were more aware of the dominance of the hearers in the MCQ and; therefore, they preferred the choice of non-conventional indirect requests in every situation. On the other hand, Non-Arts students' choices of non-conventional indirect strategies were very few as only two students chose this type of request in the first situation, one student in the second situation, one student in the third situation, and finally one student in the fifth situation.

11. Comparison with Previous Studies

The results of the present study converge with Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) CCSARP findings that conventional indirect strategies are the most strategies used in performing requests. The results are also in match with the results of Aribi (2012) who found that Tunisian students were disposed to use direct and conventional indirect strategies of requests. The results are also congruent with Aribi's who found the social power and social distance as influential on the realization of request strategies. Besides, the results of this study add support to Rose (1994) study as Yemeni Arts students used to forgo some requests in the MCQ. Further, the results of the present study are in line with the results of Umar's (2004) who found that learners of the two groups of his study (Arabic sample) and (British sample) tended to use conventional indirect strategies when addressing equal or high-status people. Besides, he found that the advanced Arabic group tended to use more direct strategies especially when a speaker has the power over the hearer while the English natives were more indirect. In this study, the Non-Arts have mostly performed more directly like Umar's (2004) Arabic native speakers group, and Arts performed indirectly almost similar to the British native speakers' group.

12. Implications of the Study

The present study is just a case study, and it cannot be generalized from it. The findings revealed that Arab doctoral students still use direct requests which are inappropriate in English contexts. However, while Arts students tended to use indirect strategies in almost all situations, Non-Arts students were inclined to use more direct strategies with different people. Non-Arts students may have been integrating their mother tongue's rules and apply them to the target language. The request act in Arabic can be realized in a direct form especially if the hearer is familiar or close friend. In contrast, the use of direct strategies in English contexts might be offensive to the hearer and may create communication problems. Thus, it is advised that syllabus

designers should integrate components of pragmatic competence into the EFL curricula. Teachers should involve students in role-play activities that entail making requests to different people with different power (high-equal-low) and distance (familiar-unfamiliar). Further, EFL teachers should raise their students' awareness of the cross-cultural differences between cultures.

13. Conclusion

The present study investigated the impact of social power and social distance on Yemeni students' realization of the English speech act of request. Two groups participated in the study: Arts and Non-Arts. The findings of the study obtained from the DCT indicated that the Arts students were more influenced by the social power and social distance of the hearers than Non-Arts students. Because of their awareness of the social position of the hearer, Arts students attempted to use various appropriate request strategies with every hearer according to their status. On the other hand, Non-Arts students used almost the same strategies with every hearer. The use of the same request strategies with every hearer without taking into consideration their social power and distance of the hearer indicates the incompetence of Non-Arts students in socio-pragmatics. The use of direct strategies with everyone can also be attributed to the effect of the mother tongue interference because requests in Arabic are mostly realized in a direct form, especially if the hearer is familiar.

Further, the findings obtained from the MCQ indicated that while Arts students opted out some requests and chose non-conventionally indirect requests with dominant hearers, Non-Arts students maintained choosing the same direct and conventional indirect requests used in the DCT with every hearer. These results also indicated that Arts students were more mindful of the social power and social distance of the interlocutor.

The findings of the study also revealed that conventional indirect request strategies were the most frequently used by the two groups. More exactly, while Arts students used direct requests very little familiar and unimpressive hearers, Non-Arts students were more inclined to use direct strategies even with dominant hearers. However, Non-Arts students seemed to be influenced by their linguistic and cultural background as requests can possibly be realized in a direct manner in Arabic (Al-Marani & Sazalie, 2010; Umar, 2004). Arts students, whose background is English, performed better in making appropriate requests than Non-Arts whose background is partly English.

Finally, Arts students used modifications with the head request more often than Non-Arts students who rarely used modifications. Regarding the semantic formulas most frequently used by Arts and Non-Arts students, three types were observed (request-reason; explanation-request; apology-request).

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