Verbosity and Politeness: External Mitigation of Request Speech Acts in Australian English and Iraqi Arabic

Mohammed Tahir Aldhulaee

ABSTRACT	Published Online: July 04, 2024
This paper examines external modifiers that Australian English native speakers and Iraqi Arabic native speakers use to soften the force of request speech acts in everyday situations. Request samples were collected by means of role-play interview and external devices employed to mitigate the request acts were identified and classified using a framework based on CCSARP model. The results showed that external mitigating devices were pervasive in requests from both groups. The two groups have also been found to use different semantic formulae of some mitigating devices in specific situations. The occurrence of external mitigators in both groups' requests is discussed in terms of verbosity as a politeness strategy. It is also suggested that the divergence between the two groups in their utilisation of request mitigations is related to cultural variations between the Australian and Iraqi cultures.	**KEYWORDS:** request speech acts; request mitigation; external modifiers; politeness; verbosity; cultural variation

INTRODUCTION

Politeness is crucial in social interactions for reducing the risk of confrontation, as noted by Lakoff (1989). It is a form of linguistic behavior, making it a significant area for linguistic analysis focused on the linguistic features and communicative strategies that achieve politeness (Lakoff and Ide, 2005). Research on politeness uses various data sources, including speech acts, conversations, text messages, and emails. Speech acts provide particularly valuable insights into polite behavior across different social settings and cultures. Studies have examined politeness in requests (Beal, 1990; EconomidouKogetsidis, 2008; Merrison et al., 2012), apologies (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Trosborg, 1995; Ohashi and Cohen, 2010), refusals (Cohen and Olshtain, 1981; Sifianou, 1999), and compliments (Herbert, 1989; Golato, 2002).

Requests have garnered significant attention in both interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics. This focus is due to several factors: first, requests are prevalent in everyday communication, providing abundant natural data on speech acts across various cultures and contexts; second, they have an explicit connection to politeness, as requests inherently involve a level of imposition on the addressee.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), requests are Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) that imply constraints or burdens on the addressee. Therefore, speakers must use politeness strategies to mitigate the potential imposition and maintain social harmony.

Among the politeness strategies that interlocutors may utilise to redress the imposition of their request speech acts is request modification. According to Reiter (2000), request modification encompasses the incorporation of peripheral elements that can be added to the main utterance of a request speech act to either mitigate or aggravate its pragmatic force. Request external modification involves the deliberate introduction of peripheral elements to the core structure of a request, thereby intricately shaping its politeness implications (Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984; Trosborg, 1995; Sifianou, 1999). This may include employing an explanation of the contextual circumstances surrounding the request, wherein the speaker provides reasons substantiating the necessity of the request. It may also involve expressions of regret for imposing upon the addressee or expressions of gratitude toward the addressee for their anticipated compliance with the request.

Within the domain of cross-cultural pragmatics, there is a paucity of research examining request modifications across diverse languages and cultures. Most prior investigations into request modifications have been situated within the realm of interlanguage pragmatics. These studies primarily focus on the utilisation of request modifications by second language (L2) learners in comparison to the usage patterns exhibited by

native speakers of the target language (e.g., Trosborg, 1995; Beal, 1998; Hassall, 2001; and Kanchina and Deepadung, 2019). The examination of linguistic patterns and devices employed in executing the speech act of request across various languages necessitates heightened consideration from scholars engaged in the domain of cross-cultural pragmatics. Such attention is imperative to glean valuable insights into the impact of the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of interlocutors on their approach to politeness within routine interpersonal interactions.

As a step to achieve the above goal, this study attempts to explore the usage of external modifications to mitigate request speech acts in Australian English and Iraqi Arabic. It delves into external devices employed by speakers of these two languages to diminish the imposition force inherent in requests, examining the influence of linguistic and cultural parameters on their application. It scrutinizes the quantity and quality of external modifiers that subjects from both groups employed to enhance the politeness level of their requests. Due to paucity of empirical examination of request modifications in Iraqi Arabic in direct comparison to those in Australian English, this study seeks to contribute a comparative analysis of request patterns from both languages to the empirical domain of cross-cultural pragmatic research on the speech act of requests. The present study posits the following inquiries for examination:

1. What external mitigating devices do Iraqi Arabic native speakers (IANSs) and Australian English native speakers (AENSs) employ in their everyday requests?

2. Are there any quantitative and/or qualitative differences between the two groups in their utilisation of these devices?

3. How do the contextual characteristics of the situations in which requests occur influence the utilisation of external mitigations by the two participant groups?

The subsequent sections of this paper begin with a literature review to establish a contextual framework for the study. This is followed by an explanation of the research methods used to fulfill the study's objectives. The findings from the data analysis are then presented, leading into a discussion of these results. The paper concludes with a summary of the findings and a discussion of their potential implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brown and Levinson (1987) categorize requests as Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) because they impose on the hearer's freedom of action, threatening their negative face (their desire to be free of imposition). Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008) adds that requests can also harm the hearer's positive face (their desire for approval), indicating the speaker's disregard for their feelings. In their politeness theory, Brown and Levinson propose four strategies for making requests:

1. *On record*, the speaker expresses his/her request baldly without any redress.
2. *Positive politeness,* the speaker can save the hearer's positive face through preserving his/her desire to be approved.
3. *Negative politeness,* the speaker can redress the imposition on the addressee's freedom.
4. *Off record,* the speaker uses an ambiguous utterance (hint) and depends on the hearer's interpretation.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), individuals commonly employ indirect request strategies to enhance the politeness level of their requests, contingent upon three social variables: social power, social distance, and the degree of imposition. While Brown and Levinson's framework regarding politeness strategies and the association between indirectness and politeness has been proposed as universal, its application in cross-cultural investigations has yielded contentious findings. The equation of politeness with indirectness, alongside the perception of pragmatic clarity and directness as posing threats to one's social face, underscores the ethnocentric character inherent in Brown and Levinson's theoretical framework (Ogiermann, 2009).

Post-modern theorists, including Watts (2003), Terkourafi (2005), and Locher (2006), argue against the notion that politeness can be evaluated in isolated utterances, thus rejecting the concept of any speech act being inherently face-threatening. They advocate for the examination of politeness phenomena within broader stretches of discourse. For instance, to draw robust conclusions regarding the politeness or impoliteness of request speech acts in specific contexts, researchers must analyse the entirety of the discourse in which the request occurs, as well as consider the contextual variables of the situations in which these requests are made. Consequently, recent studies within the realms of cross-cultural pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics have increasingly focused on analysing the discourse surrounding target speech acts, such as request modifications.

Request modifiers can be defined as the peripheral elements that can be added to the request head act (the main utterance that conveys the requesting act) to either mitigate or aggravate its pragmatic force (Reiter, 2000). Trosborg (1995) highlights that the utilisation of request modifiers constitutes an additional mechanism through which the requester can soften or increase the forcefulness of their requests alongside selecting the level of directness. House and Kasper (1981) categorize request modifiers into "downgraders" and "upgraders" (p. 166). Downgraders encompass all linguistic devices employed to soften or mitigate the illocutionary force of the request, whereas upgraders encompass those devices that heighten or intensify the force of the request. Scholars investigating downgraders (Blum-kulka et al., 1989; Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984; Trosborg, 1995; Sifianou, 1999) differentiate between

internal and external downgraders based on their location within the request utterance. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984, p. 201) delineate external downgraders, the focal point of the present study, as supportive moves situated "not within the 'Head act' but within its immediate context". These devices are further categorized according to their function within the request utterance. They play a crucial role in enhancing the politeness of request acts (Blum-Kulka, 2005). This enhancement is achieved by providing justifications and explanations that appeal to the hearer "as a rational agent in need of persuasion as required by the principle of the independence tenet of negative politeness" (Blum-Kulka, 2005, p. 267).

The investigation into external request mitigation and its function in augmenting the level of politeness inherent in requesting acts has been the subject of some previous scholarly inquiries within the field of cross-cultural pragmatics. These studies have collectively sought to elucidate the array of linguistic strategies employed by individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to temper the forcefulness of requests. Several cross-cultural investigations have highlighted that linguistic and cultural variation across cultures contribute to divergent manifestations of request strategies, encompassing variations in the frequency and types of modification devices employed. For instance, House and Kasper (1981) conducted an inquiry into the utilisation of request modifications in both English and German contexts. Their investigation revealed that English speakers exhibited a greater propensity for employing external mitigating devices compared to their German counterparts. Nonetheless, they found that the *grounder*, classified as one of the external downgraders, was prevalent in requests across both languages. In their analysis of these findings, House and Kasper ascribe the preference of German speakers for employing more direct request strategies and fewer downgraders to the fundamental differences in cultural frameworks between German-speaking and English-speaking communities. They posit that behaviours considered impolite in contexts external to the German cultural milieu might be deemed appropriate within the cultural norms and expectations of the German cultural system.

Reiter (2000) investigated the expression of requests within the linguistic contexts of British English and Uruguayan Spanish. Her research revealed comparable frequencies of external modification devices, notably the *grounder*, in requests from both language groups. The author posits that the employment of rationales or grounders can be construed as a cooperative mechanism aimed at fostering harmonious interpersonal exchanges. By providing reasons, the speaker anticipates that the addressee will demonstrate enhanced understanding and a greater propensity for cooperation (Reiter, 2000, p. 129). Similarly, in her study of request strategies utilised by British English native speakers and

Japanese native speakers, Fukushima (1996) found that participants from both cultural backgrounds exhibited a higher incidence of employing external mitigating devices in situations of elevated request imposition. However, it was observed that British participants tended to utilise these devices, particularly *grounder*, more frequently than their Japanese counterparts. Fukushima attributed this discrepancy to the disparate socio-cultural values prevalent in the respective cultures. Within Japanese culture, solidarity among ingroup members holds significant importance, consequently leading to requests implying closeness and necessitating less elaborate mitigation, especially when directed towards in-group members.

Previous research on requests within Australian cultural norms (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Beal, 1990, 1998; Merrison et al., 2012) underscores the influence of egalitarianism and individualistic cultural orientations on the behavioral patterns of Australian participants. These studies suggest a predilection among Australians to uphold both positive and negative face needs of the addressee through the employment of indirect request strategies, often augmented with various mitigating devices. BlumKulka et al. (1989), in their seminal Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP), delineated the prevalence of indirectness in Australian participants' requests, characterized by the frequent use of conventional indirect strategies and linguistic downgraders aimed at mitigating the imposition of requests. Likewise, Beal (1990), in her examination of request speech acts among native speakers of French and Australian English, corroborated the inclination of Australian speakers towards indirectness and negative politeness strategies, which serve to minimize potential threats to the addressee's autonomy and privacy. Merrison et al. (2012) further documented the proclivity of Australian participants to employ external modification devices in their request emails directed towards academic faculty, indicative of an interdependent egalitarian ethos. These external modifiers, encompassing expressions of closeness, well-wishes, and references to shared personal experiences, serve to foster a sense of social equality and mitigate hierarchical differentials within the academic context. Additionally, participants utilise other rhetorical strategies such as but-justifications and accounts to assert a professional identity and competence within the institutional framework.

The investigation of request speech acts in Arabic, with a particular focus on request modifications, has been relatively limited within the realm of cross-cultural pragmatics. Comparative studies examining request patterns in Arabic in relation to other languages are notably scarce. In his work, Al-Gahtani (2017) undertook an examination of the sequence organization of requests in Saudi Arabic and Australian English. He observed commonalities in the sequence organization of requests between the two languages, particularly noting the utilisation of pre-expansions and

multiple pre-expansions serving as mitigation strategies by providing accounts, such as explanations and reasons, for the request acts. However, unlike Australian English native speakers, Saudi participants frequently provided accounts after the articulation of requests. Al-Gahtani attributed this difference to the inclination of Saudi participants to attenuate the illocutionary force of their direct requests, as opposed to the often-indirect requests of Australian participants.

In the domain of interlanguage pragmatics, Abdul Sattar, Lah, and Suleiman (2009) investigated the realization of requests among ten Iraqi non-native English speakers enrolled at Universiti Sains Malaysia. They observed variability in both the frequency and content of request patterns and strategies employed by the participants. The subjects commonly utilised external mitigating devices such as grounder, apology, compliment, sweetener, and expression of gratitude. The authors noted that the structure of request formulations among Iraqi non-native English speakers was influenced by sociolinguistic norms prevalent in Iraqi culture. It was suggested that Iraqi participants may lack familiarity with the social and situational conventions governing request expression in English-speaking communities. Similarly, Roever and Al-Gahtani (2015) explored the usage of multiple requests in conversations in Arabic as a second language. Their findings revealed two distinct types of multiple requests: those delivered within a single turn and those spread across multiple turns. In instances of same-turn multiple request sequences, the initial request was often followed by a rationale to mitigate its directness. Sometimes, the initial request was indirectly and politely reiterated immediately after its initial expression. The researchers highlighted that participants' inclination towards mitigating the imposition of requests and enhancing their politeness level motivated the use of rationales and repeated requests within the same turn.

Previous research on request speech acts in Arabic cultures, primarily focused on Arab learners of English, explored request formulae, strategies, and the influence of sociocultural factors on directness and indirectness. However, there is limited understanding of request patterns and mitigation strategies in Arabic compared to other languages. This study aims to investigate request mitigation strategies in Iraqi Arabic and Australian English, specifically focusing on external devices employed to diminish the imposition force of requests and elevate their politeness quotient. Scant literature has undertaken a comparative analysis of request modifications between Iraqi Arabic and Australian English; thus, this research aims to fill this gap and contribute to empirical linguistic and cultural studies on politeness across cultures.

METHODOLOGY
Data collection
Two cohorts of participants were engaged in the investigation. In the pursuit of congruent responses, I endeavoured to assemble two nearly identical groups characterized by similar demographic attributes, notably age, gender, and educational attainment. The first cohort comprised fourteen Iraqi Arabic native speakers (IANSs), consisting of seven females and seven males who had been living in Australia for a duration of 3-4 years. These individuals were all within the age range of 25 to 35 years and were pursuing postgraduate studies at the university level. The second cohort consisted of fourteen Australian English native speakers (AENSs), also comprising seven females and seven males, aged between 20 and 35 years, and encompassing both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The method employed for data collection encompassed the utilisation of role play interviews, wherein participants were tasked with responding to hypothetical scenarios without engaging in actual enactment. The rationale underpinning the selection of this technique is rooted in its comparative advantages over alternative data collection methods. The role play interview methodology facilitates the elicitation of spontaneous instances of request speech acts within controlled situations, enabling the examination of the linguistic formulae and strategic manoeuvres employed by participants in real-life contexts. Furthermore, it overcomes the constraints inherent in ethnographic methodologies and written completion tasks. Ethnographic approaches, such as observational techniques, encounter challenges in controlling the occurrence of speech acts and the influence of associated social variables in real-life situations (Cohen, 1995). Similarly, the utilisation of written Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) suffers from limitations in capturing authentic oral data due to the inherent constraints associated with written expression (Olshtain and Blum-Kulka, 1985).

The role-play interviews were conducted utilising the participants' respective native language, namely Australian English or Iraqi Arabic. Each scenario was presented audibly by the researcher, prompting participants to mentally envision the situation and provide responses reflective of their anticipated reallife reactions. Audio recordings were made of participants' responses. Eight distinct scenarios were strategically crafted to encompass various social dynamics, including power differentials, social proximity, and degree of imposition. These scenarios were structured as follows:

1. A student seeks to borrow lecture notes from a classmate after missing a lecture.
2. A younger brother is requested by an older sibling to buy coffee from nearby shops.
3. A student requests a textbook loan from their lecturer.
4. A student seeks financial assistance from a friend to purchase books.
5. A bus passenger solicits assistance from a stranger to open a window.
6. A taxi passenger requests the driver to reduce speed.

7. A roommate implores their cohabitant to tidy the shared living space.
8. A customer in a café asks the waiter/waitress for two cups of coffee.

Data analysis

A total of 224 requests were collected from participants representing both Australian and Iraqi demographics. The total word count across all requests amounted to 2866 words. The length of individual request utterances ranged from succinct expressions containing as few as 4 words to more extensive ones extending up to 60 words. Notably, certain requests were succinctly formulated within a single clause, primarily conveying the request head act, whereas others were more complex, incorporating up to 7 clauses and incorporating additional contextual modifications surrounding the primary request head act. Transliteration of Arabic requests gathered from Iraqi participants into English was facilitated utilising the ALA-LC system as delineated by Barry (1997).

The analytical framework utilised for data analysis was primarily based on the CCSARP model proposed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), as presented in Table 1. In order to effectively address the complexities inherent in the collected data, this framework underwent expansion through the inclusion of supplementary categories derived from existing literature, alongside the introduction of one novel category conceived within the context of this research endeavor. Noteworthy among the incorporated categories from extant scholarly works are *alerter* (Schauer, 2007), *apology* (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008), and *closing* (Al-Ali and Alawneh, 2010). Additionally, a novel category termed *verbal incentive* was introduced to fulfill the analytical requirements of the data under scrutiny in this investigation.

Table 1: The analytical framework utilised in this investigation.

Category	Definition	Examples
Alerter	Attracting attention	Excuse me, hey, sir, hi, David
Preparators	Preparing speech act	There is something I want you to do for me.
	Checking availability	Are you free now?
	Getting pre-commitment	Can you do me a favour?
Grounder	Providing reasons, explanations, justifications	I was sick last class and could not attend. Can I borrow your notes?
Imposition minimizers	Reducing the imposition of request.	Could you lend me some money? I'll pay you back tomorrow.
Verbal incentive	Expressing appreciation or supplication	I would really appreciate it if you can lend me some money.
Promise of reward	Announcing reward	Can you clean the room today and I can clean it twice in a row if you like later on. .
Apology	Apologising	I'm very sorry but I want to borrow your book for a short time.
Closing	Appreciating and/or thanking the addressee	Can you bring us two cups of coffee? Thank you.

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software facilitated the determination of both the aggregate frequency of each external device within the datasets of each group and its occurrence across the eight scenarios. Employing the T-test, discrepancies in device frequency between the two groups were identified. The significance of these differences was evaluated through the calculation of the associated P-value. A P-value below 0.005 indicated a significant distinction between the groups, while a P-value exceeding 0.005 signified insignificance.

RESULTS

The findings of the data analysis indicate that Australian and Iraqi participants employed external modifiers in most of their requests. The overall frequency of these devices reveals that both cohorts utilised one or more of these devices in the majority of their requests. As delineated in Table 2, these devices were evident in 95% of Australian requests and 91% of Iraqi requests. Statistical analysis yielded a non-significant difference in the overall occurrence rate of these devices between the two groups, with a calculated P-value of 0.038. Nevertheless, some external modifiers were more dominant in both groups' corpora across all situations. Also, qualitative disparity between the two groups was discernible in the nuanced utilisation of linguistic expressions for performing request mitigation and the contextual circumstances under which the external modifiers were predominantly employed.

Table 2: Frequency of external mitigating devices (%)

CATEGORY	SITUATIONS										
	Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total	P-value
Alerter	AENSs	86	36	50	93	86	50	50	57	63	
	IANSs	57	50	93	93	57	29	64	36	60	0.279
Preparator	AENSs	0	29	0	14	0	0	21	0	8	
	IANSs	0	0	0	7	0	0	7	0	2	0.000
Grounder	AENSs	100	50	100	79	64	79	86	0	70	
	IANSs	71	64	86	93	57	79	93	0	70	0.567
Imposition minimizer	AENSs	14	21	50	79	7	7	7	7	24	
	IANSs	57	0	36	64	57	14	14	36	35	0.001
Promise of reward	AENSs	21	14	0	0	0	0	93	0	16	
	IANSs	0	0	0	0	0	0	57	0	7	0.000
Apology	AENSs	21	0	7	0	14	29	36	0	13	
	IANSs	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.000
Verbal incentive	AENSs	0	7	0	0	7	0	7	0	3	
	IANSs	0	7	0	7	0	14	0	0	4	0.445
Closing	AENSs	21	21	7	21	14	21	14	21	18	
	IANSs	0	0	14	7	0	14	14	0	6	0.000
Combination of devices	AENSs	93	57	71	100	64	71	93	14	70	
	IANSs	64	29	100	100	57	43	93	7	62	0.006
All devices	AENSs	100	86	100	100	100	100	100	71	95	
	IANSs	93	93	100	100	93	93	100	57	91	0.038

The most prevalent external mitigating devices, namely grounder and alerter, were used with similar frequency across both participant groups. Grounder appeared in 70% of utterances in both the Australian (78 instances) and Iraqi (76 instances) corpora, except in situation 8 (requesting coffee from a waiter). It was most common in situation 3 (student borrowing a book from a lecturer), followed by situations 1 (student borrowing lecture notes) and 4 (student seeking financial help from a friend). Examples 1 and 2 from situation 3 show how grounders, placed before or after request head acts, provide rationales, justifications, and explanations for the requests.

Example 1

Hi, I'm sorry. I'm not able to get a copy of this book. I have tried the library. I'm wondering if it's possible for me to actually borrow your copy.

Example 2

ممكن ,بسبب حاجتي له ونفاذ النسخ في المكتبة؟لو سمحت أستاذ أستعارة الكتاب

law samaḥt istadh, mumkin ist'arat alkitab bisbab hajati lahu wanafadh alnisakh fi almktaba?

Excuse me professor, is it possible to borrow your book because I need it urgently and there are no copies left in the library?

Both groups frequently used alerters in their requests, but there were notable differences in their linguistic forms and contexts of use. AENSs regularly began requests with 'excuse me', often adding a first name or title (e.g., example 3). In contrast, IANSs' use of alerters varied with context. They used first names when social distance was small (situations 2, 4, and 7), the honorific أستاذ'istadh' (professor) in situation 3, and fictive kinship terms like خوية 'khwya' (brother) and أختي'ukhti' (sister) in more distant social contexts (situations 1, 5, 6, and 8). Example 4 from situation 5 illustrates this pattern.

Example 3

Excuse me sir, would you mind opening the window, please?

Example 4

.أفتح الجامة شوية ,بدون زحمة عليك ,خوية

Khuya, bedun zehma alaik, eftah eljamah shewaya.

Brother, without pressure on you, open the window a little bit.

The two groups differed in their use of other external downgraders. Imposition minimizers were more prevalent in the requests of IANSs compared to those of AENSs. IANSs frequently used these devices across most contexts, including high social distance scenarios. In contrast, AENSs mainly used these devices in high-imposition scenarios (situations 2, 3, and 4, see example 5). While both groups employed minimizers to reduce the tangible costs of requests (time, effort, possessions), IANSs also used them to lessen moral costs, protecting the requestee's negative or positive face, as shown in example 6.

Example 5

I'm just wondering if I could borrow some money of you and <u>I'll be able to pay you back as soon as possible</u>.

Example 6

<div dir="rtl">عليك زحمه <u>بلا</u> يدخل؟ الهوى مود على شوية النافذة تفتح ممكن</div>

bala zahma 'alyk mumkin tftaḥ alnafdha shwaya 'lamud alhawa ydkhil?

<u>Without any pressure on you</u>, is it possible to open the window a little bit in order to get some fresh air?

Preparators were used four times more often in AENSs' requests than in IANSs'. AENSs used them mainly in high-imposition situations (e.g., 2 and 4), while IANSs used them in situations 4 and 7, but not in situation 2, which involved closer social distance. AENSs employed three types: preparing the speech act, checking availability, and obtaining a pre-commitment, whereas IANSs used only the first type (see examples 7 and 8).

Example 7

<u>Are you doing anything at the moment</u>? Could you just go down to the shop and get some coffee for me?

Example 8

<div dir="rtl">ادج ةلوغشم ً. ؟ينع ً لادب فيظنتلاب يموقت نأ كِ ناكماب لهف <u>أريد أطلب منك شيء</u>.انأ مويلا اذه</div>

aryd aṭlub minak shy. Hadha alyum ana mshghula jdan. Fahal bimkanik an taqumy biltanẓif badlan 'any?

<u>I want to ask you something</u>. Today I'm very busy. Are you able to do the cleaning instead of me?

AENSs utilised the promise of reward strategy over twice as often as IANSs. AENSs applied this strategy in scenarios 1, 2, and 7 (refer to example 9), whereas IANSs restricted its use to scenario 7 (asking a roommate to clean the room), perceiving it as having a significant level of imposition (refer to example 10).

Example 9

Can you please clean the room today? <u>I'll do it next when it's your turn</u>.

Example 10

<div dir="rtl"><u>اللفبس</u> شاء أن وأنا ف أنظ العليك الدور.</div>
<div dir="rtl">الغرفة اليوم نظف</div>

Fabas nadhif aluwm alghurfa w'ana insha Allah aldwr il'alyk anadhif.

Just clean the room today and <u>I'll clean instead of you when it is your turn by Allah willing</u>.

AENSs used apologies more frequently in their requests compared to IANSs. AENSs predominantly apologized in situations with high imposition or significant social distance, such as borrowing lecture notes from a classmate, asking a roommate to clean the room, or requesting a taxi driver to slow down (see example 11). IANSs, however, utilised apologies solely in situation 3 (borrowing a lecturer's book),

which entails a significant level of the social dimensions of power, distance, and imposition (refer to example 12).

Example 11

<u>I'm really sorry</u> that I haven't cleaned today. I still have lot assignments to do. Is it OK if you could do it now?

Example 12

<div dir="rtl">النسخة تنطيني أن فأرجو المكتبة من نفذت النسخ لأن.</div>
<div dir="rtl"><u>،أستاذ العفو المعذرة مالتكأرجو</u></div>

Al'afw istadh, arjw alm'adhra li'an alnisakh nifdhat min almaktaba fa'rju an tnṭyny alniskha maltak.

Excuse me professor, <u>I'm sorry</u> because all copies in the library were booked out. I hope that you give me your copy.

Verbal incentives were rarely used in the corpus. Both groups employed them in high-imposition scenarios (e.g., asking a younger sibling to buy coffee) or with socially distant interlocutors (e.g., asking a taxi driver to slow down). However, AENSs expressed appreciation like 'it's really appreciated', while IANSs used both appreciation and supplication, such as <div dir="rtl">رحم الله والدي ك</div>'raham Allah waledaik' (May God bless your parents).

Example 13

Hey, I was wondering if you can go shopping because if you are, <u>it's really really appreciated</u> to get some coffee for me. I'm almost falling sleepy, thanks.

Example 14 <div dir="rtl">عدنا ترى</div>
<div dir="rtl">شوية بالوضعية وتدري وهاي أطفال</div>
<div dir="rtl">لوالديك رحمه .السرعة خفف</div>

Rahma lwaldyk tara 'idna atfal whay watdry bilwaḍi'ya shwaya khafif alsr'a.

<u>May God bless your parents</u>, we have kids and, you know, our circumstances are difficult. Slow down a little.

The use of closing, the fourth most frequent external modifier, varied notably between Australians and Iraqis. Australians employed it in all situations, whereas Iraqis used it predominantly in situations of high-power, social distance, or increased imposition. Additionally, their closing expressions differed: Australians typically ended with 'thanks' or 'thank you', while Iraqis often used expressions of gratefulness or supplication like <div dir="rtl">رحم الله والديك</div>'raham Allah waledaik' (May God bless your parents) (examples 15 and 16).

Example 15

Excuse me, can we please get two cups of coffee over here? <u>Thanks</u>.

Example 16

<div dir="rtl">تعيرني أن دكتور زحمة بلا منك أطلب <u>ألكفانا ممنون وأكون</u>.</div>
<div dir="rtl">عندك اللي النسخة</div>

fa'ana aṭlub minak bla zaḥma dktwr an tu'yrani alniskha aly i'ndak <u>wa'akwn mamnun ilak</u>.

> I ask you, without any pressure Dr, that you lend me your copy and I'll be very grateful.

Both AENSs and IANSs utilised various combinations of external devices in their requests. These combinations were more commonly employed in scenarios marked by higher social power, such as scenario 3; greater social distance, observed in scenarios 1 and 6; or a heightened level of imposition, as the case in scenario 4 (see examples 13 and 14 above).

DISCUSSION

This study reveals that Australian and Iraqi participants extensively employed external mitigating devices in their requests. Both groups used these devices as politeness strategies to reduce potential facethreatening impacts, aligning with findings from previous studies (House and Kasper, 1981; Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Trosborg, 1995; Beal, 1998; Reiter, 2000; EconomidouKogetsidis, 2009). However, notable differences emerged: Australians and Iraqis selected different linguistic forms for some external modifiers and varied in how frequently they used them in specific situations. These variations can be attributed to cultural differences between the groups. Additionally, the frequent use of external downgraders observed in this study may be linked to 'verbosity', where longer, more elaborate requests are used to enhance the positive reception of the request act (cf. BlumKulka and Olshtain, 1984).

Verbosity as a politeness strategy

Both groups commonly used external mitigating devices in their requests, with alerters and grounders being the most prevalent. The frequent use of alerters and grounders underscores their significance as fundamental elements in request formation. According to Schauer (2007, p. 204), alerters and grounders are crucial for obtaining the listener's attention and providing justification for the request. The preference for initiating requests with alerters, which also function as markers of politeness, highlights their dual role. Specific alerters like 'excuse me' and the title أستا ذ'*istadh*' (professor) serve not only to capture attention but also to preserve the listener's social standing. The alerter 'excuse me', which appeared more often in requests from AENSs, acts as a negative politeness strategy by indicating the speaker's awareness of the imposition. Conversely, the use of أستاذ'*istadh*' by all IANSs in situation 3 represents a positive politeness strategy, reflecting respect for the addressee's academic and social status.

Both AENSs and IANSs frequently incorporate grounders within their request acts to provide reasons and justifications. Prior studies (Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Reiter, 2000; Hassall, 2001; Trosborg, 1995; Schauer, 2007) have identified grounders as the most common external mitigating device in crosscultural examinations of request modifications. Hassall

(2001) specifically highlights grounders as the primary type of external modifier across various languages. The prominence of grounders appears to stem from their function in facilitating the requester's attempt to gain cooperation while minimizing the threat to the hearer's face. By including justifications, explanations, or reasons in the main request, the requester can encourage the hearer's cooperation by elucidating the circumstances necessitating the request. Faerch and Kasper (1989, p. 239) emphasise that grounders serve as effective mitigating strategies because they foster "an empathetic attitude from the interlocutor by revealing the underlying motives of the requester". Consequently, grounders can be employed as strategies of both negative and positive politeness. Brown and Levinson (1978) argue that providing rationales or reasons for a request conveys positive politeness by assuming the hearer will be inclined to assist once the necessity is understood, while simultaneously conveying negative politeness by showing the requester acknowledges the imposition and justifies it. This dual function of grounders as both positive and negative politeness strategies likely accounts for their widespread use among AENSs and IANSs.

The extensive utilisation of external mitigations in the requests made by both groups can be attributed to the concept of verbosity as a politeness strategy. According to Sifianou (2013), verbosity reflects the degree of politeness required in a given context. Some researchers use the term 'volubility' to describe this phenomenon. Blum-Kulka (2005) characterizes volubility as the deployment of additional verbal effort to enhance the politeness level when performing a speech act. Scollon and Scollon (2001) regard volubility as a politeness strategy that denotes involvement and affiliation in social interactions. Both AENSs and IANSs tend to make relatively lengthy requests, particularly in scenarios with heightened power dynamics, social distance, and/or imposition, as illustrated by the following examples from situation 7, where a person asks a roommate to clean the room due to their own lack of time.

> **AENS**: *I hate to ask this, but would you mind just cleaning the room today because I do have some assignments that are due and I will repay the favour and I'll do the cleaning twice in a row for next week.*
>
> **IANS:** اليوم تنظف الغرفة لأن أنا مشغول ,بدون زحمة عليك خوية وباجر تنظيف الغرفة وعكبة علية
>
> *bdun zahma alayk khwya, ilywm tnaẓif alghurfa li'an ana mashghwl wabachr tanẓif alghurfa wa'ugba alaya.*
>
> If it doesn't cause any pressure on you brother, today you clean the room because I'm busy, and tomorrow and the day after I'll do the cleaning.

As illustrated in the examples above, participants from both groups utilised a greater number of words by incorporating multiple external mitigation devices in their request

utterances. In the first example, the Australian participant employed a preparatory statement – 'I hate to ask this', provided a rationale – 'because I have some assignments that are due', and offered a promise of reward – 'I will repay the favour and I'll do the cleaning twice in a row for next week'. Similarly, in the second example, the Iraqi participant used an imposition minimizer – 'bdun zahma alayk' (If it doesn't cause any pressure on you), provided a rationale – 'li'an ana mashghwl' (because I'm busy), and also made a promise of reward –

'wabachr tanẓif alghurfa wa'ugba alaya' (tomorrow and the day after I'll do the cleaning). Such extensive verbal strategies may indicate the speaker's recognition of the hearer's positive face and can diminish the burden imposed by the request. Consequently, request utterances that include one or more external mitigations are more likely to secure the requestee's cooperation compared to a simple request head act. Faerch and Kasper (1989) attribute the effectiveness of external mitigations to their ability to divert attention from the illocutionary force of the request head act, thereby reducing the negative psychological impact associated with it. These pragmatic advantages likely explain the tendency of both Australian and Iraqi participants to extensively use these devices to soften their requests. Nonetheless, there were notable qualitative differences between the two groups regarding the linguistic strategies used for certain mitigating devices and the situational contexts in which external modifiers were primarily employed. These distinctions can be explained by the cultural differences between the two cohorts.

Cultural variation

The variance in the use of request mitigating strategies between AENSs and IANSs in some situations likely arises from differences in their sociocultural frameworks. AENSs frequently employ external mitigations across various contexts, influenced by the Australian cultural emphasis on individualism and egalitarianism. Australian culture prioritises personal independence over group objectives and desires (Winter, 2002), and values egalitarianism, where each individual is seen as autonomous and deserving freedom from imposition. This leads Australians to respect privacy and protect the negative face—the desire to avoid imposition—of their interlocutors. In individualistic cultures like Australia, negative face is prioritised to project confidence and independence (Ting-Toomey, 1988). Beal (1990) notes that AENSs typically use negative politeness strategies to reduce threats to the hearer's face. Swangboonsatic (2006) further observes that Australians tend to be cautious and make efforts to preserve each other's privacy in request exchanges. Consequently, AENSs frequently use external downgraders even with addressees of lower social power or close social distance, reflecting their general tendency to protect the negative face of others.

Australian participants also employ external mitigating strategies to protect their own face when making requests. This inclination is rooted in the desire to mitigate potential rejection by presenting requests tentatively. According to Beal (1998), Australians tend to adopt tactics that minimise threats to their own face, opting for subtle permission-seeking rather than direct asking. One common technique they use is the 'preparator', where the request is preceded by a query about the hearer's availability or willingness to fulfill it. This approach, exemplified by phrases like 'Are you doing anything at the moment? Could you just go down to the shop?' serves to gauge the hearer's cooperation before making the actual request. By employing the preparator, Australians create a space for the hearer to decline without causing offense to either party, thereby maintaining social harmony and preserving relationships.

Conversely, Iraqi culture is characterized by hierarchical relationships and reciprocal obligations, which are key aspects of social interaction, as seen in many collectivist Arabic cultures (Buda and ElsayedElkhouly, 1998). These dynamics are prevalent in both institutional and familial contexts, where individuals must show respect and obedience to superiors, parents, or elder siblings. Requests to higherstatus individuals must be mitigated and justified, reflecting the significant psychological burden described by Abdul Sattar et al. (2009, p. 64). On the contrary, requests made by higher-status individuals to those of lower status, such as students or younger siblings, tend to be more direct and less softened, as illustrated in examples from situations 2 and 8 where the requestee is either a younger brother or an attendant in a café.

Social distance significantly affects how Iraqis use request mitigations, especially when the requester and requestee have equal social power. In requests to friends or family, Iraqis expect cooperation based on moral obligations, leading to fewer external downgraders compared to Australian participants. The collectivist nature of Iraqi culture, characterized by a strong sense of mutual obligation and harmony, reduces the need for tentativeness in requests within close social networks. Consequently, Iraqis often rely on established interpersonal bonds and reciprocal duties in their social and familial interactions (cf. Al-Uzri, 2011; Jouili, 2012). However, in interactions with socially distant and equal-status addressees, IANSs tend to protect the positive face of their interlocutors, with whom they lack reciprocal obligations. This may explain the frequent use of mitigation strategies in IANSs' requests in these situations. For instance, IANSs employed external mitigations in 93% of requests asking a stranger to open a bus window. This behaviour reflects a broader cultural norm in Iraqi society and similar Arabic cultures, where maintaining a positive image in social interactions, particularly with distant others, enhances social acceptance (Dainton and Zelley, 2011; Al-Marrani and Sazalie, 2010).

Additionally, the cultural differences between AENSs and IANSs may result in varied conventionalization of mitigation strategies. Notable examples of this variation were observed in the subjects' use of verbal incentives, closings, and alerters. IANSs frequently employed supplicatory expressions such as الله يخليك 'Allah yakhlik' (May God preserve you) as verbal incentives and in closing statements, whereas their Australian counterparts favoured expressions of gratitude and appreciation for the same functions. This divergence in linguistic conventions is also apparent in the use of alerters. AENSs commonly used phrases like 'excuse me', with or without a name or title, in most of their requests, while IANSs tended to use fictive kinship terms, such as خوية 'khwya' (brother), titles like أستاذ 'istadh' (professor), and first names, depending on the social context.

CONCLUSION

This research explored the employment of external mitigation in request speech acts in both Iraqi Arabic and Australian English. The study analysed the types and frequencies of mitigating strategies in request samples gathered from Australian and Iraqi participants across eight scenarios with different social variables. The results indicated a widespread use of external mitigations in the requests of both groups. Nevertheless, notable differences emerged between the two groups in the linguistic characteristics of certain mitigating devices and in the frequency of external mitigation strategies in some situations.

The findings were explained through the lens of verbosity as a politeness strategy. Participants frequently employed external mitigations to enhance the politeness of their requests, incorporating additional language elements such as alerters, justifications, preparatory statements, promises of rewards, and expressions of gratitude. The observed differences between the two groups in the linguistic characteristics of certain external modifiers and their usage frequencies in some contexts were attributed to cultural differences. AENSs and IANSs might have divergent perceptions of the request situations, influenced by the prevailing cultural values—egalitarianism in Australian culture and hierarchical relationships and reciprocal obligations in Iraqi culture.

Some implications can be drawn from the findings of this study. This study introduces Iraqi Arabic into the research on request speech acts across different languages and cultures. Its findings are particularly relevant for cross-cultural communication, by highlighting how cultural differences influence communication styles and strategies. In language education, especially for Arabic and English as second or foreign languages, the study underscores the importance of incorporating cultural awareness into teaching. Recognizing that politeness strategies and interaction styles vary across cultures, it is crucial for L2 learners to develop pragmatic competence to use language appropriately in different contexts.

Additionally, L2 educators should consider students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds to facilitate positive transfer from their native languages and cultures and reduce negative transfer that may hinder L2 learning.

This study acknowledges several limitations that arose during its execution. First, the study required larger samples from Australian and Iraqi populations to ensure that the findings accurately reflect request realization practices within these cultures. Additionally, integrating the role-play interview with another method could provide more authentic data. For example, combining this method with an observational technique offers a comprehensive approach to data collection. Observing participants in real-life scenarios complements verbal responses, providing deeper insights into their behaviours and decisionmaking. To gain deeper insights into the research problem addressed in this study, future investigations that overcome these limitations are essential.

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