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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

**A STUDY OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS'  
REALISATION OF REQUESTS AND APOLOGIES IN AN ACADEMIC  
SETTING**

**MASTER THESIS**

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Approval of the Graduate School of Educational Sciences



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I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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This is to certify that we have read this thesis submitted by Alimie Churlu, titled “A STUDY OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS’ REALISATION OF REQUESTS AND APOLOGIES IN AN ACADEMIC SETTING”, and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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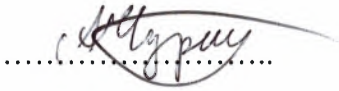
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this study.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Alimie Churlu', is written over a horizontal dotted line.

Alimie Churlu

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A STUDY OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS' REALISATION OF REQUESTS AND APOLOGIES IN AN ACADEMIC SETTING**

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**MA Programme in English Language Teaching**

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The aim of the present study is to analyse realizations of speech acts of request and apology by EFL students majoring in ELT that occur in the course of teacher-student communication and to find out how the students' speech act realisations deviate from or conform to English politeness norms. Participants of the study were 20 English-major EFL learners studying at Near East University in North Cyprus. The data collection instrument was a written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) comprised of 20 scenarios describing everyday situations in an academic setting, 10 of which required making requests and another 10 – apologising to teachers. According to the findings of the study, the respondents demonstrate some level of pragmatic awareness and adhere to negative politeness, which is appropriate in formal communication in the English communicative culture. However, although the data contained instances of overall valid request and apology strategies in the target language, some responses featured inappropriate speech acts realisations that can result in pragmatic failure. In addition, the respondents showed little variation in their choice of linguistic forms: they tended to select routinized, formulaic expressions and lacked mastery of the more sophisticated ways of formulating speech acts. The results confirmed that even students majoring in English still face problems linked to their pragmatic competence. Their deviations from English norms can lead to problems in communication with university faculty. Situations that require making requests and apologising often arise in teacher-student communication, and university students need to learn appropriate ways of voicing these speech acts in order to successfully interact with academic staff.

**Keywords:** the speech act of request, the speech act of apology, linguistic politeness, pragmatic competence.

## ÖZ

### YABANCI DİL OLARAK İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRENEN ÖĞRENCİLERİN AKADEMİK BİR ORTAMDA RİCA VE ÖZÜRLERİ KAVRAYIŞLILARI ÜZERİNE BİR ÇALIŞMA

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Bu araştırmanın amacı, öğretmen-öğrenci iletişimi sırasında oluşan, uzmanlık dalları İngilizce öğretmenliği olan yabancı dil öğrencilerinin rica ve özürle ilgili söz eylemlerinin kavrayışlarını incelemek ve bu öğrencilerin söz eylem kavrayışlarının İngiliz incelik normlarına nasıl uyduğunu veya onlardan nasıl saptığını bulmaktır. Araştırmada yer alan katılımcılar, Kuzey Kıbrıs'ta Yakın Doğu Üniversitesi'nde okuyan ve uzmanlık dalları İngilizce olan 20 yabancı dil öğrencisiydi. Bilgi toplama aracı, akademik ortamda günlük durumları anlatan, 10'u istekte bulunma diğer 10'u ise öğretmenlerden özür dilemekle alakalı 20 senaryodan oluşan yazılı bir Söylem Tamamlama Testi (STT) idi. Araştırmanın bulgularına göre, katılımcılar biraz edimsel duyarlılık seviyesi gösterip İngiliz konuşma kültüründeki resmi iletişimde kullanılan ve olumsuzluk ifade eden kibarlığa bağlı kalmışlardır. Bununla beraber, veriler, yabancı dildeki tüm geçerli istek ve özür örneklerini içermesine rağmen, bazı cevaplar edimsel başarısızlıkla neticelenebilecek uygunsuz söz eylem kavrayışlarını da içermiştir. Buna ek olarak, katılımcılar dilsel biçimlerdeki seçimlerinde biraz farklılık göstermişler: rutinleşmiş, basmakalıp ve söz eylemlerini kesin ve açık olarak daha karmaşık şekillerde belirtmede yetersiz kalan ifadeleri seçme eğilimi göstermişler. Araştırmanın sonuçları, uzmanlık dalları İngilizce olan öğrencilerin bile hala edimibilim yetisi ile ilgili problemlerle karşılaştıklarını doğrulamıştır. İngiliz normlarından sapmaları, üniversiteyle iletişimlerinde sorunlara yol açabilir. İstekte bulunma ve özür dilemeyi gerektiren durumlar sıkça öğretmen-öğrenci iletişimde ortaya çıkar ve üniversite öğrencileri akademik personelle başarılı bir şekilde diyalog kurabilmeleri için bu söz eylemlerini doğru biçimde ifade etmeyi öğrenmeleri gerekir.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CCSARP	Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project
D	Social Distance
DCT	Discourse Completion Test
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
FN	First Name
FTA	Face Threatening Act
H	Hearer
IFID	Illocutionary Force Indicating Device
L1	First Language
L2	Second language
NNS	Non-native Speaker
NS	Native Speaker
P	Social Power
R	Ranking of Imposition
S	Speaker
SA	Speech Act
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TLN	Title + Last Name

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives information on the background of the study, the aim of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, and the limitations.

#### **Background of the study**

The study explored the realization of speech acts of requesting and apologising in English as a foreign language (EFL) context. This research belongs to the field of interlanguage pragmatics – “the study of nonnative speakers’ use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge” (Kasper, 1996, p.145). To master a second or foreign language, learners should develop not only linguistic competence – “the knowledge of the items and rules that comprise the formal system of language” (Ellis 1994, p. 715), but also pragmatic competence– “the knowledge that speaker-hearer use in order to engage in communication, including how speech acts are successfully performed” (Ellis 1994, p. 719). Another definition of pragmatic competence is “the knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realising particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts, and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular language’s linguistic resources” (Barron, 2003, p. 10). Developing these two competences leads to the mastery of communicative competence.

Even advanced EFL students sometimes face difficulties communicating in the target language because they often study the language focusing only on linguistic competence and therefore lack the necessary pragmatic skills. According to Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010), even those students who study abroad, in English-speaking countries, may reveal important pragmatic deviations from native speakers. The researchers suggest that even a long stay in a target-language country not always results in sufficient pragmatic improvement. Hassall (2006) claims that “advanced learners remain nonnative in even quite basic pragmatic knowledge and aspects of pragmatic performance after a sojourn of one year’s length or more” (p. 32).

Mastering speech act realisation in the target language is a key element of pragmatic competence (Ellis, 1994), and therefore, second and foreign language

learners' pragmatic competence is often measured through examining their production of particular speech acts: requests, apologies, suggestions, promises, etc.

As Saeed (1997) points out:

Learning to communicate in a language involves more than acquiring the pronunciation and grammar. We need to learn how to ask questions, make suggestions, greet and thank other speakers. In other words we need to learn the uses of language to which utterances are conventionally put in the new language community and how these uses are signaled. (p. 203)

Understanding and producing speech acts in the target language is one of the most difficult aspects of developing learners' communicative competence. Language learners and teachers should pay more attention to acquisition of speech acts as they are culture-specific, meaning that we cannot apply the way we organize the talk in our native language into the way we talk in other languages (Trosborg, 1995). Inability to recognise norms of the target language and culture and pragmatic transfer from learners' first language can lead to misunderstandings, both in producing the appropriate speech act and in interpreting the intended meaning of one uttered by somebody else. Understanding communicative intent of people who speak a different language based on one's own native language systems or cultural norms can potentially result in pragmatic failure and communication breakdown. Awareness of the differences between the communicative practices in native and target language and acquiring nativelike speech act production helps to prevent communication breakdowns and avoid being misunderstood or considered rude when interacting in non-native language.

The present study examined EFL learners' the realisation of two speech acts – *requesting and apologizing*– with reference to the phenomenon of linguistic politeness. Being able to make request appropriately is very important in human interaction since communication often revolves around our need to get somebody to do something. This speech act frequently occurs in daily interaction with people and is an important part of successful communication, “which gives the request a primary position in the whole linguistic repertoire of speech acts” (Belza, 2008, p. 8). Request is a face-threatening act (FTA) because it infringes on the hearer's freedom of action. Therefore, even if non-native speakers manage to avoid pragmatic transfer from their first language when making requests in a foreign language, they may still produce inappropriate requests, and so is crucial to understand how to make polite requests in



the target language. Another speech act examined in the present study, namely apology, is often considered as playing an important politeness role in communication because repairs face damage when social norms have been violated and aims to maintain social harmony (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983) and is thus necessary for successful cross-cultural communication. Norrick (1978) emphasises the role of apologies in maintaining “the smooth working of society” and states “acts of apologizing and forgiving are more basic and important to society than such acts as thanking and congratulating, which by comparison are its pleasant byproducts rather than functional principles” (p. 284). Apologizing is face-threatening to the speaker and not an easy matter even in native language, and having to do it in a foreign language is even more complicated. Previous studies have shown that even though nonnative speakers’ perceptions of politeness in requests and apologies correlate with those of native, differences in performance exist, and language learners’ pragmatic competence is not native like (Krulatz, 2012).

### **The Aim of the Study**

This study aims to analyse EFL learners’ realisation of two speech acts – requests and apologies – in the target language and to explore how linguistic politeness is realised in these speech acts (emphasising the ways in which the respondents’ requests and apologies deviate from or conform to English norms). The study focuses on speech acts realisation in particular situational context, namely in the context of student-teacher communication at university.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What strategies are used by EFL learners in performing the speech act of requesting in the course of student-teacher interaction?
2. What are the strategies employed by EFL learners when apologising to academic staff?
3. How do the students’ realisations of requests and apologies deviate from or conform to English norms in terms of linguistic politeness?

### **Significance of the study**

The current study is expected to contribute to the research on foreign language pragmatic competence. The results may provide better understanding of

EFL learners' production of speech acts of requesting and apologising in a formal academic setting. The findings of the study can help identify problems that EFL learners face in realisation of these speech acts in the target language. This research may also help to shed light on sources of pragmatic failure that leads to misunderstandings and miscommunication. The results can be beneficial for teachers in guiding students to develop their communicative competence and aiding them in acquiring more native-like language to avoid impoliteness and miscommunication when using the target language. The findings may be used for the development of teaching methods and teaching materials for EFL classrooms that involve teaching pragmatics and speech act production.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Since the research was conducted with only master students at the ELT department, and only 20 Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) were analysed (several students' DCTs could not be accepted because they were filled in incorrectly; still more students did not submit their DCTs at all), and students of only one university were selected for the study, the findings may not be generalized to all learners of English. The small size of the sample and the lack of statistical significance, in most of the categories, suggest a cautious interpretation of the results. Results from such a small sample are not generalizable, but it is interesting that they seem to confirm the results of other studies.

The justification for selection of the DCT as the data collection method was presented in Chapter 3. Its major advantages include the relative ease of obtaining homogenous data, and its common use in studies on speech acts. However, it is clear that the task is an artificial one. As a result, the data collected in this study may not exactly reflect the way requests and apologies are typically uttered. Addressing a real person is a much more complex task exactly because the speaker knows so much more about the interlocutor. Without a doubt, the nature of the relationship and the personal characteristics of the addressee affect the choice of linguistic moves in the message.

In addition, the participants were asked to write several requests and apologies during one data collection session. The serial production of similar speech acts could have influenced respondents' answers in such a way that each response became more and more repetitive. They may have also been shorter than real



requests and apologies would be simply because the participants knew in advance how many total messages they would be writing, and they were not compensated for the participation in the study. Thus, some respondents may have completed the DCT hurriedly, and without paying much attention to the strategies they were selecting simply because, in real life, they had nothing to lose or gain. Or, on the other hand, they may have actually taken more care and time than they would have in real life because they knew these data were collected for a linguistic study. Overall, both the length of the DCT replies, and the choice of the politeness strategies may have been affected by the artificiality of the task.

Additionally, the investigation of request and apology behaviour in the first language of the students would constitute a means of analysing the influence of linguistic transfer. Since the respondents in the present study were international students from different countries, it would have been difficult to investigate the influence of L1. Moreover, the researcher shares the same L1 with only four respondents and doesn't know native languages of the rest of participants. Therefore, it would be preferable to investigate a group of students with shared L1.

Finally, this study focused on only two speech acts, request and apology. Assessing the performance of these two FTAs is not enough to evaluate pragmatic competence. Future studies need to focus on other speech acts such as refusals, disagreements, invitations, etc., in languages other than English, in both written and spoken discourse.

Notwithstanding the limitations, this study does suggest that while acquiring the skills that allow language users to construct appropriate and polite messages in their L2 takes a long time, certain approximations to native-speaker politeness and appropriateness do exist. It is possible that given sufficient time and instructional support, L2 learners can approximate native-speaker models.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter introduces the key concepts of the research and provides the review of related literature. First, an account of Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1979) speech act theory will be given. Then, Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness theory will be discussed. Finally, speech acts of request and apology will be addressed. Background information on each of the speech acts will be given followed by overview of relevant studies focusing on English language learners' production of requests and apologies respectively.

#### Speech Act Theory

Speech acts (SAs) can be defined as "actions performed via utterances" (Yule, 1996, p. 47). John L. Austin first described speech act theory in his book *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). The researcher claimed that we use language not only to describe reality, but to change it: create social relationships, make people do what we want, etc. Austin's notion of utterance-as-action offered a new insight into language studies. John Searle further developed and improved Austin's theory.

According to speech act theory, there are three levels of the act occurring in an utterance. First, there is a *locutionary act*, the sentence's literal meaning: "the basic act of utterance, or producing a meaningful linguistic expression" (Yule, 1996, p. 54). It involves uttering sounds, using words in accordance with grammar rules of a language. For a long time, linguistics used to study only the locutionary aspect of SAs (including phonetics, lexicology, and syntax) without taking into account the communicative situations in which they were produced. However, people do not usually speak for the sole purpose of producing utterances. They usually perform certain actions which have non-linguistic purposes: they ask or answer questions, criticize, make promises and so on. This non-linguistic purpose of an utterance is the second dimension – the *illocutionary act*. It is the notion of illocutionary act that is central to SA theory. In fact, the term "speech acts" is often used with just this meaning of illocutionary acts. Finally, via speaking, people achieve certain results. The result of producing SAs may or may be in accordance with the speaker's intentions. An SA viewed in the light of its real consequences, the effect of the action

upon the listener, is called a perlocutionary act. Since the perlocutionary act resulting from the illocutionary act may or may not be intentional, Searle suggests that the investigation of meaning should focus on the illocutionary act, which is motivated to achieve a goal, even though the result may not comply with this intention.

Austin originally made distinction between performative and non-performative (constative) utterances. Non-performatives are those utterances that can be classified as true or false, while performatives cannot: instead, they are categorised as felicitous or infelicitous. Austin (1962) points out that it is pointless to ask whether performative utterances are true or not, rather we should ask whether they work or not: do they constitute a successful warning, bet, ship-naming etc.? For example, the sentence "I am drawing you" can be true or false depending on the real state of affairs, but the same cannot be said about the sentence "I congratulate you". The latter utterance can only be characterised as appropriate or inappropriate, rather than true or false. In Austin's terminology a performative that works is called *felicitous* and one that does not is *infelicitous*. Austin coined the term *felicity conditions* to describe the conditions required for a performative to be considered appropriate.

Searle (1979) presents a classification of *felicity conditions* that are necessary for performing a successful SA. As Yule (1996) explains, in an example "I sentence you to six months in prison", the SA will be only be felicitous in the right context and if S has a certain social status (a judge in a courtroom). First, there are *general conditions*: the interlocutors must be able to speak and understand the same language; their utterances must make sense, etc. Then there are *propositional content conditions*. They define the type of meaning expressed by the propositional part of an utterance. For example, promises and threats can only refer to the future and not to the past actions. *Preparatory conditions* specify prerequisites to the performance of the speech act, e.g. promise implies two preparatory conditions: the event will not happen by itself and the event is in the interest of the addressee. There is also the *sincerity condition* that determines whether SA is sincere or insincere, e.g. genuinely intending to fulfil one's promise. Finally, *essential condition* determines what the speech act must "count as". It "combines with a specification of what must be in the utterance content, the context, and the speaker's intentions, in order for a specific speech act to be appropriately (felicitously) performed" (Yule, 1996, p. 51). The essential condition for a request is that S (speaker) tries to make H (hearer) do something, and for a promise is that S takes an obligation to carry out



promised action. An example of Searle's felicity conditions for requests is given below:

**Propositional content condition:** Future act A of H.

**Preparatory condition:**

1. H is able to do A. S believes H is able to do A.
2. It is not obvious to both S and H that H will do A in the normal course of events of his own accord.

**Sincerity condition:** S wants H to do A.

**Essential condition:** Counts as an attempt to get H to do A.

where: H = Hearer

S = Speaker

A = future action (Searle, 1969, p. 66)

Searle (1979) classified speech acts into five categories according to S's intentions: declarations, assertives, expressives, directives, and commissives.

*Assertives* are statements which can be characterized as true or false because they aim to describe the reality as S sees it, "state what the speaker believes to be the case or not" (Yule, 1996, p. 53) (e.g. "The train arrives at 5 p.m."). They include assertions, descriptions, statements of fact. "In using a representative, the speaker makes words fit the world" (Yule, 1996, p. 53)

*Directives* are attempts by S to get people to do something (e.g. "Turn down the radio."). They include requests, orders, suggestions and commands. "In using a directive, the speaker attempts to make the world fit the words (via the hearer)" (Yule, 1996, p. 54).

*Commissives* commit S to a certain course of action and express his or her intentions (e.g. "I promise to complete the project by Monday.") and include promises, threats, offers, pledges, refusals. "In using a commissive, the speaker undertakes to make the world fit the words (via the speaker)" (Yule, 1996, p. 54).

*Expressives* describe S's feelings, attitudes, psychological state. (e.g. "I'm so sorry I couldn't visit you last week"). They include thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating.

*Declarations* "change the world via their utterance" (Yule, 1996, p. 53). Declarations bring changes in the state of affairs via the words, e.g. marrying someone by saying "I do". They must be performed in a certain context by an S with

the appropriate social role (e.g. a priest saying "I pronounce you man and wife."). Declarations include marrying, resigning or firing, declaring war, etc.

According to Austin (1962), SAs are closely related to the performative verbs that name the acts which are being performed and thus carry their semantic meaning. Searle (1975), on the other hand, claims that verbs with different semantic meanings can be used to convey the same message. He distinguishes between direct and indirect SAs. Direct SAs presuppose a direct relationship between linguistic structure (declarative, interrogative or imperative) and function. Correspondingly, in indirect SAs this relationship is indirect: they are performed through the utterance of another speech act and thus have two illocutionary forces. For instance, an interrogative used to give a command is an indirect speech act. Yule (1996) points out that in English it is common to use interrogatives to form indirect SAs, e.g. asking ability question ("Could you?") to make a request. In other words, Searle (1975) claims that an indirect SA is realized by performing a different kind of SA, and thus the same utterance can have different meaning depending on context. For instance, "It is cold here" could be interpreted as a request to close the window, a question for inquiring about any heating equipment available, a complaint, or just a factual statement. Indirect SAs are performed because of politeness considerations (Searle, 1979). They require that both interlocutors are aware of sociocultural norms reflected by the context. Similarly, to be successful in the production and understanding of speech acts in the target culture, second and foreign language learners also need to learn new contextual distributions of speech acts (e.g., when to thank whom for what) and their corresponding norms in the target cultures (Kasper, 1989). It is not surprising that speech act theory has been widely used to investigate native and foreign language use. Many cross-cultural studies on language use focus on SAs as a means of comparing speech patterns of people from different backgrounds. For instance, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) study has shown that even non-native speakers (NNSs) with excellent linguistic competence may still fail to communicate effectively due to the cross-linguistic differences in speech act realization rules. Some speech acts may be considered polite in some cultures, but are impolite in others. This then leads to the study of politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) developed a politeness theory based on the investigation of face-threatening speech acts, which will be addressed in the following section.



## Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

Politeness is a communicative strategy which people use to maintain and develop relationships. According to Lakoff (1975), the purpose of politeness is to reduce conflicts in personal interaction. The present study relies on Brown and Levinson's approach to politeness. It was first introduced in their work *Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena* (1978) and later in the monograph *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (1987). Despite being often criticized, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is still regarded the most significant and influential in this area and provides researchers with an effective model for understanding people's communicative behaviour (Larina, 2009).

The key to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is the notion of face. They see politeness as face-work. The notion of *face* as a significant social value was first introduced by Goffman (1967), who claimed that "to study face-saving is to study the traffic rules of social interaction" (1972, p. 323). Face means "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Brown and Levinson claim that every adult member of a community has (and knows that others also have) a public self-image which consists of two connected aspects: negative and positive face. They define *negative face* as the want of a person "to have his freedom of action unhindered" (1987, p. 129), that is desire for independence; and *positive face* as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (1987, p.62), that is the desire to be accepted and approved of. The authors argue that the notion of face is universal, although they recognise it is culture-specific and subject to much cultural elaboration.

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) claim that some speech acts (SAs) are potentially face-threatening (consequently, they are called face-threatening acts or FTAs). For example, SAs that threaten negative face include requests, orders, threats, suggestions, warnings, and advice; those threatening positive face are expressions of disapproval, accusations, insults, complaints, disagreement, interruptions. This classification is only approximate since some FTAs can damage both types of face. FTAs have the potential to damage both S's and H's positive and negative face, so up to four faces can be involved in social interaction. Any social encounter potentially involves SAs that could threaten H's or S's face.

Since interlocutors need to maintain their own and the addressee's face, they try to avoid FTAs or use certain strategies to minimize the threat. Brown and Levinson list five strategies for doing FTAs, ranging from bald on record SAs to refraining from doing the FTA (see Figure 1). The choice of strategy depends on the degree of face-threat: the higher the risk the more polite the strategy (climbing from 1 – the least polite to 5– the most polite).

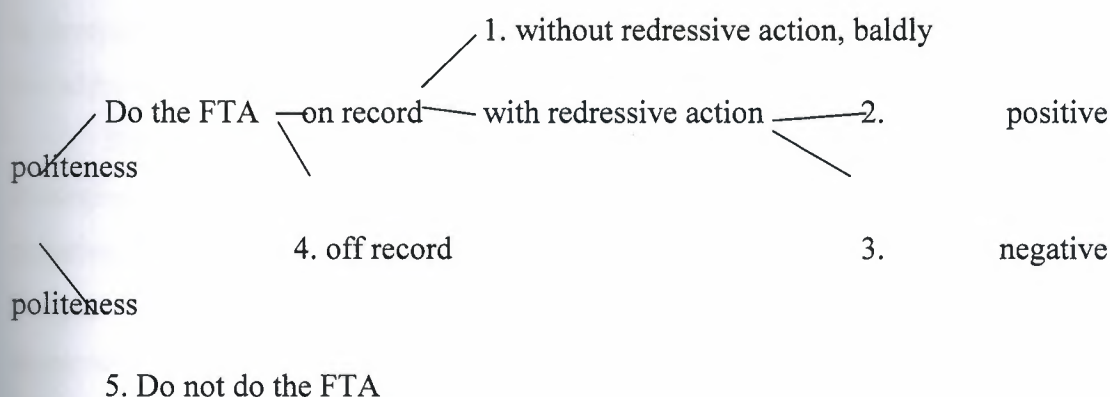


Figure 1. Possible strategies for doing FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 69)

As shown in Figure 1, FTAs can be done on record, that is directly, or off record, indirectly. On-record SAs can be performed without or with redressive action. The latter includes positive and negative politeness strategies.

The first strategy, *bald on record*, is the clearest and most direct way of doing the FTA; it does not minimise the face-threat but has the advantage of making S appear honest and trustful. The second and third strategies are associated with positive and negative faces. Since positive face refers to one's need to be accepted and valued by others, *positive politeness* presupposes expressing solidarity with the Hearer (H), showing understanding, establishing a common ground. *Negative politeness* that caters for one's need to be independent and have freedom of action presupposes showing respect, maintaining social distance, emphasizing the importance of H's time or concerns. It is characterized by self-effacement and formality. Brown and Levinson call negative politeness "the heart of respective behavior" (1987, p. 129). Negative politeness strategies are directed at acknowledging H's independence, personal autonomy, at showing that S has no intentions of violating H's personal boundaries.



The fourth strategy, *off record*, involves being indirect, ambiguous and giving hints. The ambiguity allows S to avoid the responsibility of doing an FTA and H – to retreat behind the literal meaning of the words. The disadvantage of this strategy lies in the possibility of being misunderstood and failure to communicate the FTA.

Brown and Levinson's fifth strategy, "*don't do the FTA*", is employed when the speaker considers the risk of face loss too great, and therefore says nothing in order to avoid face loss. The advantage of this strategy is that the damage to the face is completely eliminated. Naturally, in this case S is unable to pass the message to the addressee and reach his or her goal.

Brown and Levinson give special attention to positive and negative politeness strategies. They list fifteen positive and ten negative politeness strategies. The 10 negative politeness strategies are as follows: be conventionally indirect; question; hedge; be pessimistic; minimize the imposition; give deference; apologize; impersonalize S and H, avoid the pronouns "I" and "you"; state the FTA as a general rule; nominalize; go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 131). The 15 positive politeness strategies are: seek agreement; avoid disagreement; joke; offer or promise; be optimistic; intensify interest to H; use in-group identity markers; presuppose or assert common ground; attend to H's interests, wants, needs or goods; exaggerate interest, approval or sympathy with H; include both S and H in the activity; give reasons; assume or assert reciprocity; give gifts to H.

In deciding which strategy to use, the S considers individual payoffs of each strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987) which are listed below.

1. Bald on record strategy: (a) enlists public pressure; (b) S gets credit for honesty, outspokenness which avoids the danger of seeming manipulative; (c) S avoids danger of being misunderstood.
2. Positive politeness: (a) minimizes threatening aspect by assuring that S considers to be of the same kind with H; (b) when S includes himself equally as a participant in the request or offer, it may lessen the potential for FTA debt.
3. Negative politeness: (a) helps avoid future debt by keeping social distance and not getting too familiar with the addressee; (b) pays respect or deference by assuming that you may be intruding on the hearer in return for the FTA.

4. Off record: (a) S gets credit for being tactful, non-coercive; (b) S avoids responsibility for the potentially face-damaging interpretation; (c) gives the addressee an opportunity to seem to care for S because it tests H's feelings towards S.
5. Don't do the FTA: (a) S avoids offending H at all; (b) S also fails to achieve his desired communication.

Brown and Levinson further argue that the assessment of the seriousness of an FTA involves evaluating three sociological factors: social distance (D) between the parties (symmetric relation); power (P) relations between the parties (asymmetric relation); and absolute ranking (R) of the impositions (the degree of imposition of the speech act on H's wants). They present a formula to calculate the weightiness of an FTA, using the above three variables:

$$W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$$

where  $W_x$  measures weightiness of the FTA<sub>x</sub>,  $D(S, H)$  represents the social distance between interlocutors,  $P(H,S)$  stands for power that H has over S, and  $R_x$  measures the degree of imposition of the FTA in that culture. The authors argue that the three social variables help determine the level of politeness with which, other things being equal, an FTA will be communicated.

Brown and Levinson claim that the notion of face and the politeness are universal. They also distinguish between positive-politeness and negative politeness cultures. According to them, British is characterised as negative politeness culture. Although Brown and Levinson admit that there are cultural differences in politeness norms, they emphasise the universal rules of politeness, i.e. the universality of face, satisfying other's face wants, and mutual knowledge between interlocutors of the two aforementioned universalities (Jakubowska, 1999). Such claims about the universal character of face which in fact reflects the Western model is the main reason behind the continuing criticism of their theory (e.g. Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Wierzbicka, 1985). Some of the universals pointed out by Brown and Levinson are questionable because of the differences in politeness norms in each language and culture. The researchers' views concerning positive and negative face have been criticised by Wierzbicka (1985) as being anglocentric. It is said that territorial rights and freedom are highly valued by the British, therefore they favour negative politeness (Sifianou, 1992; Márquez Reiter, 2000). Márquez Reiter (2000) suggests that knowledge of a particular culture is important in determining the face constituents and in understanding the meaning of polite language in that culture. In



addition, some researchers think that this politeness theory reflects a highly pessimistic view on social interaction, seeing it as “an activity of continuous mutual monitoring of potential threats to the faces of the interactants, and of devising strategies for maintaining the interactants' faces – a view that if always true, could rob social interaction of all elements of pleasure” (Nwoye, 1992, p. 311). In spite of the criticism, Brown and Levinson's framework still remains the most influential politeness model to date and gives us an effective instrument for understanding people's behaviour in communication. (Márquez Reiter, 2000).

### **The Speech Act of Requesting**

Requests can be defined as “pre-event acts which express the speaker's expectation of the hearer with regard to forthcoming action, verbal or nonverbal” (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989, p. 11). According to Searle, this SA belongs to the class of directives which are intended make H perform a certain act. Some directives comprise the competitive category, where the illocutionary goal competes with the social goal, such as *asking*, *demanding*, while others are intrinsically polite, such as *inviting* (Leech, 1983). Requests belong to the competitive category of directives, which Leech termed *impositives* (Leech, 1983).

Brown and Levinson (1987) recognise request as an FTA that threatens the negative face of the addressee. Requests can be made directly or indirectly to various degrees. Fukushima (2003) draws a parallel between Brown and Levinson's (1987) strategies for doing FTAs and request strategies introduced by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). The identical pairs are:

1. On record without redress – Direct requests: “Open the window”.
2. On record with redress – Conventionally indirect requests: “Would you mind opening the window please?”
3. Off record – Non-conventionally indirect requests (hints): “It's hot in here”.

Fukushima (2003) further explains that “in negative politeness, there is a tension between (a) the desire to go on record as a prerequisite to being seen to pay face, and (b) the desire to go off record to avoid imposing” (p.69 ). Conventionally indirect strategies present a compromise: “whatever the indirect mechanism used to do an FTA, once it is fully conventionalized as a way of doing that FTA, it is no

longer off record" (Fukushima, 2003, p. 69). She further suggests the following payoffs for the three types of requests:

**1. Payoffs for direct requests:** efficiency; clarity.

**2. Payoffs for conventionally indirect requests:** S can pay respect to H in return for the FTA, leaving H unimpeded.

**3. Payoffs for off-record requests:** (a) S can evade the responsibility of damaging H's face by leaving the option for H to interpret off-record requests. (b) S can give H an opportunity to be seen to care for S. In other words, H is given an opportunity to demonstrate solicitousness (Fukushima, 2003, p. 74).

Cross-cultural comparison studies show that different cultural groups have their preferred ways of making requests. Breuer and Geluykens (2007) confirm the use of conventionally indirect requests by both American and British native speakers (NSs). Wierzbicka (1985) claims that the English requests are characterized by the major Anglo-Saxon cultural principle of "polite pessimism". This results in limiting the use of the imperative mood in favour of indirect requests in interrogative or interrogative-conditional forms. In other cultures, e.g. Russian, Ukrainian and Polish, imperatives are considered polite and perfectly appropriate for making requests. This example demonstrates how the politeness strategies naturally acquired by English NSs may pose a challenge for NNS. EFL learners face both semantic and pragmatic constraints when struggling to make appropriate requests. This is one of the reasons why requests have often been the focus of cross-cultural and interlanguage research. The studies on interlanguage requests in English have managed to describe strategies and linguistic politeness features produced by learners from different cultures, such as Hebrew (Blum-Kulka et al, 1989), Japanese (Fukushima, 1996), German (Schreiner, 2009), Greek (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009, 2011) and others.

One of the first and most influential studies of requests is that by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989). They conducted the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) in order to investigate requests and apologies. The researchers made a two-way comparison of native and nonnative language use in several languages. A significant phenomenon uncovered from the analysis is that of "verbosity"—learners tend to generate their requests with unnecessary or inappropriate information. The CCSARP design has served as a model for numerous further studies on speech acts.



House and Kasper (1987) compared requests of Danish and German learners and British English NS. Similarly to the abovementioned study, they found that NNSs tended to produce lengthy requests with unnecessary details and proving that “verbosity” is characteristic to second and foreign language learners. The study also found that compared to English NSs, NNSs’ requests were more direct and had fewer syntactic downgraders. Danish and German learners also differed from each other in their request production. For example, Danish learners tend to use more, whereas German learners use less, lexical internal modifiers than the British NS.

Faerch and Kasper (1989) examined the request strategies used Danish L1 speakers in two different L2s (English and German). The results showed that the NNSs’ choice of directness levels was mostly similar to that of English and German NSs. NNSs were also found to use internal request modification (syntactic and lexical downgraders; see Chapter 3) less frequently and with less variety compared to NSs, and were partially influenced by L1 transfer. As for external modification (see Chapter 3), NNSs displayed more supportive moves than the target language native speakers.

Trosborg’s (1995) among other speech acts analysed requests made by Danish EFL learners. The data were collected through role play from the EFL learners and from Danish and English NSs. Trosborg found that the learners used internal request modification (lexical and syntactic downgraders) less frequently than NSs. There were also differences in the types of modifiers preferred by NSs and NNSs, e.g. past tense was a frequent syntactic downgrader in the NSs’ requests but not in the learners’. Finally, English NSs were found to use a wider range of internal modifiers compared to the NNSs.

In a large-scale cross-sectional study of Japanese EFL learners at different proficiency levels, Hill (1997) found that the advanced group, while displaying an increase in downgraders per request, still fell short of target norms as represented in the native speaker data. An analysis of the sub-strategies used in internal mitigation patterns in Hill’s study indicated a move away from native speaker norms by the learner group in the overuse of syntactic downgraders as compared to the native speaker group.

Lin (2008) compared production of requests and compliments of five Chinese graduate students and five English NSs in a British university using a written Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Both groups of students mostly employed

conventionally indirect strategies, but there still were differences in ways of expressing the requests between Chinese students and NSs. While the latter used more complex syntactic structures to mitigate the degree of request when they spoke to their teacher (e.g. "Would you mind if...?" or "Is there any chance that I could...?"), the NNSs preferred simpler phrases (e.g. "Could you...?", "Can I...?") (Lin, 2008, p. 48). A follow-up interview among NNSs showed that, although Chinese students can respond to the situations with relatively appropriate request strategies, they sometimes failed in their real life experiences. For example, a student reported that she said "Stop, stop" directly to a taxi-driver when she expected the driver to drop her off at some place instead of applying more polite and indirect request strategies (Lin, 2008).

Su (2010) and Al-Ali and Sahawneh (2008) investigated the differences between English NSs and learners in producing requests in written speech. Both studies found that EFL speakers (Chinese and Arabic NSs) tended to use more direct request strategies, more external mitigating devices and less syntactic modifiers among internal downgraders (i.e. interrogative, negation, past tense, and *if*-clause) which are largely used by native English speakers to show politeness.

Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) examined requests to university professors of advanced ESL learners with different L1 and British English NSs elicited by a written DCT. Significant differences were found in internal and external modification patterns and request perspective. The results showed learners' overuse of zero marking in internal modification of requests and little variety in choice of external modifiers. NSs used significantly more requests employing impersonal perspective combined with a range of internal mitigation devices, and elided and formulaic constructions.

Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) were one of the first researchers to conduct a study on NNS requests in e-mail. The study analysed international students' English NSs' email requests to their professors. The researchers compared the negative and positive reactions towards the e-mails by the faculty and examined the linguistic forms used in the e-mails that had affected the faculty's reactions. The researchers reported four important findings on international students' requesting behaviour. They found a number of pragmatic infelicities in NNSs' messages. Firstly, their requests tended to be too direct: the emails that triggered negative reaction had the form of want/need statements which are inappropriate to the



student's lower-status role as they appear to give the teacher-recipient no choice in answering the request. Secondly, NNS's emails contained inappropriate and insufficient mitigation. Thirdly, they acknowledged imposition on the addressee less often than American English NSs. Finally, international students highlighted their personal needs and asked for unreasonable time-frames. Hardford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) concluded that the students' choice of forms "reflect an apparent overestimation on the part of the student of the faculty member's level of obligation to comply" (p. 58) and explain that "requests which do not employ sufficient mitigation or fail to address the precarious balance of the faculty as institution vs. the faculty as (over-worked) fellow humans risk negative evaluation" (p. 67).

Chen (2001) analysed email requests collected from Taiwanese students (each submitted several emails previously written to professors) and compared them to that of native American English speakers. Conventionally indirect requests were found to be most frequently used among both Taiwanese students and NSs, followed by want-statements. However, the American students employed more internal request modifiers that made their requests more indirect and polite. In addition, unlike American English NSs, the Taiwanese students always addressed their teachers by title and last name. Following a politeness strategy of Chinese indirectness they put their requests at the very end of the email while the Americans did the opposite. The NNSs also used compliments, a common Chinese positive politeness strategy, while the American NSs instead expressed politeness by minimizing the imposition. Chen states that the Taiwanese students "transfer their Chinese pragmatic knowledge, probably in an automatic and unconscious way, to their English use" (p.13).

Chen (2006) also conducted a longitudinal study of a Taiwanese student writing emails to American university professors. Chen found that the student used to write lengthy emails full of irrelevant details, use mostly want statements rather than conventionally indirect requests, give unconvincing reasons and explanations, express the professors' obligation to help students. For example, she wrote: "This is Ling Wang from Taiwan. Because you are my initial academic advisor, I need you to help me about the questions of my required credits" (p. 47). However, after the student arrived to the U.S., her requests gradually changed and became more polite.

Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) also studied NS/NNS student politeness strategies in email. Using CCSARP framework, the researcher categorized request head acts of 533 emails sent to her by students over six semesters. Both groups of students were

found to use more direct strategies for lower imposition requests versus conventionally indirect and hints for higher imposition. At the linguistic level, the NNSs showed over-reliance on set phrases, such as “could you”, and inappropriate lexical choices, such as “please” rather than NSs “I was wondering” or embedded forms. Some of these infelicitous forms may result from lack of linguistic competence, but it is likely that a lack of pragmatic understanding is also the problem.

Hendriks (2010) investigated English e-mail requests written by Dutch learners and had them evaluated by English NSs in a survey. Results suggested that the underuse of internal request modification may lead to the email sender be regarded less agreeable by English NSs. Underuse of elaborate modification may reflect negatively on the sender’s personality and may result in pragmatic failure. Unlike elaborate modification patterns however, the use of single modifiers such as past tense modal or the downtoner ‘possibly’, did not affect sender evaluation. The author argues that a possible explanation for this might be that the requests were preceded by extensive external modifiers which therefore helped to increase the politeness level of the e-mail.

Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) did a study on Greek Cypriot students’ emails to university faculty. She collected 200 emails from 200 students, and NS teachers were asked to give feedback and evaluate them in terms of politeness. The emails were analysed in terms of address forms (salutations), the degree of directness in requests, and the use of internal and external modifiers. Economidou-Kogetsidis found that the students wrote overly direct emails, employed little to no internal modification, omitted greetings and closings and used inappropriate forms of address, all of which NSs consider impolite. Thus, such requests are capable of causing pragmatic failure. The emails “appear to give the faculty no choice in complying with the request and fail to acknowledge the imposition involved” (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011, p. 3193).

To sum up, a number of pragmatic studies investigated the request performance of native speakers and language learners. The results revealed that although many learners can perform request head act strategies closely to the performance of the native speakers, in general, learners’ level of directness and the use request modifiers are quite different from the English NS norms. NNSs fail to fully grasp the use of internal modifiers, more grammatically complex forms, fail to



see the nuances that NSs are aware of. Moreover, learners tend to make lengthy requests that contain a great deal of unnecessary information.

### **The Speech Act of Apologising**

Bergman and Kasper (1993) defined an apology as a “compensatory action to an offense in the doing of which S was casually involved and which is costly to H” (p. 82). According to Leech (1983), apology constitutes “a bid to change the balance-sheet of the relation between *s* and *h*” (125) and is uttered in order to maintain social harmony that was disturbed by the preceding offence. An apology is called for when social norms have been violated, whether the offence is real or potential (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983). Apologies have the effect of paying of a debt, thus compensating the victim for the harm done by the offence (Searle, 1969). Norrick (1978) lists the social functions of apologies which are: (a) admitting responsibility for a state which affected someone in an adverse way (thereby implicating contrition); (b) asking to be forgiven; (c) showing good manners; (d) assuaging the addressee’s wrath; (e) getting off the hook. Norrick states that:

It is essential to the smooth working of society that there be standard means of admitting responsibility, implicating remorse, and forgiving. Without these we would probably be at one another’s throats much of the time. In this sense, acts of apologizing and forgiving are more basic and important to society than such acts as thanking and congratulating, which by comparison are its pleasant byproducts rather than functional principles. (p. 284)

Searle (1979) classifies the speech act of apologising, along with thanking, congratulating, condoling, and welcoming, to the category of expressives – acts that “express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content” (p. 15). Olshtain and Cohen (1983) find this taxonomy insufficient and suggest the notion of “apology speech act set” to describe possible types of utterances that may function as apologies. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) indicate that the apology speech act set contains the following acts: 1. An expression of apology; 2. An explanation or account of the situation; 3. An acknowledgement of responsibility; 4. An offer of repair; and 5. A promise of forbearance (see Chapter 3). In most cases just one of these five potential strategies is sufficient in order to perform an apology, but using a combination of two or more



can intensify the apology. The speech act set of apologising has been taken up in most subsequent research on apologies.

Owen (1983) has constructed the set of rules or felicity conditions for the use of the appropriate illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) as follows:

**Preparatory condition:**

1. The act A specified in the propositional content is an offence against the addressee H.
2. H would have preferred S's not doing A to S's doing A and S believes H would have preferred S's not doing A to his doing A.
3. A does not benefit H and S believes A does not benefit H.

**Sincerity condition:** S regrets (is sorry for) having done A.

**Essential condition:** Counts as an expression of regret by S for having done A.

Brown and Levinson classify apologies as negative politeness strategies, i.e. strategies oriented towards the hearer's right to non-distraction. However, Meier (1992), Ogiermann (2009a), and Edmondson and House (1981) claim that apologies are also beneficial not only to H but also to S: an offence committed by S damages his or her face, and the apology is used to restore S's social status. According to Meier (1992), "concern for H's face is only a by-product of the attempt to serve the intent of saving S's face" (p. 31). Ogiermann (2009a) describes apology as an SA restoring S's positive face, stating that "the apologise's positive face needs are central to all apologies, for if we did not care about what others think of us, we would see no reason for putting things right and humiliating ourselves by doing so" (p. 51).

At the same time, apologising is considered embarrassing and humiliating (Olshtain, 1989; Norrick, 1978). By apologising, S restricts his or her freedom of action, threatens one's own negative face. At the same time, by refusing to apologise S will fail to restore his or her positive face damaged by the preceding offence. Thus, apologising saves S's positive face at the expense of their negative face. Without the speaker's positive face needs, there might be no apology, which is uttered despite threat to negative face. Hence, whenever an apology takes place, positive face needs can be said to supersede negative face needs (Ogiermann, 2009a).

Numerous studies have been carried out on the speech act of apologizing, such as Cohen and Olshtain (1981, 1985), Owen (1983), Olshtain and Cohen (1983), Trosborg (1987), Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Garcia (1989), Holmes (1990),

Suszczynska (1999), Márquez Reiter (2000), Ogierman (2009). As mentioned in the previous section, one of the first and most significant of them is the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). This project compared across languages the realization of requests and apologies to establish similarities and differences between native and non-native speakers in the realization patterns of these two acts (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Most of the subsequent studies have adopted the methodology and coding system developed in the CCSARP.

There have been many studies on apologies dedicated to measuring NNS's proficiency in performing requests in English. Most of the studies focus on comparing NNS's apologies with the way NSs use this speech act, e.g., English and Hebrew (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981, Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstein, 1986), English and Danish (Trosborg, 1987, 1995), English and German (House, 1989), English and Spanish (García, 1989), English and Thai (Bergman & Kasper, 1993), English and Japanese (Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper, & Ross, 1996), and other languages. Such studies are very important as they contribute to a better understanding of the differences between cultures that lead to the differences in the production of apologies in particular, and of speech acts in general.

Cohen and Olshtain (1981) conducted a study of apologies with English NSs, Hebrew NSs, and Hebrew learners of English. They found that Hebrew speakers of English were less likely to accept responsibility for an offense or to make offers of repair than native English speakers and did not intensify their expressions of regret as much as native English speakers did. In some situations deviations from the cultural pattern of English appeared as a result of transfer from L1 patterns. The researchers claim that learners are highly likely to transfer the socio-cultural patterns employed in their L1 while performing apology in the target language. They also suggest that the main reasons behind the NNSs' deviation from the cultural norms of English NSs are related to the NNS's limited grammatical competence. Poor mastery in English language is viewed by the researchers to be the main reason behind the non-native speakers' deviation in the degree of intensity while performing apology.

Another study by Olshtain and Cohen (1983) used as native-speaker respondents Israeli elementary students participating in a drama class. It focused on the degree of apology that a child would use in response to the severity of the offending action. It was found that at the lowest severity level, the most frequently



used strategies were apology and a sub-strategy of “accepting responsibility” – “lack of intent”. At the two highest degrees of severity, offenders used the strategy “offer of repair”. The most striking result of this study was that children tended to deny responsibility when apologizing at the highest degree of severity, since they expected strong reaction (e.g.) reprimand from the recipient.

Cohen and Olshtain (1985) studied the production of the SA of apology by Hebrew learners of English. Investigating the factors that stand behind the deviation from the target language, the researchers found that language transfer and limited linguistic knowledge are the reasons behind the learners’ pragmatic failure. They distinguish between overt and non-overt grammatical errors. While the former are easy to detect, the latter occur when the non-native speakers produce expressions that are linguistically correct, but functionally inappropriate.

A study by Cohen, Olshtain and Rosenstein (1986) investigated the American English NSs and Hebrew-speaking advanced learners of English. The researchers found that the learners lacked sensitivity to some nuances such as the difference between ‘excuse me’ and ‘I’m sorry’. Advanced learners were found to use the same apology strategies as English NSs. However, the selection of apology intensifiers (“very”, “really”, “terribly” etc.) used by NNSs differed greatly from that used by native speakers. The learners, unlike native speakers, tended to add intensifiers in low-severity situations. The NNSs also used the intensifiers as mutually interchangeable and did not see the subtle differences in their meanings that were obvious for English NSs. In addition, NSs often added emotional interjections, while the NNSs tended to avoid using them, and so their apologies sounded more formulaic and less sincere.

Trosborg (1987) investigated apologies realized by Danish learners of English at three proficiency levels compared to NSs. She found that learners used a smaller range of apology strategies compared to NSs, which was attributed to insufficient linguistic knowledge. The lack of relevant linguistic means was also used to account for the tendency of the learners to resort to ritual language use i.e. direct apologies or to deny responsibility altogether. Denial of responsibility also correlated with the degree of the severity of the offence. Finally, with increasing proficiency, the NNSs used more modality markers, thus increasing the politeness of the apologies. The study also found that learners had problems with pragmatic transfer from L1 to the target language.



Garcia (1989) used open-ended role-plays to compare the politeness strategies used by American English NSs and Venezuelan Spanish NSs in English. The study indicated that due to pragmatic transfer Venezuelans exhibited more positive politeness, whereas the American subjects preferred negative politeness. Venezuelans thus sounded impolite and showing no respect to H in negative-politeness oriented English environment. Garcia concludes that sociocultural factors greatly influence the choice of apology strategies. She claims that Venezuelans prefer to establish an attitude of equality in such situations rather than one of deference.

Mir (1992) studied apology strategies of Spanish EFL learners and found that they used a smaller range of strategies compared to NSs. They mostly relied on the strategy "expression of apology" (IFIDs like "I am sorry", "forgive me"; see Chapter 3) rather than use and combine different strategies like English NSs. In addition, significant differences were found in the use of explicit apologies and offers of repair, which suggests that the Spanish learners are not aware of when these strategies are required in the target language, and therefore transfer their pragmatic competence from their native language.

In their study of advanced Catalan EFL learners, Sabaté i Dalmau and Curell i Gotor (2007) found that less advanced learners were more inclined to pragmalinguistic errors, while the more advanced learners used as many strategies in L2 as in L1, and encountered few pragmalinguistic difficulties. However, they sometimes failed to recognise in which situation it was appropriate to employ specific strategies: in other words, the Catalan learners had not fully acquired sociopragmatic competency in L2. In addition, the learners diverged from NS norm in their use of apology intensification. Although most advanced learners employed intensifiers more frequently, they did not achieve native-like ability, nor did they use the full range of intensifiers, but rather, preferred a more limited set.

In Kondo's (1997) study of Japanese students learning English in the U.S. for one academic year, she concluded that learners moved towards using apology strategies that were more target-like, such as using explanations for the offense (e.g., "It happened because of X") more frequently and expressions of apology (e.g., "sorry") less frequently.

Having analysed previous studies, Shively & Cohen (2008) concluded that lower-proficiency English learners (beginning, intermediate) often overuse direct

expressions of apology, such as standard phrases “I’m sorry” and “excuse me” and are more inclined to transfer strategies from their L1 than more advanced learners: the higher the proficiency level the less instances evidence of L1 transfer were evident. The most advanced learners appear to use a wider range of apology strategies and may also shift their use of strategies to be more similar to NSs. Proficiency level has also been found to affect apology intensification (“I am *so/very/really/terribly* sorry”; see Chapter 3). Acquiring native-like intensification strategies is argued to be rather difficult. Although learners have been observed employing intensification more frequently at higher proficiency levels (Sabaté i Dalmau & Curell i Gotor, 2007; Trosborg, 1995), greater frequency of intensification does not always go hand in hand with nativelike apology realization.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This chapter will focus on the methods and procedures used for collecting and analysing data. The following issues will be discussed in the chapter: (a) the research design; (b) information about the participants of the study; (c) data collection procedures; (d) the instrument of data collection, that is Discourse Completion Test (DCT); (e) data analysis methods.

The study aims at examining linguistic politeness in speech acts of request and apology produced by MA students at the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT) of Near East University in academic context.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What strategies are used by EFL learners in performing the speech act of requesting in the course of student-teacher interaction?
2. What are the strategies employed by EFL learners when apologising to academic staff?
3. How do the students' realisations of requests and apologies deviate from or conform to English norms in terms of linguistic politeness?

#### Research Design

This study adopted a survey design; the nature of the study is descriptive. Descriptive research cannot be attributed to either qualitative or quantitative methods, but it can combine the elements of them both in the same study (Jonassen, 2001).

Descriptive research aims at finding out "what is," which is why descriptive data are often collected with the help of survey methods (Borg & Gall, 1989). It involves gathering data that describe events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collection (Glass & Hopkins, 1984).

#### Participants

Participants of the study were graduate students of the ELT department of Near East University (NEU) in North Cyprus ( $N=20$ ), 15 males and 5 females. The respondents were divided into several age groups. The majority of them ( $n=13$ ) were



between the ages of 24 and 29. Out of the remaining respondents, two were in the age group 21-23, and 5 in the age group 30-39.

When asked to rate their level of English proficiency from excellent to poor on a 4-point scale, 15 participants estimated their level as good, and the remaining five as excellent. Seven of the participants reported that they had previously visited an English-speaking country (all of them reported having stayed there for at least a year). When asked to rate the frequency of their previous contact with native speakers of English on a 3-point scale (frequent, occasional, rare), 9 respondents indicated that in the past it was occasional, 6 – rare, and 5 – frequent. As for the current contact with native speakers, 10 respondents reported that it was occasional, 8 – rare, and 2 – frequent.

The respondents were native speakers of the following languages: Kurdish ( $n=9$ ), Russian ( $n=4$ , although all of them were bilingual: 1 also named Bashkir as native language, and 3–Crimean Tatar), Turkish ( $n=3$ ), Hausa ( $n=2$ ), Arabic ( $n=1$ ), and Azerbaijani ( $n=1$ ).

## Procedure

The data were collected during 2012-2013 academic year. Permission from the head of the Department of English Language Teaching was obtained in order to carry out the study. Initially, two questionnaires were designed. The first one was distributed to as many graduate students at the ELT department as the researcher could reach. The second one was supposed to measure politeness in e-mail, but due to the lengthy nature of the questionnaires and the participants' poor feedback, the researcher had to refrain from the second questionnaire, as it was unlikely to be properly responded to.

The questionnaire used in the study consisted of two parts (see Appendix). The first part was given to elicit demographic information such as age, gender, nationality, first language, and students' self-perceived English proficiency level. The second was a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) comprised of 10 scenarios eliciting requests and 10 scenarios eliciting apologies. The test contained short descriptions of status-unequal (student/teacher) situations, and the respondents were asked to respond as they would in real life.

The questionnaire was distributed to 40 graduate students via the e-mail and to 10 students during their classes at the department. The respondents were encouraged to

ask questions if they had any difficulties in filling in the questionnaire. They could either return the questionnaire in person or send it by e-mail. As the questionnaire was lengthy, the respondents had no time restrictions. The return rate was 24, and 4 of the completed questionnaires had to be excluded from the study (they were incomplete or filled in incorrectly), leaving only 20 qualified questionnaires which provided 400 speech acts: 200 requests and 200 apologies. The responses were then coded and analysed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0.

## **Instrument**

**Discourse completion test.** The instrument used for data collection was the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) (see Appendix) initially developed by Blum-Kulka and employed by as an instrument for data collection in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP). DCT is a questionnaire employed to elicit a particular speech act. It requires respondents to read a description of a social situation and write what they would say in that situation. An example of a DCT scenario is presented below:

You are very much interested in auditing a class taught by one of your teachers. You already have taken two classes from the professor, and you know each other well. So you decide to ask this professor's permission to audit. You say: \_\_\_\_\_

DCTs have been frequently used in pragmatics research and they have also been much criticized (Kasper & Dahl, 1991). They served as data elicitation instruments in many empirical studies in pragmatics (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1982; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Fukushima, 1996; Woodfield, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010).

The biggest advantage of DCTs is that they allow collecting large amounts of data in a relatively short time (Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Sasaki, 1998; Wolfson, Marmor, & Jones, 1989). DCTs also make it possible to control the contextual variables important to the study (Rintell & Mitchell, 1989) and to collect comparable data (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

Nevertheless, DCT as a data collection instrument also has its drawbacks. To begin with, many researchers claim that using a written mode to elicit spoken data is



inappropriate and DCTs cannot elicit natural oral data from subjects (Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Fukushima, 2003). The administration of the questionnaires in written form imposes a certain risk of interference from written language: respondents may use more formal language in written DCTs as writing is perceived as a more formal activity than speaking (Rintell & Mitchell, 1989). In addition, written responses cannot capture such information as prosodic features of speech, turn-taking and sequencing of action, and nonverbal features in interaction. However, there are hardly any studies that have taken advantage of this kind of information and included it into analysis.

Some researchers also claim that DCT data are incompatible with naturally occurring speech since the questionnaire reflects only what participants think they should say, which is not necessarily what they would actually say in the real situation (Boxer, 1996; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Wolfson, Marmor, & Jones, 1989). The counterargument is that, although DCTs cannot measure respondents' "actual production", they are useful to inform about speakers' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic "knowledge of the strategies and linguistic forms by which communicative acts can be implemented" (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 96) and about what "speakers tend to view as being pragmatically appropriate linguistic behaviour" (Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010, p. 89). Thus, it can be said that DCT measures participants' competence but does not evaluate their performance (Kasper, 2000). In language learning setting, DCTs may be used to assess learners' sociopragmatic competence (Nurani, 2009).

As DCT creates model responses which are likely to occur in spontaneous speeches, DCT responses and natural speech have been shown to contain the same strategies and semantic formulae, though they tend to differ in length and complexity (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992).

In the view of its advantages, the written DCT was chosen to investigate request and apology realization strategies in this study.

**Design of the DCT for the study.** The DCT employed in the present study was designed to elicit requests and apologies. The respondents were given short descriptions of status-unequal (student/teacher) scenarios and were instructed to imagine themselves in these situations and respond to them in direct speech, thus providing a request or apology strategy in English. The tasks required the students to



“react to these scenarios as *they* would, thus allowing them to retain their identities, which is likely to elicit authentic responses reflecting their politeness norms” (Ogiermann, 2009a, p. 82). An example of a completed scenario was provided in order to ensure the clarity of the instructions.

The DCT consisted of 20 situations from academic life eliciting requests and apologies (see Appendix). Most of them were adopted from DCTs in studies of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Byon (2005, 2006), Chang (2010), Gonda (2001), İstifçi (2009), Krulatz (2012), Marazita (2009), and Rose (1994). The researcher aimed to select situations commonly found in students' daily interaction with their lecturers. There were 10 request and 10 apology scenarios (see Appendix).

### **Data Analysis**

This study adopted the framework first introduced by Blum-Kulka et al. in Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) in the 1980s. Blum-Kulka designed a taxonomy for classification of requests and apologies which has since then been used in studies on these speech acts. The classifications for coding of requests (DCT questions 1-10) and apologies (DCT questions 11-20) are discussed below.

**Coding of requests.** The categorization of requests was based on the taxonomy first introduced in CCSARP (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Following the CCSARP coding scheme, the researcher segmented all requests from the questionnaire into the following units of analysis: head act (also referred to as core request or the request proper); internal modifications; external modifications; alerters.

All segments excluding the head act are optional and therefore do not have to be present in every request.

The coding schemes of head act strategies, internal and external modifiers, and alerters are presented below.

**Request head act.** The head act is “the minimal unit which can realize a request” (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 275). Head act can be employed on its own, without any peripheral elements, to convey the request. However, it is often combined with external and internal modifiers, which can mitigate or aggravate its force. Head acts vary in terms of strategy type and perspective.

*Request strategy.* Request strategy is “the obligatory choice of the level of directness by which the request is realized” (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 278). Nine head act strategies introduced by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), from the most direct to the most indirect, are listed below (Table 1). They are mutually exclusive, i.e. only one request strategy can be used in the head act.

Table 1

*Classification of Request Strategies*

- |  |
|--|
| 1. <i>Mood Derivable</i> : utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force (e.g., ‘Leave me alone’, ‘Clean up that mess.’)  |
| 2. <i>Performatives</i> : utterances in which the illocutionary force is explicitly named (e.g., ‘I am asking you to clean up the mess.’)  |
| 3. <i>Hedged Performatives</i> : utterances in which the naming of the illocutionary force is modified by hedging expressions (e.g., ‘I would like to ask you to give your presentation a week earlier than scheduled.’)                               |
| 4. <i>Obligation Statements</i> : utterances which state the obligation of the hearer to carry out the act (e.g., ‘You’ll have to move that car.’).  |
| 5. <i>Want Statements</i> : utterances which state the speaker’s desire that the hearer carries out the act (e.g., ‘I really want you to stop bothering me.’)  |
| 6. <i>Suggestory Formulae</i> : utterances which contain a suggestion to do X (e.g., ‘How about cleaning up?’)   |
| 7. <i>Query Preparatory</i> : utterances containing reference to preparatory conditions (e.g., ability, willingness) as conventionalized in any specific language (e.g., ‘Could you clean up the kitchen, please?’, ‘Would you mind moving your car?’) |
| 8. <i>Strong Hints</i> : utterances containing partial reference to object of element needed for the implementation of the act (e.g., ‘You have left the kitchen in a right mess.’)  |
| 9. <i>Mild Hints</i> : utterances that make no reference to the request proper (or any of its elements) but are interpretable as requests by context (e.g., ‘I am a nun.’ in response to a persistent hassler).  |

(Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 18)

Among these strategies, three levels of directness can be identified:

1. Direct level, to which belong such strategies as mood derivable, performative, hedged performative, obligation statement, and want statement.
2. Conventionally indirect level, represented by suggestory formulae and query preparatory.
3. Non-conventional indirect level – hints.

In addition to the above-mentioned strategies, there is also the option to opt out, that is refrain from doing the speech act.

*Request perspective.* As it has been mentioned above, head acts also vary in terms of perspective. The choice of perspective affects the illocutionary force of the request. A request can be realized from the perspective of the requestee, i.e. H (hearer), the requester, i.e. S (speaker), or both participants. Request perspective can also be impersonal, i.e. avoid mentioning any of the agents (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). The coding scheme for request perspective is given below:



Table 2

*Types of Request Perspective (Examples Taken from Student Data)*

Category	Example
<i>Hearer oriented</i>	"Could you please allow me to do my test next day?"
<i>Speaker oriented</i>	"May I send you an e-mail this weekend?"
<i>Speaker and hearer oriented (joint)</i>	"We should postpone our thesis consultation for the weekend".
<i>Impersonal</i>	"Is it possible to postpone our meeting for several hours?"

**Internal modification.** Blum-Kulka et al. (1989, p. 60) define internal modifiers as "elements within the request utterance proper (linked to the head act), the presence of which is not essential for the utterance to be potentially understood as a request". These modifiers include downgraders and upgraders: the former serve to soften the request and the latter to intensify it. There are two types of internal modifiers: syntactic and lexical/phrasal. The classification scheme for coding internal modification in the present study was adopted from Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) and is shown below in Tables 3a and 3b. Since no upgraders were found in the data, they are not included in the study.

Table 3a

*Classification of Syntactic Downgraders*

Name	Example
Conditional structures	'Could you give me an extension for a few days?'
Conditional clause	'... if it's possible to have an extension for the assignment.'
Tense	'Is it all right if I <u>asked</u> for an extension?'
Aspect (aka -ing form)	'I was wondering if it's possible to have an extension for the assignment.'
Interrogative	'Will you do the cooking tonight?'
Negation of preparatory	'I don't suppose there's any chance of an extension?'

(Woodfield &amp; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010, p.91)

Regarding syntactic downgraders, it should be noted that past tense is considered as downgrader only when used with present tense reference, durative aspect— only if it can be replaced with a simple form, and the interrogative in query preparatory requests is not considered as syntactic downgrader (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).



Table 3b

*Classification of Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders*

Name	Definition	Devices
Marker 'please'	'An optional element added to a request to bid for cooperative behaviour' (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 283).	'please'
Consultative devices	'expressions by means of which the speaker seeks to involve the hearer directly bidding for cooperation' (Blum-Kulka, et al., 1989, p. 283).	'would you mind', 'do you think', 'would it be all right if', 'is it/would it be possible', 'do you think I could...', 'is it all right?'
Downtoners	'modifiers which are used by a speaker in order to modulate the impact his or her request is likely to have on the hearer' (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 284).	'possibly', 'perhaps', 'just', 'rather', 'maybe'
Understaters/ Hedges	'adverbial modifiers by means of which the speaker under- represents the state of affairs denoted in the proposition' (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 283).	'a bit', 'a little', 'sort of', 'a kind of'
Subjectivisers	'elements in which the speaker explicitly expresses his or her subjective opinion vis-a`-vis the state of affairs referred to in the proposition, thus lowering the assertive force of the request' (Blum-Kulka at al., 1989, p. 284).	'I'm afraid', 'I wonder', 'I think/suppose'
Cajolers	'conventionalized, addressee-oriented modifiers whose function is to make things clearer for the addressee and invite him/her to metaphorically participate in the speech act' (Sifianou, 1992, p. 180).	'You know', 'You see ...'
Appealers	Addressee-oriented elements 'Clean the table dear' will occurring in a syntactically final position. They may signal turn-availability and 'are used by the speaker whenever he or she wishes to appeal to his or her hearer's benevolent understanding' (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 285).	Clean the table dear, will you? ..... ok/ right?').

(Woodfield &amp; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010, p.90)

**External modification (supportive moves).** External modifiers, or supportive moves, are the parts that are external to the head act which either aggravate or mitigate its force (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). They can both precede and follow the head act. The classification of supportive moves used in this study is based on that by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Woodfield and Economidou-Koetsidis (2010).

Table 4

*Classification of External Modifiers (Examples Taken from Student Data)*

Name	Definition	Example
Grounder	"The speaker indicates the reasons for the request. (Grounders may precede or follow the Head act)" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p.205)	"...since I need to meet my mother from the airport"
Disarmer	"The speaker tries to remove any potential objections the hearer might raise upon being confronted with the request" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 287)	"I understand that you are very busy"
Preparator	"preparing the hearer for the ensuing request by announcing it or asking permission to perform it" (House & Kasper, 1987, p. 1277).	"I'd like to ask you about something"
Imposition minimizer	"the speaker tries to reduce the imposition placed on the hearer by his request" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 288).	"in your free time"
Apology	"The speaker apologises for posing the request and/or for the imposition incurred" (Woodfield & Economidou-Koetsidis, 2010, p. 92)	"I apologize for any inconveniences"
Gratitude	the speaker expresses gratitude to the hearer	"Thanks for giving me an appointment"
Discourse orientation move	"opening discourse moves which serve an orientation function but do necessarily mitigate or aggravate the request in any way" (Woodfield & Economidou-Koetsidis, 2010, p. 92)	"you said that you've got a book about my topic"
Sweetener	"By expressing exaggerated appreciation of the hearer's ability to comply with the request, the speaker lowers the imposition involved" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 205)	"and I noticed that there is a really good book on your shelf"

**Alerters.** Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) define alerter as “an opening element preceding the actual request” (p. 276). Alerters can be of two kinds: attention getters (e.g. greeting and apologies like “Hello”, “Excuse me”) and address terms (“Professor Gardner”, “Mr. Smith”). They are not mutually exclusive and can be used together, e.g., “Hello, Kate”. Table 5 shows coding scheme for alerters.

Table 5

*Types of Alerters*

Category	Example
Attention getter	Excuse me Hey, Hello, Hi, Listen, etc.
Address term	Professor XXX, Mary, sir, ma'am, etc.
Both	Hi, Mary
Zero alerter	Not using any alerter

To summarize the procedure of analysis, consider the following example:

“Professor, I have a problem with my teeth, and doctor said that I should be in the hospital for several hours. I can’t come to your office on Monday. Is it possible to postpone our meeting for several hours, or some days?”  
(Situation 3).

This utterance can be coded in the following way:

Table 6

*An Example of Coding for Requests*

Dimension	Category	Element
1. Request perspective	Impersonal	“Is it possible”
2. Request strategy	Query preparatory	“Is it possible to postpone”
3. Downgraders	Lexical: 1) Consultative device 2) Hedge	“Is it possible to” “ <u>several</u> hours”, “ <u>some</u> days”
4. Upgraders	none	none
5. External modification	grounder	I have a problem with my teeth, and doctor said that I should be in the hospital for several hours. I can’t come to your office on Monday
Alerter	Address term	“Professor”



**Coding of apologies.** There are several strategies of realization of apology. According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), "the most direct realization of an apology is done via an explicit illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), which selects a routinized, formulaic expression of regret (a performative verb) such as: *(be) sorry; apologize, regret; excuse, etc.*" (p. 206). Four more possible apology strategies can be distinguished in addition to the IFID. They are: an expression of the S's responsibility for the offence; an explanation or account of the cause which brought about the offence; an offer of repair; a promise of forbearance. The first of them, i.e. taking on responsibility, can be realized though several sub-strategies (see Table 7) which "may be placed on a continuum from strong self-humbling on S's part to a complete and blunt denial of responsibility" the latter meaning "rejection of the need to apologize" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p.207). Unlike the request strategy types, the categories mentioned above are not mutually exclusive and can be used simultaneously, i.e. several apology strategies can be employed in the same utterance. Apology can be intensified by using several strategies at once and with the help of intensifying expressions within the IFID (See Table 7). In this study, coding categories for apologies were based on that of CCSARP and Ogiermann (2009a).

Table 7

*Classification of Apology Realization Strategies (Examples Taken from Student Data)*

Strategy	Type	Example
Expression of apology (IFID)	Expression of regret	"I am very sorry"
	Offer of apology	"please accept my apologies"
	Request for forgiveness	"Please forgive me"
	Disarming Softener	"I'm afraid", "Unfortunately"
Intensification	Adverbials	"really", "so", "very", "terribly", "truly"
	Repetition	"very-very"
	Politeness Marker)	"please"
	Exclamation	"oh", "oh no", "oh my God", "ups"
Acknowledgement of responsibility	Denial of fault	"There was nothing I could do"
	Minimisation	"This is the first time that I have forgotten an assignment"
	Admission of fact	"I have lost your dictionary"
	Lack of intent	"I didn't mean to"
	Self-deficiency	"How silly I am!"
	Expression of embarrassment	"I feel really embarrassed"
	Explicit self-blame	"It's completely my fault"
Explanation		"I had a serious problem and I didn't even have the time to let you know".
Offer of repair	Unspecified	"May I help you?"
	Specified	"I promise I will buy a new one for you".
Promise of non-recurrence		"I promise it won't happen again"
Concern for the hearer		"Are you ok? Have I hurt you?"
Alerter	Address term	"Sir/Mam", "Professor"
	Attention getter	"Hello", "Hi", "Excuse me"

The coding of apology can be demonstrated in the example below:

“Sorry, Doctor. I forgot to take your book with me. Can I come tomorrow to your office? Or I can go to the dormitory right now and bring it to you”  
(Situation 11).

This utterance can be coded in the following way:

Table 8

*An Example of Coding for Apologies*

Element	Sub-strategy (Type)	Element
Expression of apology (IFID)	Expression of regret	“Sorry”
Intensification of the IFID	none	None
Acknowledgement of responsibility (RESP)	Admission of fact	“I forgot to take your book with me”
Explanation (EXPL)	none	None
Offer of repair (REPR)	Specified	“Can I come tomorrow to your office? Or I can go to the dormitory right now and bring it to you”.
Promise of non-recurrence/ forbearance (FORB)	none	None
Concern for the hearer	none	None
Addresser	Address term	“Doctor”

The coded data were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0. The frequencies of request and apology strategies were analysed using descriptive statistics.

## Conclusion

This chapter provided information about research design, participants, instrument, data collection procedures, and methods of analysis. The results and discussion will be given in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings on the realization of the speech acts of request and apology. The first part of the chapter will dwell on requests: the request strategies produced by the respondents, request perspective, the use of internal and external modifications, and the use of alerters (terms of address and attention-getters) will be discussed. The second part of the chapter will concentrate on apology strategies produced by respondents, such as IFIDs, taking on responsibility, explanation, offer of repair, promise of forbearance, and expressing concern for the hearer. The categorisation of the data in this study was based on the request taxonomy developed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) (see Chapter 3).

#### Requests

In the following section, the types and frequencies of use of the request strategies and request modifications will be discussed.

The DCT used in the study contained 10 request situations and was filled out by 20 respondents, so 200 requests were supposed to be elicited. However, 196 request utterances were obtained instead of the expected 200, because in four cases the respondents chose to opt out, that is not to do the face-threatening act of request. The questionnaires containing such “no-responses” were not excluded from the study because not doing the FTA is one of the possible politeness strategies described by Brown and Levinson: it allows speaker (S) to avoid imposing on hearer (H) as well as to save one’s own face. “Opting out” was added to the list of head act strategies in the comparative table of request strategies. However, when closely examining the request perspective and modifications, the 196 actual responses were regarded as 100%.

**Request head act strategies.** Request head acts were assigned to one of the request strategies found in Blum-Kulka’s taxonomy and examined according to degree of directness. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) divided the various request strategies into three major categories ranging from most to least direct. The first group is comprised of direct requests, to which belong the following strategies: mood derivable, performative, hedged performative, obligation statement, and want



statement. Then there is the category of conventionally indirect requests represented by suggestory formulae and query preparatory. The last category, indirect requests, is represented by hints.

In speech acts beneficial to S and face-threatening to H, such as requests, indirectness is considered to be a sign of politeness since it reduces the imposition on H. Thus, the less direct a request is the more it should be polite. Leech (1983) states that "indirect illocutions tend to be more polite (a) because they increase the degree of optionality, and (b) because the more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be" (p. 108). Blum-Kulka (1987), on the other hand, remarks that there is "no linear relationship between indirectness and politeness" (p. 140), which means that indirectness does not necessarily imply politeness. Blum-Kulka's (1987) research was designed to examine the English native speakers' perception of politeness and (in)directness. The most direct strategy type (mood derivable) is thought to be the least polite. However, *hints*, judged as the most indirect, are not considered to be the most polite. Blum-Kulka suggests that *query preparatory* questions, which are achieved by the use of *conventional indirectness*, seem to be the most polite. According to Blum-Kulka (1987), the highest level of politeness in relation to requests may be reached "by appearing to be indirect without burdening the hearer with the actual cost of true indirectness" (p. 143). Larina (2009) also highlights the importance of conventional indirectness. She claims that in the English communication where privacy considerations make direct impact on the addressee unacceptable, request is one of the most dangerous speech acts. That is why native speakers devote a lot of effort to maintain distance and mitigate imposition on the hearer, actively using politeness strategies of distancing. As a result, they avoid the use of the imperative (i.e. direct requests) and prefer interrogative constructions with modal verbs with questions about the ability or desire to perform an act (i.e. conventionally indirect strategies), as well as a variety of modifiers that add doubt and uncertainty to this opportunity.

According to previous studies (Hassall, 2003; Hill, 1997; Rose, 2000), the frequency of use of conventionally indirect strategies increases with proficiency of language learners, while the preference for direct strategies appears to be typical of the lower proficiency groups' performance.

In the present study, direct strategies were used in 29/200 (14.5 %) requests, conventionality indirect were found in 155/200 (77.5%) responses, and hints – in

8/200 (4%) requests. In 4/200 (2%) of DCT situations students chose to opt out, and 2% of the requests had more than one head act. Table 9 shows the distribution of the request strategies chosen by the respondents. The most dominant strategy in the present study was query preparatory found in 150/200(75 %) cases. Other request strategies were used much less frequently. The second most used request strategy was that of want statement which appeared only in 14/200 (7 %) responses. Other strategies are even scarcer: hints were found in 4% or 8/200 requests, hedged performatives – in 7/200 (3.5%), mood derivable and suggestory formulae – each in 5/200 (2.5%), performative –in 3/200 (1.5 %). The strategy “obligation statement” was never used by the respondents. In addition, in four cases (2%), more than one head was present in a request. For that, the category “multiple head acts” was added. Finally, in four situations (2%) participants chose to opt out. Each of the requests found in the data will be examined in detail below.

Table 9  
*Request Strategies Used by the Respondents*

	Mood derivable	Performative	Hedged performativ	Obligation statement	Want statement	Suggestory formulae	Query preparatory	Hint	Multiple head acts	Opting out
S1	-	-	1 (5%)	-	1 (5%)	-	18 (90%)	-	-	-
S2	1 (5%)	-	-	-	1 (5%)	-	18 (90%)	-	-	-
S3	-	-	1 (5%)	-	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	14 (70%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	-
S4	-	-	1 (5%)	-	1 (5%)	-	16 (80%)	-	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
S5	-	1 (5%)	-	-	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	14 (70%)	-	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
S6	1 (5%)	-	-	-	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	11 (55%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	2 (10%)
S7	2 (10%)	-	1 (5%)	-	4 (20%)	-	13 (65%)	-	-	-
S8	1 (5%)	-	-	-	-	-	17(85%)	2 (10%)	-	-
S9	-	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	-	1 (5%)	-	16 (80%)	-	-	-
S10	1 (5%)	-	2 (10%)	-	2 (10)	-	13 (65%)	3 (15%)	-	-
Total	5 (2.5%)	3 (1.5%)	7 (3.5%)	0 (0%)	14 (7 %)	5 (2.5%)	150 (75%)	8 (4%)	4 (2%)	4 (2%)

*Note.* S1.Borrowing a book; S2. Asking the university president for an interview; S3. Asking a teacher to postpone an appointment; S4. Asking a permission to change a test date; S5. Asking for permission to audit a class; S6. Asking for a consultation on the weekend; S7. Asking a teacher to help fixing a computer; S8. Asking a teacher to speak slower; S9. Asking a teacher to write a recommendation letter; S10. Asking for permission to leave the class earlier.

**Opting out.** Brown and Levinson regard remaining silent and not doing the FTA as the most polite option. According to their politeness scale(1-perform the FTA bald on record; 2- positive politeness; 3- negative politeness;4- perform the FTA off-record; 5- withhold the FTA), “the higher the number, the greater the risk of loss of face presented by the situation, and thus the more polite the strategy,” (Sifianou, 1997, p. 67) which means that the fifth strategy, not doing the FTA, is the



most polite one among the five strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987) write: “the payoff for the fifth strategic choice, ‘Don’t do the FTA’, is simply that S avoids offending H at all with this particular FTA. Of course S also fails to achieve his desired communication, and as there are naturally no interesting linguistic reflexes of this last-ditch strategy, we will ignore it in our discussion henceforth” (p. 72).

As shown in Table 9, respondents opted out in the following scenarios: S4 (asking a permission to change a test date because of a wedding), S5 (asking for permission to audit a class), and S6 (asking for a consultation on the weekend). The students might have chosen to opt out in S4 and S6 because the degree of imposition seems to be rather high in these situations. Two of the respondents commented on their choice not to do the FTA:

“It’s impossible for me to miss my exam for a “wedding.” (S4)

“I’m not sure I could ask for such a favour.” (S6)

However, S5 does not seem to be a situation that seriously threatens the faces of both interlocutors. The respondent did not explain the reason why (s)he chose to opt out in this situation. It might be that the student thought that it was allowed to audit classes without asking for permission and considered the request unnecessary.

**Direct strategies.** As already mentioned, the group of direct request strategies consists of such strategies as mood derivable, performative (also called explicit performative), hedged performative, obligation statement (sometimes referred to as locution derivable), and want statement. Direct strategies were used in 29/200 (14.5%) requests. In general, direct request strategies are considered rather impolite in the English language (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Larina, 2009). They can be used in informal communication between people who are close to each other, but are rather inappropriate in situations with medium social distance where H is superior in status, like in this study. Thus, students’ low preference for these strategies evidences in favour of their awareness of the English politeness norms. The respondents who did choose direct strategies in their requests consistently added politeness marker “*please*” and other internal and external modifiers in order to mitigate the effect of direct requests, which means that they were not entirely unaware of the importance of negative politeness: the students seemed to acknowledge the directness of the requests and thus tried to mitigate them. Still, 29 direct requests in formal settings with status-superior interlocutors signal that some



respondents lack pragmatic competence. Each of the direct strategies will be discussed below.

*Mood derivable.* In the present study, mood derivable strategy was found only in five requests (2.5%). Such infrequent use of this strategy and the tendency to mitigate it shows that most students' requests were in line with the English language norms, according to which using mood derivable is considered impolite in most situations (Searle, 1975; Wierzbicka, 1991; Trosborg, 1995; Belza, 2008; Larina, 2005, 2009). Searle (1975, p. 64) claims that "conversational requirements of politeness normally make it awkward to issue flat imperative sentences (e.g. *Leave my room*) or explicit performatives (e.g. *I order you to leave the room*), and we therefore seek to find indirect means to our illocutionary ends". According to Belza (2008), unmodified mood derivable sounds "authoritative and must be obeyed" (p. 85). Trosborg (1995) also states that if an utterance has the form of the imperative, it is perceived as an order rather than a request. This idea is supported by Wierzbicka (1991) and Larina (2005), who claims that in English communication, a command is conventionally expressed by imperative (*Give me that book*) and a request by interrogatives (*Would you give me that book, please?*) or declaratives (*I'd appreciate if you would give me that book*).

In addition, some researchers claim that mood derivable requests, especially unmodified, are supposed to be used in status-unequal situations when the requester is superior to the requestee (Trosborg, 1995; Belza, 2008; Sifianou, 1992), but not vice-versa. In the present study, however, all the requests were made from a lower-status interlocutor (a student) to a higher-status requestee (a teacher). This explains why mood derivable requests were avoided by the respondents, and the few requests containing this strategy were modified by internal and external downgraders to soften the strength of the imperative (all of them had politeness marker "please" and at least one external modifier), which is shown in the following examples:

(1) I am really sorry, sir, because of my terrible illness, I can't meet you on the arranged time as I have promised. And I know very well that you will be very busy, but please give me another chance to meet you. (S6)

(2) Now I'm working on thesis, you know how it is difficult, please, I need your help, I cannot trust in anyone, please fix my computer as soon as possible. (S7)

(3) I'm sorry, I cannot follow your speech, please, repeat it again. (S8).

(4) I am so sorry, I know you're busy, but I have a serious problem on my computer, please help me. (S7)

To sum up, the low frequency of mood derivable in the data and its considerable mitigation indicate that most students were aware of the high degree of illocutionary force of this strategy and tried to avoid it when speaking to their professors, and those who nevertheless used them compensated for its use by mitigation.

*Performative.* In performative requests, the illocutionary intent is explicitly named by the requester with the help of a performative verb (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Trosborg (1995) claims that "the inclusion of a performative verb conveying requestive intent, e.g. *ask, request, order, command*, etc. explicitly marks the utterance as an order" (p. 203). Larina (2009) states that in the English communicative culture, performative verbs are perceived as too direct expression of communicational intent of the requester and therefore their use is highly limited. This refers to the verb "to ask" in the first place. Wierzbicka (2006) notes that in the English language, the norm forbidding the use of performative strategy with the verb "to ask" is even stronger than the norm forbidding the use of the imperative. Larina (2009) also claims that direct declarative statements expressing a request, such as performative and want statement, are just as untypical for the English communicative culture as the imperative. They are perceived as close to the imperative constructions in terms of directness, because the requester using them also directly states his or her will while ignoring wishes and abilities of the requestee. From English speakers' point of view, a person using such request strategies puts his or her interests above the interests of the requestee and thus demonstrates his or her own superiority over the interlocutor.

Performative was one of the least frequent strategies found in the data, which is a point in support of the students' pragmatic awareness: it was used only in 1.5% (3/200) of the students' requests:

(5) Mr./Mrs., I'm applying for a scholarship and might need a recommendation letter to submit. Since you're my academic advisor and know me well, I've come to you with a petition to write me a recommendation letter, if you please. (S9)



(6) Hi, Doctor. I am applying for a scholarship and this scholarship will not be accepted if I don't bring a recommendation letter from any of my professors, so I have chosen you, Doctor, to write for me this recommendation. (S9)

(7) Since I got benefit from your two previous classes, I am asking your permission to audit again. (S5)

*Hedged performative.* Hedged performatives differ from explicit ones in that they contain modal and quasi-modal verbs (e.g. *must, would, have to*) or verbs expressing intention (e.g. *would like to*), which modify the illocutionary verb (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Using hedged performative instead of explicit performative helps to soften the illocutionary force of the request. It might be for this reason that this strategy was used slightly more frequently than the explicit performative (7/200 [3.5%] requests):

(8) Sir, since I have to go to the air-port, I would ask you to let me leave an hour earlier, please. (S 10)

(9) I am so sorry for taking your time, but since you are my best teacher, I would like to ask you to provide me with a recommendation letter in order to get a scholarship (S9)

*Obligation statement.* No instances of this request strategy were found in the data. Obligation statements are rather authoritative and highly inappropriate in upward requests (from a student to a teacher). Belza (2008) claims that "when employing *Obligation Statements*, S either exerts his or her own authority, or refers to some external authority (e.g. institution, law, etc.) in order to persuade H to perform a desired action" (p. 95). Naturally, students refrained from using this strategy in requests to their professors.

*Want statement.* Want statement was the second most preferred strategy after query preparatory and the most frequently used type among direct request. Even so, this strategy accounted for only 14/200 (7%) requests. As already mentioned above, want statements are untypical for the English communicative culture (Larina, 2009). Their illocutionary force is relatively strong, which makes unmodified want statements rather impolite (Trosborg, 1995). Wierzbicka (1991) claims that English people tend to avoid this form in all SAs with pragmatic meaning *I want you to do it*, trying to diminish and soften their imposition and demonstrate their respect to other people's autonomy (privacy), and it does not matter whether the H is obliged to



comply with the S (as in command), whether the action is of benefit to the speaker (request) or to the hearer (invitation).

The illocutionary force of want statement may be softened through the choice of verb (*need* has a weaker illocutionary force than *want*), syntactic downgrading (conditional structures such as *I would like to* and tense *I wanted to*) (Lubecka, 2000). It should be noted that only three requests found in the data were not softened in any of the abovementioned ways and followed the simple “I want” formula, and even these requests were somewhat mitigated with the help of external modifiers (supportive moves):

(10) I am sorry, I want to change the appointment time to the next week (S3)

(11) I know you are so busy Professor, but I have a difficult request for you. If you don't mind, I want to change the date of our appointment to the weekend. (S6)

(12) If it is possible, I want to take permission to reschedule my test because a friend of mine has a wedding party. (S4)

In the rest of the requests, the verb *need* or syntactic downgrading were employed. Below are the examples of want statements with *need*:

(13) I am sorry to tell you this, but I need your help because I know you are very good in this field and I also don't want to waste your time. (S7)

(14) I need one hour of your time. (S2)

As for the syntactic downgrades, they were restricted to the use of conditional structure, that is the formula *I would like to* which was used in in 6 out of 14 want statements, for instance:

(15) Sir, I would like to audit one of your classes if you please. I'm very much interested in it. (S5)

(16) Hello (Teacher's name), I would like to audit this class if possible. (S5)

(17) My system behaves strangely these days. I would like to bring it to you if you don't mind. (S7)

**Conventionally indirect strategies.** This group of request strategies includes suggestory formulae and query preparatory requests. As illustrated in Table 9, conventional indirectness was the most frequent strategy type found in the study. It accounts for 155/200 (77.5%) responses, the majority of which were query preparatory requests (150/200 [75%]). According to Larina (2009), conventional indirectness is a requirement of the English politeness. The politeness of

conventionally indirect requests can be explained by the fact that they make it easier for H to refuse and, what is more important, demonstrate S's respect towards the addressee's independence because they sound not as a direct call to action but rather as a question or willingness of the addressee to perform the act, that is, the final word belongs to the requestee. Regarding politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1978), being indirect is the way to express negative politeness, so conventionally indirect requests are negative politeness strategies.

*Suggestory formulae.* When applying this strategy, the speaker checks the hearer's cooperativeness by asking whether any conditions exist that may stop the hearer from performing a requested action, for instance:

(18) I am very interested in your way of teaching, why don't you let me audit your course? (S5)

(19) How about some other time? (S3)

(20) How about some other time, because I was ill? (S6)

Trosborg (1995) claims that "by presenting a request by means of a suggestory formula the speaker makes his/her request more tentative and plays down his/her own interest as a beneficiary of the action" (p. 201). Making request in the form of a suggestion is an expression of solidarity (Bella, 2012). According to Lubecka (2000), suggestory formulae are acceptable in informal situations, mainly among friends, which can explain a rather low frequency of occurrence of this strategy in the study (only five (2.5%) requests), since all the scenarios involved status-unequal requests addressed to superiors.

*Query preparatory.* As illustrated in Table 9, Query preparatory is the most common request strategy in the present study: it accounts for 150/200 (75%) requests and its predominance is consistent throughout all the request situations, comprising from 55% to 90% of the answers for each scenario. Such results are not surprising, since this request strategy is considered the most polite and appears to be the main request type of native speakers not only of English, but of many other languages (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

Query preparatory requests can be further divided into several sub-strategies. In this study, the classification of Trosborg (1995) is used. It includes four types of query preparatory: willingness, ability, possibility, and permission questions.



*Willingness questions* concern the hearer's willingness to carry out the desired act (Trosborg, 1995). They are hearer-oriented (see section 4.2.2) and contain auxiliaries *will* or *would*. Examples of willingness questions are demonstrated below:

(21) Would you please give me the book?(S1)

(22) Would you please repeat what you said before? (S8)

Trosborg (1995) also includes requests with if-clauses into this category: "The requests querying the hearer's willingness may be embedded in expressions of appreciation, hope, etc. on behalf of the requester" (p. 199). For example:

(23) Dear President, I'm writing my graduate thesis and I would appreciate if you spent a little time for the interview which I would like to conduct with you. It will be quite beneficial for me. (S2)

(24) Sir, I would be very much obliged to you if you help me to fix my computer.(S7)

As for the *ability questions*, according to Trosborg, the condition of ability refers to the hearer's capacity to perform the desired act. Two different conditions are relevant: 1) the inherent capacities of the requestee, both physical and mental, 2) the external circumstances related to time, place, etc. of the action. The verbs which appear in such requests are the modals *can* / *could*. The Hearer-oriented perspective is used in ability questions, for example:

(25) I wish I could come on time, but I am very sorry I have some serious problems. Could you postpone the appointment to next week please? (S3)

(26) Sorry for breaking off the conversation but could you please repeat it from the beginning? I'm lost. (S8)

Joint perspective is also possible:

(27) I am very sorry Mr. .... I have a very serious personal problem and I won't be able to come today. If it's possible, can we please arrange another meeting next week? (S3)

(28) Sir, I am really sorry but I will not be able to meet you on Wednesday because I am terribly sick. I know you are really busy but could we please meet at the weekend? (S6)

*Request for permission* involves a shift of focus alluding explicitly to the requester as the beneficiary or recipient of an activity instead of mentioning the requestee as the agent of the action (Trosborg, 1995), e.g.:

(29) Please, could I audit your class since I am really interested in it? (S5)



(30) Doctor, may I leave earlier? My mother is coming, and I need to be at the airport at 11.00 to meet her. (S10)

Requests for permission can also take hearer-oriented perspective (requests with “*let*” and “*allow*”):

(31) Mr./Mrs., on the same day we have a test in class there is an event I really have to be at. It’s actually an out-of-town wedding of very close friend of mine. Would you allow me to take the test on another day please? (S4)

(32) Sir, could you please let me go earlier? I have to be at the airport at 11:00 am. (S10)

*Possibility questions* determine the possibility of having an action carried out. They are often impersonal, but can also be hearer- or speaker-oriented or have joint perspective (*is it possible for you/for me/for us*). As noted by Lubecka (2000), the impersonal perspective indicates the lowest degree of the illocutionary force.

(33) Sorry for asking such a thing but I have a terrible illness and I won’t be able to come on Wednesday. As we have limited time, will it be possible to meet at the weekend? (S6)

(34) Professor, I am so sorry, but due to some serious problems I can’t come to the appointment. I wanted to ask if it would be possible for you to make it next week. (S4)

The distribution of the types of query preparatory is shown in Table 10.

Table 10  
*Types of Query Preparatory Requests*

	Ability			Willingness			Permission					Possibility	Total
	Can you	Could you	Can/Could we	Will you	Would you	“If” clause	Can I	Could I	May I	Can/could you	Would you		
S1	-	4	-	-	1		4	2	5			2	18
S2	3	7	-	-	4	2	1	-	-			1	18
S3	2	4	1	-			2	-	-			5	14
S4	-	3	-	-		1	3	-	-	2	2	5	16
S5	-	-	-		1		4	3	2	1	2	1	14
S6	1	2	1			1	2	1	-			3	11
S7	4	2	-	2		3	-		1			1	13
S8	4	9	-		3		-		-			1	17
S9	3	7	-		3		1	1	-			1	16
S10	-	-	-		1		2	2	3	3	2	-	13
Total	17/150 (11.3%)	38/150 (25.3%)	2/150 (1.3%)	2/150 (1.3%)	13/150 (8.7%)	7/150 (4.7%)	19/150 (12.7%)	9/150 (6%)	11/150 (7.3%)	6/150 (4%)	6/150 (4%)	20/150 (13.3%)	150 (100%)

Note. S1. Borrowing a book; S2. Asking the university president for an interview; S3. Asking a teacher to postpone an appointment; S4. Asking a permission to change a test date; S5. Asking for permission to audit a class; S6. Asking for a consultation on the weekend; S7. Asking a teacher to help fixing a computer; S8. Asking a teacher to speak slower; S9. Asking a teacher to write a recommendation letter; S10. Asking for permission to leave the class earlier.

Ability and permission questions were the most widely used query preparatory sub-strategies in the present study (38% and 34% of query preparatory requests correspondingly). Willingness and possibility questions were less frequent, the former found in 14.7% and the latter in 13.3 % of preparatory requests. Among willingness questions, respondents showed preference for constructions with auxiliary *would* (13 requests), and *will* was only used in two cases. The rest of willingness questions (7 requests) were embedded. As for the ability questions, most of them were hearer-oriented with auxiliary verb *could* (38 requests). *Can you* was used in 17 requests, and 2 requests had joint perspective (*Can/could we*). Among requests for permission, the constructions with *Can I* took first place in terms of frequency (19 requests) followed by *May I* (11 requests) and *Could I* (9 requests). There were also 12 instances of hearer-oriented requests in this category, half of them following the *Would you let/allow* formula and another half using auxiliaries *can/could* (see Table 10). Finally, possibility questions were the least frequent type of query preparatory.

Larina (2005) states that willingness questions with *would you* along with ability questions with *can you* and *could you* are the most frequent forms of request in the English language. According to Lubecka (2000), conditional forms (*would* and *could*) are the most polite and thus occur most frequently. Larina (2009) also acknowledges that requests with conditional forms sound milder. According to her, *could you please* is one of the most preferable ways of making a request. Questions with *would* are more polite than those with *could*. Questions with the auxiliary *will* are also quite widespread, but the difference between *will* and *would* is greater than that between *can* and *could* (Larina, 2009). Questions with *will* express request quite directly, while expressions with *would you* signal social distance and formality.

Regarding requests for permission, those with the auxiliary *can* are the most widespread in informal, unofficial communication. *Could* is characterised by a higher level of politeness, and requests with the auxiliaries *may* and *might* sound even more polite and respectful and thus are characteristic for formal communication (Larina, 2009). There is a tendency for permission requests to be directed upward in rank (Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Trosborg, 1995). Trosborg (1995) notes that requests using auxiliary *may* rather than *can* signal formality and/or subordination and thus can emphasise a difference in rank. In general, permission questions are considered to be



very polite since the cost to the addressee is suppressed and the benefit to requester is emphasized (Belza, 2008).

*Non-conventionally indirect strategies (hints).* The category of non-conventional indirectness is represented by hints. In most requests of this type, neither the desired action nor the role of agent is specified in the proposition. In this way both interlocutors have the opportunity to legitimately opt out at some stage of their conversation, i.e. S may either deny having made a request or deny its propositional content; on the other hand, H may either ignore the request or make speaker believe he or she misunderstood its content (Weizman, 1993). Despite the common belief that a hint, having the most indirect illocution, should be considered as the most polite among all request strategies (Leech, 1983), researchers have proved that people from different speech communities do not perceive hints to constitute the most polite strategy (Blum-Kulka, 1987). Blum-Kulka (1987) found that speakers of English in fact perceive hints as *less* polite than conventionally indirect requests. So it appears hints may not after all be the least face-threatening means to perform a request. In addition, Trosborg (1995) claims that non-native speakers (NNS) may use hints not to convey indirectness, but as compensatory means that balances early learners' lack of proper pragmalinguistic skills.

Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) distinguish between direct and indirect hints (also called strong and mild hints). According to Schreiner (2009), if the desired action is not mentioned at all by the requester, we call it a 'mild hint'. If the speaker partially mentions or alludes to his wishes and desires, the utterance is considered a 'strong hint'. Since hints were very rare in the data (in this study, it was the least frequent request strategy), the present study did not make distinction between strong and mild hints. *There were only eight (4%) requests made as hints. Below are some of the examples:*

(35) *Pardon sir, I couldn't get it* (S8)

(36) Sir /Miss. I apologize about our appointment, due to a sudden illness, I will not be able to come on Wednesday. (S6)

The directness level of the head act does not necessarily reflect the degree of politeness of the whole request utterance. The role played by internal and external modifiers, request perspective and alerters and their interaction with the strategy type



of the head act can influence the hearer's judgement about politeness, appropriateness and effectiveness of the request.

**Request perspective.** Request perspective can affect the perceived politeness of the request (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Four request perspectives, or points of view, are possible. They are listed below from least to most polite (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007):

- a. hearer-oriented perspective: Sorry, could you write a recommendation letter, because I am applying for M.A.? (S9)
- b. joint perspective: Can we please arrange another meeting next week? (S3)
- c. speaker-oriented perspective: I do apologize, can I see you on the weekend to talk about my thesis?
- d. impersonal perspective: Is it possible to take the test next class? (S4)

Ogiermann (2009b) highlights a connection between grammatical mood and request perspective. She notes that imperative constructions (i.e. mood derivable strategy) are always hearer-oriented and declarative utterances (i.e. performative, hedged performative, want statement and obligation statement) tend to be speaker-oriented, and interrogative constructions (suggestoy formulae and query preparatory) tend to take the hearer's perspective. In case of query preparatory requests with modals *can* and *could*, it is the request perspective that determines whether to classify them as ability questions ("Can/could you...") or requests for permission ("Can/could I...").

The choice of request perspective can affect the illocutionary force of the request (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), H-oriented perspective emphasizes the role of the hearer in the speech event, as it is the hearer whose face is threatened by request, "any avoidance in naming the addressee as the principal performer of the act serves to soften the impact of the imposition" (p.203). Similarly, Leech (1983) states that a request can be softened "by omission of reference to the cost to *h*" and suggests that "Could I borrow this electric drill?" is more polite than "Could you lend me this electric drill?" Thus, H-oriented perspective is likely to strengthen the illocutionary force, while S-oriented perspective may minimise the imposition, and the choice of joint perspective may serve to encode a sense of commonality and solidarity between interlocutors. The findings regarding request perspective are shown in Table 11:

Table 11  
*Request Perspective*

	H-oriented	S-oriented	Joint	Impersonal	Multiple Head Acts	Total
S1	6/20 (30%)	13/20 (65%)	-	1/20 (5%)	-	20
S2	18/20 (90%)	2/20 (10%)	-	-	-	20
S3	8/20 (40%)	4/20 (20%)	3/20 (15%)	4/20 (20%)	1/20 (5%)	20
S4	8/19 (42.1 %)	7/19 (36.8%)	-	3/19	1/19 (5.2%)	19
S5	5/19 (26.3 %)	12/19 (63.1%)	-	1/19	1/19 (5.2%)	19
S6	6/18 (33.3%)	5/18 (27.7%)	2/18 (11.1%)	4/18	1/18 (5.5%)	18
S7	15/20 (75%)	5/20 (25%)	-	-	-	20
S8	18/20 (90%)	1/20 (5%)	-	1/20 (5%)	-	20
S9	14/20 (70%)	6/20 (30%)	-	-	-	20
S10	6/20 (30%)	14/20 (70%)	-	-	-	20
Total	104/196 (53%)	69/196 (35.2%)	5/196 (2.6%)	14/196 (7.1%)	4/196 (2%)	196

*Note.* S1. Borrowing a book; S2. Asking the university president for an interview; S3. Asking a teacher to postpone an appointment; S4. Asking a permission to change a test date; S5. Asking for permission to audit a class; S6. Asking for a consultation on the weekend; S7. Asking a teacher to help fixing a computer; S8. Asking a teacher to speak slower; S9. Asking a teacher to write a recommendation letter; S10. Asking for permission to leave the class earlier.

A strong preference for H-oriented (104/196 [53%]) request perspective was found among the students. The second most frequent request perspective was S-oriented (69/196 [35.2%]). Impersonal perspective was used only in 14 requests (7.1%), and joint perspective was the least preferred among the respondents (5 [2.6%]). Request perspective in the 4 (2%) utterances with multiple head acts was not taken into account.

As mentioned above, S-oriented perspective is considered more polite. It is consequently preferred by native speakers (Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). As for the non-native speakers, several studies among English learners have shown that lower proficiency learners mostly employ H-oriented perspective, but as the level increases, more preference is given to S-oriented requests (Trosborg, 1995; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). The researchers also connect this with the shift from direct requests such as mood derivable to increasing use of query preparatory requests among more proficient learners.

Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) claims that the choice of perspective is to some extent predetermined/influenced by the type of request. In other words, the same request perspective can be more or less appropriate in different situations:

Requests for appointment assume a "we" perspective: action is required from both student and professor to make the appointment happen, as the professor makes time for the appointment and the student needs to go to the professor's office... Requests for extension



can be said to presuppose an "I" perspective: while the professor grants the extension, it is still the student who needs to complete and submit the work. (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007, p. 71)

Thus, although S-oriented perspective is generally considered more polite, it can be rude in some cases. For example:

(37) Can I change the time to see you, because I am not in a good situation?

(S3)

(38) Professor, I know you are so busy, but if it is possible, can I postpone an appointment because of my illness? (S6)

**Internal modification.** Internal modification serves to soften or intensify the impact of a request. In the present study, internal modification was examined in regard to syntactic and lexical/phrasal modifiers (see Chapter 3). As no upgraders were found in the data, the study focused only on downgraders. The results of frequency analysis of syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders are presented in Tables 12, 13 and 14 below.

Table 12  
*Internal Modification*

	No downgrader	One downgrader	More than one downgrader	Total
S1	4/20 (20%)	8/20 (40%)	8/20 (40%)	20
S2	4/20 (20%)	5/20 (25%)	11/20 (55%)	20
S3	6/20 (30%)	8/20 (40%)	6/20 (30%)	20
S4	1/19 (5.3%)	11/19 (57.9%)	7/19 (36.8%)	19
S5	5/19 (26.3%)	8/19 (42.1%)	6/19 (31.6%)	19
S6	6/18 (33.3%)	8/18 (44.4%)	4/18 (22.2%)	18
S7	5/20 (25%)	9/20 (45%)	6/20 (30%)	20
S8	5/20 (25%)	5/20 (25%)	10/20 (50%)	20
S9	3/20 (15%)	9/20 (45%)	8/20 (40%)	20
S10	7 (35%)	9 (45%)	4 (20%)	20
Total	46/196 (23.5%)	80/196 (40.8%)	70/196 (35.7%)	196

*Note.* S1. Borrowing a book; S2. Asking the university president for an interview; S3. Asking a teacher to postpone an appointment; S4. Asking a permission to change a test date; S5. Asking for permission to audit a class; S6. Asking for a consultation on the weekend; S7. Asking a teacher to help fixing a computer; S8. Asking a teacher to speak slower; S9. Asking a teacher to write a recommendation letter; S10. Asking for permission to leave the class earlier.

As demonstrated in the Table 12, most of the requests (76.5% [150/196]) contained internal modification, and 70 of them (35.7%) had more than one modifier. According to Faerch and Kasper (1989), internal modifiers implicitly imply politeness, and their absence can imply impoliteness or inappropriateness as well. In this light, it can be said that such results are indicative of the respondents' pragmatic



awareness. However, it should be noted that there was little variation in the students' use of internal downgraders: they were almost completely limited to the politeness marker "please" among lexical modifiers and conditional structures among syntactic downgraders.

**Syntactic downgrading.** The use of syntactic mitigation softens the impact of the request on the addressee making the request sound less direct. This provides H with some freedom and consequently diminishes the threat to H's face, should he or she decide not to comply with S's wish. Table 13 summarises the findings on syntactic downgraders.

Table 13  
*Frequency of Use of Syntactic Downgraders*

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	Total
Conditional structure	8/20 (40%)	14/20 (70%)	8/20 (40%)	11/19 (57.9%)	11/19 (57.9%)	5/18 (27.8%)	7/20 (35%)	12/20 (60%)	11/20 (55%)	9/20 (45%)	96/196 (49%)
Conditional clause	-	-	2/20 (10%)	-	-	2/18 (11.1%)	1/20 (5%)	1/20 (5%)	1/20 (5%)	-	7/196 (3.6%)
Tense	-	-	1/20 (5%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1/196 (0.5%)
Aspect	-	-	1/20 (5%)	-	1/19 (5.3%)	-	-	-	1/20 (5%)	-	3/196 (1.5%)
Interrogative	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Negation	-	-	-	-	1/19 (5.3%)	-	-	-	-	-	1/196(0.5%)

*Note.* S1. Borrowing a book; S2. Asking the university president for an interview; S3. Asking a teacher to postpone an appointment; S4. Asking a permission to change a test date; S5. Asking for permission to audit a class; S6. Asking for a consultation on the weekend; S7. Asking a teacher to help fixing a computer; S8. Asking a teacher to speak slower; S9. Asking a teacher to write a recommendation letter; S10. Asking for permission to leave the class earlier.

Five types of syntactic downgraders were found in the data: conditional structure, conditional clause, tense, aspect, and negation. Such downgrader as the interrogative was absent from the respondents' requests: although a lot of requests were given in the interrogative mood, all of them belonged to the preparatory strategy where the interrogative is unmarked, that is cannot be considered internal modifier (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

Even though syntactic downgraders were used roughly in half of the requests, the learners' repertoire of syntactic modification devices turned out to be almost completely limited to the use of conditional structures (96/196 [49%]). This can be explained by frequent use of the query preparatory with forms such as "Could I...?", "Could you...?", "Would you...?" In addition, conditional structures were used in hedged performatives and to mitigate want statements. Examples:

(39) Please, I was wondering *if you could* write a letter of recommendation to me (S9)

(40) *I would like* to use [title] book about second language acquisition, but I cannot find it anywhere, I'm sure you have this book, I hope you'll help me. (S1)

(41) Please, *could I* audit your class since I am really interested in it? (S5)

Other syntactic downgraders took up a much lower percentage (see Table 13).

Learners' underuse of syntactic downgraders, especially tense, which is widely used by native speakers, is evidenced in many studies (Trosborg, 1995; Sasaki, 1998; Woodfield, 2006, 2007; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) presume that learners may simply be unaware of the mitigating function of syntactic downgraders, which is, according to Faerch and Kasper (1989) "is not inherent in the grammatical meaning of syntactic structures: it is a pragmatic, 'acquired' meaning that derives from the interaction of the structure with its context and requires ... extra inferencing capacity on the part of the addressee" (p. 237).

**Lexical and phrasal downgrading.** As for the choice of lexical and phrasal downgraders, most of the respondents simply resorted to politeness marker "please" (40.8% [80/196]). Other lexical/phrasal modifiers found in the data were consultative devices (11.2% [22/196]), understaters and hedges (7.7% [15/196]), and subjectiviser (0.5% [1/196]). The frequency of their use is much lower compared to that of the politeness marker. Such downgraders as downtoner, cajoler and appealer were absent altogether. The lexical and phrasal downgraders used by respondents are listed in Table 14 below.

Table 14  
*Frequency of Use of Lexical and Phrasal Downgraders*

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	Total
Marker 'please'	10/20 (50%)	8/20 (40%)	6/20 (25%)	8/19 (42.1%)	5/19 (21%)	6/18 (33.3%)	8/20 (40%)	12/20 (60%)	10/20 (50%)	7/20 (35%)	80/196 (40.8%)
Consultative device	2/20 (10%)	2/20 10%	5/20 (25%)	5/19 (26.3%)	2	3/18 (16.7)	1/20 (5%)	1/20 (5%)	1/20 (5%)		22/196 (11.2%)
Downtoner	-	-	-	-							0
Understater/ Hedge	3/20(1 5%)	8/20 (40%)	2/20 (10%)	-		1/18 (5.6%)	4/20 (20%)				15/196 (7.7%)
Subjectiviser	-	-	-	-					1/20 (5%)		1/196 (0.5%)
Cajoler	-	-	-	-							0
Appealer	-	-	-	-							0

Note. S1. Borrowing a book; S2. Asking the university president for an interview; S3. Asking a teacher to postpone an appointment; S4. Asking a permission to change a test date; S5. Asking for permission to audit a class; S6. Asking for a consultation on the weekend; S7. Asking a teacher to help fixing a computer; S8. Asking a teacher to speak slower; S9. Asking a teacher to write a recommendation letter; S10. Asking for permission to leave the class earlier.



*Politeness marker "please"*. Because of its syntactic independence, some researchers consider "please" to be an external modifier (Alcon-Soler, Safont Jorda, & Martinez-Flor, 2005; Sifianou, 1992). It can occur in isolation as an utterance in its own right, and it can occur in very short responses such as *Yes please*, and *Please do*. However, some classifications, including the one used in this study, have considered it as an internal lexical/phrasal modifier (e.g. Trosborg, 1995).

It has been observed that *please* co-occurs only with certain kinds of requests, such that occur in 'standard situations' (House, 1989), i.e. situations in which the rights and obligations of participants are clear, which are "not associated with social or communicative difficulty" (p. 107). This means that *please* typically occurs for example in service encounters, where the right to ask for something and the obligation to give it is inherent in the event. It also occurs when what is being requested is a minimal imposition on the hearer (such as passing the salt at table). In situations where the imposition is greater and / or the rights and obligations of the participants are not self-evident, *please* is less likely to occur.

House (1989) has observed that the more indirect or opaque the request, the less likely it is to be accompanied by *please*. This is consistent with the fact that it tends not to occur in 'non-standard' situations. Where rights and obligations are not pre-determined, any request has to take particular care not to offend the hearer's face. This is done by increasing the indirectness, so that the force of the utterance is open to interpretation and the hearer may choose to attend to the propositional meaning rather than any implied request. This accounts for the fact that less conventionalised indirectness strategies (e.g. *I wonder if it would be possible for you to...*) rarely occur with *please*, and is consistent with the notion of *please* as being propitiatory, i.e. making well-disposed.

As already mentioned, politeness marker "*please*" was the most frequent among lexical and phrasal downgraders in the present study: learners relied almost exclusively on the politeness marker in order to mitigate their requests. *Please* occurs most commonly with the speech act of request (Wichmann, 2002). It is regarded as the most frequent and most significant modifier in requests, which can signal politeness by softening the imposition carried out by this speech act, and can also elicit cooperative behaviour from the addressee. Wichmann (2002) notes that "please" most often co-occurs with imperatives among direct requests and



interrogatives among indirect. The latter are mostly modal constructions. They are usually in the form of modal interrogatives using the modal verb *can*.

The respondents in the present study tended to almost exclusively rely on the politeness marker and ignored other lexical downgraders. Such overuse of politeness marker *please* is noted in many previous studies (Barron, 2007; Bella, 2012; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987). One possible explanation for the overuse of the politeness maker involves its extra-sentential status; that is, the learners can simply add it to the beginning or the end of an utterance with the intention to sound polite (Bella, 2012). A further explanation can be found in Faerch and Kasper (1989), who interpret the overuse of the politeness marker 'please' as a result of "its double function as illocutionary force indicator and transparent mitigator ... language learners tend to adhere to the conversational principle of clarity, choosing explicit, transparent unambiguous means of expression rather than implicit opaque and ambiguous realizations" (Faerch & Kasper, 1989, p. 233).

*Consultative devices.* Consultative devices are a means by which 'a speaker seeks to involve the hearer directly bidding for cooperation' (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). They modify the illocutionary force of the request by consulting the hearer's opinion (House & Kasper, 1987):

(42) I know you are very busy and feel really sorry to disturb you, but *would it be possible* for you to spare some time for the interview? (S2)

(43) Sir, *would you mind* giving me some time to interview, because as you know I have to finish my research on time, and I am very sorry that you don't have enough time to spare but I need to interview (S2)

Consultative device was the second most used lexical downgrader and was found in 22 (11.2%) requests, which is in line with Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) and Trosborg (1995), who notes infrequent use in the requests of the learner and native speaker groups in her study. Ogiermann's (2009b) study, however, found consultative devices to be the most frequent lexical/phrasal modifiers among native English speakers.

*Understaters and hedges.* In this study, understaters and hedges were found in only 15 requests (7.7%). Understatement is used to minimize parts of the proposition, such as the required action or object. By using hedges the speaker avoids specification in making a commitment to the illocutionary point of the utterance, in

naming the required action, in describing the manner in which it is to be performed, or in referring to any other contextual aspect involved in its performance (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984):

(44) I am sorry, but I have something important. Can you give *a little* of your time? (S2)

(45) Could you lend me your book *for a while*?(S1)

Little variance in the use of internal modifications is said to bear evidence of underdeveloped pragmatic competence. Various studies found both quantitative and qualitative differences between native and non-native speakers in the use of internal modifiers. Researchers state that there is generally less frequency and variety in the use of internal downgraders among NNS with lower proficiency compared to NS and learners with higher proficiency (Bella, 2012; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009; House & Kasper 1987; Sasaki, 1998; Trosborg, 1995). NS mitigate their requests with the help of a greater variety of external downgraders, while learners in general prefer using external modifications. Their use of internal modifiers is less frequent, and they mostly use a limited range of internal modifiers (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Hassall, 2001; Sasaki, 1998; Woodfield, 2008; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). This applies even to advanced learners (Trosborg, 1995). Woodfield (2008) found that learners may experience difficulty in combining several internal modification devices in one request. Trosborg (1995) explains that the “optional” nature of internal mitigators makes them more difficult to acquire. According to Trosborg, internal modification of speech acts by means of lexical/phrasal mitigators presents inherent difficulties for learners, since it is likely to increase the complexity of the pragmalinguistic structure. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) also notes that the mastery over lexical/phrasal modifiers constitutes a rather complicated task for learners of all proficiency levels.

**External modification.** External modifiers (also referred to as supportive moves) are external to the head act, occurring either before or after it, which modify the impact of the act for the purpose of softening or aggravating its force (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). External modification does not affect the utterance used for realizing the act, but rather the context in which it is embedded, and thus indirectly modifies illocutionary force (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). As with internal modification, external modification might serve to either soften or emphasise the



force of the whole request. The present study examined external modifiers that soften the request through the use of mitigating supportive moves. It should be noted that although it is the head act that carries the illocutionary force of the request, when used on their own, that is not as adjuncts to the head act, supportive moves can constitute off-record requests (Ogiermann, 2009b). Grounders, in particular, can become hints when used alone. When combined with a head act, however, grounders supply a reason for making the request.

Frequency and the types of supportive moves found in the present study are summarised in Tables 15. and 16.. There was much more diversity in the use of external modifiers in the study compared with internal downgraders, although the frequency of usage of both types of modifiers is almost the same (150/196 [76.5%] for internal modification and 149/196 (76%) for external modification). External modification was widely used across all the request situations. Supportive moves are not mutually exclusive: several types of modifiers may be used in the same request. As demonstrated in Table 15 below, more than one supportive move was found in 68/196 (34.7%) requests.

Table 15  
*External Modification*

	No modifiers	One modifier	More than one modifier	Total
S1	7/20 (35%)	9/20 (45%)	4/20 (20%)	20
S2	5/20 (25%)	4/20 (20%)	11/20 (55%)	20
S3	2/20 (10%)	8 (40%)	10 (50%)	20
S4	5/19 (26.3%)	5/19 (26.3%)	9/19 (47.4%)	19
S5	9/19 (47.4%)	9/19 (47.4%)	1/19 (5.3%)	19
S6	1/18 (5.6%)	4/18 (22.2%)	13/18 (72.2%)	18
S7	3/20 (15%)	4/20 (20%)	13/20 (65%)	20
S8	9/20 (45%)	9/20 (45%)	2/20 (10%)	20
S9	4/20 (20%)	13/20 (65%)	3/20 (15%)	20
S10	2/20 (10%)	16/20 (80%)	2/20 (10%)	20
Total	47/196 (24%)	81/196 (41.3)%	68/196 (34.7%)	196

Among supportive moves, grounder took the highest percentage and was used in 114/196 or 58.2% of requests. It was also the only supportive move used in every single request situation. Grounder is a type of external modifier in which the speaker indicates the reasons for the request (see Chapter 3). Grounders may precede or follow the head act (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). For example:



(46) Sir, *the test which is in two weeks coinciding with the wedding that I suppose to go to. It will take place out of the town.* So, there is no way for me to attend that class. Is it possible to take it on another day? (S4)

(47) Excuse me (University president's name), I am aware that you are extremely busy, but can you allocate 1-2 hours of your precious time for my interview *as I am approaching the deadline for finishing my thesis project?* (S2)

The remaining types of external modifications occur far less frequently than grounders. As demonstrated in Table 16, apology took the second place with 31/196 (15.8%) instances of use, followed by such modifiers as disarmer (28/196 [14.3%]) and imposition minimizer (21/196 [10.7%]). Other supportive moves, such as preparatory, sweetener, expression of gratitude, and discourse orientation move were considerably underused compared to the ones mentioned above.

Table 16 shows the distribution of various types of external modifiers found in the data.

Table 16  
*Types of External Modifiers*

	Imposition Minimiser	Preparator	Sweetener	Apology	Disarmer	Gratitude	Grounder	Discourse orientation move
S1	2/20 (10%)	-	1/20 (5%)	-	-	2/20 (10%)	9/20 (45%)	3/20 (15%)
S2	4/20 (20%)	-	3/20 (15%)	3/20 (15%)	8/20 (40%)	-	8/20 (40%)	2/20 (10%)
S3	2/20 (10%)	-	-	9/20 (45%)	2/20 (10%)	2/20 (10%)	14/20 (70%)	1/20 (5%)
S4	3/19 (15.8%)	1/19 (5.3%)	-	4/19 (21.1%)	1/19 (5.3%)	3/19 (15.8%)	11/19 (57.9%)	1/19 (5.3%)
S5	1/19 (5.3%)	1/19 (5.3%)	3/19 (15.8%)	-	-	-	6/19 (31.6%)	-
S6	2/18 (11.1%)	2/18 (11.1%)	-	7/18 (38.9%)	5/18 (27.8%)	-	15/18 (83.3%)	-
S7	5/20 (25%)	2/20 (10%)	4/20 (20%)	4/20 (20%)	12/20 (60%)	-	11/20 (55%)	-
S8	-	-	-	2/20 (10%)	-	-	10/20 (50%)	-
S9	2/20 (10%)	-	1/20 (5%)	1/20 (5%)	-	-	14/20 (70%)	-
S10	-	-	1/20 (5%)	1/20 (5%)	-	1/20 (5%)	16/20 (80%)	-
Total	21/196 (10.7%)	6/196 (3.1%)	13/196 (6.6%)	31/196 (15.8%)	28/196 (14.3%)	8/196 (4.1%)	114/196 (58.2)	7/196 (3.6)

Note. S1. Borrowing a book; S2. Asking the university president for an interview; S3. Asking a teacher to postpone an appointment; S4. Asking a permission to change a test date; S5. Asking for permission to audit a class; S6. Asking for a consultation on the weekend; S7. Asking a teacher to help fixing a computer; S8. Asking a teacher to speak slower; S9. Asking a teacher to write a recommendation letter; S10. Asking for permission to leave the class earlier.

A study by Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) revealed that while the native speakers generally employed rather vague explanations and reasons, the learners went into much greater detail by providing specific reasons and explanations, primarily concerning matters of poor health, family emergencies and so on. Similar tendency to specify explanations was found in the present study. When the possible reasons behind the request were given in request scenarios (e.g. S4, S6,

S7, S9, S10, see Appendix), respondents were more likely to use them as grounders. However, when the specific reasons were not given, the students made up specific reasons less frequently than they used the ones already present in request scenarios.

Many researchers have found grounders the most frequent external modifiers in both interlanguage requests (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Faerch & Kasper 1989; Hassall, 2001; Schauer, 2007; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010) and native English requests (House & Kasper, 1987; Trosborg, 1995). The extensive reliance of the speakers on the grounder is not unexpected as this external modifier, which provides reasons and explanation for the request being made, is a very basic constituent of the requesting act (Schauer, 2007). Explaining why it is necessary to impose on H makes the request more plausible and may thus increase H's willingness to comply with it (Ogiermann, 2009b). Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) point out that grounder is acquired by learners quite early on, probably due to the fact that offering explanations and/or justifications for the request does not require knowledge of idiomatic (i.e. native-like) use and simply involves the construction of a new, often syntactically simple clause.

*Disarmer* was used in 28/196 or 14.3% of all requests. With this downgrader the speaker indicates his/her awareness of a potential offense, thereby attempting to anticipate possible refusal (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984):

(48) Mr./Mrs., *I know how busy you are*, but I need you to answer a number of questions that will contribute to my thesis a great deal. Could you spare one or two hours for interview at the earliest convenient time, please? (S2)

(49) Mr./Mrs., there's something happened to my computer, it doesn't work. *I know it's a great deal to ask*, but could you please look it up, if it's not too much trouble? (S7)

Another supportive move that occurs in the data is *cost minimiser*, also called *imposition minimiser*. With the help of cost minimiser the speaker indicates consideration of the 'cost' to the hearer involved in compliance with the request (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Imposition minimisers can be found in 21/196 (10.7%) requests:

(50) Could you help me to write a recommendation letter, *if it is possible*? (S9)



(51) Professor, you said that you've got a book about my topic. Is it possible to take it for a while? *I'll return it after 1 week.* (S1)

*Apology* is itself a speech act, but when used in a request, it is considered an external modifier. It is the second most used external downgrader in this study (used in 31/196 [15.8%] of all requests). Apologies co-occur with requests more frequently than with any other speech act (Davies, Merrison, & Goddard, 2007). In addition to minimising the degree of imposition, they have another function. According to Davies, Merrison, and Goddard (2007), since requests are beneficial to S and costly to H, apologies are used to maintain equilibrium between interlocutors. Bella (2012) notes that language learners display higher frequencies of apologies in the higher imposition situations.

(52) I know you are very busy and feel *really sorry to disturb you*, but would it be possible for you to spare some time for the interview? (S2)

(53) Professor, *I am so sorry*, but due to some serious problems I can't come to the appointment. I wanted to ask if it would be possible for you to make it next week. (S3)

*Preparators* occur infrequently in the data: they were used in 6/196 (3.1%) of all cases. The term preparator has been applied to several related strategies in previous literature, all of them "preparing the hearer for the ensuing request by announcing it or asking permission to perform it" (House & Kasper, 1987, p. 1277). Trosborg (1995) distinguishes four types of preparators: those preparing the content; the speech act; those checking on availability; and those getting a pre-commitment. Ogiermann (2009b) divides preparators into two categories: checking on availability and introducing the request. In Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) study, checking on availability and introducing a request are presented as two different types of external modifiers. Since there are very few preparators in the study, no sub-classification was made here, and all such external modifiers were listed under one category – preparator. Examples:

(54) Doctor, *I need to ask you some questions about my research*. May I send you an e-mail this weekend? (S6)

(55) Mr./Mrs., *I have something to ask you for*. Would you allow me to audit a class taught by you? (S5)



*Expression of gratitude.* Similarly to apology, expression of gratitude is a speech act that, when included in request, becomes a supportive move. Formulaic acknowledgments of debt such as *I owe you one* can also be included into this category. In the present study, expressions of gratitude only occur eight times (4.1%) in the data.

(56) Hello (teacher's name), I am extremely sorry; I know you are too busy, but my computer is down, can you help me to fix it in your free time please? *Thanks a lot.* (S7)

(57) Sir, if it will be possible I would like to ask for your permission to attend a very important wedding on your test day. *I will be very grateful* if I can do the test on another day. (S4)

*Discourse orientation moves.* In their taxonomy for external modification, Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) identified a discourse orientation move which is neutral with regard to mitigation. The orientation move functions to establish the focus of the request and operates at an interpersonal level, serving to establish the extent of shared knowledge between the speaker and hearer. Seven (3.6%) discourse orientation moves were found in the data.

(58) Mrs./Mr., *I know you have that book I badly need for my research paper.* Could I borrow it from you just for a couple of days, please? (S1)

(59) Sir, *currently I'm doing research on curriculum development.* Your opinion can be crucial in this area of investigation. Could you please give me one hour to ask some questions about the problems that the teacher and a president of the university face in that field? I need to know the strategies that you are using while dealing with the curriculum issues: these strategies can help other managers to do learning process more effective. (S2)

Frequent use of external modification by learners in this study is in line with the findings of other studies on foreign language requests. Previous research findings assert that the overwhelming use of external modification, especially in high imposition situations, is a rather common phenomenon in the intermediate (and often also in advanced) learners' speech act performance (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001). The reason for this is related to the nature of external modifiers, in the sense that these particular devices "derive their politeness value precisely from their propositional meaning and

illocutionary force (to justify, praise, minimize, etc.)” (Faerch & Kasper, 1989, p. 239). Due to this fact, external modifiers appear to satisfy the learners’ concern for clarity and propositional explicitness (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009; Hassall, 2003; Faerch & Kasper, 1989). A second reason for the overwhelming use of external modifiers by learners can be found in the fact that “external modifiers do not require knowledge of native-like use and they simply involve the construction of a new, often syntactically simple clause. As such, external modifiers tend to be syntactically less demanding and pragmalinguistically less complex” (Economidou- Kogetsidis, 2009, p. 102). It appears then, that the use of these modifiers demands neither particularly high linguistic competence nor too much processing effort. It is possible that learners use excessive external modification as a form of compensation for the lack of adequate internal (especially lexical/phrasal) modification attested in their requestive behaviour. It is also suggested that learners’ over-reliance on supportive moves may also find its roots in their lack of confidence resulting from their non-native linguistic proficiency (Economidou- Kogetsidis, 2009) and their social role as overseas students. House and Kasper (1987) also comment on ‘the insecure social status associated with the foreigner role’ as being a reason why learners employ more supportive moves’ (p. 1285). This might be particularly important in the academic encounter examined as the status balance needs to be maintained and students must perform a request to a higher status interlocutor. When examining the acquisition of pragmatic competence in academic advising sessions, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) noted how non-native speaker students differed from native speakers in their ability to employ appropriate speech acts and negotiate successfully. This over-reliance on grounders on the part of the learners might therefore serve as a form of compensation for their lack of confidence both as speakers and as university students.

**Alerters.** In addition to request head acts and type of request modification, the current study also analysed data in terms of alerters. Alerters are an optional category in requests. They constitute the opening move of the request and serve to gain the hearer’s attention (Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2003). Alerters include attention getters (greetings and apologies) and address terms, which can sometimes be combined together in phrases like “*Excuse me, Miss*”. There are 26 instances of combination of attention-getters and terms of address in the data. Altogether, alerters



of either type occur in 84/196 (42.9%) of responses (see Table 17 below). It should be taken into account that the written medium of the questionnaire may have reduced the respondents' use of alerters, since there was no actual interlocutor to communicate with. In comparison, in a study by Dong (2009) which also used written DCT as a data collection tool, alerters occur in only 109/349 (31.2%) of the American English responses.

Table 17  
*Alerters*

	Zero alerter	Address term	Attention getter	Attention getter+address term
S1	13/20 (65%)	3/20 (15%)	-	4 (20%)
S 2	13/20 (65%)	6/20 (30%)	--	1/20 (5%)
S 3	13/20 (65%)	5/20 (25%)	--	2/20 (10%)
S 4	8/19 (42.1 %)	7/19 (36.8%)	-	4/19 (21%)
S 5	13/19 (68.4%)	4/19 (21.1%)	-	2/19 (10.5%)
S 6	8/18 (44.4%)	7/18 (38.9%)	1/20 (5%)	2/18 (11.1%)
S 7	13/20 (65%)	6/20 (30%)	-	1/20 (5%)
S 8	10/20 (50%)	1/20 (5%)	5/20 (25%)	4/20 (20%)
S 9	10/20 (50%)	6/20 (30%)	1/20 (5%)	3/20 (15%)
S 10	11/20 (55%)	6/20 (30%)	--	3/20 (15%)
Total	112/196 (57.1%)	52/196 (26.5%)	7/196 (3.6%)	25/196 (12.8%)

Note. S1. Borrowing a book; S2. Asking the university president for an interview; S3. Asking a teacher to postpone an appointment; S4. Asking a permission to change a test date; S5. Asking for permission to audit a class; S6. Asking for a consultation on the weekend; S7. Asking a teacher to help fixing a computer; S8. Asking a teacher to speak slower; S9. Asking a teacher to write a recommendation letter; S10. Asking for permission to leave the class earlier.

*Attention getters* are greetings and apologies. Their primary functions in requests would seem to be phatic, i.e., to attract the addressee's attention:

(60) *Excuse me* Miss/Sir, could I borrow that book please? (S1)

(61) *Hello* (Teacher's name), I would like to audit this class if possible. (S5)

Table 18 below includes attention getters that were used both on their own (7/196 [3.6%]) and in combination with address terms (25/196 [12.8%]), that is 32 alerters altogether.

Table 18

*Attention Getters*

Greetings			Apologies		
Hello	Hi	Excuse me	(I am)sorry	Pardon	I apologise
6	2	7	11	5	1
Total			24		

As demonstrated in Table 18, most of the attention getters (24/32) took the form of apologies. Dong's (2009) notes that "I am sorry" as an attention-getter is different from "I am sorry" used as an external modification serving as a real

apology: its primary goal is to get the addressee's attention. Furthermore, attention-getter "I am sorry" always stands in the beginning of requests:

(62) *I am sorry*, I couldn't get your point, can you explain this point in more detail? (S8)

(63) *Excuse me* (teacher's name), I have to be at airport at 11 am to pick up my mum, can I leave at 10 am please? (S10)

**Address terms.** In the present study, address terms occurred more often than attention getters— in 77/196 requests (39.3%). This is a rather high percentage taking into account the fact that these requests were produced in a written questionnaire: there was no real interlocutor, and no names were given in the DCT. In comparison, in a study by Dong (2009), terms of address occurred in only 23/349 (6.6%) of the possible cases in requests of NSs of American English. In another study by Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch (2003) featuring native English speakers, participants also frequently avoided naming strategies. In this study, "despite the fact that participants could be reasonably expected to know the full name of their interlocutor (one of their lecturers), naming avoidance was the most frequent strategy in the Peninsular Spanish (and the British English) data" (p.6). Bargiela et al. (2002) also point out that "[m]any British people have adopted the strategy of not using names at all in certain circumstances to avoid the difficulty of finding the appropriate form of address" ( p. 12). Formentelli's (2009) study of British English speakers also found that there was a preference for avoidance strategies which was interpreted as an attempt for students to find a neutral compromise between formality (i.e. the use of honorific or 'title + last name' (TLN)) and informality (i.e. first name (FN)). This dilemma was also noticed by Duranti (1986), who pointed out that the particular ways students addressed their professors demonstrated the tension between power and solidarity. In his study focusing on e-mail requests to professors, he found that many American students used the professors' FN to signal solidarity. When FN was used, it helped to shorten the distance and lessen the status difference between student and professor. The use of the first-name strategy was also associated with an informal, conversational tone conveyed in the message, indicating a relatively friendly, close relation with the professor. On the other hand, when the request was written to a professor that the student was not familiar with, a formal address term was used and the tone of language in the e-mail tended to be more formal as well.



For the American students, the use of address terms became strategic in that they used titles and last names to show deference politeness but first names to show solidarity politeness.

The problems described above might also apply to the respondents in the present study. Being NNSs, they had even more reasons to be confused over which form of address to choose. In addition to dilemma between formality and solidarity, difficulties in choosing forms of address might arise due to not knowing the English norms; not knowing whether to adhere to norms of English NSs or the norms of the Turkish-speaking community in North Cyprus. The frequency of address terms used by the respondents is demonstrated in Table 19:

Table 19

*Address Terms*

Sir	30
Professor	14
Mr./Ms.	10
Other	9
Doctor	7
Teacher	5
Sir/Ms	2
Total	77

As evident from Table 19, participants preferred to use formal address terms that signal of negative politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 276) state that honorifics are "direct grammatical encodings of relative social status between participants, or between participants and persons or things referred to in the communicative event." At the same time, the respondents also tended to use address terms incorrectly (e.g. using "Teacher" as a term of address).

The most frequently used address term in the study was "Sir" occurring in 32 requests, 30 of them without the corresponding female counterpart. The use of only masculine form can be justified in S2, S7, and S8, where the gender of the teacher is specified through the use of pronouns: "The president was your teacher and you know *him* quite well" (S2), "You know he has been very busy recently, but you still want to ask *him* to fix your computer" (S7), "You do not follow what *he* is saying, so you want to ask your teacher to say it again" (S8). In these situations, the pronouns personal pronouns were used due to my inattentiveness. Otherwise, the study avoided identifying the gender of the potential addressee. Avoiding gender markers was the reason why no names were used in the questionnaire in the first place: it would be, on the one hand, useful to assign a name to the addressee in each DCT scenario to

see how personal names would be used by respondents, but on the other hand, some researchers insist on omitting personal names in order to avoid gender bias (Fukushima, 2003).

Courtesy term “Sir” occurred twice in S2, thrice in S8, and five times in S7. Other address terms used in these scenarios were gender-neutral (e.g. *Professor*, *Doctor*). In addition, one participant did not notice the masculine personal pronouns and used “Mr./Mrs.” in all of these situations. So the preference of the address term of masculine gender might be not only due to the personal pronouns in those DCT scenarios: as this example shows, the respondents may be inattentive and miss the gender markers. The remaining 20 instances of the address term “Sir” without its female counterpart were found in the seven scenarios in which the gender of the addressee was not mentioned. This can be partially explained by the fact that masculine is the “default” grammatical gender in English. On the other hand, an inference can be made that some respondents simply assumed that the potential interlocutor, a university teacher, would be of masculine gender. This would have made sense if the university faculty had been predominantly male, but three of five professors teaching MA courses at the time the questionnaire was given out were female. That is why the option that the respondents chose only masculine address term thinking about their own teachers is unlikely. In addition, some other address terms frequently in the requests – *Doctor*, *Professor*, and *Teacher*—are gender-neutral. Considering that many respondents used both “Sir” and “Doctor” or “Professor” across situations as mutually interchangeable, they might have been imagining addressing a male interlocutor in all DCT scenarios.

Among other address terms, there were seven instances of respondents simply writing “Professor’s name” or “teacher’s name and two instances of addressing university president in S2 as “president”, despite the fact that in the DCT scenario “the president was your teacher and you know him quite well” :

(64) *Mr. president*, I know you are really busy, but could you please reserve some of your valuable time for an interview ?

(65) *Dear President*, I’m writing my graduate thesis and I would appreciate if you spent a little time for the interview which I would like to conduct with you. It will be quite beneficial for me.

Since the names of the addressees were not specified in the DCT, some respondents indicated that they would address the interlocutor by writing “teacher’s



name" in brackets, which makes it unclear what kind of address they would use. The most literal interpretation would be that the students meant to use FN on its own (which never happened among students at our department in my memory). However, by "teacher's name" they might have meant TLN, title+FN, title+FN+LN, or even "teacher" +FN. The only thing that can be understood is that they were going to somehow include a personal name into the address term.

In nine requests, address terms included the salutation "dear" usually used when addressing letters. This might be explained by the influence of the written data collection tool. There were five instances of addressing the imaginary interlocutor as "Dear Professor", two instances of "Dear Teacher", one "Dear Sir", and one "Dear President" (when addressing a university president in S2). However, it should be taken into account that the salutation "dear" was used by the same four respondents: two of them added "dear" to address terms once each, and the remaining two used it thrice and four times correspondingly.

(68) Dear Professor, may I please have your book for a couple of days? (S1)

(69) Dear President, I'm writing my graduate thesis and I would appreciate if you spent a little time for the interview which I would like to conduct with you. It will be quite beneficial for me. (S2)

It can be concluded that the respondents have demonstrated inappropriate use of address terms, which can be explained by such factors as the written medium of the data collection tool and the absence of a real interlocutor, the fact that no names were provided in the DCT making the standard formula TLN impossible to use, and, finally, lack of unawareness of the appropriate forms of address among the respondents.

## Apologies

This section will focus on the realisation patterns of apology strategies. Apology is considered an inherently polite speech act that benefits to the hearer. Since apologies are preceded by an offence, their performance is expected: H's face has already been damaged by the offence and the apology must restore it. The lack of apology can be interpreted as another offence (Ogiermann, 2009a).

When analysing apologies, both hearer's and speaker's positive and negative face needs should be taken into account (Deutschmann, 2003; Ogiermann, 2009a), since it is face considerations that determine the choice of apology strategies.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), apologies threaten S's face. They claim that by uttering an apology, the speaker humiliates him or herself and admits responsibility. Thus, to restore H's face damaged by the offence, S performs a speech act which is costly to his or her own face, which makes apologies "face-saving for the H and face-threatening for the S" (Olshtain, 1989, p. 156). Therefore, people are often very reluctant to perform this FTA: apologies restrict apologisers' freedom of action, i.e. threaten their negative face (Ogiermann, 2009a). However, Brown and Levinson state that it is S's *positive face* that is damaged by apologies. Ogiermann (2009a) argues that it is not the apology but "the offence that damages S's positive face because, obviously, we do not approve of people who offend us" (p. 52). Damage to positive face has already been caused by the offence and will be even greater if no apology takes place. We do not risk our positive face when apologising but attempt to restore it, which is why apologies are oriented towards satisfying S's positive face needs, at the expense of S's negative face. Apologies benefit the speaker since they serve as a means of image restoration. Edmondson and House (1981) point out that the apologies are uttered not only for H's sake, but also to restore one's own social status. Fraser (1981) claims that apologies relieve the offender of some moral responsibility, and Meier (1992) refers to research conducted in the field of psychology when arguing that apology is a face-saving device as regards S (not H), and concern for H's face is only a by-product of the attempt to save S's face. Thus, the apologiser's positive face needs are central to all apologies, for if we did not care about what others think of us, we would see no reason for putting things right and humiliating ourselves by doing so.

The apology restores H's negative and/or positive face as well as S's positive face, but some damage to S's negative face is unavoidable. The apologiser not only has "two points of view – a defensive orientation toward saving his own face and a protective orientation toward saving the other's face" (Goffman, 1972, p. 325), but is also caught in a conflict between his or her positive and negative face needs. The speaker's face plays a central role in the performance of an apology. Strategy choice oriented more towards S's negative face than H's face needs can lead to a rejection of the apology. Without the speaker's positive face needs, there might be no apology, which is uttered despite threat to negative face. Hence, whenever an apology takes place, positive face needs can be said to supersede negative face needs.



While in requests indirectness serves to cater for the H's needs, in apologies it is employed out of consideration for the speaker. Request threatens H's negative face, since it is one of the speech acts that invade H's private territory. Through the use of downgrading strategies, the threat is minimised, the speech act becomes less direct and more polite. Apologies, on the other hand, threaten S's negative face, not H's. Ogiermann (2009a) explains that although indirectness is usually associated with politeness, this does not apply to apologies: speech acts that are beneficial to the hearer generally do not constitute an imposition on the beneficiary's face, and therefore directness is fully acceptable (e.g. in direct offers, such as: "Have a chocolate"). When SA is beneficial to H, no redress of H's negative face is necessary, and hedges on the illocutionary force will not make it more polite. Indirectness is used in apologizing to minimise threat to the S's face. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that the more an act threatens S's or H's face, the more S will want to choose a higher-numbered strategy. Apologies are "essentially threats to S's face" (p. 76), and it is the damage to the speaker's face that can be minimised. Basically, by choosing a higher-numbered category on Brown and Levinson's scale (the lowest being bold on record FTA, and the highest— withholding the FTA, i.e. opting out), we are being more polite to ourselves, or rather more protective towards our own face. Redress of the speaker's negative face does not result in politeness but in strategies aiming at minimising the offence or transferring the responsibility to external factors. Thus, a direct, on record apology is likely to be successful, but it is at the same time highly face-threatening for the speaker. The employment of indirect and downgrading strategies, in contrast, not only makes the apology less polite but also reduces damage to S's face.

In this study, coding categories for apologies were based on that of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and Ogiermann (2009a). While some apology strategies, such as *an expression of an apology* ("I am sorry") and *an acknowledgement of responsibility* ("It's my fault") are universal and can be used in any situation, other strategies, such as *explanation* ("it was because of the traffic jam"), *offer of repair* ("I promise I will buy a new one for you"), and *promise of forbearance* ("I will not be late again"), are situation-specific indirect apology realisations (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). According to Searle (1975), apologies can be realised by performing a different speech act.

In the study, 20 participants had to give responses in 10 situations, which was supposed to elicit 200 responses. However, in 13 cases, respondents chose to opt out, that is withhold the FTA. In addition, some of the strategies analysed here cannot be described as apology strategies, but merely as strategies used to deal with offensive situations, since they do not acknowledge responsibility for the offence. Such non-apologetic strategies will be analysed as well as genuine apologies. The distribution of strategies used by respondents to deal with DCT situations aimed at eliciting apologies, including opting out and those strategies that do not constitute an apology (e.g. denying guilt), is shown in Table 20. Besides that, in several DCT scenarios aimed at eliciting apologies, some respondents produced the speech act of request in addition to or instead of apology (percentage of requests is also demonstrated in Table 20). Such requests were included into analysis because in some situations they contributed to or even substituted an apology.

Table 20  
*Strategies Used by Respondents in Situations Requiring an Apology*

	S11	S12	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20	T o t a l
Opting out	-	3/20 (15%)	1/20 (5%)	-	1/20 (5%)	3/20 (15%)	-	-	--	5/20 (25%)	13/200
IFID	16/20 (80%)	15/17 (88.2%)	18/19 (94.7)	17/20 (85%)	19/19 (100%)	12/17 (70.6%)	17/20 (85%)	18/20 (90%)	19/20 (95%)	5/15 (33.3%)	156/187 (83.4%)
Explanation	2/20 (10%)	5/17 (29.4%)	11/19 (57.9%)	5/20 (25%)	6/19 (31.6%)	3/17 (17.6%)	4/20 (20%)	4/20 (20%)	3/20 (15%)	4/15 (26.7%)	47/187 (25.1%)
Offer of repair	10/20 (50%)	--	3/19 (15.8%)	8/20 (40%)	--	14/17 (82.3%)	--	4/20 (20%)	14/20 (70%)	--	53/187 (28.3%)
Promise of nonrecurrence	--	1/17 (5.9%)	2/19 (10.5%)	--	2/19 (10.5%)	--	5/20 (25%)	--	--	--	10/187 (5.3%)
Concern for the Hearer	1/20 (5%)	--	--	--	--	--	--	8/20 (40%)	1/20 (5%)	--	10/187 (5.3%)
Request	1/20 (5%)	8/17 (47.1%)	--	14/20 (70%)	5/19 (26.3%)	--	--	--	--	1/15 (6.7%)	21/187 (11.2%)
Denying guilt					1/19 (5.3%)		1/20 (5%)			5/15 (26.7%)	7/187 (3.7%)
Minimisation				2/20 (10%)	1/19 (5.3%)		--	--	--	1/15 (6.7%)	4/187 (2.1%)
Admission of fact	15/20 (75%)	2/17 (11.8%)	1/19 (5.3%)	12/20 (60%)	2/19 (10.5%)	13/17 (76.5%)	7/20 (35%)			2/15 (13.3%)	52/187 (27.8%)
Lack of intent	--	--	--	--	--	--	1/20 (5%)	3/20 (15%)	6/20 (30%)	2/15 (13.3%)	12/187 (6.4%)
Expression of embarrassment	1/20 (5%)	--	--	--	--	--	2/20 (10%)	1/20 (5%)	--	--	4/187 (2.1%)
Expression of self-deficiency	--	--	--	--	--	--	2/20 (10%)	1/20 (5%)	3/20 (15%)	--	6/187 (3.2%)
Explicit self-blame	--	--	--	--	--	--	1/20 (5%)	1/20 (5%)	--	--	2/187 (1.1%)

Note. S11. Forgetting to return a borrowed book; S12. Being late for the class; S13. Missing a class; S14. Forgetting to do an assignment; S15. Being late for an appointment; S16. Losing a dictionary borrowed from a teacher; S17. Forgetting to turn to a meeting with one's advisor for the second time; S18. Bumping into a teacher in the corridor, the teacher falls; S19. Bumping into a teacher in the library, the teacher drops books; S20. Being overheard by a teacher complaining to a friend about him or her.



As shown in Table 20, IFIDs were the most frequently used strategy (156/187 [83.4%] responses), followed by offer of repair (53/187 [28.3%]), a sub-strategy of “taking on responsibility” admission of fact (52/187, or 27.8%), and explanation (47/187 [25.1%]). Other strategies were used much less frequently. These findings are similar to that in Gonda’s (2011) study, where IFID and repair were the most frequently used strategies by both native and non-native English speakers. In studies by Olshtain (1989) and Bergman and Kasper (1993), however, IFID and expression of responsibility were the most preferred ones. The preference for repair may be interpreted as an effect of the specific situations used in the questionnaire (Gonda, 2011). The strategies found in the study will be further discussed below.

**Opting out.** This category includes all non-verbal reactions aiming at avoiding confrontation (Ogiermann, 2009a). Although the strategy opt out is, strictly speaking, not an apology strategy, it has been included in the data analysis as the most face-saving option in Brown and Levinson’s chart of strategies used to perform an FTA and a non-verbal way of denying responsibility. Opting out can be regarded as the most face-protective approach taken in offensive situations. By remaining silent or ignoring the offended party, the speaker refuses not only to accept responsibility but also to deal with the situation. While in case of requests opting out is considered polite because it is the hearer’s face that is threatened by the request, in case of apologies, when the damage to the header’s face has already been done by an offence, doing the FTA of apology is necessary to restore it. The decision to refrain from apology is made because of S’s concern for his or her own negative face, and protection of one’s own face does not result in politeness.

This strategy was chosen by students in several types of situations:

- when the offence was minor: some respondents apparently found that apologising might be unnecessary (S12-being late for a class; S15- being 15 minutes late for a meeting);

- when they did not want to draw attention to their misdemeanour hoping that it will would not be noticed (S12, S15, S13- seeing a teacher the next day after missing their class; S16- losing a borrowed dictionary);

- in the situations when the offence was severe and the face-threat for the students would be high in case of apologising, so they preferred not to deal with the situation and avoid responsibility (S16- losing a dictionary; S20- being overheard

complaining about a teacher). The students opted out most frequently in S20: five respondents found it difficult to deal with the situation and chose to stay silent rather than do the FTA of apology. A few of the respondents also noted that in S20 they would first observe the teacher, remain silent until the teacher reacted in some way, and only then choose a course of actions.

**Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs).** The term “illocutionary force indicating device” (IFID) was coined by Searle (1969) and adopted by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). IFIDs contain a word or phrase with a performative verb, such as *apologise*, *forgive*, *excuse*, or *be sorry*. IFIDs are highly routinized and have been classified as negative politeness strategies (Deutschmann, 2003). Nevertheless, they most explicitly signal S’s interest in the restoration of social equilibrium

In this study, the majority of utterances contained an IFID (156/187 [83.4%]). Twenty-five of those 156 responses (14%) were limited to IFID only, and 131 (84%) included a combination of IFID and one or several other strategies. IFIDs constitute the most frequent apology strategy in the data and appear in all DCT scenarios.

The high frequency of IFIDs can be explained by the fact that this apology strategy is the most used in English and is also easy to acquire for language learners. Several studies have pointed out that foreign language learners frequently overuse lexically transparent expressions of apology in English (Rose, 2000; Sabaté i Dalmau & Curell i Gotor, 2007; Trosborg, 1995).

Table 21  
*Types of IFIDs used by Respondents*

	No IFID	Expression of Regret	Offer of Apology	Request for Forgiveness	Regret+Apology	Regret+Forgiveness	Disarming softener	Total
S11	4/20 (20%)	11/20 (55%)	2/20 (10%)	1/20 (5%)	1/20 (5%)	-	1/20 (5%)	20
S12	2/17 (11.8%)	13/17 (76.5%)	1/17 (5.9%)	-	1/17 (5.9%)	-	-	17
S13	1/19 (5.3%)	15/19 (78.9%)	2/19 (10.5%)	-	-	-	1/10 (5.3%)	19
S14	3/20 (15%)	16/20 (80%)	1/20 (5%)	-	-	-	-	20
S15	-	16/19 (84.2%)	3/19 (15.8%)	-	-	-	-	19
S16	5/17 (29.4%)	8/17 (47.1%)	1/17 (5.9%)	1/17 (5.9%)	1/17 (5.9%)	-	1 (5.9%)	17
S17	3/20 (15%)	12/20 (60%)	3/20 (15%)	-	2/20 (10%)	-	-	20
S18	2/20 (10%)	14/20 (70%)	1/20 (5%)	-	1/20 (5%)	2/20 (10%)	-	20
S19	1/20 (5%)	17/20 (85%)	-	-	2/20 (10%)	-	-	20
S20	10/15 (66.7%)	5/15 (33.3%)	-	-	-	-	-	15
Total	31/187 (16.6%)	127/187 (67.9%)	14/187 (7.5%)	2/187 (1.1%)	8/187 (4.3%)	2/187 (1.1%)	3/187 (1.6%)	187

*Note.* S11. Forgetting to return a borrowed book; S12. Being late for the class; S13. Missing a class; S14. Forgetting to do an assignment; S15. Being late for an appointment; S16. Losing a dictionary borrowed from a teacher; S17. Forgetting to turn to a meeting with one’s advisor for the second time; S18. Bumping into a teacher in the corridor, the teacher falls; S19. Bumping into a teacher in the library, the teacher drops books; S20. Being overheard by a teacher complaining to a friend about him or her.



There are several types of IFIDs: (a) an expression of regret (*I'm sorry*); (b) an offer of apology (*I apologise*); (c) a request for forgiveness (*forgive me*), and (d) disarming softener (*I'm afraid, unfortunately*) (the latter is controversial since not everyone recognises it as an IFID). IFIDs consisting of the an offer of apology are most explicit, requests for forgiveness are characterised by involving the hearer in the process of apologising, while expressions of regret make the most indirect apologies. According to Ogiermann (2009a), the request for forgiveness and the expression of regret vary greatly in the degree to which they threaten face. By requesting forgiveness, offenders not only place themselves at the hearer's mercy, but also threaten H's negative face by assigning him or her an active role in the process of forgiving. The expression of regret, on the other hand, implies a much lower degree of imposition for both parties involved. Suszczyńska (1999) sees the preference for the expression of regret in English as being "in accordance with the general assumption that contemporary English displays features of avoidance-based negative politeness" (p. 1059) As for the offer of apology, it relies exclusively on the apologizer performing the act and therefore appears to be more face-threatening to S than it is to H.

*Expression of regret* was the most used IFID in the data, occurring in 137/187 (73.3%) apologies (used as the only IFID in 127/187 (67.9%) cases, combined with the offer of apology in 8/187 (4.3%) cases, and with request for forgiveness in 2/187 (1.1% cases). Other types of IFIDs were considerably underused compared to expression of regret (see Table 21).

The frequent use of expression of regret is consistent with other studies of apologies. Olshtain and Cochen (1983) claim that in English the substrategy expression of regret is most common. Ogiermann (2009a) also states that the expression of regret is the most frequent IFID realisation in English and plays the central role in the English concept of apologising. In her study, expression of regret was used in 635/645 (98%) situations by native English speakers. A study conducted by House (1989) suggests that 80% of all apology realisations in British English are represented by (*I'm*) *sorry*, whereas Aijmer's results (1996) exhibit a frequency of 83.7%.

The preference for this sub-strategy can be thus explained by the fact that, firstly, it is the most widely used IFID type in English, and secondly, it is the least direct and the least threatening to the speaker's face among all IFID types.

Ogiermann (2009a) points out that expression of regret “is not particularly face-threatening to the speaker, nor does it entail a great imposition on the hearer’s face” and that “the IFID realisation preferred in English, being face-saving for both parties involved, can be classified as a negative politeness strategy” (p. 236).

*Offer of apology* is comparatively infrequent in this study, found in 22/187 or 11.8% of all cases. This IFID type was used on its own in 14/187 (7.5%) responses, for instance:

(70) *I do apologize* for being late. May I come in please? (S15)

(71) *I really apologise* for missing a class yesterday. (S13)

It was also combined with expression of regret in 8/187 (4.3%) apologies, such as:

(72) *I apologize* very much since I forgot to bring the book. Could I bring it tomorrow please? *I am so sorry*. (S11)

(73) Sir, I know I have done the same mistake two times, *I am really sorry* to have missed the meeting with you again, *please accept my apologies*. (S17)

Offer of apology is considered to be largely limited to formal contexts, involving official apologies uttered in public or offered in writing (Trosborg, 1995; Aijmer, 1996). It may also be given preference in situations in which “absolute unambiguity is required”. They are used very rarely in spoken English. In her cross-cultural study of apologies, Ogiermann found only one expression including the noun *apology* in English NS data.

*The request for forgiveness.* The classification of requests for forgiveness as English apology strategies can be justified by their fulfilling the function of apologies, i.e. restoring social balance. The pronoun ‘me’ in the English request for forgiveness clearly identifies the speaker as the person to be forgiven and thus responsible for the offence.

There are only 4/187 (2.1%) instances of the IFID “request for forgiveness” in the data. Twice it occurs as the only IFID:

(74) Sir, despite the fact that I had promised to return your book, I unfortunately left it at home, *please forgive me*. (S11)

(75) Sir, *please forgive me*. I have lost your dictionary. I promise I will buy a new one for you. (S16)

and twice combined with expression of regret:

(76) *I am really sorry* dear teacher, *please forgive me*. If you’re hurt, let me take you to the hospital. (S18)

(77) Oh my god *I am really sorry*, Sir, *please forgive my silliness!!* (S18)



*Disarming Softener.* The classification of disarming softeners (“*unfortunately*”, “*I’m afraid*”) as apology strategies is controversial. The only disarming softener found in the data is “I am afraid”, and it was used only in three (1.6%) responses:

(78) *I am afraid* I forget to take the book back, but I promise to give it back tomorrow. (S11)

(79) *I am afraid* I could not come yesterday; I had to visit my uncle. (S13)

(80) *I am afraid* I have lost the dictionary, but let me buy you a new one. (S16)

The expression *I’m afraid* especially takes on an apologetic function when combined with a confession, and some earlier apology studies (e.g. Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Deutschmann, 2003) regard it as an explicit apology strategy. Aijmer (1996) maintains that *I’m afraid* “has the function to apologize just as much as *I’m sorry*” (p. 84) but, at the same time, she compares its function to that of the adverbs *regrettably* and *unfortunately*. Edmondson and House (1981) describe the expression *I’m afraid* as “a softener with a disarming function” (p. 156), and this term was adopted by Ogiermann (2009a).

***Intensification of IFIDs.*** Although speakers do not seem to reflect upon the exact meaning and illocutionary force of the apologetic routine formulae they use, the addition of intensification can be interpreted as a conscious attempt to emphasise one’s apologetic attitude (Ogiermann, 2009a). Intensifiers include adverbial intensifiers, the politeness marker *please*, exclamations, and repetitions. The findings on the use of intensifiers in the present study are summarised in Tables 22a and 22b.

Table 22a

*IFID Intensification*

Intensifier	Frequency
No intensifier	91 (58.3%)
One intensifier	51 (32.7%)
More than one intensifier	14 (9%)
Total	156 (100%)

Table 22b

*Types of Intensifiers*

Intensifier	Frequency
Repetition	1
Adverbial Intensifier	57
Politeness marker	6
Exclamation	20
Total	84

The respondents added intensifiers to 65 out of 156 IFIDs, that is 41.7% (the results are comparable to that of English NSs in Ogiermann's (2009a) study where intensifiers were added to 42% of all IFIDs). Most IFIDs were accompanied by only one intensifier (see Table 22a).

*Adverbials* were the most frequently used intensification devices (see Table 22b), but only four adverbs appear in the data: *so*, *very*, *really*, and *terribly*. They usually accompanied the expression of regret (*I am sorry*), and occasionally—offer of apology (*I apologise*):

(81) I am *so sorry*, I forgot to do the assignment, but I promise to do it next time. (S14)

(82) I *apologize very much* since I forgot to bring the book. Could I bring it tomorrow please? I am *so sorry*. (S11)

Morning, sir. I am *very sorry* for missing your class yesterday. (S13)

(83) I *really apologize*. I forgot to do the assignment. (S14)

(84) I am *terribly sorry* for being late, sir. (S15)

*Exclamations* usually precede the IFID and also have an intensifying effect. It has even been argued that an exclamation, given the appropriate contextual conditions, can serve as an apology on its own (Fraser, 1981; Holmes, 1990). One example of an exclamation without an IFID or any other apology strategies was found in the data, although taking into account the circumstances in S20, it can hardly serve as an apology in this context:

(85) *Oh my God are you here?* (S20)

The main and most obvious function of exclamations, however, is to express surprise, which is why they were used frequently in scenarios with an unexpected outcome. Obviously, exclamations are unlikely to be used in situations in which the apology is simultaneously a confession, or when it is preceded by a complaint. Hence, exclamations can be regarded as situation-specific devices emphasising non-intentionality rather than intensifiers co-occurring with formulaic apologies (Ogiermann, 2009a). Predictably, subjects tended to intensify their IFIDs through the use of exclamations to express unintentionality of the offence caused (that is why they were mostly used in S18 and 19 that involved accidentally bumping into people):

(86) *Oww my god*. I am terribly sorry. Did anything happen to you? May I help you? (S18)



(87) *Oh*, sorry. I didn't see you (S19)

Wierzbicka (1985) argues that exclamations in English "are a conventional device aimed at 'being nice' to the addressee rather than any spontaneous and unrestrained outburst of the heart" (p. 163). Finally, it should be borne in mind that the present data have been elicited by means of a written questionnaire, which is not a reliable instrument for examining linguistic devices expressing spontaneity and emotionality.

*Politeness marker please* was found in six apologies. In five of them it was combined with the IFID request for forgiveness (*please forgive me*), and in one case it accompanied an offer of apology:

(88) Sir, *please* forgive me. I have lost your dictionary. I promise I will buy a new one for you. (S16)

(89) Sir, I know I have done the same mistake two times, I am really sorry to have missed the meeting with you again, *please* accept my apologies. (S17)

*Repetition*. Only one example of repetition was found in the data:

(90) I am *really-really* very sorry to forget about my second meeting. (S17)

**Taking on responsibility.** The acceptance of responsibility is generally regarded as an indispensable element of apologies, necessary for the restoration of social equilibrium (Ogiermann, 2009a). It has been argued that expressions acknowledging responsibility can fulfil the function of an apology in any context (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; House, 1989), which classifies them as direct apology strategies. Olshtain (1989) maintains that expressions of responsibility make particularly effective and sincere apologies. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) define taking on responsibility as follows:

In the attempt to placate the hearer, the speaker often chooses to express responsibility for the offence which created the need to apologize (...) The subcategories for this strategy may be placed on a continuum from strong self-humbling on the speaker's part to a complete and blunt denial of responsibility. (p. 21)

While an explicit acknowledgement of responsibility may result in a more convincing apology than would a routinized IFID formula, there are various possibilities of expressing one's responsibility for an offence, and not all of them are equally effective. Whereas some of the strategies related to responsibility can serve

as direct apologies, others are employed to deny rather than accept responsibility. These strategies, from the lowest to the highest degree of responsibility, include: (a) denial of fault, (b) minimization, (c) admission of fact; (d) lack of intent; (e) expression of self-deficiency; (f) expression of embarrassment; (g) explicit self-blame (see Chapter 3).

Strategies referring to S's responsibility for the offence reflect S's attitude towards the hearer and the offence. They are good indicators of S's willingness to allow threat to S's own face in the process of restoring H's face. Strategies that accept responsibility and threaten S's negative face reflect willingness to restore the damaged relationship and both interlocutors' positive face at the expense of S's negative face. The strategies intended to reduce the offender's responsibility provide evidence for the speaker's intention to save negative face. Compared to IFIDs, strategies expressing responsibility acceptance are less conventionalised and more threatening to S's negative face. At the same time, they pay more attention to H's positive face than do IFIDs, thus constituting an efficient means of eliciting forgiveness from the offended party. Denials of guilt, in contrast, can be successfully employed to protect S's face in situations where they are plausible; otherwise they jeopardise the offender's positive face and the relationship with the victim. The taxonomy used in the present study encompasses all the strategies related to responsibility, whether they constitute apologies or not. The inclusion of strategies avoiding responsibility in the analysis shows the extent to which speakers are willing to risk losing face when referring to the offence. The order in which strategies have been presented suggests a continuum of increasing responsibility acceptance and face-threat.

***Denial of responsibility.*** As already mentioned, denial of responsibility is a face-saving strategy used to protect mainly S's negative face. This strategy includes all the utterances negating the speaker's involvement in the offence and shifting the blame to other people or the hearer. By refusing to acknowledge guilt, the offender denies his or her involvement in the offence and rebuffs accepting responsibility. Naturally, denials of responsibility are not regarded as apologies, and even when combined with IFIDs, cancel out the apologetic function of the IFIDs they accompany (Ogiermann, 2009a).

Seven instances of denying responsibility were found in this study, and three of them were combined with IFIDs. According to Ogiermann (2009a), IFIDs



accompanied by denials of responsibility serve as face-saving devices for the speaker:

(91) I am sorry for coming after the office hour is over, *I had no choice*. (S15)

(92) I am sorry, I know this is the second time I forgot, but *it really was out of my control*. (S17)

(93) I will tell the teacher the truth: "*I am not interested in your class and it seems to me to be boring*." But I am very sorry I hurt you." (S20)

The greatest discrepancies arise in connection with the first two examples that, in addition to being accompanied by IFIDs, seem to acknowledge and deny guilt at the same time: "sorry for coming after the office hour is over" but "I had no choice"; "I know this is the second time I forgot" but "it really was out of my control".

By denying responsibility for the offence, people seek to avoid confrontation and try to protect their own face, so this strategy, while being ineffective in restoring social harmony and having the potential to result in a new offence, is nevertheless used in offensive situations. However, responsibility acceptance is an indispensable element of an apology, and an apologetic formula combined with a denial of responsibility will not result in a successful apology. According to Ogiermann (2009a), in the context of student-teacher dynamics, Denials of responsibility display a rather careless attitude towards H's higher social status, whereas admissions of responsibility suggest not only that those using them are concerned about the future relationship with the professor, but perhaps also that they do not assess the situation as particularly face-threatening. (S2 (S11-book))

It follows that the more offensive the situation the more likely the speaker is to deny responsibility because with the severity of the offence grows the face-threat to the offender. It is not surprising, therefore, that three of five instances of denying guilt were found in S20 (which is also the DCT scenario with most "opting out" choices, the situation most offensive for the hearer and therefore making apology most face-threatening to the speaker). Interestingly, in a study by Olshtain and Cohen (1983) which focused on apologies produced by elementary students in response to offending actions of varying severity, it was found that children tended to deny responsibility when apologizing at the highest degree of severity of the offence, since they expected strong reaction (e.g. reprimand) from the recipient. At the same time,

at the lowest severity level, most frequently used strategies were IFID and substrategy of accepting responsibility – “lack of intent”, and at the two higher degrees of severity, offenders used strategy “offer of repair”. In Trosborg’s 1987 study with Danish learners of English, denial of responsibility also correlated with the degree of the severity of the offence.

It can be concluded that in highly face-threatening situations, that is in cases of committing comparatively severe offences, the offenders’ concern for their face is likely to outweigh their concern for H’s face, the desire to be polite and restore the damaged relationship with H. Ironically, although it would seem logical that the greater the offence the more one should expect the offender to apologise, the reverse tends to happen.

**Minimisation.** In the present study, this strategy was rather rare (4/187 [2.1%]). Minimisation is not primarily related to the degree of responsibility but rather to that of imposition for it reduces the offensiveness of the situation and not necessarily the offender’s responsibility for it (Ogierman, 2009). However, the less offensive the act, the less face-loss it entails to admit responsibility, which classifies minimisation as a strategy reducing threat to the speaker’s face:

(94) *This is the first time that I have forgotten an assignment; I don’t know how it happened. Please, give me extra time to complete it.* (S14)

(95) Sir, I am very sorry for not doing my assignment on time. *You know it is not my habit.* I promise to do it today and bring it tomorrow to your office. (S14)

(96) *It is not my habit,* I’m really sorry for being late... (S15)

Combined with an IFID, the latter two examples seem to function as apologies.

According to Trosborg (1987), infrequent use of minimisation is characteristic for language learners but not English native speakers and is a sign of insufficient pragmatic knowledge.

**Admission of facts.** Among the strategies related to responsibility, “admission of facts”, neutral in terms of responsibility acceptance, was used in the majority of situations, while strategies that explicitly admitted or denied guilt were minimally used. Admissions of facts occupy a middle position on the responsibility scale: they neither reduce nor accept it. However, when used on its own, without IFIDs or other apology strategies, admission of facts is face-saving and serves to distance S from the offence. The strategy is situation-specific: admissions of facts are



most likely to appear in scenarios requiring S to inform H about the offence. Scenarios where H is absent while the offence takes place and unaware of the exact circumstances leading up to it are likely to elicit a high number of admissions of facts. In this study, this strategy was mostly used in the following situations: S11 (15/20 [75%]) (forgetting to bring back a borrowed book), S14 (12/20 [60%]) (forgetting to do an assignment), S16 (13/17 [76.5%]) (losing a borrowed dictionary). Admissions of facts were entirely absent in S18 and S19 where the apology took place immediately after the offence committed in H's presence (see Table 20 for the use of the strategy "admission of facts" across DCT scenarios).

Admission of facts was used in 52/187 (27.8%) cases. In 49 of them it was combined with at least one other strategy, and only in 3 responses it was employed on its own. Being neutral in terms of responsibility acceptance, admission of facts is the strategy type which is most likely to carry divergent illocutionary forces when combined with other strategies. The face-threat involved in admitting facts depends to a great extent on the strategies with which it is combined (Ogiermann, 2009a). This strategy frequently co-occurred with IFID in this study: since admissions of facts do not accept responsibility, they are not sufficient to constitute an apology on their own. IFIDs co-occurred with admissions of facts in 46 situations. Out of those 46 responses, more than half of (25) contained one more apology strategy in addition to IFID and admission of facts, as in the examples below:

(97) Sir, please forgive me. I have lost your dictionary. I promise I will buy a new one for you. (S16)

(98) I'm sorry teacher, I have forgotten your book, I hope you don't need it today, I'm sorry again. (S11)

**Lack of intent.** This strategy was employed in 12/187 (6.4%) cases. The category "lack of intent" does not attempt to reduce the speaker's responsibility by transferring it somewhere else, thus resulting in greater responsibility acceptance, because, as Ogiermann (2009a) argues, saying 'I did not mean to do it' automatically implies 'I have done it'. Expressions of lack of intent are generally associated with neutral formulations, such as '*I did not mean to*', which can be followed by naming the offence. No realisations naming the offence were found in the study. All of the utterances assigned to this category in the current study do not refer to the offence:

(99) (As I am collecting the books) I am very sorry sir, *I didn't mean it. It unintentionally happened.* (S19)

(100) I am sorry, *I didn't mean that.* (S20)

The involuntary character of the offence can also be emphasised by claiming lack of foresight:

(101) I am so sorry sir, *I didn't expect this happen.* I was trying to get to the class as soon as possible. (S18)

The strategy "lack of intent" never occurred in the data on its own: in all 12 cases where this strategy was used it accompanied an IFID, and in four of them the strategy "offer of repair" was employed in addition to these two. It can be concluded that lack of intent was only used as an additional strategy.

Expression of lack of intent also seems to be a situation-specific strategy (see Table 20). It was used in S17 (one instance) S18 (three instances), S19 (six instances), and S20 (two instances), where "I didn't mean to" practically meant trying to take back one's words:

(102) I am sorry, *I didn't mean that.* (S20)

(103) I am terribly sorry, sir. *I didn't mean to.* (S20)

Strategies admitting guilt, that is embarrassment, self-criticism, and explicit self-blame, were used minimally, which can be explained by their high threat to the speaker's face. The strong preference for admissions of guilt seems to be, on the one hand, related to the speaker's responsibility being so obvious that the face threat involved in admitting it is relatively low. On the other hand, the admissions of guilt were mostly used in connection with offers of repair, thus providing the reason for offering compensation (offer of repair also mitigates the face-threat to S thus making it easier to admit guilt).

**Expression of embarrassment.** This strategy occurred in only 4/187 (2.1%) cases and always in combination with other strategies. Expressions of embarrassment usually consist of formulaic phrases focusing on the discomfort the speakers experience due to their offensive behaviour. Thus, these accounts only implicitly accept responsibility. In the context of an offence, an expression of embarrassment can be interpreted as the offender's admission to have committed an act offensive enough to be embarrassed about:

(104) Sir, I know this is second time when I missed the meeting. *I feel awkwardness for the situation.* I promise it won't happen again. (S17)

(105) Mr. /Mrs., *I feel really awkward,* I forgot to bring you the book. I promise I will bring it you tomorrow. (S11)



**Expressions of self-criticism.** Although expressions of self-criticism do not explicitly acknowledge responsibility, they are highly face-threatening and humiliating and can be described as strongly hearer-oriented. They disregard the speaker's negative face needs and may even damage his or her positive face. In expressing self-criticism in an offensive context, S enhances H's face by taking over the role of the accuser. Self-criticism not only confirms the victim's right to be offended, but often also exaggerates the offender's guilt, showing a particular concern for the hearer's damaged face (Ogiermann, 2009a). Considering this, it is not surprising that this strategy was used only in 6/187 (3.2%) cases, four of them being situations where the offence happened in H's presence and was undeniable (S17, S18, and S19):

(106) Mr. /Mrs. I am sorry! *I'm so absentminded!* Let me help with those books, please! (S19)

(107) Oh my god I am really sorry, sir, please forgive *my silliness!!* (S18)

**Explicit self-blame.** Explicit expressions of guilt are a direct, context-independent apology strategy (Ogiermann, 2009a). When selecting this strategy, the apologizer explicitly admits being guilty. Although S's self-humbling threatens his or her face, it helps appease H, as the offender wants to restore social harmony. In the present study, this strategy was found only in 2/187 (1.1%) situations:

(108) Oh my God, I am so sorry teacher I am running just not to miss the lesson but I *did something worst.* (S18)

(109) I forgot about the meeting Sir/Mam. *It's completely my fault.* (S17)

In general, the category "taking on responsibility" was frequently used (87/187 [46.5%]). It was mostly represented by sub-strategy "admission of facts", while other sub-strategies were rarely used and limited to certain situations.

Table 23

*Co-occurrence of "Responsibility" with Other Strategies*

RESP	9/187 (4.9 %)
IFID+RESP	32/187 (17.1 %)
REPR+RESP	4/187 (2.1 %)
RESP+FORB	1/187 (0.5%)
RESP+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
RESP+EXPL	1/187 (0.5%)
IFID+RESP+REPR	22/187 (11.8%)
IFID+RESP+ REQU	5/187 (2.7%)
IFID+RESP+EXPL	5/187 (2.7%)
IFID+RESP+FORB	4/187 (2.1 %)
IFID+RESP+EXPL+ REPR	2/187 (1%)
IFID+RESP+Concern	1/187 (0.5%)
Total:	87/187 (46.5%)

*Note.* RESP= responsibility; EXPL=explanation; REPR=offer of repair; FORB=promise of forbearance; Concern= concern for the hearer; REQU=request

**Explanation.** Blum-Kulka, Housse and Kasper (1989) define explanation as “self-justification by explaining the source of the offence as caused by external factors over which the speaker has no control” (p. 21). Explanations are indirect apology strategies, though most researchers agree that they can perform an apology on their own (Aijmer, 1996). Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones (1989) suggest that the acceptability of an explanation as an apology may be culture-dependent.

Explanations were found in 47/187 (25.1%) cases and were present across all scenarios (see Table 20). They were usually combined with other strategies, usually with IFIDs (39 instances), which suggests that the respondents found explanations not sufficient to constitute an apology on their own. There are only four examples of explanation being used as the only strategy (one in S12 and three in S20):

(110) I mean the last class was very difficult, and I couldn't understand therefore for me it was boring. (S20)

(111) I wanted to tell you about the class which was boring, but I didn't dare to tell you. To feel relaxed I said that to my friend. (S20)

Ogiermann (2009a) states that “arguments making one's behaviour more understandable are clearly involvement strategies, though, when used in response to an offence, they focus on redress of the *speaker's* positive face and may not necessarily classify as politeness strategies” (p. 237). Using explanation as the only strategy in such highly offensive situation as S20 once again shows the respondents' concern for their face outweighing politeness considerations. This strategy most often co-occurred with IFIDs: there are 39 instances, 21 of which were limited to Explanations+IFIDs only, and 18 combined with one or two more strategies, e.g.:

(112) I am sorry for being late; it was because of the bus, it will not happen again. Are you free right now? (S15)

Table 24  
Co-occurrence of “Explanation” with Other Strategies

EXPL	4/187 (2.1 %)
IFID+EXPL	21/187 (11.2%)
EXPL+REPR	3/187 (1.6%)
RESP+EXPL	1/187 (0.5%)
IFID+RESP+EXPL	5/187 (2.7%)
IFID+EXPL+REPR	4/187 (2.1 %)
IFID+RESP+EXPL+ REPR	2/187 (1 %)
IFID+EXPL+Concern	2/187 (1 %)
IFID+EXPL+ REQU	2 /187 (1 %)
EXPL+REPR+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
IFID+EXPL+REPR+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
IFID+EXPL+FORB+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
Total:	47/187 (25.1%)

Note. RESP= responsibility; EXPL=explanation; REPR=offer of repair; FORB=promise of forbearance; Concern= concern for the hearer; REQU=request



Explanations can refer not only to the real circumstances but also to invented information. The hearer's ignorance of the exact circumstances of the offence makes it possible to present him or her with a less offensive version of it and to minimise damage to both parties' face. Since DCTs provide the respondents with contextual information establishing the circumstances of the offence, explanations deviating from that information can be identified. The arguments that conceal the real offence constitute face-saving strategies minimising the severity of the offence. In the case of apologies, the face-saving mechanisms making the speech act less face-threatening are related to the speaker's face needs, and, as already mentioned, protection of one's own face does not result in politeness.

Explanations contradicting the information given in the DCT were found in S11, S14, and S17. In S11, a respondent lied that she did not bring a borrowed book because she still needed it, which is a better explanation than simply forgetting it at home as specified in the DCT. She also added a request to return it later:

(113) Thank you very much for allowing me to use the book. It was very useful, but *I haven't finished my assignment* so can it stay with me for one more day? I promise I will return it tomorrow. (S11)

Four of the five explanations found in S14 also were lies – students did not admit simply having forgotten to do the assignment:

(114) Sorry, Doctor. *I couldn't complete it*. Can I give it to you tomorrow? (S14)

(115) I am sorry, *I forgot to bring my assignment for the course today, I got up late this morning and I had to be hurry for the class*. (S14)

(116) Sorry, teacher, *I thought you gave assignment for next class*. At home I will do my assignment and send you by e-mail. (S14)

(117) *I will lie and say: "I forgot the assignment at home, but I will bring it during the next class"*. (S14)

Finally, three of four times this strategy was used in S17, the explanations were also made-up:

(118) Sorry, Doctor. I know that it's not an excuse, but this time I also *have a serious reason for not coming on time*. Sorry. *My friend had a car accident, and I was with him. I don't have your phone number, therefore I come to apologize, and I need to go and be with him today in the hospital*. (S17)

(119) I am very sorry. I know it's not the first time but *I had a serious problem and I didn't even have the time to let you know.* (S17)

(120) I do apologize for missing a crucial meeting with you for the second time; *I had two other appointments at the same day which made me completely forget about yours.* (S17)

According to Ogiermann (2009a), such selection of strategies illustrates the respondents' awareness of the importance of maintaining harmony with a status superior addressee. The decision to reveal or conceal the real circumstances of the offence is indicative of the perceived face-threat underlying the encounter and of considerations concerning the ensuing consequences for the future relationship with the professor. By concealing the true nature of the offence, the respondents reduced its severity and the corresponding damage to the hearer's *and* the speaker's positive face. At the same time, lying brings with it the danger of misjudging the hearer's knowledge, which is very likely to result in a new offence. When S's attempt to save face is recognised by H, more damage occurs to both H's and S's face as well as to their relationship. Hence, the speaker's interest in maintaining his or her reputation and the relationship with the victim generally makes repair work necessary.

**Offer of repair.** Such apology strategies as offer of repair, promise of forbearance (also referred to as promise of non-recurrence), and concern for the hearer are indirect strategies, since "their apologetic function is context-dependent and they are not applicable to all offensive situations" (Ogierman, 2009, p. 179). They all appear in Brown and Levinson's (1987) chart of positive politeness strategies as "offer", "promise", and "attend to H", respectively. Expression of concern, offer of repair and promise of forbearance attend to the speaker's and the hearer's (mutual) positive face needs with the aim of restoring the equilibrium and maintaining it in the future. The strategy "concern for the hearer" classifies as a positive politeness strategy because it attends to the victim's needs, which have been negatively affected by the offence. At the same time, an offender showing concern for the hearer avoids damage to his or her own self-image. Offer of repair and promise of forbearance are directed to both interlocutors' positive face as they emphasise the speaker's interest in maintaining the relationship. While the former has the function of restoring the equilibrium by repairing the damage in a more than



verbal way, the latter is used to ascertain the smooth functioning of the relationship in the future.

The situation-specific nature of the strategy offer of repair restricts its applicability to offences causing damage which can be compensated for. When offering repair, the offender “makes a bid to carry out an action or provide payment for some kind of damage that resulted from the infraction” (Cohen & Olshtain, 1994, p. 144). It is questionable whether offer of repair presupposes acceptance of responsibility. Ogiermann (2009a) argues that the function of offers of repair in combination with explicit apology strategies differs from the one they serve when used on their own, in which case they substitute rather than constitute an apology. She points out that offering material compensation *instead* of apologising is a face-saving strategy: it does not necessarily entail responsibility, nor does it attend to the hearer’s positive face.

In the present study, offer of repair was employed in 53/187 (28.3%) responses. As mentioned above, this strategy is situation-specific. Offer of repair was found in six out of the ten DCT scenarios in the study, mostly in situations that involve causing damage which can be compensated for, which in this study were S11 (forgetting to return a borrowed book); S14 (forgetting to do an assignment); S16 (losing a borrowed dictionary); S19 (bumping into a teacher with a stack of books; several books fall down). Its frequent occurrence in responses can therefore be explained by the frequency of DCT situations involving causing repairable damage. In addition, making amends somewhat reduces the guilt and serves to restore S’s face:

(121) Mr./Mrs., I feel really awkward, I forgot to bring you the book. *I promise I will bring it you tomorrow.* (S11)

(122) Sir, I am very sorry for not doing my assignment on time. You know it is not my habit. *I promise to do it today and bring it tomorrow to your office.* (S14)

In S16, respondents either promised to buy a new dictionary or used the past tense claiming they had already bought a new one. Such an approach consists in informing the hearer about the compensation rather than offering it, and it does not really fit with the description of the scenarios. Nevertheless, it minimises threat to both interlocutors’ face and may even make the apology dispensable. Nearly all respondents using this strategy combined it with a confession informing the hearer about the offence, thus making the confession less face-threatening:

(123) Sorry, Doctor. I lost your dictionary, and *I bought a new one*. It's a bit different, could you please accept it? (S16)

There are only two instances of utterances which consist solely of an offer of repair:

(124) Would you like me to buy you a dictionary when I go shopping? (S16)

(125) I will give you my assignment as soon as possible. (S14)

According to Ogiermann, offers of repair assume responsibility for compensating for the offence but not necessarily for committing it, and used on their own, may substitute the apology, in which case they have a face-saving function for the speaker. She nevertheless suggests that the offers of repair used on their own are to be regarded as strategies assuming responsibility for the offence due to the lack of contrary evidence.

The remaining 51 offers of repair co-occur with other strategies, and are likely to serve the function of positive politeness strategies emphasising the sincerity of the apology and the speaker's interest in maintaining the relationship with the hearer. Forty-two offers of repair co-occur with IFIDs, 22 of them with IFIDs only. This strategy was also combined with the strategy "taking on responsibility" in 28 cases. Other combinations are less frequent (see Table 25). As for co-occurrence of offer of repair and taking responsibility, there is a tendency to combine explicit admissions of guilt with direct offers of repair (Ogiermann, 2009a). When the offender's responsibility for the offence is obvious, it is easier to admit it (or more difficult to deny it), and, therefore, more necessary to repair the damage. Offers of repair evolve from admissions of guilt and also have a face-saving function for the offender once his or her responsibility for the offence has been established.

Table 25.  
*Co-occurrence of "Repair" with Other Strategies*

REPR	2/187 (1 %)
IFID+RESP+REPR	22/187 (11.8%)
IFID+REPR	12/187 (6.4%)
REPR+RESP	4/187 (2.1 %)
IFID+EXPL+REPR	4/187 (2.1 %)
EXPL+REPR	3/187 (1.6%)
IFID+RESP+EXPL+ REPR	2/187 (1 %)
Concern +REPR	1/187 (0.5%)
IFID+REPR+Concern	1/187 (0.5%)
EXPL+REPR+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
IFID+EXPL+REPR+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
Total	53/187 (28.3%)

Note. RESP= responsibility; EXPL=explanation; REPR=offer of repair; FORB=promise of forbearance; Concern= concern for the hearer; REQU=request



**Promise of forbearance.** Promises of forbearance are context-specific and are generally offered in potentially recurrent offensive situations (Ogiermann, 2009a). In case of repeatedly committed offence this strategy becomes a central element of the apology, but in offensive situations happening for the first time it has mainly an intensifying function. Promises of forbearance are positive politeness strategies and are employed when the future harmony between S and H is particularly important to S. The majority of promises of forbearance consist of formulaic expressions negating the recurrence of the offence:

(126) I apologize for being late. *It won't happen again.* (S12)

These formulations do not refer to the circumstances of the offence and can be employed in any potentially recurring offensive situation. Other promises of forbearance explicitly address the circumstances of the offence:

(127) I apologize, I know it is my second time, but *I will not be late anymore.* (S17)

This strategy was minimally used by respondents, which is in accordance with previous findings (Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstein, 1986; Trosborg, 1987). The total of promises of forbearance amounts to 10/187 (5.3%) instances, and half of them were found in S17 (forgetting about a meeting for the second time, i.e. context in which the offence has been committed repeatedly). Other situations where this strategy is used involve being late (S12, S15) and missing a class (S13):

(128) I am terribly sorry because I couldn't attend the class, *I will do my best for not being absent again.* (S13)

(129) I am sorry for being late; it was because of the bus, *it will not happen again.* Are you free right now? (S15)

The strategy "offer of forbearance" never occurred on its own in the data, but only in combination with other strategies, mostly with IFID (9 out of 10, see Table 26). That is consistent with Ogiermann's (2009a) claim that promises of forbearance minimise the offence by portraying it as exceptional and therefore cannot fulfil the function of apologies.

Table 26  
Co-occurrence of "Forbearance" with Other Strategies

IFID+FORB	4/187 (2.1 %)
IFID+RESP+FORB	4/187 (2.1 %)
IFID+EXPL+FORB+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
RESP+FORB	1/187 (0.5%)
Total	10/187 (5.3%)

Note. RESP= responsibility; EXPL=explanation; REPR=offer of repair; FORB=promise of forbearance; REQU=request

**Concern for the hearer.** The occurrence of the strategy “concern for the hearer” is largely limited to offences causing physical damage (Ogiermann, 2009a). This strategy was employed in 10/187 (5.3%) cases. Nearly all occurrences (8 of 10) were found among the responses to the offence described in S18 (bumping into a teacher and knocking him or her off their feet):

(130) OMG, I’m so sorry. *Are you alright?* (S18)

(131) Oww my god. I am terribly sorry. *Did anything happen to you? May I help you?* (S18)

In half of the cases respondents used formulaic realisations *Are you OK?* and *Are you alright?* Nearly all instances of the strategy “concern for the hearer” co-occurred with an IFID (see Table 27)

Table 27  
Co-occurrence of “Concern” with Other Strategies

IFID+ Concern	4/187 (2.1 %)
IFID+EXPL+Concern	2/187 (1 %)
IFID+REPR+Concern	1 /187 (0.5%)
IFID+RESP+	1/187 (0.5%)
Concern+Repr	1/187
Concern	1/187 (0.5%)
Total	10/187 (5.3%)

Note. RESP= responsibility; EXPL=explanation; REPR=offer of repair; FORB=promise of forbearance; Concern= concern for the hearer; REQU=request

**Request.** In several of the situations aimed to elicit apologies, some respondents added requests (21/187 [11.2%]). Although requests are not included into any coding category for apologies, in the context of several DCT scenarios, such as being late or forgetting to do an assignment, they can be very appropriate. A request following an offence that would have been unnecessary had that offence not taken place makes the apology more polite: by uttering a request, S acknowledges that because of the offence (s)he lost some privilege and therefore has to ask permission from the offended party. For instance, under normal circumstances, a student does not need permission to enter the class where (s)he is having a lesson. However, if the student is late, a request for permission to come in is a way to acknowledge one’s fault and thus indirectly apologise. Therefore, in this study, the speech act of request was added as an additional strategy, and it was found to be highly context-specific. Requests were found in 21/187 (11.2%) responses and were mostly used alongside apology strategies in S12 (being late for the class), S14 (forgetting to do the assignment) and S15 (being late for an appointment with a



teacher). In S12, eight respondents used the standard phrase "May I come in?" after apologising for being late:

(132) Excuse me please, I apologize for being late, *may I come in?* (S12)

Similarly, in S15, 5/19 (26.3%) respondents asked if they could still have an appointment with the professor in spite of being late. Two of them used the formulaic "May I come in", and three asked if they could still see the professor/ if the professor was not busy:

(133) I do apologize for being late. *May I come in please?*

(134) I am terribly sorry for being late, sir. *I wonder if I could still see you, please?*

In S14, respondents asked if they could still bring the assignment later, thus admitting the teacher's right to decide whether to still accept it:

(135) I apologize very much, but I really forgot about the assignment. *Could I send it to you later as soon as I accomplish it?*

(136) I am sorry I somehow forgot to do the assignment, Sir. *Could you please extent the dead-line for a day, please?*

Table 28

Co-occurrence of "Request" with Other Strategies

REQU	2 /187 (1 %)
IFID+ REQU	8/187 (4.3%)
RESP+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
IFID+RESP+ REQU	5/187 (2.7%)
IFID+EXPL+ REQU	2 /187 (1 %)
EXPL+REPR+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
IFID+EXPL+REPR+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
IFID+EXPL+FORB+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
Total	21/187 (11.2%)

Note. RESP= responsibility; EXPL=explanation; REPR=offer of repair; FORB=promise of forbearance; REQU=request

In addition, request was also used instead of apology in S12 and S20:

(137) *Knock on the door*: "May I come in?" (S12)

(138) What do you thing about my telling and feelings, Sir? Can we do different things together to make our lesson enjoyable? (S20)

**Combinations of strategies.** The majority of speech acts produced by respondents (143/187 [76.5%]) included a combination of two or more apology strategies, and only 44/187 (23.5%) were limited to one strategy (which was IFID in more than half of the cases). As demonstrated in Table 29, the most common formula found in the data was IFID+RESP (32/187 [17.1 %]). Another commonly used strategies were IFIDs used on their own (25/187 [13.4 %]), IFID+RESP+REPR (22/187 [11.8%]), and IFID+EXPL (21/187 [11.2%]). Each of the other strategies

and combinations of strategies were each used in less than 10% of all responses. This is not surprising, since IFIDs, offer of repair, a subcategory of "taking on responsibility" admission of fact, and explanation were the top most used strategies in the study.

Table 29  
*Strategies and their Combinations*

One strategy		Combination of two strategies		Combination of three and more strategies	
Strategy	Frequency	Strategies	Frequency	IFID+RESP+REPR	22/187 (11.8%)
IFID	25/187 (13.4 %)	IFID+RESP	32/187 (17.1 %)	IFID+RESP+ REQU	5/187 (2.7%)
RESP	9/187 (4.9 %)	IFID+EXPL	21/187 (11.2%)	IFID+RESP+EXPL	5/187 (2.7%)
EXPL	4/187 (2.1 %)	IFID+REPR	12/187 (6.4%)	IFID+RESP+FORB	4/187 (2.1 %)
REPR	2/187 (1 %)	IFID+ REQU	8/187 (4.3%)	IFID+EXPL+REPR	4/187 (2.1 %)
REQU	2/187 (1%)	IFID+FORB	4/187 (2.1 %)	IFID+RESP+EXPL+ REPR	2/187 (1 %)
Concern	1/187 (0.5%)	IFID+Cocern	4/187 (2.1 %)	IFID+EXPL+Concern	2/187 (1 %)
Intensifier	1/187 (0.5%)	REPR+RESP	4/187 (2.1 %)	IFID+EXPL+ REQU	2/187 (1 %)
		EXPL+REPR	3/187 (1.6%)	IFID+REPR+Concern	1/187 (0.5%)
		RESP+FORB	1/187 (0.5%)	IFID+RESP+Concern	1/187 (0.5%)
		RESP+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)	EXPL+REPR+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
		RESP+EXPL	1/187 (0.5%)	IFID+EXPL+REPR+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
		Concern+Repr	1/187 (0.5%)	IFID+EXPL+FORB+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
Total	44/187 (23.5%)	Total	92/187 (49.2%)	Total	51/187 (27.3%)

Note. RESP= responsibility; EXPL=explanation; REPR=offer of repair; FORB=promise of forbearance; Concern= concern for the hearer; REQU=request

The fact that almost a third of the responses were a combination of more than two different strategies may evidence in favour of the respondents' politeness. However, employing four or five strategies in the same apology might be interpreted as an indication of waffling: the "excessive use of linguistic forms to fill a specific discourse 'slot' or 'move' " (Edmondson & House, 1991, p. 273). In other words, the researchers claim that learners lack knowledge of formulaic routines and "talk too much" to make up for it. They point out that "waffling is exclusively an interlanguage phenomenon in terms of statistical significance, and it occurs independently of the learners' mother tongue" (1991, p. 279). Oversuppliance of different strategies by NNSs was also found in Gonda's (2001) study where NNS's used combinations of strategies much more frequently than English NSs. Edmondson and House also claim that waffling is usually found in data collected from DCTs but not role-plays and thus may be an instrument effect of DCT. They suggest that waffling is not manifest in face-to-face situations, simply because the native speaker addressee negotiates or accommodates. Thus, what could have become waffle does not have a chance to evidence itself verbally. DCTs, on the other hand, provide learners with opportunity for knowledge display that is precluded for many NNSs by the cognitive demands of face-to-face interaction.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides the conclusions of the study, points out the pedagogical implications of the study and makes recommendations for further research.

#### Conclusions

The aim of the present study was to analyse realizations of speech acts of request and apology by EFL learners. My focus has been to analyse requests and apologies that occur in situations typical for university students' life, in the course of teacher-student communication.

**Requests.** The respondents mostly demonstrated appropriate choice of request head act strategies, choosing conventional indirectness and employing negative politeness. However, they also showed low variety in the use of internal modifiers and excessively relied on external modifiers, especially grounders, which, is characteristic of foreign language learners and is indicative of underdeveloped pragmatic competence. Previous research (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001) has shown that the correct use of internal and external modification poses a problem to intermediate and even advanced learners.

Some patterns have emerged in the data collected in the present study. The respondents showed preference for negative politeness strategies, such as conventional indirectness, lexical and syntactic downgraders, formal address terms.

On studying the request strategies chosen by the respondents, it was found that the students maximally used conventionally indirect request strategies (in nearly 80% of all requests), particularly the strategy "query preparatory". Direct requests were scarce and non-conventionally indirect ones even more so. In the rare cases when direct strategies were used, they were usually mitigated by politeness marker "please" and other internal and external modifiers. Such findings are in line with previous studies. It is generally accepted that query preparatory request strategy is the most polite and appears to be the main request type of native speakers not only of English, but of many other languages (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). The frequency of use of conventionally indirect strategies increases with proficiency of language

learners, while the preference for direct strategies appears to be typical of the lower proficiency groups' performance. Thus, the preference for query preparatory rather than direct strategies and hints in this study are indicative of the students' pragmatic awareness. In addition, in query preparatory requests, the respondents frequently used syntactic downgraders: they preferred to formulate questions using conditional forms *would* and *could* more often than *will* and *can*. Willingness questions with "would you" along with ability questions with "can you" and "could you" are the most frequent forms of request in the English language (Larina, 2005). The use of conditional structures (that were the most frequently used syntactic downgrader in the study) is a negative politeness strategy, since questions with conditionals signal social distance and formality. The use of permission questions, which was widely used in the study, is also an indication of negative politeness: permission requests are often directed upward in rank (Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Trosborg, 1985) and are considered to be very polite since the cost to the addressee is suppressed and the benefit to requester is emphasized (Belza, 2008).

As for request perspective, H-oriented perspective was the most frequent (53%), followed by speaker-oriented S-oriented perspective (35.2%). According to some researchers, the latter is considered more polite and is consequently preferred by native speakers (Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). Several studies among English learners have shown that lower proficiency learners mostly employ H-oriented perspective, but as the level increases, more preference is given to S-oriented requests (Trosborg, 1995; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). However, it should also be taken into account that the choice of perspective is to some extent predetermined by the type of request, and the same request perspective can be more or less appropriate depending on the situation (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007).

Although more than 75% of the requests contained internal modification and nearly half of them had more than one modifier, there was little variation in the students' use of internal downgraders: they were almost completely limited to the politeness marker "please" among lexical modifiers and conditional structures among syntactic downgraders. The overuse of politeness marker "please" is noted in many previous studies (Barron, 2007; Bella, 2012; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987) and may be explained by its extra-sentential status; that is, the learners can simply add it to the beginning or the end of an utterance with the intention to



sound polite (Bella, 2012). Little variance in the use of internal modifications is said to bear evidence of underdeveloped pragmatic competence. Various studies found both quantitative and qualitative differences between native and non-native speakers in the use of internal modifiers. Researchers state that there is generally less frequency and variety in the use of internal downgraders among NNSs with lower proficiency compared to NSs and learners with higher proficiency (Bella, 2012; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009; House & Kasper 1987; Sasaki, 1998; Trosborg, 1995). NSs mitigate their requests with the help of a greater variety of internal downgraders, while learners in general prefer using external modifications. Their use of internal modifiers is less frequent, and they mostly use a limited range of internal modifiers (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Hassall, 2001; Sasaki, 1998; Woodfield, 2008; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). According to Trosborg (1995), lexical/phrasal mitigation present difficulties for learners, since it increases the complexity of the pragmalinguistic structure. The mastery over lexical/phrasal modifiers constitutes a rather complicated task for learners of all proficiency levels – even advanced learners (Trosborg, 1995; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). Similarly, learners' underuse of syntactic downgraders, especially tense, which is widely used by native speakers, is evidenced in many studies (Trosborg, 1995; Sasaki, 1998; Woodfield, 2006, 2007; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) presume that learners may simply be unaware of the mitigating function of syntactic downgraders.

There was more diversity in the use of external modifiers compared with internal ones, although the frequency of usage of both types of modifiers is almost the same. Among supportive moves, grounder took the highest percentage and was used in 58.2% of requests. Grounder was also the only supportive move found in every single request situation. Apology took the second place (present in 15.8% of requests), followed by disarmer (14.3%) and imposition minimizer (10.7%). Other supportive moves, such as preparatory, sweetener, expression of gratitude, and discourse orientation move were much less frequent in the data.

Many researchers have found grounders the most frequent external modifiers in both interlanguage requests (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001; Schauer, 2007; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010) and native English requests (House & Kasper, 1987; Trosborg, 1995). Woodfield and

Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) point out that *grounder* is acquired by learners quite early on, probably because *grounder* does not require knowledge of idiomatic use and simply involves the construction of a new, often syntactically simple clause.

A study by Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) revealed that while the native speakers generally employed rather vague explanations and reasons, the learners went into much greater detail by providing specific reasons and explanations, primarily concerning matters of poor health, family emergencies and so on. Similar tendency to specify explanations was found in the present study.

Frequent use of external modification by learners in the study is in line with the findings of other studies on foreign language requests. Previous research findings assert that the overwhelming use of external modification, especially in high imposition situations, is a rather common phenomenon in the intermediate (and often also in advanced) learners' speech act performance (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001). External modifiers appear to satisfy the learners' concern for clarity and propositional explicitness (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009; Hassall, 2003; Faerch & Kasper, 1989). A second reason for the overwhelming use of external modifiers by learners can be found in the fact that "external modifiers do not require knowledge of native-like use and they simply involve the construction of a new, often syntactically simple clause. As such, external modifiers tend to be syntactically less demanding and pragmalinguistically less complex" (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009, p. 102). It appears then, that the use of these modifiers demands neither particularly high linguistic competence nor too much processing effort. It is possible that learners use excessive external modification as a form of compensation for the lack of adequate internal (especially lexical/phrasal) modification attested in their requestive behaviour. It is also suggested that learners' over-reliance on supportive moves may also find its roots in their lack of confidence resulting from their non-native linguistic proficiency (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2009) and their social role as overseas students. This might be particularly important in the academic encounter examined as the status balance needs to be maintained and students must perform a request to a higher status interlocutor. Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford (1993), when examining the acquisition of pragmatic competence in academic advising sessions noted how non-native speaker students differed from native speakers in their ability to employ appropriate speech acts and negotiate successfully. Over-reliance



on grounders on the part of the learners might therefore serve as a form of compensation for their lack of confidence both as speakers and as university students.

Alerters occurred in 42.9% requests, and it should be taken into account that the written medium of the questionnaire may have reduced the respondents' use of alerters, since there was no actual interlocutor to communicate with. Attention getters were used in 16.3% requests, and apologies were more frequent than greetings. Address terms occurred more often than attention getters—in 39.3% requests. This is a rather high percentage taking into account the fact that these requests were produced in a written questionnaire with no real interlocutor. Participants preferred to use formal address terms that signal of negative politeness. At the same time, the respondents also tended to use address terms incorrectly (e.g. using “Teacher” as a term of address). The most frequently used address term in the study was “Sir” occurring in 32 requests, 30 of them without the corresponding female counterpart. This can be partially explained by the fact that masculine is the “default” grammatical gender in English. On the other hand, an inference can be made that some respondents simply assumed that the potential interlocutor, a university teacher, would be of masculine gender. This would have made sense if the university faculty had been predominantly male, but three of five professors teaching MA courses at the time the questionnaire was given out were female. That is why the option that the respondents chose only masculine address term thinking about their own teachers is unlikely. In addition, some other address terms frequently in the requests – *Doctor*, *Professor*—are gender-neutral. Considering that many respondents used both “Sir” and “Doctor” or “Professor” across situations as mutually interchangeable, they might have been imagining addressing a male interlocutor in all DCT scenarios.

In nine requests, address terms included the salutation “dear” (e.g. *Dear Professor*, *Dear Doctor*, and even *Dear Teacher*) usually used when addressing letters. This might be explained by the influence of the written data collection tool. However, it should be taken into account that the salutation “dear” was used by the same four respondents.

It can be concluded that the respondents have demonstrated non-native like and inappropriate use of address terms, which can be explained by such factors as the written medium of the data collection tool and the absence of a real interlocutor, the

fact that no names were provided in the DCT making the standard formula TLN impossible to use, and, finally, lack unawareness of the appropriate forms of address among the respondents.

**Apologies.** Among apology strategies, IFIDs were the most frequent, followed by offer of repair, a sub-strategy of “taking on responsibility” admission of fact, and explanation. The high frequency of IFIDs is in agreement with findings of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Olshtain (1989), and Bergman and Kasper (1993). There was also a tendency to combine other strategies, especially indirect, contextual ones, with IFIDs. Since strategies maximally used in the data— such as explanation, offer of repair, and admission of facts— are also indirect (i.e. they do not directly admit guilt and express apology), adding IFIDs made apologies explicit. This is also true for less frequent strategies such as concern for the hearer, offer of forbearance, and lack of intent. In combination with IFIDs (or strategies admissions of guilt), indirect strategies may make the apology sound more polite, but used on their own they might not function as valid apologies. In general, there was a tendency to combine several strategies together, which, on the one hand, can be a sign of aspiration to be polite and show consideration for the hearer, but can be also interpreted as waffling, which is common among language learners who lack knowledge of formulaic routines and “talk too much” to make up for it (Edmondson & House, 1991). Oversuppliance of different strategies by NNSs was also found in Gonda’s (2001) study where NNS’s used combinations of strategies much more frequently than English NSs.

In any case, the tendency to employ IFIDs and to avoid using indirect strategies as the only apologies indicates that the respondents preferred directness, and in case of apologies directness means politeness since it is a speech act beneficial to H and face-threatening to S. In the case of apologies, the face-saving mechanisms making the speech act less face-threatening are related to the speaker’s face needs, and protection of one’s own face does not result in politeness. For example, opting out, while being polite in requests, in apologies, on the contrary, results in impoliteness: H’s face was already damaged by the offence, so not doing the FTA of apology is highly impolite and may itself become a new offence. Opting out can be regarded as the most face-protective approach taken in offensive situations and is a non-verbal way of denying responsibility. By remaining silent or ignoring the



offended party, the speaker refuses not only to accept responsibility but also to deal with the situation. The decision to refrain from apology is made because of S's concern for his or her own negative face, and protection of one's own face does not result in politeness. In the present study, opting out was chosen by students in several types of situations: when the offence was trivial and apologising could be considered unnecessary; and when S did not want to draw attention to the offence; when the offence was severe and apology would be highly face-threatening. The latter results from the fact that, ironically, the threat to S's negative face and therefore the need to protect it increases with the severity of the offence. Olshtain (1989) pointed out that "severity of the offence is the representative factor in the socio-pragmatic set of apology" (p. 160). Bergman and Kasper also concluded that "severity of the offence is systematically related to the offender's obligation to apologise" (1993, p. 89), and it would be reasonable to expect most offensive behaviour to result in most elaborate apologies. However, since the most severe offences also make apologising most face-threatening for the offender, they are also likely to elicit most denials of guilt and least explicit apologies. In other words, the more offensive the situation, the more likely the speaker is to opt out, deny responsibility, or employ indirect and downgrading strategies. Thus, avoiding explicit apologies result from the respondents' attempts to save face. In addition, Ogiermann suggests people's reluctance to deal with an offensive situation and thus risk face loss increases with decreasing social distance: in contrast to strangers, relationships with friends and acquaintances need to be maintained. Offensive behaviour clearly threatens these relationships, which might explain why several respondents chose to save face by concealing the offence instead of allowing damage to both parties' face by revealing the offence.

In agreement with that pattern, highly offensive situations (especially S20) elicited less IFIDs and most denials of responsibility and opting out (altogether, there were 7 instances of denying guilt and 13 of opting out). Situations describing minor offences and giving the opportunity to easily repair the damage resulted in most IFIDs and sub-strategies of "taking on responsibility" that admit guilt. Similarly, in a study by Olshtain and Cohen (1983) which focused on apologies produced by elementary students in response to offending actions of varying severity, it was found that children tended to deny responsibility when apologizing at the highest degree of severity of the offence, since they expected strong reaction (e.g. reprimand) from the

recipient. At the same time, at the lowest severity level, most frequently used strategies were IFID and substrategy of accepting responsibility – “lack of intent”. In Trosborg’s 1987 study with Danish learners of English, denial of responsibility also correlated with the degree of the severity of the offence. It can be concluded that in highly face-threatening situations, that is in cases of committing comparatively severe offences, the participants’ concern for their face can prevail over their concern for the hearer’s face and the desire to be polite. However, it should be also mentioned that according to Gonda (2011), one more reason for not using IFIDs in high severity offences may be that a routinized formula is insufficient to make amends for the offence. An extension of apology propositionally related to the specific offence might be a more adequate response and more likely to convey the sincerity of the speaker’s regret.

Ogiermann (2009a) claims that in the context of student-teacher dynamics, denials of responsibility display a rather careless attitude towards the hearer’s higher social status. She also states that admissions of responsibility suggest not only that those using them are concerned about the future relationship with the professor, but perhaps also that they do not assess the situation as particularly face-threatening.

Strategies admitting guilt, that is embarrassment, self-criticism, and explicit self-blame, were used minimally in the study, which can be explained by their high threat to the speaker’s face. The choice of strategies that admit guilt seems to be related to the speaker’s responsibility being so obvious that the face threat involved in admitting it is relatively low. All three strategies accepting responsibility – expression of embarrassment, expression of self-deficiency (of self-criticism), and explicit self-blame– were used in situations where H knew about the offence and it was impossible to deny it (S17, 18 and 19). The one exception is one example of expression of embarrassment in S11. The admissions of guilt were mostly used in connection with offers of repair, thus providing the reason for offering compensation (offer of repair also mitigates the face-threat to S thus making it easier to admit guilt). When the offender’s responsibility for the offence is obvious, it is easier to admit it (or more difficult to deny it), and, therefore, more necessary to repair the damage. Offers of repair evolve from admissions of guilt and also have a face-saving function for the offender once his or her responsibility for the offence has been established.



It is easy to see that among the category “taking on responsibility”, sub-strategies that explicitly admitted or denied guilt were minimally used and limited to certain situations. In contrast to that, sub-strategy “admission of facts”, neutral in terms of responsibility acceptance, was used in the majority of situations. Thus, most of the time the respondents gave preference to the strategy that had little face-threat to both parties, trying to balance between their positive and negative face needs. It should be added, however, that most admissions of facts found in the data co-occurred with IFIDs, thus serving as additions to direct apologies, as already mentioned above. Furthermore, this sub-strategy is situation-specific and its high frequency can be explained by the presence of certain types of scenarios in the DCT.

Ogiermann (2009a) explains that among the situation-specific factors that influences strategy choice is the victim’s prior knowledge about the offence and/or its circumstances. H’s knowledge of the circumstances leading up to the offence determines the choice of formulaic realisations vs. formulations semantically reflecting the contents of the offence. The more obvious the circumstances are, or the better the victim is informed about them, the more likely will the account take a formulaic form. When he or she is unaware of the offence, more information needs to be supplied. The analysis showed that admissions of facts indeed were predominant in situations that required informing H about the offence – S11 (forgetting a borrowed book), S14 (forgetting to do an assignment), and S16 (losing a borrowed dictionary). Predictably, this strategy was infrequent in scenarios that involved H witnessing the offence – S12 (being late for a class), S15 (being late for an appointment), S18 (bumping into a teacher), S19 (bumping into a teacher; books falling), S20 (being overheard complaining). S13 (missing a class) and S17 (forgetting about a meeting for the second time) are peculiar in the sense that although H already knows about the offence, the apology takes place somewhat later, so S might need to remind what he or she is apologizing for. Admission of facts was used in seven responses in S 17 and in one response in S13. Admissions of facts were entirely absent in S18 and S19 where the apology took place immediately after the offence committed in H’s presence. They are also the scenarios where respondents chose strategies admitting guilt.

The hearer’s ignorance of the exact circumstances of the offence also leaves room for manipulation. Whenever the victim is not aware of the offence – as in scenarios 11, 14, and 17 – the damage to the offender’s face is delayed until a

confession has been offered. Such offences may tempt the offender to protect his or her face by redefining the offence or denying responsibility. Offences happening with both parties present largely preclude this possibility. In connection with that, when using explanations (one of the most frequent strategies in the data), respondents referred not only to the circumstances described in the DCT but also to invented information. Explanations contradicting the information given in the DCT were found in S11 (forgetting a borrowed book), S14 (forgetting to do home assignment), and S17 (forgetting about a meeting for the second time). Such explanations constitute face-saving strategies minimising the severity of the offence. In the case of apologies, the face-saving mechanisms making the speech act less face-threatening are related to the speaker's face needs, and – as already mentioned – protection of one's own face does not result in politeness. According to Ogiermann (2009a), such selection of strategies illustrates the respondents' awareness of the importance of maintaining harmony with a status superior addressee. The decision to reveal or conceal the real circumstances of the offence is indicative of the perceived face-threat underlying the encounter and of considerations concerning the ensuing consequences for the future relationship with the professor. By concealing the true nature of the offence, the respondents reduced its severity and the corresponding damage to the hearer's *and* the speaker's positive face. At the same time, an approach in which the speaker distances him- or herself from the offence could make an apology dispensable. Taking advantage of such an opportunity, however, brings with it the danger of misjudging the hearer's knowledge, which is very likely to result in a new offence. When S's attempt to save face is recognised by H, more damage occurs to both H's and S's face as well as to their relationship. Hence, the speaker's interest in maintaining his or her reputation and the relationship with the victim generally makes repair work necessary.

In several of the situations aimed to elicit apologies, some respondents added requests. Although requests are not included into any coding category for apologies, in the context of several DCT scenarios, such as being late or forgetting to do an assignment, they can be very appropriate. A request following an offence that would have been unnecessary had that offence not taken place makes the apology more polite: by uttering a request, S acknowledges that because of the offence (s)he lost some privilege and therefore has to ask permission from the offended party. For instance, under normal circumstances, a student does not need permission to enter



the class where (s)he is having a lesson. However, if the student is late, a request for permission to come in is a way to acknowledge one's fault and thus indirectly apologise. Therefore, in this study, the speech act of request was added as an additional strategy, and it was found to be highly context-specific. Requests were mostly used alongside apology strategies in S12 (being late for the class) and S15 (being late for an appointment with a teacher) and included variations of the standard phrase "May I come in?" after apologising for being late. In S14 (forgetting to do the assignment), request to bring the assignment later meant admitting the teacher's right to decide whether to still accept it.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The results of the study confirmed that even MA students majoring in English still face problems linked to their pragmatic competence. Their deviations from English norms can lead to problems in communication with university faculty. Situations that require making requests and apologising often arise in teacher-student communication, and university students need to learn appropriate ways of voicing these speech acts in order to successfully interact with academic staff. Pragmatic failures can result in miscommunication, inability to achieve students' communicative goals, and problems in interpersonal relationships. The learners may seem to be rude and behave inappropriately when speaking in, therefore causing important social misunderstandings.

Teachers of EFL/ESL should be aware of students' language problems and take pragmatic aspects into account. Many scholars have voiced the necessity of inclusion of pragmatics in language learning and teaching (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Rose & Kasper 2001; Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004; Woodfield, 2006). In general, explicit instruction in pragmatics has proven to be an effective means to assist learners in learning L2 pragmatic norms (cf. Bouton, 1999; Kasper, 1997; Rose & Kasper, 2001) and could alter the sequencing of developments that have been observed in uninstructed contexts. Thus, students should be taught the appropriate ways to perform requests and apologies, as well as other speech acts. Ideally, developing pragmatic competence should already begin in the very first year of FL acquisition process. Differences between the cultures and the languages should be pointed out. The significance of pragmatic

competence for successful communication in the target language should be emphasised, so that being unintentionally rude or impolite can be avoided.

Students should be exposed to English speaking environment, to interact more with NSs and use them as role-models. Students should be encouraged to communicate in English with native speakers in their spare time, make friends and acquaintances, which brings exposure to NS speech patterns. Such communication will help to create informal learning environment which can be a strong stimulus to improvement in language competence. However, for this to have a positive effect, learners should be aware of pragmatic aspect of language learning and pay conscious attention to the available pragmatic input. Similarly, students should pay attention to production of speech acts in books and films for in order to enrich their speech repertoire through videos and literature. Language learners should learn to notice diverse speech patterns in both in the media and communication with NSs. This is especially important for learners who, like the students in the present study, already have some pragmatic skills (e.g. performing conventionally indirect query preparatory requests rather than direct requests), and need to further learn to perform less routinized SAs using more diverse linguistic forms rather than stick to standard formulaic expressions of requests and apologies.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

A suggestion for further research would be to broaden both the number and the nature of the sample to include respondents other than university students in order to check variation across educational background, among other things. Because the number of respondents in this study was not large, the results may be very different if DCT data are collected from a broader demographic base of students. There should be studies of request and apology strategies by other groups of participants, such as different educational levels and proficiency levels (BA students, school-level English learners). The results from such study can be generalized and be used to guideline a course syllabus henceforth.

In addition to written DCTs, other data collection instruments involving spoken data should be used, such as role plays and naturally occurring data, in order to study speech acts in the actual spoken language of learners of English. To increase the validity of the methodology, a combination of different methods could be



employed. Wolfson et al. (1989) note that "research into human behavior is notoriously "squishy" and requires multiple approaches in order to reach a level of validity which will give our analyses both predictive power and generalizability" (p. 194). The use of a combination of different approaches is also supported by Cohen and Olshtain (1994) who point out that no single method will thoroughly assess the behaviour in question.

Other speech acts besides requests and apologies should be studied in order to gain more understanding on EFL learners' communicative competence which can be used as a guideline for the development of teaching methods and syllabus designs for the EFL classroom.

The majority of research has focused on oral communication, but clearly the ability to communicate in writing is a goal for many language learners. In order to address these needs in the classroom, specific problem areas must first be identified. Studies on written communication should focus on electronic modes such as email, blogs, chat rooms, and social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

More broadly speaking, continued crosslinguistic work, incorporating yet unexplored languages is also needed. Speech act data from more languages would allow better understanding and appreciation of cross-cultural differences in what is socially and linguistically appropriate. Clearly, languages differ in the strategies they employ for performing different speech acts, and findings from future studies would contribute to the body of pragmatic literature and potentially inform the field of second language acquisition.

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## APPENDIX

### Discourse Completion Test

Dear Respondent, You are kindly requested to complete this questionnaire. This is NOT A TEST; there is no right or wrong answer. Your responses will be dealt with in purely academic manner and will never be used for any purposes other than the present research. Thank you for your help and cooperation.

#### Background Information

1. Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age: ☐18-20 ☐21-23 ☐24-29 ☐30-39 ☐40-49 ☐50+
3. ☐male ☐female
4. Country of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Mother Tongue: \_\_\_\_\_
7. If non-native English speaker, rate your speaking ability: ☐Excellent ☐Good  
☐Fair ☐Poor
8. Time spent in English-speaking community, if any: \_\_\_\_ years, \_\_\_\_ months
9. Previous use of English with native speakers: ☐Frequent ☐Occasional ☐Rare
10. Current use of English with native speakers: ☐Frequent ☐Occasional ☐Rare

**Imagine yourself in the situations below and try to react as spontaneously as possible (don't think). Please, use direct speech.**

Example:

You are returning a book at the library and the librarian notices that you have spilled coffee over it:

*I am terribly sorry. My little brother pushed me when I was reading in the kitchen.*

1. You are currently preparing a research paper about second language acquisition. There is a very good book that could be essential for your research. You know your teacher has it and decide to ask if you could borrow the book. You say:

2. You are writing your graduate thesis and need to interview the president of your university. The president was your teacher and you know him quite well. You know the president is very busy and has a very tight schedule. You still want to ask the president to spare one or two hours for your interview. You say:

\_\_\_\_\_

3. You have an appointment with a professor who will kindly help you with an important topic for your final exam. However, due to a serious problem, it is impossible for you to go to this appointment. You know you had a hard time getting an appointment but you have decided to ask the professor to change the appointment for the next week, if possible. You say:

---

4. There is a test in class in two weeks, but you'll miss class that day because you have to go to an out-of-town wedding. Class has just ended, and you want to ask your professor whether you can take the test on another day. How do you go about doing so?

---

5. You are very much interested in auditing a class taught by one of your teachers. You already have taken two classes from the professor, and you know each other well. So you decide to ask this professor's permission to audit. You say:

---

6. Because of your sudden terrible illness, you will have to cancel your Wednesday appointment with your supervisor for a thesis consultation. Since you have a deadline to gather data, you decide to ask your terribly busy professor for a consultation on the weekend. What will you say to the teacher?

---

7. Your computer is down because of a virus. One of your teachers is very skillful in fixing computers. You know he has been very busy recently, but you still want to ask him to fix your computer. You say:

---

8. You are now discussing your assignment with your teacher. Your teacher speaks very fast. You do not follow what he is saying, so you want to ask your teacher to say it again:

---

9. You are applying for a scholarship, and you decide to ask a professor, who knows you very well as your academic advisor, to write a recommendation letter for you. You say:

---

10. Your mother will be visiting from out of town/another country and you want to pick her up at the airport. However, her flight arrives at 11:00 AM, and you have lectures until 12:00 p.m. How do you ask your teacher to let you leave early?



---

11. You borrowed a book from your teacher, whom you know well. You promised to return the book today in the class, but you forgot to bring the book. What will you say?

---

12. You are late for a class. As you are walking into the classroom, what do you do?

---

13. You missed a class. The next day you see the teacher whose class you missed in the corridor. You say:

---

14. You forgot to do the assignment for your course. When your teacher whom you have known for some years asks for your assignment, you say:

---

15. You are taking an English class, and have many questions for mid-term. You set up an appointment with the teacher at 2:00 pm in his office. It is your first time meeting the teacher during his office hour, and you don't know the teacher well. You arrived in his office 15 minutes late. You say:

---

16. You lost a dictionary that you borrowed from your teacher. How will you break the news?

---

17. You completely forgot a crucial meeting at the office with your advisor. An hour later you call the advisor to apologize. The problem is that this is the second time you've forgotten such a meeting. What do you say?

---

18. You were running to the classroom to make it in time for the lesson and bumped into your teacher in the corridor. The teacher fell down. You:

---

19. At the library, you accidentally bump into your teacher who is holding a stack of books. The teacher is startled, but unhurt. A few books fall on the floor. You:

---

20. You complained to your friend about a teacher's class being very boring. The moment you finished complaining, you found that the teacher has been standing behind you and heard what you said. You:

---

and combinations of strategies were each used in less than 10% of all responses. This is not surprising, since IFIDs, offer of repair, a subcategory of "taking on responsibility" admission of fact, and explanation were the top most used strategies in the study.

Table 29  
*Strategies and their Combinations*

One strategy		Combination of two strategies		Combination of three and more strategies	
Strategy	Frequency	Strategies	Frequency	IFID+RESP+REPR	22/187 (11.8%)
IFID	25/187 (13.4 %)	IFID+RESP	32/187 (17.1 %)	IFID+RESP+ REQU	5/187 (2.7%)
RESP	9/187 (4.9 %)	IFID+EXPL	21/187 (11.2%)	IFID+RESP+EXPL	5/187 (2.7%)
EXPL	4/187 (2.1 %)	IFID+REPR	12/187 (6.4%)	IFID+RESP+FORB	4/187 (2.1 %)
REPR	2/187 (1 %)	IFID+ REQU	8/187 (4.3%)	IFID+EXPL+REPR	4/187 (2.1 %)
REQU	2/187 (1%)	IFID+FORB	4/187 (2.1 %)	IFID+RESP+EXPL+ REPR	2/187 (1 %)
Concern	1/187 (0.5%)	IFID+Cocern	4/187 (2.1 %)	IFID+EXPL+Concern	2/187 (1 %)
Intensifier	1/187 (0.5%)	REPR+RESP	4/187 (2.1 %)	IFID+EXPL+ REQU	2/187 (1 %)
		EXPL+REPR	3/187 (1.6%)	IFID+REPR+Concern	1/187 (0.5%)
		RESP+FORB	1/187 (0.5%)	IFID+RESP+Concern	1/187 (0.5%)
		RESP+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)	EXPL+REPR+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
		RESP+EXPL	1/187 (0.5%)	IFID+EXPL+REPR+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
		Concern+Repr	1/187 (0.5%)	IFID+EXPL+FORB+ REQU	1/187 (0.5%)
Total	44/187 (23.5%)	Total	92/187 (49.2%)	Total	51/187 (27.3%)

Note. RESP= responsibility; EXPL=explanation; REPR=offer of repair; FORB=promise of forbearance; Concern= concern for the hearer; REQU=request

The fact that almost a third of the responses were a combination of more than two different strategies may evidence in favour of the respondents' politeness. However, employing four or five strategies in the same apology might be interpreted as an indication of waffling: the "excessive use of linguistic forms to fill a specific discourse 'slot' or 'move' " (Edmondson & House, 1991, p. 273). In other words, the researchers claim that learners lack knowledge of formulaic routines and "talk too much" to make up for it. They point out that "waffling is exclusively an interlanguage phenomenon in terms of statistical significance, and it occurs independently of the learners' mother tongue" (1991, p. 279). Oversuppliance of different strategies by NNSs was also found in Gonda's (2001) study where NNS's used combinations of strategies much more frequently than English NSs. Edmondson and House also claim that waffling is usually found in data collected from DCTs but not role-plays and thus may be an instrument effect of DCT. They suggest that waffling is not manifest in face-to-face situations, simply because the native speaker addressee negotiates or accommodates. Thus, what could have become waffle does not have a chance to evidence itself verbally. DCTs, on the other hand, provide learners with opportunity for knowledge display that is precluded for many NNSs by the cognitive demands of face-to-face interaction.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides the conclusions of the study, points out the pedagogical implications of the study and makes recommendations for further research.

#### Conclusions

The aim of the present study was to analyse realizations of speech acts of request and apology by EFL learners. My focus has been to analyse requests and apologies that occur in situations typical for university students' life, in the course of teacher-student communication.

**Requests.** The respondents mostly demonstrated appropriate choice of request head act strategies, choosing conventional indirectness and employing negative politeness. However, they also showed low variety in the use of internal modifiers and excessively relied on external modifiers, especially grounders, which, is characteristic of foreign language learners and is indicative of underdeveloped pragmatic competence. Previous research (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001) has shown that the correct use of internal and external modification poses a problem to intermediate and even advanced learners.

Some patterns have emerged in the data collected in the present study. The respondents showed preference for negative politeness strategies, such as conventional indirectness, lexical and syntactic downgraders, formal address terms.

On studying the request strategies chosen by the respondents, it was found that the students maximally used conventionally indirect request strategies (in nearly 80% of all requests), particularly the strategy "query preparatory". Direct requests were scarce and non-conventionally indirect ones even more so. In the rare cases when direct strategies were used, they were usually mitigated by politeness marker "please" and other internal and external modifiers. Such findings are in line with previous studies. It is generally accepted that query preparatory request strategy is the most polite and appears to be the main request type of native speakers not only of English, but of many other languages (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). The frequency of use of conventionally indirect strategies increases with proficiency of language

learners, while the preference for direct strategies appears to be typical of the lower proficiency groups' performance. Thus, the preference for query preparatory rather than direct strategies and hints in this study are indicative of the students' pragmatic awareness. In addition, in query preparatory requests, the respondents frequently used syntactic downgraders: they preferred to formulate questions using conditional forms *would* and *could* more often than *will* and *can*. Willingness questions with "would you" along with ability questions with "can you" and "could you" are the most frequent forms of request in the English language (Larina, 2005). The use of conditional structures (that were the most frequently used syntactic downgrader in the study) is a negative politeness strategy, since questions with conditionals signal social distance and formality. The use of permission questions, which was widely used in the study, is also an indication of negative politeness: permission requests are often directed upward in rank (Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Trosborg, 1985) and are considered to be very polite since the cost to the addressee is suppressed and the benefit to requester is emphasized (Belza, 2008).

As for request perspective, H-oriented perspective was the most frequent (53%), followed by speaker-oriented S-oriented perspective (35.2%). According to some researchers, the latter is considered more polite and is consequently preferred by native speakers (Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). Several studies among English learners have shown that lower proficiency learners mostly employ H-oriented perspective, but as the level increases, more preference is given to S-oriented requests (Trosborg, 1995; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). However, it should also be taken into account that the choice of perspective is to some extent predetermined by the type of request, and the same request perspective can be more or less appropriate depending on the situation (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007).

Although more than 75% of the requests contained internal modification and nearly half of them had more than one modifier, there was little variation in the students' use of internal downgraders: they were almost completely limited to the politeness marker "please" among lexical modifiers and conditional structures among syntactic downgraders. The overuse of politeness marker "please" is noted in many previous studies (Barron, 2007; Bella, 2012; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987) and may be explained by its extra-sentential status; that is, the learners can simply add it to the beginning or the end of an utterance with the intention to



sound polite (Bella, 2012). Little variance in the use of internal modifications is said to bear evidence of underdeveloped pragmatic competence. Various studies found both quantitative and qualitative differences between native and non-native speakers in the use of internal modifiers. Researchers state that there is generally less frequency and variety in the use of internal downgraders among NNSs with lower proficiency compared to NSs and learners with higher proficiency (Bella, 2012; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009; House & Kasper 1987; Sasaki, 1998; Trosborg, 1995). NSs mitigate their requests with the help of a greater variety of internal downgraders, while learners in general prefer using external modifications. Their use of internal modifiers is less frequent, and they mostly use a limited range of internal modifiers (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Hassall, 2001; Sasaki, 1998; Woodfield, 2008; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). According to Trosborg (1995), lexical/phrasal mitigation present difficulties for learners, since it increases the complexity of the pragmalinguistic structure. The mastery over lexical/phrasal modifiers constitutes a rather complicated task for learners of all proficiency levels – even advanced learners (Trosborg, 1995; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). Similarly, learners' underuse of syntactic downgraders, especially tense, which is widely used by native speakers, is evidenced in many studies (Trosborg, 1995; Sasaki, 1998; Woodfield, 2006, 2007; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) presume that learners may simply be unaware of the mitigating function of syntactic downgraders.

There was more diversity in the use of external modifiers compared with internal ones, although the frequency of usage of both types of modifiers is almost the same. Among supportive moves, grounder took the highest percentage and was used in 58.2% of requests. Grounder was also the only supportive move found in every single request situation. Apology took the second place (present in 15.8% of requests), followed by disarmer (14.3%) and imposition minimizer (10.7%). Other supportive moves, such as preparatory, sweetener, expression of gratitude, and discourse orientation move were much less frequent in the data.

Many researchers have found grounders the most frequent external modifiers in both interlanguage requests (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001; Schauer, 2007; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010) and native English requests (House & Kasper, 1987; Trosborg, 1995). Woodfield and

Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) point out that *grounder* is acquired by learners quite early on, probably because *grounder* does not require knowledge of idiomatic use and simply involves the construction of a new, often syntactically simple clause.

A study by Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) revealed that while the native speakers generally employed rather vague explanations and reasons, the learners went into much greater detail by providing specific reasons and explanations, primarily concerning matters of poor health, family emergencies and so on. Similar tendency to specify explanations was found in the present study.

Frequent use of external modification by learners in the study is in line with the findings of other studies on foreign language requests. Previous research findings assert that the overwhelming use of external modification, especially in high imposition situations, is a rather common phenomenon in the intermediate (and often also in advanced) learners' speech act performance (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001). External modifiers appear to satisfy the learners' concern for clarity and propositional explicitness (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009; Hassall, 2003; Faerch & Kasper, 1989). A second reason for the overwhelming use of external modifiers by learners can be found in the fact that "external modifiers do not require knowledge of native-like use and they simply involve the construction of a new, often syntactically simple clause. As such, external modifiers tend to be syntactically less demanding and pragmalinguistically less complex" (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009, p. 102). It appears then, that the use of these modifiers demands neither particularly high linguistic competence nor too much processing effort. It is possible that learners use excessive external modification as a form of compensation for the lack of adequate internal (especially lexical/phrasal) modification attested in their requestive behaviour. It is also suggested that learners' over-reliance on supportive moves may also find its roots in their lack of confidence resulting from their non-native linguistic proficiency (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2009) and their social role as overseas students. This might be particularly important in the academic encounter examined as the status balance needs to be maintained and students must perform a request to a higher status interlocutor. Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford (1993), when examining the acquisition of pragmatic competence in academic advising sessions noted how non-native speaker students differed from native speakers in their ability to employ appropriate speech acts and negotiate successfully. Over-reliance



on grounders on the part of the learners might therefore serve as a form of compensation for their lack of confidence both as speakers and as university students.

Alerters occurred in 42.9% requests, and it should be taken into account that the written medium of the questionnaire may have reduced the respondents' use of alerters, since there was no actual interlocutor to communicate with. Attention getters were used in 16.3% requests, and apologies were more frequent than greetings. Address terms occurred more often than attention getters—in 39.3% requests. This is a rather high percentage taking into account the fact that these requests were produced in a written questionnaire with no real interlocutor. Participants preferred to use formal address terms that signal of negative politeness. At the same time, the respondents also tended to use address terms incorrectly (e.g. using “Teacher” as a term of address). The most frequently used address term in the study was “Sir” occurring in 32 requests, 30 of them without the corresponding female counterpart. This can be partially explained by the fact that masculine is the “default” grammatical gender in English. On the other hand, an inference can be made that some respondents simply assumed that the potential interlocutor, a university teacher, would be of masculine gender. This would have made sense if the university faculty had been predominantly male, but three of five professors teaching MA courses at the time the questionnaire was given out were female. That is why the option that the respondents chose only masculine address term thinking about their own teachers is unlikely. In addition, some other address terms frequently in the requests – *Doctor*, *Professor*—are gender-neutral. Considering that many respondents used both “Sir” and “Doctor” or “Professor” across situations as mutually interchangeable, they might have been imagining addressing a male interlocutor in all DCT scenarios.

In nine requests, address terms included the salutation “dear” (e.g. *Dear Professor*, *Dear Doctor*, and even *Dear Teacher*) usually used when addressing letters. This might be explained by the influence of the written data collection tool. However, it should be taken into account that the salutation “dear” was used by the same four respondents.

It can be concluded that the respondents have demonstrated non-native like and inappropriate use of address terms, which can be explained by such factors as the written medium of the data collection tool and the absence of a real interlocutor, the

fact that no names were provided in the DCT making the standard formula TLN impossible to use, and, finally, lack unawareness of the appropriate forms of address among the respondents.

**Apologies.** Among apology strategies, IFIDs were the most frequent, followed by offer of repair, a sub-strategy of “taking on responsibility” admission of fact, and explanation. The high frequency of IFIDs is in agreement with findings of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Olshtain (1989), and Bergman and Kasper (1993). There was also a tendency to combine other strategies, especially indirect, contextual ones, with IFIDs. Since strategies maximally used in the data— such as explanation, offer of repair, and admission of facts— are also indirect (i.e. they do not directly admit guilt and express apology), adding IFIDs made apologies explicit. This is also true for less frequent strategies such as concern for the hearer, offer of forbearance, and lack of intent. In combination with IFIDs (or strategies admissions of guilt), indirect strategies may make the apology sound more polite, but used on their own they might not function as valid apologies. In general, there was a tendency to combine several strategies together, which, on the one hand, can be a sign of aspiration to be polite and show consideration for the hearer, but can be also interpreted as waffling, which is common among language learners who lack knowledge of formulaic routines and “talk too much” to make up for it (Edmondson & House, 1991). Oversuppliance of different strategies by NNSs was also found in Gonda’s (2001) study where NNS’s used combinations of strategies much more frequently than English NSs.

In any case, the tendency to employ IFIDs and to avoid using indirect strategies as the only apologies indicates that the respondents preferred directness, and in case of apologies directness means politeness since it is a speech act beneficial to H and face-threatening to S. In the case of apologies, the face-saving mechanisms making the speech act less face-threatening are related to the speaker’s face needs, and protection of one’s own face does not result in politeness. For example, opting out, while being polite in requests, in apologies, on the contrary, results in impoliteness: H’s face was already damaged by the offence, so not doing the FTA of apology is highly impolite and may itself become a new offence. Opting out can be regarded as the most face-protective approach taken in offensive situations and is a non-verbal way of denying responsibility. By remaining silent or ignoring the



offended party, the speaker refuses not only to accept responsibility but also to deal with the situation. The decision to refrain from apology is made because of S's concern for his or her own negative face, and protection of one's own face does not result in politeness. In the present study, opting out was chosen by students in several types of situations: when the offence was trivial and apologising could be considered unnecessary; and when S did not want to draw attention to the offence; when the offence was severe and apology would be highly face-threatening. The latter results from the fact that, ironically, the threat to S's negative face and therefore the need to protect it increases with the severity of the offence. Olshtain (1989) pointed out that "severity of the offence is the representative factor in the socio-pragmatic set of apology" (p. 160). Bergman and Kasper also concluded that "severity of the offence is systematically related to the offender's obligation to apologise" (1993, p. 89), and it would be reasonable to expect most offensive behaviour to result in most elaborate apologies. However, since the most severe offences also make apologising most face-threatening for the offender, they are also likely to elicit most denials of guilt and least explicit apologies. In other words, the more offensive the situation, the more likely the speaker is to opt out, deny responsibility, or employ indirect and downgrading strategies. Thus, avoiding explicit apologies result from the respondents' attempts to save face. In addition, Ogiermann suggests people's reluctance to deal with an offensive situation and thus risk face loss increases with decreasing social distance: in contrast to strangers, relationships with friends and acquaintances need to be maintained. Offensive behaviour clearly threatens these relationships, which might explain why several respondents chose to save face by concealing the offence instead of allowing damage to both parties' face by revealing the offence.

In agreement with that pattern, highly offensive situations (especially S20) elicited less IFIDs and most denials of responsibility and opting out (altogether, there were 7 instances of denying guilt and 13 of opting out). Situations describing minor offences and giving the opportunity to easily repair the damage resulted in most IFIDs and sub-strategies of "taking on responsibility" that admit guilt. Similarly, in a study by Olshtain and Cohen (1983) which focused on apologies produced by elementary students in response to offending actions of varying severity, it was found that children tended to deny responsibility when apologizing at the highest degree of severity of the offence, since they expected strong reaction (e.g. reprimand) from the

recipient. At the same time, at the lowest severity level, most frequently used strategies were IFID and substrategy of accepting responsibility – “lack of intent”. In Trosborg’s 1987 study with Danish learners of English, denial of responsibility also correlated with the degree of the severity of the offence. It can be concluded that in highly face-threatening situations, that is in cases of committing comparatively severe offences, the participants’ concern for their face can prevail over their concern for the hearer’s face and the desire to be polite. However, it should be also mentioned that according to Gonda (2011), one more reason for not using IFIDs in high severity offences may be that a routinized formula is insufficient to make amends for the offence. An extension of apology propositionally related to the specific offence might be a more adequate response and more likely to convey the sincerity of the speaker’s regret.

Ogiermann (2009a) claims that in the context of student-teacher dynamics, denials of responsibility display a rather careless attitude towards the hearer’s higher social status. She also states that admissions of responsibility suggest not only that those using them are concerned about the future relationship with the professor, but perhaps also that they do not assess the situation as particularly face-threatening.

Strategies admitting guilt, that is embarrassment, self-criticism, and explicit self-blame, were used minimally in the study, which can be explained by their high threat to the speaker’s face. The choice of strategies that admit guilt seems to be related to the speaker’s responsibility being so obvious that the face threat involved in admitting it is relatively low. All three strategies accepting responsibility – expression of embarrassment, expression of self-deficiency (of self-criticism), and explicit self-blame– were used in situations where H knew about the offence and it was impossible to deny it (S17, 18 and 19). The one exception is one example of expression of embarrassment in S11. The admissions of guilt were mostly used in connection with offers of repair, thus providing the reason for offering compensation (offer of repair also mitigates the face-threat to S thus making it easier to admit guilt). When the offender’s responsibility for the offence is obvious, it is easier to admit it (or more difficult to deny it), and, therefore, more necessary to repair the damage. Offers of repair evolve from admissions of guilt and also have a face-saving function for the offender once his or her responsibility for the offence has been established.



It is easy to see that among the category “taking on responsibility”, sub-strategies that explicitly admitted or denied guilt were minimally used and limited to certain situations. In contrast to that, sub-strategy “admission of facts”, neutral in terms of responsibility acceptance, was used in the majority of situations. Thus, most of the time the respondents gave preference to the strategy that had little face-threat to both parties, trying to balance between their positive and negative face needs. It should be added, however, that most admissions of facts found in the data co-occurred with IFIDs, thus serving as additions to direct apologies, as already mentioned above. Furthermore, this sub-strategy is situation-specific and its high frequency can be explained by the presence of certain types of scenarios in the DCT.

Ogiermann (2009a) explains that among the situation-specific factors that influences strategy choice is the victim’s prior knowledge about the offence and/or its circumstances. H’s knowledge of the circumstances leading up to the offence determines the choice of formulaic realisations vs. formulations semantically reflecting the contents of the offence. The more obvious the circumstances are, or the better the victim is informed about them, the more likely will the account take a formulaic form. When he or she is unaware of the offence, more information needs to be supplied. The analysis showed that admissions of facts indeed were predominant in situations that required informing H about the offence – S11 (forgetting a borrowed book), S14 (forgetting to do an assignment), and S16 (losing a borrowed dictionary). Predictably, this strategy was infrequent in scenarios that involved H witnessing the offence – S12 (being late for a class), S15 (being late for an appointment), S18 (bumping into a teacher), S19 (bumping into a teacher; books falling), S20 (being overheard complaining). S13 (missing a class) and S17 (forgetting about a meeting for the second time) are peculiar in the sense that although H already knows about the offence, the apology takes place somewhat later, so S might need to remind what he or she is apologizing for. Admission of facts was used in seven responses in S 17 and in one response in S13. Admissions of facts were entirely absent in S18 and S19 where the apology took place immediately after the offence committed in H’s presence. They are also the scenarios where respondents chose strategies admitting guilt.

The hearer’s ignorance of the exact circumstances of the offence also leaves room for manipulation. Whenever the victim is not aware of the offence – as in scenarios 11, 14, and 17 – the damage to the offender’s face is delayed until a

confession has been offered. Such offences may tempt the offender to protect his or her face by redefining the offence or denying responsibility. Offences happening with both parties present largely preclude this possibility. In connection with that, when using explanations (one of the most frequent strategies in the data), respondents referred not only to the circumstances described in the DCT but also to invented information. Explanations contradicting the information given in the DCT were found in S11 (forgetting a borrowed book), S14 (forgetting to do home assignment), and S17 (forgetting about a meeting for the second time). Such explanations constitute face-saving strategies minimising the severity of the offence. In the case of apologies, the face-saving mechanisms making the speech act less face-threatening are related to the speaker's face needs, and – as already mentioned – protection of one's own face does not result in politeness. According to Ogiermann (2009a), such selection of strategies illustrates the respondents' awareness of the importance of maintaining harmony with a status superior addressee. The decision to reveal or conceal the real circumstances of the offence is indicative of the perceived face-threat underlying the encounter and of considerations concerning the ensuing consequences for the future relationship with the professor. By concealing the true nature of the offence, the respondents reduced its severity and the corresponding damage to the hearer's *and* the speaker's positive face. At the same time, an approach in which the speaker distances him- or herself from the offence could make an apology dispensable. Taking advantage of such an opportunity, however, brings with it the danger of misjudging the hearer's knowledge, which is very likely to result in a new offence. When S's attempt to save face is recognised by H, more damage occurs to both H's and S's face as well as to their relationship. Hence, the speaker's interest in maintaining his or her reputation and the relationship with the victim generally makes repair work necessary.

In several of the situations aimed to elicit apologies, some respondents added requests. Although requests are not included into any coding category for apologies, in the context of several DCT scenarios, such as being late or forgetting to do an assignment, they can be very appropriate. A request following an offence that would have been unnecessary had that offence not taken place makes the apology more polite: by uttering a request, S acknowledges that because of the offence (s)he lost some privilege and therefore has to ask permission from the offended party. For instance, under normal circumstances, a student does not need permission to enter



the class where (s)he is having a lesson. However, if the student is late, a request for permission to come in is a way to acknowledge one's fault and thus indirectly apologise. Therefore, in this study, the speech act of request was added as an additional strategy, and it was found to be highly context-specific. Requests were mostly used alongside apology strategies in S12 (being late for the class) and S15 (being late for an appointment with a teacher) and included variations of the standard phrase "May I come in?" after apologising for being late. In S14 (forgetting to do the assignment), request to bring the assignment later meant admitting the teacher's right to decide whether to still accept it.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The results of the study confirmed that even MA students majoring in English still face problems linked to their pragmatic competence. Their deviations from English norms can lead to problems in communication with university faculty. Situations that require making requests and apologising often arise in teacher-student communication, and university students need to learn appropriate ways of voicing these speech acts in order to successfully interact with academic staff. Pragmatic failures can result in miscommunication, inability to achieve students' communicative goals, and problems in interpersonal relationships. The learners may seem to be rude and behave inappropriately when speaking in, therefore causing important social misunderstandings.

Teachers of EFL/ESL should be aware of students' language problems and take pragmatic aspects into account. Many scholars have voiced the necessity of inclusion of pragmatics in language learning and teaching (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Rose & Kasper 2001; Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004; Woodfield, 2006). In general, explicit instruction in pragmatics has proven to be an effective means to assist learners in learning L2 pragmatic norms (cf. Bouton, 1999; Kasper, 1997; Rose & Kasper, 2001) and could alter the sequencing of developments that have been observed in uninstructed contexts. Thus, students should be taught the appropriate ways to perform requests and apologies, as well as other speech acts. Ideally, developing pragmatic competence should already begin in the very first year of FL acquisition process. Differences between the cultures and the languages should be pointed out. The significance of pragmatic

competence for successful communication in the target language should be emphasised, so that being unintentionally rude or impolite can be avoided.

Students should be exposed to English speaking environment, to interact more with NSs and use them as role-models. Students should be encouraged to communicate in English with native speakers in their spare time, make friends and acquaintances, which brings exposure to NS speech patterns. Such communication will help to create informal learning environment which can be a strong stimulus to improvement in language competence. However, for this to have a positive effect, learners should be aware of pragmatic aspect of language learning and pay conscious attention to the available pragmatic input. Similarly, students should pay attention to production of speech acts in books and films for in order to enrich their speech repertoire through videos and literature. Language learners should learn to notice diverse speech patterns in both in the media and communication with NSs. This is especially important for learners who, like the students in the present study, already have some pragmatic skills (e.g. performing conventionally indirect query preparatory requests rather than direct requests), and need to further learn to perform less routinized SAs using more diverse linguistic forms rather than stick to standard formulaic expressions of requests and apologies.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

A suggestion for further research would be to broaden both the number and the nature of the sample to include respondents other than university students in order to check variation across educational background, among other things. Because the number of respondents in this study was not large, the results may be very different if DCT data are collected from a broader demographic base of students. There should be studies of request and apology strategies by other groups of participants, such as different educational levels and proficiency levels (BA students, school-level English learners). The results from such study can be generalized and be used to guideline a course syllabus henceforth.

In addition to written DCTs, other data collection instruments involving spoken data should be used, such as role plays and naturally occurring data, in order to study speech acts in the actual spoken language of learners of English. To increase the validity of the methodology, a combination of different methods could be



employed. Wolfson et al. (1989) note that "research into human behavior is notoriously "squishy" and requires multiple approaches in order to reach a level of validity which will give our analyses both predictive power and generalizability" (p. 194). The use of a combination of different approaches is also supported by Cohen and Olshtain (1994) who point out that no single method will thoroughly assess the behaviour in question.

Other speech acts besides requests and apologies should be studied in order to gain more understanding on EFL learners' communicative competence which can be used as a guideline for the development of teaching methods and syllabus designs for the EFL classroom.

The majority of research has focused on oral communication, but clearly the ability to communicate in writing is a goal for many language learners. In order to address these needs in the classroom, specific problem areas must first be identified. Studies on written communication should focus on electronic modes such as email, blogs, chat rooms, and social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

More broadly speaking, continued crosslinguistic work, incorporating yet unexplored languages is also needed. Speech act data from more languages would allow better understanding and appreciation of cross-cultural differences in what is socially and linguistically appropriate. Clearly, languages differ in the strategies they employ for performing different speech acts, and findings from future studies would contribute to the body of pragmatic literature and potentially inform the field of second language acquisition.

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## APPENDIX

### Discourse Completion Test

Dear Respondent, You are kindly requested to complete this questionnaire. This is NOT A TEST; there is no right or wrong answer. Your responses will be dealt with in purely academic manner and will never be used for any purposes other than the present research. Thank you for your help and cooperation.

#### Background Information

1. Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age: ☐18-20 ☐21-23 ☐24-29 ☐30-39 ☐40-49 ☐50+
3. ☐male ☐female
4. Country of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Mother Tongue: \_\_\_\_\_
7. If non-native English speaker, rate your speaking ability: ☐Excellent ☐Good  
☐Fair ☐Poor
8. Time spent in English-speaking community, if any: \_\_\_\_ years, \_\_\_\_ months
9. Previous use of English with native speakers: ☐Frequent ☐Occasional ☐Rare
10. Current use of English with native speakers: ☐Frequent ☐Occasional ☐Rare

**Imagine yourself in the situations below and try to react as spontaneously as possible (don't think). Please, use direct speech.**

Example:

You are returning a book at the library and the librarian notices that you have spilled coffee over it:

*I am terribly sorry. My little brother pushed me when I was reading in the kitchen.*

1. You are currently preparing a research paper about second language acquisition. There is a very good book that could be essential for your research. You know your teacher has it and decide to ask if you could borrow the book. You say:

2. You are writing your graduate thesis and need to interview the president of your university. The president was your teacher and you know him quite well. You know the president is very busy and has a very tight schedule. You still want to ask the president to spare one or two hours for your interview. You say:

\_\_\_\_\_

3. You have an appointment with a professor who will kindly help you with an important topic for your final exam. However, due to a serious problem, it is impossible for you to go to this appointment. You know you had a hard time getting an appointment but you have decided to ask the professor to change the appointment for the next week, if possible. You say:

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4. There is a test in class in two weeks, but you'll miss class that day because you have to go to an out-of-town wedding. Class has just ended, and you want to ask your professor whether you can take the test on another day. How do you go about doing so?

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5. You are very much interested in auditing a class taught by one of your teachers. You already have taken two classes from the professor, and you know each other well. So you decide to ask this professor's permission to audit. You say:

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6. Because of your sudden terrible illness, you will have to cancel your Wednesday appointment with your supervisor for a thesis consultation. Since you have a deadline to gather data, you decide to ask your terribly busy professor for a consultation on the weekend. What will you say to the teacher?

---

7. Your computer is down because of a virus. One of your teachers is very skillful in fixing computers. You know he has been very busy recently, but you still want to ask him to fix your computer. You say:

---

8. You are now discussing your assignment with your teacher. Your teacher speaks very fast. You do not follow what he is saying, so you want to ask your teacher to say it again:

---

9. You are applying for a scholarship, and you decide to ask a professor, who knows you very well as your academic advisor, to write a recommendation letter for you. You say:

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10. Your mother will be visiting from out of town/another country and you want to pick her up at the airport. However, her flight arrives at 11:00 AM, and you have lectures until 12:00 p.m. How do you ask your teacher to let you leave early?



---

11. You borrowed a book from your teacher, whom you know well. You promised to return the book today in the class, but you forgot to bring the book. What will you say?

---

12. You are late for a class. As you are walking into the classroom, what do you do?

---

13. You missed a class. The next day you see the teacher whose class you missed in the corridor. You say:

---

14. You forgot to do the assignment for your course. When your teacher whom you have known for some years asks for your assignment, you say:

---

15. You are taking an English class, and have many questions for mid-term. You set up an appointment with the teacher at 2:00 pm in his office. It is your first time meeting the teacher during his office hour, and you don't know the teacher well. You arrived in his office 15 minutes late. You say:

---

16. You lost a dictionary that you borrowed from your teacher. How will you break the news?

---

17. You completely forgot a crucial meeting at the office with your advisor. An hour later you call the advisor to apologize. The problem is that this is the second time you've forgotten such a meeting. What do you say?

---

18. You were running to the classroom to make it in time for the lesson and bumped into your teacher in the corridor. The teacher fell down. You:

---

19. At the library, you accidentally bump into your teacher who is holding a stack of books. The teacher is startled, but unhurt. A few books fall on the floor. You:

---

20. You complained to your friend about a teacher's class being very boring. The moment you finished complaining, you found that the teacher has been standing behind you and heard what you said. You:

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