

**INTERLANGUAGE PRAGMATICS:  
DIFFERENCES OF ENGLISH REQUEST STRATEGIES BETWEEN HIGH  
PROFICIENCY AND LOW PROFICIENCY STUDENTS OF ACADEMIC YEAR  
2012 OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
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**Harliansyah Noer Yunanda, Dr. Hairus Salikin, M.Ed., Dewianti Khazanah, S.S., M.Hum.**

English Department, Faculty of Humanities, University of Jember (UNEJ)

Jln. Kalimantan 37 Jember 68121

*E-mail: harliansyah.noer@gmail.com*

**Abstrak**

Studi ini membahas tentang perbedaan strategi dalam mengutarakan permohonan pada dua kelompok mahasiswa angkatan tahun 2012 yang berbeda di Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Jember. Kelompok mahasiswa tersebut terdiri dari mahasiswa-mahasiswa yang memiliki kecakapan tinggi dan mahasiswa-mahasiswa yang memiliki kecakapan rendah. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menemukan bagaimana perbedaan dari strategi yang digunakan kedua kelompok mahasiswa tersebut serta penyebab dari perbedaan strategi tersebut. Selain itu, studi ini juga ditujukan untuk mencari tahu peran dari kecakapan terhadap metode mahasiswa mengutarakan tindak tutur permohonan dalam bahasa Inggris. Jenis penelitian yang digunakan dalam studi ini secara mayoritas adalah kualitatif, meskipun beberapa aspek tampak kuantitatif. Untuk mengumpulkan data, studi ini menggunakan jenis penelitian survei. Metode yang digunakan untuk menganalisis dan menyaring data adalah metode purposive sampling dan wawancara berkelompok yang terpusat. Transkripsi data wawancara tersebut diperoleh melalui dua wawancara berkelompok yang masing-masing dilaksanakan pada waktu dan tempat yang terpisah. Hasil dari studi ini menunjukkan bahwa baik mahasiswa yang memiliki kecakapan tinggi maupun mahasiswa yang memiliki kecakapan rendah masih terpengaruh oleh bahasa pertama mereka, meskipun mereka telah terpapar oleh lingkungan buatan bahasa Inggris dalam waktu yang lama. Namun, mereka tidak memiliki pemahaman dan penggunaan target bahasa yang seimbang. Perbedaan mereka disebabkan oleh beberapa aspek seperti kurangnya percaya diri atau jenis kosa kata. Dengan demikian, hal ini menunjukkan bahwa terpapar oleh lingkungan yang sama tidak serta merta memberikan hasil yang sama terhadap kesuksesan mahasiswa dalam meraih target bahasa mereka. Kesuksesan tersebut juga memerlukan faktor lain seperti kecakapan diri dan kepercayaan diri pribadi.

*Kata kunci: Request strategies, speech acts, proficiency*

**Abstract**

This study describes the analysis of the differences of request strategies performed in English between two different groups of students of academic year 2012 in English Department Faculty of Humanities University of Jember. The groups consist of students with high proficiency and students with low proficiency. The purpose of this study is to find out how both groups of students differ in their strategies and what causes such differences. Furthermore, this study is also meant to figure out the role of proficiency in the students' way of performing requests speech acts in English. The type of research used in the making of this study is mostly qualitative research though some aspects may look quantitative. To gather the data, this study uses survey research as the research strategy. The methods used to analyze and filter the data are purposive sampling and focused group interviews. The data transcription from the interviews are collected from two different time and place for each group interview. The results of this study reveal that both high and low proficiency students are still under the influence of their first language even when they are exposed with artificial English environment for a long time. However, they do not share equal understanding and application of their target language. Their inequality is caused by some aspects such as lack of confidence or range of vocabularies. Thus, it shows that by being exposed with the same environment does not necessarily share similar results to the students' success of achieving their target language. This also requires other factors such as proficiency and personal confidence.

*Keywords: Request strategies, speech acts, proficiency*

## Introduction

Nowadays, as English becomes international language, many people begin to learn English and so are the students. However, they do not simply learn about English. They also try to practice it in their daily lives. They use their English by performing conversation with others such as asking for time, calling for help, and so on. Though they use English less often in their conversation compared to their use of their first language, they gradually develop their English language. The development itself is commonly known as interlanguage.

Interlanguage differs from the first language and the second language. Corder (1967) and Selinker (1972) define it as a "halfway house" between the first language and the second language. This is because interlanguage is a temporary transition and constantly changing, depending on the learner's mastery toward the second language. Interlanguage integrates with other branch of linguistics. One of this integration is with pragmatics. Bachman (1990:89) states that "Pragmatics is thus concerned with the relationships between utterances and the acts or functions that speakers (or writers) intend to perform through these utterances". In other words, pragmatics is an important component in the SLA because pragmatic understanding facilitates the delivery and understanding of messages in conversations so that there is no misunderstanding between the speaker and the interlocutor.

This integration is known as Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP). It is a study about second language (L2) learners' process of obtaining and using their second language. Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993:3) explain ILP as "the study of nonnative speaker's use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language". However, Kasper then stresses even more that ILP refers as "the study of nonnative speakers' comprehension, production, and acquisition of linguistic action in L2, or put briefly, ILP investigates how to do things with words in a second language" (Kasper, 1998:184). This proves that ILP focuses not only on how L2 learners obtain and use their L2, but also how the process of the L2 learners understands their L2.

The investigations related to ILP have been getting more various over time. At one time, the investigations about ILP mainly focus on speech acts like requests (Rinnert, 1999), gratitude (Hinkel, 1994; Cheng, 2005), refusals (García, 1992), etc. There are also some investigations which focus on more than one speech acts. One of the examples is Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's work (1984) which focused on requests and apologies performed by learners of Hebrew. However, the investigations of strategies of speech acts in second language begin to get deeper investigations. Among them is the investigation about proficiency in speech acts. One of the examples is a comparison study of Cook and Liddicoat (2002) between high and low proficiency English learners.

There is a debated assumption that more proficient learners have more understanding over the second language

to express opinions and arguments of their first language at the pragmatic level. Thus, their understanding leads to more likeliness of transferring socio cultural norms of their first language than those with less proficiency over second language (Takahashi and Beebe, 1987). On the other hand, there is another assumption that more proficient learners do not necessarily have more understanding over their target language. Although learners with higher proficiency level show different performance, the difference is very insignificant compared to the performance of lower proficiency learners (Jianda, 2006).

In Interlanguage Pragmatics, there is a basic premise that knowing the words and phrases which are grammatically appropriate in the SLA is not enough. Learners should decide the properly spoken utterances by considering several things such as what can be said, where it can be said, when the utterances can be said and how to use it effectively. One of the realizations of Interlanguage Pragmatics is clearly reflected through request.

Performing requests may look easy to do. However, the basic concept of making requests in English itself has variations depending on the situations. This leads to the suggestion of how to make effective requests, so that it can increase the likelihood that our requests can be accepted by the people we are talking to. If we make requests carelessly, our requests may not be accepted clearly because one utterance may contain countless functions and meanings.

## Research Methodology

The type of research used in the thesis is qualitative research, though some aspects may look quantitative. This is because qualitative research is a "research that is based on descriptive data that does not make (regular) use of statistical procedures" (Mackey and Gass, 2005:162) while quantitative research is a research where the "data are usually in the form of numbers that researchers analyze using various statistical procedures" (Tavakoli, 2012:145).

The research strategy used in this thesis is the survey research because the strategy consists of range of methods performed in this thesis like questionnaires and interviews. Moreover, survey research is more likely to "focus on data more than theory" (Denscombe, 2003:27). It is also more likely to get data from surveys according to the samples than any other strategy. The wider the coverage of the surveys is, the more credible the data will be. Surveys can also provide excellent amount of data for "more predictable" (Denscombe, 2003:27) cost in a short time.

The data are collected by giving responses on six situations provided on DCT questionnaires. The situations, adapted from Najafabadi and Paramasivam's (2012), are slightly changed with fewer scenarios to adapt the students' familiarity and to avoid misinterpretation, either among students of academic year 2012 with high proficiency or low proficiency. The situations are as follows.

1. You are taking a course in sociolinguistics. In today's class, the lecturer mentions a new article "Language & Culture". You are interested in the topic so you go to the library to read the article. Unfortunately, the library does not have the article, and you decide to borrow it from the lecturer. This is your third course with him and you have a good relationship with him. You go to his office and say...

2. Tomorrow is the deadline for one of your final papers. You have many other assignments and cannot finish the paper on time. This is your first course with this lecturer and you have never spoken with him before. However, you decide to talk to him about an extension on the paper. You go to his office and say...

3. You have been helping your neighbor, a high school student, with his/her studies for two months now. Your next meeting with him/her is Monday evening. You have an exam on Tuesday and you want to postpone your appointment with your neighbor until Wednesday evening. You say...

4. You are a university professor. You have a department meeting and you have to cancel one of today's classes. One of the course students stops by your office to inquire about one of the requirements. This is the student's first course with you and you don't know him that well. You want the student to post an announcement about cancelling today's class at the classroom door. You say...

5. You have been sharing a boarding house with a friend for two years now. While you were working on your assignments, your laptop stopped working. You want to use your friend's laptop and finish your assignments. You go to your friend's room and say...

6. Last week, you had a bad cold and missed very important classes. You see one of your classmates in the library. You have never spoken with this classmate before but you know that he/she is an excellent student, and you want to copy his/her notebook. You go to your classmate and say...

After collecting the data, the next process is processing the raw data gained from DCT questionnaires and focus group interview. The participants are divided into two groups of HP students and LP students of academic year 2012 based on their TOEFL scores. The groups consist of fifteen students each. This is meant to ensure the representativeness of the samples. The data gained are then classified regarding to the request taxonomy and modification of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's CCSARP project (1984).

The data of this thesis are analyzed by some steps. First, the basic construction of the background of the study and the problems to discuss are established. Then, theoretical review is built to strengthen the discussion regarding to request strategy. After building the supporting basis, the population of the data is then selected. Through this population, the data are taken by using DCT questionnaires and by performing focus group interviews. After that, the received data are transcribed and classified into some categories based on the Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's request taxonomy (1984). The

data is then compared between the data transcriptions of the HP students and LP students of academic year 2012.

## Result

This study suggests that the amount of exposure is capable of providing greater potential of a person's pragmatic development only if the exposure is the natural environment of the target language. However, in artificial environment, proficiency also plays its influence towards language learners. Both HP and LP students are capable of making responses on the situations given. This can be seen on the differences between HP and LP students' request strategies performances. The differences are LP students perform less External Modifiers than HP students. LP students also have more limited vocabularies than HP students.

## Discussion

### a. Direct Requests

Direct requests are performed 23 times (11.27%) by all students. They all exploit direct requests on the situation 4 and minor exploit on situation 2 and 5. Of all sub strategy of direct requests, Mood Derivable is performed the most while Explicit and Hedged Performative are both performed the least by the students. Those with higher proficiency tend to make more than one External Modifier while those with lower proficiency tend to add Internal Modifiers Downtoner to avoid losing their face. It shows that participants with high proficiency try to deliver their L1 understanding over the target language by applying their L1 behavior (Indonesian language) and are still influenced by their L1 understanding in a way that makes them perform External Modifiers over and over. Meanwhile, Hedged Performative is almost rarely used by all students. This also happens on Explicit Performative. Hedged Performative strategy is only performed three times.

When students are asked to be a person with higher power, they are less afraid of losing face. Thus, they perform request without extensive modifiers which shows great confidence that their requests are surely not going to be rejected. Meanwhile, situation 2 can be described as a condition where the requester is in an urgent condition and the requester really needs to provide a little bit more force so that the interlocutor is willing to grant what the requester wants regardless the power of the interlocutor. There is a possibility that the requester, though the strategy is face-threatening, has confidence that he/she will not receive any refusal from the interlocutor.

Meanwhile, Explicit Performative is performed once by an LP student. Students tend to perform shorter request strategies and are less afraid of losing face. However, there's a slight difference between HP and LP students performances. HP students perform more various request strategies (6 Mood Derivable, 2 Hedged Performative, 1 Locution Derivable, 2 Scope Stating and 7 Reference to Preparatory Conditions). On the other hand, LP students

mostly use direct request strategies (11 Mood Derivable, 1 Explicit Performative and 7 Reference to Preparatory Conditions).

#### b. Conventionally Indirect Requests

Of three main types of request strategies, this type is mostly performed on all six situations (86.76%), either by HP students (90.48%) or LP students (82.83%). Moreover, all students perform sub strategy of Reference to Preparatory Conditions in almost every situation (63.24%). Not only they perform it the most, they often add more External Modifiers before or after performing their requests. They sometimes provide External Modifiers in the form of similar request strategy. However, those are still considered as External Modifiers as the requests performed are not the main requests intended.

They also use Scope Stating strategy as their second option though the usage is not as significant as the Reference to Preparatory Conditions. Yet, other strategies also contribute in the students' performances such as Language Specific Suggestory Formula and Locution Derivable. Meanwhile, though Reference to Preparatory Conditions strategy is exploited in all six situations, the figure explains that this strategy has more significant usage on the last three situations than the first three situations. Deeper findings suggest that those with higher proficiency perform Reference to Preparatory Conditions strategy less slightly (60.00%) than those with lower proficiency (66.67%).

Moreover, the HP students tend to develop more extended External Modifiers than the LP students. They approximately perform three External Modifiers on every situation, either before or after performing requests. Meanwhile, LP students approximately perform two External Modifiers on every situation. In contrast to their direct request strategies, most students do not add Internal Modifiers Downtoner while performing Reference to Preparatory Conditions strategy. It is also found that no student even add Internal Modifiers Upgrader. They just simply replace it with additional External Modifiers or performing another request as an assertion. Although they do not perform Internal Modifiers Upgraders, they still slightly perform Internal Modifiers Downtoner.

First thing that often appears before making request is that the students, both HP and LP students, creates an expression of asking permission, especially when they face interlocutor with higher power status. Some also add expression of apologizing after performing expression of asking permission. HP students perform approximately three External Modifiers every time they perform requests to interlocutor with higher power status while LP students produce approximately two External Modifiers in each of their request strategies.

Instead of solely performing Reference to Preparatory Conditions (RPC) strategy, another request strategy of Scope Stating (SS) is also included. This addition proves that the students are not familiar with Internal Modifiers Upgrader. This unfamiliarity also proves that no Internal Modifiers

Upgrader has been performed by all students. Moreover, there is also a response which provides really extensive strategy in a single situation.

In Indonesia, performing such External Modifiers is acceptable but in English, performing over extended Supportive Moves or External Modifiers leads to misunderstanding. This results on the students trying to imitate their L1 understanding over the target language.

Beside Reference to Preparatory Conditions, the second mostly used strategy is Scope Stating (18.14%). In contrast with Reference to Preparatory Conditions, HP students perform Scope Stating strategy more (23.81%) than LP students (12.12%). However, similar to Reference to Preparatory Conditions, both HP and LP students often perform External Modifiers before or after performing requests.

Another finding shows that HP Students tend to perform Scope Stating regularly. At least there is one Scope Stating strategy performed on each situation. Meanwhile, LP students do not use Scope Stating strategy on situation 4 and 5 though they still occasionally use it in other situations. LP students use Scope Stating strategy the most in situation 3 (35.71%), where they are asked to simulate themselves as a private teacher. This means that it is the reverse of the situations before, where they have higher power status than the interlocutor.

Moreover, students even still use expression of apologizing in attempt of reducing threat on their face. The expression is also followed by performance of External Modifiers which is then followed by the main request performance. As an assertion to the previous expression of apologizing, another similar expression is produced as the end of overall request strategy. Beside request strategies of Scope Stating and Reference to Preparatory Conditions, the students also perform other variations of request strategies such as Language Specific Suggestory Formula and Locution Derivable.

Generally, both HP and LP students always perform apologizing as a head start in situation 3. The usage of apologizing in Language Specific Suggestory Formula strategy is no exception. They also provide approximately three External Modifiers whenever they perform this request strategy. The slightly difference between them in the usage of this request strategy in situation 3 is that HP students prefer to construct more complex construction of External Modifiers than the LP students. Moreover, the appearance of this request strategy on other situation is only performed by HP students. This finding simply suggests that whenever the students perform request strategy of Language Specific Suggestory Formula, either on higher or lower power status, they tend to begin their performance by asking for apologize first. The next strategy performed is Locution Derivable. However there is no much description regarded to the students' performance on Locution Derivable as it is only performed once by HP student (0.49%).

The finding indicates that both HP and LP students have their eyes on Reference to Preparatory Conditions. It implies that the strategy is very flexible to be applied on the six situations. The students also have behavior of making External Modifiers whenever they perform this strategy. Yet, there are not many of the students who perform Reference to Preparatory Conditions without any External Modifiers following it. Another behavior is that they often begin their strategy with permission or apology regardless their social status.

Scope Stating is also commonly used though this strategy is not as broadly used as Reference to Preparatory Conditions. Yet, this strategy still appears at least once in every situation. Unlike Reference to Preparatory Conditions, whenever the students perform Scope Stating, they always provide approximately two External Modifiers with it.

### c. Nonconventionally Indirect Requests

Among all three category of requests taxonomy, Nonconventionally Indirect Requests is the least used request strategy. Of all performances, there are only four performances (1.96%) of this strategy. Moreover, all of those performances are in the form of Strong Hint. Thus, no one use request strategy of Mild Hint at all. The strategy is performed twice on situation 2 and 5 each. On situation 2, the strategy is performed twice by LP students while none of the HP students perform this strategy. On the other hand, situation 5 shows performances of Strong Hint which are performed once by HP and LP student each. Whenever students perform Nonconventionally Indirect Requests, especially Strong Hint, they still add External Modifiers. However, the application of External Modifiers in their request performances is not as extensive as the previous two categories of Direct Requests and Conventionally Indirect Requests. On the other hand, students do not extensively apply Nonconventionally Indirect Requests in all six situations as they are more accustomed to perform requests using Reference to Preparatory Conditions.

The overall finding suggests that HP and LP students' request strategies performances have some differences and similarities. HP students utilize direct requests (8.57%) slightly less extensively than LP students (14.14%). However, both HP and LP students use direct requests mostly in the same situation which simulates them to have higher power status with no close relationship with interlocutor. When direct requests are utilized less extensively by HP students, conventionally indirect requests are the reverse. HP students perform it slightly more often (90.48%) than the LP students (82.83%). The HP students also perform more various sub strategies of conventionally indirect requests such as Scope Stating which is performed regularly by HP students. However, this type of request strategy dominates both HP and LP students' request performances, especially sub strategy of Reference to Preparatory Conditions. As for nonconventionally indirect requests, this strategy is rarely performed as there are only four performances recorded, once by HP students and thrice by LP students. The similarities between HP and LP students

are that they often add expression of asking permission and apology as a means of reducing face threat regardless their social status. Both HP and LP students also tend to perform at least one External Modifiers before or after performing their request strategies.

## Conclusion

The DCT questionnaires show that the students perform various responses on each situation by using direct requests, conventionally indirect requests and nonconventionally indirect requests. Some perform complicated strategies while others choose to simplify their strategies. The most prominent strategy of all available strategies in request speech acts is Reference to Preparatory Conditions (63.24%), followed by Scope Stating (18.14%) in the second most used strategy. This leads to the result that students of academic year 2012 expose conventionally indirect requests more than the other two types of requests. This raises the argument that students of academic year 2012 are more accustomed in using conventionally indirect requests strategy (86.76%), especially Reference to Preparatory Conditions, as their way of performing requests. On the other hand, they are not quite accustomed with the strategies of direct requests (11.27%) and nonconventionally indirect requests (1.96%). This can also become a proof that students who learn English from artificial English environment have limitation on their English performances, especially when they perform requests. However, the study still provides insight that students who learn English in an artificial English environment even have potential to develop their English understanding further.

Although HP and LP students provide different responses or requests, they still share some similarities. The similarities found are that both HP and LP students are aware of the risk of losing face. Therefore, they often utilize additional Modifiers, either External or Internal Modifiers, as their supporting strategies. Both HP and LP students also remain under influence of their L1 understanding. This leads to the opinion that both HP and LP students still cannot be fully influenced by their target language, even though they are already exposed with artificial English environment for a long time. Meanwhile, the difference between HP students' performances and LP students' performances is that HP students often provide Internal Modifiers and External Modifiers extensively in the form of greetings, asking for permission, and apology. Although the three mentioned External Modifiers have their own field of strategy, they remain treated as External Modifiers when they are performed in the scope of request speech acts. Although LP students also provide Internal and External Modifiers, they do not expose the Modifiers as much as HP students do. LP students mostly perform much simpler request strategies. Sometimes they even do their requests without any

Modifiers before or after their request utterances. This is because they have limited vocabularies and are lack of confidence. LP students also argue that they are often afraid of making mistakes if they try to speak with lengthy or expansive strategies.

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