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## **Politeness Strategies in Arabic Request Speech Acts by Non-Native Speakers at Ma'had Al-Imarat**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to identify the request strategies employed by non-native speakers of Arabic and to analyze how these strategies reflect politeness orientations within the framework of pragmatic competence. A descriptive qualitative approach was adopted, with data collected through a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) consisting of ten communicative situations. The participants were twenty intermediate-level students at Ma'had Al-Imarat Bandung. The data were analyzed by integrating the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) model and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. The findings reveal that the dominant request strategy used by non-native speakers is the conventionally indirect strategy, particularly the query preparatory, which is consistently associated with negative politeness. In contrast, positive politeness strategies occur relatively infrequently. These results indicate that the selection of request and politeness strategies is strongly influenced by the Ma'had's socio-cultural context, which emphasizes hierarchy and pragmatic caution. Therefore, this study recommends the explicit integration of pragmatic competence, particularly request and politeness awareness, into Arabic language instruction.

**Keywords:** *request speech acts, politeness strategies, Arabic as a foreign language*

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi strategi tindak tutur permintaan yang digunakan oleh penutur non-native bahasa Arab serta menganalisis bagaimana strategi tersebut merefleksikan orientasi kesantunan dalam kerangka kompetensi pragmatik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan pengumpulan data melalui *Discourse Completion Test* (DCT) yang terdiri atas sepuluh situasi komunikatif. Partisipan penelitian berjumlah dua puluh mahasiswa tingkat menengah di Ma'had Al-Imarat Bandung. Analisis data dilakukan dengan mengintegrasikan model *Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project* (CCSARP) dan teori kesantunan Brown dan Levinson. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi permintaan yang paling dominan digunakan oleh penutur non-native adalah strategi tidak langsung konvensional, khususnya tipe *query preparatory*, yang secara konsisten berkaitan dengan kesantunan negatif. Sebaliknya, strategi kesantunan positif relatif jarang digunakan. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa pemilihan strategi permintaan dan kesantunan sangat dipengaruhi oleh konteks sosio-kultural Ma'had yang menekankan hierarki dan kehati-hatian pragmatik. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini merekomendasikan integrasi kompetensi pragmatik secara eksplisit, khususnya kesadaran terhadap strategi permintaan dan kesantunan, dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab.

**Kata Kunci:** *tindak tutur permintaan, strategi kesantunan, bahasa Arab sebagai bahasa asing*

## Introduction

The use of politeness strategies is a crucial component of communicative competence, as it determines the success of interaction between speakers and interlocutors<sup>1</sup>. Politeness is considered a universal phenomenon; however, its realization varies across different languages and cultures<sup>2</sup>. In recent years, there has been increasing attention to communication strategies within the same culture as well as across cultures in order to understand better communicative contexts<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Shadi Majed Alshraah and Amer Ahmed Daradkeh, "Contrasting the Request Act Used by EFL \ ESL Native- Arabic Speakers in Arabic and English Situations," no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels>; Zaid Hmouri, "Politeness in a Moroccan EFL Classroom: How Students of High School Using Apologizing Strategies in English?" 3, no. 3 (2022): 97–112.

<sup>2</sup> Bei Gao, Wei Zhou, and Wen Liu, "Politeness , Language and Culture Study of the Relativity of Politeness" 537, no. Ielccs 2020 (2021): 212–15.

<sup>3</sup> Hussien Mohamad Alakrash and Elaf Saad Bustan, "Politeness Strategies Employed by Arab EFL And Malaysian ESL Students in Making Request Politeness

To achieve effective communication, speakers are required to possess pragmatic competence, particularly the ability to perform speech acts appropriately in accordance with the social and cultural context of the target language<sup>4</sup>. One type of speech act that is strongly influenced by sociocultural context is the request speech act<sup>5</sup>, as it inherently involves issues of power, social distance, and the rank of imposition<sup>6</sup>.

In many conventional and formal Arabic language classes, instruction tends to prioritize grammatical and syntactic accuracy over pragmatic competence<sup>7</sup>. This limited focus can result in language learners possessing strong theoretical knowledge but experiencing difficulties in producing socially appropriate utterances in communication<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, there is a growing need to integrate pragmatic awareness into Arabic language instruction, particularly through the teaching of speech acts. This study was conducted at Ma'had Al Imarat Bandung, an Islamic educational institution equivalent to higher education, which actively uses Arabic in learning activities and institutional interactions, although in context outside of learning, a shift to Indonesian still occurs. This linguistic environment creates a communication space that brings together different language systems and cultures. This cross-cultural interaction allows for the emergence of unique communication strategies, making Ma'had Al Imarat a relevant setting for this research.

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Strategies Employed by Arab EFL And Malaysian ESL Students in Making Request” 1, no. 6 (2020): 10–20, <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v10-i6/7257>.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Mokorro, “Pragmatic Competence in Second Language Learners Pragmatic Competence in Second Language Learners,” *European Journal of Linguistics*, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Permas Adinda Chintawidy and Ni Wayan Sartini, “A Cross-Cultural Pragmatics Study of Request Strategies and Politeness in Javanese and Sundanese” 04, no. 02 (2022): 152–66.

<sup>6</sup> Penelope Brown and Stephen C Levinson, “Politeness. Some Universals in Language Use,” 1984.

<sup>7</sup> Shehdeh Fareh et al., “Cogent Arts & Humanities Assessing the Pragmatic Competence of Arab Learners of English: The Case of Apology Assessing the Pragmatic Competence of Arab Learners of English: The Case of Apology,” *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 10, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2230540>; Ahmad Hatim Qadi, “Use of Refusal Strategies among Saudi EFL Students: An Investigative Study” 14, no. 7 (2021): 27–43, <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v14n7p27>.

<sup>8</sup> Reza Khany and Ayad Kamalvand, “A Closer Look at the Impact of Social Semiotics and Smartphone Photography on Iranian English Learners’ Oral Proficiency,” 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2025.2490657>.

Pragmatic literature indicates that research on politeness strategies has been extensively conducted within Arab-speaking communities, both in Arabic and in English. In the context of the Arabic language, which is deeply embedded with values of politeness and honor, the realization of request speech acts often requires heightened sensitivity to hierarchical relationships, contextual appropriateness, and cultural norms<sup>9</sup>. Farrag<sup>10</sup> (2022), for instance, highlights politeness in the speech acts of Saudi Arabic speakers, emphasizing the influence of cultural and social factors in shaping pragmatic language use. The main findings of this study indicate that politeness strategies are integral to maintaining respectful and harmonious communication in Saudi academic environments. This aligns with Ameri et al.,<sup>11</sup> (2023) finding, which asserts that in Arab society, cultural factors and adjustments to the social context significantly determine the choice of politeness forms and how individuals interact with their interlocutors.

The importance of this study aligns with the fact that language instruction in Arab countries has increasingly shifted toward pragmatic competence in communication strategies, initially emphasizing only grammatical competence for language learners<sup>12</sup>. Similarly, previous studies have examined how politeness has expanded to include cross-cultural approaches. For example, Abdulateef and Abd Ali<sup>13</sup> (2023) explored Iraqi EFL students' understanding and application of politeness principles. Their findings indicated that pragmatic competence is more influenced by social and cultural experiences than formal education. This reflects the importance of interaction and

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<sup>9</sup> Mohammadali Ameri, Ali Zeighami, and Sayyed Reza Mirahmadi, "A Study of the Polite Method in the Arabic Language According to Brown and Levinson's Theory of Politeness" 13, no. 36 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.22075/lasem.2022.23600.1286>.

<sup>10</sup> Nahed Moussa Farrag, "Saudi Politeness: Request and Apology in the Context of Study and Work at King Abdulaziz University: A Pragmatic Study" 13, no. March (2022): 300–312.

<sup>11</sup> Ameri, Zeighami, and Mirahmadi, "A Study of the Polite Method in the Arabic Language According to Brown and Levinson's Theory of Politeness."

<sup>12</sup> Alakrash and Bustan, "Politeness Strategies Employed by Arab EFL And Malaysian ESL Students in Making Request Politeness Strategies Employed by Arab EFL And Malaysian ESL Students in Making Request."

<sup>13</sup> Rana Yousif Abdulateef and Hanan Najim Abd Ali, "Pragmatic Awareness of Speech Acts, Politeness, and Grice Maxims of Iraqi EFL Postgraduate Students" 14, no. 1 (2023): 349–68.

context in developing affective intercultural communication skills. Similarly, Latrech and Alazzawie<sup>14</sup> (2022) highlighted the use of politeness strategies in classroom interactions between EFL teachers and students in Oman. This study, involving various age groups, gender, and educational settings, demonstrated the importance of politeness strategies in fostering a supportive learning environment. Meanwhile, Hmouri<sup>15</sup> (2022) examined politeness practices among secondary school students in Morocco, which proved that cultural norms significantly influence the use of apology strategies. Most Moroccan EFL students tend to use strategies influenced by their own cultural norms, which differ from those of the target culture. These findings confirm that pragmatic competence is an important aspect not only in educational contexts but also in cross-cultural interactions.

Futhermore, several previous studied have shown that research on politeness strategies is still predominantly conducted in English, despite varying cultural backgrounds. However, research on Arabic by non-native speakers tends to focus on specific speech acts, as demonstrated by Al-rawafi<sup>16</sup> (2020) and Al Farisi et.al.,<sup>17</sup> (2021), who examined request and apology strategies. Both studies found that non-native Indonesian students struggle to perform speech acts in accordance with Arabic cultural norms, largely due to a lack of explicit pragmatics instruction. The key point in teaching pragmatics is to emphasize understanding real-world contexts and using language appropriately in communication situations. For example, Nashfati and Salamuddin<sup>18</sup> (2025) used a contextual approach to learning that encourages students to construct meaning through direct experience. This approach helps learners of Arabic as a foreign language

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<sup>14</sup> Amira Latrech and Abdulkhaliq Alazzawie, "The Use of Politeness Strategies in Teacher – Student Interaction in the Omani EFL Classroom" 3, no. 2 (2023): 102–12, <https://doi.org/10.1108/SJLS-06-2022-0052>.

<sup>15</sup> Hmouri, "Politeness in a Moroccan EFL Classroom : How Students of High School Using Apologizing Strategies in English ?"

<sup>16</sup> Abdulkhaleq Al-rawafi, "THE PRAGMALINGUISTICS OF APOLOGIZING IN THE ARABIC LANGUAGE BY NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS" 3, no. 1 (2020): 1–14.

<sup>17</sup> Mohamad Zaka et al., "Requesting Speech Acts : A Case Study of Arabic Education Students in Bandung" 595, no. Icollite (2021): 454–59.

<sup>18</sup> Nabila Nashfati, Universitas Islam, and Negeri Sumatera, "Contextual Teaching and Learning in Arabic as a Foreign Language : A Classroom-Based Case Study in Indonesia" 6, no. 2 (2025).

understand implicit meanings, use language appropriately, and communicative pragmatically.

Although these studies provide an overview of the importance of pragmatic competence in achieving successful communication, the relationship between request speech acts and the politeness orientation of non-native speakers has not been fully explained, especially in the context of Arabic as a foreign language. In contrast to previous studies that separate the analysis of speech act strategies from politeness, this study seeks to fill this gap by contributing to cross-cultural pragmatic research through an analysis of request strategies used by non-native learners, integrated with linguistic politeness.

Despite the growing body of research on politeness strategies in Arabic and other foreign languages, most previous studies tend to examine request strategies and politeness orientations separately. Moreover, studies focusing on Arabic as a foreign language remain limited, particularly those involving non-native learners in institutional Islamic educational settings. This study contributes to the existing literature by integrating the analysis of request speech act strategies based on the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) and politeness orientations grounded in Brown and Levinson's framework within a single analytical model. By situating the analysis in the sociocultural context of an Islamic boarding school, where hierarchical relations and religious norms strongly shape interaction, this study offers a contextualized understanding of pragmatic competence that remains underexplored in prior research. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) identify the request strategies employed by non-native learners of Arabic at Ma'had Al-Imarat Putri Bandung, and (2) analyze how these strategies reflect levels of politeness within a pragmatic framework.

## Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach (Sandelowski, 2000)<sup>19</sup>, to empirically and contextually describe social phenomena. The primary data were obtained from participants' written responses to a Discourse Completion Test (DCT), an instrument specifically designed to elicit form request speech acts across various social contexts based on differences in power relations, social distance, and

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<sup>19</sup> Margarete Sandelowski, "Whatever Happened to Qualitative Description?," *Research in Nursing & Health*, 2000.

the rank of imposition. This study measures pragmatic knowledge through request responses collected via Google Forms, using 10 scenarios designed to reflect situations in the Ma'had environment. These scenarios underwent initial evaluation with a pilot study, in which participants provided feedback on the complexity and clarity of the situations presented. The ten situations encompass the themes listed in the following table.

Tabel 1. Language Situation

Items	Language Situation	Power	Distance	Rank of Imposition
1	Borrowing a dictionary from a new classmate	=P	+D	-R
2	Requesting missed assignments from a close friend	=P	-D	+R
3	Rescheduling a presentation with a senior student	+P	+D	+R
4	Asking for the return of a borrowed book	-P	-D	-R
5	Seeking help with a Nahwu assignment	=P	-D	+R
6	Requesting permission to be absent from class	+P	+D	+R
7	Asking for assistance in writing an Arabic speech	=P	-D	+R
8	Borrowing a reference book from a teacher	+P	+D	+R
9	Asking a friend to open a window	=P	-D	+R
10	Borrowing a prayer mat from an unfamiliar student	=P	+D	-R

To ensure the pragmatic validity of the Discourse Completion Test (DCT), the instrument was developed based on established theoretical constructs of request speech acts, particularly the variables of Power (P), Social Distance (D), and Rank of Imposition (R) as

proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The ten scenarios were designed to reflect authentic communicative situations commonly encountered in the Ma'had Al-Imarat environment, such as interactions between students, senior students, and teachers.

Prior to data collection, the DCT scenarios underwent a pilot evaluation involving three Arabic language instructors with experience in teaching pragmatics. The evaluation focused on the clarity of the situations, sociocultural appropriateness, and the extent to which each scenario successfully elicited request speech acts. Minor revisions were made based on the feedback to improve readability and contextual relevance.

Reliability was strengthened through inter-coder agreement. Two independent coders classified 20% of the data according to the CCSARP framework and Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies. The resulting Cohen's Kappa value ( $\kappa = 0.77$ ) indicates substantial agreement, confirming the consistency of the analytical procedure.

The study not only relies on DCT but also uses semi-structured interviews based on DCT situations to complement information about participants' motives for their chosen strategies. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with the participant criteria being female intermediate level students at Ma'had Al-Imarat Bandung who have experience actively communicating in Arabic during learning activities. A total of 20 participants were involved in the study, in line with Creswell<sup>20</sup> (2014) assertion that qualitative research typically involves 5-25 participants to allow for in-depth and contextualized data exploration.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004)<sup>21</sup> which enables the systematic and interpretative identification of patterns, categories, and meanings within the data. The analytical process was deductive in nature and grounded in two main theoretical frameworks. First, the classification of request strategies was based on the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) model developed by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper<sup>22</sup> (1989), which categorizes request speech acts according to levels of

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<sup>20</sup> John W Creswell, *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009, <http://apps.who.int/bookorders>.

<sup>21</sup> Klaus H Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Shoshana Blum-Kulka, Juliane House, and Gabriele Kasper, *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies* (Ablex Publishing Corporation, 2008).

directness and conventionality. Second, politeness was analyzed through Brown and Levinson<sup>23</sup> (1987 theory, which examines how speakers manage face-threatening acts. The integration of these two frameworks allows for an in-depth exploration of both the linguistic and pragmatic dimensions of the participants' utterances.

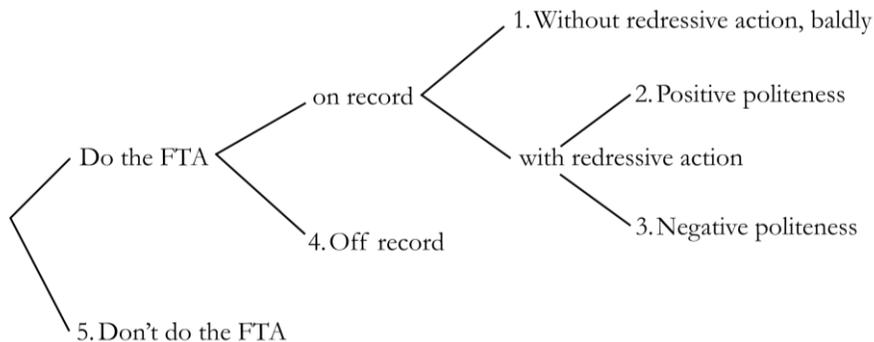


Figure 1. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Strategy Model

The stages of data analysis were conducted sequentially. First, participants' responses from the DCT were transcribed and organized into tabular form. Second, each response was classified according to the CCSARP request categories by considering the variables of power (P), social distance (D), and rank of imposition (R). Third, each request strategy was analyzed in terms of politeness based on the parameters proposed in Brown and Levinson's theory, in order to identify tendencies in the use of face-saving strategies. Finally, data obtained from observations and interviews were analyzed to support and strengthen the interpretation of the primary DCT data, thereby providing a comprehensive portrayal of politeness in request speech acts produced by non-native speakers within the Ma'had context. To ensure coding consistency, inter-coder agreement was conducted on 20% of the data. Two independent coders classified the DCT responses, producing a Kappa value of  $\kappa = 0.77$ , indicating substantial agreement.

<sup>23</sup> Brown and Levinson, "Politeness. Some Universals in Language Use."

## Results and Discussion

The analysis of 200 request utterances produced by non-native speakers at Ma'had Al-Imarat reveals that the participants employed three categories of request strategies as proposed by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper<sup>24</sup> (1989) in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP). The following table presents the frequency and percentage distribution of each request strategy:

Table 2: Distribution and Percentage of Request Strategies Based on the CCSARP Framework

No	Request Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1	Direct	78	39%
2	Conventionally Indirect	92	46%
3	Non-Conventionally Indirect	28	14%
4	Tidak valid	2	1%

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the Conventionally Indirect strategy dominates the overall data, occurring 92 times (46%). This dominance aligns with the findings of Blum-Kulka et al., (1989)<sup>25</sup>, who argue that the use of indirect strategies serves as an effective means of minimizing imposition in requests. Consider example 1 below:

(١). عفوا يا أخواتي، كان فرقتي لم تستعد، هل يمكن أن تتقدمن أولاً؟

'*Afwan yā akhawātī, kānat firaqtī lam tasta'idd, hal yumkinukunna an tataqaddamna awwalan?*

1. Excuse me, sisters, my group is not ready yet; could you go ahead first?

Sentence 1 illustrates that the participants tend to choose a safer and more polite strategy, particularly when interacting with interlocutors who hold higher power, by expressing their requests indirectly. This tendency can be identified through the use of a Query Preparatory form, marked by the construction *hal yumkinu*/هل يمكن, which functions to inquire about the possibility of fulfilling the request addressed to the interlocutor.

Furthermore, Direct Strategies rank second with a total of 78 occurrences (39%), encompassing Mood Derivable, Explicit

<sup>24</sup> Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies*.

<sup>25</sup> Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper.

Performative, Hedged Performative, and Want Statement forms. Consider the following example:

٢. افتحي النافذة لوسمحت

*Iftahī an-nāfidzah law samaḥti*

2. Please open the window

٣. معذرة، اطلب منك كتابي لأنني أحتاج حالا

*Ma 'dhirah, aṭlubu minki kitābī li 'annanī aḥtāju ḥālan*

3. I'm sorry, I'm asking for my book back because I need it urgently.

٤. عفوا، أريد أن أستعير القاموس

*'Afwan, urīdu an asta 'tra al-qāmūs*

4. Sorry, I would like to borrow a dictionary.

٥. أريد أن أطلب مساعدتك في صناعة نص الخطبة

*Urīdu an aṭluba musā 'adataki fī šinā 'ati naṣṣi al-khuṭbah*

5. I would like to ask for your help in preparing a khutbah text.

Sentence 2 represents a mood derivable strategy, which occurs when the speaker employs an imperative form. This can be identified through the use of a *fi'il amr*, which is structurally imperative but functionally serves as a request. Meanwhile, sentence 3 exemplifies an explicit performative strategy, as indicated by the use of the verb *aṭlub*/أطلب, showing that the respondent explicitly performs the act of requesting toward the interlocutor. Furthermore, sentence 4 represents a want statement strategy, marked by the expression of direct desire. This is identifiable through the construction *urīdu*/أريد followed by the object of the request. Lastly, sentence 5 illustrates a hedged performative strategy, characterized by the speaker's modification of the performative act through mitigating elements such as *urīdu 'an aṭluba*/أريد أن أطلب, which serves to soften and reinforce the intended request. According to these results, the participants used four of the five categories of direct strategies identified by Blum-Kulka et al., (1989)<sup>26</sup>. Nevertheless, these direct forms were frequently accompanied by politeness markers such as *law samaḥt*/لو سمحت, *min faḍlika*/من فضلك, or *ma 'dhirah*/معذرة, thereby preventing the utterances from being perceived as impolite.

<sup>26</sup> Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper.

Non-conventionally indirect strategies appeared in only 28 responses (14%), taking the form of strong hints. Consider the following example:

٦. الغرفة حار جدا بل أنت قريبة من النافذة

*Al-ghurfah ḥārratun jiddan, bal anti qarībah min an-nāfidzah*

6. It's very hot in this room, and you're sitting close to the window.

Sentence 6 demonstrates that the participant possesses a higher level of pragmatic competence, as they are able to adjust their utterance to the social context without explicitly stating the request. Structurally, the sentence takes a declarative form; however, functionally, it operates as a request. In addition, two responses (1%) were categorized as invalid because they did not correspond to the contextual scenarios presented in the DCT.

Furthermore, the analysis of the request speech acts produced by the participants reveals considerable variation in the use of politeness strategies. The frequency distribution of each politeness category is presented in the following table:

Table 3: Distribution and Percentage of Politeness Strategies

No	Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1	Positive Politeness	14	7%
2	Negative Politeness	162	81%
3	Bald on Record	12	6%
4	Off Record	10	5%
5	Avoidance	2	1%

Based on Table 3, the analysis of the DCT data indicates that all five politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson appear in the participants' utterances, namely positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, off record, and do not do the FTA (avoidance). The frequency distribution shows that negative politeness is the most dominant strategy, occurring 162 times (81%), followed by positive politeness with 14 instances (7%), bald on record with 12 instances (6%), off record with 10 instances (5%), and avoidance (do not do the FTA) with two instances (1%). The dominance of negative politeness indicates a high level of awareness in maintaining the hearer's face, particularly in hierarchical or formal social contexts such as interactions with teachers, religious teachers (ustadz), or other authoritative figures within the ma'had environment.

### Negative Politeness Strategy

Participants most commonly used this tactic when they wanted to keep a social distance and show respect for the other person. This pattern is entirely in line with the theoretical prediction made by Brown and Levinson, which states that because requests restrict the hearer's freedom of action, they constitute a Face-Threatening Act (FTA) toward the hearer's negative face. One salient feature of this strategy is the use of apologetic expressions or mitigating devices, such as modal verbs like *يمكن* (*mumkin*/"may I/is it possible") and permission-seeking expressions such as *لو سمحت* (*law samaħt*, "excuse me / please"). Consider sentence 7 below :

٧. معذرة يا أستاذتي، أعلم أنك مشغولة، لكن هل يمكنني استعارة الكتاب الذي  
عندك؟

*Ma 'dhirah yā ustādhātī, a 'lamu annaki mashghūlah, lakin hal yumkinunī isti 'ārat al-kitābi alladhī 'indaki?*

7. I'm sorry, my teacher, I know you are busy, but may I borrow the book you have?

Sentence 7 exemplifies a response to a request situation characterized by social distance between the speaker and the interlocutor (+D) and by the interlocutor's possession of a certain degree of power over the speaker (+P). The participant demonstrates the use of politeness markers such as *معذرة* (*ma 'dhirah*, "sorry/excuse me") through an apologetic expression, as well as a face-threatening act (FTA) mitigation strategy by employing external modification—namely *أعلم أنك مشغولة، لكن... (a 'lamu 'annaki mashghūlatun, lākin... / "I know you are busy, but..."*)—as a preface before stating the request. This strategy functions to reduce the threat to the interlocutor's negative face. Within the CCSARP framework, this type of request falls under the Conventionally Indirect category, specifically the Query Preparatory pattern. This finding is consistent with Brown and Levinson model, which posits that indirectness is closely associated with negative politeness strategies.

### Positive Politeness Strategy

Positive politeness strategies are employed to signal social closeness and solidarity between interlocutors. Although their frequency is relatively low (14 occurrences), this strategy remains significant as it reflects more intimate interpersonal relationships, particularly in informal contexts such as interactions among fellow students. The defining characteristics of this strategy include the use of

familiar address terms and expressions that foster rapport and interpersonal closeness.

Consider sentence 8 below:

٨. صديقتي العزيزة، سأشارك في مسابقة الخطبة اللغة العربية، و أعلم أنك ماهرة في

كتابة الخطب. هل يمكنك مساعدتي في إعداد خطاب للمسابقة؟

*ṣadīqatī al-'azīzah, sa'ushāriku fī musābaqat al-khuṭbah bi-l-lughah al-'arabiyyah, wa a'lamu annaki māhirah fī kitābat al-khuṭab. hal yumkinuki musā'adatī fī i'dād khiṭāb lil-musābaqah?*

8. My dear friend, I will be participating in an Arabic speech competition, and I know that you are skilled at writing speeches. Could you help me prepare the speech script for the competition?

Sentence 8 responds to a request situation in which the variables of social distance and power are equal between the speaker and the interlocutor (-D & =P), indicating that both parties are socially equal and hold the same level of power. However, because the rank of imposition is relatively high (+R), the participant employs an opening expression using the address term *ṣadīqatī al-'azīzah* (صديقتي العزيزة, "my dear friend"), which functions as a positive politeness strategy aimed at building closeness and solidarity prior to making the request.

Furthermore, the expression "...wa a'lamu annaki māhirah fī kitābat al-khuṭab" (وأعلم أنك ماهرة في كتابة الخطب) "and I know that you are skilled in writing speeches") also represents a positive politeness strategy by offering praise, thereby reducing the potential threat to the interlocutor's face. This finding is consistent with Brown and Levinson framework, which posits that such strategies are employed to emphasize familiarity, minimize social distance, and strengthen emotional rapport between interlocutors.

Bald on Record Strategy

The bald on record strategy is employed in a direct manner without mitigation or additional politeness markers. This strategy tends to occur in informal contexts, appearing 12 times in the data, particularly among peers or in situations where urgency does not allow for the inclusion of politeness forms. Consider sentence 9 below:

٩. أين كتابي؟ انا احتاج إليه

*Ayna kitābī? anā aḥtāju ilayhi*

9. Where is my book? I need it.

Sentence 9 responds to a request situation in which there is low social distance between the speaker and the interlocutor (-D), while the

interlocutor holds a lower hierarchical position (+P). Consequently, the speaker possesses relatively higher power in the interaction. In addition, the situation involves a high rank of imposition (+R), as the speaker is requesting the return of a book that has been borrowed for a month and is urgently needed.

Thus, this type of utterance reflects a high level of directness that is socially acceptable within close interpersonal relationships but would be considered impolite in more formal contexts. Accordingly, this finding aligns with Brown and Levinson framework, which suggests that such strategies are employed when the threat to face is perceived as minimal due to close social relations and pressing communicative circumstances.

#### Off-Record Strategy

The off-record strategy constitutes an indirect form of politeness that is implicit in nature. This strategy is employed when the speaker intends to convey a request without stating it explicitly. According to Brown, this strategy is chosen when the speaker seeks to minimize responsibility for the request act. Consider sentence 10 below:

١٠ . الغرفة حار جدا بل أنت قريبة من النافذة

*Al-ghurfah ḥārratun jiddan, bal anti qarībah min an-nāfidzah*

10. It's very hot in here, and you're sitting close to the window.

In this context, sentence 10 shows that the speaker does not directly request assistance but instead produces an utterance in the form of a hint, prompting the interlocutor to perform an action such as opening a window or turning on a fan. This strategy is employed by the participant in a request situation characterized by equal social distance and power between the speaker and the interlocutor (−D & =P), as well as a low level of imposition (−R). This indicates that the speaker demonstrates an understanding of how to perform speech acts appropriately according to context and makes an effort to minimize threats to the interlocutor's negative face. This strategy aligns with the concept of indirectness proposed by Blum-Kulka et.al., (1987)<sup>27</sup>, which posits that speakers may utilize conversational implicature to preserve both their own face and that of the interlocutor.

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<sup>27</sup> Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies*.

Do Not do the FTA (Avoidance)

Avoidance refers to a strategy in which the speaker chooses not to express their intention either directly or indirectly in order to avoid threatening the interlocutor's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987)<sup>28</sup>. This strategy is particularly noteworthy because it reflects a high level of pragmatic awareness on the part of the speaker in maintaining politeness and social harmony. The following is an excerpt from the interview:

P5 : "معدرة لن أفعل ذلك، أفضل أن أبحث على جوجل أو أسأل إلى صديقتي"

*Ma 'dziratan lan 'af'ala dhālika, 'ufaddilu 'an 'abḥatha 'alā jūjil 'aw 'as'ala 'ilā ṣadīqatī*

"I'm sorry, I won't do that. I'd rather search on Google or ask my friend."

P6 : "سأبحث عن أصدقاء آخرين غير مشغولين لتوجيهي"

*Sa 'abḥathu 'an 'aṣḍiqā 'a 'ākharīna ghayra mashghūlīna li-tawjīhī*

"I will look for other friends who are not busy to guide me."

(Interview with a student)

In this context, the participant chose an alternative course of action rather than making a request that was perceived to carry a high level of imposition, which could potentially threaten the interlocutor's face.

## Discussion

The main findings of this study indicate that the preference for request strategies among non-native speakers in the Ma'had Al-Imarat Putri environment, as reflected in their responses to a series of DCT scenarios, does not merely represent spontaneous linguistic choices. Rather, these preferences reflect the participants' awareness of politeness norms, social relationships, and potential face-threatening risks within the Ma'had context. The ten scenarios in the DCT were designed based on Levinson (1987) social variables: power (P), social distance (D), and rank of imposition (R). Drawing on the foundational principles of speech act theory, the data reveal that each request produced by the participants was accompanied by pragmatic considerations, either through mitigation strategies or efforts to minimize face-threatening acts. This demonstrates how non-native speakers adapt their social identities and pragmatic competence when

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<sup>28</sup> Brown and Levinson, "Politeness. Some Universals in Language Use."

using Arabic as a foreign language, adjusting their linguistic behavior in accordance with contextual demands and sociocultural expectations.

Analysis based on the CCSARP model shows that conventionally indirect strategies, particularly query preparatory forms, constitute the most dominant pattern of request realization. Participants frequently employed ability modals such as */hal yumkinu/هل يمكن* or */hal tastaṭī'u/هل تستطيع* (see sentences 1 & 7), thereby allowing interlocutors the option to accept or refuse the request without experiencing pressure. Similarly, negative politeness emerged as one of the most salient strategies, accounting for 81% of the total participant responses, and appeared consistently across all communicative contexts. The dominance of these two strategies suggests that non-native speakers at Ma'had Al-Imarat prioritize pragmatic caution and respect toward their interlocutors. According to Brown and Levinson model, this pattern indicates that indirectness is closer to negative politeness. These findings are reinforced by interviews with several participants, who stated that they consciously use indirect questions or expressions to avoid appearing overly direct or commanding, especially when interacting with those perceived as having authority or maintaining a certain social distance. Furthermore, observations within the Ma'had environment indicate that, in everyday communication, learners tend to use cautious, mitigating language when making requests. This similar tendency is reported in previous studies of non-native learners, in which speakers employ indirect strategies to minimize the burden of requests (Ogiermann & Bella, 2020).<sup>29</sup>

However, social variables play a significant role in shaping how speakers realize requestive acts.<sup>30</sup> As proposed by Erica, speech act are directly related to contextual variables. The findings indicate that some participants tended to employ direct strategies when the speaker's power was equal to or greater than that of the interlocutor.<sup>31</sup> This

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<sup>29</sup> Ogiermann, Eva, and Spyridoula Bella. "An Interlanguage Study of Request Perspective: Evidence from German, Greek, Polish and Russian Learners of English." *Contrastive Pragmatics* 1, no. 2 (September 2020): 180–209. <https://doi.org/10.1163/26660393-BJA10003>.

<sup>30</sup> Hamidah, and Abdullah. "Recontextualizing Arabic Reading Instruction: Developing Arabic Reading Skills Teaching Materials Grounded in Islamic Values." *Alibbaa': Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 6, no. 2 (July 2025): 177–97. <https://doi.org/10.19105/ajpba.v6i2.19523>.

<sup>31</sup> Yoon, Erica J., Michael Henry Tessler, Noah D. Goodman, and Michael C. Frank. "Polite Speech Emerges From Competing Social Goals." *Open Mind* 4 (November 2020): 71–87. [https://doi.org/10.1162/opmi\\_a\\_00035](https://doi.org/10.1162/opmi_a_00035).

strategy emerged as the second most frequently used pattern among non-native speakers at Ma'had Al-Imarat. Many participants relied on mood derivable forms, particularly imperatives, when making requests. Although request acts inherently involve a high degree of face-threatening potential, participants often mitigated this threat by using politeness markers such as *min faḍlik* (من فضلك, "please") and *law samaḥta* (لو سمحت, "if you please") (see sentence 20, thereby preventing the utterances from being perceived as impolite. These findings align with the results of Almathkuri (2021) and Alshraah et.al., (2023)<sup>32</sup>, which indicate that the direct strategy is the most commonly used by native Saudi Arabian speakers when the power variables are equal. This pattern is consistent with Ruytenbeek (2021)<sup>33</sup>, who stated that speakers tend to use direct strategies more often than indirect ones in request acts, especially when the speaker is in a high status, which may conflict with politeness norms.<sup>34</sup>

In certain situations, direct strategies are in fact oriented toward negative politeness, particularly in the case of want statements. For example, one participant formulated a request using the expression */awaddu/* أودّ as in the utterance : أودّ استعارة أحد كتابك. Although this utterance constitutes a request, the use of *awaddu* conveys a more softened and polite nuance compared to */urīdu/* أريد which expresses a more direct and explicit desire. This sentences was employed in a context where there was both social distance and an asymmetrical power relation, with the interlocutor holding greater authority than the speaker. In this case, the participant demonstrates a high level of politeness and a conscious effort to minimize the rank of imposition while maintaining interpersonal harmony, resulting in a highly polite request. This finding aligns with the results reported by Muid et.al., (2024)<sup>35</sup>, who observed that learners of Arabic often combine direct

<sup>32</sup> Jalal Almathkuri, "Influence of Social Power and Distance on Request Strategies in Saudi Arabic" 13, no. 3 (2021): 95–109, <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v13i3.18770>; Alshraah and Daradkeh, "Contrasting the Request Act Used by EFL \ ESL Native- Arabic Speakers in Arabic and English Situations."

<sup>33</sup> Brown and Levinson, "Politeness. Some Universals in Language Use."

<sup>34</sup> Depraetere, Ilse, Sofie Decock, and Nicolas Ruytenbeek. "Linguistic (in)Directness in Twitter Complaints: A Contrastive Analysis of Railway Complaint Interactions." *Journal of Pragmatics* 171 (January 2021): 215–33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2020.09.026>.

<sup>35</sup> Abdul Muid, Anwar Sanusi, and Sulhi Muhammad Daud Abdul Kadir, "ARABIC SPEECH ACT: INVESTIGATING STUDENTS'

structures with mitigating politeness markers in order to avoid threatening the interlocutor's negative face. Conversely, a small number of utterances exhibited the use of bald-on-record strategies, although these were relatively infrequent. For instance, expressions such as /sā'idnī/ ساعدني appeared in contexts characterized by close social relationships or informal settings. A similar pattern was also identified in the study by Mervat et.al., (2021), in which native Arabic speakers tended to employ direct strategies when interacting with close friends.<sup>36</sup>

Through qualitative observation and interviews, the findings interestingly reveal that positive politeness strategies appeared at a very low frequency, in contrast to several previous studies which reported that Arab EFL learners tend to prioritize positive politeness when performing speech acts<sup>37</sup>. Furthermore, Farrag (2022)<sup>38</sup> stated in his study that Saudi Arabian participants tended to use religious softeners, such as prayers and good wishes, when making requests, and also offered praise to their interlocutors to ease the burden of the request. This aligns with Arab sociocultural norms of being more gentle with interlocutors. This difference highlights the role of cross-cultural pragmatics, where target-language cultures that non-native Arabic learners might benefit from deeper study to produce communication appropriate to the Arabic context.

Regarding cross-cultural pragmatic knowledge and awareness of social variables, non-native speakers of Ma'had Al-Imarat seem to have understood how to determine the choice of language in certain situations. However, in some situations, some participants still exhibited L1 pragmatic transfer from Indonesian into Arabic when producing requests. Referring to Kasper (1992)<sup>39</sup> pragmatic transfer is defined as the influence of learners' pragmatic knowledge of a

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PRAGMALINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN REQUESTING AND APOLOGIZING EXPRESSIONS" 26, no. 2 (2024): 315–36.

<sup>36</sup> El-Dakhs, Dina Abdel Salam, and Mervat M. Ahmed. "A Variational Pragmatic Analysis of the Speech Act of Complaint Focusing on Alexandrian and Najdi Arabic." *Journal of Pragmatics* 181 (August 2021): 120–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.05.023>.

<sup>37</sup> Hmouri, "Politeness in a Moroccan EFL Classroom : How Students of High School Using Apologizing Strategies in English ?"

<sup>38</sup> Farrag, "Saudi Politeness: Request and Apology in the Context of Study and Work at King Abdulaziz University:A Pragmatic Study."

<sup>39</sup> Gabriele Kasper, "Pragmatic Transfer," *Interlanguage Studies Bulletin* 8, no. 3 (1992), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/026765839200800303>.

language other than the target language on their comprehension and production of pragmatic information in the L2. An example of this can be seen in the participant's utterance *في مدة النحو كيف؟ عملت؟*, which reflects a structure commonly used in Indonesian interaction (roughly meaning: "nahwu gimana? Udah kamu kerjakan"). When this pattern is transferred directly into Arabic, it results in a form that does not conform to native Arabic pragmatic conventions and may lead to communicative failure. Within the CCSARP framework, this utterance does not meet the criteria of a conventionally indirect request typically employed in Arabic. Instead, since the interlocutor must deduce the speaker's intended request from the statement, it falls under the category of non-conventionally indirect strategies, particularly a strong hint. This finding aligns with Al-Zubeiry (2024)<sup>40</sup> research, which examined how language transfer occurs among non-native speakers in making Arabic apologies.

From the perspective of the source-language culture, the above utterance reflects an off-record strategy, in which the speaker implies the intended request without stating it explicitly. The speaker chooses this strategy as a form of mitigation against the threat of negative face from the interlocutor, because even though the power variable in it is relatively low, and the social distance between the two is relatively close, the rank of the request submitted by the speaker is quite large, therefore the speaker adapts to the high rank of the request, so that the utterance remains polite even though it is less precise in its delivery. This shows that, even though the language is Arabic, cultural differences may still influence how the speaker conveys this speech act. Therefore, identifying the form of speech and social interpretation in the language being studied is important.<sup>41</sup>

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of interlanguage pragmatics by integrating CCSARP with Politeness Theory to analyze Arabic requests produced by non-native speakers. The findings show the dominance of negative politeness strategies, contributing to the

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<sup>40</sup> Al-Zubeiry, Hameed Yahya Ahmed, and Mohammed Ahmed Mohammed Alzahrani. "Variation in Dispreferred Responses among Rural and Urban Saudi Arabic Speakers: A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis." *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1 (March 2024): 229–48. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/1986>.

<sup>41</sup> Rivera, John Robert, Hikmah Maulani, and Mohamad Zaka Al Farisi. "Arabic Language Curriculum in Southeast Asia: A Comparative Analysis of Indonesia and the Philippines." *Alibbaa': Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 6, no. 2 (July 2025): 218–42. <https://doi.org/10.19105/ajpba.v6i2.20568>.

discussion of how L2 learners manage face when linguistic structures and cultural norms have not been fully mastered, thereby reflecting pragmatic transfer. This study also extends empirical evidence that the cross-cultural pragmatics paradigm positions non-native speakers as a more cautious and mitigation-oriented group, especially in the context of politeness-based education. Pedagogically, this study's results emphasize the importance of integrating the teaching of pragmatic competence into Arabic language instruction. Explicit teaching of request and politeness strategies can help learners achieve more contextually appropriate and effective communication.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, participants were drawn from a single institutional context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other Arabic language learning environments. Second, the sample consisted of participants who were relatively homogeneous in terms of linguistic background and proficiency level. Third, data were primarily collected through DCT, which captures learners' pragmatic knowledge but may not fully reflect real-time interaction behavior. Therefore, future research should involve a more diverse group of participants, multiple research locations, and complementary data-collection methods, such as role-playing, to provide a more comprehensive picture of politeness strategies in Arabic speech acts.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, request and politeness strategies in Arabic request speech acts produced by non-native speakers in the Ma'had Al-Imarat environment were analyzed. The findings indicate that non-native speakers predominantly realize request acts through conventionally indirect strategies, particularly in the form of query preparatory structures. This pattern suggests that learners of Arabic tend to employ mitigated and conventionalized request formulas when conveying their intentions. Furthermore, these request strategies are consistently integrated with negative politeness strategies, indicating a strong tendency among non-native speakers to maintain social distance and minimize face-threatening acts in interaction. In contrast, positive politeness strategies appear with relatively low frequency, distinguishing the findings of this study from several previous studies involving native Arabic speakers or learners of Arabic. These findings confirm that the socio-cultural context strongly influences the implementation of request and politeness strategies by non-native

speakers. Future research is recommended to expand the scope of investigation by incorporating comparative designs across different institutional, cultural, or proficiency-level contexts to examine whether similar patterns emerge. In addition, further studies may employ longitudinal or experimental approaches to explore the development of pragmatic competence over time and to assess the impact of explicit pragmatic instruction on learners' use of request and politeness strategies in Arabic.

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