# External Modifications of Requests among Jordanian University Students: A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis

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## Abstract

*The primary purpose of this study is to explore the external modifications of requests among Jordanian male and female university students in cross-gender settings and the factors affecting the choice of these strategies. The subjects of the study were 18 Jordanian undergraduate university students (9 males and 9 females) enrolled in different programs at Ajloun National University, Jordan. A mixed methodological approach was adopted for data collection. The data was retrieved from nine-hour audio recordings to gather naturally-occurring data and 18 DCTs to elicit organized data sets that can be analyzed based on patterns. Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) taxonomy of request strategies was espoused to analyze the obtained data. The data analysis revealed that the mitigating supportive moves (i.e., Imposition Minimizers, grounders, disarmers, preparators, getting a pre-commitment, promise of reward) were preferred by female students more than their male counterparts, whereas male students used Aggravating supportive moves (i.e., Threat, insult, Moralizing) more frequently than female students. Interestingly, other unique features that can be subsumed under Mitigating supportive moves manifested in Jordanian students' requests, Namely, apology, self-introduction and gratitude. It was concluded that request strategies are not only used to fulfill certain needs, but also to manage social interactions and to strengthen relationships. Moreover, the way in which Jordanians use request strategies is strongly influenced by gender, cultural norms, and the context of interaction.*

**Keywords:** *Request, Jordanian, External Modifications, Mitigating, Supportive Moves, Cross-Gender.*

## Introduction

Requesting is an important aspect of human communication that plays a vibrant role in meeting people's needs and desires. Cross-linguistically and cross-culturally, the act of making requests helps shape the social interaction to facilitate the exchange of services, goods, information and needs, hence contributing to the smooth functioning of society (Drew & Couper-Kuhlen, 2014).

Requests vary depending on the culture and society in which they are employed (cf. Kasper, 1990; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Wierzbicka, 2003; Felix-Brasdefer, 2005). Making requests is a rich and sophisticated element of human communication that reveals cultural values, power, and personal communication preferences. Inspecting the different aspects of requesting makes available greater insight into the social underlying forces that govern everyday interactions and shows the role of language and culture in shaping our ability to communicate our needs and desires.

Indeed, the role of requesting in Arab societies in general, and in the Jordanian society in particular, exceeds simply exchanging words between members of the society. The behavior of requesting often reveals deep-rooted values of respect, honor and interconnectedness. In other words, language in this context is not a mere means of communicating needs; rather, it involves negotiation of social structure and relationships. Since the process of making requests in the Arab societies in general, and in the Jordanian society in particular, is rich in traditional values, hospitality as well as sophisticated politeness, understanding how requests are formulated and exchanged in such a socio-cultural setting provides a clear picture of the communication process and the social fabric in such culture (see Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001; Al-Ali, 2006; Al-Shboul et al., 2022a, 2022b; Al-Momani, 2009; Al-Rousan et al., 2016).

Structurally speaking, requests manifest in different forms; Requests range from clearly direct statements to indirect ones. More importantly, the employed requesting strategy can influence how effectively the request

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is achieved. Therefore, understanding the process of requesting in different contexts and in different groups is crucial for successful communication as it opens significant avenues into social behaviors. Studying request behaviors, whether the polite request strategies used in formal settings or casual requests employed among friends, helps us understand the various aspects of human communication (cf. Trosborg, 1995; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; House, 1989; Rose, 2000).

Despite the significance of identifying the factors that affect the use of politeness, studies investigating Jordanian males and females' politeness when requesting each other are rare, which is a major motivation for the current study. Despite the significance of request strategies in promoting cooperation and social communication, there is a dearth of comprehensive studies that address how these strategies emerge, develop, and adapt within the context of restricted linguistic interactions within the Jordanian culture. Interaction between different genders in the Jordanian community is often characterized by social constraints and thus significant limitations (see Al-Khatib, 2008; Rababah & Malkawi, 2012; Ariff & Mugableh, 2013; Sahawneh et al., 2024; Hassan & Rangasawmy, 2014; Al-Rousan et al., 2016). The constraints on interaction between men and women in the Jordanian society are reflected by the social practices and some rooted cultural norms in the community. Such restrictions appear to be a challenge for understanding the intricacies of request strategies in such a cross-gender setting. This panorama begs important questions about how request strategies are used in this gender-segregated context, and this study constitutes a modest attempt to bridge this gap in the literature of Jordanian request strategies and adds to the growing body of research in the field on requesting.

This study investigates the external modifications of requests employed by Jordanian male and female university students in cross-gender exchanges and provides potential explanations of the various strategies used by them. It also examines the factors affecting the implementation of these strategies. In other words, the influence of social and cultural factors on shaping requests in the Jordanian context are discussed. Specifically, the current study purports to answer the following questions:

- What are the external modifications employed by male Jordanian university students when requesting their female peers?

- What are the external modifications employed by female Jordanian university students when requesting their male peers?

- Are there gender-specific patterns in the politeness strategies employed when making requests?

- What are the factors that influence the use of request strategies in cross-gender contexts in Jordan?

The significance of the study is related to various aspects. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that tackles request strategies in cross-gender settings in the Jordanian context. It reports how Jordanian university students realize the speech act of requesting, which in turn furthers our understanding of intracultural differences in this respect. Second, as will be shown shortly, the data of the current study were collected using a mixed approach, which makes it peculiar compared with previous studies on speech acts in the Jordanian context. Furthermore, besides gender, the study highlights the effect of other social factors that might influence request strategies. Finally, in light of the importance of appropriately employing request strategies by university students, studying this speech act in this particular context can contribute to teaching these request strategies in order to boost students' communicative competence and help them avoid potential misunderstandings. Put differently, since this study highlights different aspects of the pragmatic competence of Jordanian male and female students, it can acquaint teachers with new ways for teaching students how to apply request strategies appropriately.

## Literature Review

The theory of speech act (Austin, 1962) and the theory of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) are related to the behaviour of requesting, hence are briefly highlighted in the next two subsections. The third subsection is dedicated to Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) CCSARP framework for the study of requests, while the last subsection is devoted for some related studies on the speech act of requesting.

*Requests and the Speech Act Theory*

Austin (1962) studies how people use language to achieve certain actions, or how to do things with words, a phenomenon known as Speech act. Speech act theory (Searle, 1969; Austin, 1962) allows us to explain how language works as an instrument for performing certain actions like making requests. Requests prompt the addressee to take action; the speaker attempts to get the listener to do certain act. For example, by uttering the statement "Can you pass me the salt?", the speaker makes a request for somebody to pass him/her the salt.

Trosborg (1995) defines request as a speech act "whereby a speaker (requester) conveys to a hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act, which is for the benefit of the speaker" (p. 187). Likewise, Searle (1979) considers requests a speech act and views them as "an attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. They may be very modest attempts as when I invite you to do it, or they may be very fierce attempts as when I insist that you do it" (p.13). Moreover, Searle (1979) illustrates that requests can range from polite requests like "Can I borrow your pen?" to directives like "Give me that pen!".

*Requests and Politeness*

The politeness theory and the notion of face are also related to requests. Politeness is the linguistic and social practice to manage face, which refers to a person's sense of self-worth and social identity (Brown and Levinson,1987). The significance of politeness in requests stems from the fact that the nature of the act by definition interferes with the recipient.

Politeness strategies are generally classified into two basic types: Positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness is achieved through the use of politeness and positive politeness strategies. The question "Could you please help me?", for example, is considered polite as it elicits a response and attempts to acknowledge the addressee's willingness to help. Negative politeness, by contrast, focuses on minimizing the imposition and giving the hearer their freedom. Negative politeness is often indirect or involves hedging. "I was wondering if you might possibly consider helping me?", for example, makes the tone of the request less bold (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

*The CCSARP Framework*

Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) put forward the CCSARP framework for the study of requests. This framework outlines the various aspects that can be found in a request. Specifically, this classification contains a series of elements that a request might include: head act, external and internal modifications, and Alerters. While the head act represents the core request, internal and external modifications are additional factors that affect the strength of the request. Internal modifications involve specific word choices within the core request, whereas external modifications take place before or after the head act either to soften or sharpen the request.

According to Sifianou (1999), internal modifications refer to the specific words used within the core of the request itself (the head act). These word choices function as tools to control how forceful or polite the structure of request will be. Put differently, wording within the head act itself may make the request more or less polite or more or less forceful in tone.

External modifications, by contrast, precede or follow the head act with the goal of mitigating or aggravating the request. According to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), external modification "is achieved through the use of optional clauses which either mitigate or emphasize the force of the whole request" (p. 128). Using External modifications thus greatly affects the power of the request. These modifications come in the form of supportive moves, which are additional elements surrounding the core request (head act). These supportive moves can occur before or after the head act and serve various purposes. Table 1 below shows the mitigating supportive moves and table 2 presents the aggravating supportive moves, which are both adopted from Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) framework.

**Table 1.** Mitigating Supportive Moves

| Supportive Moves | Definition | Example |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Preparator | clauses used to prepare the requestee for the ensuing the request | "I'd like to ask you something.../ May I ask you something?" |
| Getting a precommitment | clauses provided by the requestor to indicate his commitment | "Could you do me a favor?" |
| Grounder | clauses provided by the requestor to justify his request | "Professor, I missed class last week. Could I get a hand-out?" |
| Disarmer | clauses 'disarm' the requestee from the possibility of refusal | "I know you have already planned your day, but this is an exceptionally important meeting." |
| Promise of reward | clauses used by the requester to indicate a promise to be done once the request is fulfilled | "Could you sit in for me at the meeting today? You can take a day off tomorrow." |
| Imposition minimizer | clauses used by the requester to help reduce the imposition of the request | "Would you take my place on this meeting, but only if you haven't got any urgent plans." |

**Table 2.** Aggravating Supportive Moves

| Supportive Moves | Example |
| --- | --- |
| Insult | "You dirty pig, shut up!" |
| Threat | "Turn down the music if you don't want me to indict you for this!" |
| Moralizing | "You know, when a man has got children, he sacrifices everything for them, so could you please go to that meeting instead of me." |

The present study is only concerned with the head act and external modifications, both the mitigating and aggravating supportive moves, of CCSARP. Finally, it remains to be said that, in addition to the notion of face in politeness theory, requesting as a speech act is related to other pragmatic factors such as the speaker's intention and the situation where requests are produced.

*Related Studies on the Speech Act of Requesting*

In this subsection, we review some research on the speech act of request in different cultures.

Adopting a DCT technique, Trajkova & Neshkovska (2017) scrutinized the linguistic means employed to modify requests in English and Macedonian. Both the internal modification (i.e., using syntactic downgraders as well as lexical and phrasal upgraders) and the external modification (i.e., using mitigating and aggravating supportive moves) were examined. The results indicated that the internal modification was more commonly employed than the external modification. They attributed this result to the optionality of external modification and its dependence on the speaker's assessment of the imposing force of the request due to cultural and social reasons. The findings also indicated that aggravating supportive moves are more probable to occur between interlocutors who have a close relationship, and that grounder was the most frequently used mitigating supportive moves.

Khatab (2015) examined gender differences in using the devices of external modification in requests by Iraqis. The sample of the study consisted of 42 third-year undergraduate students (21 males and 21 females) who completed a DCT). The findings displayed noticeable cross-gender variation with respect to the use of the devices of external modification. While males preferred grounder and were more straightforward in giving justifications for their requests, females tended to use apologies, greetings, sweeteners, and politeness markers in order to reduce face-threatening acts. These findings mean that males prefer to have things done in a direct way, whereas females prefer politeness. However, the findings showed no difference between the two genders regarding the preparatory and disarmer devices; males and females used these devices with a similar frequency.

Farnia et al. (2014) analyzed the responses of 60 university students (30 Malays and 30 Iraqis) to a DCT with the aim of identifying the differences and similarities in using the external modifications of requests. The data analysis was built on Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) classification of external modification. The data analysis revealed more similarities than differences between the participants regarding the use of mitigation devices like compliments, apologies and gratitude. Grounders were found to be the most frequently used external modifier.

Following Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010), who adopted some categories from the CCSARP of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Halupka-Rešetar (2014) examined the modifications of requests among 37 intermediate ESP students through a DCT. The finding of the study showed that grounder was the most common requesting strategy. It was also found that indirect request was preferred by the majority of the respondents in order to minimize the request's force; a high tendency to employ justifications in requests was suggested to soften the tone of interaction.

Al-Marrani & Sazalie (2010a) studied request strategies among Yemeni university students in their native language. The sample of the study consisted of 336 male and female students who completed a DCT. The analysis was based on Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989). Framework. The study revealed a tendency towards direct requests in male-to-male interactions. This preference for directness was attributed to the solidarity and closeness between male interlocutors. On the contrary, a trend towards indirect requests was found in male-to-female interactions, which was ascribed to the religious and cultural values of Yemeni society.

## Methodology

This study aims at examining the external modifications of requests as employed by male and female Jordanian university students in cross-gender contexts. The study seeks to find if there are any differences in the way male and female students formulate and realize their requests. In the upcoming subsections, the research design, participants, research setting, research instruments, data analysis and data coding, and validity and reliability issues are highlighted.

*Research Design*

This study implements a mixed-method research design that combines both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools in order to get a comprehensive understanding of requesting behavior among university students in Jordan. By using Audio Recording, Discourse Completion Task (DCT), and Interviews, the study is structured to gather both naturally occurring and elicited data on the formulation of requests and the sociocultural factors influencing these communication strategies. This approach makes available a multi-dimensional analysis of the research objectives by exploring how requests are structured as well as the motivations behind these communication patterns. The research design focuses on the investigation of how gender and social context influence requesting behavior. Participants were clustered based on their gender in several mix-gendered groups, which gives the opportunity to explore how each gender adapts their request strategies when communicating with the opposite gender, and how individuals would adjust their request strategies in different social context, which enables us to gain better understanding of how social dynamics influence communication styles. This controlled design helps isolate variables such as gender and social context, providing valuable insights into their impact on communication dynamics.

*Participants*

The current study focuses on Jordanian university students. The data of the study was collected from students studying at Ajloun National University in Jordan. The total number of the participants is 18 university students, comprising an equal distribution of 9 males and 9 females. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 26 years, which is the typical age range of university students in Jordan. All participants are undergraduate students who were chosen randomly from various academic majors such as English language and literature, Mathematics, accounting, business administration and law.

Regarding ethical research practices, all participants were informed about the aim of the study, and their role in the study was explained to them. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study, acknowledging their understanding of the study's aims and procedures. The identities of the participants were treated with high confidentiality in order to ensure their data security and privacy.

*Setting*

The fieldwork of the current study was conducted at Ajloun National University in Jordan. The recordings were carried out in natural settings, including informal meetings in different places inside the university campus (such as the university Cafeteria, sport complex, and allocated seats for students) in order to provide interactions that resemble everyday conversations as much as possible. The DCT was distributed to the participants in two classrooms at the English language and literature department. All participants were asked to complete the dialogues based on the provided scenarios. The interviews were conducted after analyzing the content of the Audio Recordings and DCT, with the purpose of getting explanations of the motivations of using external modifications of requests.

*Instruments*

To achieve the purposes of this study, a mixed methodological approach for data collection that incorporates three different instruments was implemented: Audio Recording, Discourse Completion Task (DCT), and interview.

*Audio Recording*

The participants recorded almost nine hours of casual, spontaneous conversations with each other. All these conversations were held between speakers of opposite genders. The adoption of the audio-recording technique was intended to gather naturally-occurring, spontaneous requests because naturally-occurring data represent the real use of language and, thus, form authentic source of data (see Hymes, 1974; Labov, 1972; Wolfson, 1983).

*Discourse Completion Task (DCT)*

The participants also completed a DCT that contained real-life situations of requesting. All participants were asked to complete the dialogues based on the provided scenarios. The DCT scenarios were structured to simulate realistic situations where requests are more likely to occur. The use of Discourse Completion Task (DCT), which is a structured and controlled method for collecting data (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), was intended to systematically elicit responses from the participants in different requesting situations, which will provide us with organized data sets that can be analyzed based on patterns, variation, and differences in requesting strategies.

*Interviews*

After analyzing the content of the DCTs and audio recordings, the researchers conducted interviews with each participant. The interviews were devoted to get deeper understanding of the motivations and/or cultural influences that stand behind the use of certain identified requesting strategies. In other words, the

interviews provided potential explanations of participants' language choices that were observed in the audio-recordings and DCTs.

The use of these three tools will enable us to provide accurate, multi-faceted examination of this speech act. This mixed-approach will inevitably serve to get better insight into the nature and reasons of employing different request strategies.

*Data Analysis and Data Coding*

Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) taxonomy of requesting strategies is advocated to analyze the data gathered through Audio Recording and Discourse Completion Task (DCT). This taxonomy contains a structured framework for categorizing and understanding the various request strategies employed by the Jordanian university students.

A mixed quantitative and qualitative approach was adopted for the data analysis (cf. Al-Daher et al., 2022, 2024). The data obtained from the Audio Recordings and DCT were first calculated and tabulated based on the gender of the requester. After that, the modification strategies of each gender were classified based on the categories and subcategories outlined in Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) taxonomy. Each observed request strategy and response to DCT scenarios was subsumed under one of the taxonomy's categories: Mitigating supportive moves (i.e., Imposition Minimizers, grounders, disarmers, preparators, getting a pre-commitment, promise of reward) and aggravating supportive moves (i.e., Threat, insult, Moralizing).

The identified requests were coded by three researchers. To validate the researchers' classification of the request strategies, two Jordanian professors of linguistics one from Yarmouk University and the other from Jordan University of Science and Technology were asked to reclassify the observed request strategies according to the adopted framework. The coding of the three researchers and the two professors was then compared, and a variation in their classification of the request strategies was found. Therefore, we held several discussions with the two professors until we all reached a consensus on how to classify the requests.

As for the data gathered from the interviews, they were analyzed qualitatively to get insights into the requesters' motivations and reasons for using different request strategies. Besides, this data helped to explore the differences between male and female students with respect to specific request strategies.

*Validity and Reliability*

As for the validity and reliability of the data, the current study implements triangulation method. Collecting data using different instruments helps validating the results of the study and comparing and contrasting the findings of the study with those of other studies. Patton (2014) states that implementing mixed-method strategies contribute to the validity and reliability of research findings through cross-checking and/or corroborating findings. Along the same lines, Plano Clark (2017) explains that using multiple methods leads to the integration of qualitative and quantitative data, which in turn enhances the validity and reliability of results.

The audio recording method was used in the current study since it is considered one of the most appropriate methods in the fields of speech acts, sociolinguistics and pragmatics. According to Baranova and Dingemanse (2016), collecting natural data provides contextual details that make the findings representative of real-life interactions. Likewise, Beebe and Cummings (2006) and Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992) argue that data collection methods in natural settings provide the researchers with findings that are rich in semantic and pragmatic features, thus contributing more valid and reliable outcomes. The DCT method was used since this method helps the researchers to obtain all possible situations that might occur with the two genders. Finally, the interview method was implemented to get better understanding of the data that was collected by the audio recording and DCT methods. This method ensures the validity and reliability of the analyzed data because the participants provided explanations and justifications for their own motivations for using the different identified external modifications strategies of requests.

## Results and Discussion

The collected data contained 634 requests that were distributed between mitigating supportive moves (# 588 = 92.75%) and aggravating supportive moves (#46 = 7.25%). This section presents the classification of the external modifications of requests among Jordanian male and female students based on Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) taxonomy of request strategies. The mitigating supportive moves and aggravating supportive moves are discussed in two separate subsections; another separate subsection is dedicated for the qualitative analysis of the interviews.

*Mitigating Supportive Moves among Male and Female University Students*

The data analysis revealed that both male and female Jordanian university students preferred using mitigating supportive moves in requesting in their conversation. In fact, 92.75% of the overall identified requests were classified under mitigating request. Moreover, it was fond that other unique features that can be subsumed under Mitigating supportive moves were manifested in Jordanian students' requests. Specifically, Jordanian students incorporated new supportive moves, namely, apology, self-introduction and gratitude, into their requests. Table 3 below provides a breakdown of all these mitigating strategies.

**Table 3.** The Frequencies of Mitigating Supportive Moves of Requesting among Male and Female Jordanian University Students

| Supportive Moves | Males | | Females | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| Grounder | 113 | 17.82 | 146 | 23.02 |
| Promise of reward | 26 | 4.1 | 35 | 5.52 |
| Preparator | 21 | 3.31 | 34 | 5.36 |
| Apology | 15 | 2.36 | 32 | 5.05 |
| Gratitude | 11 | 1.73 | 33 | 5.2 |
| Getting a pre-commitment | 13 | 2.05 | 22 | 3.47 |
| Disarmer | 24 | 3.78 | 11 | 1.73 |
| Self-introduction | 24 | 3.78 | 3 | 0.47 |
| Imposition minimizer | 21 | 3.31 | 4 | 0.63 |
| **Total** | **268** | **42.27** | **320** | **50.47** |

The data analysis revealed differences in terms of using the mitigating supportive moves between males and females, with females employing more mitigating supportive strategies than males. In fact, (50.47%) of the overall collected requests which are classified under mitigating supportive moves were used by female students, and (42.27%) of the overall collected requests which are classified under mitigating supportive moves were used by male students. This finding is in accordance with that of Alzeebaree & Yavuz (2017) who found that women tend to use more mitigating supportive strategies in their requests than males. Along the same line, Al-Marrani & Sazalie (2010a, 2010b) reported that females are more likely to use indirect and polite strategies in requests than males. Sikder (2021) also documented gender differences in the use of request supportive moves strategies, asserting that females often apply more elaborate and socially oriented forms of requesting than men.

*The Grounder Strategy*

Grounder was found to be the most frequent strategy among mitigating supportive moves. Grounder formed (40.85%) of the overall collected requests. The grounder instances performed by male students formed (17.82%) of the collected requests, and the grounder instances performed by female students constituted (23.02%) of the gathered requests. The finding that grounder is the most frequent mitigating supportive move is indeed compatible with the findings of several studies (e.g., Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Hassall, 2001; Felix-Brasdefer, 2007; Schauer, 2007; Deveci & Hmida, 2017; Trajkova & Neshkovska, 2017; Schalkoski-Dias & Godoy, 2018)

Although both males and females employed grounder when making a request, they differ in the application of this strategy. The analysis revealed that females used grounder strategy regardless of their familiarity with the requestees; however, males employed this strategy only with requestees with whom they are unfamiliar, thus emphasizing politeness and clarity in cross-gender interactions. Grounder is one of the supportive moves that is used in conversation to justify the request, clarify a point or provide additional information. The following examples illustrate that both males and females used multiple justifications in cross-gender situations.

*Example 1: Grounder (Female to Male)*

Marḥabā, ʿindī muḥāḍarah onlāyn kamān sāʿah wa mā ḍall maʿī shaḥn. Mumkin bas tukhallas shaḥn tilfūnak astakhdim al-shāḥin?

'Hello, I have an online lecture in an hour and my phone's battery is low. Is it possible to use your charger once your phone is charged?'

In example 1, the female requester made use of the grounder strategy in order to justify her request especially that the requestee is an unfamiliar male student. She justified her request in two forms: She stated that she has an online lecture which suggests urgency and importance of her need in time-sensitive context, and she clarified that she does not have enough charge in her phone. These justifications were used before making the request. The request itself was formed politely: "Is it possible to use your charger once your phone is charged?". According to Brown and Levinson (1987), forming the request in this polite way is an attempt to save the negative face of the requestee, hence an attempt to not impose on the requestee. The use of clear justifications together with polite language help the requestee understand the importance and the need behind the request.

*Example 2: Grounder (Male to Female)*

Dāʿ qalamī mā baʿrif wayn, wa mā ḍall waqt ʿala al-imtiḥān idhā mumkin aʿṭīnī qalam idhā maʿak wāḥid ziyādah

'I lost my pen, I don't know where, and there isn't much time left before the exam. If possible, can you give me a pen if you have an extra one?'

The above example illustrates the grounder strategy used by a male student in a cross-gender situation. The male requester started his request with a justification that he has lost his pen at a crucial time which suggest urgency, since the exam will start soon. The requester used these justifications in order to justify his request to a female requestee. The speaker mentioned the request saying "can you give me a pen if you have an extra one?". The use of "if you have an extra one" suggests probability and can be thought of as a means to avoid FTAs (see Sifianou, 1999; Brown and Levinson, 1987).

*The Promise of Reward Strategy and the Preparatory Strategy*

The data analysis revealed other gender differences regarding the use of mitigating supportive moves among Jordanian university students. For example, the findings showed that the Promise of Reward strategy is slightly more common among females (5.52% of the overall collected requests) compared to males (4.1% of the overall collected requests), indicating that females have a higher tendency to offer rewards in supportive interactions. Likewise, it was found that the preparatory strategy, which is used to set up or prepare for supportive interactions, is more common among females (5.36% of the overall collected requests) than males (3.31% of the overall collected requests). This might indicate that females are more proactive in preparing the context for supportive exchanges. The following example clarifies the preparatory strategy.

*Example 3: Preparatory (Female to Male)*

Biddi atlub mink shaghlah, biddi tib'athli talkhis al-maddah.

'I would like to ask you for something. I need you to send me a summary of the material.'

Example 3 shows that the female speaker used preparatory strategy in order to prepare the requestee for the request. the external modification "I would like to ask you something" functions to prepare the requestee for an upcoming request. A possible explanation of this strategy among females might be that females prefer to be direct in their requests especially when the request is directed to a male (Leaper, 2019). As mentioned earlier, cross-gender communication in Jordan is somehow restricted. It seems that the female requester tried to be direct in her request in order not to be misunderstood. By using this preparatory strategy, the requester ensures that the requestee understands the nature of the request and is ready to react to it. In fact, this strategy helps minimize any potential confusion.

*The Apology Strategy*

Apology was also found to be used more frequently by females (5.05% of the overall collected requests) than by males (2.36% of the overall collected requests). In fact, Jordanians in general tend to use multiple apology strategies in their daily interactions (cf. Harb, 2016; Jassim and Nimehchisalem, 2016). The following is an illustrative example:

*Example 4: Apology (Male to Female)*

Marhaba, keifik? Ba'tezir minnak momken akoun az'ajtak, bas beddi asawwer talkhees el-maadeh iza momken.

'Hello, how are you? I apologize if I bothered you, but I would like to photocopy the summary of the material, if possible.'

In example 4, the requester is using the politeness strategies cleverly to prevent any potential face-threatening act because of making a request. The request started with a welcoming greeting and an acknowledgement of the listener's well-being, "Hello, how are you?", which can be regarded a positive politeness strategy. In order to reduce any possible imposition on the listener, the requester employed an apology by saying "I apologize if I bothered you". the request itself is made in a polite way that allows the requestee to refuse without losing face. The way of making this request, starting with greeting, apology, and then request, serves to reduce any potential imposition on the face of the requestee.

*The Gratitude Strategy*

Gratitude can be defined as a feeling of thankfulness to acknowledge benefiting from request; it can be taken as a form of explicit politeness (cf. Froh et al., 2008). It was found that the gratitude strategy is used more frequently by females (5.2% of the overall collected requests) than by males (1.73% of the overall collected requests). This finding indicates that females are generally more appreciative than males; a greater emphasis on expressing appreciation exists among females (cf. Al-Khawaldeh & Žegarac, 2013). The following example clarifies how females employed this strategy:

*Example 5: Gratitude (Female to Male)*

Idha samaht, anta 'indak barzentayshon ma'i binafs al-yawm, bikun kathir mamnun lak idha bit-hikili shu al-mawad'i illa lazim nihki 'anha.

'If you don't mind, you have a presentation with me on the same day. I would be very grateful if you could tell me what topics we need to discuss.'

Example 5 explains how females employ gratitude to make a request. the female requester started her request with "If you don't mind" in order to reduce the imposition on the requestee. The context is then provided with "you have a presentation with me on the same day", as a way of addressing the relevance of the request. The requester expressed her gratitude by saying "I would be very grateful", which encourages a positive response by accepting the effort involved. Finally, the request itself shows clarity about the required information.

Noteworthy here is that Jordanian university students commonly integrate English terms into their Arabic conversations as appears in the above example where the female student used the English word 'presentation in the middle of her Arabic words. Similarly, the English word 'online' was incorporated in the conversations cited in example (1) above. Integrating English terms in the Arabic conversations could be construed as code-switching or borrowing. Nevertheless, it is beyond the goals of the current study to distinguish between code-switching and borrowing. For more on these two phenomena, the readers are referred to Al-Daher (2021) and Al-Dala'ien et al. (2022) respectively.

*Getting a Pre-commitment*

Similarly, getting a pre-commitment is used more by females (3.47% of the overall collected requests) than males (2.05% of the overall collected requests), which indicates that females tend to secure commitments before proceeding with interactions more than males. The following example clarifies this strategy:

*Example 6: Getting a Pre-commitment (Male to Female)*

Bti'dar ta'mli hal-khidmeh? Sar 'indi zarf biddi arouh 'ala al-bayt, biddi tbalgh il-doctor bass yinadi 'ala ismi.

'Can you do me this favor? I have an urgent situation, and I need to go home. Please inform the doctor when he calls my name.'

Example 6 represents a case of getting pre-commitment from the requestee before making the request. The requester begins his request by saying "Can you do me this favor?" in order to make an advance commitment prior to making the request. This behavior in Arab communities serves as a way to reduce imposition and mitigate the force of the request (see Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010a, 2010b; Alfattah & Ravindranath, 2009; Tamimi & Mohammadi, 2014). The requester then added "I have an urgent situation, and I need to go home", which serves to make the requestee obligated to fulfill the request.

*The Disarmer Strategy*

However, it was found that disarmer strategy was employed more commonly by males (3.78% of the overall collected requests) than females (1.73% of the overall collected requests), which indicates that males may prioritize reducing potential conflicts and focus on conflict management more than females. Consider the following example:

*Example 7: Disarmer (Male to Female)*

As-salamu 'alaykum maha, ba'raf illi fiki mkafiiki, bas daruri biddi tsa'idini bil-bahth bukra akher yawm littasleem.

'Peace be upon you, Maha. I know that you have enough to do, but it's important that you help me with the research. Tomorrow is the last day for submission.'

As can be noticed in the above example, the requester used different effective strategies in order to mitigate the force of the request. The requester started with the Islamic greeting "Peace be upon you", which is a polite way to create positive context for the request. The requester expressed his understanding of the busy schedule of the requestee (i.e., "I know that you have enough to do. The necessity and importance of the request are emphasized by "but it's important that you help me with the research" and is further stressed

by saying "Tomorrow is the last day for submission". This mixture of politeness, empathy, and necessity makes the request more possibly to be addressed and motivates the requestee to help.

*The Self-Introduction Strategy*

likewise, the results showed that males employed self-introduction in (3.78%) of the overall collected requests; by contrast, females applied self-introduction in only (0.47%) of the overall collected requests. The low frequency of this strategy is indicative of the carefulness in cross-gender interactions in Jordan and can thus be attributed to some culture-specific norms. According to Al-Rousan et al. (2016), cross-gender interaction in Arab Islamic countries is somehow restricted. Al-Khawaldeh & Žegarac (2013) assert that Jordan is a conservative, tribal society in which large restrictions are placed on male-female social interactions. This explains why males tend to introduce themselves: to justify getting involved in interaction with females. In example 8 below, the male speaker begins the request with a self-introduction (i.e., "I am a new student here") followed by a reason for the request (i.e., "This is my first semester; could you please tell me how to access the online lectures?") in order to soften the tone of the conversation.

*Example 8: Self- introduction (Male to Female)*

Marhaban, ana talib jadid hun, hatha awwal fasl li mumkin tihkili kayfa adkhul 'ala muhadarat al-online.

'Hello, I am a new student here. This is my first semester; could you please tell me how to access the online lectures?'

Finally, it remains to be said that The data analysis revealed that Imposition Minimizer strategy was the least frequent mitigating supportive move among both male and female students. the Imposition Minimizer was found to be more frequent among males (3.31% of the overall collected requests) than females (0.63% of the overall collected requests).

The low frequency of this strategy among females indicates that males tend to reduce impositions on others more than females.

Although the above-reported results show some similarities among Jordanian male and female university students with respect to the use of different mitigating supportive moves, the results have shown that more differences are indeed existent between them in terms of the strategy employed by each gender in different contexts. The differences in frequencies of some strategies as used by males and females reflect the different communicative styles and orientations between the two genders. It appears that females tend to use more preparatory, empathic approaches, whereas males appear to be more inclined toward conflict-minimizing strategies. In short, the findings of this study demonstrate that females in general use more conversational and social techniques than males. Males concentrate on reducing impositions and managing conflicts. These findings actually show how gender and cultural norms influence communication in the Jordanian society. In the following subsection, the similarities and differences between male and female students with respect to using aggravating supportive moves are discussed.

*Aggravating Supportive Moves of Requests among Male and Female University Students*

This subsection presents a comparison between male and female students in terms of using the aggravating supportive moves which include insult, threat, and moralizing. The data analysis revealed that male and female students engaged differently in these behaviors. Male students exhibited a higher use of aggravating supportive moves (#29 =4.57% of the overall collected requests) compared to female students who used the aggravating supportive moves in 17 instances (=2.68% of the overall collected requests). The higher engagement in these strategies by male students suggests that male students in general are more likely to employ negative supportive moves like insult and threat. The frequencies and percentages of Aggravating supportive moves of requesting among male and female students are given in table 4 below.

**Table 4.** The Frequencies of Aggravating Supportive Moves of Requesting Among Male and Female Jordanian University Students

| Supportive Moves | Males | | Females | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| Threat | 16 | 2.52 | 9 | 1.41 |
| Insult | 13 | 2.05 | 7 | 1.1 |
| Moralizing | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.15 |
| Total | 29 | 4.57 | 17 | 2.68 |

The results revealed that threat was the most used aggravating supportive move by both male and female students. The threat strategy was employed in (4%) of the overall collected requests, with different distribution between males (2.52% of the overall collected requests) and females (1.41% of the overall collected requests). The following example illustrates this aggravating supportive move.

*Example 9: Threat (Female to Male)*

Abed, wallah iza ma btitla' ma'i 'ala al-sooq el-yom, ma 'aad atla' ma'ak mishwar.

'Abed, I swear if you don't come with me to the downtown today, I won't go out with you anymore.'

According to the politeness theory, the above example shows clear violation of politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that everyone tries to save his/her self-image during social interaction. the female requester used the phrase " I swear", which intensifies the speaker's seriousness as it acts as FTA to the requestee's negative face, and thus prevents the requestee from acting freely. The explicit formulation of the request (i.e., "if you don't come with me to the market today, I won't go out with you anymore") emphasizes this imposition, giving priority to the need of the requester over the requestee's freedom. This example obviously lacks mitigating strategies that can help reduce imposition on the requestee. Although the request itself shows appeals to the requestees' positive face through highlighting the importance of their relationship, it remains forceful. In some Arabic cultures, the use of such direct language and the use of swearing can be taken as a sign of intimacy, reflecting a strong bond between friends (see Kerkam, 2015; Bayoumi, 2017).

Similarly, males were found to be more inclined to use insult compared to females. While males used 13 instances of insult (=2.05% of the overall collected requests), females recorded 7 instances (=1.1% of the overall collected requests). The following is an illustrative example:

*Example 10: Insult (Male to Female)*

Isma'i, tara btekouni haywanah itha ma darasteeni 'ala al-imtihan.

'Listen, you would be an animal if you don't help me study for the exam.'

Example 10 represents a request that involves insult. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, using the phrase "animal" represents a significant face-threatening act on the face of the requestee. This explicit insult threatens the positive face by attacking the social value and self-image of the requestee, which forces the requestee to agree. The form of the request is considered highly vigorous; this form turns from a polite request into demand. The illocutionary act involves the speaker's intention behind the utterance (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). It seems that the speaker's intention here is not just to make a request, but also to use insult as a power to ensure the request is fulfilled. Several studies (e.g., AlSabbagh, 2023; Rosenbaum, 2019) indicate that the behavior of using such a direct language with insult is a sign of familiarity and intimacy among friends.

In summary, the data analysis revealed significant differences between male and female students regarding the use of aggravating supportive moves. Males appeared to be more inclined to using negative supportive

moves such as insult and threat, while females seemed less likely to engage in these behaviors. Both males and females showed minimal involvement in moralizing.

*Intentions of Using Different Request Strategies*

This section sheds light on the intentions of Jordanian male and female requesters when using certain request strategies in a cross-gender situation. Such speakers' intentions were retrieved from the interviews conducted with the participants. Different intentions of using the request strategies were exhibited by male and female interviewees. Some interviewees also offered illustrative examples of their intentions behind different request strategies.

The data analysis revealed that grounder was the most frequent mitigating strategy among both male and female students. According to the Male participants, they preferred to use grounder strategy (justifications) in cross-gender communications to make their requests seem more reasonable and acceptable to the listener. One male participant, for example, states: "I feel that I need to use justifications with my request when I am requesting from girls because, as you know, it is not appropriate to ask someone without a reason". Another reason behind using the grounder strategy by males is clarifying their intentions so that they avoid any potential misunderstanding. Another male participant says: "Honestly, I use justifications with girls to pave the way for my request and also to ensure that the girl doesn't misunderstand me. I want to avoid any awkwardness".

Female participants offered different intentions for using the grounder strategy. Female participants preferred to describe a situation in order to avoid any potential embarrassment. One female participant, for instance, states: "I have to justify why I want to make a request. For example, I recently needed to ask a colleague for an extra pen, and I spent some time justifying before making the request in order to avoid feeling embarrassed. Honestly, I didn't have time to go and buy a pen, so I explained the situation to my colleague". Another female participant further elaborates and says: "In our society, you need to justify your request because, without a justification, it may sound like a command. I have to provide a justification for my requests to avoid bothering the person I'm asking".

In a nutshell, the participants' responses during the interviews assert the significance of justifications in minimizing the imposition on the requestees. Using justifications helps soften the request and prevent it from sounding like a direct command.

Self-introduction, apology, and gratitude were also attested in the collected data. As for using self-introduction strategy, one male participant states: "I introduce myself in certain situations, for example, when I want to make a request from a girl that I don't know. I find that introducing myself helps ease the situation. It makes the person I'm speaking to understand what I need and feel more comfortable".

Regarding the apology strategy, it seems that males know that they live in a conservative community where cross-gender conversations are restricted. They believe that starting a conversation with an apology serves to minimize the risk of being intrusive or inappropriate. One male participant says: "Honestly, I often start conversations with an apology. In our society, it is not acceptable to talk to a girl without a reason, and it is important to be respectful. I find that beginning with an apology is a polite and respectful way to start any conversation, especially when I need to make a request. By saying something like 'I apologize' or 'Sorry if I'm bothering you', I show that I am considerate and respectful, which helps me appear as courteous and well-mannered".

Female participants resorted to the gratitude strategy because they prefer to express their gratitude and appreciation with the goal of maintaining the listener's social face. They believe that this strategy can also mitigate any potential awkwardness or discomfort that might arise from the request. One female student states: "I express my gratitude to someone who is not obligated to achieve my request. It is a way of showing respect and appreciation, and it shows that I value their effort and time".

The results showed that, among the aggravating supportive moves, insult and threat strategies were used by both male and female students. One female student states: "When I need to ask a close friend for something, I make the request directly and sometimes it might sound rude. Since I am talking to a close friend, I pay no attention to formalities. I don't intend to be disrespectful, but my close friends understand my intentions". A male student also asserts this idea saying: "using insult toward a close friend shows the strength of our relationship". Another male participant elaborates stating: "In our Jordanian society, we often use insult or harsh language with each other during conversations, and this behavior is considered a measure of the strength and closeness of our relationships". Indeed, the participants' explanations stress the influence of friendship on the way in which people speak. Although using a direct request with insult in broader social contexts is normally impolite, this behavior is acceptable in close relationships. It seems that male and female participants employ insult in their conversations as a way to show solidarity and close relationships.

As for the threat strategy, male participants explain that this behavior is seen as playful rather than hostile; it also shows trust as both the requester and requestee understand that the threat is not serious. One male participant states: "Sometimes I jokingly threaten to embarrass my friend if she doesn't fulfill my request, but she knows that I would never actually do that. It is just the way we interact as close friends". A female participant provides another explanation for using this strategy saying: "I use threats such as stop talking to me if my friend does not agree to do what I request. I use this strategy because I know that my friend values our friendship and he will thus accept my request". It seems that threats are not used to cause harm but to emphasize the importance of the request in a way that acknowledges the existing bonds and the close relationship.

## Conclusion

This study investigates the external modifications of requests as employed by Jordanian male and female university students in cross-gender settings. It also provides potential explanations of the various strategies used by the students and examines the factors affecting the implementation of these strategies. A mixed methodological approach was adopted for data collection. Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) taxonomy of requesting strategies is advocated to analyze the data.

The data analysis revealed remarkable differences between male and female students with respect to using modification strategies in requests. While female students preferred to use mitigating supportive moves more than their male counterparts, males used insult and threat strategies more frequently than their female counterparts. Interestingly, however, the findings revealed that such aggravating behaviors are used by Jordanian students to indicate trust and solidarity. Insulting or threating a close friend is employed in cross-gender contexts as playful act to assert the strength of the relationship between the communicators. It was thus concluded that request strategies are not only used to fulfill certain needs, but also to manage social interactions and to strengthen relationships. The way in which Jordanians use request strategies is also strongly influenced by gender, cultural norms, and the context of interaction.

The small size of the sample of study might be considered one of its limitations and might make generalizing its findings uneasy. It is thus recommended that this study be replicated with a larger sample to further validate its findings. It is also recommended that variables like age, social status, occupation and level of education be examined to get better understanding of their influence on request strategies. Another limitation of this study might be its focus on only cross-gender groups. Future research can consider homogenous groups whereby male-to-male and female-to-female interactions are investigated to get a better understanding of the role of gender in using different request strategies. Despite these limitations, the results of the study still can give a holistic image about the socio-cultural values of the Jordanian society and their relations to the behavior of requesting. Future studies could also explore request strategies used in other communication modes such as online communications. Finally, this study might open the door to examine pragmatic transfer in request strategies among Jordanian EFL students. For example, the intercultural differences between native speakers of English and EFL Jordanian students in terms of

producing requests as well as the occurrence of pragmatic transfer in the requests of Jordanian EFL students might be strong candidates for future research.

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