

**INDONESIAN INDIRECT REQUEST STRATEGIES USED IN ACADEMIC SPHERE:
A STUDY IN VOCATIONAL PROGRAM OF UNIVERSITAS BRAWIJAYA**

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Abstract

People change their method of communication or use of language based on distinctive spheres, contexts and situations. Accordingly, people will not simply talk or write without even having one goal in mind. To accomplish the purpose in a systematic way, people use communicative acts or in other words, speech act. This article focuses on one type of speech act called *request* which is included in directive category. This study employs mixed methods of qualitative and descriptive quantitative approach using case study design. In this research, the researcher conducted a survey using questionnaires called DCT (Discourse Completion Test). The statistics obtained from the questionnaires were used to support the qualitative analysis. The result revealed that the most frequently used strategy is indirect request. Based on the analysis, the participants took social distance, relative power and the degree of imposition into account when they were making the requests in academic sphere, hence the choice of indirect strategy.

I. INTRODUCTION

People have the ability to use language in distinguishing specific contexts or sociolinguistic situations; the formality in academic sphere, or language varieties as in politics or engineering, for instance. People change their method of communication based on these distinctive situations. Situation commonly refers to the extra-linguistic setting in which an utterance is uttered. It relates to the number of participants, degree of formality, nature of the occurring activities, and so on (Nodoushan, 2012). Therefore, it is substantial to realize that the sole basis of successful communication entails not

only the knowledge of words or text organization of a language, but also the pragmatic category, for it contains the rules of what choice to make within which contextual situation. According to Crystal (2003), the general term of context is sometimes used to relate to all the factors which systematically regulate the form, meaning or appropriateness of utterances.

Moreover, there is also variation vis-à-vis the language and context when it comes to Bahasa Indonesia. The nature and culture of Indonesian people govern the choice of speech act and politeness strategies used in a particular sphere. To exemplify, one cannot simply address a

lecturer or a headmaster *Kamu* or *Dia*, if the speaker or writer is a student. It is because one should use *Anda* or *Beliau* instead if the individual does not want to be regarded as impolite. We can only address someone *Kamu* or *Dia* if he/she is close or at least has the same age (or younger) with us. On the other hand, we use *Anda* or *Beliau* if the person we are referring to is socially distant from us or older than us. This is just one of numerous examples in Indonesian pragmatic rules.

Accordingly, it can be inferred that people do not simply talk or write without even having one goal in mind. This point of view is supported by Eggins (2004) as she stated that language use is always moved by a goal or a purpose. To accomplish the purpose in a systematic way, people use communicative acts or in other words, speech act, which means actions performed via utterances (Yule, 1996). The speech act can be categorized as “directives” (commanding and requesting), “commissives” (promising and offering), “expressive” (apologizing and thanking), “declarations” (marrying or resigning), and “representatives” (asserting and informing), as stated by Crystal (2003).

This article focuses on one type of speech act called ‘request’ which is included in the directive category. A request is defined as an act or utterance asking for or to do something. Moreover, a request can be performed in several ways: directly or indirectly, on the basis of situation and culture of the interlocutors. In the CCSARP (Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project), Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1989) described ‘directness’ as the degree to which the speaker’s illocutionary purpose is visible from the locution. There are three major levels of directness for requests which can be identified cross-linguistically: *impositives (direct)*, *conventionally indirect requests*, and *nonconventionally indirect requests*.

The nine categories ranging from the most direct to the least one are described in table 1:

Table 1. The Categories of Request Strategy

TYPE	SEMANTIC FORMULA	EXAMPLE
<i>DIRECT</i>	Mood-derivable Performative Hedged performative Locution-derivable	You go shower. I am telling you to go shower. I would like to ask you to go shower. I want you to go shower.
<i>CONVENTIONALLY INDIRECT</i>	Suggestory formula Query-preparatory	Let’s cook pasta. Can you cook pasta with <i>me</i> ?
<i>NON-CONVENTIONALLY INDIRECT</i>	Strong hint Mild <i>hint</i>	This show is boring. We’ve been <i>watching</i> this show for over two hours now.

Generally, these nine categories proposed by Blum-Kulka might still be applicable in Bahasa Indonesia. Nevertheless, this article only concerns on the indirect strategies. Since the speech act of request is potentially impolite and face threatening in an interaction since it is meant to threaten the addressee’s negative face by being ‘directive’. Therefore, face ‘negotiation’ is required if a speaker wants to avoid the hearer losing face and to minimize the threat that one will make when he/she is making a request. This is where strategies

become the ‘negotiator’. Even though there are always the choices of making a request (to be direct or indirect), being indirect is generally more preferable since it shows more polite behavior and it can increase the degree of politeness in the utterance. Therefore, this article only focuses on the ‘indirectness’ in Indonesian request strategies realization.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs mixed methods of qualitative and descriptive quantitative approach using case study design. In this research, the researcher conducted a survey using questionnaires called DCT (Discourse Completion Test). The statistics obtained from the questionnaires were used to support the qualitative analysis. This study was conducted only in the Vocational Program, University of Brawijaya. The research participants were first semester students (from academic year of 2015/2016) of Informatics Management program.

The data of this study are utterances in making request acquired from DCT (Discourse Completion Task) questionnaires filled by the participants and their responses from the interview which is conducted after obtaining data from the DCT. The instrument of collecting the data is a DCT questionnaire which is given to each participant and an interview guide for the interview session. The method of which the researcher used to collect the data was done in several steps: *designing DCT* (each question in the DCT was embedded in the situational information on requestive goal, social distance and dominance as well as contextual and psychological information, which were meant to obtain the closest possible sense to the natural speech) and *interview guideline, distributing DCT and conducting interview*. Moreover, the methods involved in analyzing the data

were *codifying* (the researcher classified and codified the utterances in each category presented in the DCT), *determining* (the researcher identified the request strategies used in each of the categories and focused on the finding of indirect strategies), and lastly *interpreting* (the researcher interpreted the indirect strategy and its influencing factors).

III. RESULT

There are 260 utterances obtained from the distributed DCT. Based on the finding, each situational category presented in the DCT has different frequency of request strategies performed by the students. The first category (situation 1 and 2) which concern is on the communication of a student to a lecturer shows that indirect requests are the most frequently used strategy. The next category (situation 3 and 4), concerning on the communication between a student and a staff, demonstrates the indirect requests as the most frequently used strategy. The third category (situation 5 and 6), which focuses on the communication of a lecturer to a student, has direct requests as its most frequently used strategy. The last category (situation 7 and 8), which entailed the communication between a senior student and a junior student, shows that direct requests are the most frequently used strategy. The following table illustrates the frequency of request strategies performed in each category:

Table 2. The Distribution of Request Strategies

Request Strategy	Evidence (found in)	Frequency of Occurrence	Percentage
Direct	Category 1 (situation 1 and 2) Category 2	95	36.5%

<i>Indirect</i>	(situation 3 and 4)	139	53.5%
	Category 3 (situation 5 and 6)		
<i>Combination (Direct and Indirect)</i>	Category 4 (situation 7 and 8)	26	10%
	Category 1 (situation 1 and 2)		
	Category 2 (situation 3 and 4)		
	Category 3 (situation 5 and 6)		
	Category 4 (situation 7 and 8)		
	Category 1 (situation 1 and 2)		
	Category 2 (situation 3 and 4)		
	Category 3 (situation 5 and 6)		
	Category 4 (situation 7 and 8)		
TOTAL		260	100%

We can see from the results in table 2 that the most frequently used strategy is indirect request. This strategy occurred in more than half of the total utterances. As stated previously, this article only focuses on indirect strategies used in the request. An indirect request is basically a strategy conducted without showing explicit signs of request or imperative, in other words, the request is realized in different speech

act. There are two categories of indirect strategies: conventionally and non-conventionally indirect. Each of these categories breaks down into different types. Conventionally indirect requests types are locution derivable, scope stating (want statement), suggestory formula and preparatory conditions. While non-conventionally indirect requests are strong hints and mild hints. Moreover, the type of indirect strategies that is mostly found is the conventionally indirect ones. From the study, there are only two types of conventionally indirect requests used in the requests, which are 'scope stating' (want statement) and 'preparatory conditions'. Table 3 displays the distribution of indirect strategies found in this study:

Table 3. The Distribution of Indirect Request Strategies and Their Linguistic Indicators

Type of Indirect request	Ling. Indicators	Evidence (found in)	Freq.	%
<i>Conventionally Indirect</i>	Scope stating (want statement)	Category 1: situation 1 and 2	38	27.3%
		Category 2: situation 3 and 4	47	33.8%
		Category 4: situation 8	1	0.7%
		Category 1: situation 1 and 2	17	12.7%
	Preparatory conditions	Category 2: situation 3 and 4	18	12.2%
		Category 3: situation 5 and 6	7	12.9%
			8	

<i>Non-conventionally Indirect</i>	Strong hints	Category 4: situation 7 and 8	4	4.3 %
		Category 3: situation 5		5.8 %
				3%
TOTAL			140	100 %

		5 and 6		
		Category 4: situation 7 and 8	8	5.80%
<i>Non-conventionally Indirect</i>	Strong hints	Category 3: situation 5	4	3%
TOTAL			140	100%

Type of Indirect request	Linguistic Indicators	Evidence (found in)	Freq	%
<i>Conventionally Indirect</i>	Scope stating (want statement)	Category 1: situation 1 and 2	38	27.30 %
		Category 2: situation 3 and 4	47	33.80 %
		Category 4: situation 8	1	0.70%
	Preparatory conditions	Category 1: situation 1 and 2	17	12.20 %
		Category 2: situation 3 and 4	18	12.90 %
		Category 3: situation	7	4.30%

From table 3, the results show that most indirect requests appeared in category 1 and category 2. This is entirely possible since the situations depicted in this category involve the communication between a student (the participant) and a lecturer (category 1), as well as a communication between a student (the participant) and a faculty staff (category 2). Both of these categories illustrated the interlocutors to be socially distant. Moreover, these categories also depicted that the hearer or the requestee is relatively more 'powerful' than the speaker or the requester, hence the choice to be indirect. However, we can see that it is also possible to use indirect strategies even if the interlocutors have close social distance or age gap. This is shown by the appearance of indirect strategies in category 4, of which the situations depicted the communication between senior student and junior. It is safe to say that politeness can be the influential factor in this case.

A. Conventionally Indirect Request

According to Blum-Kulka (1989), this category of indirect request refers to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance as conventionalized in the

language, a request 'disguised' in a question for instance. In English, "could you do..." and "would you do..." are the examples of conventionally indirect request. Bahasa Indonesia has similar form of conventionally indirect request: "*bisa gak...*" and "*mau gak...*", which in fact have the same meaning and function as "could you do.." and "would you do..." in English. In this study, the researcher only found two types of this category: scope stating and preparatory conditions.

1. Scope Stating

This type of conventionally indirect request refers to utterances expressing the speaker's intention, desire or feeling for the hearer to do something. We can see from table 3 that generally, scope stating is the most indirect strategy found in this study. We can find it in category 1 (situation 1 and 2, category 2 (situation 3 and 4) and category 4 (situation 8). The following excerpt will explicate the scope stating strategy:

Excerpt (1) (in Bahasa Indonesia)

Line 1 Bu, sebelumnya mohon maaf. Lusa kemarin saya tidak

Line 2 dapat mengikuti ujian karena sakit sehingga saya **ingin**

Line 3 **mengikuti** ujian susulan.

(VP,FC1,S1,013)

Excerpt (1) (in English)

Line 1 Bu, I am sorry. I could not attend the final test because I

Line 2 was sick two days ago, so I **want to have** a makeup test.

Excerpt (1) is taken from the first category where the situations referring to a request made by a student to a lecturer. This example (line 2-3) reveals that the speaker used the utterance '*ingin mengikuti*' (or 'want to have' in English) to make her request. Clearly, this is included as scope stating because the speaker state what she

wants from the hearer, which is to have a makeup test since could not attend the test as formerly scheduled because she was ill (mitigating device: grounder or reason).

B. Preparatory Conditions

The next type of conventionally indirect request is preparatory conditions, which generally refers to preparatory conditions or the possibility, the ability and the willingness of the act being performed. The researcher found this strategy in all categories presented in this study. This type of indirect request is usually performed by questions which are conventionalized to be a form of a request in the language. The following example will illustrate the use of this strategy in the requests:

Excerpt (2) (in Bahasa Indonesia)

Line 1 Permisi Pak. Saya Christian Immanuel dari MI, minggu lalu

Line 2 saya sakit jadi tidak bisa mengikuti ujian. **Apakah** saya

Line 3 **bisa** meminta ujian susulan?

(CI,MC1,S1,042)

Excerpt (2) (in English)

Line 1 Excuse me, Pak, I'm Christian Immanuel from MI, I was ill

Line 2 last week so I could not take the test. **Can I ask for a**

Line 3 makeup test?

Excerpt (2) is taken from category 1, which illustrates a student making a request to a lecturer. In this example, we can see an interrogative utterance used by the speaker to achieve the request goal. He said '*apakah (saya) bisa..?*' which means 'can (I) ask for..?' in English (line 2-3). In this utterance, the requester asked the ability of the requestee to do as he wanted: to give him a makeup test. Thus, it is a request masked in a question. The

mitigating device in this request is a grounder: he was not able to take the test because he was ill.

B. Non-conventionally Indirect Request

The second category of indirect request is the non-conventionally indirect. This strategy makes use of hints, which are partially referring to the object depending on contextual clues (Blum-Kulka, 1989). In regards to this study, the researcher found only one type used a request strategy: *strong hints*. There are a few utterances displaying the use of this strategy (4 utterances) and some of the strong hints are accompanied by the other request strategy.

If a speaker uses this strategy, it means his utterances consists of partial reference to elements required for performing the act, which directly pragmatically implying the act (Blum-Kulka, 1989). This strategy can be found only in category 3 of which the situations illustrate the participant acted as a lecturer making a request to a student. The following example will explicate the finding of *Strong Hints* request strategy:

Excerpt (3) (in Bahasa Indonesia)

Line 1 **Ini ketua kelasnya mana ya?** Bisa saya minta tolongin

Line 2 pinjem LCD sama speaker? Makasih ya. (EM,FC3,S6,140)

Excerpt (3) (in English)

Line 1 **Where is the class captain?** Can you please borrow an

Line 2 LCD projector and speakers? Thanks.

As explained earlier, there are some 'strong hints' in this study accompanied by other different strategy (preparatory conditions: 'can you please borrow...?'), and excerpt (3) is an example of this. However, the focus will be only to the strong hint revealed in the beginning of excerpt (3). The strong hint is shown by the use of

question (line 1): 'Where is the class captain?' ('*ini ketua kelasnya mana ya?*'). This utterance was not meant to actually ask a question expecting an answer related to the class captain's whereabouts, but it was a hint that the request was directed to the class captain. Thus, the utterance means that the speaker requested the class captain to borrow an LCD projector and speakers.

As seen in table 2, the participants of this study mostly used indirect request strategy in category 1 and 2 (a student to a lecturer and a student to a staff). There are some factors that might influence their decision. First, the social distance between the addressor and the addressee. Generally, a student is not socially close enough to his/her lecturer or a staff of a faculty (except when they are family related, for instance). As suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987), the more socially distant the interlocutors, the more polite the utterances are performed.

The next affecting factor is 'power'. The level of indirectness of a request is more or less affected by the relative power between the interlocutors. We can say that if the addressee has more 'power' than the addressor, the utterances produced by the addressor tend to be more polite. Possibly, because the addressor feels 'intimidated' over the addressee's power and therefore he/she is aware of the need to be polite.

The third factor influencing the choice of strategy is the degree of imposition made in the request. This has something to do with the relation between politeness and the addressor's concern for the addressee. In situation 2 (category 1), for example, the participants are asked to make a call to their lecturer at 7 in the morning requesting for an assignment revision. This act could possibly be a serious threat to the lecturer's face and therefore, the participants felt the need to be very polite by apologizing before stating their requests

and thanking afterwards (as found in the data, most of the participants did this). As acquired from the interview responses conducted in this study, the participants stated that it would be very impolite if they did not apologize in the beginning of the talk because they thought they have interrupted the lecturer's morning activity by calling at very early in the morning.

Respectively, politeness principles in Bahasa Indonesia also have strong connection to the speech act of request. Although there have not been standard Indonesian politeness principles (because of Indonesia's rich ethnicity and culture), we still can identify politeness or impoliteness indicators in communicating. Pranowo (2008) stated some politeness indicators that can often be seen in Indonesia language use (including the speech act of request) such as the use of *tolong* (please) in requests or commands, the use of *terima kasih* (thank you) after or even before the request or command is fulfilled, the use of *Bapak/Ibu* (Sir/Ma'am) instead of *Anda* (you) and the use of *Beliau* (a more polite form of 'he/she') instead of *Dia* (the regular form of 'he/she') as third person singular addressing term of a respected person, and the use of *maaf* (sorry) for utterances that are potentially face threatening to the hearer (including request and command). As he suggested, Indonesian people highly respect politeness in communication. In making requests, Indonesians often use those politeness indicators in their utterances, considering that they might potentially threaten the hearer's face by requesting. Regardless the speaker's ethnicity, these Indonesian politeness indicators are considered to be very common to use in requests.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study indicates that the participants mostly used indirect strategies to achieve

their requestive goals. From 260 utterances, 139 of them (53.5%) showed the use of indirect requests (scope stating, in particular). Moreover, these strategies can be seen in almost of categories and situations presented in the DCT (all are related to academic sphere).

Thus, it is safe to conclude that the participants took social distance, relative power and the degree of imposition into account when they were making the requests in academic sphere, hence the choice of indirect strategy.

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