

An Analysis of the Speech Act of Request by Male and Female Learners of English

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Abstract

The speech act of request is a common speech act used in every day interactions. However, because of its nature to impose on other people, it is very important that people select the appropriate strategy in making requests. There are several factors that may influence the production of requests, one of them is the gender of the speaker. This study is an attempt investigate how Indonesian male and female learners of English make English requests.

To collect the data, a questionnaire in the form of a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) is distributed to the respondents. The DCT consists of six scenarios that reflect different social situations, each with different combinations of close / distant social distance, and high / equal / low power between the interlocutors. From this, the respondents are to produce requests based on the different social situations presented in each of the scenarios. The DCT is distributed to students of the English Language and Culture Department at Bunda Mulia University. The total number of respondents is 70 people, which consists of 35 males and 35 females.

The findings of the study reveal that both gender groups employ similar request strategies and modifications throughout the six scenarios, with only slight differences. First of all, the most frequently used request strategy is the query preparatory. This strategy, modified by questions and modals, is the preferred strategy for both male and female students. Additionally, in terms of modifiers, the most preferred downgraders for both gender groups are politeness markers please and supportive reasons. From these request strategies and modifications, it can be said that the females are more indirect than the males in their production of requests.

Keywords:

Request, gender, directness

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The language people use in their daily interactions with one another may vary in linguistic form depending on numerous factors such as the purpose of the

interaction, the people involved, the time and place, and many other factors. One factor that may contribute to this difference is the gender of the speaker.

The topic of gender and language has been discussed frequently over the past decades and many claims have been made regarding the difference between male and female speech. One such claim is the one made by Holmes (2008: 157) who states that “the linguistic forms used by women and men contrast – to different degrees – in all speech communities.” Similarly, Lakoff (1986: 414) mentions that “... in a particular context, women and men may not express the same thing in the same way.” She goes on to explain that “women’s language differs from the standard in being more nondirect, more capable of expressing emotion and more conservative.” These are but a few examples of the difference between male and female speech. Many other claims have been made; nevertheless, in this paper the difference is limited to the way males and females perform the speech act of request.

A request, according to Trosborg (1995: 187), “is an illocutionary 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.” In other words, a request is an act where a speaker asks something of the hearer that is beneficial for the speaker. It may be in the form of an object, action, information, etc. Requests are considered to be a sensitive type of speech act because they put certain imposition on the hearer. The degree of imposition, or “the degree with which the requester intrudes on the requestee ... may vary from small favours to demanding acts” (Trosborg, 1995: 188). Thus, in order to minimize the degree of imposition, speakers must apply certain strategies in making requests. There are several strategies that people may use, ranging from indirect to more direct request strategies.

In relation to gender, women may carry out requests differently compared to men since it has been generally claimed that women often use more polite forms of language than men. Various studies have been conducted over the years to explore this assertion. One such study is the one done by Hadisantosa (2005). She conducted a research to study the request strategies used by American native speakers of English living in Jakarta in terms of directness and indirectness within

a family interaction setting. The result of her study showed that fathers are more indirect in their requests to their children compared to mothers. This supports the claim of the difference in requests performed by men and women, although it is different with the general claim that women tend to use more indirect language than men. Another research by Rundquist (1992) explored the relationship between gender and indirectness in relation to flouting Grice's maxims of conversation. The findings revealed that men flout more than women in the situations examined. Hence, similar to Hadisantosa's conclusion, Rundquist also concluded that men used more indirect speech than women. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the speech act analyzed in this study is not limited to requests only.

Based on the studies mentioned above, the writer has become interested in the topic of gender, politeness, and request and decided to do a research on this topic. This research is an attempt to see how the male and female second language learners, more specifically Indonesian learners of English, make English requests, and to see whether the general claims on gender difference hold true. That is, whether females really do use more polite and indirect forms of language compared to males. In addition, it should be noted that the article presented here is a part of a bigger research previously conducted by the writer (Nugroho, 2012). In this article, the problem formulation and findings are more limited.

1.2 Statement of Problems and Research Questions

As a social creature, human beings cannot live alone and may often need assistance from other people. In order to get assistance, there are several things people can do and one of them is to make a request. Request is a frequently performed speech act and is very common in everyday interaction. It would not be surprising to find that everyone makes at least one or two requests everyday. Nevertheless, because of its nature to impose on other people, the speech act of request is considered to be an act which threatens the hearer's negative face want, or "the want of every person that their actions be unimpeded by others" (Brown and Levinson, 1992: 62). To minimize the effect of such imposition, it is important that the requester chooses the proper strategy in making a request. The

choice of the strategy may vary depending the speaker's gender. It has been generally claimed that women tend to use more polite and indirect forms of language compared to men. Therefore, it is possible that the request strategies used by men will differ from those used by women. From this, the writer formulates the following research question:

“How do the Indonesian male and female learners of English make English requests?”

The research question is then divided into more specific sub questions as follows:

1. What kinds of request strategies are most frequently used by Indonesian male and female learners of English?
2. Do the Indonesian female learners use more polite and indirect request strategies compared to the male learners?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Gender, Politeness, and Request

Concerning gender and politeness, it is the general contention that women often use more polite linguistic expressions compared to men. Women's preference over the use of more polite linguistic expressions is also apparent in the way they make requests, that is women make more compound requests than men. When you add a qualifier and other terms to soften a request, you are basically performing a compound request (Pearson, 1985: 188). Compound requests are viewed as being less assertive and are part of feminine linguistic forms. They are usually longer than direct requests because they add various modifiers to soften the impact of the request. Thus, females are more likely to make requests using more words than males because females tend to make compound requests while male prefer making direct ones. For example, if you wish to tell someone to be quiet, you can do it in a direct manner by saying “*Be quiet,*” or you can make a compound request by saying it like “*Please, be quiet,*” or “*Could you be quiet, please?*” The first example is a request most likely uttered by a man, whereas the latter is probably uttered by a woman.

Similarly, Holmes (2008: 277-278) mentions that “girls and women tend to favour more polite and less direct forms of directives than males.” For instance,

one study of doctors' directives to patients showed that male doctors typically used imperatives (e.g. *eat more fruit*), while the female doctors used less direct forms (e.g. *maybe you could try fresh fruit for dessert*). Furthermore, it has been noted that "women not only use less direct forms of directives, but they also receive less direct forms." So, a female patient will most likely receive a less direct form of directive compared to a male patient.

2.2 Request Strategies

There are several strategies that people can employ when performing the speech act of request. People can choose to make direct requests or indirect ones. Indirect requests are commonly considered more polite. This claim is supported by Leech's (1983: 108) assertion that the degree of politeness will increase when the kind of illocution is more indirect. Leech argues that indirect illocutions tend to be more polite because of two reasons. First, indirect illocutions increase the degree of optionality. Second, when an illocution is indirect, its force tends to be more diminished and tentative compared to direct illocutions. Nonetheless, in her study about directness and politeness in requests, Blum-Kulka (1987, cited in Janarto, 2000: 31) argues that Leech's argument is not always true. She proposes that indirectness needs to be modified by distinguishing them into two types: *conventional* and *nonconventional*. She asserts that politeness can be associated with conventional indirectness, but not necessarily with the nonconventional one. From this, Blum-Kulka et al (1989, cited in Jalilifar et al, 2011: 791) have proposed a list of nine possible request strategies which can be seen below:

a) Direct level

1. "Mood derivable: Utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force" (e.g., *Turn off your cellphone.*).
2. "Performatives: Utterances in which the illocutionary force is explicitly named" (e.g., *I order you to turn off your cellphone.*).
3. "Hedged performatives: Utterances in which naming of the illocutionary force is modified by hedging expressions" (e.g., *I would like to ask you to turn off your cellphone.*).

4. "Obligation statements: Utterances which state the obligation of the hearer to carry out the act" (e.g., *You must submit your assignment tomorrow.*).
5. "Want statements: Utterances which state the speaker's desire that the hearer carries out the act" (e.g., *I want you to open the door for me.*).

b) Conventionally indirect level

6. "Suggestory formulae: Utterances which contain a suggestion to do something" (e.g., *Why don't you take out the garbage?*).
7. "Query-preparatory: Utterances containing reference to preparatory conditions (e.g., ability, willingness) as conventionalized in any specific language" (e.g., *Could you turn off the AC?*).

c) Non-conventionally indirect level

8. "Strong hints: Utterances containing partial reference to object or element needed for the implementation of the act" (e.g., *This music is very loud.*).
9. "Mild hints: Utterances that make no reference to the request proper (or any of its elements) but are interpretable as requests by context" (e.g., *I'm married* (in response to a man trying to flirt with a woman)).

In addition to the nine request strategies described above, the impact of a request can be softened or mitigated through the use of internal modifying devices often referred to as *downgraders*. Trosborg (1995: 209-214) classifies these downgraders into two main types, *syntactic downgraders* and *lexical/phrasal downgraders*:

1) Syntactic Downgraders

- a) Questions: By using a question, the request can be more polite compared to a direct statement.

Example: *Can you hand me that screwdriver?*

- b) Past tense / negation: Using the past tense of a verb or negation in a request can also mitigate the impact of a request.

Example: *Could you erase the whiteboard, please?*

Couldn't you erase the whiteboard, please?

c) Tag questions: When a direct statement is followed by a tag question, it makes it seem like the speaker is asking for the hearer's consent, thus softening the impact of the request.

Example: *Get me my book, will you?*

d) Conditional clause: By adding a conditional clause to the request, the speaker can make the request less demanding since conditionals deal with circumstances rather than reality.

Example: *Can I borrow your car tomorrow night, if you don't mind lending it to me?*

e) Embedding: A request which is embedded with a clause that shows the speaker's attitude to the request such as tentativeness, delight, thanks, etc., sounds more polite than a statement without an embedding clause. Moreover, it is usually also made in connection with a conditional clause.

Example: *I wonder if you can open the window for me.
I'd be very grateful if you could lend me your car tonight.
I thought that maybe you can help me with the dishes later.*

f) Ing-form: By using the present continuous tense, the requester emphasizes the embedded clause which expresses the speaker's attitude in the request.

Example: *I was wondering whether you could teach me how to solve this math problem.*

g) Modals: Modal verbs in a request can be used to express tentativeness.

Example: *May I borrow your dictionary?*

2) Lexical / Phrasal Downgraders

a) Politeness markers: A politeness marker can be added to the request to show deference to the hearer and make the request more polite.

Example: *Turn on the lights, please.
Would you be so kind as to lower the volume a little?*

b) Consultative device: By using expressions that consult the hearer, the speaker is asking for the hearer's consent which in turn makes the request more polite.

Example: *Do you think that you could return my book tomorrow?*

Maybe you *wouldn't mind* accompanying me to the post office later this afternoon.

- c) Downtoner: Modifiers such as *just, simply, perhaps, possibly, rather*, etc. can be used to downtone the degree of imposition of the request.

Example: Wait *just* a moment, please.

Perhaps you could send this letter for me.

Could you *possibly* be quiet for a few seconds?

- d) Understatement: Some expressions can be used to decrease or minimize some aspects of the request, which in turn lowers the impact of the request.

Example: Could you lower the volume *a little bit*?

Can I borrow your motorcycle *for a while*?

- e) Hedge: Some adverbials such as *kind of, sort of, somehow, and so on, more or less*, etc. can be used to soften the propositional content of the request.

Example: Would you *kind of* move out of the way?

Could you *somehow* submit your assignment by tomorrow?

Could you *sort of* come early tomorrow morning?

- f) Hesitator: By showing hesitation before making a request, the speaker can show that he / she is uneasy about making the request.

Example: I *er, erm*

I don't suppose you could *umm, er* ...

- g) Interpersonal marker: Expressions like *you know, you see, I mean*, etc. help to attract the hearer's attention, interest, understanding, etc., and expressions such as *right?, okay?* etc., shows that the speaker is trying to appeal to the hearer's consent. Hence, interpersonal markers are basically used to establish and maintain a good interpersonal relationship between the interlocutors.

Example: You're coming to my birthday party this Saturday, *right?*

Please submit your papers at the latest this afternoon, *okay?*

Other than using these internal modifications, Trosborg (1995: 215-219) also states that people can mitigate their requests by means of *external modifications*¹ such as the ones below:

a) Preparators: There are various ways for a person to prepare their request.

- Preparing the content: the speaker can prepare the request by giving a brief 'introduction' or 'setting' that sets up the context for the request. For example, if the speaker needs to borrow a car, the speaker can start by talking about the unusable condition of the speaker's car.
- Preparing the speech act: the speaker can let the hearer know that he / she is about to make a request.

Example: There is something I want you to do for me.
 I need you to do me a favor.

- Checking on availability: the speaker can check on the availability of the hearer to make sure that he /she will be able to fulfill the request.

Example: Are you preoccupied at the moment?
 Do you have a second?

- Getting a pre-commitment: getting a pre-commitment is another way to ensure that the speaker will not refuse the request that will be made.

Example: Can I ask you for a favor?
 Would you mind helping me out?

b) Disarmers: The speaker can appeal to the hearer's attitude and make him / her 'willing' to fulfill the request by prefacing the request with certain disarming expressions.

Example: I'm sorry to disturb you but ...
 I hope I'm not bothering you but ...

c) Sweeteners: One way of making the hearer 'happy' and 'willing' to do the request is by flattering the hearer appropriately.

Example: I've never know anybody as generous as you (to someone whom the speaker wants to borrow money from).

¹ For further reference on external modifications, see Faerch and Kasper, 1989.

- d) Supportive reasons: By giving some reasons that support the request, it makes the request more justified and can make the hearer more willing to fulfill the request.

Example: Do you mind picking up the kids after school? I have a meeting and I will go home late.

- e) Cost minimizing: The speaker can persuade the hearer to do the request by mentioning some things that can decrease the cost of the request.

Example: Could I borrow your notes? I promise to return it before we go home today.

- f) Promise of a reward: The speaker can promise to give the hearer a reward if the request is fulfilled to persuade the hearer and make the request more enticing.

Example: If you don't tell mom about last night's party, I'll do the dishes for one week.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Object of the Study

The participants that are used as the object of the study consist of students majoring in the English Language and Culture Department at Bunda Mulia University. The participants include students from all semesters, i.e. semesters 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9. There are more or less 130 students in the entire department; however, more than 65% are females. To make a fair comparison of the request production of male and female students, only 70 students ended up being used as the object of the study. This total number of respondents used in this study is comprised of 35 male and 35 female students.

3.2 Questionnaire

The data on the speech act of request produced by the male and female students are collected using a questionnaire, more specifically a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). This is an instrument originally developed by Blum-Kulka (1982) to compare the speech act realization patterns of native speakers and learners (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984: 198). The DCT "consists of incomplete discourse

sequences that represent socially differentiated situations. Each discourse sequence presents a short description of the situation, specifying the setting, the social distance between the interlocutors and their status relative to each other, followed by an incomplete dialogue.” The respondents are asked to complete the dialogue, thereby providing the necessary speech act.

There have been many variations of the DCT made to cater to various studies of different speech acts. The DCT used in this study is also a modification from the original DCT made by Blum-Kulka, and from another DCT used in a study by Esmaeili (2011). This is done in order to adapt to the purpose of the current study.

The current DCT consists of six different scenarios that represent different social situations. Each scenario depicts a situation with different combinations of close / distant social distance, and high / low / equal power between the interlocutors. Unlike the original DCT by Blum-Kulka where the scenarios are in the form of incomplete dialogues, the scenarios in this DCT are in the form of descriptions. For every scenario, there is a short description of the setting of the situation. From that description, the respondents are to make requests based on the given context.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

This section briefly looks into the procedure in analyzing the data. The data is taken from the requests made by the respondents in the DCT. The data is first separated between the male and female respondents. Next, the data on the request is classified based on the nine request strategies proposed by Blum-Kulka et al (1989). This is to determine what kinds of strategies are used by the male and female students, and whether the request strategies used by the respondents are direct or indirect. Moreover, after classifying the requests based on the nine main strategies, the requests are further analyzed using the various internal and external modifications proposed by Trosborg (1995). Finally, after all of the data have been analyzed accordingly, the result of the analysis of the male and female requests is summarized.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Request Strategies

This section presents the result of the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) in terms of the request strategies used by the students. It has been mentioned in the previous chapters that there are nine request strategies proposed by Blum-Kulka et al (1989) that people can employ, ranging from the most direct to the most indirect strategy. The result is separated between the male and female respondents. Table 1 below summarizes the result of the male students' request strategy, while the summary of the female students' request strategies is presented in table 2. For each of the tables, there is a total of 210 requests that are made, which is from the six scenarios and thirty five respondents (35 respondents x 6 scenarios = 210 requests). The *S* and number at the top of the tables such as *S1* represents the scenario from the DCT. So *S1* stands for scenario one, *S2* for scenario two, and so on.

Table 1 Request Strategy - Males

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total	%
Mood derivable	5	2	6	3	17	21	54	25.71
Performatives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hedged performatives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Obligation statements	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Want statements	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.48
Suggestory formulae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Query preparatory	29	32	28	32	18	13	152	72.38
Strong hints	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	0.48
Mild hints	1	1	-	-	-	-	2	0.95

Table 2 Request Strategy - Females

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total	%
Mood derivable	-	3	7	-	16	21	47	22.38
Performatives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hedged performatives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Obligation statements	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Want statements	1	-	-	2	-	-	3	1.43
Suggestory formulae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Query preparatory	34	32	27	33	19	12	157	74.76
Strong hints	-	-	1	-	-	2	3	1.43
Mild hints	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Comparing the request strategies of the male and female students, it can be seen that in general the male respondents made slightly more direct requests than the female ones. This is shown from the number of direct requests made by the male students using mood derivable and want statement strategies, which totals to 55 tokens of requests (54 mood derivable and 1 want statement). As for the female respondents, they only made 50 requests, which are classified as direct (47 mood derivable and 3 want statement). Moreover, the females also made slightly more indirect requests compared to the males, which can be seen from the total of 160 tokens of indirect requests (157 query preparatory and 3 strong hints) as opposed to the total of 155 indirect requests made by the male respondents (152 query preparatory, 1 strong hints, and 2 mild hints). In short, the male students made more requests using direct strategies, while the female students produced more indirect requests.

In addition to the total number of requests, the distribution of the request strategies among the six scenarios is also compared between the male and female respondents. As has been stated above, the query preparatory is the most frequently selected request strategy in scenarios one through five, while the most dominant strategy for scenario six is mood derivable. This is true of both male and female students. Both gender groups have very similar tendencies in choosing the request strategies, as can be seen from the distribution of the query preparatory and mood derivable in all six scenarios. The total number of requests using these strategies among the six scenarios is very similar, with only very slight

differences. For instance, in scenario one, the males produced 29 requests using the query preparatory strategy, whereas the females made 34. In scenario two, both male and female students made the exact same number of requests with the query preparatory strategy. The other scenarios display similar conditions of slight differences in the total number of requests using the same strategy. Hence, it can be concluded that both gender groups tend to favor similar request strategies in the scenarios analyzed.

Another point to compare is the type of request strategies selected by the two gender groups. As is shown in the tables above, five out of the nine request strategies are used by the male students, while only four are used by the female students. In other words, the males are more varied in their request strategies compared to the females. Nonetheless, there is only one different strategy used by the male students that is not used by the females, which is mild hints; but even then, that strategy is only used in two tokens of the males' request. So, we can only say that the male group is slightly more varied in their selection of request strategy compared to the female group.

To summarize, there are three aspects to compare between the two gender group's realizations of requests. First, the males made more direct requests, while the women made more indirect ones. Second, in terms of distribution, it would seem that both gender groups tend to favor similar request strategies for each of the six scenarios examined. Both men and women favor the same type of strategy in one scenario, and similarly favor another one in another scenario. Lastly, the type of request strategy the male students selected is slightly more varied than the ones chosen by the female students. The males chose five out of the nine proposed request strategies, as opposed to the four strategies selected by the females. Nevertheless, this different strategy is found in only two of the male students' requests.

4.2 Internal and External Modifications

After analyzing the students' main request strategies, this next section examines the students' use of various modifying devices. These modifiers are used to soften or mitigate the impact of the request.

The first internal modification to be examined is the syntactic downgraders. The result of the male group's use of syntactic downgrader can be seen in Table 3 below. On the other hand, the female group's result can be seen in Table 4.

Table 3 Total Syntactic Downgraders - Males

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Question	29	31	29	32	18	12	151
Past tense / negation	2	14	6	8	7	4	41
Tag question	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Conditional clause	1	2	0	1	0	1	5
Embedding	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ing-forms	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Modals	28	31	28	32	18	12	149
Total	60	78	63	73	43	29	346

Table 4 Total Syntactic Downgraders - Females

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Question	34	32	27	33	18	12	156
Past tense / negation	8	14	6	14	7	6	55
Tag question	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Conditional clause	1	2	0	3	0	0	6
Embedding	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Ing-forms	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Modals	34	32	27	33	18	12	156
Total	77	80	60	84	43	30	374

Looking at both gender groups' use of syntactic downgraders, it is found that more syntactic downgraders are used by the female group compared to the male group. The female students used a total of 374 modifiers in their overall requests, while the male students only used 346. Moreover, the females also used more types of downgraders; that is, they used five out of the seven types of modifiers, while the males only used four.

Additionally, in terms of distribution, both male and female students used similar syntactic downgraders in all of the scenarios. For example, for scenarios

one through four, most requests are made in question form and using modals. For scenarios five and six, both gender groups employed the exact same number of question and modals (18 question and modals in scenario 5, and 12 question and modals in scenario 6). On the other hand, the male and female students used a slightly different amount of past tense form for scenarios one and four. In scenario one, the males employed 2 past tense form in their requests, while the females used 8. In scenario 4, the male students used 8 past tense form, whereas the female students used 14. Thus, for both scenarios, it can be seen that the female group employed more past tense downgraders compared to the male group, and the difference for both scenarios is 6. Also, in scenario one, the female respondents used a little more modals in their request compared to the male respondents; that is, 34 for the females and 28 for the males. As for the other downgraders such as conditional clause and embedding, the difference in their distribution is relatively small. Therefore, for the distribution of the syntactic downgraders in the six scenarios examined, it can be concluded that both gender groups have similar tendencies in using the various modifiers for each scenario.

The next internal modification, lexical / phrasal downgraders, is explored in this section. There are seven types of modifiers that are classified in this group. The result of the male students' use of these modifiers is summarized in Table 5, and the female students' results can be seen in Table 6.

Table 5 Total Lexical / Phrasal Downgraders - Males

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Politeness markers	4	20	8	5	20	18	75
Consultative device	2	1	-	1	-	1	5
Downtoner	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Understatement	-	3	-	1	-	-	4
Hedge	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hesitator	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Interpersonal marker	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Total	6	24	8	7	20	20	85

Table 6 Total Lexical / Phrasal Downgraders - Females

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Politeness markers	5	19	9	4	22	21	80
Consultative device	2	5	2	6	-	2	17
Downtoner	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Understatement	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Hedge	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hesitator	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Interpersonal marker	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	7	25	11	10	22	23	98

Comparing the two gender groups' frequency of lexical / phrasal downgraders used in their requests, it can be seen that the female group used a little more of these modifiers than the male group. The total usage of downgraders for the female students is 98, while the total for the males is 85. This difference in total is due to the different usage of the various modifiers. That is, the males used politeness marker in 75 of their requests, while the females used 80. There are 5 requests by the male group that employs consultative device, and 17 requests for the females. Understatement is found in 4 of the male's requests, but it is only found in 1 of the females'. Finally, only the male students employed interpersonal markers in their requests, but it is only used once.

For the distribution of the downgraders, there are some instances that show similarities in the use of the modifiers by both gender groups, but there are also some that slightly differ. For example, the politeness marker is used in all of the scenarios for both male and female students, and the total is also similar for each scenario. To be exact, there are 4 requests made by the males, and 5 by the females that use politeness markers in scenario one. As for scenario two, the males made 20, while the females produced 19 requests with politeness marker. The other scenarios with this politeness marker display the same tendencies for both gender groups, with only slight differences in the amount of usage. On the other hand, the consultative device is employed a little differently by the male and female students in terms of frequency. For the females, this downgrader is used in all of the scenarios but scenario five; but for the males, it is not used in scenarios

three and five. Moreover, in scenarios two and four, this modifier is only used in 1 request in each of the scenarios for the males, but it appears in 5 and 6 of the females' requests for scenarios two and four respectively. Another difference is in the use of understatement, in which it is found in scenarios two and four for the males, but it is only found in scenario two for the females. Lastly, the males made 1 request with interpersonal marker, which is found in scenario six, while the females did not use it in their requests in any of the scenarios. To sum up, there are some similarities and differences in the distribution of the lexical / phrasal downgrader for the male and female students. The similarity is apparent from the politeness marker that is used similarly in all scenarios by both gender groups. As for the difference, it can be seen from the different usage of the consultative device, understatement, and interpersonal marker.

After looking into the internal modifications, this next part analyzes the external modifications used by the students to modify their requests. There are six external modifiers in total, and the result of their use by each gender group can be viewed in tables 7 and 8 below.

Table 7 Total External Modifications - Males

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Preparators	3	1	1	1	1	-	7
Disarmers	2	17	1	11	-	3	34
Sweeteners	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supportive reasons	12	26	22	30	6	5	101
Cost minimizing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Promise of a reward	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	17	44	24	42	7	8	142

Table 8 Total External Modifications - Females

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Preparators	-	-	-	4	1	-	5
Disarmers	2	25	1	9	-	3	40
Sweeteners	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supportive reasons	12	24	21	30	7	4	98
Cost minimizing	2	-	-	1	-	-	3
Promise of a reward	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	16	49	22	44	8	7	146

Comparing the two gender groups' use of these external modifications, the results show that the total number of modifiers used by both groups is very similar, with a total of 142 external modifications for the male respondents, and 146 for the female ones. Moreover, the differences for each of the modifiers are also not very big. For example, the males used supportive reason in 101 of their requests, while the females it in 98 requests. For the disarmer, the female students employed it slightly more often than the male students, i.e. in 40 requests as opposed to 34 requests. Another difference can be seen from the female students' use of cost minimizing in their requests, whereas the males did not use it in any of their requests. However, the females only used it in 3 of their requests. In summary, the female group made requests using slightly more external modifications than the male group, both in terms of total and in terms of variation of the modifiers.

Another aspect to compare between the male and female students is the distribution of the modifiers in the six scenarios. Overall, both gender groups used the modifiers similarly, with only few exceptions. First of all, they are similar in the use of the supportive reason modification, which is found in all of the six scenarios. In each of the scenario, both male and female students used a similar amount of this modifier. For instance, in scenario one, both males and females made 12 requests which is modified by supportive reason; while in scenario two, there are 26 requests with this modifier for the males, and 24 for the females. This is also alike for the case of the disarmer modification, where in each of the scenario, both groups used similar amounts of this modifier. The difference lies in

the distribution of the preparator modifier. For the males, it is found relatively evenly in scenarios one through five; but for the females, it is found in their requests in scenarios four and five only. Additionally, the female students made requests using cost minimizing modifications in scenarios one and four, while the male students did not use this modifier in any of their requests. In short, the male and female students' distribution of the external modifications are generally alike. This can be seen from the distribution of the supportive reason and disarmer modifier. The slight difference is found in the use of the preparator and cost minimizing modifications.

5. Conclusion

From the summary of all the points mentioned above, the research questions can be answered. First of all, for the question of what is the most frequently used request strategy; the answer is the query preparatory. This is the most preferred strategy probably because it is the most commonly taught form for making requests, especially using questions and modals. This strategy, modified by questions and modals, is the preferred strategy for both male and female students. Additionally, in terms of modifiers, the most preferred downgraders for both gender groups are politeness markers *please* and supportive reasons. Secondly, to answer the question of whether women use more polite and indirect forms of request strategy, it can be concluded that in general the female respondents do use more polite and indirect forms of requests, which can be seen from the total use of the query preparatory and other indirect requests strategies which are higher than the males. Hence, the answer is yes, the females are more indirect, while the males are more direct in their production of requests. This is also reflected in the use of the different modifications of the requests, where the total of modifiers used by the female respondents is also higher than the male respondents.

Other than the summary of the findings described above, there are two additional arguments that need to be discussed, more specifically those related to the various claims concerning gender, politeness, and requests. Firstly, in relation to the claim that women in general are more polite and less direct than men; it can be said that this claim is generally true, even in the context of making requests.

This is apparent in the way the female students in this study employed more indirect requests, and modified their requests with more modifiers than the male students. This also supports the assertion that females make requests using more words than men, or in other words, make more compound requests (Pearson, 1985: 188).

Lastly, it has been mentioned in the previous chapter that imperatives are commonly used between people who know each other well, or to subordinates; while declaratives and interrogatives, including hints, tend to be used between those who are less familiar with one another (Holmes, 2008: 277). Concerning this claim, there are instances where this is true, such as in scenario two where the *query preparatory* is mostly used because the hearer is a stranger. Furthermore, the *mood derivable* request strategy, which can be considered imperatives, is most often used in scenario six where the speaker has higher power over the hearer. From this, it can be concluded that the findings in this study somewhat support this claim.

In conclusion, the descriptions above have summarized how the male and female respondents in this study make English requests. The findings also show that some of the general claims regarding male and female language, more specifically concerning requests, are somewhat true. Nevertheless, the findings of this research is not to be considered a generalization on how Indonesian male and female learners of English make English requests, seeing as the number of respondents used in this study is relatively small, i.e. only 35 males and 35 females. Further researches involving a much bigger sample need to be conducted in order to further support the findings and conclusion made in this study.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Section A

Background Information

Please complete the following information in the space provided.

- Name : _____
 - Age : _____ years old
 - Gender : Male () Female ()
 - Semester : _____
-

Section B

Discourse Completion Test

Please read the following scenarios carefully and write down what you would say if you were in these situations.

Scenario 1

You are a college student. One day, you missed class because you were sick. The next day, you ask one of your classmates, a very close friend, to lend you yesterday's lecture notes.

You would say: _____

Scenario 2

You are a college student living in a dormitory. One night, you are studying hard for an exam, but the student next door is playing music really loudly and it is very disturbing. You do not know the student, but you decide to ask him to turn down the music.

You would say: _____

Scenario 3

You are a student living with your parents. You want to ask some money from your mother because you have no more money.

You would say: _____

Scenario 4

You are a college student. One day, your little sister got very sick and your parents are out of town. You ask your professor for an extension on your paper so you can take care of your little sister.

You would say: _____

Scenario 5

You are a parent. You are carrying a lot of things and you ask your son to open the door for you.

You would say: _____

Scenario 6

You are a lecturer. One day during class, one of your student's mobile phone rings. You ask your student to turn off the mobile phone.

You would say: _____
