

Requestive Perspectives and Conventions: Exploring Language Proficiency Influence Among Saudi EFL Learners

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Abstract—This paper investigated the pragma-linguistic competence of Saudi EFL learners in expressing requests and how high achievers (HAs) and low achievers (LAs) differ in this regard. The main goals of the study were to investigate the genres of requests that these groups use and to identify the matter and manner conventions that separate their pragmatic competence. The study applied a quantitative cross-sectional design with a total sample size of 253 Saudi EFL learners. Data were collected using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and analysed through statistical measures like Pearson's Chi-Square. The research showed that HAs and LAs had markedly different use of request strategies. HAs mostly used inclusive and hearer-oriented requests (30.0% and 31.17%, respectively), while LAs preferred speaker-oriented requests (50.60%). A considerable discrepancy among the uses of inclusive requests was found, with HAs utilising this strategy much more than LAs, probably showing a higher pragmalinguistic competence among the higher achievers. The study, therefore, shows that the pragmatics of learning English should receive greater attention and more extensive types of request strategies and cultural considerations should be taught. To target the imbalance between HAs and LAs, teachers can incorporate immersive learning and cultural teaching methods.

Index Terms—requestive perspectives, pragmalinguistics, Saudi EFL, language proficiency

I. INTRODUCTION

Speech acts include actions as well as words (Asif, 2017). These behaviours show several conventions for communicating requests, appreciation, regrets, praises, and rejections. Although speech acts are common to all cultures, their particular forms differ. An increasing focus on cross-cultural communication has brought pragmatic capability into focus, in addition to language abilities. As speaking multiple languages becomes the standard in our society, the realisation of speech acts by bilinguals has grown in interest. Speaking behaviours are culturally particular; therefore, language learners might need help to execute them correctly. Considering that Saudi Arabia is among the countries with multilingual and multiethnic settings, pragmatics understanding is crucial to the success of Saudi EFL learners in English contexts. The core difficulty for these speech behaviours is to become familiar with the linguistic conventions to follow the community rules and, as a result, attain pragmalinguistic competence (El-Dakhs et al., 2023).

Speech acts are a significant component of language use; they vary from merely informative to factual. Searle (1979), as cited in Alqarawi (2018), classified speech acts into five categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Assertives show the speaker's point of view about something true; directives are involved when the speaker tries to modify the hearer's behaviour; commissive statements represent promises of future actions; expressive clauses indicate what the speaker feels or emotions; and declarations are used to change reality based on the speaker's words.

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According to these classes, the speaker's part of speech under directives is an attempt to move the addressee's behaviour (Al-Hassaani & Al-Saani, 2022; Alshakhi, 2019). In this research, requestive speech acts are given the key role due to their pivotal role in communication and the challenges they cause to beginner Saudi EFL learners.

Requestive speech acts are one of the most important fields within pragmatics skills proficiency. Requests are used when asking someone to do or not do something and conveyed requests depend on one's competence in being direct, polite, and culturally appropriate. Saudi EFL learners may find learning the English language tricky due to the varying politeness, customs and social norms as opposed to a speaker of native English. This study focuses on investigating the linguistic and cultural factors affecting how Saudi students use English in different situations concerning the function of requestive speech acts by Saudi EFL Students. This study is expected to contribute to an improved understanding of how Saudi EFL learners acquire pragmatic skills and as a source of useful information for teachers and researchers in the field of EFL. Based on the study objectives, the following research questions are pursued in this paper:

- a. How do Saudi EFL learners with high English proficiency (HAs) differ from those with low proficiency (LAs) in their use of request strategies, particularly regarding inclusivity, impersonal requests, speaker-oriented requests, and hearer-oriented requests?
- b. What are the most common conventions of means and forms used by high achievers (HAs) and low achievers (LAs) in request acts, and what are the statistically significant differences between these groups?
- c. To what extent do social and cultural factors contribute to the variations in requestive speech acts among Saudi EFL learners, and how do these factors influence the pragmatic competence of high achievers (HAs) and low achievers (LAs)?

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A. Key Dimensions in the Study of Request in Foreign Language Learning

Countless studies have been dedicated to investigating requestive speech acts in the language use of Arabic and non-Arabic EFL learners. Al-Otaibi (2016), for example, contrasted the request speech act in Persian and English. In this regard, the direct statements from a couple of chosen Persian and English TV dramas were transcribed and ranked according to the level of directness. The research showed that the requirements of Persians and Americans were usually direct and assertive. Al-Momani (2009) showed the difference between British English and Kuwaiti Arabic in the speech act of request. Over 500 participants provide data using the mixed approaches methodology. The results showed that the Kuwaiti and the British participants used the "query preparatory" approach the most frequently.

Additionally, power as a personal trait was reflected in fulfilling the parties' needs. The participants opted for an indirect approach when the speaker had great power. Along with the cross-cultural investigation, much interlingual research was carried out. Bibi et al. (2021) researched types of English requests made by Costa Rican undergraduate students as the most effective ones, for example. In the survey, people consider the modal auxiliaries such as "would you mind" or "could you" to be more polite than other alternatives.

The students were likewise accurately assessed the amount "of the appropriateness of other structures, including as imperatives, interrogatives, and desire expressions" (Hamdi, 2023, p. 58). The findings, a testament to the meticulous work of the researchers, demonstrated that, via exposure to a foreign language, EFL learners may acquire a sufficient degree of pragmatic ability. In the same vein, Qadha et al. (2021) looked at how native speakers of Australian English and Indonesian English realised request speech acts differently. Data were obtained using observation and DCTs. Results revealed that both groups made both "direct and indirect requests" (Casil et al., 2018, p. 68). Nonetheless, the native speakers favoured using more declarative statements, whereas the "EFL learners tended to use more interrogative ones" (Jorda, 2005, p. 3). Besides, EFL students often used more honorifics and attractors than native speakers.

Many researchers in the Arab world have looked at the speech act of request (Ali et al., 2019; Al-Qarni, 2023; Jahara et al., 2021), however not according to the degree of directness as this study does. Relevant to this work are A-Qari (2017), Alsalem (2024), and A-Qari (2021). A-Qari (2017) looked at how native speakers of Saudi Arabic, Saudi English as a Foreign Language students, and native speakers of British Arabic produced requests. About 160 people's data were gathered using DCTs. The findings indicated that Saudis preferred to make more straightforward demands than the British group and the EFL students. Nonetheless, indirect tactics were preferred by the last two groups. Regarding mitigation, the British preferred to employ grammatical and linguistic strategies, whilst Saudis used semantic softeners.

In a similar spirit, Alsalem (2024, p. 39) looked at "how American native speakers of English and Moroccan EFL learners produced requests". Once again, sixty participants had their data obtained by DCTs. The results showed that compared to the Americans, the Moroccans made more straightforward requests. All the same, the two groups favoured the traditional indirect request techniques over the other ones. This applied especially to the regular use of the query preparation technique.

Regarding Qari (2021), her research was instructive. Qari (2021) examined whether giving requests clear instructions will help Saudi EFL students become more knowledgeable about and adept at using the right request techniques in English. To that purpose, thirty Saudi EFL students received specific instruction in using English request tactics, and written questionnaires were used to gather data before and after the exam.

According to the findings, students who received explicit instruction were much better at comprehending and using the request techniques in English. They also made notable progress in identifying the purposes of the pertinent strategies and

tended to use more suitable strategies in their production. This result is not just a theoretical finding, but it has practical implications for language teaching. It aligns with past research on educational pragmatics that demonstrates the need for explicit teaching to enhance the pragmatic understanding of EFL students (Napoli & Tantucci, 2022). This underscores the importance of our research in the field of language acquisition and pragmatics.

B. Theoretical Basis of the Study

Arrays of theories have been applied in studying different speech actions and their impacts on communication, mainly in the learning process of foreign language learners. This paper considers two theories: the Speech Act theory, the Politeness theory, and the Sociocultural theory. Speech Act Theory, proposed by J.L. Austin and refined by John Searle, is a basic linguistic theory in the linguistics and philosophy of language (Almomani, 2009). The locutionary act has a particular meaning; the illocutionary act is intended for the listener, and the perlocutionary act is the impact or the result of the utterance. John Searle followed the framework of Austin, concentrating on different types of illocutionary acts and the conditions of their use. Searle categorised speech acts into five types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Requests are, by the definition of this study, the speaker's command to the listener to do something (Altheby, 2018; Elmahdi & Khan, 2015). Every speech act has its circumstances of completion called felicity conditions, which differ. They embrace intent, competence, and fitness, among others. As a result, a hearer's awareness of the speaker's intended meaning and the social norms of appropriate responses are the keys to the success of the request (Jackson et al., 2020; Elder, 2021). According to Alkhalaf (2023), speech Act Theory proves a helpful model concerning the requestive point of view and language patterns of Saudi EFL learners. The study highlighted how Saudi EFL learners' fashion their requests, particularly their underlying intentions and the desired outcomes. The data classification approach of speech acts aside from the linguistic structures and the cultural and contextual factors that influence such requests (Hamdi, 2023; Shen & Chui, 2019). The investigation aimed to estimate the degree to which the Saudi EFL learners stick to English-speaking standards in their requests or preserve the cultural communication patterns of their language. Furthermore, the Study of the Speech Act Theory helps to classify the tactics employed by Saudi EFL learners to be polite, blunt, or indirect when asking for something. These tools will help the teacher to assess the learners' pragmalinguistic competence which is shown through awareness of the social dynamics and language conventions.

The politeness theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), as cited in Alshraah et al. (2023), is the first model. It sees the speech act of request as a "face-threatening act to both the speaker and the listener". Interlocutors collaborate to preserve one another's societal reputation or face by refraining from face-threatening behaviours or lessening their detrimental impact. Face, in this sense, may be either negative (the need to be autonomous and unimpressed) or positive (the want to be loved and liked). Since it entails imposition and invasion, the speech act request threatens the speaker and the listener (Almusallam, 2023). Speakers may try to lessen the impact of requests by employing less direct tactics or combining several modifiers.

Furthermore, expected to change depending on pertinent situational elements like dominance and social distance is the realisation of speech actions. It should be mentioned, nonetheless, that the politeness theory has drawn criticism for failing to adequately consider cultural variations. Many claim the model is Eurocentric (El-Dakhi et al., 2023). As such, it is more available to Western culture, which greatly emphasises freedom and individuality. Many civilisations might respond to speech actions differently (Alrabai, 2016).

III. STUDY METHODOLOGY

A. Study Design

This research utilized a quantitative research design to analyse the pragmalinguistic knowledge of Saudi EFL learners in making requests. The researchers developed the study as cross-sectional survey in order to have a large data set from a suitable sample of various Saudi learners who study English as a foreign language. The choice of survey design is to be able to gain statistical insights from the study participants and understand their usage of different request strategies.

B. Study Participants and Sampling

This study involved a group of Saudi EFL students attending well-known universities in Saudi Arabia. There were 253 research participants out of which 170 were high achievers (HAs). The other 83 were low achievers (LAs) due to their poor English course academic results. Through this method of sampling, we had a varied representation for the students in terms of gender, age, and academic background which gave us the chance to have a wide view about the requestive speech act usage across the demographic groups. The High Achievers (HAs) group consisted of students with a high level of English language proficiency. The candidates who were identified as LAs were those who manifested poor level of proficiency in the English language through their low scores in English coursework. Sample size was calculated on the basis of power analysis that established 80% statistical power and significance level of 0.05. This approach, therefore, made the study powerful enough to detect statistically meaningful differences between HA and LA outcomes. A large sample size provided statistical tools for a thorough analysis and allowed to generalize the results for the wider population of Saudi EFL students.

C. Data Collection

Data was collected via DCT (Discourse Completion Task), a general pragmatic research method, whereby each participant was presented with a scene containing an appropriate request. The workshops included a range of context in the form of different level of social distancing and power arrangements that ensured volunteers could practice in all situations. The development of the DCT is based on the situated learning environment of a SA EFL learners which helps to assess their pragmalinguistic competence. The time allowed for the participants was enough for them to address the issues in the DCT and offered enough time to think things through before responding. The data collected helped in answering the question on the range of strategies used: ranging from direct to indirect and also in their frequency across two groups: HAs and LAs. Therefore, the research utilized the data obtained from DCT and enabled it to conduct in-depth analysis into the requestive speech acts and the norms involved.

D. Data Analysis Procedure

The statistical analysis performed was based on quantitative statistics to discover trends and differences in the use of requestive speech acts among high achievers and low achievers. The use of descriptive statistics features in this study is mainly to derive the actual frequency and percentile values of the requesting strategies of the study participants. We also employed chi-square to evaluate the correlation between the four request strategies and the related proficiency levels.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Results

(a). Results of Demographic Features

The survey included key demographic information of the study participants. The demographic characteristics form the basis for understanding the peripheral data required from the study sample. The findings are summarised in the Table 1 below.

TABLE 1
RESULTS OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Category	Variable	Repetition (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	138	54.5%
	Female	115	45.5%
Age Group	18-21	88	34.8%
	22-25	102	40.3%
	26-29	43	17.0%
	30+	20	7.9%
Academic Level	Undergraduate	145	57.3%
	Graduate	108	42.7%
English Proficiency	High Achievers (HAs)	170	67.2%
	Low Achievers (LAs)	83	32.8%

The demographic table above reveals that the sample consisted of 253 Saudi EFL learners with a relatively similar gender distribution, where males accounted for 54.5% (N = 138) and females 45.5% (N = 115). This relatively egalitarian distribution ensures that the results can be used across gender lines, thus minimising the biases related to gender that may be present in analysing the requestive speech acts. For the age groups, most participants were between 22 and 25, 40.3% of the total sample (N = 102). The second largest age group was 18-21 years and represented 34.8% (N = 88), followed by 26-29 years at 17.0% (N = 43), and the smallest group included people 30 or older at 7.9% (N = 20). This age distribution indicates that most participants were young adults, typically university students or young professionals, who coincide with the study's context about English language teachers.

Most of our respondents were undergraduates, making up 57.3% of the total respondents (N = 145), and graduates followed with 42.7% (N = 108). Such a relationship between undergraduates and graduates creates an overview of academic backgrounds and demonstrates a wide range of educational levels in the EFL training context in Saudi Arabia. Last, but not least, the English proficiency level of the participants was evaluated, and 67.2% were classified as HAs, while 32.8% were classified as LAs. This distribution is meaningful, suggesting that most respondents possessed higher levels of English proficiency, which might be a reason for their high frequency of requestive speech acts. The ratio of HAs indicates a considerable majority of highly accomplished English learners in the research, thus allowing for a solid observation of the disparities in request strategies between upper and lower achievers.

(b). Results of the Main Survey

As the importance of conventional indirect in request act and it was used frequently by both HAs (28.43%) and LAs (16.24%) with a significant difference between them in this study, it is necessary to present the results for requestive perspectives and conventions of forms and means. Choosing the request perspective shows a necessary choice of variation in employing request act. According to Blum-Kulka (1989), request perspective could be classified into four categories as follows: impersonal request (e.g., *how about cancelling the session*) inclusive requests (e.g., *can we prepare for the*

exam together), speaker-oriented requests (e.g., *may I get this the story*), and hearer-oriented requests (e.g., *could you help me*) as shown in Table 2 below. Request perspectives are classified into four categories as follows:

1. Impersonal request (S6, HA#23) "*how about postponing the meeting*"
2. Inclusive requests (S2, HA# 36) "*can we prepare for the exam together*"
3. Speaker-oriented requests (S12, LA# 21) "*may I get this story*"
4. Hearer oriented requests (S11, LA#18) "*could you help me*"

The classifications of request strategies according to the speaker-oriented requests, hearer-oriented requests, inclusive requests, and impersonal requests on DCT are illustrated in the following tables. The first column shows the perspective strategies that are used by participants. Next, frequencies and percentages are presented in column three and four. This is followed by the Pearson Chi-Square values that indicate the frequency and percentage for each situation between groups. The P-value in the last column tells us if there is significant difference between groups pertaining pragmatic production in the last column.

TABLE 2
PERCENTAGE, RAW FREQUENCY, AND PEARSON CHI-SQUARE VALUES OF PERSPECTIVE BY GROUPS

Perspective	High		Low		Pearson Chi-Square	p-value
	N	%	N	%		
Speaker-oriented requests	48	28.2	42	50.60	.400	0.527
Hearer-oriented requests	53	31.17	35	42.16	3.682	0.055
Inclusive requests	51	30.0	6	7.2	35.526	0.000*
Impersonal requests	18	10.58				
Total	170		83		29.917	0.000*

* $p < 0.05$

Table 2 above shows that there are statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the inclusive requests according to the variable of the proficiency as the value of "Pearson Chi-Square" was (35.52) by a statistical significance of (0.000*). Furthermore, HAs (30.0%) employed inclusive requests significantly more than LAs (7.2%) at a p-value (0.000*). It is noteworthy that low achievers do not utilize impersonal requests in their responses; the reason may be the insufficient pragmatic competence that helps them use various request perspectives. HAs (n=170) have a significant pragmatic knowledge compared with LAs (n= 83) in using requests perspective strategies according to Chi-square (29.917) at P-value (0.000*).

The use of speaker-oriented request, which means that the focus lies on the speaker as a requester, was higher among LAs (n=42) than HAs (=48). On the other hand, hearer-oriented requests, which means that the focus lies in the hearer, were higher among HAs (n= 53) compared to LAs (n= 35). Interestingly, the findings revealed a great tendency of HAs towards using inclusive requests (30.0%) compared to LAs (7.2%). Surprisingly, HAs are inclined to use the impersonal request strategy with a proportion of (10.58%) as opposed to LAs who have never resorted to employing this strategy due to their insufficient pragmatic competence, as mentioned in Table 2, with 0.0% using impersonal request.

The most prevalent request strategy among HAs was the use of inclusive requests, as exemplified by the phrase "can we change the appointment" (S10, HA#3). This strategy was likely employed to avoid face-threatening acts by involving both the speaker and the hearer in the request. The use of the modal verb "can", which suggests the possibility, further served as a request mitigating device, preventing the hearer from rejecting the request (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

On the other hand, both HAs (6.7%) and LAs (0.0%) were less inclined towards using impersonal request strategy "suggestion", such as "how about postponing the meeting" (S6, HA#18), such as request is rendered in an indirect manner that implies suggestion, which entails the hearer to refer to the contextual cues. More importantly, such types of request strategies are considered face-saving because they risk not being understood since there are insufficient contextual clues for the hearer to interpret them appropriately. As Blum-Kulka (1989) stated, a requestive perspective may be employed to mitigate and minimize the coerciveness of the request act as it is seen as face-threatening.

(c). Conventions of Means and Forms

Blum-Kulka described conventions of means as "the kinds of sentences that are standardly used as indirect requests" (p. 41). For instance, speakers usually start their request by asking the hearer's ability to reply to his/her request, such as "Can you lend me your summarizing?" (Sit#5, LA# 34). However, the convention of form is used as the linguistic form and exact expressions. For example, "Could you?" rather than "Would you be able to?". Table 3 presents the five conventions of means used by participants: ability (e.g., "Can you?....."), permission (e.g., "Could I?"), possibility (e.g., "Is it okay . . ."), willingness (e.g., "Would you...?"), and suggestion (e.g., "let us).

Data 3 shows differences and similarities in their use of conventions of means. LAs (n=41) and HAs (n=45) prefer ability but are not statistically different. However, there are also statistically significant differences between HAs (29.41) and LAs (2.40%) at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the willingness according to the variable of the proficiency as the value of " Chi-Square " was (37.786) by a statistical significance of P-value (0.000*). In addition, only HAs employ suggestion strategies compared to LAs with no occurrence. Most important, Pearson Chi-Square pair comparisons revealed significant differences in their use of possibility as used by HAs (11.76%) significantly more compared with LAs (6.02%) at P-value (0.003*).

Turning now to unravel the use of conventions of means into suggestion (e.g., what about...), willingness (e.g., would you mind...), possibility (e.g., is it possible....), permission (e.g., may I...), and ability (e.g., could you...). The first column shows the Conventions of means strategies that participants use. Next, frequencies and percentages are presented in columns three and four. This is followed by the Pearson Chi-Square values that indicate the frequency and percentage for each situation between groups. The P-value in the last column tells us if there is a significant difference between groups about pragmatic realization in the last column.

TABLE 3
PERCENTAGE, RAW FREQUENCY, AND PEARSON CHI-SQUARE VALUES OF CONVENTIONS OF MEANS B BY GROUP

Conventions	High		Low		Pearson Chi-Square	p-value
	N	%	N	%		
Ability	45	26.47	41	49.39	0.186	0.666
Permission	49	28.82	35	42.16	2.333	0.127
Possibility	20	11.76	5	6.02	9.000	0.003*
Willingness	51	29.41	2	2.40	37.786	0.000*
Suggestion	5	2.94	0	0	-	-
Total	170		83		29.917	0.000*

* $p < 0.05$

Pearson Chi-Square was used to identify the differences and/or similarities between two groups in using request strategies according to the convention of means request strategies that consists of ability, permission, possibility, willingness, and suggestions. The findings in the above Table 3 showed that there are differences between HAs and LAs in using convention of means request strategies that consists of ability, permission, possibility, willingness, and suggestions. The data presents that the participants have used the convention of means sub-strategies with either major or minor differences between them. It is clearly obvious that “ability” sub-strategy occupies the highest rank for LA group. For instance, HAs used “could you...” while “can you...” among LAs.

To clarify, the use of request strategy “could you” is considered hearer-oriented requests in which the speaker might seek to check the ability of the hearer to do a specific matter such as “could you give me a charger.....?” (S3, HA#18). On the contrary, LAs used “me sorry, can you give me charge?” (S3, LA#45). To draw a distinction between them, both groups are using request strategies but statically different. However, HAs used more polite strategy than LAs. Moreover, it is clearly obvious that LAs have low English language proficiency. To illustrate, they use the verb “charge” rather than the noun “charger”, moreover, they did not use an article “a” that precedes the noun “charger”. The reason behind their linguistic errors might be attributed to their poor vocabulary items and their low linguistic and proficiency levels.

To sum up, there is a statistical difference between both groups in employing conventions of forms. Let us now turn to demonstrate the percentage of using convention of forms by HAs and LAs as indicated in Table 4. Closer inspection of Table 4 shows that conventions of forms sub-strategies, such as possibility, ability, permission, and willingness have been used by both groups with either major or minor differences between them. Remarkably, LAs have a greater tendency to use ability strategy, while HAs have a great tendency to use permission strategy. Furthermore, the use of the introductory phrases that precede the request strategy differs between both. However, it is observed no use of the suggestion strategy by LAs compared to HA.

Based on the results on Table 3, the three most preferred strategies by HAs were willingness (29.41%), permission (28.82%) and ability (26.47). However, LAs showed their preference just to the two strategies that are: ability (49.39%) and permission (42.16%).

TABLE 4
PERCENTAGE AND RAW FREQUENCY OF CONVENTIONS OF FORM BY GROUP

Convention of form	HA		LA	
	N	%	N	%
Ability	45	26.47	41	49.39
Can you ...	14		27	
Could you ...	21		14	
Would you be able ...	10			
Permission	49	28.82	35	42.16
Can I ...?	13		11	
Could I ...?	15		9	
May I ...?	13		15	
Would I be able ...?	8			
Possibility	20	11.76	5	6.02
Is it possible/okay ...?	9		4	
Would it be possible/okay...?	0	0		
Is there any way ...?	11		1	
Willingness	51	29.41	2	2.40
Will you ...?	7		0	
Would you ...?	14		2	
Would you mind ...?	12			
Do you mind .	18			
Suggestion	5	2.94	0	
How about ...?	3			
Let us ...	2			
Total	170		83	

Permission strategy was among both groups in which HAs inclined to use the phrase “could I”, while LAs were inclined to use the phrase “*can I*” for asking the hearer’s permission to perform the request. It is worth mentioning that using “could” is considered more polite than “can”, therefore, HAs have more proficiency levels in performing request strategies as opposed to LAs. On the other hand, the least commonly used request strategy by HAs groups is suggestion. To illustrate, HAs showed a much stronger tendency towards using “how about” introductory phrases that denote suggestion, while LAs did not use this strategy in their request situations.

Generally speaking, the data suggested that HAs group exhibited a high frequency of using ability request strategy, but a low frequency of using suggestion sub-strategy. In addition, LAs showed low frequency in using possibility and willingness compared with HAs. Based on the foregoing, HAs’ use of willingness, suggestion strategies and “could” suggests their ability to master the language and their pragmatic realisation in using request strategies that are appropriate for addressing those with higher power and social distance such as the use of could in the sixth situation in which the student asks his professor to postpone the date of submission for the final homework by using the following request strategy “*could you postpone the date of submission?*”(S6, HA#16).

On the other hand, LAs’ use of “can” suggests their lack of L2 pragmatic competence due to their inability to use the appropriate modal verb for addressing those with higher power and social distance such as using the following request strategy “*can postpone mission*” (S6, LA#45). which is considered informal as opposed to “could” that is considered more formal. More importantly, LAs lack the vocabulary knowledge that enables them to produce request strategy in an appropriate manner such as missing pronoun “you” after the verb postpone and the use of “mission”, rather than “submission”.

B. Discussions

(a). Summary of Findings

On the other hand, the higher use of speaker-oriented requests among LAs (50.60% vs. 28.2%) reflects a less collaborative approach; the low-proficiency learners may tend to focus on their objectives rather than paying due attention to the hearer. This might be derived from using language tools, which are rare and have less exposure to English-speaking cultures where people are known to use collaborative language structures more often (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). In addition, impersonal request absence among LAs proves that low achievers use a limited pragmatic repertoire. They may prefer a more direct way of communication due to the features of high-context cultures such as Saudi Arabia (A-Qari, 2021). Their directness might prove detrimental while dealing with complex English communication, especially in the workplace and academia.

Concerning the second research question, the analysis of the conventions of means and forms demonstrated clear divergence from HAs to LAs. This trend was prevalent among both sub-groups, wherein LAs were dependent on “can you...” requests (49.39%), while HAs used a more diverse set of conventional phrases such as “would you mind...” and “could you...”. The sole fact that HAs also use politeness markers and modal verbs as native speakers do supports the research showing that proficient English speakers tend to use more indirect and polite language to avoid offending other people (Blum-Kulka, 1989; as cited in Bibi et al., 2021). On the other hand, LAs’ dependency on literal-based requests and the use of simpler structures suggests a lower level of pragmatic competence, likely due to insufficient exposure to English-speaking environments where indirect requests are more propagated.

The large gap in readiness strategies between HAs and LAs (29.41% vs. 2.40%) complements the existing evidence of the skill gap. HAs have shown a greater inclination to put forth requests in ways that make the hearer eager to consent, which is appropriate and non-violent. Such difference may be due to English-speaking cultures, which are more polite and face-saving oriented (Kuriri, 2023). LAs (whose linguistic resources are more limited) often fall back on simpler and more direct impositions, needing more delicate linguistic politeness demonstrated by high-achievers. This finding again reminds us that LAs are better-provided chances to get involved in real language usage and cultural practice activities to improve their pragmatic skills and comprehension of English style (Qadha et al., 2021).

The study results, in tandem with the third research question, revealed that social and cultural factors dominate in forming the requestive speech acts by the Saudi EFL learners. The variation in the use of inclusive requests between HAs and LAs demonstrates that cultural factors like collectivism and high-context communication affect how learners organize their requests. The HAs tend to use more polite and consensual request forms that correspond to the English-speaking tradition, which focuses on politeness and shared responsibility (Kim, 2020). This change might be justifiable through more exposure to the Western cultural context, where indirectness and collaboration are common practices (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). However, using speaker-orientated and impersonal requests is rare, as SA cultural norms are stronger and favour clarity and direct communication between people (Hall, 1976). Such a result corresponds with an understanding that the high-context culture, which is a Saudi culture, such a culture typically uses shared understanding and implicit communication, leading to a preference for direct speech acts. The lack of diverse language request strategies among LAs shows they could lack exposure to English-speaking cultural norms that stress indirectness and courtesy. This may cause their communication in different linguistic environments to be affected as well.

These findings highlight the need to include cultural awareness in English as a foreign language teaching for Saudi EFL learners. The gap between HAs and LAs can be narrowed by offering learners a chance to engage in a broader

spectrum of ask strategies that will be most relevant (Asif, 2017). Hence, the learners will be able to develop their pragmatic competence more diversely while mastering English communications in all contexts, locally and internationally.

(b). Practical Implications

Regarding the implications for practice, this study's results are important for English language teaching and intercultural communication. The study findings have shown that proficiency levels can significantly determine the proficiency of the individual's pragmatic competence and how requests are framed and delivered. These outcomes emphasize the necessity of integrating the study of pragmatics into the English language curricula, which should include teaching how to use different request strategies and the cultural contexts in which they are most appropriate. Educators should emphasize activities that raise cultural awareness and empower learners to diversify the request forms, for instance, by using inclusive and hearer-oriented forms and the impersonal request form. The present research demonstrates the value of hands-on experience intended for the users to practice English in real-world situations, which boosts comprehension of social and cultural elements that affect language usage. Providing targeted teaching methods like role-play and peer-to-peer interaction will help fill the gap between people with high and low English levels. Lastly, if educators adopt these practical implications, learners can add pragmatic language skills necessary to participate in a global English-speaking environment and promote cross-cultural understanding and communication.

(c). Policy Implications

The results from this study have important policy implications for foreign language education in Saudi Arabia. The fact that pragmatic competence differs between high achievers (HAs) and low achievers (LAs) means that education policymakers should consider adding pragmatic training to English language curricula at both the school and university levels. This includes developing policies that embrace a balanced approach to language learning where learners are assessed on vocabulary and grammar and their ability to navigate culturally correct speech acts such as requests. Policymakers may, therefore, suggest professional development programs that enable English language teachers to be competent in teaching pragmatics that target cultural sensitivity and various communication strategies. Moreover, policies can encourage cross-cultural interactions and exposure to English-speaking communities, allowing the learners to have firsthand experiences with the social conditions that dominate language usage. Through implementing these policy measures, educational systems will facilitate their EFL students to attain proficiency in a globalized world that will make the learners both linguistically strong and culturally sound.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has meticulously explored the pragmatological competence of Saudi EFL learners in making requests, and it has shown some important information concerning the differences in invoking request strategies between the high achievers (HAs) and the low achievers (LAs). Accordingly, the study revealed that HAs tend to have a broader range of request strategies, showing a preference for inclusive and hearer-oriented requests, which are more polite and cooperative. It indicates that more competent learners understand English language communication's social and cultural shades very well. In contrast, LAs often use more speaker-oriented requests, with shorter, impersonal requests suggesting a relatively narrow pragmatic repertoire and a directional communication style. Differences between HAs and LAs demonstrate the central role of English proficiency in requestive speech patterns, a key factor determining the quality of English language education and cross-cultural communication. The study results indicate the involvement of societal and cultural factors in creating the pragmatic competence of Saudi EFL learners. The documented disparities in request strategies suggest a requirement for a total approach to language education covering sociocultural awareness and pragmatic skills besides traditional language learning. This more diverse focus might be beneficial in reducing the fluency gap between LAs and HAs, implying a more intricate understanding of English communication. The research emphasises the need for classrooms conducive to immersion and authentic language use where the learner can acquire the required communication context skills. In general, the study provides the field of English as a second language with the necessary information and serves as a base for research on pragmatic competence in L2 learners. This study is aligned with Alshraah et al. (2024), who stated that "training in linguistic diversity and variation would be helpful in developing more effective methods of instructing students of many languages simultaneously in the field of foreign language learning" (p. 66).

In light of the study's findings, certain recommendations can give academic guidance to improve the practical skills of Saudi EFL learners. Firstly, educational policymakers should put up explicit instructions on pragmatics in the curriculum for English language teaching with the main focus being on various request strategies and the cultural context in which they are used. This orientation will help learners explore the wider aspects of their language choices, enabling them to use inclusive and respectful communication. Another important thing is that language teachers should incorporate native methods in their courses, for example, role-playing and peer-to-peer activities. They will help learners practice various requestive speech acts in real-life situations. Different approaches can aid students' self-confidence in using English and thus enable them to manage different communicative circumstances. Finding is consistent with AlTameemy et al. (2024) as stated that "HAs display consciousness of both social distance and power in realizing and producing speech acts. However, LAs show less consciousness of the influence of social power and distance in altering request strategies" (p. 321).

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