

In-directness and Politeness in American English and Saudi Arabic Requests: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

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Abstract

This article examines the notions of (in)directness and politeness in the speech act of requests among Saudi Arabic native speakers as compared to American English native speakers. To elicit data on the requestive strategies that the two groups employed, a randomly chosen group of 30 Saudi and American undergraduate students were given a discourse completion test that consisted of twelve written context-enriched situations. The results revealed that conventional indirectness was the most prevailing strategy employed by the American sample. On the other hand, the Saudi sample varied their request strategies depending on the social variables of power and distance. The results also showed that the level of directness differed cross-culturally. American students used direct requests when addressing their friends on the condition that the request was not weighty; however, directness was the most preferred strategy among Saudi students in intimate situations where directness is interpreted as an expression of affiliation, closeness and group-connectedness rather than impoliteness.

Keywords: politeness, cultural differences, request strategies, directness, conventional indirectness, Saudi Arabic, American English

1. Introduction

Since the evolving of speech act theory and politeness theory, cross-cultural pragmatics has gained the attention of many researchers in this field. They have investigated and compared the use and realizations of speech act of request as performed by native speakers of diverse languages and cultures (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Sifianou 1992; Eslamirasekh 1993; Zhang 1995; Fukushima 1996 and 2002; Van Mulken 1996; Liao 1997; Reiter 2000; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2002 and 2005; Pinto and Raschio 2007; Ogiermann 2009; Yu 2011). However, it has been remarked that the Arabic society, particularly the Saudi society, has been far less investigated in cross-cultural and contrastive pragmatics (for example, Umar 2004; Al-Khatani 2005). Therefore, what stems is the significance of this study in widening the scope of cross-cultural pragmatics by investigating and comparing the request strategies in the level of directness of Native American English and Saudi Arabic native speakers.

Requests are directive acts and they are "attempts on the part of a speaker to get the hearer to perform or to stop performing some kind of action" (Ellis 1994: 167). Thus, they are beneficial to the former and costly to the latter. According to Brown and Levinson's (1978 and 1987) politeness theory, requests are face threatening acts (FTAs) because "the speaker impinges on the hearer's claims to freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984: 201). In order to minimize the potential threat of a person's face in interactions, people vary their requests between direct and indirect strategies depending on different factors such as power relations, social distance, rate of imposition, and cultural values. Wolfson (1989), for example, noted that social distance and power relationships between interlocutors greatly influence the form a request takes.

Even though the speech act of requesting is culturally universal, research has shown that there are cross-cultural differences in the realization of request patterns, especially in the level of directness. One of the most popular works is that of Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) who examined the request realization patterns in eight languages: Australian English, British English, Canadian French, Danish, German, Hebrew, Argentinean Spanish and Russian. The researchers classified the requestive strategies into three main categories in decreasing order of

directness and impact. These are: direct (impositives), conventional indirect, non-conventional indirect. The researchers found that the level of directness employed in given situations differed cross-culturally. For example, in Argentinean Spanish, they tended to use more direct strategies than other languages like British English. In addition, the research supported the universality of the category of conventional indirectness.

Brown and Levinson (1978 and 1987), Leech (1983), and Searle (1975) proposed that the more indirect the request is, the more polite it is. However, the notion of politeness is culturally relative. That is to say, what is considered polite behavior in a culture may not be accepted so in other cultures. For example, imperatives in some occasions are more likely to be interpreted as impolite requests in English but polite in other languages as in Polish (e.g., Lubecka 2000; Wierzbicka 2003), Greek (e.g., Economidou-Kogetsidis 2002), German (e.g.; Pavlidou 2000) and Arabic (e.g., Al-Marrani and Szalgie 2010). For example, directness on the part of the Greek callers is motivated by clarity, goal orientedness, and formality rather than impoliteness (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2005:270).

Although the speech act of request has received a lot of attention by different researchers in different languages and cultures, little is known about the culture-specificity of Saudi Arabic requests. Therefore, the present study aims at providing insights into the request strategies made by Saudi Arabic native speakers as compared to Native American speakers. Based on this, this current study will try to answer the following questions:

- What are the request strategies that emerge in Saudi Arabic and American English?
- How do social factors such as power, distance and rate of imposition affect the choice of request strategies in both groups?

2. Theoretical Framework

According to J.L Austin's (1962) theory of speech act, utterances of language are not simply information, but rather equivalent to actions. A theory that was later developed by Searle (1969) who asserted that all speech acts such as requests are meaningful and that they are rule-governed. For that reason, in interactions, participants ought to be aware of their actions and thus consider what Goffman (1967: 5) named 'face', defined as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" and that face can be lost, maintained or enhanced during interactions with others.

Brown and Levinson (1978 and 1987) expanded Goffman's theory of face in their 'politeness theory'. According to them, face is a set of wants, roughly "the want to be unimpeded" and a person's desire to act without imposition, and "the want to be approved in certain respect". (ibid.63); the former refers to negative face, and the latter refers to positive face. In everyday communications, there are considerably a very large number of acts such as requests that threaten face intrinsically (FTAs). Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) are acts that violate the hearers' need to maintain his/her self esteem, and be respected. Requests are FTAs because the speaker (S) is impeding on hearer (H) by asking H not to do what H wants, but rather to do what S wants (Fasold 1990:161). Therefore, people do facework in order to offset FTAs (Brown and Levinson 1978: 68). Brown and Levinson identified five types of politeness strategies that people resort to in their politeness behavior to manage face: Act baldly, Going off-record-indirect, Do not perform the act, Positive politeness, Negative politeness. People vary their request strategies based on three factors: the social distance of speaker and hearer, the relative power between them, and the absolute ranking of impositions in the particular culture (Brown and Levinson 1978: 79).

As every language offers different terms or lexemes to refer to polite behavior which help us understand culture-specific concepts of politeness, it is important here to shed light on the semantic meanings of the word 'polite' (مودب) in Arabic as compared to English. The Arabic word 'adab'(أدب) - nowadays refers to either politeness or literature based on the context- was only intended to mean 'invitation' in the pre-Islamic period. Idrees (1985: 13) pointed out that the first meaning of the word 'adab'(أدب) in the ancient Arabic environment was meant to be generosity and hospitality. For example, Arabs used to say (Fulan adaba al-qawm) (فلان أدب القوم اذا دعاهم لمأدبه) meaning that someone invited people to feast; thus, the meaning of the word 'adab'(أدب) was concerned with the behavioral aspect of a person's relationships with others. That is to say, a greater emphasis was placed on positive aspects of face and connectedness with others. Then the use of the word(أدب) has expanded in the Islamic era to refer to morality, generosity, tolerance, and virtue. All these meanings have been numerously reported by many sayings of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). After that, in the late Umayyad and early Abbasid era, the word has also been used to refer to education and literature. On the other hand, Watts (2003: 35) mentioned 'considerate', 'thoughtful', 'well-mannered', as synonyms of the English 'polite'.

Requests are directly related to 'politeness' since people use polite behavior to minimize the potential threat of a person's face. Thus, people vary their request from being the most direct to the most indirect depending on different socio-cultural factors such as power and social distance between interlocutors, rate of imposition, context,

sex, age, etc. However, as Brown and Levinson (1978 and 1987) pointed out, there exists cross cultural differences in the realization of speech acts. That is to say, people of different languages and cultures may have access to the same range of speech acts and realization strategies, yet, they can differ in the strategies they choose (Wolfson 1989: 183).

Scollon and Scollon ([1995] 2001) highlighted the fact that politeness is deeply influenced by such factors as power, distance and weight of imposition. They introduced three main types of politeness systems based essentially on whether there is a power difference and on the distance between participants. First, deference politeness system, an egalitarian system in which the participants maintain a deferential distance from each other. They are considered to be equals or near equals with no interlocutor exerting power over the other (-Power), but treat each other at a distance (+Distance). As a result, both interlocutors use independence strategies, including expressions that minimize threat to avoid the risk of losing face. Second, solidarity politeness system which is also an egalitarian system in which the participants feel or express closeness to each other. The speakers may feel neither power difference (-Power) nor social distance (-Distance) between them. The interlocutors use involvement strategies to assume or express reciprocity or to claim a common point of view. Third, hierarchy politeness system which is a system with asymmetrical relationships; in other words, the participants recognize and respect the social differences that place one in a higher position and the other in a lower position. The speakers resort to different politeness strategies: the 'superordinates' use involvement politeness strategies and the 'subordinates' use independence politeness strategies. To Scollons, cultural differences in politeness behavior can be explained in these three types of politeness systems.

To better account for the structure of requests, this current study uses Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) coding scheme in classifying request strategies into three main types: direct, conventionally indirect, non-conventionally indirect. Of these head acts, five are considered direct (mood derivable, explicit performatives, hedged performatives, obligation statements, want statements), two are considered conventionally indirect (suggestory formulae, query preparatory), and two are considered non-conventionally indirect (strong and mild hints). (See Appendix I for the classification of request head acts). In interpreting the different request strategies the samples employed, we drew upon Scollon and Scollon's ([1995] 2001) politeness framework and took into account the views of some pioneering researchers in this field.

3. Previous Studies

Reiter (2000) investigated the request patterns used by Uruguayan Spanish (US) and British English (BE). The results showed that speakers of both languages had a clear preference for conventionally indirect strategies over any other request strategies. However, as regards to direct strategies, these were used far more in US than in BE and the reverse applies to non-conventional indirect strategies. Also, higher levels of directness appeared to be appropriate in US but not in BE. Moreover, the study showed that US did not consider negative politeness as weighty as BE who preferred to use redressive strategies to reduce the harshness on other's negative face.

Lee (2005) analyzed and compared linguistic devices of requests written by native English-speaking (NEC) and native Cantonese speaking (NCS) respondents in an academic context in which hierarchical and power relationships were involved based on a discourse completion tests. The findings showed that both groups tended to request directly; however, they tended to use different syntactic and lexical features of requests to soften their impositive force. NES tended to use a higher frequency and a wider range of syntactic downgraders but a lower frequency of lexical devices than NCS to reduce directness. NCS, on the other hand, tended to use a lower frequency of syntactic downgraders but a higher frequency and a wider range of lexical devices. The findings also revealed that both groups took into considerations power relationship and social distance when they made their requests.

Research into the requests made by native English and Arabic speakers can be classified into two folds. There are few studies which analyzed the linguistic forms of requests in different Arabic dialects as compared to English native speakers (for example, Karasneh 2006; Al-Ali and Alawneh 2010; Al-Marrani and sazalie 2010; Alaoui 2011), and some other studies analyzed and compared the requisitive strategies employed by Arab learners of English and native English speakers (for example, Umar 2004; Abdul Sattar et al 2009). We will present below some of the important studies that are relevant to the scope of our research.

Abdul-Sattar et al (2009) investigated the production and perception of requests in English language as they were used by 10 Iraqi postgraduates through their responses to a discourse completion test and a multiple choice questionnaire that consisted of eight different situations in addition to a rating scale. The results revealed that the preference of the three main request strategies was conventionally indirect as realized by question forms and modals. Respondents, however, were not aware of the social and situational rules affecting request making.

Although the respondents have spent many years studying English, they were not capable of performing adequate requests in English. In other words, their utterances were not always consistent with native speakers in terms of appropriateness to the situation.

Another study on the Gulf Arabic is Al-Marrani and Sazalie's (2010) who examined the request strategies employed by native speakers of Yemeni Arabic in male-male and male-female interactions. The results illustrated that there was a general trend in Yemeni Arabic for higher levels of directness in male-male interactions, whereas there was a general tendency for higher levels of indirectness in male-female interactions. Male speakers of Yemeni Arabic in male-male interactions employed high levels of directness without losing face. This was attributed to cultural norms emphasizing involvement and solidarity between male-male interactions. The use of indirect strategies by male speakers in male-female interactions was also attributed to cultural and religious values.

In considering the various formats that politeness formula can exhibit in the speech act of request in English and Moroccan Arabic, Alaoui (2011) concluded that in both languages the speaker was always socially motivated by the need to play down the cost to hearer; thus, speakers gave high importance to negative politeness, so both the speaker and the hearer tried in their interaction not to threaten the other's face. Also, the analysis showed that English seemed to opt for syntactic downgraders to mitigate the impact of the speech act, whereas Moroccan Arabic opted for lexical downgraders especially politeness markers such as "llah yxelik", "llah yrđi 'lik" (God bless you) to alleviate the imposition of speaker's will on hearer.

So far, research in cross-cultural pragmatics has demonstrated that there are culture-specific preferences in the realization of the speech act of request. To the best knowledge of the researchers, this research will be the first pioneering cross-cultural study on the realization patterns of requests in spoken Saudi Arabic and American English. It is hoped, therefore, that it enriches literature on speech act theory and provides insightful information to the researchers in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics.

4. Design and Methodology

4.1 Sample of the Study

The sample consisted of a randomly chosen group of thirty 18-24-year-old Saudi and American male and female undergraduate students from various areas of specialization in the undergraduate program in the fall semester of the academic year 2010/2011.

4.2 Procedure

All the subjects were asked to fill out a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The DCT is a form of questionnaire representing some natural situations to which the respondents are expected to react and respond making requests. This test was originally constructed by Blum-Kulka in 1982 and has been widely used since then in gathering data on speech acts realization. The questionnaire used in this investigation involved twelve written context-enriched situations developed by Reiter (2000) (Appendices II and III). In each of the situation, the information was given on the requestive goal, social distance, social dominance, the role-relationship, the length of acquaintance, the frequency of the interaction, and a description of the setting. Each situation could only be answered by a request. For the Saudi Arabic Native Speakers, SANSSs, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic with the necessary modifications in the names of people and places to make them more familiar with the situations.

Table 1. The combination of three social variables in twelve situations

Situation	Social power	Social distance	Degree of imposition
1. Borrow book	S < H	+ SD	Low
2. Time-off errands	S < H	-SD	Low
3. Mind telephone	S > H	+SD	Low
4. Ask for direction	S = H	-SD	Low
5. Ask for lift	S = H	+SD	High
6. Borrow car	S < H	-SD	High
7. Cancel holiday	S > H	-SD	High
8. Type letter	S > H	-SD	Low
9. Borrow house	S = H	-SD	High
10. Swap seats	S = H	+SD	Low
11. Ask for loan	S < H	+SD	High
12. Borrow computer	S > H	+SD	High

S= speaker, H= hearer, SD= social distance

4.3 Data Coding and Analysis

The requesting strategies yielded by the two groups were analyzed within the coding scheme developed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). The analysis was based on an independent evaluation of each request 'head act' according to its degree of 'directness'. By 'head act' is meant as the core request or 'the minimal unit which can realize a request' (Blum-Kulka et al 1989: 275). By 'directness' is meant 'the degree to which the speaker's illocutionary intent is apparent from the locution' (Blum-Kulka et al 1989: 278). Based on the dimension of directness/indirectness, three major levels of directness will be discussed in this study: direct, conventionally indirect, non-conventionally indirect. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0) was used to analyze the data. A repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed. The alpha level was set at 0.05.

5. Results and Discussion

The main interest of this article is in analyzing and comparing the request strategies as used by Saudi Arabic Native Speakers (SANSs) and American English Native Speakers (AENSs). To do so, the request strategies yielded by both groups have been classified into three types according to their levels of directness: impositives (I), conventionally indirect (CI), non-conventionally indirect strategies (N-CI).

Table 2 shows the distribution and percentages of the request strategy types across the twelve situations at each level of directness.

Table 2. Distribution of main request strategy types in twelve situations

Target request	Strategy type	Saudi Arabic (SA)	SA(%)	American English (AE)	AE(%)
S1 Borrow book	I	0	0%	0	0.00%
	CI	27	90.0%	26	86.7%
	N-CI	3	10.0%	4	13.3%
No. informants		(30)		(30)	
S2 Time-off errands	I	1	3.3%	0	0%
	CI	29	96.7%	30	100%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
No. informants		(30)		(30)	
S3 Mind telephone	I	22	73.3%	9	30.0%
	CI	8	26.7%	21	70.0%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
No. informants		(30)		30	
S4 Ask for direction	I	29	96.7%	17	56.7%
	CI	1	3.3%	13	43.3%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
No. informants		(30)		(30)	
S5 Ask for lift	I	4	13.3%	0	0%
	CI	26	86.7%	19	63.3%
	N-CI	0	0%	11	36.7%
No. informants		(30)		(30)	
S6 Borrow car	I	0	0%	0	0%
	CI	30	100%	20	66.7%
	N-CI	0	0%	10	33.3%
No. informants		(30)		(30)	
S7 Cancel holiday	I	21	70.0%	5	16.7%
	CI	9	30.0%	25	83.3%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
No. informants		(30)		(30)	

S8 Type letter	I	26	86.7%	9	30.0%
	CI	4	13.3%	21	70.0%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
No. informants		(30)		(30)	
S9 Borrow house	I	19	63.3%	0	0%
	CI	11	36.7%	22	73.3%
	N-CI	0	0%	8	26.7%
No. informants		(30)		(30)	
S10 Swap seats	I	10	33.3%	0	0%
	CI	20	66.7%	30	100%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0.00%
No. informants		(30)		(30)	
S11 Ask for loan	I	0	0%	0	0.00%
	CI	23	76.7%	17	56.7%
	N-CI	7	23.3%	13	43.3%
No. informants		(30)		(30)	
S12 Borrow computer	I	18	60.0%	2	6.7%
	CI	12	40.0%	28	93.3%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
No. informants		(30)		(30)	

Table 3. A repeated measures ANOVA comparing the means of strategy use across the twelve situations

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.836	11	.076	27.960	.000
Within Groups	.049	18	.003		
Total	.884	29			

5.1 The Use of Impositives

Figure 1 compares the use of impositives across the twelve situations in both languages. It is apparent that there are cross-cultural differences in the use of impositives in both groups.

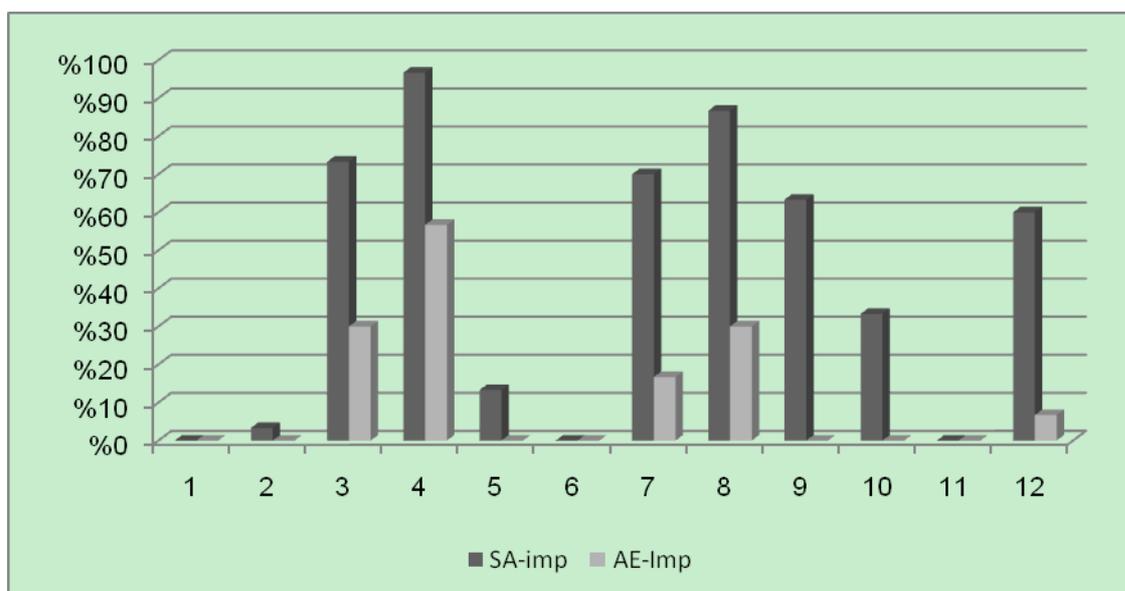


Figure 1. The use of impositives across the twelve situations in both languages

As illustrated graphically in Figure 2, the finding shows that SANSs used high percentages of direct requests in S 4 (ask for direction) with a percentage of 96.7%, S 8 (type letter) 86.7%, S 3 (mind telephone) 73.3%, S 7 (cancel

holiday) 70.0%, S 9 (borrow house) 63.3%, and S 12 (borrow computer) 60.0%. On the other hand, AENSs employed this strategy in S 4 (ask for direction) 56.7%, S 8 (type letter) 30.0%, S 3 (mind telephone) 30.0%, S 7 (cancel holiday) 16.7% and S 12 (borrow computer) with a low percentage of 6.7%. Specifically speaking, the highest percentage of using direct requests by AENSs was scored in S 4 (ask for direction). In this situation, both the speaker and the hearer are friends trying to reach their destination. The speaker is asking his/her friend to ask a pedestrian for directions. The relationship is closer and equal, and that the rate of imposition is low. Thus, 56.7% of informants opted for direct requests. In situations 8 and 7, the speaker is exerting power over the hearer but their relationship is less distant; both are colleagues. However, as the degree of imposition is high in S 7, only 16.7% of informants opted for direct strategy but 30.0% opted for direct strategy in S 8 as the degree of imposition is low. In S 12, only 6.7% of AENSs employed direct strategy though the speaker is higher in status than the hearer. The things that count here are both social distance and the degree of imposition. In this situation, the speaker is asking a new trainee (+ Distance) to use his/her laptop (high rate of imposition). We conclude that the more distant the relationship between the interlocutors and the higher the rate of imposition is, the less likely it is for AENSs to make a direct request.

On the other hand, direct request is the most preferred strategy among SANSs in situations where the speaker is either exerting power over the hearer or if both of them are close friends. More specifically, the less distant the relationship between the interlocutors, and the more power the speaker is having over the hearer, the more likely it is for SANSs to make a direct request. In situations 8, 3, 7, 12 the speaker is in a higher position than the hearer, thus, s/he states her/his desire that the hearer performs the action directly regardless of the social distance between them or the harshness of the request. This can be explained by Scollon and Scollon's ([1995] 2001) hierarchy politeness system. The speaker is in a superordinate position and the hearer is in a subordinate position. This power variable enables the speaker to use direct requests and involvement politeness strategies as part of his/her authority without threatening the addressee's face. In other words, "the greater the right of the speaker to ask and the greater the obligation of the hearer to comply, the less motivation for the use of indirectness." Abdul-Sattar et al (2009: 12).

The preference for direct requests by SANSs was also found in S 4 with the highest percentage of 96.7%, and in S 9 with a percentage of 63.3%. In both situations, the speaker and the hearer are close friends and neither of them is exerting power over the other (-Power, -Distance). Culturally speaking, Saudi Arabic is a collectivist culture that favors group identity over individual autonomy. As a consequence, direct requests can be seen as an example of solidarity or positive politeness. That is to say, SANSs express reciprocity, camaraderie, social closeness and a common point of view when requesting directly from their close friends. "The mutually shared factual background information the speaker has of the hearer and vice versa makes the use of impositives not only appropriate but probably the expected behavior" (Reiter 2000: 104). This finding supports previous claims in other varieties of Gulf Arabic that found a preference for direct requests in situations where informants were close friends or family members. (see for example, Abdul-Sattar et al 2009; Al-Marrani and Szalgie 2010), as well as in other positive politeness-oriented cultures such as Indonesia (Hassall 1999).

A further analysis of the SANSs questionnaires revealed that although SANSs in the aforementioned situations employed direct requests when addressing their inferiors or intimate friends, they still used an amount of face redressing or mitigating devices in the form of religious expressions and in-group identity or involvement markers such as *'azeezi, habeebi(ti)/my dear, bill'lah/for God sake, yakhoyah/my brother, allah yijzaka alkhair/God bless you*. This is consistent with El-Shazly's (1993) and Aloui's (2011) studies on Egyptian Arabic and Moroccan Arabic native speakers who were found to use religious expressions and lexical downgraders as instances of politeness markers. Accordingly, the researchers hypothesized that when these lexical expressions and markers used in Arabic, they render the request to be considered as polite and conformed to the socially and culturally established norms that a request is almost polite if these lexical devices appear. Based on Fraser's (1990:233) definition of politeness as "a state that one expects to exist in every conversation", and in order to check the validity of this hypothesis, the researchers chose a randomly group of students and discussed with them their conceptualization and perspective of polite direct request in Saudi Arabic. The students were also given sentences to judge the degree to which each sentence was considered polite. The students affirmed that a request is considered polite when it includes proper expressions such as the ones mentioned above. Also, the students confirmed that if these lexical expressions are missing, the request sometimes looks as impolite and imposing. To conclude, imperative constructions among friends and in S > H serve as polite requests in Saudi Arabic culture when they include politeness markers and involvement expressions. Very importantly, these expressions and markers have two functions: first, they mitigate the harshness of the request, and second they maximize closeness and intimacy between interactants.

5.2 The Use of Conventional Indirectness

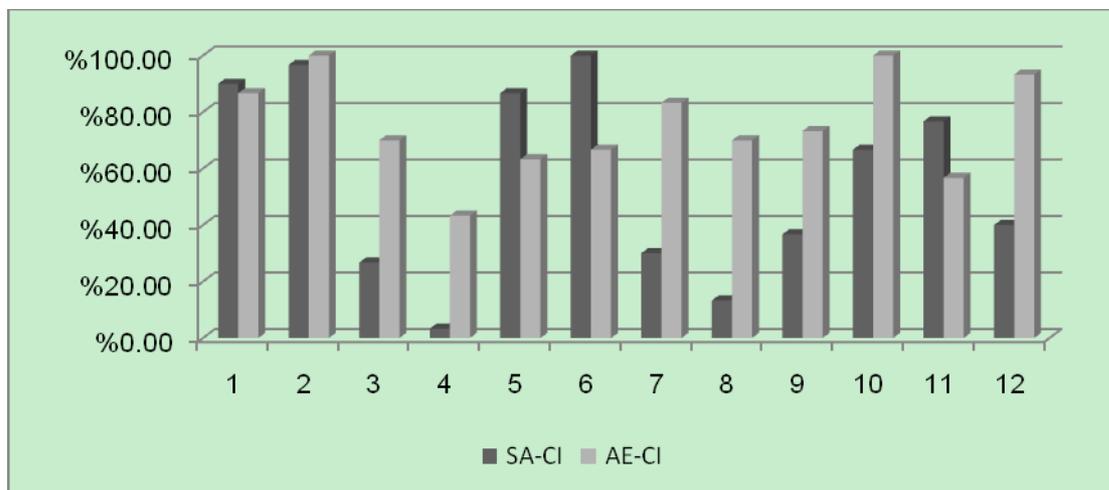


Figure 2. The use of conventional indirectness across the twelve situations in both languages

It is obvious that the strategy was employed by both groups in all situations with varying percentages though. There are cross-cultural agreement in the use of conventional indirectness among SANSs and AENSs with almost similar percentages in S 2 (time-off errands), and in S 1 (borrow book). 96.7% of SANSs preferred to use indirect requests while 100% of AENSs employed them in the second situation. As for the first situation, 90.0% of SANSs opted for indirect request while 86.7% of AENSs opted for the same strategy too. In S 2, the speaker is asking his/her manager/ess whom s/he gets on with well to cover for him/her. And in S 1, the requester is a student asking to borrow a book from his/her lecturer. Also, both groups favored the use of CI in S 6 (borrow car), 100% for SANSs, and 66.7% for AENSs, and in S 11 (ask for loan), 76.7% for SANSs, and 56.7 for AENSs. In all of these situations, the requester is in a lower position than the requestee and s/he does not have the right to impede on the requestee's freedom of action. Accordingly, the common factor here is the power difference between the interlocutors (+power). As a result, the more power the hearer has over the speaker, the more likely it is for the speaker to issue the request indirectly.

Specifically speaking, both SANSs and AENSs tended to address their superiors' negative face wants by requesting indirectly. In situations 1, 2, 6, 11, the speaker is in a lower position than the hearer. Whether the interlocutors are socially distant or close and whether the rate of imposition is high or low, still both groups preferred not to ask directly from their superiors. This could be explained by Scollon and Scollon's [(1995) 2001] politeness framework. In these situations, the system is hierarchical. The speaker is in a lower position (-Power) and the hearer is in a higher position (+Power). Therefore, the speaker tries to avoid using direct strategy and resorts to an independence strategy that "emphasizes the individuality of the participant and their right not to be completely dominated by group or social values, and to be free from the imposition of others." (Scollon and Scollon 1995: 37). It should be borne in mind that cultural dimensions play also a major role in shaping the communicative style and behavior of individuals and that interestingly "the dimensions of individualism and power distance have proved most influential in studies linking culture with verbal behavior" (Ogiemann 2009: 25). As a result, the preference in the use of indirect requests in the aforementioned situations by both groups can be plausibly explained too by Hofstede's (1991) cultural dimensions theory. The Arab world is characterized by high power distance. As a result, subordinates acknowledge and perceive power differences between them and the superordinates. Thus, subordinates have to show formal and respectful behaviours. Part of that respect is requesting indirectly from their superiors and using formal titles such as *Doctor/Dr*, *ustadi/my boss*. On the other hand, Americans are classified as individualists where there is a great emphasis on personal achievements and individual rights. Part of those rights is not intruding in others' territories by giving them options to either comply or decline the request.

On the other hand, cross-cultural variation in the use of indirect request was found clearly in S 3 (mind telephone) 26.7% for SANSs and 70.0% for AENSs, S 7 (cancel holiday) 30.0% for SANSs and 83.3% for AENSs, S 8 (type letter) 13.3% for SANSs and 70.0% for AENSs, S 12 (borrow computer) 40.0% for SANSs and 93.3% for AENSs, S 4 (ask for direction) 3.3% for SANSs and 43.3% for AENSs, and in S 9 (borrow house) 36.7% for SANSs and 73.3% for AENSs. In all of these situations, the speaker is either exerting power over the hearer or both of them are friends. Consequently, SANSs favored not to use indirect strategy when requesting from either their

inferiors or friends. On the contrary, AENSs opted to use indirect request even though they were addressing their inferiors. Unlike SANSs, AENSs preferred to use conventional indirectness with their friends on the condition that the request was costly. For example, in S 9 (borrow house), both S and H are friends (-Distance) with (-Power) relationship, but the rate of imposition is high. As a result, while only 36.7% of SANSs employed indirect request, 73.3% of AENSs opted for the same strategy. Being indirect, the speaker gives the hearer more options and minimizes the threat to the hearer's face. Culturally speaking, indirect requests are motivated by politeness in an individualistic culture that emphasizes every individual's autonomy and right to be free from imposition. This result goes hand in hand with previous research that has shown that there is a marked preference in Anglo-Saxon communities to use indirect requests and that indirectness in requests is motivated by politeness (for example, Brown and Levinson 1987; Leech 1983; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Yu 2011).

The lowest incidence in the use of conventional indirectness in both languages was found in S 4 (ask for directions). This could be explained by the scenario of the situation itself: two friends were driving and they got lost; one of them is asking the other to ask a pedestrian for the direction. Notice that both of them are close friends (-Distance); there is no one exerting power over the other (-Power); and the rate of imposition is low (-High). This is a solidarity politeness system in which friends express closeness and a common point of view when requesting directly from each other. As a result, the use of indirect strategy seemed to be appropriate by only 3.3% of SANSs and by 43.3% of AENSs.

We can readily notice that both SANSs and AENSs preferred to use indirect strategy when addressing their equals on the condition that there is a social distance between interlocutors. For example, indirect request was employed by 86.7% of SANSs and by 63.3% of AENSs in S 5 (ask for lift) and by 66.7% of SANSs and 100.0% of AENSs in S 10 (swap seats). In both situations, the status between the speaker and the hearer is equal but there is a distance between them. As a result, participants preferred to use indirect strategies to minimize the risk of losing face. An explanation can be found in Scollon and Scollon's [(1995)2001] deferential politeness system in which the participants maintain a deferential distance from each other. They are considered to be equals or near equals with no interlocutor exerting power over the other (-Power), but treat each other at a distance (+Distance). As a result, both interlocutors use independence strategies, including expressions that minimize threat to avoid the risk of losing face. To conclude, the more the social distance between interlocutors and the more the rate of imposition, the more indirect strategy is employed by both groups.

5.3 The Use of Non-Conventional Indirect Strategy

Figure 3 compares the use of non-conventional indirectness (NCI) across twelve situations in both languages.

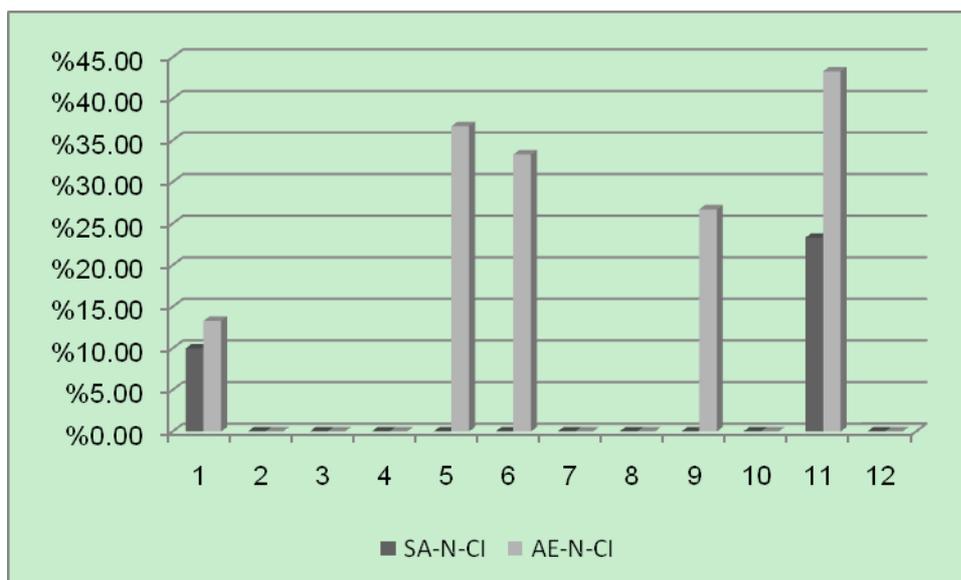


Figure 3. The use of non-conventional indirectness across the twelve situations in both languages

It is obvious that instances of NCI (i.e., hints) were less frequently observed and were the least preferred strategy amongst SANSs. On the contrary, AENSs employed NCI more than SANSs. AENSs used this strategy in five situations while SANSs employed it only in two situations.

More specifically, and as illustrated graphically in Figure 3, the highest percentage in the use of NCI in both languages was found in S 11 (ask for loan) in which 43.3% of AENSs opted for NCI while 23.3% of SANSs employed the same strategy too. In this situation, the speaker is asking his/her newly-appointed manager/ess for loan. Moreover, the speaker has previously got a loan from the company and they said that would be the last time. Notice that the social variables of power difference and the rate of imposition are involved. Therefore, in order to minimize the threat and to avoid the risk of losing face, the speaker has to avoid requesting directly from the hearer and rely on context embedded meaning.

Likewise, cross-cultural agreement in the use of NCI appeared also in S 1 (borrow book). 13.3% of AENSs employed hints whereas NCI was seen only in 10.0% of the SANSs data. In this situation, the speaker is a student trying to get a book from his/her university professor. Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010: 327-28) pointed out that in Arab norms, a university professor is one who has gained much academic knowledge, and, thus placed at the top of the academic and social hierarchy. Accordingly, students have to reflect their awareness of this asymmetrical professor-student relationship. Part of that reflection is the use of hints to give the professor more options and diminishes the force of the request.

It is worth pointing out that the rate of imposition greatly influenced the use of NCI in AENSs requests. They used NCI in S 5 (ask for lift) with a percentage of 36.7%. Similarly, they employed the same strategy in S 6 (borrow car) with a percentage of 33.3% and in S 9 (borrow house) with a percentage of 26.7% respectively. The common factor between all of these situations is the high rate of imposition. The request is very imposing and there is a great risk of losing face; thus, the speaker has to preserve the hearer's face by relying on hints. To conclude, the highest preference for NCI appeared in situations where the relationship between participants is unequal, distant, and when the rate of imposition is high.

6. Conclusion

In this article we examined and compared the notions of indirectness and politeness in the speech act of requests among Saudi Arabic native speakers and American English native speakers. Interestingly, this research has revealed a number of points. Firstly, it was found that conventional indirectness was the most preferred strategy among AENSs. AENSs were found to opt for conventional indirectness in most of the situations even when they were addressing their inferiors. The only situation in which AENSs opted for direct strategy was when the relationship between the speaker and the hearer was very intimate (-Distance), and the rate of imposition was low. In American English context, there seemed to be a relationship between conventional indirectness and politeness as conventional indirectness expressed respect to every individual's right to be free from imposition. This result is consistent with other studies which found that conventional indirectness is the most preferred strategy in Anglo-Saxon communities (e.g., Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Reiter 2000; Yu 2011). Secondly, it was found that conventional indirectness was used among SANSs in situations when inferiors were addressing their superiors regardless of the degree of imposition and in situations that displayed equal status and distance between informants. This result is supported by Scollon and Scollon's ([1995] 2001) hierarchy and deferential politeness systems respectively. In asymmetrical relationships, subordinates acknowledge and respect the social differences between them and their superordinates and thus use independence politeness strategies that show respect and emphasize individual's freedom of action. In (-Power), (+Distance) relationships, both interlocutors use independence politeness strategies to minimize threat and avoid losing face. The results revealed that there was a negative correlation between in-directness and social distance in (-Power), (+Distance) relationships. The less familiar the informants were, the more likely it was for them to request indirectly. Thirdly, it was found that direct request was the preferred strategy among SANSs in situations when superiors were addressing their inferiors and among friends regardless of the weight of the request. It could be argued now that unlike Brown and Levinson's (1878 and 1987) and Leech's (1983) assumptions that the more indirect an utterance is, the more polite it is, the results from this study illustrated that directness in the Saudi Arabic context was the expected behavior in a solidarity politeness system (-Power, -Distance). This is consistent with other studies which found that directness in some cultures should not be considered impolite, but rather should be seen as a way of expressing connectedness, closeness, camaraderie and affiliation (e.g., Economidou-Kogetsidis 2002; Wierzbicka 2003; Al-Marrani and Szalgie 2010).

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Appendix I

Classification of Request Head Acts

(Adapted from Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper 1989)

1. The Most Direct Strategies (Called Performatives)

This most explicit level realized by requests syntactically marked as such, for example, imperatives, or by other verbal means that name the act as a request. (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 46) (e.g., 'give me your notebook please'). There are five substrategies in this strategy level. These are as follows:

a. Mood Derivable / Imperative

'Utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force'

(Blum-Kulka et al 1989: 18) (e.g., 'Please leave me alone').

b. Explicit Performatives

'Utterances in which the illocutionary force is explicitly named' (Blum-Kulka et al 1989: 18) (e.g., 'I'm asking you to clean up that mess').

c. Hedged Performatives

'Utterances in which the naming of the illocutionary force is modified' (Blum-Kulka et al 1989: 18) e.g. by hedging expressions (e.g., 'I would like to ask you to give your presentation a week earlier than scheduled.')

d. Obligation Statement

'Utterances which state the obligation of the Hearer to carry out the act' (Blum-Kulka et al 1989: 18) (e.g., 'You will have to move that car').

e. Want Statements

'Utterances which state the Speaker's desire that the Hearer carries out the act' (Blum-Kulka et al 1989: 18) (e.g., 'I really want you to stop bothering me').

2. The Conventionally Indirect Strategies

Strategies that realize the act by reference to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance, as conventionalized in a given language (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 47) (e.g., 'could you please give me your notebook'). The sub-strategies of this level are as follows:

a. Suggestory Formulae

'Utterances which contain a suggestion to do X' (Blum-Kulka et al 1989: 18) (e.g., 'How about cleaning up tonight?').

b. Query Preparatory

Utterances which contain reference to preparatory conditions (e.g., 'Could you clean up the kitchen, please?').

3. The Non-Conventionally Indirect Strategies (Called Hints)

Strategies that realize the request either by partial reference to the object or element needed, for the implementation of the act by reliance on contextual clues (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 47) (e.g., 'will be using your notebook tonight') intent: borrowing the addressee's notebook. The sub-strategies of this level are as follows:

a. Strong Hints

Utterances containing partial reference to object or element needed for the implementation of the act. (e.g., 'You have left the kitchen in a right mess.')

b. Mild Hints

Utterances that make no reference to the request proper but can be interpreted as request by context (e.g., 'I am a nun.' in response to persistent hassler).

Appendix II: Questionnaire--Arabic Version

الإستبانة

الاسم:(اختياري):

العمر:

التخصص:

أنثى

ذكر

شكرا على قيامك بالإجابة على هذا الإستبيان و الذي يهدف إلى دراسة موضوع الطلب باللغة العربية العامية المستخدمة في السعودية . يحتوي هذا الإستبيان على اثني عشر موقف . المطلوب منك هو أن تقوم بالكتابة في الفراغ كما تتوقع أن تقول في ذلك الموقف كما لو أنه حقيقي و واقعي. يرجى كتابة كل ما يمكن أن تقول قبل و بعد الطلب الأساسي. هذا الإستبيان هو لإغراض البحث العلمي فقط و سوف تبقى هوية المشاركين فيه مجهولة تماما.

الموقف الأول: أنت طالب في الجامعة و بحاجة إلى كتاب (مرجع) من المكتبة لإتمام بحث مطلوب منك تسليمه في وقت محدد. المكتبة مغلقة هناك شخص واحد تعرف أن لديه المرجع و هو احد مدرسيك, شاهدت هذا المدرس في طريقه إلى مكتبه, ماذا ستقول له؟

الموقف الثاني: أنت بحاجة إلى ساعة من الوقت لإتمام بعض المهام خارج المدينة, ذهبت إلى المسؤول عنك في العمل (مع العلم أنك على علاقة حميمة معه) لتطلب منه أن يحل محلك بينما أنت في الخارج . ماذا ستقول له؟

الموقف الثالث: أنت موظف في شركة منذ فترة من الزمن , إحدى واجباتك في العمل هي الإجابة على المكالمات , ذهبت إلى مكتب احد المتدربين الجدد في الشركة لتطلب منه أن يجيب على الهاتف بينما أنت في الخارج لوضع دقائق لإحضار بعض الأشياء . ماذا ستقول له؟

الموقف الرابع: أنت مع صديقك في السيارة , و أنت السائق, كلاكما يقصد شارع عبدا لله خياط و أضعتما الطريق, و فجأة رأيتما احد المارة في نهاية الشارع, طلبت من صديقك أن يسأل ذلك الشخص عن الاتجاه الصحيح. ماذا ستقول لصديقك؟

الموقف الخامس : أنت بحاجة لنقل بعض الأغراض من بيتك و لم ترتب لذلك بإحضار شخص يساعدك لان كل أصدقائك في إجازة و لم تطلب وسيلة نقل لأنك لا تملك النقود , شاهدت جارك (الذي لا تعرفه جيدا) و الذي يملك سيارة , تريد أن تطلب منه مساعدتك في نقل الأغراض . ماذا ستقول له ؟

الموقف السادس: تعطلت سيارتك و أنت بحاجة ماسة لإحضار شخص من المطار, و لا يوجد وسيلة نقل إلى المطار إلا السيارات الخاصة, ذهبت إلى مكتب رئيسك في العمل, الذي أنت على علاقة حميمة معه, لتطلب منه أن يعيرك سيارته. ماذا ستقول له ؟

الموقف السابع: تم تعيينك كمسؤول عن مشروع مهم في العمل . أحد زملائك في المشروع قد حجز تذكرة طائرة للاستمتاع بعطلته. و أدركت أنك بحاجة ماسة إلى كل أفراد الطاقم لإنهاء المشروع في وقته المحدد, استدعيته إلى مكتبك لتطلب منه إلغاء السفر و البقاء, ماذا ستقول له ؟

الموقف الثامن : تم تعيينك كمسؤول عن مشروع في العمل , ذهبت إلى مكتب احد زملائك في العمل لتطلب منه أن يطبع لك بعض الرسائل . ماذا ستقول له؟

الموقف التاسع : يملك صديقك شاليه في أبحر و أنت تريد الذهاب في إجازة لمدة إسبوع و تعلم أن الشاليه سيبقى خاليا لمدة إسبوعين من الآن . قابلت صديقك في الجامعة و تريد أن تطلب منه قضاء الإجازة في الشاليه خاصته. ماذا ستقول له؟

الموقف العاشر : استقبلت الباص مع إبنك و لم تجد فيه أي كرسي مزدوج فارغ مع العلم بأن هنالك العديد من المقاعد الفردية فارغة, تريد أن تطلب من أحد الراكبين في المقاعد المزدوجة أن يبادل لك المقعد من أجل أن تجلس بجانب إبنك . ماذا ستقول له؟

الموقف الحادي عشر: ترتب عليك العديد من الفواتير المستحقة الدفع و لا تملك المال لدفعها و لا تريد أن تطلب من أصدقائك المال بسبب ما يعرفونه عنك من أنك لا تسدد ما تستدينه من المال, كما أن الشركة التي تعمل بها لن تعطيك قرضاً لأنك تقدمت بطلب لقرض في وقت سابق و أعلمت أنك لا تستطيع أن تأخذ غيره في المستقبل, لكنك بحاجة ماسة لدفع الفواتير, و إلا ستعرض لقطع خط الكهرباء و الهاتف إذا لم تدفع في القريب العاجل , ذهبت إلى مكتب رئيسك في العمل المعين حديثاً لتطلب منه المال, ماذا ستقول له؟

الموقف الثاني عشر: أنت تعمل في شركة منذ فترة من الزمن , و أحد المتدربين الجدد معك في المكتب أحضر معه حاسوباً محمولاً جديداً خاصاً به , وتريد أن تطلب منه أن تستخدم هذا الحاسوب لفترة قصيرة , ماذا ستقول له؟

Appendix III: Questionnaire--English Version

Instructions:

You will be asked to read brief situations; you will have to act as you would in an actual situation. Do not think too much and try to be as spontaneous as possible. This questionnaire will be used for research purposes only. Thank you for your cooperation.

Name: (optional):

Age:

Major:

SEX: M

F

Situation 1: You are a university student. You need to get the book from the library to finish your assignment on time. The library is closed and there is only one person you know who has the book you need, one of your lecturers. On the way to his/her office you meet him/her in the hallway. What do you say?

Situation 2: You need to run few errands down town. You think that will take you an hour. You go to your manager/ess's office at work with whom you get on well and ask him/her to cover for you. What do you say?

Situation3: You have been an employee of a company for some time now. One of your duties is to answer the telephone. You go to the desk of new trainee and ask him/her to answer the telephone while you pop out for a few minutes to get some things. What do you say to him/her?

Situation4: You are in your car with a friend. You are driving. You both need to go to X Street. Your friend was given a map with directions which s/he gave to you just before leaving the house. You are now lost. You suddenly see a pedestrian at the end of the road. You ask your friend to ask the pedestrian for directions. What do you say to your friend?

Situation5: You ask neighbor you do not know very well to help you move some things out of your apartment with his/her car since you have not got a car and you have not got anyone else to ask since everyone you know appears to be on a holiday and you have no money either to hire someone who can help or to arrange transport. You see your neighbor on the street. What do you say to him/her?

Situation6: Your car has just broken down and you need to collect someone from the airport urgently and there is no other means of getting there other than by car. You go to your manager/ess's office at work, with whom you get on well, and ask him/her for his/her car. What do you say to him/her?

Situation7: You have been put in charge of a very important project at work. Your colleague has already booked a ticket to go on a holiday. You realize you will be needing all members of the staff to finish the project on time and thus you ask him/her to stay. You ask him/her to come to your office to break the news. What do you say to him/her?

Situation8: You have been put in charge of new project at work. You go to the desk of your colleague of yours to ask him/her to type a few letters for you. What do you say to him/her?

Situation9: A friend of yours has a house in countryside. You want to go on a holiday somewhere relaxing for a week and you know nobody is going to be in the house for at least two weeks. You meet your friend in a pub and ask him/her to stay in his/her country house for a week. What do you say to him/her?

Situation10: You are on a bus with a child. There are plenty of seats on the bus but there are not any for two people together. You ask a passenger who is sitting on his/her own on a two-seater to change seats with you so that you can sit next to the child. What do you say to him/her?

Situation11: You have received a lot of house bills which are due for payment. You have not got any money. You cannot ask your friends for money since you have got a reputation of never paying back. The company where you work will not give you a cash advance since the last time you asked for one they said that would be the last time. You desperately need to pay these bills otherwise you will not have any electricity, gas or telephone. You go to the office of the recently appointed manager/ess and ask him/her for the money. What do you say to him/her?

Situation12: You have been working for a company for some time now. One of the new trainees has brought his/her new brand laptop to work. You ask him/her to use it for a while. What do you say to him/her?