

# Interlanguage request modification: a case in vocational college

*by I Made Rai Jaya Widanta*

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**Submission date:** 13-Mar-2023 10:08AM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 2035733618

**File name:** guage\_Request\_Modification\_a\_Case\_in\_Vocational\_College\_IOP.docx (601.08K)

**Word count:** 3882

**Character count:** 21410

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To cite this article: I M R J Widanta *et al* 2018 *J. Phys.: Conf. Ser.* **953** 012095

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## Interlanguage request modification: a case in vocational college

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**Abstract.** There has been much attention given by scholars to the investigation of inter-language pragmatics (ILP), and some of them have been concentrating on how ILP speakers modify their speech acts (SA) of request. This study was aimed at investigating request modification produced by Indonesian English speakers. A group of 23 college students majoring in tourism was involved as research participants. The participants were given two tests using two role play cards with two hotel-context request situations, i.e. low imposing request (R- Rq) and high imposing request (R+ Rq). Pretest was given prior to and post-test was given upon treatment. The situation was chosen based on <sup>[1]</sup> exemplar generation<sup>1</sup> model. The data of request utterances was analyzed and compared with request taxonomies proposed by some scholars. Data analysis showed that the research participants were more competent pragmatically upon the treatment, indicated with the fact where they were able to produce 13 request modification patterns being compared to 11 patterns prior to the treatment.

### 1. Introduction

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has been one of many focuses of attention of scholars in more or less the past twenty years. More specifically, much research was undertaken to investigate how ILP speakers modify their speech acts (SA) of request. Request (Rq), as discussed in this research, consists of two parts, the core or head act and peripheral modification<sup>2,3</sup>. Core or head act consists of the main utterance which has a requesting function and can stand by itself. While peripheral modification devices are optional items that serve to either mitigate or intensify the force of requesting move.

Research on ILP request had brought great achievement in the way how modification of request is classified <sup>[4], [5], [6], [7], [8]</sup>. The classifications, which were used to analyze requests modification made by participants in this research, had been referred by scholars <sup>[9], [10]</sup>. Modification is one of conditions used to judge whether or not someone is considered to be competent pragmatically.

Pragmatic competence is the ability to use language appropriately and effectively. The competence comprises three major parts; (1) grammatical competence; (2) sociolinguistic competence; and (3) strategic competence<sup>[11]</sup>. Pragmatic competence itself belongs to sociolinguistic competence. On the other hand <sup>[12]</sup>, subdivides pragmatic competence into two parts; (1) pragmalinguistic, the linguistic end of pragmatics, and (2) sociopragmatic, sociological interface of pragmatics. Sociolinguistic ability is the ability to produce and recognize socially appropriate language in context, operationalized as SA of request, refusal produced in oral role play<sup>[13]</sup>.



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In spite of some investigation undertaken on modification, they have not showed similar result one another.<sup>[9]</sup> Investigated how Australian learners of Indonesian language made modification when making request. Involving 20 students in an interactive oral role play using Indonesian language, this research was in attempt to draw a more complete picture of second language (SL) SA performance. It was found that most modification used in making request was internal modification. It was summarized that 67,7% of the modifier were the use of negation '*ngak*' and '*ndak*', kinship term of address '*pak*', appeler '*ya* and *yess*', and under starter '*sedikit* or *little*'. In conclusion, It was found that request modification produced by learners lacked of internal modification and frequent supportive moves. In line with this research,<sup>[14]</sup> investigated use of modification of request SA by Greek learners of English<sup>14</sup>. The investigation was in purpose to see to which extend the learners' use of mitigation deviates from that of British English native speakers. It was found that the amount and type of modification of mitigation used by Greek learners present some deviations from native speakers' use since there has been native influence and pragmatic and sociopragmatic influence. In addition, the fact was also judged as the result of different politeness orientation of the two groups.

<sup>12</sup> In line with<sup>[9]</sup> findings, Iranian learners of English was found to overuse external modification and underused internal modification being compared to the American native speakers (NSs)<sup>10</sup>. The ILP request modification research was intended to investigate ILP knowledge of Iranian English learners to see their ability to perform SA of request, clearly to see to what extent they approximate native speakers (NSs) in using internal and external modification. Thus, performance of Iranian learners of English was compared to American NSs of English. Using discourse completion task (DCT) with 12 situations to elicit data, there were 120 participants involved to fill in the DCT. Data was categorized using CCSARP modification<sup>6</sup>. Clearly, it was found that they used external modification a lot higher in frequency than internal modification being compared to American NSs. In addition, they showed pragmatic development toward NS norms with an increase in language proficiency level. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the learning of English as second language (L2) involves acquisition of not only lexical, phonological and syntactical knowledge of target language (TL) but also its pragmatic rules. The endeavor is of importance for the learners to be able to use TL in a native like manner<sup>10</sup>, gain socio-cultural rule appropriately apart from grammatical competence<sup>[15]</sup>. The research results found did not draw consistence one another. Thus, this research was aimed at investigating request modification done by research participants prior to and up on the learning. Specifically, it is in purpose to respond to the following research questions:

1. Are participants of the research considered more competent pragmatically up on their learning?
2. How are their request modifications prior to and up on the learning like?

## 2. Methodology

The research was initiated with developing instrument used to obtain data. The instrument was oral role play card, which was believed to be able to give more natural data of request modification related to English in hotel context. To find the most frequently used situation of request in hotel context, exemplar generation model<sup>[16]</sup>.<sup>1</sup> was utilized. A questionnaire containing direction for hotel staff to list a number of situations in which request was use in order of its frequency was delivered. Two most frequently occurred situations were then chosen. They were used as the basis for making oral role play card. They were two request cards, high imposing request (Rq R+) and low imposing request (Rq R-) composed. The cards were written in Indonesian language to ease participants to comprehend them. Prior to their use, the cards were piloted by 3 students who were in the same level as the research participants to see whether or not the cards were comprehended and participants will be able to follow the instruction. Up on their execution, there were some comments or revision including narration, word choices, spelling, font given in a focused group discussion (FGD).

There were 23 semester III students majoring in tourism in a vocational higher education institution of Tourism were involved as research participants. The class in which the group of student was in was chosen with purposive sampling method. The first test (T1) was done to draw research participants' basic competence prior to the treatment. On the T1, two students were called into the test

room. Using the oral role play cards, each participant was given chance to respond to the two cards. In this case, the teacher acted as a hotel guest to who the speech acts of request were delivered. The teacher at the same occasion also recorded the participants' utterances.

Treatment by giving a period of 6-meeting-learning was done after T1. Participants were taught English for tourism whose materials was inserted with pragmatics-based English materials. The learning materials were design in such a way that the use of English contextually can be explicitly introduced. The materials scope for the learning was made in line with the oral role play card materials. Students were involved in communicative language teaching (CLT) <sup>[17]</sup> to give participants chance to use the TL for communication. It is enhanced to train participants to use the language and sociological aspects of language in order for them to be able to use the TL appropriately.

The T2 using the same instrument of oral role play card was given up on the treatment. As T1, T2 was also done with the same process. Each participant's utterance recording was explicated and was printed into a table. Each participant's name was printed in the table and was given four grids to fill with each utterance for instance, utterance Rq R- was posted in column Rq R- of the speaker concerned. Each utterances of participants were compared to expressions stated in taxonomies used for judgment.

Analysis of score was done descriptively. The data in terms of modification to request was described with sentences. The description includes that of type of modification, classification of modification, and number of modification made for each card, as well as frequency of each modification appeared.

Table 1. Request Taxonomy <sup>[15]</sup>

| No                           | Request Modification                                                                                    | Sample Expression                                              |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>External Modification</b> |                                                                                                         |                                                                |
| 1                            | Preparatory                                                                                             | Hey, you had this management class, right?                     |
| 2                            | Grounder                                                                                                | I wasn't in class the other day                                |
| 3                            | Disarmer                                                                                                | I know this is short notice                                    |
| 4                            | Promise of reward                                                                                       | I'll buy you dinner                                            |
| 5                            | Imposition minimizer                                                                                    | I'll return them in an orderly fashion                         |
| 6                            | Sweetener                                                                                               | Today's class was great                                        |
| 7                            | Pre-pre strategy                                                                                        | Hallo sir, How are you today?                                  |
| 8                            | Appreciation                                                                                            | I would appreciate it.                                         |
| 9                            | Self-Introduction                                                                                       | Hey, I'm in your politics class.                               |
| 10                           | Confirmatory strategy                                                                                   | I would be grateful if you could help me                       |
| 12                           | Getting a pre-commitment                                                                                | Could you do me a favor?                                       |
| 13                           | Apology                                                                                                 | I'm sorry. I can't give you the lesson on Monday.              |
| <b>Internal Modification</b> |                                                                                                         |                                                                |
| 1                            | Down grader (Syntactic down grader)                                                                     |                                                                |
|                              | Play down                                                                                               | I was wondering if I could join your group                     |
|                              | Conditional .....                                                                                       | if you have time                                               |
| 2                            | Down grader (Lexical/phrase down grader)                                                                |                                                                |
|                              | Politeness marker                                                                                       | Can I <u>please</u> have an extension on this paper?           |
|                              | Embedding                                                                                               | I'll be grateful if you could put this on the door.            |
|                              | Understate                                                                                              | <u>If</u> you have minutes, could you help me with this stuff? |
|                              | Appealer                                                                                                | <u>I need your computer to finish my assignment, okay?</u>     |
|                              | Down toner                                                                                              | Is there any way I could get an extension?                     |
|                              | Consultative device                                                                                     | Would <u>you</u> mind lending me a hand?                       |
| 3                            | Upgrader (Adverbial Intensifier): I would be <u>most</u> grateful if you could let me use your Article. |                                                                |

Table 2. Request Taxonomy <sup>[4], [2], [3], [7], and [8]</sup>



| No                           | Request Modification     | Sample Expression                                                 |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>External Modification</b> |                          |                                                                   |
| 1                            | Preparatory              | My I ask you for a favour? Could you open the window?             |
| 2                            | Grounder                 | It seems it is quite hot in here. Could you open the window?      |
| 3                            | Disarmer                 | I hate bothering you but could you open the window?               |
| 4                            | Expander                 | Would you mind opening the window? Once again, could you open it? |
| 5                            | Cost minimizer           | Could you open the window? I'll close it after the class session. |
| 6                            | Please                   | Would you mind opening the window, please?                        |
| <b>Internal Modification</b> |                          |                                                                   |
| 1                            | Opener                   |                                                                   |
|                              | Question                 | Do you think you could open the window?                           |
|                              | Constructive device      | Would you mind opening the window?                                |
|                              | Negative                 | I don't suppose you mind closing the window.                      |
|                              | Conditional              | I'll be grateful if you could open the window.                    |
| 2                            | Hedges                   |                                                                   |
|                              | Softener (diminutives)   | Abbreviation ( info=information)                                  |
|                              | Softener (Tag question)  | You could open the window, couldn't you?                          |
|                              | Softener (Miscellaneous) | Could you possibly open the window for a moment?                  |
| 3                            | Intensifier              | You really must open the window.                                  |
|                              | Fillers                  |                                                                   |
|                              | Hesitator                | I er er mmm, I wonder if....                                      |
|                              | Cajoler                  | You know, you see....                                             |
|                              | Appealers                | Ok, right, yes                                                    |
|                              | Attention getter         | Excuse me, Hallo, Look                                            |

### 3. Result and Discussion

Result of both tests (T1 and T2) shows a different situation about participants' ability in modify their utterances when making requests. They obviously could make quite different modifications. In the table below, it is drawn the comparison between participants' ability in modifying request prior to treatment and up on the treatment. The table draws number and type of modification they could produce because I was sick in both periods and frequency of use of each modification. In addition, it is also clearly described differences and tendency of type of utterances they produced.

Table 3. Participants' Request (Rq) Modification Pattern

| T1                        |                  | T2                              |                  |
|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Modification Patterns     | Frequency of use | Modification Patterns           | Frequency of use |
| Preparatory               | 1.2%             | Softener (Miscellaneous)        | 0.6%             |
| Filler (attention getter) | 24%              | Lexical Down grader (embedding) | 3%               |
| Filler (Hesitation)       | 3.7%             | Syntactic Down grader           | 1.8%             |
| Grounder                  | 12.6%            | Pre-pre strategy                | 33%              |
| Apology                   | 11.3%            | Please (Ex)                     | 0.6%             |
| Pre-pre strategy          | 16%              | Wishes                          | 13.4%            |
| Constructive device       | 20%              | Filler (Hesitation)             | 1.2%             |
|                           | 1.2%             | Grounder                        | 14.7%            |
|                           |                  | Apology                         | 6.7%             |

|                   |      |                       |       |
|-------------------|------|-----------------------|-------|
| Imposition        | 6.3% | Constructive device   | 13.4% |
| Minimizer         | 1.2% | Imposition Minimizer  | 6.7%  |
| Please            | 1.2% | Confirmatory strategy | 3.6%  |
| Self-introduction |      | Promise of reward     | 0.6%  |
| Alternative       |      |                       |       |

The data in table 1 indicates that research participants' ability was quite extremely different before and after treatment. They were far more productive and could perform better ability on T2 than on T1.

On T1, there were 11 kinds of modification produced by the research participants with the total number of 79 utterances for both external and internal modifications. Their production of external modification dominated the production of the internal modification. The research participants were able to produce 58 external modification and 16 internal modifications. However, their ability to produce utterances varied, ranging from 1 utterance to 6 utterances. Most research participant (about 47.8%) were able to produce 3 utterances in T1. The second most utterance was 4 utterances produced by about 26% of entire participants. 1 utterance and 2 utterances were produced by about 8.6% participants respectively and the least utterances were 5 and 6 utterances, produced by about 4.3% of the entire participants. Their modification choice was different from that in T2.

The most modification successfully produced by the participants in T1 was filler (24%). Constructive device was made by 20% participant. The third most modification made was pre-pre strategy (16%). Grounder and apology was made by almost 11.5% participant, while please and hesitation were made by almost 6.3% and 3.7% respectively. The least modification made by participants were preparatory, self-introduction, and alternative (1.2%).

On T2, there were 13 kinds of modification produced by the research participants with the total number of 163 utterances for both external and internal modifications. As in T1, their production of external modification dominated the production of the internal modification in T2. The research participants were able to produce 145 external modification and 18 internal modifications. However, their ability to produce utterances varied, ranging from 2 utterance to 10 utterances. The most number of utterances produced were 7 and 9 produced by almost 30% participants and the least number of utterance was 2, 3, 5, and 10 utterances produced by almost 4.3% of all participants. While 6 and 8 utterances were produced by almost 13% of all participants. No participant produces 1, and 4 utterances during the T2.

The most modification successfully produced by the participants in T2 was pre-pre strategy (by almost 33%). Grounder, wish and constructive device were produced by almost 13.5%. Apology and imposition minimizer were produced by almost 6.7% participants. Confirmatory strategy was produced by 3.6% while syntactic down grader and filler (hesitation) were produced by almost 35% of participant. The least modification, such as softener, please, and promise of reward were produced by 0.6% of all participants.

The data above describes that external modification was mostly produced by participants in both test situations. And their use of both modifications in T2 was a lot more dominant than in T1. In the case of internal modification, they could produce 18 type of utterances in T2 and 16 types of utterances in T1. However, their ability in producing external modification utterance in T2 out weighted that in T1 (145 being compared to 58 utterances). The evidence proved that they were competent in pragmatics up on the treatment.

Participants' number of request modification utterance of T2 proceeded that of T1 in each episode. Participants generally could perform much more utterances for each role play card. They could produce between 2 to 10 utterances being compared to T1 (between 1 to 6 utterances). Even though, there were a small number of participant produced between 2 to 4 sentences, but most of them could produce more than 4 sentences for each period. It clearly indicates that they had richer ideas and better understanding of concept of request. This may be resulted by the treatment effectiveness.

The data also showed that research participants succeeded in producing more complicated pattern of utterances. This may be the result of having richer vocabulary and better pattern producing capability. It can be proven by the fact that they could produce more types of modification in T2 being compared to T1. They were able to use wider range of pre-pre strategy, lexical and syntactical down grader which was not found in T1. In addition to this, variation of modification they produced in response to the role play cards of request in T2 clarified that they had better knowledge of pragmatic<sup>[12]</sup>. There were some new modifications successfully produced in T2 which did not appear in T1, such as softener, lexical down grader, syntactic down grader, wishes, confirmatory strategy and promise of reward. Modification of wish which was uttered 13.4% of all utterances was an endeavour they took to show their pragmatic awareness, a condition required in order for someone to have a proficient use of target language<sup>[18], [19]</sup>. Additionally, the use of lexical down grader, confirmatory strategy, softener, syntactic down grader, as well as promise of reward was also a token of such achievement. To support the statement, the research participants were also successful in producing more complex forms of utterance, one of which is bi-clause sentences. This type of sentences was made in T2 to response to the oral role play card. This might be the cause of their having rich inputs. The inputs were of much help to enable them to produce better request modification. Even though input can be obtained through social interaction with their friends, families or relatives or in the target language community, it is not very significantly helpful as they did not get much knowledge of pragmatics during their social interaction. In addition, they did not have much chance to do interaction in the target language community as their profession did not allow them to do so.

It is assumed that intervention at language class was the major cause based on which participants were able to perform better knowledge. Explicit-implicit approach of language instruction was the primary aspect to improve their competence. Explicit exposure of pragmatic knowledge, such request, headacts of request and pragmatics functions of request during intervention was undertaken with explicit approach. Leading their brain to pragmatic area on the opening of lesson using implicit approach and communicative activity was playing important role to the success. In addition, implicit approach during activating and automatizing was very much helps to the achievement. The learning syntagmatic of “engage-enrich-encourage” took important parts to improve their competence<sup>[20]</sup>. In addition to this, the explicit intervention helped them to be able to notice the inputs the teacher delivered during the intervention<sup>[21]</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion

Participants’ pragmatic competence was exposed by the pragmatic intervention in spite of their pursuing inputs during social interaction with their friends or involving in target language. Implicit-explicit-implicit approach using learning syntagmatic of “engage-enrich-encourage” triggered participants to foster better pragmatic competence.

This finding might be considered a non-final conclusion about the factors triggering someone to be able to perform skill in modifying request. A research replication in the same area with different aspect can be done, such as using bigger number of participant, different respondent, and research location. Modification the interventional activities might also be optimized, such as different approach, learning syntagmatic, or materials.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to thank Directorate Research and Social Service, Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education for their financial support that this research was successfully undertaken.

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# Interlanguage request modification: a case in vocational college

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