

International Conference Minds, networks, narratives: 90 Years of the Department of English,  
University of Zagreb

# A COMPARATIVE VIEW ON SOCIO-PRAGMATIC PARAMETERS OF REQUESTS

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# INTRODUCTION

- Speech act theory:
  - each utterance, in addition to its meaning, performs a specific act.
- speech acts are language acts used to convey a certain communicative function.
- Speaker needs to be able to correctly express his/her communicative intent,
  - while the hearer needs to be able to recognize it.
- Used as part of a speech situation/speech event.
- Influenced by social and contextual factors.

# REQUESTS

- Diverse acts that can be realized through various language forms.
- Closely intertwined with concepts of indirectness and politeness.
- Show great cross-cultural variation.
- Defined as an act that expresses the speaker's desire.
- The speaker asks the hearer to perform a certain act to its benefit.
- The speaker attempts to get the hearer to perform or stop performing some kind of action.

- ❖ Most often used as single & **opening act**.
  - Function as discourse initiators.
- ❖ **Impositive acts** – the requester imposes the requestee in some way.
  - The level of imposition helps determine different request types.
- ❖ **Face-threatening acts** to both interlocutors.
  - The act puts an imposition on the hearer's freedom of action.
  - The degree of imposition is often decreased with indirectness that consequently decreases the face threat.

## ❖ Directive acts

- the act is the cause for an expected action.
- the act is used to influence the behaviour of the hearer for the benefit of the speaker and at the cost of the hearer.
- More direct request means more transparent request.
- Although equated with imperative mood, can be expressed by interrogatives and/or other speech acts.
- The level of directness entails high level of imposition and lower level of politeness.

# METHODOLOGY

## ❖ Quantitative method

- Conveyed by an SPSS system (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

## ❖ Qualitative method

- Used to correlate the statistical data with the sociocultural features.

## ❖ Participants:

- American & Macedonian university students currently enrolled in a university.

## ❖ Instrument:

- An anonymous open-ended discourse completion task (DCT) conducted through 'Google forms'.

## ❖ Variables:

- Independent variable: the language spoken by each group.
- Dependent variables: social factors.
- Social **distance** – measured through the degree of familiarity between the interlocutors.
- Social **status** – determined in accordance to the interlocutors role in society.
- Severity of **imposition** – based on the importance of the request.

Speech act	Scenario	Social distance	Social status	Degree of imposition
REQUEST	1. You ask a stranger for help.	distant	neutral	low
	2. You ask classmate for notes.	close	equal	medium
	3. You ask the professor to regrade your assignment.	medium	unequal	high

➤ Classification of **strategies** in accordance to the categories proposed by Trosborg (1995).

Category	No.	Strategy
Indirect request	1	Hints
Conventionally indirect (hearer based)	2	Ability / willingness / permission
	3	Suggestive formulae
Conventionally indirect (speaker based)	4	Wishes / desires
	5	Needs / demands
Direct requests	6	Obligation and necessity
	7	Performatives
	8	Imperatives

➤ Hearer-based = the hearer is the agent of the request, who might politely refuse.

➤ Speaker-based = the focus is on the speaker; there is higher level of directness; more difficult to refuse.



# EXAMPLES

- Excuse me sir, do you know where I can leave my dog for a minute?
- Could you look for my dog for a second?
- Hi would you mind looking for my dog for a few minutes.
- Can I look at your notes
- Is there any chance you can regrade this?
- I wish you gave me the notes from the lecture.
- I will need to take your notes, if that's okay?
- I want my assignment regraded.
- You have to review my assignment

HINT

ABILITY

WILIGNESS

PERMISSION

SUGGESTIVE FORMULAE

WISHES

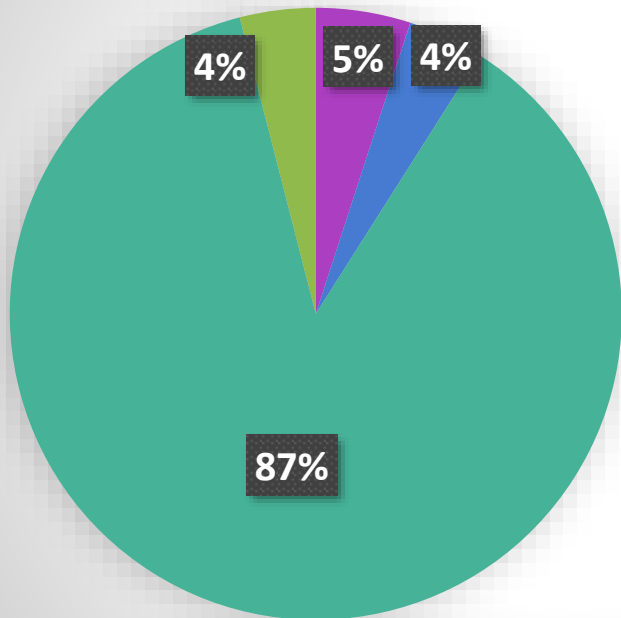
NEEDS

DEMANDS

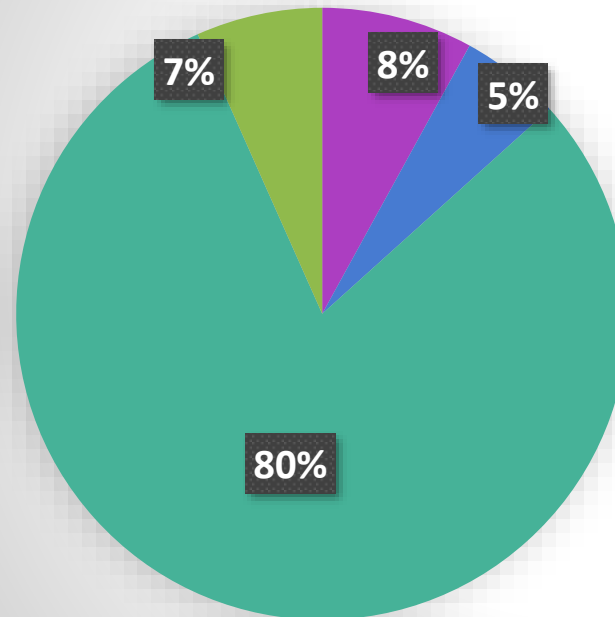
IMPERATIVES

# RESULTS

## USA respondents



## MK respondents



- indirect requests
- direct requests
- conventionally indirect hearer oriented requests
- conventionally indirect speaker oriented requests

# THE MOST FREQUENT FORM OF A REQUEST

## ❖ American respondents:

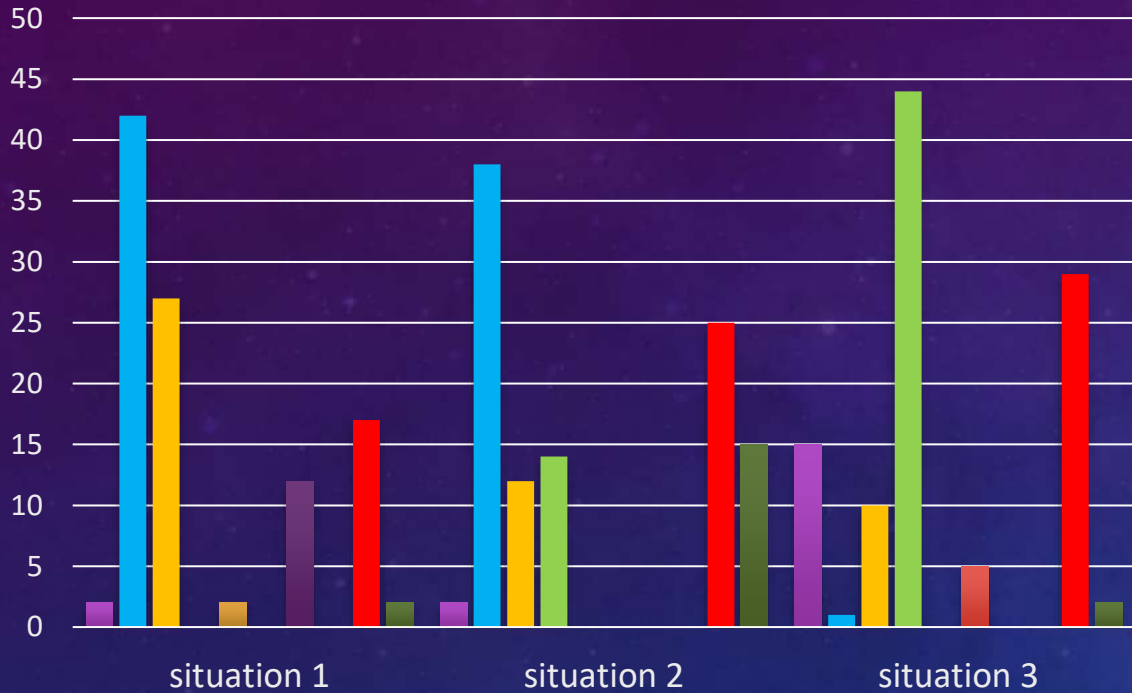
- conventionally indirect that asks for hearer's ability or willingness to respond.

## ❖ Macedonian respondents:

- conventionally indirect act that questions hearer's ability to respond, or
- direct act that expresses a statement of obligation.

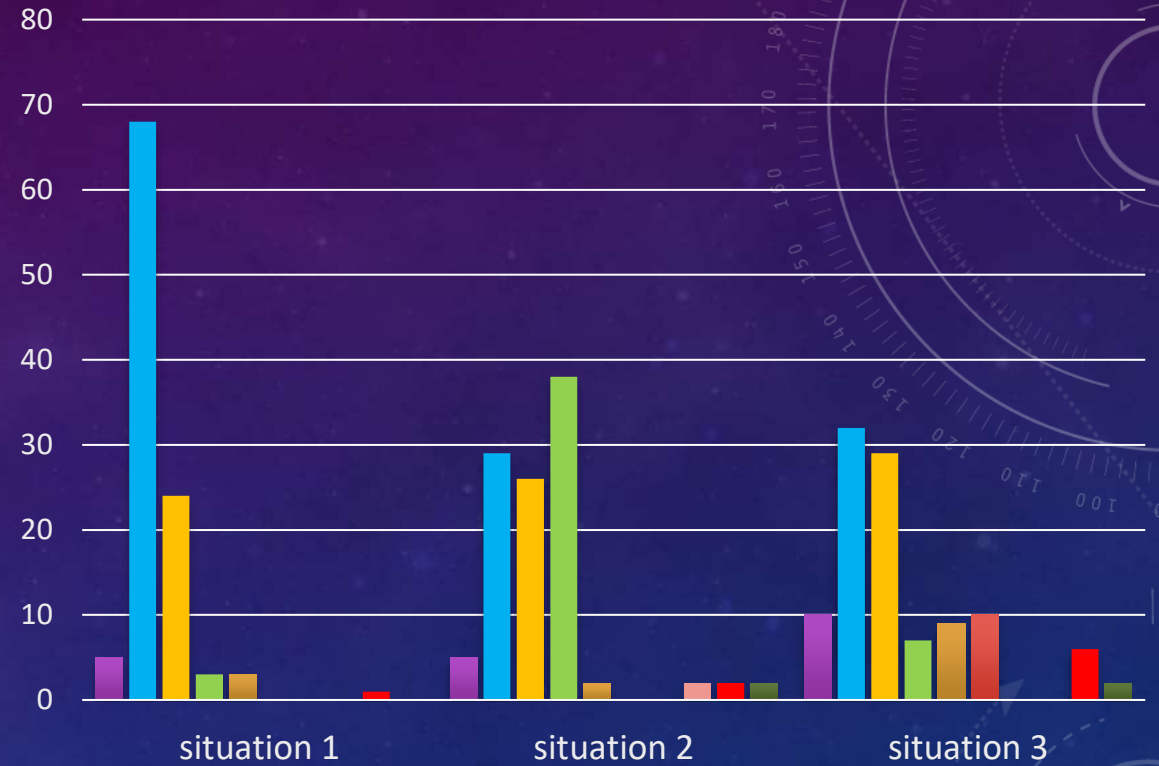
# RESULTS

## MK respondents



- hints
- willingness
- suggestive formulae
- desires
- obligation
- ability
- permission
- wishes
- needs
- necessity

## USA respondents



- hints
- willingness
- suggestive formulae
- desires
- obligation
- ability
- permission
- wishes
- needs
- necessity

### ❖ Scenario 1: speaking with a stranger

- Both groups tend to use requests that question the hearer's ability or willingness to respond to the request.

### ❖ Scenario 2: speaking with a friend

- USA respondents tend to ask for permission.
- MK respondents tend to use a direct request as a statement for obligation or necessity.
- some participants again question the hearer's ability or willingness to respond to the request.

### ❖ Scenario 3: speaking with a professor

- USA respondents drop the requests asking for permission but opt for requests that question the hearer's ability or willingness to respond to the request.
- MK show rise in requests that ask for permission and a large number of direct requests that express obligation.

# DISCUSSION

- There is **no difference** in the language form in a situation with **distant** interlocutors with **neutral social status** and **low imposition**.
- Interlocutors with **close** social distance, **equal social status** and **medium** imposition generate **different** requests.
- Interlocutors with **medium** distance, **unequal social status** and **high** imposition reflect **different** form of requests.
- USA respondents presented an indirect and peaceful communication, obedience and respect toward more authoritative interlocutors.
- MK respondents show partial use of indirect expression and respectful communication mostly present with the unknown interlocutors, more direct and explicit requests are preferred.

# CONCLUSION

- the **social distance** is the most influential parameter that influences differently the two groups of interlocutors, and consequently produces different pragmatic structures.
- the **social status** also has a different influence over the two groups of interlocutors, but its **influence is larger** on the American respondents.
- the **degree of imposition** of the speech situation has **very little influence** over the produced pragmatic structure.
- **Macedonian and American speakers use different strategies** in the expression of the speech act of *request*.
- The differences derive from the variable influence of the social parameters over the utterances of the two sample groups.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- English fluency is not possible without pragmatic instruction.
- Teachers may offer valuable advice on speech act application.
- Pragmatic instruction should be incorporated within EFL lessons through real discourse analysis, role plays, multiple choice activities, open-clause activities etc.
- There are no specific rules for expression, but preferable speech patterns and guidelines.
- Raise the awareness of students about the influence of social and contextual factors on language forms, as well as intercultural communication.



The preferred linguistic form of requests in American English includes:

- Emphasis on the hearer,
- Indirectness by the speaker,
- Clear expression of the communicative intent,
- The hearer has an opportunity to politely refuse,
- When speaking to strangers -> question the hearer's ability to do the act,
- When speaking with people close to you with similar social status -> ask for the hearer's permission to do the act.

The background features a dark blue gradient with faint, light-colored technical diagrams. On the left side, there is a large circular scale with numerical markings from 40 to 260 in increments of 10. Several dashed lines with arrows indicate circular paths or trajectories around the scale and other points. The overall aesthetic is technical and scientific.

THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR  
ATTENTION

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