THE USAGE AND IMPORTANCE OF REQUEST INTERNAL MITIGATION IN AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH AND IRAQI ARABIC: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the utilization of internal mitigating devices employed by Australian English native speakers and Iraqi Arabic native speakers for softening the force of request speech acts in everyday situations. Data for the study were collected through a role-play interview and analysed using an analytical framework based on the CCSARP model. The findings reveal both quantitative and qualitative distinctions between the two participant groups. Specifically, internal mitigating devices were found to be more prevalent in Australian English requests compared to Iraqi Arabic requests. Moreover, the two groups exhibited divergent employment of semantic formulae associated with certain mitigating devices in specific situations. The observed disparities in the use of request mitigations were attributed to linguistic and cultural variations inherent in the Australian and Iraqi contexts.

Keywords: Request Speech Acts; Request Mitigation; Internal Modifiers; Syntactic Downgraders; Lexical/phrasal Downgraders.

1. INTRODUCTION

Request speech acts are an essential component of everyday communication, allowing individuals to express their needs, desires, and intentions. The study of request speech acts in interlanguage and cross- cultural pragmatics has gained significant attention in recent years. Numerous studies have examined various strategies and linguistic formulae employed by individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to soften or intensify the imposition of their requests (Fukushima, 2000; Hassall, 2001, 2003; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2005, 2008, 2011; Barron, 2008; Merrison et al., 2012; Şanal and Ortaçtepe, 2019; Kaivanpanah and Langari, 2022). These investigations shed light on the potential impact of differences and similarities in the expression of request speech acts on cross-cultural communication and second language acquisition.

Previous research on requests (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1982; Blum-Kulka and House, 1989; Fukushima, 1994; Pair, 1996; Hassall, 2003; Blum-Kulka, 1987; Vinagre, 2008; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2002; Jalilifar, 2009; Umar, 2004) has primarily focused on request strategies employed in the head act, which refers to the core utterance conveying the request act itself. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), individuals tend to use indirect request strategies to enhance the politeness level of their requests, taking into account social power, social distance, and the level of imposition. However, the degree of directness or indirectness in the linguistic formula of the request head act is not the sole factor influencing the illocutionary force of a request. Hassall (2001) argues that request strategies are just one aspect that shapes the pragmatic effect of requests. Requesters can also employ internal and/or external modifications to mitigate or intensify the impact of their request acts (Faerch and Kasper, 1989).

Despite the extensive research on request strategies within the head act, there is a need to examine the utilization of internal mitigating devices within request head acts to comprehend requesters' linguistic behaviour and the cultural and contextual factors that may shape such behaviour. Investigating the use of such devices provides valuable insights into how individuals manage the social dynamics and interpersonal relationships associated with making requests. Moreover, understanding the cross-cultural and interlanguage variations in the employment of these devices contributes to our knowledge of pragmatic competence in second language acquisition and intercultural communication.

To date, very limited research has explored the specific utilization of internal mitigating devices in requests among Arabic native speakers in comparison to speakers of other languages. Thus, this study aims to address this gap by examining the use of internal mitigating devices by Iraqi Arabic native speakers and Australian English native speakers. By comparing these two distinct cultural and linguistic groups, we can gain insights into the influence of linguistic and cultural variations on the choice and effectiveness of internal mitigating devices in request speech acts. Therefore, the present study attempts to provide answers to the following research questions:

1.What are the quantitative differences in the usage of request internal mitigation between Iraqi Arabic native speakers (IANSs) and Australian English native speakers (AENSs)?

2.How do the contextual characteristics of the situations in which requests occur influence the utilization of internal mitigating devices by the two participant groups?

By investigating these research questions, we aim to contribute to the existing literature in interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics, enhance our understanding of request strategies, and provide practical insights for second language learners and intercultural communicators in navigating diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

Request modifiers offer an additional way for the requester to soften or strengthen the impact of their request, alongside the choice of directness or indirectness (Trosborg, 1995). Internal mitigating devices refer to linguistic cues or strategies employed within the request utterance itself to soften the imposition or mitigate the directness of the request. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) classify internal mitigating devices (downgraders) into two main categories. The first category comprises syntactic devices, such as interrogative, negation, and conditional clauses, which are employed to mitigate the imposition force of a request. The second category includes lexical/phrasal devices used within the request head act to soften its imposition, such as "please," understaters (e.g., "a little bit," "a minute"), and downtoners (e.g., "possibly," "perhaps," "just"). These devices contribute to the overall politeness and mitigating effect of the request (Hassall, 2001; Trosborg, 1995). The use of internal mitigating devices allows individuals to manage social dynamics and maintain positive interpersonal relationships while making requests.

In the field of cross-cultural pragmatics, limited research has been conducted on the internal mitigation of request speech acts across diverse languages and cultures. Most of previous investigations on request mitigation were conducted in interlanguage pragmatics, examining how second language (L2) learners employ request modifiers in the target language compared to native speakers' usage of these linguistic devices (Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Trosborg, 1995;

Beal, 1998; Hassall, 2001; Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010; Kanchina and Deepadung, 2019). However, some studies have been conducted within the field of cross-cultural pragmatics. The findings of most of these studies generate the impression that variations in language and culture can lead to different manifestations of request strategies, encompassing the frequencies and types of internal mitigating devices. One of these studies was conducted by Reiter (2000) who investigated the realization of requests in British English and Uruguayan Spanish. Her findings revealed a significantly lower occurrence of internal modifications in Uruguayan requests when compared to the frequency observed in British data. Reiter attributed this divergence in the use of internal downgraders to linguistic and cultural variations between British English and Uruguayan Spanish.

Likewise, in her investigation of the linguistic variations in the expression of requests by native speakers of English and native speakers of Chinese Cantonese, Lee (2005) posited that the unique linguistic characteristics of each language, along with the influence of social factors, impacted the frequency of internal modification devices employed by the two groups. Lee's findings indicated that both groups utilised different proportions of syntactic and lexical modifiers in their requests. English native speakers predominantly employed syntactic downgraders alongside a limited number of lexical devices, whereas Cantonese native speakers utilised a higher frequency and broader range of lexical downgraders but a lower percentage of syntactic downgraders. Lee attributed these disparities to the linguistic divergence between English and Cantonese, such as the absence of explicit tense marking in Cantonese. Additionally, each group exhibited distinct assessments of the social and power dynamics in the given situations, employing syntactic and lexical modifiers accordingly.

Previous research on request speech acts in Australian culture (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Beal, 1990, 1998; Merrison et al., 2012) suggests that cultural values influence the inclination of Australian participants to uphold positive face and preserve the negative face of the addressee by employing indirect request strategies with a greater number of mitigating devices. Australian culture is characterized as an egalitarian and individualistic culture where social equality and individual freedom are deeply ingrained values (Goddard, 2006; Merrison et al., 2012). The seminal Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) examined requests and apologies across eight language groups, including Australian English. In their analysis of the strategies and devices employed to soften or intensify the imposition of requests, Blum-Kulka et al. identified indirectness as a prominent feature of Australian participants' requests, with a high frequency of conventional indirect strategies and downgraders used to mitigate their imposition.

In her study comparing request speech acts by native speakers of French and Australian English, Beal (1990) also observed the reliance of Australian native speakers on indirectness and negative politeness in their requests. Australian native speakers employed linguistic devices that reduce the threat to the addressee's privacy and freedom of action. In contrast, their French counterparts tended to employ positive politeness strategies and linguistic devices aimed at minimizing social distance and establishing common ground with the addressee. Beal attributed the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic variations in the realization of request speech acts to differences in sociocultural conventions that govern conversational styles and politeness norms in the two cultures. She further argued that the formulation of requests based on distinct sociolinguistic rules can lead to conflicts and negative stereotypes in cross- cultural communication.

Previous research on request speech acts in Arabic cultures has predominantly focused on interlanguage pragmatics, investigating the request formulae and strategies employed by Arab learners of English. However, there is limited knowledge about the request patterns and mitigating strategies used in Arabic language and dialects when compared to other languages. Specifically, there has been little attention given to the realization of request speech acts in Iraqi Arabic, particularly in terms of internal modification. Existing literature lacks studies that shed light on the strategies and linguistic choices employed by native speakers of Iraqi Arabic to soften or strengthen the impact of request speech acts in everyday conversations. However, there have been some attempts to explore the impact of Iraqi sociocultural values and norms on the fulfillment of requests made by Iraqi non-native speakers of English.

Abdul Sattar, Lah, and Suleiman (2009) conducted a study to analyze the realization and perception of requests among ten Iraqi non-native English speakers. The study revealed that the subjects predominantly relied on conventionally indirect request strategies across various situations. Furthermore, it highlighted the frequent use of internal mitigating devices, especially negation, conditional clauses, politeness markers, minimizers, and promises of reward in the participants' requests. Abdul Sattar et al. emphasized that the structure of request semantic formulae employed by Iraqi non-native English speakers appeared to be influenced by sociolinguistic norms prevalent in Iraqi culture. They concluded that Iraqi participants might have limited awareness of the social and situational rules governing the realization of requests within English-speaking communities.

To address the gap in the existing research, the present study aims to investigate the use of request mitigating devices in Iraqi Arabic compared to request mitigation employed in Australian English. The study seeks to explore the internal devices that speakers of the two languages use to mitigate the imposition force of requests and examine the impact of linguistic and cultural parameters on this use. By comparing these two languages, the research aims to contribute to the body of empirical linguistic/cultural research on request speech acts and provide insights into the specific characteristics of request modification in Iraqi Arabic. Additionally, given the increased interaction of Iraqi individuals with English speakers in recent years, the study can shed light on possible challenges and potential conflicts that may arise in intercultural communication between Iraqi Arabic speakers and English native speakers.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1.Data collection

Two groups of subjects participated in this study. To ensure comparable responses, I recruited two nearly identical groups with similar individual characteristics, particularly age, gender, and educational background. The first group consisted of fourteen Iraqi Arabic native speakers (IANSs), comprising seven females and seven males who had been residing in Australia for 3-4 years. All participants were postgraduate university students between the ages of 25 and 35. The second group consisted of fourteen Australian English native speakers (AENSs), also consisting of seven females and seven males between the ages of 20 and 35, including undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The instrument employed in this study for collecting data is the role-play interview. The role-play interview is a popular format of role-play technique, in which the subjects are required to provide responses to some fabricated situations without acting them out (Cohen, 1995).

Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1985, p. 21) refer to this instrument as a "semiethnographic technique" which requires the subjects to perform roles in different situations. The role-play interview in this study consists of a description of the situation read aloud to the subjects, a prompt that invites the subjects to respond, and the response provided by the subjects. The use of role-play interview in this study aims to overcome the limitations of ethnographic methods and written completion tasks. It can surpass the restriction of formal writing in written completion tasks and provide natural, spontaneous instances of request speech acts in more controlled situations. It can also capture the formulae and strategies that subjects from both groups may use in everyday life situations. Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1985) indicate that semi-ethnographic instruments, including the role-play interview, replicate real-life interaction and therefore can provide natural responses.

The role play interviews were administered in the participants' respective first language: Australian English or Iraqi Arabic. Each scenario was verbally presented by the researcher, and the participants were instructed to mentally envision the situation and respond as they would in a real-life encounter. The participants' responses were recorded audibly. The following eight scenarios were employed in the interviews, designed to incorporate the three main social factors of power relationship, social distance, and imposition:

Situation 1: A student has missed a lecture and needs to borrow a classmate's lecture notes.

Situation 2: A younger sibling is requested by their brother/sister to purchase coffee from nearby shops.

Situation 3: A student asks the lecturer if they can borrow a recommended textbook.

Situation 4: A student intends to borrow money from a friend to purchase books.

Situation 5: A bus passenger asks a stranger to open the window.

Situation 6: A taxi passenger requests the driver to reduce speed.

Situation 7: A roommate asks their cohabitant to tidy up the room they share.

Situation 8: A café customer asks the waiter/waitress for two cups of coffee.

3.2. DATA ANALYSIS

The corpus comprised a total of 224 requests obtained from Australian and Iraqi participants. The corpus contained a total of 2,866 words. The length of the request utterances varied, ranging from 4 words to lengthier utterances of up to 60 words. Certain requests were formulated in a single clause, conveying the request head act only, while others comprised up to 7 clauses and incorporated modifications surrounding the request head act. To transliterate the Arabic requests collected from Iraqi participants into English, the researcher utilised the ALA-LC system (Barry, 1997).

The researcher employed an analytical framework based on the CCSARP model (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) for data analysis (see Table 1). To address the requirements of the collected data,

the analytical framework was expanded by incorporating additional categories derived from previous literature and novel categories developed within this study. The supplementary categories from prior works included the consultative device (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984) and question (Trosborg, 1995). The wish/hope statement was a novel category invented to meet the requirement of the data analyzed in this study.

Table 1: The analytical framework employed in the study.

	Category	Examples
Syntactic downgraders	Question	Can/Will you open the window for me please?
	Aspect	I'm wondering if I could borrow your notes.
	Past tense	I was wondering if you can open the window a little bit.
	Conditional clause	Is it all right if I borrow your notes?
	Wish/hope statement	بلكي تقرضني كم فلس أذا عندك *Belki tekerthni kam felis itha endak.* (I hope you lend me some money if you have).
Lexical/phrasal downgraders	Politeness marker	*minfathlak* من فضلك *rajaan,* رجاءً، please
	Consultative device	would you mind, do you think, is it possible, would it be all rightif, is it all right, ممكن *mumkin* (is it possible)
	Downtoner	possibly, perhaps, just, rather, maybe
	Understater	a bit, a little, a second, a minute, شوية *shewaya* (a little bit)
	Subjectivizer	I am afraid, I'm wondering, I think, I suppose, أرجو *arju* (I hope)

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was utilised to determine the overall frequency of each internal device within each group's data, as well as its frequency in various situations. The disparities in the frequency of devices between the two groups were assessed using the T-test. This statistical test determined the significance of the differences between the two groups by calculating the P-value. A P-value of less than 0.005 indicated a significant difference between the groups, while a P- value greater than 0.005 indicated insignificance.

4. RESULTS

The data analysis reveals disparities between Australian and Iraqi participants regarding their utilization of internal mitigating devices. These disparities primarily pertain to the frequency of device usage and the specific situations in which they are employed. These findings will be presented in the subsequent sub-sections and further discussed in the following section.

4.1. Syntactic downgraders

As evident from Table 2, the utilization of syntactic downgraders was more frequent among AENSs compared to IANSs. Moreover, a notable observation was the limited occurrence of

these downgraders in the Iraqi corpus, particularly in situations where the recipient is perceived to possess relatively lower social power (situations 2, 6, and 8). The disparity between the two groups was found to be statistically significant, with a P-value of 0.000.

Table 2: Frequency of syntactic downgraders

CATEGORY	Group	SITUATIONS								Total	P-value
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**		
Question	AENSs	9	12	11	9	13	11	10	12	87 (**78%**)	0.000
	IANSs	9	6	7	11	10	5	8	2	58 (**52%**)	
Hope/wish statement	AENSs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0.000
	IANSs	2	2	2	1	3	2	1	4	17 (**15%**)	
Aspect	AENSs	5	4	3	4	7	2	5	1	31 (**28%**)	0.000
	IANSs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	
Past tense	AENSs	2	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	7 (**6%**)	0.000
	IANSs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	
Conditional clause	AENSs	9	1	7	7	1	1	6	0	32 (**29%**)	0.000
	IANSs	0	0	5	1	1	0	0	0	7 (**6%**)	
Combination of devices	AENSs	9	5	7	6	7	2	7	1	44 (**39%**)	0.037
	IANSs	11	6	5	6	12	5	7	1	53 (**47%**)	

The frequency of questions and conditional clauses in Australian speakers' requests is significantly higher compared to Iraqi participants' requests. Australian participants used questions in 78% of their requests, while their Iraqi counterparts used them in only 52% of their requests. Similarly, conditional clauses are present in 29% of Australian requests but only 6% of Iraqi requests. It is noteworthy that questions are consistently used in various situations by Australian participants (as exemplified in Example 1). However, Iraqi participants employ fewer questions, particularly in situations where the addressee holds lower social power. This trend is evident in situation 6, where 11 Australian requests and only 5 Iraqi requests utilised questions when a taxi passenger asked the driver to slow down. Similarly, in situation 8, where a customer requested two cups of coffee from a café waiter/waitress, questions were employed in 12 Australian requests compared to only 2 Iraqi requests. The only situation in which Iraqi speakers used questions more frequently than Australians was situation 4, where the requester sought to borrow money from the requestee, indicating a higher level of imposition (see Example 2). Nonetheless, Iraqi participants employed questions, albeit less frequently than their Australian counterparts, in situations involving a remote social distance, such as situation 5 (the requester asked a stranger on a bus to open the window), and situations featuring a higher

social power of the addressee, as exemplified in situation 3 (a student requested a book from a lecturer).

Example 1

Do you mind if I could borrow your notes?

Example 2

تكدر تدايني فلوس أشتري بيهن كتب وبعدين من يصير عندي أرجعهن ألك؟

Tgdar tdayny flws wb'dyn min yṣyr 'ndy araj'hn ilak?

Can you lend me money to buy the books and I'll pay you back when I get some cash?

In most Australian requests, conditional clauses are employed in circumstances involving an unequal power relationship, a remote social distance and/or a high degree of imposition. This linguistic device can be observed in situation 1 (a context of remote social distance), where it was found in nine requests made by Australian participants (Example 1). Similarly, it is utilised in seven Australian requests in situation 4, which is characterized by a high level of imposition. Furthermore, in situation 3, which involves a combination of all three social variables—power, distance, and imposition—conditional clauses were employed in seven Australian requests. In contrast, Iraqi participants used conditional clauses in only three situations: situation 3 (in five requests), situation 4 (in only one request), and situation 5 (in only one request) (see Example 3 from Iraqi data).

Example 3

فلو ممكن يعني أستعير كتابك؟

Falw mumkin y'ny ast'yr ktabak?

If it's possible, I mean, I borrow your book?

As demonstrated in Table 2, certain syntactic downgraders were exclusively identified in either AENSs or IANSs' requests. Hope/wish statement was solely observed in IANSs' requests, accounting for 15% of their requests. This phenomenon was primarily observed in scenarios illustrating a considerable social distance between the interlocutors, such as situations 5 and 8 (see Example 4). Conversely, the application of Aspect and Past tense was exclusively employed by AENSs. The usage of Past tense was limited to 6% of all Australian requests. Aspect was present in 28% of AENSs' requests, with most instances occurring in situations where the social distance between the interlocutors was significant, such as situation 5, as well as in circumstances involving a higher level of imposition, as the case in situations 1 and 7 (see Example 5).

Example 4

من رخصتك, أذا تكدر بلكي تفتح الشباك لأن كلش حارة.

min rkhṣtak, idha tgdar blky tftah alshubak li'an klish ḥarah.

Excuse me, if you can, I hope you open the window because it is very hot.

Example 5

Excuse me sir, I'm just wondering if you could open the window.

Both groups employed combinations of syntactic devices, with the Iraqi corpus demonstrating the use of this structure in nearly half of all requests. However, there were differences between AENSs and IANSs in their selection of syntactic devices for combination. IANSs tended to combine conditional clauses with hope/wish statements (evident in example 4, derived from situation 5), whereas AENSs predominantly combined conditional clauses with questions (as can be seen in example 1, derived from situation 1).

4.2. Lexical/phrasal downgraders

Both AENSs and IANSs employed lexical and phrasal downgraders to mitigate their request speech acts; however, Australian participants displayed a higher frequency of utilizing these linguistic devices compared to their Iraqi counterparts. As illustrated in Table 3, AENSs consistently incorporated lexical and phrasal downgraders in their requests across all situations. Conversely, IANSs employed fewer instances of lexical and phrasal downgraders in scenarios characterized by close social proximity, such as situation 2 (where a requester asks a younger brother to purchase coffee from nearby shops), and situations involving a requestee with lower social power, such as situation 8 (where a café customer requests two cups of coffee from the waiter/waitress).

Table 3: Frequency of lexical/phrasal downgraders

CATEGORY	Group	SITUATIONS									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total	P-value
Politeness marker	AENSs	3	5	4	2	9	10	3	11	47 (**42%**)	0.000
	IANSs	2	0	0	1	3	6	1	5	18 (**16%**)	
Consultative device	AENSs	5	4	5	7	9	3	6	2	41 (**37%**)	0.040
	IANSs	8	4	6	9	10	4	6	2	49 (**44%**)	
Downtoner	AENSs	4	1	2	3	1	0	1	1	13 (**12%**)	0.000
	IANSs	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1 (**0.9%**)	
Understater	AENSs	2	13	3	12	2	1	0	0	33 (**29.5%**)	0.000
	IANSs	2	1	3	2	8	2	0	0	18 (**16%**)	
Subjectivizer	AENSs	5	1	3	3	1	1	2	0	16 (**14%**)	0.000
	IANSs	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 (**0.9%**)	
Combination of devices	AENSs	4	10	3	10	7	1	1	1	37 (**33%**)	0.000
	IANSs	2	0	1	0	8	3	1	1	16 (**14%**)	

The politeness marker 'please' was observed in 42% of requests made by AENSs, while 'رجاءًا' (raja'an) and 'من فضلك' (min fadhlak) (both meaning 'please') were found in only 16% of requests made by IANSs. It is evident that both groups utilised the politeness marker most frequently in situations that implied a significant social distance between the speakers, particularly in situations 6 and 8 (refer to examples 6 and 7 from situation 6). However, AENSs used this linguistic device approximately twice as often as IANSs did in both cases: 10 instances compared to 6 instances in situation 6, and 11 instances compared to 5 instances in situation 8.

Notably, IANSs did not employ this marker in situation 2, which involves a close social distance and a high level of imposition. Similarly, in situation 3, which entails unequal social power and a high level of imposition, IANSs also refrained from using the marker. In contrast, AENSs used this marker 5 times in situation 2 and 4 times in situation 3.

Example 6

I'm sorry, I'm a terrible passenger. Could you _please_ slow down?

Example 7

ممكن أن تخفف السرعة رجاءً لأني أخشى السرعة الزائدة؟

mumkin an tkhafif alsur'a raja'an li'any akhsha alsur'a alza'ida?

Is it possible that you slow down _please_ because I fear the over limit speed?

The distribution of consultative devices was comparatively more balanced across the two corpora. In both groups, these devices were found to be less frequent in situations where the addressee held a lower social power, as exemplified in situations 2, 6, and 8. Importantly, there were discernible differences in the selection of consultative device types between IANSs and AENSs. The IANSs' data exhibited a prevalent use of "ممكن mumkin" (is it possible), as seen in example 7. On the other hand, AENSs tended to employ consultative devices that inquired about the hearer's ability (e.g., 'would you be able'), willingness (e.g., 'would you mind'), and the feasibility of fulfilling the request (e.g., 'is it possible'). This is illustrated in example 8 from situation 5, where a request was made to a passenger on a bus to open the window.

Example 8

Would you be able to open the window a little bit?

Downtoners were infrequent across the entire data, but their frequency of usage varied significantly between requests made by AENSs and IANSs. In the Australian corpus, there were 13 instances of downtoners, whereas only one occurrence was found in the Iraqi corpus. The single Iraqi example of this linguistic device was identified in situation 7, wherein the requester asks their roommate to clean the room (refer to example 9). AENSs employed the downtoners 'just' and 'possibly' in situations characterized by an unequal power relationship (e.g., a student seeking to borrow a book from a lecturer), greater social distance (e.g., a passenger requesting a stranger to open the bus window), or a higher level of imposition (e.g., a requester seeking to borrow money from a friend), as illustrated in example 5 above.

Example 9

فبس نظف اليوم الغرفة وأنا أن شاء الله الدور العليك أنظف.

Fabas nadhif aluwm alghurfa w'ana insha Allah aldwr il'alyk anadhif.
Just clean the room today and I'll clean instead of you when it is your turn by Allah willing.

There is a notable disparity in the utilization of understaters between the two corpora, exhibiting a significant distinction. Table 3 illustrates that the frequency of this mitigating linguistic device is nearly twice as high in the requests of the AENSs compared to the IANSs. AENSs predominantly employed understaters in circumstances where the act of making a request implied a greater level of imposition, even when the addressee had a close social relationship, as observed in situation 2 (see example 10) and situation 4 (borrowing money from a friend). Conversely, IANSs utilised understaters primarily in situations characterized by a distant social relationship between the participants, such as in situation 5 (see example 11), and when the addressees held a higher social power, as exemplified by situation 3 (a student attempting to borrow a book from a lecturer).

Example 10

> Could you just go down to the shop and get some coffee for me?

Example 11

> من رخصتك خوية, ممكن تفتح الجامة شوية؟

> *min rkhṣtak, khuya mumkin tftaḥ aljama shwya?*

> Excuse me brother, is it possible to open the window a little bit?

Subjectivizers were found to be rare in the entire data. They were utilised in 16 requests by AENSs, but only one instance was recorded in the IANSs' corpus. The IANSs' example of this device occurred in situation 3 where a student attempts to borrow a book from a lecturer (see example 12). AENSs tended to employ the phrase "I'm wondering" or "I was wondering" more frequently than other lexical configurations, particularly in situations characterized by remote social distance, such as situations 1 and 5 (see example 5), situations involving increased social power as observed in situation 3, or situations with an elevated level of request imposition as in situation 4.

Example 12

> الآن أتسائل اذا كان بأمكاني أستعارة النسخة الموجودة لديك.

> *al-ān ats'al idha kan b'imkany ist'arat alniskha almwjwda ladyak.*

> Now I'm wondering if I can borrow the copy that you have.

The analysis has also identified clusters of lexical/phrasal downgraders that are notably more prevalent in Australian participants' requests. AENSs utilised most of their combinations of lexical/phrasal devices in situation 2 (as seen in example 10 - asking a younger brother to buy coffee) and situation 4 (borrowing money from a friend), which demonstrate a high level of imposition in requests. On the other hand, most of the combinations used by IANSs were employed in situations characterized by greater social distance between interlocutors, as the case in situation 5 (asking a stranger to open the bus window) (see example 11).

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the structure of the examined request utterances reveals that Australian subjects employed internal mitigating devices more frequently compared to their Iraqi counterparts.

Moreover, the two groups displayed differences in the quality and frequency of some devices utilised in particular situations. The disparities in the usage of internal mitigating devices between Australian English native speakers (AENSs) and Iraqi Arabic native speakers (IANSs) can be attributed to linguistic and cultural differences existing between the two groups.

5.1.Linguistic variation

English and Arabic belong to distinct language families, resulting in divergent linguistic systems. Berg's (2009) classification of structural variation among languages identifies two types of linguistic differences between Arabic and English. The first type is qualitative variation, which denotes the presence of specific structural units (such as morphemes, words, or syntactic structures) in one language but their absence in the other. The second type is quantitative variation, which denotes a more pronounced presence of certain structural units in one language compared to the other.

In terms of qualitative linguistic variation, the divergence between Australian English Native Speakers (AENSs) and Iraqi Arabic Native Speakers (IANSs) in their use of mitigating devices as linguistic elements can be attributed to certain factors. One factor is related to the availability of these devices within Australian English or Iraqi Arabic. The syntactic downgrader, aspect, is a good example of this variation. The continuous aspect, as in 'I was wondering if I could borrow your notes from yesterday', was used in 28% of AENSs' requests. It represents a fundamental grammatical feature in English, characterized by its distinct forms and functions. However, Arabic verbs do not possess the continuous aspect. In Arabic, the simple present form of the verb is used to describe an ongoing action/event at the moment of speaking, e.g., "علي يكتب الدرس الأن" *Ali yaktub aldars alan* (Ali is writing the lesson now). Another aspect of qualitative linguistic variation between Arabic and English is observed in the use of past tense in request utterances. AENSs utilise past tense modals, such as "could" and "would," as syntactic mitigating devices in their requests. However, past tense modals are not available as linguisticfeatures in Arabic. Furthermore, Arabic grammar permits the formulation of requests in present or future tense only, with no possibility for expressing them in the past tense form (cf. Al-Awsi, 1982).

Quantitative linguistic variation between Iraqi Arabic and Australian English may also provide insights into the differences between Australian and Iraqi subjects in the utilisation of internal mitigation. The request structure in Australian English and Iraqi Arabic assigns varying importance to different types of mitigation. While certain linguistic elements are regularly employed in one language, making them more frequent, they are not commonly used in the other language, resulting in their infrequent occurrence. For instance, Arabic grammarians consider hope statements to be a commonly used strategy for requesting things and actions in Arabic (Al-Awsi 1982), whereas they are rarely employed as a request strategy in English. In the analysis of the requests made by IANSs, the researcher observed that the syntactic downgrader, i.e., *hope/wish statement*, was utilised in 15% of the requests, such as in the following example: "أرجو أن تعيرني أذا ممكن كتابك" *arju an tu'irani idha mumkin kitabak* (I hope that you lend me your book if it's possible). However, this syntactic element was absent in the requests made by Australian English native speakers (AENSs). The quantitative linguistic variation between Australian English and Iraqi Arabic is also evident in the use of combinations of syntactic devices. The English syntactic system allows for the combination of certain syntactic mitigating devices to reinforce the act of requesting. However, the use of some of these combinations within a request utterance is uncommon in Iraqi Arabic. For instance, the

combination of questions and conditional clauses is a prevalent strategy in requests made by AENSs, as seen in the example, "Would you mind if I could borrow your notes?". Conversely, this combination is less commonly used for requests in Iraqi Arabic.

5.2.Cultural variation

The differences between AENSs and IANSs in their utilisation of request mitigating devices may also stem from the variations between Australian and Iraqi sociocultural systems. The prevalent use of internal mitigation in the examined AENSs' requests can be attributed to the conceptualisation of "face" in Australian culture. Australian culture is characterized as individualistic, where individuals are considered independent from the goals and desires of the group (Winter, 2002). One prominent value in this culture is egalitarianism. Australians appear to be conscious of the assumption that every member of their society is an autonomous individual who has the right to be free from any imposition. Therefore, when making a request, they strive to maintain privacy and protect the negative face of the requestee. Ting-Toomey (1988) notes that in individualistic cultures, members tend to emphasize negative face to uphold their image as confident, self-directed, and independent individuals. Beal (1990) argues that Australian English native speakers prefer the negative politeness approach to minimize the threat to the hearer's face. Additionally, Swangboonsatic (2006) suggests that Australian interlocutors often employ tentative language and make efforts to preserve each other's privacy during request exchanges. The frequent use of downgraders in AENSs' requests, even in situations where the addressee holds lower social power or has a close social relationship, can be understood as a reflection of Australian participants' inclination to preserve the negative face of the addressee. Moreover, the tendency of Australian subjects to employ mitigation strategies can also be interpreted as an endeavour to protect their own face as requesters. By extensively utilising internal mitigating devices, they make their requests tentative, aiming to secure the hearer's cooperation in advance and avoid potential rejection. Beal (1998) argues that Australians tend to employ strategies that make their requests more tentative and indirect to diffuse potential threats to their own face.

In Iraqi culture, hierarchical relationships and reciprocal obligations are fundamental aspects of the social system. Arabic cultures, particularly those in the Gulf States, are commonly categorized as collectivistic cultures (Buda & Elsayed-Elkhouly, 1998). Within collectivistic cultures, social hierarchy and reciprocal obligations shape interlocutors' linguistic behaviour in social interactions. Hierarchical relationships are prevalent in Iraqi institutions, educational organizations, and familial networks. Individuals are expected to demonstrate respect and obedience towards their superiors at work, parents, and even older siblings. When making requests to individuals of higher social status or role, Iraqi requesters are anticipated to display deference by justifying and mitigating their requests. According to Abdul Sattar et al. (2009: 64), in Iraqi culture, "making a request to someone in authority may impose greater psychological burdens compared to making a request to someone of lower status". Conversely, when an Iraqi requester of higher social status or power addresses someone of lower social power, such as a student, younger sibling, waiter/waitress, and so on, a more direct request with fewer mitigating devices is expected. This is evident in situations such as situation 8, where the requestee is a waiter in a café, and situation 2, where the requester asks a younger brother to purchase coffee from the neighbouring shops.

The familial bond or friendship appears to exert a pivotal influence on the adoption of request mitigations among Iraqi participants. When individuals make requests to friends or family

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members, they anticipate cooperation and support as part of the addressee's moral obligation towards them. The Islamic identity and collectivistic nature of Iraqi culture encourage individuals to establish interpersonal relationships with other members of their social networks and foster a sense of reciprocal obligation towards them (Metz, 1990; Al-Uzri, 2011; Jouili, 2012). Iraqi individuals typically form social and familial networks characterized by reciprocal obligation and responsibility. This phenomenon may account for the infrequent use of internal mitigation in requests made by IANSs in situations where the addressee maintains a close social distance, even when the requests impose a high level of imposition. For instance, only half of the requests produced by IANSs in situation 7, which involves asking a roommate to clean the room, contained lexical or phrasal mitigating devices. In contrast to AENSs, IANSs may not feel the need to express tentativeness when requesting someone with whom they share a close social connection. The sense of moral obligation and harmony that Iraqi interlocutors experience within their social networks could contribute to their tendency to engage in request acts with fewer internal mitigating devices.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study provides insights into the utilisation of internal mitigation in request speech acts among Australian English native speakers (AENSs) and Iraqi Arabic native speakers (IANSs). The findings reveal discrepancies between AENSs and IANSs in terms of the frequency of internal mitigating devices used in their requests, as well as the specific situations in which these devices are employed. Internal mitigations are found to be more prevalent in requests produced by AENSs compared to those by IANSs. Additionally, the two groups differ in their selection of linguistic formulae for some mitigating devices and the contexts in which they employ internal mitigation. These variations can be attributed to differences in linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the two groups. The usage of mitigating devices in the requests of AENSs and IANSs is influenced by the range of linguistic choices available in their respective languages. The extent of mitigation used in a particular situation is shaped by the sociocultural values, norms, and beliefs that prevail within each group's culture.

The findings obtained in this study have several implications. Firstly, this study contributes to the existing body of research on request speech acts by analysing request samples in Iraqi Arabic and comparing them with samples from Australian English. Consequently, it has the potential to enhance cross-cultural communication between individuals from Australian and Iraqi cultures. By increasing interlocutors' awareness of the underlying cultural differences in communication styles and strategies, this study can facilitate successful communication between these two cultures.

Additionally, the findings of this study hold significance in language teaching and learning contexts, particularly in situations where Arabic or English is being learned as a second or foreign language. The study underscores the importance of considering the cultural dimension in teaching and learning second/foreign languages. Individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds may employ distinct politeness strategies and interaction styles. Therefore, it becomes crucial for second language learners to acquire pragmatic knowledge specific to the target language. This knowledge will enable L2 learners to utilise appropriate language in specific situations, based on a careful assessment of the contextual features.

This research is not without limitations, which should be acknowledged. Firstly, a larger sample size of subjects from Australian and Iraqi cultures is needed to ensure that the collected data

accurately represents the reality of request realization in both cultures. Secondly, it would have been more advantageous to supplement the role-play interviews with another method to obtain more naturalistic data. Thirdly, the classification of mitigating devices was partially reliant on the linguistic characteristics of these devices. This classification appears tailored to suit the linguistic characterization and specifications of the languages examined in previous studies from which it was derived. It has been expanded in the current study to meet the data requirements; however, an adequate analytical framework could be formed based on input from other previous studies in interlanguage pragmatics and cross- cultural pragmatics. Further research is needed to address the aforementioned limitations and construct an effective framework for classifying internal request modifiers applicable in studies comparing data from various languages and cultures.

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