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Request Mitigating Devices in Australian English and Iraqi Arabic: A comparative study

A Research Paper submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

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CANDIDATE’S STATEMENT

I certify that the Research Paper entitled:

Request Mitigating Devices in Australian English and Iraqi Arabic: A comparative study

and submitted for the degree of

Master of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

is the result of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this Research Paper (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution.

Approval to conduct the study was granted by the Deakin University Ethics Committee
through the Faculty of Education Ethics Subcommittee.

Signed ………………………………………

Date ………………………………………
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Abstract

Significant issues, especially miscommunication in a cross-cultural setting and pragmatic failure in second language (L2) acquisition, stem from the linguistic and cultural differences between social groups. The investigation of speech acts realization in everyday situations is deemed as an important field to explore the impact of linguistic and cultural variations on cross-cultural communication and L2 acquisition. This paper examines the internal and external mitigating devices that Australian English native speakers (AENSs) and Iraqi Arabic native speakers (IANSs) use to soften the force of request speech acts in everyday situations. It aims to explore request mitigating devices employed in Australian English and Iraqi Arabic in terms of semantic formulae and frequencies in everyday interaction. Request samples were collected from native speakers of Australian English and Iraqi Arabic by means of role-play interviews. The mitigating devices found in requests were identified and classified. The results showed that internal mitigating devices were more frequent in AENSs’ requests than in IANSs’ requests, while external mitigating devices were pervasive in both groups. The two groups also used different semantic formulae of some mitigating devices in some situations. The pervasive occurrence of external mitigators in both groups’ requests is explained in terms of the notion of volubility as a politeness strategy. It is also suggested that the divergence between the two groups in their utilization of request mitigations is related to linguistic and cultural variations between the Australian and Iraqi cultures.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background

In recent years, much emphasis has been placed on studying speech acts in both interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics. Studies conducted on speech acts (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, 1989; Trosborg, 1995; Reiter, 2000; Ogiermann, 2009; Kawate-Mierzejewska, 2009) provide an account of a variety of strategies and formulae that people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds use. They also demonstrate the impact of these differences and similarities in cross-cultural communication and second language acquisition.

Requests, as one category of speech acts, seem to be more prominent in interlanguage and cross-cultural research than other types of speech acts. This phenomenon can be assigned to a number of reasons. First, requests are more frequent in everyday communication than other types of speech acts. We produce and receive many requests in everyday life; therefore, requests are deemed as a rich source of natural data about the ways in which people perform speech acts in different cultures and different situations. Second, requests can provide sufficient data for those who are interested in politeness phenomena across cultures because of the explicit relationship between requests and politeness. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), requests are Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) that imply imposition and constraints at the expense of the addressee and, therefore, interlocutors need to employ politeness strategies to redress their force. Third, requests provide insights into the different linguistic patterns and strategies that are used to perform acts across cultures and languages. The diversity of request forms and strategies can help researchers to explore the individual, situational and sociocultural variables that provoke people to use certain request strategies and formulae more than others.

The rich nature of the request act has stimulated many researchers to investigate its realization in various contexts. Within the realm of interlanguage pragmatics, studies such as those by Blum-Kulka (1982), Pair (1996), Takahashi (1996), Rossiter and Kondoh (2001), Kobayashi and Rinnert (2003), Hassall (2003) and Byon (2004) investigate second language learners’ perception and production of the request act in various situational and sociocultural settings. They compare request realization of L2 learners with different cultural backgrounds to that of native speakers, in order to explore essential
issues in second language acquisition, such as pragmatic competence, pragmatic transfer and pragmatic failure. Other contrastive studies, for example, Blum-Kulka (1987), Fukushima (2000), Reiter (2000), House and Kasper (1981), Economidou-Kogetsidis (2005), Rue and Zhang (2008) and Sifianou (1992) investigate the realization of request speech acts across different languages and cultures. These studies explore the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences and similarities, mostly in terms of request realization and its relationship to politeness phenomena. They also highlight the situational and sociocultural factors that may lead to different perceptions and realizations of request speech acts.

1.2. Rationale

Most of research on requests (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Blum-Kulka and House, 1989; Fukushima, 1994; Pair, 1996; Hassall, 2003; Blum-kulka, 1987; Vinagre, 2008; Ogiermann, 2009; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2002; Jalilifar, 2009; Umar, 2004) has focused on request strategies within the head act (the main utterance in the request sequence that can convey the request act by itself) in terms of the degree of directness or indirectness. However, the choice of request strategy is only one factor that determines the pragmatic effect of requests (Hassall, 2001). The pragmatic effect or the illocutionary force of requests can be also manipulated by modifiers – optional elements which can either mitigate or aggravate the request force. Thus, request modifications are as important as request strategies per se in the performance of requests. Few studies (Faerch and Kasper, 1989; House and Kasper, 1981; Trosborg, 1995; Hassall, 2001; Reiter, 2000; Al-Ali and Alawneh, 2010) have investigated the structure and functions of request modifications within the request sequence. Most of these studies were conducted in interlanguage pragmatics, exploring how L2 learners use request modifications in the target language.

This study investigates the use of request mitigating devices in Australian English and Iraqi Arabic. It explores the internal and external devices that speakers of the two languages use to mitigate the imposition force of requests and the impact of the linguistic and cultural parameters on this use. No study the researcher is aware of has investigated the use of request modifications in Iraqi Arabic in a comparison with those in other languages. In recent years, especially after the downfall of the political regime in 2003, Iraqi people have started a new era of interaction with the world using English as a means of communication with others around the world. Therefore, a comparative study of the realization of request mitigations in Iraqi Arabic can shed light on some issues in the
fields of interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural communication that Iraqi individuals are more likely to experience. Furthermore, an investigation of the formulae and strategies of request mitigations in Iraqi Arabic can highlight the realization of request speech acts not only in Iraqi culture but also in other Arabic cultures that share identical language varieties and cultural values.

1.3. Aims of this study

This study aims to explore the differences and similarities between Australian English native speakers and Iraqi Arabic native speakers in terms of the semantic formulae and frequencies of request mitigating devices that they use in everyday communication. It also aims to explore the cultural and linguistic factors that may influence the use of request mitigations in the Australian and Iraqi cultures and, therefore, it can provide some explanation of the misunderstanding that Iraqi Arabic native speakers and Australian English native speakers are likely to experience when they exchange requests. It can contribute to the understanding of request realization in both cultures and the situational and sociocultural parameters that influence this realization. It can also contribute to the understanding of the assumption that the use of a certain language in everyday interaction is constrained by the linguistic repertoire available in that language. The present study also aims to include Iraqi Arabic in the body of empirical linguistic/cultural research into request realization. In addition, the study specifically aims to:

1. identify the types of internal and external request mitigating devices used in both cultures;

2. explore whether or not interlocutors from the two cultures use similar or different mitigating devices when they perform requests;

3. highlight the linguistic constraints of Iraqi Arabic and Australian English on their speakers’ use of request mitigations, and

4. highlight the influence of social power, social distance and request imposition on the utilization of request mitigating devices in each culture.

1.4. Research questions

The following enquiries are introduced for investigation in this study.

1. Do Australian English native speakers and Iraqi Arabic native speakers vary in their use of request mitigating devices?
2. How are request mitigations used in both cultures constrained by the linguistic repertoire available in the speaker’s first language?

3. How do the social variables of power, social distance and the degree of imposition influence the use of request mitigating devices in both cultures?
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, a review of some of the literature concerning request speech acts starts with a general definition of requests as speech acts and their relationship with politeness. Then request modifications and their role within request utterances are introduced, before providing a review of some studies that have investigated the use of request modifications across languages and cultures. Finally, the utilization of request modifications in some Arabic cultures is highlighted through a review of some studies investigating request modifications employed by Arab learners of English.

2.1. Requests speech acts

Requests are the speech acts by which the speaker tries to get the hearer to do something. Searle (1979) classifies requests as directive speech acts that have two realizations: direct and indirect requests. Direct requests occur when the illocutionary force (the speaker’s real intention) of the request utterance conforms to its locutionary force (the literal meaning of the speaker’s utterance). For instance, the utterance, ‘open the door’, has the same intention as its literal meaning. Indirect requests, on the other hand, occur when the illocutionary force is different from the locutionary force of the request utterance. For instance, the requester can use the statement, ‘it is hot in here’, to get the hearer to switch on a fan. The use of direct or indirect requests is constrained by social, situational and individual factors, such as social power, social distance, degree of imposition, gender, age, occupation and educational background. According to these variables, the speaker may prefer a direct or indirect request in order to produce a tactful and polite request act.

2.2. Requests and politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987) classify request speech acts as FTAs, since they imply imposition at the expense of the hearer to do what the speaker wants. In this sense, requests threaten the addressee’s negative face (their willingness to be free of imposition and to have freedom of action unimpeded by others). According to Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008), request speech acts can also threaten the addressee’s positive face (their endeavour to have their self-image approved and appreciated). Economidou-Kogetsidis argues that requests can cause damage to the hearer’s positive face because they may indicate the speaker’s disregard of the addressee’s feelings. According to Brown and Levinson, when trying to produce a request, the speaker has two options:
either to avoid producing the request since it is an FTA, or to perform it in one of the following strategies.

1. *On record*, the speaker expresses his/her request baldly without any redress.

2. *Positive politeness*, the speaker can save the hearer’s positive face through preserving his/her desire to be approved.

3. *Negative politeness*, the speaker can redress the imposition on the addressee’s freedom.

4. *Off record*, the speaker uses an ambiguous utterance (hint) and depends on the hearer’s interpretation.

According to Blum-Kulka (2005), the requester can use a request head act with a particular level of directness/indirectness and/or internal and external modifications in order to redress the influence of requests as FTAs on the hearer. Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that people usually use more indirect request strategies to increase the degree of politeness of their request acts according to three social variables: social power, social distance and the degree of imposition. Later cross-cultural research on request speech acts (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Fukushima, 1994; Pair, 1996) has shown that the influence of the social variables of power, distance and the degree of imposition on the realization of requests may differ from one culture to another; as a result, the degree of directness or indirectness of request strategies may differ accordingly. However, the degree of directness or indirectness of the linguistic formula of the request head act is not the only means by which the requester can modify the illocutionary force of his/her request. As Faerch and Kasper (1989) point out, in addition to request strategies, the requester can also use internal or external modifications in order to mitigate or aggravate their request acts.

2.3. Defining request modifications

Reiter (2000) defines request modifications as the peripheral elements that can be added to the request head act. Trosborg (1995) points out that the use of request modifiers is another means by which the requester can soften or increase the impact of his/her request beside the selection of the directness level. House and Kasper (1981) divide request modifiers into “downgraders” and “upgraders” (p. 166): downgraders, which are the focus of the current study, consist of all devices that are used to soften or mitigate the
illocutionary force of the request, while upgraders include the devices that aggravate or intensify the request force. Researchers who have investigated downgraders (Blum-kulka et al., 1989; Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984; Trosborg, 1995; Sifianou, 1999) distinguish between internal and external downgraders according to their location in the request utterance. Internal downgraders are the elements whose position is within the request head act. Blum-Kulka et al. classify internal downgraders into two main categories. The first category consists of the syntactic mitigating devices, such as interrogative, negation, conditional clauses, etc that are used to mitigate the imposition force of the request. Trosborg (1995) argues that syntactic devices have “the ability to distance the request from reality” (p. 210); therefore, they can reduce the impact of any refusal on the requester’s face and they also make it easier for the requestee to reject the request. The second category includes the lexical/phrasal mitigating devices that are also used within the request head act to mitigate its imposition, such as the marker please, understaters, downtoners, etc.

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984, p. 201) define the second type of downgraders – the external mitigating devices, as the supportive moves that are “localized not within the ‘Head act’ but within its immediate context”. They classify these devices into various categories according to the functions they have within the request utterance. Blum-Kulka (2005) argues that external downgraders can play a pivotal role beside request strategies and internal downgraders in redressing the imposition of the request act; this is achieved through providing justifications and explanations which appeal to the hearer “as a rational agent in need of persuasion as required by the principle of the independence tenet of negative politeness” (P. 267). Trosborg (1995) points out that it is often necessary to make the request more acceptable through employing the external downgraders that seem necessary in a specific situation.

2.4. Research on request modification

Request modifications have been the focus of a body of empirical study in the fields of interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics. All these investigations aimed to provide an account of the different devices that people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds use to modify the illocutionary force of requests. However, much emphasis has been placed on the use of request modifications by learners of English as a second language (ESL) or a foreign language (EFL) in comparison with English native speakers’
use of these devices. In cross-cultural pragmatics, few studies were conducted to compare the utilization of request modifications across different languages and cultures.

2.4.1. Interlanguage studies

In interlanguage pragmatics, many studies have been conducted comparing the linguistic behaviour of ESL/EFL learners to that of native speakers of English in terms of the use of request modifications. Among these studies is that by Faerch and Kasper (1989), who examined how Danish learners of English and German use internal and external modifiers; they also investigated the impact of situational and sociocultural factors on this use. Faerch and Kasper used a Written Completion Test (DCT) to collect the participants’ responses in five situations. Despite the limitations of the DCT and the limited number of the modifiers within the classification used for coding their data, Faerch and Kasper arrived at interesting findings. With regard to internal modification, they found that the learners underused downtoners (e.g., perhaps, possibly, etc), but overused the politeness marker, please. On the other hand, the grounder was the most frequent external modifier in both native speakers’ and learners’ requests. Faerch and Kasper concluded that Danish learners tend to employ “transparent, over-complex, explicit and longer procedures of request modification” (p. 245). They attributed this phenomenon to the learners’ low level of proficiency and lack of pragmatic competence. The pragmatic transfer from the learners’ first language was also evident.

As a part of her contrastive study of request realization of Danish learners of English and British English native speakers, Trosborg (1995) investigated the use of internal and external modification devices. She used role-play interactions to collect her data, arguing that role-plays can help the researcher to gather authentic data because they allow the participants to say as much as they want in a natural way. The results of her study revealed that English native speakers used internal mitigating devices, especially the politeness marker ‘please’, downtoner, past tense, and conditional clause more often than Danish learners did. External modifications were also more frequent in the English native speakers’ data than in the learners’ data. However, some external devices, especially the supporting reasons, were pervasive in the requests of both groups. Trosborg claimed that the divergence between English native speakers and Danish learners of English, in terms of the frequency of occurrence of request modifiers, results from the complex structure and use of some modifiers which make them more difficult for learners to master as well as the pragmatic transfer from the learners’ first language.
Beal (1998) compared the request utterances produced by French non-native speakers of English with those produced by Australian English native speakers and French native speakers. She explored the speech act performance of L2 speakers in English, and the linguistic and cultural factors that may make this performance deviate from that of English native speakers. Beal used interview and observation techniques to collect the data in a workplace where French and Australian subjects were working. The results of this study show that Australian subjects used request downgraders more than French non-native speakers of English (60% vs 40%). The results also indicate that request downgraders were less frequent in the requests of French native speakers. Beal attributes the deviant linguistic behaviour of French non-native speakers of English to three factors: insufficient language proficiency, pragmalinguistic transfer from French, and the different cultural values and norms prevailing in French and Australian cultures. She concludes that linguistic and cultural variation between French and Australian cultures leads to a different realization of speech acts. Australians, unlike French, seem to be “unduly tentative, self-effacing and egalitarian” (p. 23) and, therefore, they use indirect requests with more downgraders.

Hassall (2001) conducted a study to examine how Australian learners of Bahasa Indonesia use internal and external modifications in their requests. The modification devices found in the data obtained from 20 Australian learners of Bahasa were compared to those used by 18 native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia. Hassall used interactive oral role-play to collect request samples. The results of this study show that Australian learners used internal modifiers less frequently than Indonesian native speakers. However, Australian learners’ use of external devices, especially grounders, was almost identical to that of the native speakers. Hassall argues that Australian learners may lack pragmatic knowledge in Indonesian and, therefore, underused the internal modifiers which require control over the pragmalinguistic routines in the second language. He also argues that external modifiers do not usually require more complex pragmalinguistic structure, and they explicitly perform the mitigating function; therefore, they are more pervasive in the learners’ requests.

Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) examined the internal and external request modifications employed by Greek, Japanese and German learners of English as compared to those used by British English native speakers. They used the DCT to collect their data. The findings of this study reveal that ESL learners underused internal modifiers, especially the politeness marker please, consultative devices, cajoler and tense. They also
show that the ESL learners employed external modifiers, especially *preparator* and *grounder* more often in their requests. The researchers attribute the underuse of internal modifiers to the lack of learners’ proficiency in English and the lack of confidence in their linguistic abilities. The matter is different with external modifiers, especially *grounders*, which, according to Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis, are active at an early stage of language acquisition.

2.4.2. Cross-cultural studies

In the realm of cross-cultural pragmatics, few studies investigated request modifications across different languages and cultures. House and Kasper (1981) investigated the use of request modifications in English and German. They used role-play as an instrument to elicit data from German native speakers and English native speakers. Through examining the request modifications employed in both groups’ requests, House and Kasper tried to provide some explanation of German ESL learners’ requestive behaviour in English, and whether or not it stems from the impact of the social norms of a German speech community. Their findings show that English native speakers used syntactic downgraders more than German native speakers, who used lexical/phrasal downgraders more often in their requests. With regard to external modification, English speakers used external mitigating devices more than German speakers did; however, the *grounder*, one of the external downgraders, was most common in both English and German requests. In their discussion of their findings, House and Kasper attribute the German speakers’ tendency to use more direct request strategies and less downgraders to the fact that their cultural system is organized differently from that of an English-speaking community. What is viewed as impolite outside the German cultural system might be seen as appropriate inside this system.

The Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) is a well-known project that studied requests and apologies across a number of languages, and native and non-native varieties, including American English, Australian English, British English, Canadian French, German and Hebrew. The instrument used to collect data for this project was the DCT. The coding scheme used in the CCSARP divides the request sequence into alerters (elements that precede requests to get the hearers’ attention), the request head act (the request proper), and internal and external request modifications. Many later studies (Pair, 1996; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008; Achiba, 2003; Schauer, 2004) adopted this coding scheme in their investigation of the
patterns of the speech acts of request across languages and cultures. With regard to the Australian English native speakers’ requestive behaviour, the findings of the CCSARP project reveal that they used downgraders with conventional indirect request strategies more often in their requests. The study also concludes that the cross-linguistic variation and the cross-cultural variation are crucial parameters that influence the request patterns and strategies cross-culturally.

Reiter (2000) studied the realization of requests and apologies in British English and Uruguayan Spanish. She used the role-play technique to collect her data from native speakers of the two languages. She criticizes the use of DCTs in speech act research as being inadequate to represent the speech acts in their full discourse context. The findings of Reiter’s study indicate an agreement between British and Uruguayan subjects on the use of some external modification devices. Reasons, preparators, disarmers, enquirers and getting pre-commitment were the most common types of external devices in both British English and Uruguayan Spanish. Reiter ascribes the incidence of these external devices in both groups’ requests to the role of these devices as a means of achieving positive and negative politeness in the request utterance. With regard to internal modification, instances of internal devices were found in 90% of British requests and in only 27% of Uruguayan requests. Reiter attributes this divergence between the two groups in the use of internal downgraders to the linguistic and cultural variations between the two cultures.

2.5. Request mitigation in Arabic cultures

A limited number of studies (Al-Ali and Alawneh, 2010; Al-Ali and Sahawneh, 2008; Abdul Sattar, Lah and Suleiman, 2009) have examined the use of request modifications in Arabic cultures. The focus of these studies was mainly on the internal and external request modifiers employed by Arab ESL/EFL learners when they interact in English. Among these studies, Al-Ali and Sahawneh (2008) studied the generic structure of requests found in emails written by Jordanian non-native English speakers (JNNESs) and American English native speakers (AENSs). They collected emails from American and Jordanian student subjects in which the subjects requested an extension for submitting their essays. These emails were analysed according to their component moves, including internal and external request mitigating devices. Al-Ali and Sahawneh found that JNNESs underused syntactic mitigating devices, but employed lexical/phrasal devices frequently, especially the politeness marker please. In both groups’ requests, external
mitigating devices were the most common. It was also found that JNNESs employed some devices that were rare in the AENSs’ requests, such as ‘invoking compassion’, which was used to provoke the requestee’s cooperation. Furthermore, JNNESs used modification devices with different linguistic formulae from those found in AENSs’ requests. Al-Ali and Sahawneh argue that the lack of pragmatic competence of Jordanian subjects and the pragmatic transfer from their first language and natal culture are the motives behind their deviant use of request mitigation in English.

Another study on the request mitigations by Arab learners of English was conducted by Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010) who compared Jordanian learners’ and American English native speakers’ use of request mitigating devices in everyday life situations. They used the DCT to collect the data. The data analysis was based on Faerch and Kasper’s (1989) classification of mitigating devices, with some new devices added to meet the requirements of their data. The findings of this study demonstrate both quantitative and qualitative differences between the two groups in terms of their use of mitigating strategies. With regard to internal devices, Jordanian learners fell short in their use of syntactic downgraders in comparison with American native speakers, but they overused lexical/phrasal downgraders and external modifiers. The two groups also differed in their selection of the types of mitigating devices, the linguistic formulae of these devices and the situations in which these devices were more frequent. Al-Ali and Alawneh attribute the different requestive behaviour of Jordanians to one or more of three causes: the learners’ insufficient proficiency in English; the negative interference of their first language pragmatic knowledge; and/or the sociocultural norms of their culture. Al-Ali and Alawneh argue that the cultural values and norms, especially the Islamic identity of Jordanian society, influence Jordanian learners’ realization of mitigating request strategies.

Abdul Sattar, Lah and Suleiman (2009) examined request realization and perception of Iraqi non-native English speakers (INNESs). The sample consisted of ten Iraqi students taking postgraduate courses at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Malaysia. Abdul Sattar et al. used the DCT and a multiple-choice questionnaire to collect INNESs’ responses in eight different situations. The results show variation in the frequency and content of the request patterns and strategies used by the subjects. The conventionally indirect request strategies were used widely in almost all situations. In terms of request modifications, the external mitigating devices: grounder, apology, compliment, sweetener and gratitude, were frequently used by the subjects. The internal mitigating devices: negation, conditional
clause, politeness marker, minimizer and promise of reward were also frequent in the subjects’ requests. Abdul Sattar et al. point out that the structure of request semantic formulae employed by Iraqi non-native speakers of English was influenced by the sociolinguistic norms of Iraqi culture. They conclude that Iraqi subjects may lack an awareness of the social and situational rules that govern request realization in English speaking communities.

Most of previous research on Arabs’ realization of request speech acts was conducted in interlanguage pragmatics to explore request formulae and strategies employed by Arab learners of English. The focus of previous research was mainly on the request realization in some Arabic cultures in terms of directness and indirectness and the influence of the sociocultural factors on this realization. There is a little known about the request patterns and mitigating strategies used in Arabic language and the linguistic, situational and sociocultural factors that may influence this use.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Instrument
Researchers use different methods for collecting data when they investigate the realization and perception of speech acts. Some (Wolfson, 1989; Beal, 1998) prefer gathering naturally occurring data through observation. However, observation may not provide comparable sets of data that are obtained from various contexts with different social variables. The absence of controlled contexts may prevent researchers from identifying the relationship between the various social variables and speech act forms and strategies in different contexts. Cohen (1996) argues that the occurrence of speech acts and the presence of social variables related to them are difficult to control when researchers use observation to collect data. Fukushima (2000) impeaches the validity of naturally occurring data collected for speech acts studies, arguing that it is difficult to generalize hypotheses depending on the observation of the production of a speech act in only one context. Other researchers (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis) prefer using written completion tasks, such as the DCT to elicit data representing the use of speech acts in controlled contexts. In spite of the advantages of written approaches to collecting speech acts data, they have some deficiencies in practice. Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1985) point out that written instruments may fail to obtain authentic data because they cannot capture all the features of natural interaction. Kasper and Dahl (1991) claim that the data collected through using the DCT may not represent the diversity of formulas and strategies used in speech acts realization.

In order to obtain comparable data in terms of different social factors, the instrument used 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 can overcome the insufficiency of ethnographic methods and written completion tasks. It can cope with the limitation 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 in this study were conducted in each group’s first language: Australian English or Iraqi Arabic. The same situations used in the role-play interviews were written in both languages. Australian subjects responded in Australian English to the English version, while Iraqi subjects responded in Iraqi Arabic to the Arabic one. In terms of the role-play process, each situation was read aloud by the researcher to each subject, who was asked to imagine the situation in his/her everyday life and then to say what they thought they would if they were confronted with a similar situation in real life. To record the subjects’ responses, the researcher used a digital voice recorder.

Eight situations were used in the role-play interview in this study (Appendix 1). These situations presented the following scenarios:

**Situation 1:** A student has missed a lecture and would like to borrow a classmate’s notes.

**Situation 2:** A younger brother is asked by a sibling to buy coffee from the neighbouring shops.

**Situation 3:** A student asks the lecturer to lend him/her a recommended book.

**Situation 4:** A student wants to borrow some money from a friend to buy some books.

**Situation 5:** A passenger who is travelling on a bus asks a stranger to open the window.

**Situation 6:** A passenger asks a taxi driver to slow down.

**Situation 7:** A roommate requests his/her mate to clean the room.

**Situation 8:** A customer in a cafe asks the waiter to bring two cups of coffee.

The above situations are designed according to three social variables introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987), who claim that the degree of risk of requests, as face-threatening acts, is determined by these universal social parameters. The first parameter is the relative social power (P) between the interlocutors. Fukushima (2000) points out that social power can be measured according to social status, social class, institutionalised role, age, sex, wealth, physical strength and regional or ethnic identity. People may have relatively different social power according to these elements. For instance, people have different institutionalised roles according to the duties and rights that their professions
impose. It is assumed in this study that the waiter and the taxi driver have lower social power than their customers because their jobs require them to serve their customers and to fulfil their requests. It is also assumed that people of the same age may have equal social power (=P); however, a younger brother or sister may have lower social power than their older siblings. The second social parameter is the social distance (D) between the addressee and the addressee. The social distance is determined in the situations used in this study according to the degree of familiarity between the interactants, length of acquaintance and frequency of contact. Thus, they may have known each other for a long time and, therefore, they have close social distance (-D), or they may have greater social distance (+D) because they have never met before or have had less frequency of contact. The third parameter is the degree of imposition (I) required by the request. Fukushima (2000) demonstrates that the degree of imposition will be high if the request costs the addressee something of a high value. According to Fukushima, this cost includes time, effort, financial burden and psychological burden.

The three social parameters are distributed across the eight situations used in this study, as shown in Table 1. In each situation, one or more of these parameters is made prominent in order to stimulate the subjects to observe them when they produce their responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
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<th>Social distance</th>
<th>Imposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<td>7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The distribution of the social parameters in the eight situations

3.2. Participants

Two groups of subjects participated in this study. The two groups were similar in terms of age, gender and educational background. The first group consisted of 14 Iraqi Arabic native speakers (henceforth IANSs), seven females and seven males. All Iraqi subjects were postgraduate students at Deakin and Monash universities in the State of Victoria. Their ages ranged from 20 to 35 years old. The second group consisted of 14 Australian English native speakers (henceforth AENSs). They were seven females and seven males,
aged between 20 and 35 years old. They were undergraduate and postgraduate students at Deakin University. It was necessary to find two identical samples in terms of individual characteristics in order to obtain comparable responses. Fukushima (2000) argues that comparability between two groups of subjects recruited in a cross-cultural study entails that the participants in both groups are almost similar in terms of their individual features.

3.3. Categorization of mitigating devices

The basic unit to be analysed in this study is the request utterance(s) provided by each subject in every situation introduced in the role-play interview. In order to identify the internal and external mitigating devices in the request utterance(s), the boundaries of the request head act should be assigned first. Then through the examination of the structure of the head act, the internal mitigating devices are identified. The external mitigating devices are identified through examining the peripheral elements that are localized outside the head act. In the examples below, ‘can you clean the room today’ and ‘would you mind opening the window a little bit’ are the head acts in the two requests because they are the basic units that can be used alone to convey the requesting acts. These head acts are modified with internal mitigations such as ‘can you’, ‘a little bit’ and ‘would you mind’. The utterances before and after the head acts are the external mitigations that have been attached to the head acts to modify their imposition force.

*Can you clean the room today* because I’m busy with my assignment?

*It is really hot in here. Would you mind opening the window a little bit?*

The categorization scheme used for classifying the internal and external mitigating devices employed in the requests collected in this study is based primarily on the CCSARP (Blum-Kulka *et al.*, 1989). However, this categorization scheme was expanded to meet the requirements of analysing the data collected in this study. Additional categories were added to the categorization scheme. These include consultative device (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984), questions (Trosborg, 1995), apology (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008), alerter (Schauer, 2007), closing (Al-Ali & Alawneh, 2010), and new categories: wish/hope statement and verbal incentive.

Accordingly, the categorization scheme used for analysing the data obtained in this study consists of the following categories and subcategories:
3.3.1. Internal mitigating devices

a. Syntactic downgraders
These are the syntactic choices that the speaker utilizes to mitigate the imposition force of the request head act. They include the following devices:

- Questions, e.g.,
  
  *Can/Will you open the window for me please?*

- Aspect, especially the –ing form, e.g.,
  
  *I’m wondering if I could borrow your notes.*

- Past tense, e.g.,
  
  *I was wondering if you can open the window a little bit.*

- Conditional clause, e.g.,
  
  *I was wondering if it’s possible to slow down a little bit.*

- Subjunctive: the subjunctive mood of the verb is another syntactic device of request mitigation, e.g,
  
  *Arjo an tuataini el ketab.* (I hope that you give me the book.)

- Wish/hope statement: a request can be formulated in a form of a wish or a hope for the request to be performed, e.g.,
  
  *Belki tekerthni kam felis* itha endak. (I hope you lend me some money if you have.)

- Combinations of syntactic devices, e.g.,
  
  *I was wondering if you can slow down a little bit.*

b. Lexical/phrasal downgraders

The following devices are used to mitigate the illocutionary force of the requesting act at the lexical/phrasal level.

- Politeness marker: ‘please’ in English and ‘rajaan’ or ‘minfathlak’ in Arabic, e.g.,
  
  *Can you please clean the room today?*

- Consultative devices: elements, such as ‘would you mind’, ‘do you think’, ‘is it possible’, ‘would it be all right if’ and ‘is it all right’, e.g.,
Is it possible to borrow your book?

- Downtoners: elements, such as ‘possibly’, ‘perhaps’, ‘just’, ‘rather’, and ‘maybe’, e.g.,
  Could you possibly lend me your book?

- Understaters: adverbial modifiers, such as ‘a bit’, ‘a little’, ‘a second’, and ‘a minute’, e.g.,
  Would you mind opening the window a little bit?

- Subjectivizers: elements, such as ‘I am afraid’, ‘I wonder’, ‘I think’, and ‘I suppose’, e.g.,
  I wonder if you can clean the room today.

- Combinations of lexical/phrasal devices, e.g.,
  I’m wondering if you can slow down a little bit.

3.3.2. External mitigating devices

- Alerter: the element that the speaker uses to attract the hearer’s attention or to alert him/her to receiving the request, such as ‘excuse me’, ‘hey’, ‘sir’, ‘hi’, ‘David’, ‘you’, etc, e.g.,
  Excuse me mate, can I borrow your notes for a short time?

- Preparators, which include three elements:
  1. Preparing the speech act, e.g., there is something I want you to do for me.
  2. Checking availability, e.g., are you doing anything at the moment?
  3. Getting a pre-commitment, e.g., can you do me a favour?

- Grounder: reasons, explanations or justifications for the request provided before or after the request head act, e.g.,
  I missed the last bus. Could you please drive me home?

- Imposition minimizers: elements with which the speaker tries to reduce the imposition of the request, e.g.,
  Could you lend me some money? I’ll pay you back tomorrow.

- Verbal incentive: expressions of appreciation or supplication that provoke the hearer’s cooperation, e.g.,
I would really appreciate it if you can lend me some money.

- Promise of reward: the requester can announce a reward for the fulfilment of the request, e.g.,
  
  Can you clean the room today? I’ll do it when it is your turn.

- Apology: the speaker apologises for making the request and for the imposition that the request might have on the hearer, e.g.,

  I’m very sorry, but I want to borrow your book for a short time.

- Closing: expressions of appreciation and thanking used at the end of the request sequence as closing indicators, e.g.,

  Can you bring us two cups of coffee? Thank you.

- Combinations of devices, e.g.,

  Excuse me sir, would you mind opening the window? It is really hot in here.
Chapter 4: Data analysis and results

4.1. Data analysis

The audio-recorded responses obtained from the subjects were transcribed and the IANs’s data was translated into English using word-for-word translation and edited English translation. The process of data analysis used in this study can be outlined in four stages.

In the first stage, each request utterance was segmented into two basic parts: the request head act, which can be modified internally, and the external modification, which may occur before or after the head act in the request sequence (see Appendix 2). The supportive role of external modification implies its redundancy within the request utterance, because an external modifier can be omitted from the utterance without affecting its illocutionary force as a request. For example, in the request, ‘excuse me, I was sick yesterday. Could I borrow your notes?’ the segment ‘excuse me, I was sick yesterday’ is redundant because it can be omitted from the request sequence without affecting its realization as a request act. The distinction between the head act and external modification was also made on a sequential and functional basis. The external modifications were identified through examining their position within the request utterance and how they were linked to (through the use of conjunctions, for instance) or separated from (with a pause or any other suprasegmental features) the head act. In addition, they were identified through examining their pragmatic function within the request utterance, i.e., whether they were mitigating or aggravating the illocutionary force of the request act. The pragmatic function was of significant importance. It helped the researcher to determine whether the role of a segment within the request utterance was marginal (supporting the request act) or substantial (conveying the request act itself). For example, in the request, ‘I’m sorry, I’m a terrible passenger. Could you please slow down?’, the segment ‘Could you please slow down?’ is of a substantial role because it conveys the request act, while the preceding utterance ‘I’m sorry, I’m a terrible passenger’ is of a marginal role.

The second stage of data analysis included the process of identifying and categorizing internal and external mitigating devices according to the classification explained in the methodology chapter (as shown in Appendix 3). These devices were examined according to their linguistic structure and position within the request sequence, their semantic meanings, and their pragmatic functions. The third stage was to investigate the frequency
of occurrence of mitigating devices. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was effective in identifying the overall frequency of use of each internal or external device in each group’s data, in addition to its frequency in every situation (see Appendix 4). In the fourth stage, the differences and similarities between the two groups in terms of the use of mitigating devices were identified. The comparison between the two groups had two dimensions: quantitative and qualitative. The first was related to the frequency of occurrence of internal and external devices and was carried out using the T-test in the SPSS. T-test indicated whether the difference between the two groups in terms of the frequency of each mitigating device in their data was significant or not through calculating the P-value. If the P-value was less than 0.005, the difference between the two groups would be significant, and it would be insignificant if the P-value was more than 0.005 (see Appendix 4). The qualitative dimension demonstrated whether the two groups had used different or similar types of mitigating devices in each situation. This comparison was conducted through examining the types and functions of the mitigating devices. In order to identify the qualitative differences or similarities between the two groups, it was necessary to go back to the classification made in the second stage of data analysis, in which the internal and external devices found in the subjects’ requests were categorized.

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Internal mitigating devices

The examination of the request utterances indicated that AENSs used internal mitigating devices more frequently than their Iraqi counterparts. The difference between the two groups in terms of the frequency of occurrence of these devices was found to be significant at P-value= 0.000. The two groups also differed in terms of the selection of the linguistic formulae of some of these devices and the situations in which these devices were used frequently.

4.2.1.1. Syntactic downgraders

AENSs and IANSs demonstrated differences in terms of the frequency of occurrence of syntactic downgraders in their requests and the situations in which they used these devices. AENSs used syntactic downgraders more often than IANSs, as shown in Table 2. The difference between the two groups was found to be significant at P-value= 0.000. AENSs utilized these devices in all the eight situations, while their Iraqi counterparts
employed them less frequently in situations 2, 6 and 8, in which the addressee has relatively lower social power.

1. Questions

Both groups used questions in their requests more than any other syntactic device. However, AENSs used questions more than IANSs did. As shown in Table 3, AENSs employed questions in 77.7% of their requests, while IANSs used them in 52.7% of their requests. This quantitative difference was found to be significant at P-value= 0.000. Questions were pervasive in AENSs’ requests in all the eight situations, as exemplified in (1) from situation 8, in which a customer in a cafe asks the waiter to bring two cups of coffee. On the contrary, IANSs used less question forms in situations with lower social power of the addressee, especially situations 6 and 8. They used questions more often in situations with an increased degree of the three social variables: imposition, distance and power, as exemplified in (2) from situation 3, in which a student asks a university lecturer to lend him/her a recommended book.

(1) AENS:  *Can I* please have two cups of coffee?

(2) IANS:  *Austath, mumkin* astaeer alkitab mink?
Sir  possible  [I]  borrow  the  book  from  you
(Sir, is it possible to borrow the book from you?)

2. Hope/wish statement

Some of the requesting acts produced in the role-play interviews were mitigated internally through using statements that express a hope or a wish for the request to be performed. However, these statements were used only by IANSs (Table 3). IANSs used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S 1</td>
<td>S 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AENSs</td>
<td>Number of requests</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IANSs</td>
<td>Number of requests</td>
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<tr>
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Table 2: Subjects’ overall use of syntactic downgraders
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<th>Group</th>
<th>The situations</th>
<th>P-value</th>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IANSs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Subjects’ use of syntactic downgraders in the eight situations
these statements in 15.2% of their responses, especially in situations that imply a remote social distance between the interlocutors, as in example (3) in situation 5, where a passenger on a bus asks a stranger to open the window as he/she cannot reach it.

(3) Min rekhustak aamy belki teftah eljamah shewaya.

After [your] permission uncle [I] hope [you] open the window a little bit.

(Excuse me uncle, I hope you open the window a little bit.)

3. Aspect

Aspect was found only in AENSs’ requests. Table 3 demonstrates that AENSs used aspect in 27.7% of the total number of their requests. Most instances of aspect were employed in situations with a remote social distance between the interlocutors, especially situations 1 and 5, and the situations with a higher degree of imposition, especially situations 2, 4 and 7. Consider example (4) from situation 4, in which the degree of imposition is high because the requester wants to borrow some money.

(4) I’m just wondering if I could borrow some money from you.

4. Past tense

Only AENSs used the past tense as a mitigating device in their requests (Table 3). They used the past tense in 6.3% of the total number of their requests. Most of instances of the past tense were found in situations 1 and 8 which share the characteristics of the remote social distance between the requester and the requestee, as shown in example (5) from situation 1, where the requester asks a classmate whom he/she has just met at the beginning of the semester to lend her notes from the previous missed lecture.

(5) I was wondering if I could just borrow your notes.

5. Conditional clause

Conditional clauses were used as syntactic mitigating devices by both groups, but with a different frequency. They were used in 28.6% of AENSs’ requests, and only in 6.3% of IANSs’ requests (Table 3). The quantitative difference between the two groups was found to be significant at P-value= 0.000. AENSs employed these devices in situations with a higher degree of imposition, greater social distance or higher social power of the addressee, especially in situations 1, 3, 4 and 7, as shown in example (6) from situation 1, where the requester wants to borrow some notes from a classmate whom he/she has just met at the beginning of the semester. IANSs, on the other hand, used most of their conditional clauses in situation 3, in which the three social variables of power, distance
and imposition are high because the requester wants to borrow a book from his/her lecturer, as shown in example (7) below.

(6) AENSs: I’m just wondering if I could get a copy of your notes from yesterday.

(7) Rajaan austath, etha tegdar tentainy almassder eli endak.
    Please Sir if [you] can give [me] the resource that [you] have
    (Please Sir; if you can, give me the resource that you have.)

6. Subjunctive

Only IANSs used subjunctive as a syntactic mitigating device in their responses. They used this device in 58% of their total requests. Subjunctive was more frequent in situations with a higher degree of imposition, a remote social distance or a higher social power of the addressee, as shown in the following example from situation 5, in which the requester asks a stranger on a bus to open the window.

(8) Tegdar teftah elnafitha shewaya?
    Are [you] able to open the window a little bit?
    (Can you open the window a little bit?)

7. Combinations of devices

Combinations of syntactic devices were found in 39.3% of AENSs’ requests and 47.3% of IANSs’ requests (Table 3). The T-test indicated that the difference between the two groups in terms of the frequency of occurrence of combinations of syntactic devices was insignificant at P-value = 0.037. However, AENSs and IANSs differed in their selection of the syntactic devices that were combined in their requests. IANSs preferred to combine subjunctive with questions or hope/wish statements, as shown in example (10) below, in which a question is combined with a verb in the subjunctive mood. AENSs, on the other hand, preferred to combine conditional clauses with other syntactic devices, especially questions, as shown in example (9), in which the a question is combined with a conditional clause.

(9) AENSs: Do you mind if I could borrow your notes..... (situation 1)

(10) IANSs: mumkin yaany an tueirany dafter almulahthaj... (situation 1)
    Possible I mean to lend me the notebook....
    (Is it possible, I mean, to lend me the notebook....)
4.2.1.2. Lexical/phrasal downgraders

Both AENSs and IANSs used lexical and phrasal downgraders to mitigate their request acts; however, AENSs used these devices more than their Iraqi counterparts. The difference between the two groups in the frequency of occurrence of these downgraders was significant at P-value= 0.000. Instances of lexical and phrasal downgraders were found in 92% of AENSs’ requests and 63.4% of IANSs’ requests (Table 4). AENSs’ instances were pervasive in each of the eight situations, whereas IANSs did not employ lexical and phrasal downgraders frequently in situations with a close social distance between the interactants, especially in situations 2, in which the requester asks a younger brother to go to a shop to buy some coffee.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

Table 4: Subjects’ overall use of lexical/phrasal downgraders

1. Politeness marker

The politeness markers ‘please’ in English and ‘rajaan/minfathlak’ in Arabic were found in both groups’ requests. ‘Please’ was found in 42% of AENSs’ requests, but ‘rajaan’ and ‘minfathlak’ were found in only 16.1% of IANSs’ requests. The difference between the two groups was found to be significant at P-value= 0.000. Table 5 demonstrates that both groups preferred to use these markers in situations that imply a remote social distance between the interlocutors, especially in situations 8, 6, and 5, as shown in examples (11) and (12) from situation 8, in which the requester asks a waiter in a cafe to bring two cups of coffee.
<table>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>IANSs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Combination of devices</td>
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<td>Number of requests</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Subjects’ use of lexical/phraseal downgraders in the eight situations
AENSs: We will have two coffees, please.

IANSs: areed kubain gahwa min fathlak.
[I] want [two] cups coffee please
(I want two cups of coffee, please.)

2. Consultative devices

Both AENSs and IANSs employed consultative devices to mitigate their request acts. AENSs used consultative devices in 36.6% of the total number of their requests, whereas IANSs used them in 43.8% of their requests (Table 5). The difference between the two groups in terms of the frequency of occurrence of these devices was insignificant at P-value= 0.040. In both groups, consultative devices were less frequent in situations in which the addressee was of lower social power: situations 2, 6 and 8. Although both groups preferred using consultative devices at a similar rate of occurrence, they differed in their selection of the type of these devices. While ‘mumkin’ (is it possible) was pervasive in IANSs’ data, AENSs preferred using a variety of consultative devices that ask about the hearer’s ability (e.g. ‘would you be able’), willingness (e.g. ‘would you mind’) or the possibility of performing the request (e.g. ‘is it possible’). Consider examples (13) and (14) in situation 5, where a passenger on a bus has to ask a stranger to open the window because the requester cannot reach it.

AENSs: Would you mind please opening the window?
IANSs: mumkin teftah eljamah shewaya?
Possible [you] open the window a little bit
(Is it possible for you to open the window a little bit?)

3. Downtoners

AENSs used downtoners more than IANSs did in their requests. Instances of downtoners were found in 11.6% of AENSs’ requests, whereas only one example (0.9%) was found in IANSs’ requests, as shown in Table 5. The difference between the two groups in terms of the frequency of occurrence of these devices was found to be significant at P-value= 0.000. AENSs used the downtoners, ‘just’ and ‘possibly’ in situations with higher power, a remote social distance or a higher degree of imposition, as shown in example (15) in situation 1, where the requester asks a classmate whom he/she has just met at the beginning of the semester to borrow yesterday’s lecture notes.

AENSs: I was wondering if I could just borrow your notes.
Subjectivizers were employed in AENSs’ requests more than in those by IANSs. AENSs used subjectivizers in 14.3% of the total number of their requests, whereas only one instance of these downgraders was found in IANSs’ requests, so the difference between the two groups was significant. AENSs used ‘I’m wondering’ or ‘I was wondering’ more frequently than other instances of subjectivizers, especially in situations with increased social power, social distance or request imposition force. Consider example (18) from AENSs’ data in situation 3, where the requester is a student who wants to borrow a book from his/her lecturer because he/she could not find a copy in the library.

(18) I’m wondering if I could borrow your copy.

6. Combinations of devices

AENSs used combinations of lexical/phrasal downgraders more than their Iraqi counterparts. They used these combinations in 33% of their requests, while IANSs used them in only 14.3% of their requests. The quantitative difference between the two groups was found to be significant at P-value= 0.000. AENSs used combinations of
lexical/phrasal devices more often in situations with a greater social distance or a higher degree of imposition, especially in situations 2, 4 and 5, as illustrated in example (19) in situation 4, where the requester asks a friend to lend him/her some money to buy some textbooks. However, IANSs used combinations mostly in their requests in situations in which there was a greater social distance between the interlocutors, as shown in example (20) in situation 5, where a passenger on a bus asks a stranger to open the window.

(19) *Would it be possible* for me to borrow *some* money from you?

(20) *Mumkin* teftah eljamah *shewaya*?

Possible [you] open the window a little bit
Is it possible for you to open the window a little bit?

4.2.2. External mitigating devices

As shown in Table 6, external mitigating devices were pervasive in both AENSs and IANSs’ requests across the eight situations. AENSs used these devices in 94.6% of their total requests and their Iraqi counterparts used them in 91.1% of their requests. There was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of the frequency of occurrence of these devices since the P-value is 0.038. However, a qualitative difference was found between the two groups, as they employed different types of external devices in specific situations.

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<th>Group</th>
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<th>P-value</th>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>92.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Subjects’ overall use of external mitigating devices

1. Grounders

*Grounders* were the most common external mitigating devices in both groups’ requests. AENSs used *grounders* in 69.6% of their total requests and IANSs used them in 67.9% of their total requests (Table 7). The T-test indicated that the difference between the two groups in terms of the frequency of occurrence of these devices was insignificant at
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mitigating device</th>
<th>Group</th>
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<th>Total</th>
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<td>S2</td>
<td>S3</td>
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<td>Number of requests %</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Number of requests %</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>

Table 7: Subjects' use of external mitigating devices in the eight situations
P-value = 0.567. As exemplified in (21) and (22) below, subjects from both groups preferred to give reasons, justifications or explanations before or after the request head acts in all the eight situations except in situation 8, in which the addressee is of a lower power according to his/her job as a waiter.

(21) AENSs: I actually missed yesterday because I was unwell. I was wondering...
(Situation 1)

(22) IANSs: mumkin astaeer alkitab minak lean ma hassalit kutub bilmaktaba?
possible [I] borrow the book from you because [I] didn’t get books in the library
(Is possible to borrow your book because I couldn’t find books in the library?)
(Situation 3)

2. Alerter

Alerter constituted the second most preferred external modification found in both groups’ requests. Alerter were found in 63.4% of AENSs’ requests and 59.8% of IANSs’ requests with insignificant difference at P-value = 0.279 (Table 7). However, the two groups differed in terms of their preference of different types of alerter and the situations in which they employed these devices. AENSs utilized the attention getter ‘excuse me’ combined sometimes with a first name or a title in most of their requests in the eight situations. IANSs, on the other hand, used different alerter in different situations. They preferred to use first names in situations in which the social distance between the interlocutors was close, as was the case in situations 2, 4 and 7. In situation 3, where the addressee was of a higher social power, IANSs preferred to use the title, ‘austath’ (sir). Furthermore, they preferred “fictitious kinship terms of address” (Hassall, 2001, p. 265), such as ‘kuwya’ (brother) and ‘aukhti’ (sister), when they addressed a requestee with a remote social distance, as was the case in situations 1, 5, 6 and 8. Consider examples (23) and (24) in situation 5, where the requester is a passenger on a bus who would like to ask a stranger to open the window close to him.

(23) AENSs: Excuse me sir, would you mind opening the window, please?

(24) IANSs: Khuya bedun zehma alaik, eftah eljamah shewaya.
Brother without pressure on you open the window a little bit
(Brother, if that doesn’t cause any pressure on you, open the window a little bit.)
3. Imposition minimizer

*Imposition minimizers* were found in the data obtained from both groups. They were more frequent in IANSs’ requests than in those obtained from AENSs (Table 7). *Imposition minimizers* were found in 34.8% of IANSs’ requests and 24.1% of AENSs’ requests with a significant difference at $P$-value $= 0.001$. Both groups used these devices mainly in situations with a higher degree of imposition, as was the case in situation 4, in which the requester asks a friend to lend him/her some money to buy some textbooks (example 25). IANSs also employed them in situations in which there was a remote social distance between the interlocutors, as was the case in situations 5, in which a passenger travelling on a bus asks a stranger to open the window (example 26). Although both groups used minimizers that aim to reduce the tangible cost of requests in time, effort or possession, IANSs also employed *imposition minimizers* that aim to reduce the moral cost of their requests (the damage that the request may cause to the requestee’s negative or positive face).

(25) AENSs: would you mind lending me some money to purchase this book and *I’ll pay you back tomorrow*?

(26) IANSs: *bala zehma alaik, mumkin teftah alnafutha shewayya.*

Without pressure on [you] possible [you] open the window a little bit.

(If it will not cause any pressure on you, is it possible that you open the window a little bit.)

4. Preparators

Few examples of *preparators* were found in AENSs’ and IANSs’ requests. As shown in Table 7, AENSs used *preparators* in 8% of their total requests, while IANSs used them in only 1.8% of their total requests. Both groups used *preparators* mostly in situations with a higher degree of imposition, especially in situations 2, 4 and 7. AENSs used examples from the three categories of *preparators*: preparing the speech act, checking availability and getting a pre-commitment. IANSs used only examples from the first category (preparing the speech act), as shown in the following examples in situation 7, where the requester asks a roommate to clean the room instead of him/her as he/she is very busy.

(27) AENSs: *Are you doing anything at the moment?* Could you just go down to the shop and get some coffee for me?

(28) IANSs: *Aureed attlub minak shaya.* Hal bemkanki an takumy biltantheef?
[I] want ask from you something. Are [you] able to do the cleaning?
(I want to ask you something. Can you do the cleaning?)

5. Promise of reward

AENSs excelled their Iraqi counterparts in using promise of reward in their requests. They used promise of reward in 16.1% of their total requests, whereas IANSs used this device in only 7.1% of their total requests (Table 7). The quantitative difference between the two groups was significant at P-value= 0.000. Both groups preferred to offer a reward in situations with a high degree of imposition on the hearer, especially in situation 7, in which the requester asks a roommate to clean the room instead of him/her as he/she is very busy, as in the following examples from the data:

(29) AENSs: Do you think you can clean the room today and I’ll do it next time?

(30) IANSs: mumkin tantheef alghorfa mukani.....welamen yeji durik anathuf mukanik?
    possible cleaning the room instead of [me]...and when comes your turn
    [I] clean instead of you.
    (Is it possible to clean the room instead of me...and when it’s your turn
    I’ll clean for you?)

6. Apology

Apology was used more often in AENSs’ requests than in IANSs’ requests. AENSs used apology in 13.4% of their total requests, whereas IANSs used it in only 1.8% of their requests (Table 7). AENSs used this device mostly in situations with a higher degree of imposition or a remote social distance between the interlocutors, as shown in example (31) in situation 7, where the requester asks a roommate to clean the room because he/she is very busy. IANSs used apology only in situation 3, in which the requester is a student who wants to borrow his/her lecturer’s book, as in example (32) below.

(31) AENSs: I’m really sorry that I haven’t cleaned today. I still have lot assignments
to do. Is it OK if you could do it now?

(32) IANSs: arjo almaathera lian alnisakh nifathat min almaktaba...
    [I] hope excuse because the copies run out from the library......
    (I’m sorry because all copies in the library were booked out...
7. Verbal incentive

Verbal incentive was used with similarly low frequency in both groups’ requests. It was found in 2.7% of AENSs’ requests and 3.6% of IANSs’ requests in the eight situations, with insignificant difference at P-value= 0.586 (Table 7). Both groups used verbal incentive in situations with a high degree of imposition or a remote social distance between the interlocutors. A qualitative difference was found between the two groups in terms of the type of verbal incentive they preferred in their requests. AENSs preferred to use expressions of appreciation of the hearer’s cooperation, such as ‘it’s really appreciative’. IANSs, on the other hand, used expressions of appreciation as well as expressions of supplication, such as ‘raham Allah waledaik’ (God bless your parents), as in the examples below.

(33)  AENSs: I was wondering if you can go shopping today because if you can, it’s really, really appreciated... (situation 2)

(34)  IANSs: ala keifak rahma liwaledaik..... (situation 6)
   Slow down grace to [your] parents
   (Slow down, God grace your parents.)

8. Closing

Closing was used in AENSs’ requests more often than in IANSs’ requests with a percentage of (17.9%) versus (6.3%), as shown in Table 7. This quantitative difference was significant at P-value= 0.000. AENSs used closing in the eight situations regardless of the characteristics of these situations, as shown in example (35) from situation 8, in which a customer in a cafe asks a waiter to bring two cups of coffee. IANSs, on the other hand, used it in situations in which one or more of the three variables of power, distance and imposition were high as shown in example (36) from situation 7, in which the requester asks a roommate to clean the room. The two groups also employed different semantic formulae of closing in their requests. AENSs preferred to end their requests with an expression of appreciation or thanking; however, IANSs preferred to end their requests with an expression of gratefulness or supplication.

(35)  AENSs: Could you bring us two cups of coffee? Thank you.

(36)  IANSs: tegedreen tenthifeen bemukani alyawm? ..... Allah yekhlich.
       Can you clean instead of me today? .... May God preserve you.
9. Combinations of devices

Both AENSs and IANSs employed combinations of more than one external device in their requests. AENSs used combinations of devices in 70.5% of their requests, while IANSs used them in 61.6% of their requests (Table 7). The quantitative difference between the two groups was insignificant at P-value= 0.006. Both groups used combinations of devices more frequently in situations with higher social power, a remote social distance or a higher degree of imposition, as shown in the examples below from situation 3, in which a student asks a university lecturer to lend him/her a book.

(37) AENSs: *Excuse me* (alerter), *I’ve looked in the library and I can’t find this book.* *Everyone’s borrowed it* (grounder). *So could I please borrow yours? Maybe I only need it overnight, so I’ll give it back to you as soon as possible* (imposition minimizer).

(38) IANSs: *Sabah alkhair austath* (alerter), *lilasaf rehit lilmaktaba walegait alkutub kulha mustaara* (grounder). *Falaw mumkin yaani anahu tueirani ketabak legharath hajati almasa elah, walifatra mahduda waarahaj elak* (imposition minimizer).

Good morning sir, unfortunately, [I] went to the library and [I] found the books all of them were borrowed. If it is possible I mean that [you] lend me [your] book because of [my] urgent need and for a limited time and [I] return it to you.

Good morning sir, unfortunately, I went to the library but I found all the copies of this book out. If it’s possible for you to lend me your copy because I need it urgently for a limited time and I’ll give it back to you.
Chapter 5: Discussion

As the results of the analysis show, there is a significant difference in the frequency of occurrence of internal downgraders found in AENSs’ and IANSs’ requests. AENSs used more syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders than their Iraqi counterparts. They used syntactic downgraders in 97.3% and lexical/phrasal downgraders in 92% of their requests, while IANSs used syntactic downgraders in 75.9% and lexical/phrasal downgraders in 63.4% of their requests. *Questions* were the most frequent syntactic device in AENSs’ data with a percentage of 77.7% of their requests, whereas in IANSs’ data, *subjunctive* was the most frequent syntactic device, forming 58% of their requests. With regard to lexical/phrasal downgraders, the politeness marker *please* was used more frequently than other lexical/phrasal devices in AENSs’ requests (42%), whereas in IANSs’ requests *consultative devices* were more often used than other lexical/phrasal devices (43.8%). The results also indicate a qualitative difference between the two groups who used different semantic formulae of some downgraders in different situations. External downgraders, on the other hand, were pervasive in both groups’ requests. They were found in 94.6% of AENSs’ requests and 91.1% of IANSs’ requests. The frequency of occurrence of external devices indicates an insignificant difference between the two groups’ requests. *Alerter* and * grounder* were the most common external devices in both groups’ requests. The former was found in 63.4% of AENSs’ requests and 59.8% of IANSs’ requests, whereas the latter was found in 69.6% of AENSs’ requests and 67.9% of IANSs’ requests. Some external downgraders, especially *alerters* and *verbal incentives*, had a different linguistic realization in the requests produced by subjects from each group.

The findings of this study coincide with the findings of some previous studies (House and Kasper, 1981; Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Trosborg, 1995; Reiter, 2000), which demonstrate that English native speakers use internal and external mitigating devices profusely in their requests. On the other hand, the low frequency of internal downgraders and the pervasive occurrence of external mitigating devices in IANSs’ requests seem to be consistent with the findings of some previous studies that investigated the use of request modifications in Arabic cultures (Al-Ali and Sahawneh, 2008; Al-Ali and Alawneh, 2010). The results obtained in the present study can be interpreted in terms of the linguistic and cultural variation between AENSs and IANSs, as well as the use of volubility as a politeness strategy.
5.1. Linguistic variation

The fact that AENSs and IANSs use different first languages with distinctive linguistic systems may provoke an assumption that their use of request mitigations, especially internal devices, is constrained by the linguistic repertoires available in their languages. It has been claimed that the different realization and structure of request speech acts across languages may result from the cross-linguistic variation between these languages (Blum-Kulka, et al., 1989; Reiter, 2000). English and Arabic languages are two linguistic systems that descend from different language families. While English is an Indo-European language, Arabic is one of the Semitic languages that is characterized by linguistic features and structures different from those of English. According to Berg’s (2009) classification of structural variation among languages, two types of linguistic variation may exist between Arabic and English. The first is the qualitative variation that refers to the existence of a particular structural unit (e.g., morpheme, word, syntactic structure, etc) in one language and its absence in another. The second is the quantitative variation that refers to a more significant existence of a particular structural unit in one language than in the other. These two types of linguistic variation seem to play a substantial role in the divergence between AENSs and IANSs in their use of request mitigations. Al-Ali and Sahawneh (2008) and Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010) argue that the qualitative and quantitative differences between Jordanian learners of English and English native speakers in the use of request modifications are partially due to the negative interference of Arabic language in the learners’ interaction in English. Internal downgraders seem to be more concerned with linguistic variation because most of these devices are categorized according to their syntactic and lexical/phrasal traits, which represent distinctive features of the language system.

In terms of the qualitative linguistic variation, the availability of some mitigating devices as linguistic elements in either Australian English or Iraqi Arabic may explain the divergence between AENSs and IANSs in their utilization of these devices. The syntactic downgrader, aspect, is a good example of this variation. The continuous aspect, e.g., “I was wondering if I could borrow your notes from yesterday”, was used in 27.7% of AENSs’ requests, but it was not found in IANSs’ requests due to the absence of the continuous aspect as a linguistic element in Arabic. The continuous aspect is deemed as a basic linguistic feature of grammar that has forms and functions in English (Cowan, 2008). However, in Arabic, the continuous aspect of the verb is not available. The simple present form of the verb is used in Arabic to describe an event that is happening at the
moment of speaking, e.g., ‘Ali yakibu aldersa alan’ (Ali is writing the lesson now). The qualitative linguistic variation between Australian English and Iraqi Arabic is also evident in the use of combinations of syntactic devices. The English syntactic system allows some syntactic mitigating devices to be combined in order to reinforce the mitigation of the request act. However, some of these devices cannot be combined within the request utterance in Arabic. For instance, the combination of questions and conditional clauses is a common strategy found in AENSs’ requests, e.g., ‘do you mind if I could borrow your notes?’, but this combination is rare in the Arabic sentence. IANSs preferred to combine questions with subjunctive in one request utterance because this combination is possible according to the syntactic rules of Arabic, e.g., ‘mumkin an tueirani defter almulahathat?’ (is it possible to lend me the notebook?).

Quantitative linguistic variation between Iraqi Arabic and Australian English may also provide some explanation of the difference between AENSs and IANSs in the realization of internal mitigations of request speech acts. The discrepancy in the occurrence of these devices in both groups can be ascribed to the different status that these devices have in the request structure in both groups’ first languages. Some devices seem to be routinized linguistic elements in communication in one language, but they are not in the other. Therefore, they appear more frequent in the requests of one group rather than in those of the other. For example, in IANSs’ requests, the syntactic downgrader, subjunctive, was used frequently (58% of requests), e.g., ‘mumkin tenteiny dafter almulahathat?’ (is it possible to give me the notebook?), but it was absent in AENSs’ requests. Ryding (2005) points out that the subjunctive mood of the verb in Arabic is usually used to denote feelings and attitudes towards actions, including requesting acts. However, it seems not to have a similar importance in the request realization in English where it is limited to express non-factual or unreal meaning, such as in a wish for something that is unlikely to occur (cf. Quintero, 2002). Other internal mitigating devices were also used more frequently in one group’s requests rather than in the other’s due to the quantitative linguistic variation between Australian English and Iraqi Arabic, e.g., hope/wish statements in IANSs’ requests (15.2%) versus (0%), and downtoners in AENSs’ requests (11.6%) versus (0.9%).

5.2. Cultural variation

The differences between AENSs and IANSs in their use of request mitigating devices may also stem from the variance between the Australian and Iraqi sociocultural systems.
Kramsch (1998) argues that culture constrains the use of language through imposing structures and principles of interaction on group members. The frequencies and types of mitigating devices utilized in AENSs’ and IANSs’ requests suggest that both groups have structured their request utterances according to different assessments of the situational contexts in which these requests occurred. The divergence of the cultural systems of Australian and Iraqi cultures may lead to different conceptualizations of ‘face’ and what constitutes a face-threatening act in a specific situation, which, in turn, can result in different linguistic behaviour. It may also lead to different conventionalization of forms of mitigation. Interesting examples of different conventionalization of forms of mitigation were found in the subjects’ use of verbal incentives, closings and alerters. IANSs tended to use expressions of supplication, such as ‘Allah yekhlich’ (May God preserve you), as verbal incentives and closings, while their Australian counterparts used expressions of appreciation and thanking for the same purpose. The different linguistic conventionalization is also evident in the use of alerters. While AENSs preferred using ‘excuse me’ with or without a first name or a title in most of their requests, IANSs used fictitious kinship terms, e.g., ‘khewya’ (brother); titles, e.g., ‘austath’ (sir) and first names in various situations with different social variables. Some previous cross-cultural studies on the speech act of request (House and Kasper, 1981; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Trosborg, 1995; Beal, 1990 and 1998; Reiter, 2000) emphasize that interlocutors of different cultural backgrounds structure their request utterances differently on most occasions according to different cultural criteria. The linguistic behaviour of a specific cultural group’s members is shaped by their shared views and beliefs about what constitutes polite behaviour in a certain situation.

The pervasive use of internal and external mitigations in AENSs’ requests collected in this study can be explained in terms of the conceptualization of ‘face’ in the Australian culture. Australian culture is an individualistic culture, in which individuals are deemed independent of the group’s goals and desires (Winter, 2002). One of the outstanding values that characterize the Australian culture is also egalitarianism – the belief that individuals are socially, politically and economically equal (Swangboosatic, 2006). Australians seem to be conscious of the assumption that every member in their society is an autonomous individual who has the right to be free of any imposition. Therefore, when they produce a request in any situation, they try to maintain the privacy and protect the negative face of the requestee as much as they can. Ting-Toomey (1988, as cited in Dainton and Zelley, 2011) points out that in an individualistic culture, members mainly emphasize negative face to maintain their images as confident, self-directed and
independent individuals. As the data analysed in this study indicates, AENSs used request mitigations frequently in most of the situations including those in which the addressee is of a lower social power or a close social distance, as in the following example in situation 6, where the requester who has hired a taxi to take him/her home wants to ask the taxi driver to slow down: ‘excuse me, could you please slow down?’. The speaker in this example used three mitigating devices: ‘excuse me’ (alerter), ‘could you’ (question) and ‘please’ (politeness marker). The use of all these devices in one request indicates that the speaker is tentative and concerned about the negative face of the hearer, although the hearer is of a lower social power, being a taxi driver whose job is to serve his/her costumers and to perform their requests. Some previous studies demonstrate that Australian interlocutors use indirect request strategies and a high frequency of downgraders in order to maintain the negative face of each other. Beal (1990) claims that Australian English native speakers prefer the negative politeness approach in order to minimize the threat to the hearer’s face. Swangboonsatic (2006) points out that Australian interlocutors tend to be more tentative and exert an effort to maintain each other’s privacy when they exchange requests.

The Australian subjects’ tendency to employ more request mitigations can be also interpreted in terms of their endeavour to maintain their own faces as requesters. They made their requests tentative through employing internal devices, especially questions, conditional clauses, consultative devices, downtoners and subjectivizers in order to seek the hearer’s cooperation in advance and to avoid any potential direct rejection. For the same purpose, they also employed the external device, preparator, in some situations to guarantee the hearer’s cooperation before issuing the request, e.g., ‘are you doing anything at the moment? Could you just go down to the shop?’. This request is one of the AENSs’ responses in situation 2, in which the requester asks his/her younger brother to go out to buy some coffee. The structure of the above request demonstrates the AENSs’ tentativeness and willingness to get the hearer’s cooperation without causing much threatening to their own faces as well as their addressees’ faces. It starts with a preparator that checks the availability of the hearer to perform the request and provides an option to refuse cooperation without causing much face-threatening to the requester and requestee. The request head act in the above example also starts with an enquiry about the hearer’s ability to perform the request act to sustain the tentative nature of the request. Beal (1998) claims that Australians tend to employ “strategies that diffused the potential threat to their own face, like ‘fishing’ for permission rather than asking up front and risking rejection” (p. 16).
On the other hand, in Iraqi culture, social power and distance seem to be influential factors in determining the amount of mitigation involved in a request act in any situation. Iraqi culture is one of the Arabic cultures in which the hierarchical relationships and the reciprocal obligation are basic features of the cultural system. Arabic cultures, especially those of Gulf States, are classified as collectivistic cultures (Buda and Elsayed-Elkhouly, 1998). In collectivistic cultures, the social hierarchy and the reciprocal obligation are basic features of social life (DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2004). Hierarchical relationships are dominant within the Iraqi institutional and educational organizations, as well as the Iraqi familial networks. Individuals have to show respect and obedience to their work superiors, parents or even elder siblings. When issuing a request to someone with a higher social status or role, the Iraqi requester is expected to show deference through justifying and mitigating his/her request. Abdul Sattar et al. (2009) claim that in Iraqi culture “making a request to someone in authority may impose heavier psychological burdens than making a request to someone of a lower status” (p. 64). The results of the current study demonstrate that 100% of IANSs’ requests in situation 3, in which the requester is a student and the requestee is a university lecturer, contain syntactic downgraders and external mitigating devices, and that 57.1% of these requests contain lexical/phrasal downgraders. Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010) point out that, according to Arab norms, a university lecturer has a high social status in the social hierarchy as an individual with much academic knowledge. However, the matter is different when an Iraqi requester with a higher social status or power produces a request towards someone with lower social power, e.g., a student, a younger sibling, a waiter, etc. In Iraqi culture, with an addressee of lower social status or power, the requester is expected to use a more direct request with less mitigating devices. For instance, IANSs used syntactic downgraders in 42.9%, lexical/phrasal downgraders in 42.9% and external mitigations in 50% of their total requests in situation 8, in which the requestee is a waiter in a cafe.

Social distance seems to be a crucial factor that influences Iraqi subjects’ use of request mitigations in situations where the requester and the requestee have equal social power. When issuing a request towards a friend or a family member, the requester expects cooperation and support as a part of the addressee’s moral obligation towards him/her. This may explain the low frequency of internal downgraders in IANSs’ requests in situations in which the addressee is of a close social distance, even if some requests imply high imposition. For example, lexical/phrasal downgraders were found in only 50% of IANSs’ requests produced in situation 7, where the requester asks a roommate to clean the room. Unlike AENSs, IANSs may not need to be tentative when they ask someone
with a close social distance to do something. Iraqi interlocutors’ mutual feeling of moral obligation and harmony with other members of their social networks may foster them to perform request acts with less internal distracters. The Islamic identity and the collectivistic nature of Iraqi culture encourage Iraqi individuals to develop interpersonal relationships with other members of their social networks and to enhance a sense of reciprocal obligation towards them. Iraqi people tend to organize themselves in social and familial network in which reciprocal obligation and responsibility are essential. This may assert the assumption that verbal behaviour, like any other social behaviour, is also influenced by interlocutors’ feelings, i.e., their affect (cf. Moore and Isen, 1990). Brown and Gilman (1989, as cited in Blum-Kulka, 2005) suggest that ‘affect’ should be treated as important as distance, power and imposition in social interaction.

On the other hand, the high frequency of request mitigations in IANSs’ requests, in situations with a remote social distance and equal power between the interlocutors, can be explained in terms of the tendency of IANSs to maintain the positive face of the requestee with whom they may lack reciprocal obligation. For instance, IANSs used internal and external mitigating devices in 92.9% of their requests in situation 5, where the requester asks a stranger to open the bus window. Being members of a collectivistic culture, Iraqi individuals tend to maintain their positive image in social interaction, especially with interlocutors of a remote social distance. This can increase their appreciation and acceptance within their social groups. For members of a collectivistic culture, positive face is of primary importance because they try to maintain their social images as likable, cooperative and interested in constructing relationships (Dainton and Zelley, 2011). This trend to maintain the positive face of the requestee was also found in other Arabic cultures which are close to Iraqi culture in terms of sociocultural values and norms. For example, Al-Marrani and Sazalie (2010) demonstrate that Yemeni native speakers of Arabic tend to use positive politeness strategies when they perform request acts in situations with a remote social distance between the interlocutors.

5.3. Volubility as a politeness strategy

External mitigating devices were pervasive in both groups’ requests. The most frequent external devices were grounder (in 69.6% of AENS requests and 67.9% of IANS requests) and alerter (in 63.4% of AENS requests and 59.8% of IANS requests). This high frequency of both alerter and grounder indicates their importance as basic components within the request structure. Schauer (2007) argues that both alerter and
**grounder** are ‘basic constituents of a request’ (p. 204) and ascribes their weightiness within the request utterance to their essential roles of gaining the addressee’s attention and justifying the request being produced. Both groups preferred to start most of their request utterances with **alerters**, which can be utilized as politeness indicators in addition to their primary role of attracting the hearer’s attention, as shown in the following examples from situation 3:

**AENSs:** *Excuse me.* I’ve looked in the library and I can’t find this book. Everyone’s borrowed it, so could I please borrow yours.

**IANSs:** *Austath,* arjo an tuaerany etha mumkin ketabak lean lam atamakan min alhessol ala neskha fi almaktaba. (Sir, I hope that you lend me your book if it’s possible because I couldn’t get a copy from the library.)

The alerters, ‘excuse me’ and ‘austath’ (sir) in the above examples are not only used to get the hearer’s attention but also to maintain his/her face. The alerter ‘excuse me’, which was more frequent in AENSs’ requests, seems to be used by subjects as a negative politeness strategy, since it indicates the speaker’s caution to impose on the hearer. However, the title ‘austath’ (sir), which was employed by all IANSs in situation 3, seems to constitute a positive politeness strategy since it implies the requester’s acknowledgment of the requestee’s academic and social status within the social group.

AENSs and IANSs tended to provide reasons and justifications for their requests through including **grounders** within the request utterance. The **grounder** has also been found to be the most frequent external mitigation device in some previous studies (Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Reiter, 2000; Hassall, 2001; Trosborg, 1995; Schauer, 2007) that investigated request modification cross-culturally. Hassall (2001) demonstrates that **grounder** is the main type of external modifiers across languages. The importance of **grounders** seems to be related to their role as a means of sustaining the requester’s endeavour to get cooperation with less face-threatening to the hearer’s face. The justifications, explanations or reasons that are provided with the request head act can provoke the hearer’s cooperation if he/she realizes the circumstances that induce the request. Faerch and Kasper (1989) point out that **grounders** are effective mitigating strategies because they can open up “an emphatic attitude on the part of the interlocutor in giving his or her insight into the actor’s underlying motive(s)” (p. 239). Thus, the **grounders** can be utilized as negative and positive politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson (1978, as cited in Hassall, 2001) argue that providing grounding or reasons for a
request can convey positive politeness by assuming that the hearer will like to help if he or she knows why it is necessary; additionally, they can also convey negative politeness as they indicate that the requester would not impose on the requestee without a good reason. This double role of the grounder as a positive and negative politeness strategy might explain the pervasive usage of this device in AENSs and IANSs’ data.

The pervasive utilization of external mitigations in both groups’ requests can be explained in terms of the notion of volubility. Blum-Kulka (2005) refers to volubility as the investment of more verbal effort to increase the politeness level when performing a speech act. According to Scollon and Scollon (2001), volubility is regarded as a politeness strategy that indicates involvement and affiliation in social interaction. AENSs’ and IANSs’ request utterances are relatively long, especially in situations with an increased level of power, distance and imposition, as shown in the following examples from situation 7, in which the requester asks a roommate to clean the room because the requester does not have enough time to do it:

AENSs: I hate to ask this, but would you mind just cleaning the room today because I do have some assignments that are due and I will repay the favour and I’ll do the cleaning twice in a row for next week.

IANSs: bedun zehma alaik khewya, alyawm tunathif alghorfa lean ana mesheghol wabacher tantheef alghorfa waugba alaya. (If it doesn’t cause any pressure on you brother, today you clean the room because I’m busy, and tomorrow and the day after I’ll do the cleaning).

As shown in the examples above, subjects from both groups used more words through the employment of more than one external mitigating device in the request utterance. In the first example above, the Australian subject used the preparatory – ‘I hate to ask this’, the grounder – ‘because I do have some assignments that are due’, and the promise of reward – ‘I will repay the favour and I’ll do the cleaning twice in a row for next week’. In the second example, the Iraqi subject used the imposition minimizer – ‘bedun zehma alaik’ (if it doesn’t cause any pressure on you), the grounder – ‘lean ana mesheghol’ (because I’m busy), and the promise of reward – ‘wabacher tantheef alghorfa waugba alaya’ (and tomorrow and the day after I’ll do the cleaning). The use of extensive verbal behaviour may denote the speaker’s acknowledgement of the hearer’s positive self-image, and can also reduce the imposition required by the request being made. Therefore, a request utterance with one or more external mitigations is more likely to attain the requestee’s
cooperation than a bare request head act. Faerch and Kasper (1989) ascribe the significance of external mitigations to their ability to shift the emphasis from the illocution force of the request head act; thus, they are able to minimize the negative psychological effect associated with the request head act’s force. All the above advantages and pragmatic functions of external devices may interpret the tendency of Australian and Iraqi subjects to rely heavily on these devices in mitigating their requests.

The use of extended utterances to perform request speech acts may indicate the importance of attaining a high level of politeness and appropriateness in social interaction through the investment of more verbal effort. It may also question Grices’s maxim of quantity (1975, as cited in Levinson, 1983): ‘make your contribution as informative as is required’ (p. 101). According to the findings of the current study, it seems plausible to assume that interlocutors may violate this maxim in order to maintain face when they exchange request speech acts. A requester can make his/her request informative through only using a request head act which can convey the requesting act by itself; however, he/she may prefer to include redundant elements, such as external modifications to maintain the negative or the positive face of the addressee.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the internal and external devices that Australian English native speakers and Iraqi Arabic native speakers use to mitigate the illocutionary force of request speech acts. It aimed to explore how speakers of the two languages structure request speech acts in everyday situations, and the impact of the linguistic and cultural factors on their realization of request mitigations. The findings revealed significant differences between AENSs and IANSs in terms of the frequency of occurrence of internal mitigating devices in their requests. Internal downgraders were more frequent in AENSs’ requests than in those by IANSs. In addition, the distribution of these devices in the eight situations indicated another distinction between the two groups in terms of their selection of the situations in which they preferred to employ internal devices. The divergence between AENSs and IANSs in their utilization of request mitigations was explained in terms of the linguistic variation and the cultural variation between the two groups. It was suggested that the use of the mitigating devices in AENSs’ and IANSs’ requests, especially internal ones, was constrained by the availability of linguistic choices in their languages. It was also supposed that the different cultural norms, values and beliefs of AENSs and IANSs constrain their utilization of request mitigating devices. The individualism and egalitarianism of the Australian culture and the hierarchical structure and in-group affiliation of the Iraqi culture were discussed as cultural factors that may provoke interlocutors from both cultures to structure their request utterances differently, according to different assessments of the contexts in which these requests occur.

External mitigating devices, on the other hand, were found pervasive in the requests collected from AENSs and IANSs. Nevertheless, the two groups used different forms of some external devices in some situations, especially alerters, verbal incentives and closings, due to different conventionalization of these devices. The pervasive use of external mitigating devices in both groups’ requests was explained in terms of the notion of volubility as a politeness strategy (the investment of more words to increase politeness level). Australian and Iraqi subjects preferred to invest more verbal effort through providing justifications, explanations, reasons and other verbal effort to make their requests more appropriate and polite. The double role of external mitigating devices as negative and positive politeness strategies within the request utterance might also foster subjects from both groups to employ more than one external device in their requests; this
is especially so in some situations where there is an increased level of request imposition, social power or social distance.

The present study provides some insights into the linguistic formulae and strategies that AENSs and IANSs use to mitigate request acts, and the factors that impact the use of these formulae and strategies in social interaction. Nevertheless, some limitations emerged during the investigation. In the first place, larger samples of subjects from Australian and Iraqi cultures were necessary in order to ensure that the data collected from the samples represents the reality of request realization in both cultures. Secondly, although the role-play interview has been acknowledged in literature (Cohen, 1995; Olshtain and Blum-Kulka, 1985) as an effective instrument for collecting speech act data, it would be more beneficial if the role-play interview was combined with an observation method. The combination of the two methods could help the researcher to gain more natural data and to examine the influence of different social variables on request realization through the use of controlled situations in the role-play interviews. Thirdly, a categorization scheme that is based on the pragmatic functions of request modifiers was needed for analysing the data collected in this study. The classification of the mitigating devices, especially internal ones, was based to some extent on the linguistic features of these devices. This classification seems to be tailored to meet the linguistic characterization and specification of the languages investigated in the previous studies from which it was borrowed. Further research that considers the above limitations is needed in order to generalize findings not related solely to the use of request mitigations in Australian English and Iraqi Arabic, but also to the effective classification of request modifiers that can be used in research across languages and cultures.

Some implications can be elicited from the findings obtained in this study. This study adds Iraqi Arabic to the body of research that has investigated request speech acts across different languages and cultures. It may provide insights into the realization of requests in Iraqi Arabic and the factors that may influence this realization. In cross-cultural communication, this study can help interlocutors from the Australian and Iraqi cultures to establish successful communication through increasing their awareness of the cultural differences underlying their use of communication styles and strategies. The findings of this study may emphasize how cultural values, beliefs, norms and conventions of Australian and Iraqi interlocutors constrain their use of language in cross-cultural communication.
The results obtained in this study may also have some implications in language teaching and learning contexts, especially in those where Arabic or English is learnt as a second or a foreign language. In the first place, they emphasize the importance of the cultural dimension of L2 teaching and learning. People of different cultural backgrounds may use different politeness strategies and interaction styles; therefore, it is essential for second language learners to acquire an adequate level of pragmatic knowledge in the target language. This knowledge can help L2 learners to use appropriate language in a specific situation, according to an accurate assessment of the contextual features of this situation. In order to help learners develop pragmatic knowledge, L2 teachers may need to attract the learners’ attention to cultural and situational factors that shape language use in context through employing explicit and implicit teaching methods. Secondly, the results of this study may illustrate how interlocutors’ linguistic and cultural knowledge constrains their verbal behaviour in social interaction. It seems necessary to consider the role of L2 learners’ first languages and natal cultures in L2 acquisition and use. It might be beneficial for L2 teachers to explore their students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds before designing their teaching plans. If they are aware of the linguistic and cultural differences of their students, L2 teachers can cultivate positive transfer from the students’ first languages and natal cultures and decrease negative transfer, which may constrain L2 acquisition and use.
References


