

# INTERNATIONAL DEBATER'S POLITENESS STRATEGY IN INTERLANGUAGE PRAGMATICS OF REQUEST

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**Abstract:** The study aims to investigate the speech acts of international debaters in the 2022 Asian English Olympics in giving requests. This study focuses on the request speech acts and the politeness strategy produced by international debaters with different cultural backgrounds. This study used a qualitative approach because it observed the request speech acts of international debaters in applying the politeness strategy. There were four participants, consisting of Uzbekistan, Philippines, Hong Kong, and Malaysian debaters. The data contained the requests delivered by the international debaters conducted through WhatsApp messenger, both group and private messages. In collecting the data, the researcher was a part of the participants in the debate competition. Thus, the researcher could collect the data in the private group made special for the participants who joined the debate competition. Additionally, the researcher's relationship with the participants was the opponent of the debate team. Finally, it is found that the request speech acts by showing a demand, command, and force expression. Thus, politeness strategy, social distance in which, status and relationship, and background impact the way of giving requests.

**Keywords:** *Politeness Strategy, interlanguage pragmatics, cross-cultural communication, speech acts*

## INTRODUCTION

In today's world, communication has become easy as everyone can access many platforms that provide online-based interaction (Krizanova et al., 2019). People could not only interact in separate places but also became an essential platform for organizations to create events through online media (Ramirez et al., 2019). Online communication makes it possible to keep in touch with people worldwide from different cultures (Eliyahu-Levi, 2020). However, as there are some distinctions between people when communicating, it becomes easier for miscommunication to happen (Healey et al., 2018). It is because of certain

behaviors and cultural backgrounds that cross-cultural communication happens (Zhao, 2019). Moreover, the communication itself happens from illocutors with different cultural backgrounds and behavior from each individual. The reason why miscommunication happens or perceptions towards other people during the conversation is that they have different politeness strategies since they come from different cultural backgrounds, especially during online communication such as WhatsApp (Salgado & Benitez, 2018)

Previous research has already been conducted that focused on politeness. Azwan (2018) found that Ambonese people use negative politeness strategies such as apology, deference, and being conventionally indirect in a politeness system. It means that politeness strategy can emerge in any form other than request strategy alone; it can be a form of apology and deference. Not only that, but the previous study also indicates that different strategies may be attributed to different cultural backgrounds (Alakrash & Bustan, 2020). It implies that politeness demonstrates a person's awareness and consideration for others when communicating (Nurilaila et al., 2020), which means that a person can use a politeness strategy for the other person to understand from their point of view by considering other people. Moreover, the 'culture-specific forms of attention' built into the politeness notion have left an essential dimension in human social interaction research unexplored, which is known as a critical social relation category in a lingual culture (Ye, 2019).

In order to stay in touch or create intimate communication with people, we must also understand other people, their beliefs, values, and cultural backgrounds. The closest way to achieving those things is by enhancing our ability to communicate with people. Because the way we encounter people leaves an impression on others. For instance, this online communication is not as accessible as when we encounter people offline or face-to-face interaction. The online platform became more sensitive than the offline platform because of a limitation in showing facial expressions or intonation. Previous research also shows that negative energy can be sensed through online text messages. There is a way for people to minimize impoliteness through text messages by using certain aspects such as emoticons to minimize the tense or to show particular expressions through messagers. Common problems during online communication include miscommunication, false perceptions, wrong impressions of others, and many more. Therefore, this research is crucial to avoid problems that could emerge in online communication and to create an intimate conversation with other people, especially in cross-cultural communication. At least there will be mutual acceptance in each elocution, especially when they talk through online platforms.

In the debater context, research on politeness strategies of request has yet to be conducted, focusing on the interlanguage pragmatics that occurs with international debaters. The researcher believes that each debater has a politeness strategy when addressing something to the adjudicators. This study examines text messages taken from the messaging app WhatsApp Messenger, focusing on the speaker's language when requesting information from hearers of varying power and distance from the speakers. The study examines debaters' politeness and request strategies concerning their distance and degree of composition between speakers. It uses Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies (1987) and the request strategy proposed by Blum-Kulka's theory (1984). Specifically, we analyze by relating the debaters' request strategy with each country's cultural request system.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Speech Acts

Speech act theory was initially intended to be a tool for interpreting human verbal communication (Roberts, 2018). However, what speech acts are and what relationships can be found with communication, we can best approach them through pragmatics as an attempt to study language related to the contextual background features (Geurts, 2021). Previous research focused on analyzing speech acts in conversations held by the person with an essential role in family relationships, particularly moms (Rahayu, 2020). Also, because writers and readers are separated in time and location, and occasionally the readers are unknown, what happens in spoken interpersonal contact may not always be transmitted entirely to written communication (Hua, 2013). The fundamental reason for looking into speech acts is that they are the foundation of communication and have many uses ( Ramirez et al., 2019). Furthermore, empirical research looks into how people's politeness strategies for requesting speech are influenced by gender and socioeconomic status (Esfahlan & Boroumand, 2020). This study focuses on the speech acts generated by the international debater to comprehend the speech acts made by people from various backgrounds through the Messenger application, in which distant communication, as opposed to genuine face-to-face interaction, is used (Dolata et al., 2019).

The speech act is an essential tool for recognizing and comprehending various utterances' meanings, such as apology, greeting, request, complaint, invitation, compliment, or refusal (Zulianti, 2018). Moreover, it indicates that the request strategy is one of the face-threatening speech acts that employs multiple

techniques to either reinforce or lessen their requests (Sari, 2018). In this study, the researcher used the request strategy proposed by Blum-kulka & Olshtain (1984), distinguishing the request strategies into three direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect. Previous studies have looked into request strategies similarly, but they focused on the differences in the request techniques employed by the three age groups (Febriani & Hanidar, 2019). Thus, this paper mainly focused on the request strategy conducted by the speaker to the hearer. Not only that, although previous research conducted a study about the use of speech acts in people from different countries (Astia, 2020), previous research mainly focused on the speech act of greeting as performed by Russian EFL learners (Shleykina, 2019).

### **Politeness Strategy**

According to Blum-Kulka, politeness is a deceptive performance to display good manners or the potential to manipulate the need for politeness (Gumartifa, 2022). When another individual appears socially distant, politeness is exhibited by employing respect and deference to show awareness of that person's face (Darwis, 2018). Meanwhile, Brown and Levinson claimed that when a speech act is performed in a specific setting, it threatens the participants' face wants, and politeness is employed to adjust these face-threatening acts (Jasim Betti & Salah Slman, 2020). Furthermore, a Face Threatening Act (FTA) is a communicative act in which the speaker disregards the hearer's need for space (negative face) or desire to have their self-image supported (positive face), or both (Face threatening acts (FTAs)) (Ruziyeva, 2020).

## **METHOD**

### **Data collection**

This research uses a descriptive approach to extract descriptive data. Descriptive data analysis was used to explain the research findings. The researcher then concluded. In collecting the data, the researcher was a part of the participants in the debate competition. Thus, the researcher could collect the data in the private group made special for the participants who joined the debate competition. Additionally, the researcher's relationship with the participants was the opponent of the debate team. After the debate competition is over, it is common for the debaters to contact other teams to stay in touch with them for further training in debate, if possible.

The researcher used the WhatsApp messenger app to collect data in group and private conversations. The data was collected through natural text messages between the researcher and others in the WhatsApp group, including all of the debate competition participants. Besides, the data were collected through participants who sent screenshots of their text messages to the researcher. The participants were taken from the debaters who joined the Asian English Olympics (AEO) 2022 debate competition. Concerning any ethical concerns that may arise due to the nature of the data, participants have been informed that their messages will be used for this study and have also provided their agreement.

### Data analysis

The researcher used the speech act of request framework strategies in analyzing the data according to Blum-Kulka's and Olshtain's (1984) theory. Moreover, the researcher used politeness strategies based on Brown's and Levinson's theories. The researcher was first classifying the data gathered into the request and politeness strategies categories so that the hypothesis may be formulated from the finding. In analyzing the request strategies used by the participants in asking for feedback from the adjudicators, the data were analyzed by relating the request system that the participants have in their own country.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

The data were taken from WhatsApp Group and personal private messages between the requester and receiver.

Table 1. International debater's request and politeness

International debater's request	Request	Politeness Strategy
Data 1	Hedge Performatives (HP)	On Record Positive Politeness

Data 2	Preparatory Conditions (PC)	On Record Positive Politeness
Data 3	Hedge Performatives (HP)	Bald On Record
Data 4	Mood Derivable (MD)	Bald On Record
Data 5	Mood Derivable (MD)	Bald On Record
Data 6	Mood Derivable (MD)	Bald On Record
Data 7	Mood Derivable (MD)	Bald On Record
Data 8	Mood Derivable (MD)	On Record Positive Politeness

### The request of Uzbekistan's debater

The context of the situation is when the international debater from Uzbekistan sends a private message to the adjudicator. The message contained the adjudicator's request in the hope of receiving feedback and suggestions after the competition was over.

(Data 1) *"Good morning dear Adjudicator, I hope you are good. **I am going to ask** for constructive feedback on our team so that we can do better in the next Debates.*

(Data 2) *"**If it is possible, could you please** suggest sources such as websites, and books, to improve debating skills? Thank you in advance. Best regards, Mirabbos."*

In the request strategy proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), the request strategy of Hedged Performatives was applied because the requester tried to use direct requests as clearly as possible but was still polite. The Hedge Performatives (HP) can be seen from the utterance "I'm going to ask." The illocutionary force of request embeds in the utterance since it contains the force of telling the receiver to answer the question but is still polite as opposed to, for example, saying "give me feedback." Thus, the Uzbekistan debater tried to be as

straightforward as possible but still maintain politeness. Moreover, the debater also applied Reference to Preparatory Conditions (PC) before stating his second request. "If it's possible" refers to his intention to ask the hearer's willingness. It means that what the debater means by applying the words is that the debater wanted to know whether or not the debater could get a suggestion from the adjudicator to improve his debate skills. Besides that, the debater also applied another Preparatory Conditions (PC) by adding the expression "could you please." It indicates that the debater tried to be as polite as possible since the debater knew their relationship with the hearer was only bound simply as acquittance. They are strangers to each other as a debater and adjudicator.

Based on the politeness strategy on the face-threatening act (FTA) proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987) On Record positive politeness was applied as a politeness strategy by the requester in knowing that the requester wanted to achieve direct communication in order for the receiver to understand what the requester wanted. Positive politeness can be seen when the requester uses the word "please." It gives the receiver no room to decline, which means there is no probability of the receiver declining the requester's favour. Furthermore, it is common to ask for feedback since the relationship between the requester and receiver is a debater and adjudicator during the competition. Therefore, the requester used the on record positive politeness. Moreover, the requester applied the tact maxim in the first line of the message because the requester wanted to be as polite as possible. Additionally, the requester is aware that although it is common for a debater to ask for feedback and suggestion from the adjudicator, the requester still respects the receiver by greeting before starting the request. Hence, Bald On Record Positive politeness and tact maxim was applied.

Usually, the bald on record used by the utterance is because of the close relationship the utterance has with the receiver (FTA). However, the reason behind the politeness strategy used by the requester is because of the cultural background. The requester has a different cultural background from the receiver, giving them a different perspective.

### **The request of Hong Kong's debater**

The request message that was sent contains its request in a separate message, in contrast to one line message. The requester makes three requests for the receiver. However, before telling its request, the requester starts by giving prior information to the receiver, in which there will be three requests asking for an explanation from the receiver. Firstly, the context situation was when the debater, as a requester, used a private message to contact the adjudicator after

the competition was over. It was common for the debater to do so because the adjudicator is someone who assesses for the debater to be aware of things they could improve.

(Data 3) "There are three questions I would like to ask."

According to the request strategy proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), there are words indicating the request made by the requester. In this context, the phrase "I would like to ask" implies the direct request made by the requester. As a requester, the debater wanted to seek some explanation regarding the debate's motion. Therefore, the debater tried to be as straightforward as possible while maintaining some distance to be perceived as polite, in comparison if, for example, the debater just right away said, "let me ask you."

Based on the politeness strategy on the face-threatening act (FTA) proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987), bald on record was applied because the requester wanted the receiver to understand its message through direct communication. The direct speech can be seen in how the requester contacts the receiver for the first time without going around the bush with greetings. It might be because all debaters deliver their general assessment right after the zoom meeting. The adjudicators welcome the debater to contact them if they need more explanation regarding the debate motion. Thus, in this case, knowing that the debater just directly said his intention in messaging the adjudicator.

In the context of the first request of Hong Kong's debater, the request is seeking an explanation regarding the assessment given during the competition through a zoom cloud. The debater contacted the adjudicator after the results of the competition and a general assessment of the whole team were raised. However, the requester was still seeking more explanation regarding the debate motion.

(Data 4) "About the portrayal of how Morality looks like, what does it mean, is it like how the world looks like with morality used in setting ethical standards?"

Based on the politeness strategy on the face-threatening act (FTA) proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987), bald on record was applied by the requester for the message to get through to the receiver as efficiently as possible. The debater tried to give some context first before stating the question. The context of the question from the debater regarding the portrayal of morality might be from the previous general feedback that the adjudicator stated during



the assessment time in zoom meeting with other participants. Thus, knowing the debater's lack of ability to understand the meaning of morality, the debater further seeks an explanation by contacting directly to the adjudicator through a private message, in contrast to the WhatsApp group where all of the participants and committee of the competition were there.

(Data 5) " for the opposition, our stance is to keep on with the status quo, unlike gov \which need to prove why removing moral reasons are valid? So basically, our house is fine with both pragmatic and moral reasons?"

Another data taken from the Hong Kong debater is that the debater stated the second question regarding the debate. Here, we can see clearly that the debater directly stated the problem, which he still did not understand. The word "for the opposition" debater tried to give his teammate position information during the competition in which the debater was in the opposition team. The preliminary information about the debater's identity is because the question is related to the adjudicator's assessment in the Zoom meeting. The debater wanted to ensure his understanding of the motion and added additional conclusions based on his understanding by saying, "so basically."

(Data 6) "For my speech, the biggest problem is the lack of explanation(?) so does this mean I need to add in more impacting after the mechanism?"

Data 6 shows that the debater asks for his most lacking during the performance of the debate competition, which he specifies by asking about his way of elaborating the argument. The debater received feedback from the adjudicator during the zoom meeting. It is the adjudicator's explanation of the debater's lack. In Data 6, the debater added "for my speech" compared to Data 5, the debater firstly used "for the oppositional team." The debater's way of requesting things is started from the general feedback needed for the team. It came with the request for his feedback as an individual during the performance of the debates.

### **The request of Philipines's debater**

The Data 7 context situation is about one of the debaters from the Philippines participating in an international competition. The Philippine debater sent a message through WhatsApp group, a group for all participants, debaters, adjudicators, and committees included in the debate competition. It contrasts

with the two previous debaters, Uzbekistan and Hong Kong, since they asked for feedback through private messages.

(Data 7) "Hello' how do I know my registered PIC account."

Based on the politeness strategy on the face-threatening act (FTA) proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987), the on-record negative politeness was applied because the debater wanted to explicitly and as clearly as possible in delivering the request. The expression "hello" is a direct utterance but is still considered polite because it is the debater's greeting before stating her question. At first, one of the committees gave information to the debate about the competition certificate by accessing the link provided that the committee sent using the PIC account. It might be because of the unfamiliar word of the PIC account. The Philippine debater asked for information on where she could get the PIC account. Thus, the committee explained later that the PIC account meaning here, is the account that the debater team used when registering the teammates for the debate competition.

According to the request strategy proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), the Mood Derivable (MD) request strategy was applied because the debater wanted to be polite as possible but also sought an explanation through the message.

### **The request of a Malaysian debater**

The Malaysian debater sent a message through WhatsApp to seek information regarding the debate competition. The message was sent after the competition was over. It was several days after the competition. The situation of context is no following information regarding the results of the competition and the certificate of the participants. The message was sent hoping the committee would help him explain some matters regarding the competition.

(Data 8) "Hello and good afternoon, organisers!

I have 3 questions to which I seek answers to:

1. Is there any update on the certs? Is there any estimation as to when will they be ready?
2. When will the ranking list be up on the website?
3. Will the total number of participants for each category of competition be revealed too together with the ranking list?

I am asking as I need to work on the report to be submitted to my institution, considering the fact that the competition ended quite some time ago. Without the certs and the details, the report cannot be submitted to the school.

Thank you in advance for your time in answering my inquiries and have a blessed weekend 🌹 "

Here, we can see that the debater directly sent the message in one entire message in order for the message to be as simple and efficient as possible. In contrast, if, for example, the debater sent several questions. The debater firstly used a greeting at the beginning of his message. Based on the politeness strategy on the face-threatening act (FTA) proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987), the request of Bald On record was applied because the debater's intention was forward the message to be answered right away. It might happen because the debater has been waiting for the certificate and the information regarding the result, knowing that the competition ended some time ago. The debater also requested that information be explained since he needed to submit the competition report to his intuition.

Moreover, if we look at the request strategy used by the debater, as a requester, in asking for information, the request strategy of scope stating was applied as proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). The scope stating (SS) can be seen from the phrase "I seek an answer to" because the requester wanted to get the hearer to do something. The debater wanted the committee to answer the following questions that the debater asked, which means that the debater directly stated the request due to the debater's desire to get the information. The desire to get the explanation regarding the information can be seen in the following sentence, explaining why he needed the information as soon as possible. Then, we later came to learn that it seemed that the debater urgently needed the certificate and the results of the competition in order for the debater to report it to his institution.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research focuses on request tactics used by debaters to contact their adjudicator using WhatsApp mobile messenger, both in group and private settings. Mood derivable (MD), Preparatory conditions (PC), and Hedge Performatives (HP) are used in the requests, according to the findings. The directness of the request does not indicate impoliteness. Instead, it demonstrates how the speakers are attempting to gain the attention of their listeners in order to engage in a more amicable dialogue with them.

When there is a positive social gap, the speaker's power dictates the strategy used. When the speakers' power levels are equal, they are more likely to use a direct approach. However, when the power is positive, the strategy

possibilities are more evenly distributed. When the power is negative, the speakers only use an indirect manner. Furthermore, the fact that the discrepancies between the speakers are related to their linguistic and cultural origins underlines the strong relationship between language and culture. Therefore, it concludes that the politeness strategy of the debaters and adjudicators from different countries happens based on their cultural backgrounds and relationship.

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