A cross-cultural study of request speech act: Iraqi and Malay students

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Abstract
Several studies have indicated that the range and linguistics expressions of external modifiers available in one language differ from those available in another language. The present study aims to investigate the cross-cultural differences and similarities with regards to the realization of request external modifications. To this end, 30 Iraqi and 30 Malay university students are selected as the participants of this study. Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management theoretical framework is used to examine how face rapport is managed through the use of external modifications. The corpus consists of responses to a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) consisting of eight situations. The questionnaires, adopted from Rose (1994), were distributed among Iraqi students and Malaysian Malay students studying at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia. The corpus was then analyzed based on Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) classification of external modifiers. The primary objective of this paper is to compare the effect of situational factors on the realization patterns of request modification between Iraqi and Malay university students .The findings indicated that grounders are the most common external modifier used by the subjects. Results also show more similarities than differences between the subjects under study in terms of the use of mitigation devices such as apologies, compliments and gratitude. However, both Iraqis and Malays differ in their perception of the situational factors. Finally, the study suggests some pedagogical implications for both ESL and EFL teachers.

Keywords: Request; modifications; situational factors; rapport management

Introduction

Making a request is an important act in people's daily life. Many people view request as a panel from where they enhance social relationships. Asking someone to do something for you would give anyone an opportunity to. Based on the definition provided by Cambridge advanced learner's dictionary, request refers to the act of politely or officially asking for something as in the sentence *I requested a taxi for eight o'clock*. Asking for help or requesting something is an act that is socially understood as a way through which people tend to express their feelings to support and help each other and thus be connected. However, the act of making a request may vary from culture to culture and also different cultures have a different view of what is considered a polite request in much the same way that they have a different view of the value of contextual factors such as participants' social status and social distance as well as the perception of other factors like imposition, obligation and right. Accordingly, the request can serve as an illuminating source of information on the

socio-cultural values of a speech community and provide important insights into the social norms that are embedded in cultures.

Requests, the speech act chosen for the present study, have the intended meaning (i.e., illocutionary force) of affecting a hearer's behaviour in such a way that they get the hearer to do something (Blum-Kulka, 1991). House and Kasper (1987, p.252) define requests as directives by which "S (Speaker) wants H (Hearer) to do p (p is at a cost to H)". Requests have been viewed as a face-threatening speech act (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). Since requests have the potential to be intrusive and demanding, there is a need for the requester to minimize the imposition involved in the request. This is done through the use of peripheral elements (also known as internal and external modifications) to get addressees to support their requests. Accordingly, the present study aims at investigating the cross-cultural differences and similarities in the way Iraqi and Malay university students manage the face rapport through the use of external modifications.

Request as a face-threatening act
Brown and Levinson (1978, p. 61) developed the face-saving view of politeness theory based on the universal notion of *face* as the "public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself". The theory posits that maintaining the face of the speaker or the hearer is the primary concern of politeness strategies. In this sense, Brown and Levinson were trying to provide a sample picture of what happens in everyday life communication where people do attempt to avoid conflict and try their best to cooperate. Eelen (2001) indicated that in everyday conversation, people generally try to avoid embarrassing the other person or making them feel uncomfortable. Speakers attempt to choose the most effective course of action to avoid conflict

with hearers, while minimizing the imposition and the cost of losing their face.

Face, according to Brown and Levinson (1978, p.66), is 'something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction'. This means that one's own face can only be sustained by the actions of others, thus they assume that all members of a society would co-operate in order to maintain each other's faces. In other words, they claim that all members of a society are concerned about their 'face', the self-image they present to others, and that they assume that other people have similar 'face' wants. In fact, Brown and Levinson identified two main kinds of face, i.e. 'negative face' and 'positive face'. To them, these two types of face are universals and do identify two essential desires of any person in any conversational exchange (Reteir Márquez, 2000). Positive politeness refers to a person's desire to be unimpeded by others, to be free to act without being imposed upon. Whereas negative politeness refers to a person's wish to be desirable to at least some others who will appreciate and approve of one's self and one's personality.

In relation to the notion of face, Brown and Levinson indicated that certain acts inherently threaten the 'face' needs of one or both participants. Brown and Levinson (1987, p.65) regard "face-threatening acts (FTAs) as those acts which run contrary to the addressee's and/or the speaker's positive and/or negative 'face'. Their research focuses mainly on speech acts. Examples of acts that are considered as a threat to the 'negative face' are requests, threats, suggestions and advices because the speaker will be putting some pressure on the addressee to do or refrain from doing a specific act. In the case of making a request, the speaker infringes on the

recipient's freedom from imposition. The recipient may feel that the request is an intrusion on his/her freedom of action or even a power play. As for the requester, s/he may hesitate to make requests for the fear of exposing a need or out of the fear of possibly making the recipient lose face (Blum-Kulka et al, 1989). In this sense, requests are face-threatening to both the requester and the recipient.

Bowe and Martin (2006, p.35) refer to the fact that "Brown and Levinson's theory has provided an important foundation for analyzing linguistic politeness". However, despite its influence on and contribution to the literature on politeness, Brown and Levinson's theory has a significant weakness. It overlooks the importance of culture in cross-cultural and intercultural communication. Fukada and Noriko (2004) referred to many studies which criticized Brown and Levinson's politeness theory as being constructed on the basis of European Anglo-Saxon culture and it cannot be applied in other cultures". More specifically, it has been criticized for its overemphasis on the notion of individual freedom and autonomy.

In fact, Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness was criticized for many issues such as the legitimacy of the term *politeness*. Spencer-Oatey (2000) cast doubt on the appropriateness to be labelled as politeness the study of evaluation of what constitutes polite and impolite behavior in social interactions. As mentioned previously, politeness is hard to define since it is a context-dependent evaluative judgment and the linguistic constructions in themselves do not bear any property of being polite or rude, rather this is determined by the conditions of usage. The researchers do agree with Spencer-Oatey argument as well as Arendholz (2013) who believed that politeness is as a purely metal notion which is strongly dependent on the interpreting mind in terms of scope of

applicability, i.e. a person's willingness to label an utterance an action polite. In other words, politeness depends on the evaluation of individual interlocutors at individual moments in individual circumstances.

Another issue can be seen in the mutual With regard to politeness strategies, Brown and Levinson's Politeness Model has been criticized for their overwhelming concern of politeness strategies in the context of face threatening acts. Yet interaction is not restricted to face threatening acts. Bowe and Martin (2006, p. 31) indicated that "the building of positive relationships, through mutual care and assistance over time is surely important, and is usually accompanied by the expression of mutual appreciation and praise. Such actions contribute to the building of positive face between individuals, in an ongoing way". However, in their view, Brown and Levinson's model only treats this in passing as they mentioned.

These criticisms and issues mentioned above were based on a number of shortcomings from which this theory suffered. Accordingly, this theory brings a number of limitations when trying to explain the concept of politeness. The first limitation can be seen in the neglect of cultural values. Song (2012) indicated that Brown and Levinson (1987) had argued that regardless of culture, politeness utterances are based on contextually expected concerns for face, which they refer to as 'weightiness'. According to them, politeness weightiness is universally applicable and determined by factors such as the distance (familiarity) between the communicators, relative power of the speaker and the hearer, and the imposition of the task. However, these factors are not likely to have the same effects on culturally different verbal expressions (and perceptions) of politeness. For instance, an old man and a young boy in East Asia

cannot be friends because of the hierarchical nature of the culture, but such friendship is possible in Western culture. In other words, distance and relative power between the communicators are likely to vary according to the cultural values of each.

Bowe and Martin (2006, p. 32) mentioned that "in Asian cultures, the expression of deference and respect is almost mandatory with addressees who are senior in age, experience or status". Examples of cultural difference in the perception of these factors that determine politeness can be seen in the use of the honorifics, greetings, speech formulas used for rituals, and many other formal speech elements employed according to social conventions of a culture like Japanese culture. This would put Brown and Levinson's theoretical framework into question. The researchers do agree that such a theory promotes only a rational or a logical use of strategy in expressing politeness. That is why the researchers do agree with the fact that Brown and Levinson's (1987) theoretical framework is essentially based on British analytical logic and North American psychology.

Moreover, Arendholz (2013) also supported the view that these three remarkable vague terms fell well short of covering all influencing factors. In fact, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 16) themselves reached the conclusion that "there may be a residue of other factors which are not captured within the P, D and R dimensions". Accordingly, one would say that their theory oversimplified the complexity of human relation. This can be proven by a number of studies that later looked at the many factors that affect the realization of speech acts in terms of politeness such as the realization of request. Barron (2003) indicated that factors like right and obligation may affect the value of social variables in request realisation. According to Blum-Kulka and

House (1989, p.146), estimates of the right the speaker has to issue the request and the relative degree of obligation for the hearer to comply with the particular request are considered to affect request realisation, i.e. the level of directness in a correlational relationship: the greater the right of the speaker to ask and the greater the obligation of the hearer to comply, the less the motivation for the use of indirectness.

In terms of politeness strategies, Brown and Levinson's ignored the cultural aspect. Brown and Levinson (1987), as cited in Marti (2006), claimed that there is an intrinsic ranking of politeness strategies in terms of indirectness. However, the authors neglected the fact that some cultures used direct strategies as part of solidarity and closeness and thus would never be perceived as impolite. For example with the speech as of request, Brown and Levinson's (1987) influential theory have underlined parallels between the notions of indirectness and politeness. In other words, indirect requests are the most polite ones. However, studies such as Blum-Kulka's (1987) showed that such relationships do not always hold. Blum-Kulka proposed a scale based on degrees of illocutionary transparency. She described directness as "the degree to which the speaker's illocutionary intent is apparent from the illocution" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). They also presented three main levels of directness. (1) an explicit level, the most direct, realised through the linguistic form of imperative, as in "Come to my dorm tomorrow", (2) a conventionally indirect level realised by conventional linguistic means known as indirect speech acts, as in "Let's have lunch one day", and, (3) a least direct level realised by hints, as in "Is this seat taken?" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Blum-Kulka noted that the rating of strategies on the politeness scale reveals disparity in the relative position on the directness scale. The thrust of her argument is that a certain degree of clarity is an indispensable part of

politeness. Politeness is identified as the interactional balance between two needs: the need to avoid being coercive and the need to be pragmatically unambiguous. The balance is achieved in the case of conventionally indirect speech acts, rated as the most polite. Thus, favouring either pragmatic clarity or avoiding coerciveness would decrease politeness, as direct strategies may be injurious to the interlocutor's face, and non-conventional indirect strategies, i.e. hints, may be perceived as impolite because of their pragmatic opacity (Blum-Kulka,1987).

Taking these arguments into consideration, the present study follows a modified framework for conceptualizing face proposed by Spencer-Oatey (2008). She called her new approach as "rapport management, i.e. the management of harmony–disharmony among people" (p.13). This framework consists of three main interconnected elements. The first is the management of face which involves the management of face sensitivities. The second one is the management of sociality rights and obligations that deal with the management of social expectations or entitlements that a person effectively claims for him/herself in his interactions with others. The last one is the management of interactional goals which involves the specific task and/or relational goals that people may have when they interact with each other. Within this framework, requests are perceived to be threatening/enhancing of face or infringing/supporting of sociality rights (or a combination of these), depending on the range of circumstantial and personal factors. In other words, requests are rapport sensitive speech acts, and thus need to be managed appropriately. Spencer-Oatey (2008, p. 21) indicated that "every language provides a very wide range of linguistic options that can be used for managing face and sociality rights, and hence for managing rapport". One of these ways in terms of the illocutionary domain can be seen in the use of modifiers within the scope of speech act realization. For example, since requests can easily threaten rapport because of their influence on autonomy, freedom of choice and freedom from imposition, there is a need for the requester to minimize the imposition involved in the request. This is done through the use of optional clauses that modify the request to help minimize the imposition involved in the request. This includes both internal and external modifications.

Based on the selected studies cited above, it can be deduced that there is a strong connection between the act of making a request and losing face in daily life interactions. This is due to the fact that requesting involves different types of strategies which reflect the social norms and assumptions of different communities and cultures. Accordingly, the present study is to examine how face rapport is managed through the use of external modifications.

Request external modification
External modification plays a central role in mitigating or aggravating a requesting force. External modifiers consist of supportive moves which in some way prepare the ground for the actual request and are located outside it. External modification "is achieved through the use of optional clauses which either mitigate or emphasize the force of the whole request" (Blum-Kulka et al, p. 128). Supportive moves are acts that may precede or follow head act strategies and may serve as down-graders to check on availability. They may also serve as attempts to obtain a pre-commitment or they may provide a reason for the request (Blum-Kulka et al, 1989).

Head act: it is the smallest unit which can realise a request. It is the core of the request sequence, which can be modified.

Alerter: it is an opening element preceding the actual request. These opening elements draw the hearer's attention to the ensuing speech act. For example, terms of address or attention getters like "excuse me," "professor," "hello," "hey," or "well". The term "opener" is used in this study to refer to alerters.

Mitigation is achieved through the use of optional clauses which mitigate the force of the whole request such as the following:

- Preparator refers clauses used to prepare the requestee for the ensuing the request e.g. I'd like to ask you something,
- Getting a pre-commitment refers to clauses provided by the requestor to indicate his commitment e.g. Could you do me a favour....
- Grounder refers to clauses provided by the requestor to justify his request, e.g. Judith, I missed class yesterday. Could I borrow your notes?
- Disarmer refers to clauses 'disarm' the requestee from the possibility of refusale.g. I know you don't like to lend out your notes, but could. . .
- Promise of reward refers to the clauses used by the requester to indicate a promise to be done once the request is fulfilled e.g. Could you give me a lift home? I'll give you something for the petrol.
- Imposition downgrader refers to the clause used by the requester to help reduce the imposition of the request e.g. Could you lend me that book, if you're not using it at present?

Aggravation is achieved through the use of optional clauses which aggravate the force of the whole request such as
- Insult, e.g. You've always been a dirty pig, so dear up!
- Threat, e.g. Move that car if you don't want a ticket.

- Moralizing, e.g. If one shares a flat, one should be prepared to pull one's weight in cleaning it, so get on with the washing up!

From the description above, it is clear that requests' linguistic realization depend on a number of strategies. Hence, there is a concern for cross-cultural and intercultural communication. Accordingly, the present study is to examine how face rapport is managed through the use of external modifications.

Selected studies
The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) is perhaps the most extensive empirical investigation of cross-cultural pragmatics. It is the first major attempt to study speech acts across a range of languages and cultures, carried out by a group of international researchers. They investigated whether there are universal principles in request and apology speech act realisations and what the patterns may be. The instrument used was a DCT which consisted of 16 situations (8 requests and 8 apologies). The DCT situations were designed to represent all possible combinations of the two variables of social distance and social dominance. Data were collected from more than a thousand subjects and analyzed by native speakers in respective countries, with a shared analytical framework. The CCSARP investigated native speakers of Danish, three dialects of English (American, Australian, and British), Canadian French, German, Hebrew, and Argentinean Spanish and non-native speakers of English, German, and Hebrew. The project's coding scheme was based on frames of primary features expected to be manifested in the realisation of requests and apologies. For example, requests were classified into a nine-point scale of mutually exclusive categories ranging from the most direct (imperative) to the most indirect (mild hints). The data analysis also considers the choice of

perspective as an important source of variation in requests as well as the internal and external modifications. Findings showed both situational and cultural factors influence use of these request strategies. Different cultures seem to agree on general trends of situational variation (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

A number of studies have followed the framework built up by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) more particularly focusing on how learners use modification in order to mitigate or aggravate their speech acts. Within the speech act of requesting, it has been mostly examined in relation to politeness and language proficiency by investigating whether the two language/cultural groups use combinations of internal/external modifiers in the same way and to the same extent. What follows is a review of some selected studies conducted on requests' modifications.

Otcu and Zeyrek's (2008) study aims at investigating the acquisition of requests by Turkish learners. They considered the role of language proficiency in the acquisition of requests, more particularly the way these learners modify their requests. The authors also compared the learners' requesting strategies to those of English native speakers. They investigated four groups: 19 low and 31 high proficiency Turkish learners of English, 13 English native speakers, and 50 Turkish native speakers. The instruments used were discourse completion tasks and role plays. Findings suggested that there is a strong link in the way learners modify their request and their level of proficiency. For example, they found that English learners with a lower proficiency level used formulaic utterances, lacking the ability to create with the language while the more advanced learners were able to do more with the L2, but this did not guarantee the control of pragmatic constructions.

In line with Otcu and Zeyrek's (2008) study, Huangfu Wei (2012) also focused on request modifications and language proficiency. The author compared the uses of the English request speech acts among native speakers of English and Chinese. He also examined the effects of social status and familiarity on request modifications. There were three groups, 20 low, 20 high proficiency and 20 native speakers. An oral discourse completion task (ODCT) was used to collect data. The ODCT included two parts: questionnaire direction and the statement of 12 scenarios, in which every statement was ended with a question requiring the participant to make a request. The ODCT was embedded with two social variables, social status and familiarity. Chi-square analysis method was applied to examine the data. Findings suggested that there was a difference in the way English and Chinese modify their requests. Results indicated that Chinese native speakers used more thanking strategies than English native speakers, while English native speakers preferred to use preparator, grounder and disarmer in most of the situations. The author argued Chinese native speakers' difficulties in performing request speech acts can be traced back to the linguistic and cultural aspects. Moreover, results also indicated the effects of social status and familiarity on the two groups as the findings showed different usages of internal and external modifications.

Another study looked at how learners of a language differ from native speakers in the way they phrase their requests is that of Economidou-Kogetsidis (2009). The author focused on those areas of deviation from native usage as far as the learners' production is concerned. The participants were 83 Greek learners (ESL learners of English and 86 native speakers of British English. The instrument used was a discourse completion task including three situations. Results indicated that grounder

as an external modifier is by far the most popular softener for both groups in all three situations. Disarmer is considered as the second most popular device in the data collected, while all other external mitigators were used particularly sparingly by both groups. Both groups employed more combinations of external modification devices than combinations of internal modification. However, comparing the external modification combinations with the internal modification combinations, the results indicated that while the native speakers employed more combinations of devices of internal modification, the learners employed more combinations of devices of external modification. The researcher justified the use of external modifications to many reasons. She argued that learners might feel more confident to use external modification in order to be adequately polite because external modifiers are longer and derive their politeness value directly from the propositional context and the illocutionary meaning of the move itself. Another reason can be related learners linguistic proficiency.

Previous research, however, has also dealt mainly with perceptive data elicited from different instruments involved in the use of request modifications. For example, Eslami Rasekh (2012) examined the validity of speech act data taken from two of the most popular speech act instruments, namely, written DCT and closed role play. The focus was on the speech act of request as realized by forty Iranian university students in their native language (Persian). Findings indicated that modification devices used in the oral data had a softer tone and in terms of the request perspective the oral data provided more impersonal responses while the requests in the written data were more hearer-oriented. Based on his findings, he claimed that the data gathered through role play is more natural than DCT.

Abdolrezapour and Eslami-Rasekh (2012) investigated the possible correlation between request compliance and the use of mitigation devices among Iranians and Americans. Four role-play interactions followed by stimulated recall procedures were used to collect the required data. The results obtained from the analysis of data revealed that, in similar situations, American requestors are comparably more certain than Iranians that the addressee would comply with their requests using fewer mitigation devices; while, as far as the requestees are concerned, Americans are more influenced by the use of mitigation devices on the part of requestors than Iranians.

Koosha and Dastjerdi (2012) explored the use of request forms presented in Richard's Interchange Series, Books I, II, and III, widely used in Iranian foreign language teaching institutes. For this purpose, Alcon et al's (2005) taxonomy of peripheral modification devices used in requests was used to locate the instance of request forms in such texts. Results showed that the series fail to include materials which are needed for meaningful and, at the same time, face saving communication when resorting to different kinds of requests is required. The researchers found that there is no balance between the presentation of internal and external modifications in the different books they studied. The study concluded with some implications for textbook writers, materials developers, language teachers and learners, highlighting the fact that modifications should receive more attention in terms of frequency of exposure.

Within the context of Iraqi subjects, Aldhulaee's (2011) study looked at Iraqis requesting behaviour. He focused on exploring the differences and similarities between Australian English native speakers and Iraqi Arabic native speakers in the way they modify their requests. The

subjects were 14 Iraqi Arabic native speakers and 14 Australian English native speakers. The instrument used was role-play interviews which were conducted in each group's first language: Australian English or Iraqi Arabic. Findings indicated some cultural and linguistic factors that influence the use of request mitigations in the Australian and Iraqi cultures. As far as the use of external modifiers, they were pervasive in both groups' requests. The most frequent external devices were grounder and alerter.

Similarly, there have been some attempts looking at the requesting behaviour within the Malaysian context. These studies examined the request strategies in relation to other factors such as proficiency, social and situational factors. For example, Youssef (2012) studied the similarities and differences in the request strategies and modifications by Malaysian and Libyan postgraduate students at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia. Data used in this study are from existing literature on natural conversations and role-play. In terms of external modifications, both groups used the same external modifiers consisting of preparators, sweeteners, cost minimizers and grounders. Both groups mostly favour the grounders. Malaysian students employed fewer internal modifications and more external formulae than Libyan university students to enhance request efficiency do.

By looking at the research that has been conducted in the realm of the speech act of request, it is found that there has been little research done when it comes to the performance of non-native speakers of English such as Iraqis and Malays. In other words, when comparing the extensive research conducted on other speech acts such as requests by speakers of other languages, it is clear that research on non-native speakers of English failed to fill the gap in pragmatic research within the area

of giving advice. More research is needed on unexplored speech communities as it can be extensively beneficial to the understanding of the culture of its speech community. It is also found that there has been little research done when it comes to request modifications as compared to request strategies. Requests involve different types of mitigation strategies which reflect the social norms and assumptions of different communities and cultures. The speech act of request includes real life interactions and requires not only knowledge of the language but also appropriate use of that language within a given culture. Thus, further research may provide us with a more global view of the cultural tendencies in the act of requesting among Iraqis and Malays.

Methodology
Subjects
The researchers used a random sampling method of selecting 30 respondents for each group. The subjects were first given a background questionnaire. This instrument was addressed to all participants in the form of a questionnaire written in English. The purpose of this questionnaire is to record data about their personal information like gender, age, etc. (See Table 1).

Table 1: Description of the subjects

	Iraqis	Malays
Gender	15 males, 5 females	7 males, 23 females
Age	27 to 35	21 to 26
1 am currently enrolled in:	Masters	Masters
Area of study	Physics, Pharmacy and Computer Science	Physics, Pharmacy and Computer Science
Native language	Arabic	Bahasa Malay
How long have you been in Malaysia? (Iraqis only)	6 month to one year	-

Based on the table above, thirty Iraqi and thirty Malay university students participated in this study. The choice of Malaysian Malays only is to keep the homogeneity of the subjects. The Malay group consists of seven males and twenty three females, whose ages range twenty-one and twenty-six. The Iraqi group consists of fifteen males and five females, with an age range of between twenty-seven and thirty-five. It should be noted that age and gender effects were not considered in this study.

Each group was met individually by the researchers at USM. Researchers provided the subjects with detailed instructions about the tasks. Each subject was given 30 minutes to complete the provided task in both English and their mother tongue, i.e. Bahasa Malay and Iraqi Arabic. Subjects were presented with the written situations and were asked to write down what they would say under each situation.

Instrument
Building on the work of earlier researchers on different speech act realizations, Discourse Completion Task (DCT) has been used as instrument for studying the realization of speech acts (Beebe and Cumming, 1996; Kasper and Dahl, 1991; Sasaki, 1998). The DCT used in the present study has adopted Rose's (1994) study on requests. It included eight situations in which subjects were placed in the role of a student making a request. Each situation was based on two social variables: "relative power" and "social distance" between the interlocutors. In other words, each situation consists of variation in social factors: an equal status (=P) and high status (+P). It also looks at request realization between familiar interlocutors (-D) and strangers (+D).

Table 2: Description of the eight DCT situations as adopted from Rose (1994)

Situations	Description
S1 (Music) [=P,+D]	Student - Student, Student asks another student in nearby room whom s/he does not know to turn his/ her music down.
S2 (Notes) [=P, -D]	Student - Student, Student asks to borrow a friend's notes from a class that s/he has missed.
S3 (Test) [+P, -D]	Student - Professor, Student asks professor to be allowed to take on another day a test that s/he has miss due to an out-of-town wedding.
S4 (Photo) [+P,+D]	Student – Man(lecturer), Student asks a man whom s/he does not know wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase to take a photo of the student and his /her friend.
S5 (Study) [=P,-D]	Student - Student, Student asks a friend to help him/her study for an upcoming test.
S6 (Bus) [=P,+D]	Student - Student, Student asks another student whom s/he does not know to move over on the bus.
S7 (Food) [+P,-D]	Student - friend's mother, Student asks a friend's mother for more food during dinner at the friend's house.
S8 (Door) [+P, +D]	Student - Professor, Student asks professor whom s/he does not know to open a door which the student cannot open because his/her hands are full.

Furthermore, to make sure that the different perceptions of the situations would not affect the modifying elements used in the request patterns, both groups were asked to rate on a 1–5 scale (adopted from Barron, 2003) the degree of imposition of each situation. Brown and

Levinson (1987, p.77) define the degree of imposition as "a culturally and situationally defined ranking of impositions by the degree to which they are considered to interfere with an agent's wants of self-determination or of approval". In addition, they were also asked to rate two social parameters right and obligation since both right and obligation are considered to be relevant for the choice of the request form (Blum-Kulka et al.,1989). Barron (2003) indicated that factors like right and obligation may affect the value of social variables. According to Blum-Kulka and House (1989, p.146), estimates of the right the speaker has to issue the request and the relative degree of obligation for the hearer to comply with the particular request are considered to affect request realisation, i.e. level of directness in a correlation relationship: the greater the right of the speaker to ask and the greater the obligation of the hearer to comply, the less the motivation for the use of indirectness. The rating of those situational factors was done by answering the following questions:

How much an imposition does the speaker's request put on the hearer in this situation?

1 low
2 mid-low
3 mid
4 mid-high
5 high

Does the other person have an obligation to accept your request?

1 no obligation at all
2 no obligation
3 no real obligation
4 an obligation
5 a strong obligation

Do you have the right to pose request?

1 no right at all
2 no right
3 no real right
4 a right
5 a strong right

Data analysis

Data were analyzed based on Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) coding scheme used in the CCSARP study. According to the coding scheme in the CCSARP, a request sequence consists of a head act and other parts such as internal and external modifications which are optional and nonessential for realizing a request. For example:

Judith, I missed class yesterday. Do you think I could borrow your notes? I promise to return them by tomorrow.

The example shows that the request sequence may include several strategies including alerters, such as address terms (Judith), proposed supportive moves (I missed class yesterday), the request proper, or Head act (I could borrow your notes), optionally elaborated with down-graders (do you think) or up-graders and post-supportive moves (I promise to return them by tomorrow). However, in the present study, only external modifications were coded and included in the analysis.

Results and discussion
Perception of situational factors
Table (3) includes the evaluation of the situational factors (see Appendix). The findings of the t-test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the perception of obligation P=.01* in S5 where 18 (60%) out of 30 Iraqi subjects perceive that the other person is obliged to accept the request given while 19 (63.3%) out of 30 Malay subjects perceive no real obligation for the other person to accept the request.

Sociality rights are social or personal expectancies or entitlements that individuals claim for themselves (Spencer-Oatey 2000, p.14). Some are constantly negotiated, while others are culturally or situationally determined beforehand. Since interlocutors expect these rights to be respected, they create expectations which, if unsatisfied, may affect rapport management. Thus in situation 5, these rights and obligations are determined by the nature of Iraqi friendship context which is inseparable from social obligations. In the sense that part of a ''healthy'' friendship among Iraqis is that a friend ''must'' feel indulged to fulfill certain obligations such as offering help and doing everything he/she can to comfort a friend. They comprise the friend's obligation to help and the other person's right to be adequately treated appropriately. Thus, Iraqi subjects perceive that the other person is obliged to accept the request in such a situation. However, the case is obviously treated differently within the Malaysian context where such obligations are negotiated and not determined.

Another difference in the perception of the situational factors is evident in the perception of imposition in S7. The findings of the t-test show that there is a statistically significant difference in the perception of imposition P=.01* in S7. In S7, the 22 (73.4%) out of 30 Iraqis subjects do not feel any imposition when asking a friends' mother for more food during dinner at the friend's house. Their perception was between a little lower and mid. The subjects' requesting behaviour is influenced by the high familiarity between the interlocutors as well as the informal setting. Iraqis' socio-cultural norms stress hospitality. Thus, upon accepting an invitation for dinner at a friend's house, it is a social norm for the host to keep on asking the guest to eat just a bit more. Therefore, asking for more food would never be an imposing act on the part of both the requester and the requestee. The person who posed the request is sure that his request would never be refused. There is a great expectation of compliance on the part of the hearer. However 18 (60%) out of 30 Malay subjects perceive high imposition when requesting in this situation. Iraqi subjects perceived this situation according to their cultural norms of invitation. However, for Malays the interpretation of imposition is quite high in this situation. There are still limits in asking for more food within this culture where such as act is considered to be rude even with close relations.

External modifiers
The responses were coded and analyzed based on Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) classification and the coding scheme used in the CCSARP as mentioned before. The results are demonstrated in table 4 (See Appendix).

Table 3 shows that 'grounder' is the most common external mitigator used by both subjects. In a grounder, the speaker gives reasons, explanations, or justifications for his or her request, either before or after the main request. The use of grounders in other situations like S4 (Photo) S6 (Bus) and S7 (Food) is not frequent due to the use of other external modifiers by the subjects.

A closer look at the situation number three shows that the effect of the participants' relation is influencing the use of rapport management through the use of grounders in this situation. Grounder is highly employed by Malaysians in S3 (Test) 93%. Power as a contextual variable can be seen in terms of unequal role relations, e.g. Professor –student. A professor can be perceived to have coercive power, reward power, expert power and legitimate power. As Song (2012, p.33) put it out, "College professors and school teachers are highly respected in East Asia because of the influence of confucianism, which

means that the society values education. As a result, students accept teacher's disciplinary acts." Request in such a situation should be worded in a way to gain a successful face rapport in interaction. Thus, the request looks less blunt when it is mitigated by the use of justification or explanation.

Grounders are used mostly when making a request to someone with a higher status. Aldhulaee (2011) justified the use of grounder by the fact that a university lecturer has a high social status in the Arabic social hierarchy as an individual with much academic knowledge. In such a case, making a request to someone with a higher status, the speaker should manage the face rapport through justifying and mitigating his/her request. The reason for using a grounder might probably be viewed in a way that the speaker is trying his best to build the rapport and achieve a smooth interaction with an expectation that this reason would have an impact on the addressee to be more co-operative and understanding to his situation. " The use of reasons or grounders can be seen as a co-operative strategy towards harmonious exchanges since by giving reasons the speaker expects the addressee to be more understanding and willing to co-operate"(Aldhulaee, 2011, p. 129). This is in line with Faerch and Kasper (1989) who pointed 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). Examples of grounders taken from Iraqi and Malay data:

Saya terpaksa balik ke kampong. Bolehkah saya ambil ujian terlebih dahulu?
I have to go back to my village. Can I seat for the test in advance?

Saya tak dapat hadir pada hari ujian. Boleh tunda tarikh ujian?

I cannot come to the test day. Could you postpone the test date?

In the examples above, subjects mitigate the request by using a grounder. Then they realised the request. In the first example, the speaker tries his best to manage face rapport through the use of mitigation where he justifies his demand to take the test in advance by saying Saya terpaksa balik ke kampong. It should be mentioned that Malay subjects adherence to their culture is defined by a politeness system which is characterized as being hierarchical. In other words, "The way language is used, the intonations of speech and the ways people are addressed according to a status hierarchy, are part of the polite system" (Storz, 1999, p.119). This shows that the level of politeness is determined by the rank by the society in Malaysia.

However, Iraqi subjects used another common device to mitigate the request as they begin their request by defining the relationship between their interlocutors and themselves with regard to social status. This is accomplished by referring to the rank of the hearer (e.g. ., professor, doctor) or by using a formal address term such as ''professor'' استاذي. In addition, Iraqi subjects tend to linguistically mitigate their request with more detail. The following examples illustrate the point:

استاذي عندي شغل خارج المدينة اريد تأجيل الامتحان
Prof., I have something to do out of town, I want to postpone the test.

استاذي اموري مزدحمة اكدر امتحن هذا الاسبوع؟
Prof., I'm busy, can I take the test next week?

In the example above, subjects mitigate a request by using an address term then followed by an explanation of being away outside town to justify the requested act which is postponing the test. However, in

the second example, the mitigation is done by using an ambiguous grounder where the speaker justifies his absence by being busy. Not much information is mentioned for the status of being busy, yet a successful face rapport is built through the second part of the request where the subject offered to take the test for this week. This secures the professor's obligations and rights of his job and gives him more space to be cooperative and complying with the request. Despite the use of mitigation in the second example, the request sounds blunter than the previous, this probably due to the fact that the speaker fails in providing enough details for justifying his request. This reflects the Iraqi cultural norms where hierarchical relations are dominant in everyday life interaction.

The third example is an elaborated realisation of a request where the speaker starts with a greeting form and an address term. The speaker provides a detailed explanation to justify his request then followed by a thanking and commitment so that if the professor would comply with his request that would be considered as a favour. Thanking and expressions of favours are very common in Iraqi culture.

Another common type of mitigation is achieved through the use of an apology. The use of forms like 'aasif/ aasfa' (I am sorry) or 'al afu' (I beg your pardon) is common in Iraqi Arabic as well as in Bahasa Malayu " Maaf" as a way of redressing the face-threatening act of request especially when interacting with a speaker of high authority or when interacting with strangers. The speaker infringes on the recipient's freedom from imposition by making a request. The recipient may feel that the request is an intrusion on his/her freedom of action or even a power play. Using the apology as a mitigation device would help soften the interaction and manage the face rapport. Examples given by Iraqi subjects:

اعتذر استاذ بس عدنه حفلة كراينا ضروري احضرها ممكن أجل الامتحان؟

I apologize, prof., but we have a wedding party that I should attend. Can I postpone the test?

العفو ممكن اكعد بصفك؟
Sorry, can I sit beside you?

العفو ممكن تنصي الصوت؟
Sorry, can you slow down the sound?

العفو استاذ الكتب ثقيلة مساعدتك في فتح الباب
Sorry, prof., the books are so heavy, help me by opening the door.

العفو ما اكدر اوكف ممكن اكعد هنا؟
Sorry, I can't stand. Can I sit here?

العفو أخوية ممكن تنصي صوت الموسيقى لان أريد أقرأ؟

Sorry brother, can you turn down the sound of the music I want to study?

Examples of apology given by Malay subjects:

Maafkan saya kerana tidak dapat menduduki ujian itu. Saya harap dapat mengambilnya semula.
I am sorry because I cannot seat for the test. I hope I can reseat it.

Saya minta maaf kerana tak dapat hadir untuk ujian itu kerana saya perlu pulang ke kampong untuk menghadiri satu majlis perkahwinan. Boleh tak tolong pertimbangkan untuk tunda tarikh ujian itu?
I am sorry I cannot come to the test because I have to go back to my village to attend a wedding. Could you please consider postponing the test date?

Another way of modifying a request can be done by using a 'sweeteners'. This is reflected in the use of formulaic expressions like compliments which are used for daily social interactions by Iraqis to soften the social distance and show

more friendliness. In the present study, "sweeteners" occurred quite frequently in the Food situation. Bella (2011, p. 1734) stated that, "A speaker in such a condition seems to invest in pragmatic routines whose formulaic nature can guarantee a politeness effect." It should be noted that the use of compliments such as 'Ashet iedek' (literally, 'God save your hands' are very common and routine in Iraqi culture. The English equivalent would be 'That's really tasty' or 'Mmm.. That's yummy' or any other complimentary remark regarding the food). They are used to stress closeness and intimacy.

Examples given by Iraqi subjects:

امك تطبخ كلش زين ونفسها طيب بالاكل

Your mother's cooking is very good and she has a very good taste in food

اكلكم طيب ناوشني بعد ماعون

Your food is delicious, give me another plate.

عاشت ايدج خالة الاكل كلش طيب ممكن أخذ شوية

God save your hands, aunty. The food is very delicious, can I have a little more?

عاشت الايادي طبخكم ممتاز

God save your hands ..your cooking is excellent

لاول مرة اذوك هيجي اكل طيب ..عاشت ايديها لامك

It's the first time that I taste such a nice food.. God save your mother's hands

Based on the realisation of the above examples, it should be noted that the guest expects the right to be respected and treated well based upon the cultural norms of Iraqi hospitality. Thus he/she creates expectation which, if unsatisfied, may affect rapport management. Being a host, she is obliged to present her best to comfort her guest. The guest, on the other hand, creates expectations that determine the interaction of the whole situation. It is a social norm for the host to keep on

asking the guest to eat just a bit more. The rights and expectations rise when the familiarity is high. Therefore, the guest would be expected to be appreciated the host by asking for more food. There is a great expectation of compliance on the part of the hearer, i.e. the mother. This would also be regarded as a sign of friendliness and closeness.

Malay subjects show a similar tendency in using sweeteners as mitigation strategy. The use of such strategies might be explained by the fact that it perhaps helps in managing the face quality of the hearer that is the mother's desire to be positively evaluated by her guests on the basis of her personal features, i.e. skillful in cooking.

Examples of sweeteners given by Malay subjects:

Sedapnya masakan makcik hari ini. Boleh saya tambah sikit?
Auntie's cooking is delicious. Can I have some more?

Masakan mama sedap sekali. Untung Rashid ada emak macam mama. Saya ambik lagi ye.
Mama's cooking is so delicious. Rashid is so lucky to have a mother like you. I take some more (food).

Conclusion
The present paper is a cross-cultural research between Iraqi and Malay university students by studying the requesting behaviour and the social, cultural norms of these groups. This would enhance our understanding of the way these two groups modify their requests. In fact, both Iraqi and Malay cultures are classified as types of collectivistic cultures. One of the distinctive features of this type of culture is that the hierarchical relationships and the reciprocal obligation are basic features of the cultural system. Having examined the types of mitigations used by the participants, the findings

indicated that grounders are the most common external modifier used by the subjects. This is in line with Hassall (2001) who argued that grounders can be found in all languages and considered as the main type of external modifiers. The importance of this modifier seems to be related to its function as a means of sustaining the speaker's endeavour to get cooperation and build the rapport with less face-threatening to the hearer's face (Aldhulaee, 2011).

Though the results of the present study show more similarities than differences between the subjects under study in terms of mitigation devices use such as apologies, compliments and thanking, further research may provide us with a more global view of the cultural tendencies in mitigating the act of making requests among Iraqis and Malaysians. Ongoing research in the study of real life encounters in which requests are performed would give more insight into the cultural tendencies, and may be more authentic if the responses were verbal as opposed to written as done in this study.

Moreover, from examining the results of the rating scale, it became clear that both Iraqis and Malays differ in their perception of the situational factors. The dominance and the influence of Islamic culture are clearly demonstrated within the Iraqi culture. Thus, concepts such as hospitality, sharing, involvement, obligations and closeness are promoted by the whole Iraqi society. In case of Malays, they might still be dominated by the Anglo culture in terms of adherence to the etiquette and the manners of not asking for more food where the requester feels a great imposition since he is exposing a need. Feeling of embarrassment and being ashamed might be the reason behind feeling such a burden when asking for more food.

Accordingly, the findings of this study might be utilized by English language teachers within the ESL/EFL contexts. This study supports the importance of understanding speech acts across cultures and the fact that understanding, or lack thereof, can either hinder or strengthen communication exchanges between cultures. It is believed that teaching the cultural aspects of language is a vital part of teachers' duty to aid their students in becoming successful second language speakers. ESL teachers should design contextualized, task-based activities that expose learners to different types of pragmatic information along with the linguistic means needed to perform a particular speech act. In addition, because of the function of different social variables (e.g., social status) in speech acts, students should be taught how to perform speech acts appropriately based on the relative status levels of the interlocutors.

Finally, it should be mentioned that there are some certain limitations in the present study which should be taken into account. The present study utilised DCT as an instrument for data collection. It is true that DCTs do not provide samples of an interactive language in a real life situation. Instead, they provide data of high comparability due to the controlled nature of the situation given. However, DCT can still be used as an instrument in assessing the knowledge of how a particular speech act might be performed but not how it is actually performed. Thus, a rating scale is used in addition to DCT as a way to compensate the major issues related to DCT validity and reliability in terms of authentic discourse. More research might be conducted for cross-cultural studies to capture the ideal data, i.e. naturally occurring data.

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Appendix

Table 3: Evaluation of imposition, obligation and right across situations

Factors	Iraqis		Malays	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
S1.Imposition	3.20	.664	3.40	.968
S1.Obligation	2.90	1.062	3.30	1.149
S1.Right	3.80	.961	4.20	.610
S2.Imposition	2.93	.980	3.13	.860
S2.Obligation	2.77	1.251	3.07	.944
S2.Right	3.40	.894	3.50	.731
S3.Imposition	2.77	1.104	3.17	1.053
S3.Obligation	2.53	1.332	2.77	1.165
S3.Right	2.77	1.040	3.27	.828
S4.Imposition	2.77	.858	3.17	.874
S4.Obligation	2.57	1.305	2.73	1.081
S4.Right	2.63	1.129	2.87	.900
S5.Imposition	3.23	.679	3.43	.774
S5.Obligation	3.73	.583	2.77	.858
S5.Right	3.23	.817	3.57	1.040
S6.Imposition	3.23	1.040	3.50	.900
S6.Obligation	3.03	1.066	3.33	1.093
S6.Right	3.90	1.185	4.40	.770
S7.Imposition	2.10	.803	3.80	.761
S7.Obligation	2.73	1.230	2.97	1.098
S7.Right	2.90	1.029	3.27	.740
S8.Imposition	2.87	1.008	3.27	.868
S8.Obligation	2.53	1.074	3.00	1.050
S8.Right	3.20	1.095	3.20	1.215

Appendix

Table 4: External modifiers

	Iraqi Subjects				Malay Subjects			
	Grounders	Apology	Gratitude	Sweetener	Grounders	Apology	Gratitude	Sweetener
S1	13.3	0	0	0	60	16.6	16.6	0
S2	26.6	3.3	0	0	53.3	0	3.3	0
S3	13	20	0	0	93	43.3	0	0
S4	3.3	0	3.3	0	3.3	3.3	16.6	0
S5	26.6	6.6	3.3	0	36.6	0	0	0
S6	3.3	6.6	0	0	6.6	3.3	6.6	0
S6	13.3	3.3	3.3	70	3.3	0	0	83.3
S8	20	6.6	6.6	0	26.6	0	30	0