IRAQI POSTGRADUATES' PERCEPTION AND PRODUCTION OF

REQUESTS IN ENGLISH: A PRAGMATIC STUDY

By

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List of Abbreviations

S1, S2, …S8	Situation one, situation two….situation eight
DCT /DCTs	Discourse completion Test/ Discourse completion Tests
DET	Discourse Evaluation Test
MCQ	Multiple choice questionnaire
CCSARP	Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project
χ^2	Chi- square test
P	Power
D	Distance
(N2)	Student Number 2
L2	Second language
L1	First language
Ns	Native speakers
NNs	Non native speakers
MDCTs	Multiple discourse completion test
MC	Multiple choice
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
FTA	Face threatening act
EFL	English foreign language
WDCTs	Written discourse completion tests
BE	British English
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
S	Speaker
H	Hearer

ILP	Interlanguage Pragmatics
KFL	Korean Foreign Language
IL	Interlanguage
ESL	English Second Language
NR	No request
D	Direct
CID	Conventionally Indirect
NCID	Non Conventionally Indirect
+D /-D	+ social distance/ - social distance
+P/-P	+ social power/ -social power

PERSEPSI DAN PENGHASILAN PELAJAR SISWAZAH IRAQ BAGI LAKUAN BAHASA MEMINTA DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS : SATU KAJIAN PRAGMATIK

Abstrak

Lakuan bahasa meminta oleh pelajar siswazah Iraq dipilih sebagai unit analisis kerana ia sering digunakan sebagai strategi tak langsung; permintaan bersifat mengancam air muka dan kebarangkalian menyinggung perasaan seseorang adalah tersirat dalam lakuan itu sendiri (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Beberapa kajian telah dilakukan oleh penutur asli Arab berkaitan dengan lakuan bahasa secara umum dan khususnya bagi lakuan bahasa meminta secara khusus. Walau bagaimanapun, dalam konteks Iraq, tiada kajian empirik yang memberi tumpuan khususnya terhadap lakuan bahasa meminta menggunakan bahasa Inggeris. Oleh itu, kajian ini cuba mengisi jurang yang wujud dalam penyelidikan pragmatik, dengan memberi tumpuan khusus terhadap keupayaan pragmatik orang Iraq dalam menghasilkan dan menilai lakuan bahasa meminta Kajian ini meneliti dua aspek utama kompeten pragmatik: *persepsi* (kebolehan sosiopragmatik) dan *penghasilan* (kebolehan pragmalinguistik) daripada lakuan bahasa meminta oleh pelajar siswazah Iraq. Kajian ini juga meneliti persepsi pelajar berdasarkan faktor kontektual seperti kuasa, jarak, imposisi, kewajipan dan hak yang membentuk pewujudan lakuan bahasa meminta dalam bahasa Inggeris dalam kalangan pelajar siswazah Iraq di Universiti Sains Malaysia. Sehubungan itu, kajian ini meneliti pewujudan linguistik lakuan bahasa meminta. Korpus ini mengandungi respons terhadap ujian pelengkapan wacana (*discourse completion test*, DCT) yang merangkumi lapan situasi, soal selidik aneka pilihan (*multiple choice questionnaire*, MCQ), suatu skala perkadaran and ujian

penilaian wacana (*discourse evaluation test*, DET). Informan terdiri daripada 50 orang penutur asli Arab Iraq yang belajar di Universiti Sains Malaysia. Korpus dianalisis secara kualitatif berasaskan skema pengekodan yang dibangunkan di bawah CCSARP (Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project) oleh Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) dan secara kuantitatif (menggunakan analisis deskriptif dan analisis statistik).

Dalam tahap sosiopragmatik, dapatan menunjukkan bahawa subjek sedar akan faktor kontektual yang mempengaruhi lakuan meminta. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan, pada tahap pragmalinguistik, subjek menggunakan kebanyakan lakuan bahasa meminta. Akhirnya, berasaskan dapatan, kajian ini dirumus dengan beberapa implikasi pedadogi bahawa ia boleh dilaksanakan dalam konteks EFL secara umum dan khususnya dalam program pengajaran bahasa Inggeris yang sedia ada di Iraq.

IRAQI POSTGRADUATES' PERCEPTION AND PRODUCTION OF REQUESTS IN ENGLISH: A PRAGMATIC STUDY

Abstract

The speech act of requesting by Iraqi postgraduates is selected as the unit of analysis because requests often call for strategies of indirection; requests are face-threatening, and the possibility of offending someone is inherent in the act itself (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Some studies have been conducted on native speakers of Arabic concerned with speech act in general and requests in particular. However, within the Iraqi context, there is no single empirical study that has looked at the specific speech act of requesting by Iraqis in English. Hence, this study fills an existing gap in pragmatic research by looking at Iraqis' pragmatic ability when perceiving and producing the speech act of requesting. This study investigates the two primary aspects of pragmatic competence: *perception* (sociopragmatic ability) and *production* (pragmalinguistic ability) of requests by Iraqi postgraduates. Accordingly, it examines Iraqi postgraduate students' perception of contextual factors such as power, distance, imposition, obligation and right that govern the realizations of requests at Universiti Saina Malaysia. The study also investigates the linguistic realisation of request speech acts in English by Iraqi postgraduate students. The corpus consists of responses to a discourse completion test (DCT) that contains eight situations, a multiple choice questionnaire (MCQ), a rating scale and a discourse evaluation test (DET). The informants were 50 Iraqi Arabic native speakers studying at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia. The corpus was analyzed both qualitatively based on the coding scheme developed under Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization

Project (CCSARP) by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) and quantitatively (using descriptive and statistical analysis).

Results show, on the sociopragmatic level, findings indicate that subjects are aware of the contextual factors governing request making. On the pragmalinguistic level, subjects do have the knowledge of making requests in English. Finally, based on the findings, the study concludes with some pedagogical implications that could be implemented in EFL contexts, in general and the existing programmes of English language teaching in Iraq in particular.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

As an introduction to the present study, this chapter is structured around three broad areas. First, this chapter describes the background and the research problem of the study, while articulating the specific aim and research questions for the study. This chapter then outlines the significance of this study, the limitations of the study and definition of terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

Pragmatics is concerned with the ability to understand the speakers' intention, to interact and communicate with native speakers as well as speakers of other languages through language forms appropriate to specific contexts. Moreover, this ability includes the pragmatic knowledge of the socio-cultural rules that govern language use. One of the serious outcomes of lack of pragmatic knowledge is miscommunication or communication breakdown. Language learners often fail to follow the socio-cultural rules that govern language behavior in the target language, and this has been referred to in the literature as pragmatic failure. The concept of pragmatic failure was first proposed by Thomas (1983) to define the inability to understand what is meant by what is said. She explains that there are two reasons for this pragmatic failure: a) learner's lack of linguistic means to convey his or her pragmatic knowledge, and b) cross-cultural differences as to what constitutes appropriate cultural behavior. When learners lack this socio-pragmatic knowledge of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior in L2 (Second Language), they often draw on their knowledge of appropriate language behavior from L1 (First Language).

Within the field of cross-cultural pragmatics, many examples can be seen that highlight the cultural differences between speech communities and samples of communication breakdown or pragmatic failure. For instance, Rubin (1983) reported a compelling example regarding an Arab student visiting an American family for the first time. During his visit, the student was served some delicious sandwiches. When the host offered him more sandwiches, the Arab student refused. Much to his amazement, the host did not repeat the offer, and as a consequence, "the Arab student sat there, confronted by some lovely sandwiches which he couldn't eat" (p. 14). As an individual of Arab descent, the researcher of the current study can understand the confusion experienced by the student. As part of a larger system of etiquette, Arabs are taught to refuse food and drink repeatedly, with the expectation that their host will repeat the offer more than once; indeed, if the offer is not repeated, the Arab individual questions the sincerity of the offer.

A similar cultural difference can be seen within the Iraqi society as it has a special pattern of inviting. For an Iraqi family, everyone is welcome at any time and thus the issue of general invitation is common by the people. However, for some other cultures this might not be the case. A typical example is that an Iraqi family living in the US might issue a general invitation, not realizing that they must pin down a specific time and place, then sit at home socially isolated and lonely.

Moreover, pragmatic failure in Thomas' (1983) terms leads to negative judgments of learners as having bad manners or bad temperament. In other words, whereas learners who make grammatical errors seem to be seen as less proficient language users, those who fail to use language in a socially and culturally appropriate way may appear unfriendly, impolite or even rude (Harlow, 1990).

Hence, in order to become a truly fluent second or foreign language user, it is of primary importance to attain pragmatic competence, in addition to grammatical competence, so that the language user knows "when to speak, when not, and … what to talk about with whom, when, where, and in what manner" (Hymes, 1979, p.15). Brown and Levinson (1987, p.202) made this point clearly, suggesting that "the pragmatic purpose of language – the use of signs and symbols for communication – is thus the final and ultimate objective of the second language learner".

Pragmatic competence includes pragmalinguistic competence, i.e. 'the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions' (the linguistic interface of pragmatics), and sociopragmatic competence i.e. 'the assessment of interlocutors' social distance and social power, rights and obligations and degree of imposition involved in different linguistic acts' (the sociological interface of pragmatics) (Leech, 1983; Kasper, 1992).

One main aspect of pragmatic competence is the production and understanding of speech acts and their appropriateness in a given situation. A speech act, as indicated by Searle (1969), is an utterance that serves a function in communication. Some examples are apologies, greetings, requests, complaints, invitations, compliments or refusals. A speech act might contain just one word such as '*No*' to perform a refusal or several words or sentences such as: "I'm sorry, I can't, I have a prior engagement". In pragmatic research, numerous studies have been conducted on a variety of speech acts such as requests, apologies, complaints, refusals, expressions of gratitude, and compliments. Among them, requests have received considerable attention since they are frequently used in everyday communication for gaining information, help, or cooperation from others. They are extremely important to L2 learners in the sense that the majority of their interaction with target language

speakers takes place in the form of requests (Fraser, 1980; Fraser et al, 1980; Koike, 1989). However, studies have shown that EFL(English as a Foreign Language) /ESL (English as a Second Language) learners' lack of pragmatic knowledge of the target language can contribute to the production of inappropriate speech acts in the target language, and this can result in miscommunication (Blum-Kulka, 1982).

Requests, the speech act chosen for 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). By 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 fear of exposing a need or out of fear of possibly making the recipient lose face (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, 1989, p. 11). In this sense, requests are face-threatening to both the requester and the recipient. 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. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) terms, when making requests, a speaker threatens a hearer's freedom to act without being misinterpreted by others (i.e., negative face) and at the same time, runs the risk of losing his/her public self-image or personality (i.e., positive face) of both speaker and hearer.

Over the last few decades, various request speech act studies have been carried out by comparing native speakers' request performances with those of non-native

speakers (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Hill, 1997; Trosborg, 1995). The body of research on L2 learners' request speech acts has revealed that different cultural values can influence language users' perceptions of many variables like the social power, social distance and others which may lead to misunderstandings and even pragmatic breakdown in communication. For example, the structure 'Can you X?' is likely to be interpreted by native speakers as a request to do X rather than a question as to one's ability to do X. The following conversation between two family members at a table can provide a clue.

A: Can you pass me the salt?
B: Yes, I can pass you the salt.

Here A is actually making a request. B may properly react by saying 'Yes/Yes, I can.' with the action of passing the salt or simply the action. Otherwise, the response in the example implies either the failure of the hearer to interpret the speaker's intention (if without any action while answering) or his unwillingness to do what the speaker wants him to do.

Moreover, Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper and Ross (1996) reported that the conditions where by requests are called for and the patterns they take vary from culture to culture. Moreover, different cultures have a different view of what is considered a face-threatening request or 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 (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986). In other words, request strategies are expected to be influenced by the relation between interlocutors, i.e., the requester and requestee and their relative dominance over each other (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). These relations can be classified into three categories: higher-ranking to lower-ranking, equal to equal and lower- ranking to

higher-ranking. A typical example is provided by Umar (2004) who, in his study, indicated that the advanced Arab learners of English tend to use more direct strategies such as "mood derivable" and "performatives" when requesting people in lower position than their English counterparts. Thus, in a situation like: (*You want your younger brother to fetch some bread from the near-by bakery. What would you say to him*?), their typical answers would be:

1.Hey! Go and get us some bread.
2.It is dinner time and you have to get the bread.
3. You know there is no bread, so you have to get us some from the bakery. Make sure it is hot.

While a British native speaker would request by saying:

1. We are short of bread! Would you mind bringing us some from the bakery?
2. Do you think you can make it? But we need some bread for the dinner.
3. Oh dear! We don't have any bread at the moment.

Examples above indicate that the way requests are actually realized varies from culture to culture. As mentioned before, cultural values can influence language users' perceptions of the factors that govern the use of request such as power, distance, etc. and may lead to misunderstandings and even pragmatic breakdown in communication. Being too direct is due to Arab native speakers' different assessment of the size of imposition, social-distance, etc. from that of a native speaker.

1.2 Requests and Iraqi Society

Iraq with its population of about 22 million people has been shaped by a number of cultural and ethnic factors. When trying to understand Iraqi culture there are many things to consider. There are many differences between this culture and that of the Western world--from religion and clothing to behaviors and customs. Relatedness and group consciousness are central aspects of Iraqi culture. Social networks provide support to individuals. Socially, the conventional expectations of Iraqi society are that brothers, sisters, relatives, friends and even neighbours will

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remain in contact with each other, and be mutually loyal and helpful. Therefore the act of requesting is a very common social activity in an Iraqi society. Asking for help or requesting something is an act that is socially understood by this community as a way through which they tend to express their feelings to support and help each other and thus be connected.

Moreover, Iraqi Arabs judge others on how well they treat their friends. In other words, how well one treats his friend, what type of support and how much help he offers to his friend is a typical Iraqi tradition, and seen as a direct measurement of what kind of a person he is. Friendship in Arab society is inseparable from social obligations. For instance, part of a ''healthy'' friendship among Arabs is that a friend ''must'' feel indulged to fulfil certain obligations such as offering help and doing everything he/she can to comfort a friend. Therefore, when requesting a friend, an Iraqi speaker would expect expressions like *Tedellal haDriin* (my pleasure), *ehna bel Khedmah* (At your service) as a reply. These forms are likely to be used by Iraqis when they want to express the willingness to perform the request demands. However, this does not mean that the favour must actually be done all the time.

Iraqi society has a special pattern of requesting. Requests are linguistically realized by the use of both imperative and interrogative forms. Consider the following examples:

(1) Please open the door I can't use my hand.
ارجوك افتح الباب ما اكدر استعمل ايدي

(2) Please can you give the lecture notes I couldn't attend the class?
بله زحمة ممكن ان تنطيني المحاضرة مكدرت احضر الدرس

Example (1) is a typical instance of an imperative utterance that formulates a direct request in Arabic as it is known as an order form (صيغة الامر). In the Iraqi culture, direct requests or the use of the imperative are classified as solidarity

politeness strategies (involvement politeness strategies) and it permits a more direct level of interaction between close people such as brothers, sons, daughters, sisters and even close friends because they imply that the speaker assumes only a small social distance between him/herself and the interlocutor. However, an Iraqi speaker of Arabic would also use formulaic utterances such as (بلا زحمة excuse me) and (ارجوك please) to soften a direct request and make it more polite.

Utterance (2) provides an example of an interrogative request as it is done by the use of semi-formulaic expressions 'mumkin'(can) and 'tiqdar' which are markers of indirect request strategies.

From the description above, it can be conclude that this society is characterized by its special requesting behavior following the rules and the cultural values of the Iraqi speech community. In other words, the interactional strategies utilized by Iraqi people for the purposes of requesting are culturally shaped by interactive elements and that they could be understood and appreciated by people sharing the same cultural background. This confirms what has been mentioned before that the conditions whereby requests are called for and the patterns they take vary from culture to culture and that different cultures have a different view of what is considered a face-threatening request or 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.

Therefore, there is a concern for cross-cultural and intercultural communication. For example, Iraqi students who study abroad and who thus interact with students from other countries might face a great chance of misunderstanding and miscommunication since there are differences in the perception of direct

requests. For an Iraqi a friend ''must'' feel indulged to fulfill certain obligations such as offering help and doing everything he/she can to comfort a friend. Therefore, making a direct request in a situation like for example requesting for a textbook will never be perceived as an impolite behavior among Iraqis. However, the case is not the same in another culture which values indirectness in speaking. This may often result in more serious communicative misunderstandings. Therefore, many funny stories may be resulted that may be far from amusing, either from the perspective of the speaker, who may feel silly, helpless or rude, or from the perspective of the listener, feeling confused, insulted or angry.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

A number of studies on native speakers of Arabic have indicated that they face difficulties when speaking in English (El-Shazly,1993; Al-Ammar, 2000; Umar, 2004). These difficulties are not the result of Arabic native speakers' errors in English morphology or syntax, or their inaccurate pronunciation of English but the result of their ignorance of the appropriate use of linguistic forms in different situations. The inappropriate use of linguistic forms may evoke impressions of awkwardness or rudeness.

Studies on native speakers of Arabic have shown that Arabs do indeed have problems when speaking English. Arabs find it extremely difficult to produce or sometimes understand a speech act (Al-Ammar, 2000; Umar, 2004). This is because of their inability to use English effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand it in context which in turn may lead to pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983).

Billimyer (1990) argued that a major difficulty faced by non-native speakers in acquiring pragmatic competence is that "speech acts are complex and highly variable, and require that the non-native speakers understand the multiple functions each serves" (p. 2). Requests are among the most commonly used speech behaviors in everyday interaction, which render their mastery vitally important to the communicative and pragmatic competence of the second language learner. Requests have been shown to be particularly problematic for ESL/EFL learners. Although the main categories of request (direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect) exist in different languages, there are considerable cross-cultural and linguistic differences in the preferred form of a request in a given situation (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Ellis, 1992). Ellis emphasized that the existence of linguistic and cultural differences "calls for a considerable linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge on the part of the learner" (p. 6) to avoid pragmatic failure.

In the field of requests, native speakers of Arabic are likely to encounter problems in handling the speech act of requesting. This is due to the degree of directness in request making strategies as well as the degree of sensitivity to social variables that affect the requests realisation and their performance in terms of the content of strategies which might vary cross-culturally (El-Shazly,1993; Al-Ammar, 2000). For example, Umar (2004) demonstrates that Arab students of English, even at advanced levels, may fall back on their cultural background when formulating their request strategies. It is said that Arab learners of English are not aware of the pragmatic differences between Arabic and English and that an appropriate Arabic request in a given situation might not be appropriate in English in that same situation.

However, studies on native speakers of Arabic failed to provide in-depth investigation of the use of requests. They suffered from major limitations:

1. These studies only captured the different degrees of directness and indirectness in request behaviour by native speaker of Arabic. They did not touch on two major aspects of requests supportive moves and perspective thus leaving these aspects for other researchers to investigate.

2. They failed to provide an analysis that examined what factors might determine variation in how subjects perceive or produce speech acts. Studies on native speakers of Arabic failed to provide the analysis of the production of requests and the link to their perception.

3. They failed to use a method that would thoroughly address one of its major research concern the influence of pragmatic transfer on learners' requests performance. These studies asses the pragmatic knowledge of native speakers of Arabic by using one pragmatic instrument in each study like DCT. However, there are some drawbacks to this method of data collection (DCT) for these studies.

4. The Arab participants came from various cultural backgrounds. Clearly, there should be a more accurate specification of the Arab population sample used in cross-cultural pragmatic studies; otherwise, "findings may be misleading and their generalizability may be questioned" (p. 14).

In sum, research on native speakers of Arabic failed to provide a comprehensive investigation that identifies cross-linguistic and cross-cultural influences on the use of requests. When comparing the extensive research conducted on requests by speakers of other languages, it is clear that research on native speakers of Arabic failed to fill the gap in pragmatic research within the area of request's perception and production. More research is needed on native speakers of Arabic as

it can be extensively beneficial to understand the culture of this speech community. The lack of knowledge of speech act realisation patterns and strategies across cultures can lead to breakdowns in intercultural and inter-ethnic communication. A similar view was adopted by Nelson, Al Batal and EL Bakary (2002) as they stated that one of the reasons for studying Arabic communication relates to the misunderstanding of Arabs by many outside the Arab world.

Within the Iraqi context, English language courses receive greater attention after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and are required more than before by the Iraqis. Many people try to learn English because now Iraq is an open country. Many people try to travel, pursue their studies, or find a job. Besides, the new policy of the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education as it opened the door to thousands of Iraqi students by offering them a large number of scholarships and fellowships in different countries. Consequently, many educated Iraqis are now able to complete their post-graduate study in different countries like Malaysia, the USA and the UK. This has resulted in the travel of students in large numbers. These students are immersed in their new language and cultural setting, and thus potentially have numerous opportunities for developing their English language abilities and cultural knowledge of the rules that govern the use of a foreign language like English. However, these are students who have received limited, if any, preparation to be language and culture learners/ users beyond what they would normally learn in a classroom setting. Thus, they depart for their study programs lacking the strategies that would enable them to more effectively use the English language.

In Iraq, English is taught as a foreign language. Students start learning English in grade five, that is at the age of eleven, and continue learning it up to grade

twelve, that is up to the age of eighteen. They then study different programmes of English according the courses they are studying. Students of medicine, for instance, study most of their subjects in English while other colleges teach English for only one year. However, the use of English is only confined to the classroom. As such, students have no chance to practise the language outside of the classroom. This results in the limited ability of speaking the language in real life interactions.

Robson (1995) states that most educated Iraqis have at least a limited ability to speak English, although it might turn out that they read much more than they can speak or understand. Those who have studied English in Iraq would gain conversational English relatively quickly if they are given opportunities to use the English they have learned. However, learners of English in Iraq learn it in their own cultural context with few immediate opportunities to use it. Iraqi students are not exposed to English in the way that they have no interaction with native speakers. They lack the linguistic means to convey their pragmatic knowledge, and they are unaware of the cross-cultural differences as to what constitutes appropriate cultural behavior. Therefore, it can be predicted that they would find it extremely difficult to produce or sometimes understand a speech act especially requests.

When Iraqis go to study at a university abroad to obtain a degree in a specific field, and to work in that field, they do not focus on the pragmatic function of English but on the use of that language to access knowledge in their respective academic fields. Yet, these students encounter situations in real life in which pragmatic competence comes into play. Making requests is one of these situations. The speech act of request is very situation-dependent in that speakers should know how to perform the speech act considering such aspects as the hearer, the relationship with

the hearer, the topic, the purpose of the speech, and the appropriate linguistic forms for the speech act. Appropriate requests are among the most important speech acts needed by Iraqi postgraduates. Thus, the speech act of request is selected because requests occur very frequently. The inappropriate use of the request act by non-native speakers can serve to make them look rude or impolite. In some cases, communication breakdowns can occur. In addition, speech acts in general and requests in particular, "require a high level of pragmatic competence in communication", Brown (2005). It is widely believed that native speakers consider pragmatic errors to be more serious than phonological or syntactic errors (Thomas,1983; Wolfson,1989). As Blum-Kulka (1991) points out, requesting style is a good index of a cultural way speaking. Sifianou (1992) maintains that conventionalized realisations of requests, as well as their frequency, are the clearest indicators of whether a society is positively or negatively oriented. Asking someone to do something for you (request) is the most frequent speech act that an international student may encounter in the context of studying abroad. For example, interacting with academic staff and colleagues is an important task for students, and they may need to ask a tutor or lecturer for help with an assignment. A typical example is the instance where an Iraqi student asks a professor whom he does not know to open a door which the student could not open because his hands are full. He does this by saying: "Professor, open the door. I return a lot of books to the library". This sounds inappropriate as the subject starts with an alerter indicating the status difference then directly asks the hearer to open the door justifying his request by saying that he has a lot of books to return to the library. A native speaker of English would say: *"Excuse me, do you mind holding the door for me a second, please?"* Thus, cultural differences make it difficult to have successful communication without touching on some

pragmatic attributes. Thus, requests appropriate realisations are significant to the establishment and maintenance of relationships in a speech community.

Therefore, any research that identifies cross-linguistic and cross-cultural influences on the use of various speech act realisation strategies by Iraqi native speakers of Arabic can be extensively beneficial to understanding the culture of its speech community. The lack of knowledge of speech act realisation patterns and strategies across cultures can lead to breakdowns in cross-cultural and intercultural communication. There is no single empirical study that has looked at the specific speech act of requesting by Iraqis in English. Hence, this study fills an existing gap in pragmatic research by looking at Iraqis' pragmatic ability when perceiving and producing the speech act of requesting.

Due to the increasing number of Iraqi students at Universiti Sains Malaysia, it would be significant to observe the requesting behaviour of Iraqi students. This study attempts to explore the possible cultural differences in realizing a request in English among Iraqis studying in Malaysia. In Malaysia, as indicated by Kim (2009), English is regarded as an important second language for instrumental purposes, a neutral language for social integration and a pragmatic one for professional growth and career advancement.

The choice for English is made due to the fact that more and more Iraqi students are going to English-speaking countries to further their studies. Thus, it is important to encourage them to become competent speakers of English, the world's lingua franca. The choice of request is due to the fact this speech act is an illocutionary force that is so common to take place in daily contexts. It is not easy to ask someone to do something. It is even harder to request in a foreign language

without risking offending the interlocutor. It involves not only linguistic knowledge, but also pragmatic knowledge. Communicative, or pragmatic, competence is the ability to use language forms in a wide range of environments, factoring in the relationships between the speakers involved and the social and cultural contexts of the situation (Lightbown and Spada, 1999; Gass and Selinker, 2001).

Therefore, it is important to carry out the present study to enhance the pragmatic knowledge of Iraqi postgraduates and make them aware of those instances where communication breakdown can occur. This study follows the line of research conducted on native speakers of Arabic and steps further by advancing the research through the investigation of pragmatic ability of making and understanding requests.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study will look at both perception and production of requests. The present study investigates the perception of requests by Iraqi postgraduates as it will look at the extent to which Iraqis are aware of the social and situational rules governing request making. It will examine their sensitivity to contextual factors such as characteristics of the participants and the content of the request. Furthermore, the study will investigate the relation between perception and production.

The study examines Iraqis' realisation of requests with a wide range of linguistic forms that are socially and culturally appropriate. It examines their degree of directness in strategies, and their performance in terms of the content of strategies which might vary cross-culturally. What you would say to your best friend and to a stranger when you ask for a pen? There should be differences in the linguistic forms of these two utterances. People speaking different languages can make a single request

using a wide range of linguistic forms that vary in terms of the level of directness (Blum-Kulka, 1987).That is to say, the study aims at the following:

1. To examine Iraqi postgraduate students' perception of contextual factors that govern the realisations of requests such as power, distance, imposition, obligation and right.

2. To explore the extent to which Iraqi postgraduate students' perception of contextual factors such as power, distance, imposition, obligation and right are linked to their linguistic realisation of request.

3. To investigate the linguistic realisation of request speech acts in English by Iraqi postgraduate students at USM.

1.5 Research Questions

This investigation - a pragmatic study of the speech act of request as perceived and realised by Iraqi postgraduates in English - is intended to address the following questions:

1. How do Iraqi postgraduate students perceive the contextual factors that govern the realisations of requests such as power, distance, imposition, obligation and right?

2. To what extent is Iraqi postgraduate students' perception of the contextual factors such as power, distance, imposition, obligation and right are linked to their linguistic realisation of the request?

3. How do Iraqi postgraduate students at USM linguistically realize request speech acts in English?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study can be discussed from different perspectives. First, the speech act of request may 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. It provides a valuable insight into the Iraqi culture. Each culture has its own unique set of conventions, rules and patterns of communication. These reflect the structure of the society as well as its values. Second, this study has the potential to benefit language teachers and ESL/EFL curriculum and textbook designers. Language teachers can use the findings to anticipate and thus reduce the incidence and severity of situations where in learners experience cultural and language miscommunication that leads to communication breakdown. In other words, it provides a better understanding of the complexities involved in the use of English by non-native speakers of English. It explains areas in which pragmatic failure might occur between Iraqis and non – Iraqis. It helps learners of English to acquire strategies in situations where by they are expected to make requests. Thus, this will enhance the development of communicative competence in the target language.

Finally, it adds to the literature already existence in specifically the area of cross-cultural pragmatics, i.e. the investigation of Iraqis' pragmatic ability when perceiving and producing the speech act of requesting. There is no single empirical study that has looked at the specific speech act of requesting by Iraqis in English. Hence, this study fills an existing gap in pragmatic research and lays a foundation for more studies that focus on Iraqis' speech act production, comprehension, and development.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

There are some certain limitations in the present study which should be taken into account before drawing generalizations from its results. It focuses on Iraqi post-graduate students undertaking their studies at USM. The sample includes only Iraqi native speakers of Arabic. Age and sex factors are not included in the presentation or explanation of requesting behaviour in this study. Therefore, results obtained from the present study should not be generalised to all Iraqi postgraduates at USM since the sample includes only male Iraqi postgraduates. The sample is also limited to only those who are doing their studies in subjects other than languages or linguistics.

Another limitation is the English language proficiency. The relationship between students' L2 proficiency and their preferences in response styles will not be explored here. There is a body of research that describes how students with a higher level of L2 proficiency demonstrate better pragmatic abilities in L2 (Koike, 1996; Takahashi, 1996), while other studies document that higher proficiency does not ensure better pragmatic knowledge (Maeshiba et al., 1996). As the results of these previous studies suggest, the development of pragmatic knowledge in an L2 involves much more than those language abilities assessed by grammar and vocabulary tests.

In essence, the goal of the present study is to provide some insight into the pragmatics of the speech act of request by Iraqi postgraduates studying at USM. However, the analysis of L1 sociocultural norms in realizing speech acts in L2 (i.e., pragmatic transfer) will not be presented as it is beyond the scope of this study.

Further, the investigation of request or directness in realising speech acts has been closely tied to politeness. This study is limited to Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) model of directness based on degrees of illocutionary transparency. Blum-Kulka's

model emphasizes the idea that relationships between politeness and indirectness of a request do not always hold.

1.8 Operational Definitions of Terms

In this section, the researcher will review the basic concepts that will be used in this study. The following terms are operationally defined to achieve the purposes of the study:

Pragmatic competence is the component of communicative language ability which is related to the use of language and knowledge of its appropriateness to the context in which it is used. Pragmatic competence is "the ability to act and interact by means of language" (Kasper & Röver, 2005, p. 317). A pragmatic competence is operationally going to be defined as the speaker's knowledge of the rules of appropriateness, which dictate the manner in which the speaker perceives and produces communicative action.

Speech act is a theoretical concept introduced by philosophers of language (e.g., Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979) that sees language use as the performance of a specific action or as doing something through words, such as requesting, declining, warning, promising and so forth. The present study adopts the definition of speech acts as "the minimal unit of speech that has rules in terms of where and when they may occur and of what their specific features, such as complaining, apologizing, advising, and so on" (Hymes, 1972).

Request has 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.1252) define requests as directives by which "S

(Speaker) wants H (Hearer) to do p (p is at a cost to H)". Following Trosborg (1995) a request is operationally going to be defined as an illocutionary act whereby a requester conveys to requestee that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act, which is for the benefit of the speaker.

Strategies are linguistic forms or utterances chosen by a language user to express a speech act in a given situation. For example, a request strategy is the obligatory choice of the level of directness by which the request is realised (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). The term strategy is operationally going to be defined as the means by which a particular speech act of requesting is accomplished in terms of the primary content of an utterance.

Perception denotes 'the sociological interface of pragmatics', referring to the social perceptions underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action (Leech, 1983, p.10). The term perception is operationally defined in the present study as the judgment and comprehension of the appropriateness of the utterance in the context of the situation. It also includes the judgment and comprehension of factors such as power, distance, imposition, obligation and right that govern the realisation of appropriate linguistic forms which the speech act of requesting is accomplished.

Production is operationally defined as the choice of speech acts, use of strategies, the content of the proposition encoded in the acts, and difference in linguistic forms. In other words, it refers to the formulation of the content of the speech act of request that includes the realisation of requests' strategies, sub-strategies, modifications as well as the perspective

Sociopragmatics is 'the sociological interface of pragmatics', referring to the social perceptions underlying the participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action (Leech, 1983, p.10). Speech communities differ in their assessment of speaker's and hearer's social distance and social power, their rights and obligations, and the degree of imposition involved in particular communicative acts (Takahashi & Beebe, 1993; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Olshtain,1989).

Pragmalinguistics refers to "the more linguistic end of pragmatics" (Leech, 1983, p.11); that is, the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational or interpersonal meanings. Such resources include pragmatic strategies like directness and indirectness, routines, and a large range of linguistic forms which can intensify or soften communicative acts (Leech, 1983; Thomas,1983).

1.9 Summary

Chapter One introduced the topic and illustrated the aim of the study which is to investigate both the perception and the production of requests by Iraqi postgraduates. It contextualized the problem, and presented the research questions. It also addressed the limitations and significance of the study. Finally, the chapter ended with a review of some basic concepts that would be used in this study.

<center>**CHAPTER TWO**</center>

<center>**LITERATURE REVIEW**</center>

2.0 Introduction

The present study is situated within the area of linguistic research known as pragmatics that examines language as it is actually used by speakers to carry out their objectives, within their limitations and abilities. Pragmatics, as defined by Leech (1983, p.6), is "the study of meaning in relation to speech situations". Pragmatics analyses verbal acts that occur in actual situations. These verbal acts generate "utterances" that are not the acts themselves, but are merely products of the verbal acts. Linguistic units, such as sentences and questions, are "grammatical entities," in contrast to utterances that can be "instances" of these items in specific contexts. Therefore, pragmatics examines the meaning of these utterances, which can be of varying lengths (from one word (*No!*), to one sentence or many sentences) "relative to a speaker or user of the language". It is known that there are many kinds of acts associated with the speaker's utterances in a typical speech situation (Searle 1972, p.136). Searle called production of linguistic communication 'a speech act' (1972, p.137).

The study of speech acts has been a central concern of pragmatics, especially in cross-cultural pragmatics (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p.2). The present study examines the meaning of utterances that carry out the speech act of request in different situations. Pragmatics, thus, "is the study of acting by means of language, of doing things with words" (e.g., persuading, refusing, apologising) (Kasper, 1989, p.39).