



# The Role of Requestee's Gender in the Choice of Request Strategies by Female Speakers of Saudi Colloquial Arabic

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## Abstract

This study examined the impact of requestee's gender on the choice of request strategies by female speakers of Saudi Colloquial Arabic. A Discourse Completion Test consisting of twelve situations was used to collect data from two groups of participants. The first group consisted of 40 Saudi females directing their requests to female requestees. The second group consisted of 40 Saudi females directing their requests to male requestees. The collected data from the two groups were compared and analyzed using Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's (1989) coding scheme of request head act strategies. Findings suggest that Saudi females varied their request strategies based on the gender of requestee. While they tended to use more direct request strategies with females, they tended to use more indirect request strategies with males. A remarkable finding revealed by this study relates to situations in which the rate of imposition is high. While Saudi females tended to use more indirect request strategies with females in these situations, most of them refused to make a request to males regardless of the power and social distance between interlocutors. This study's findings, however, have to be understood in terms of the specific nature of the cultural norms of Saudi society. Since Saudi Arabia is a gender-segregated society, it is expected that females would keep distance from males who are not first-degree relatives. This would normally entail the use of higher level of indirectness and avoidance of requesting weighty personal favors.

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*Keywords:* culture; directness; gender; indirectness; request strategies; Saudi colloquial Arabic

## Introduction

Since the development of speech act theory, various speech acts including request, apology, invitation, suggestion, etc. have been the focus of numerous studies in the field of pragmatics. Most of these studies were conducted from cross-cultural perspective in which various speech acts' realizations in different languages were compared and contrasted. The speech act of request in the Saudi Colloquial Arabic has been examined in a number of studies from cross cultural perspective as well (e.g., Alshammari (2015); Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012)). Saudi Colloquial Arabic, however, has been far less investigated from the perspective of variational pragmatics, which focuses on how language use varies within a single language (Schneider & Barron, 2008). The current study thus intends to examine the potential effect of the gender of requestee on the choice of request strategies by female speakers of Saudi Colloquial Arabic.

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Traditionally, the speech act of requesting has been considered as a face-threatening act due to its imposition nature on the requestee's negative face (Brown, Levinson, Levinson, & Gumperz, 1987). More specifically, requests are face threatening acts because "the speaker impinges on the hearer's claims to freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). In order to mitigate the potential threat on a requestee's face, speakers vary their requests between direct and indirect strategies based on three factors: the social distance between interlocutors, the relative power between them, and the degree of imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

In spite of the fact that the speech act of request has received greater attention by many researchers in different languages and cultures, "little is known about the culture-specificity of Saudi Arabic requests" (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). Moreover, the gender of requestee in general was rarely taken into consideration when examining the speech act of request in previous studies. The present study thus aims at providing insights into the effect of the requestee's gender on linguistic choices by female speakers of Saudi Colloquial Arabic. Saudi Arabia represents an interesting context for exploring the impact of gender on the use of language. This is due to the fact that Saudi Arabia is a gender-segregated society. This social practice has limited contact and interactions between men and women who are not first-degree relatives. This was further reinforced by the limited profession options available for Saudi women. Recently, however, Saudi government has introduced many social changes especially regarding empowering women. For instance, women have been granted the right to drive cars. Also, Saudi women now can enter into many professions that they were not allowed to do in the past. These changes would necessarily entail contact and interactions between the two sexes. Based on this, the current study focused on exploring the possible effect of the addressee's gender on linguistic choices by Saudi females regarding the speech act of request.

The main objective of this study was to examine the extent to which the gender of the requestee affects the choice of request strategies by female speakers of Saudi Colloquial Arabic. Thus, this study was guided by the two following research questions:

1. What are the request strategies used by Saudi females when interacting with females?
2. What are the request strategies used by Saudi females when interacting with males?

This study is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, findings would contribute to the growing body of research on language and gender by studying language use in the most sex-segregated society in the world. Moreover, what makes this contribution even more significant is the fact that gender of addressee was rarely accounted for in previous pragmatic studies on other languages. Secondly, it is hoped that findings of this study would create an awareness among learners of Saudi Colloquial Arabic from other cultures regarding cultural differences in relation to gender which might cause misunderstanding or even failure of communication.

## Literature Review

Requesting is one of the most studied speech acts in pragmatics, probably due to its highly frequent use in daily interactions, and its potentially negative effect on requestee's negative face. The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) by Shoshana et al. (1989) represents the seminal work in this area in which similarities and differences in the realization of the speech act of request were examined in eight languages. Following this research, a vast body of studies was conducted by many researchers around the globe. Most of these studies focused on similarities/differences between different languages regarding the realization of this type of speech act. It is noteworthy to mention that the factor of gender is rarely accounted for in previous studies especially the gender of the requestee. Saudi Colloquial Arabic is no exception in this regard. Existing literature on request in Saudi Colloquial Arabic lacks studies investigating the possible impact of the gender of requestee on speaker's pragmatic choices.

In general, language and gender are seen as interrelated variables. Research in sociolinguistics suggest that there are differences between men and women in the ways they use language (Coates, 2015; Mills, 2014; Simon, 2021). Holmes (1995), however, regarded these differences as a result of men's and women's perception of language in which "[women] use language to establish, nurture and develop the personal relationships. Men tend to see language more as a tool for obtaining and conveying information" (p. 2). A prominent aspect that was investigated in this regard is the relationship between gender and linguistic politeness. Many researchers have argued that women's speech is politer than men's speech especially when using speech acts that involve face-related issues such as requests and apologies (e.g., Holmes (1995); Lakoff (1975); Tannen (1990)). This argument is based on the ground that women use more indirect strategies than men, and they tend to use more softening devices (Furkatovna, Jurabekovna, & Mamurjonovna, 2021; Holmes, 1995; Scollon & Scollon, 2001). In fact, the positive correlation between indirectness and politeness has been emphasized since early research on politeness regardless of the factor of gender (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Brown et al., 1987; Leech, 1983; Searle, 1975).

The claim that women are politer than men since they use more indirect requests, however, has been challenged by a number of studies. Salazar and Orts (2018), for instance, examined 147 naturally occurring requests made by native speakers of English in a tourist information center focusing on the variable of gender. The study revealed that females used more direct questions in comparison to males who used more indirect questions. Salazar and Orts (2018) suggested that direct requests in this type of service encounter do not really imply impoliteness or threats to the requestee's face due to the task-oriented nature of this context. It is worth mentioning here that although Salazar and Orts' (2018) study accounted for the gender of requester, it did not pay attention to the gender of the requestee.

Márquez Reiter (2000) compared and contrasted requests in British English and Uruguayan Spanish. An open role-play was used to elicit data from 12 situations considering various variables such as social distance, power and gender. Results of Márquez-Reiter's (2000) study showed that speakers of British English and Uruguayan Spanish differ in their choices of request strategies. Regarding gender and directness level of requests, the study's findings were in contrast to the general claim that females are more indirect than males. Based on findings of Márquez-Reiter's (2000) study, male speakers of British English were found to prefer using indirect request strategies more than their female counterparts. Furthermore, female speakers of Uruguayan Spanish were found to use higher level of directness of request than female speakers of British English in same gender situations.

Regarding studies on the speech act of request in Saudi Arabic, it has been found that most studies were conducted from cross-cultural perspective. For instance, Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012) conducted a comparative study between Saudi Arabic and American English. The study focused on examining the speech act of request in the two languages in terms of (in)directness and politeness. Discourse Completion Task was used to elicit data from 30 male and female participants from each language group. The study revealed that directness was the most preferred request strategy by speakers of Saudi Arabic whereas conventional indirectness was the most preferred one by speakers of American English. Although the sample of Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily's (2012) study consisted of both male and female participants, the factor of gender was not taken into consideration. Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily's (2012) emphasized that the relationship between directness and politeness is culturally relative.

Similarly, Alshammari (2015) examined the notion of (in)directness in the speech act of request in Saudi Colloquial Arabic and American English. Although Alshammari's (2015) study considered social distance and power relation between interlocutors in the examination of the speech act of request in the two languages, the gender factor was not accounted for. The study sample consisted only of male participants from both languages. The study revealed that direct request strategies were the most used strategies in different situations by the Saudi sample. On the contrary, speakers of American English used more conventional indirect request strategies.

In addition to the abovementioned cross-cultural studies, Almathkuri (2021) conducted an intralingual study on the speech act of request in Saudi Colloquial Arabic. Almathkuri (2021) examined the impact of power and distance on the choice of request strategies by native speakers of Saudi Colloquial Arabic. Discourse Completion Task was used to gather data from 26 males and 8 females. It has been found that directness was the most preferred strategy by the participants in most situations except in situations where requestee has some sort of power over requester in which conventionally indirect strategies were mostly used. Also, it was found that non-conventionally indirect strategies were the least preferred strategies. Almathkuri (2021) concluded that the use of directness by Saudi speakers was not considered impolite. Although this study included both male and female participants, the factor of gender of either requester or requestee was not taken into consideration in the analysis.

## Methodology

### *Data and Participants*

This study applied a mixed-methods research design by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Data for this study were collected from 80 Saudi female voluntary participants. They were employees at various places such as governmental offices, companies, banks and stores in Jeddah city, Saudi Arabia. Their ages ranged from twenty to thirty years old and they were chosen randomly. The reason for choosing this particular group of participants was to have realistic responses to the situations in the written questionnaire (this will be introduced in the next section). As was explained earlier Saudi Arabia is a gender-segregated society, but recently the Saudi government enabled women to work in mixed-gender work places. This recent change gave Saudi women the opportunity to interact with the opposite sex with various degrees of power and social distance between the two sexes.

### Data Collection Method and Procedures

Data were collected using Discourse Completion Test. This test was originally developed by Blum-Kulka (1980) and since then it has been widely used to gather data on the realization of various speech acts both within and cross languages. In this test, participants are given a number of situations and asked to write what they think they would say if they found themselves in these situations in real life (Ogiermann, 2018). The written discourse completion test used in this study was adapted from a test that was originally developed by Márquez Reiter (2000). The test comprised twelve written context-enriched situations. These situations reflected different combinations of social variables of power, social distance and rate of imposition. The reason for including all these three variables was to provide richer description of the issue under investigation. In order to have realistic responses, necessary modifications were made to the situations considering the unique nature of the Saudi culture. For example, in Saudi culture it would not be appropriate for an individual to have a friend from the opposite sex. Based on this, social distance between unrelated males and females in this study is used to refer to degree of familiarity or length of acquaintance between them rather than intimacy and closeness. Summary of the twelve situations in the DCT of the present study and combination of the social variables in all situations are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** The combination of three social variables (power, social distance and degree of imposition) in the twelve situations.

	Situation	Social power	Social distance	Degree of imposition
1.	Borrow a phone charger	S<H	+SD	Low
2.	Time-off errands	S<H	-SD	Low
3.	Mind telephone	S>H	+SD	Low
4.	Borrow a stapler	S=H	-SD	Low
5.	Ask for changing the tire	S=H	+SD	High
6.	Borrow car	S<H	-SD	High
7.	Cancel holiday	S>H	-SD	High
8.	Type letter	S>H	-SD	Low
9.	Pick up a parcel	S=H	-SD	High
10.	Swap seats	S=H	+SD	Low
11.	Ask for loans	S<H	+SD	High
12.	Borrow computer	S>H	+SD	High

S= speaker, H= hearer, SD= social distance

Since this study is concerned with examining the effect of requestee's gender on the choice of request strategies, there are two versions of the test; version A and version B. The two versions are identical in terms of the situations, however, in one version the gender of the requestee is male and in the other is female. Version A was distributed to 40 Saudi females directing their requests to male requestees (See Appendix A). Version B was distributed to a different group of 40 Saudi females directing their requests to female requestees (See Appendix B). The reason for having two versions of the test distributed to different participants was to avoid any possibility that participants might feel to give different responses if they were asked in the same questionnaire about their request strategies when interacting with male and female requestees.

The tests were translated into Arabic language and they included a short section at the beginning to obtain background information on the participants. The tests were distributed personally by the researcher who visited various commercial centers, stores, banks and governmental offices where women and men work in the same place. Women were approached by the researcher and explained to them the nature of the project. If they agreed to take part of the study, the researcher gave them the questionnaire and waited for them till they had finished filling it.

### Data Coding and Analysis

Requesting strategies employed by participants in this study were coded and analyzed using Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's (1989) coding scheme of request head act strategies. According to this coding scheme, speakers usually make requests using a variety of directness levels. Blum-Kulka et al. classified request strategies into three basic levels: direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect. Each level included a number of sub-strategies of request. A summary of these request strategies is as follows:

1. *The direct level:* including mood derivables, performatives, hedged performatives, obligation statements, and want statements.
2. *The conventionally indirect level:* including suggestory formulas and references to query preparatory.
3. *The non-conventionally indirect level:* including strong and mild hints.

In order to analyze the collected data, frequency and percentage of request strategies used to make requests in each of the two data sets (F→F) and (F→M) were calculated. This was followed by comparing and contrasting the results of the analysis of the two data sets to reveal similarities and differences between them.

## Results

Results of this study are based on the analysis of request head act strategies in terms of their directness levels. The data corpus of this study consisted of two data sets. The first data set included requests directed by Saudi female speakers to female requestees (F→F), and the second data set included requests directed by Saudi female speakers to male requestees (F→M).

Request strategies employed by participants of both groups (F→F) and (F→M) were classified into three categories based on their levels of directness: Direct (D), Conventionally Indirect (CI), Non-Conventionally Indirect Strategies (N-CI). This classification is based on Blum-Kulka et al's. (1989) coding scheme of request head act strategies that was explained earlier. However, a fourth category (None) was added for responses in which participants opted not to make a request. During the examination of data, it was found that a considerable number of participants in certain situations chose not to make a request. In fact, it is not just that they left those situations in the questionnaire without responses, they clearly stated that they would not make a request. As a result, and instead of just discarding these responses, the researcher decided to include them in the analysis since they might have a valuable significance.

Table 2 presents results of the distribution of used request strategies by participants of the (F→F) and (F→M) groups. A detailed illustration of the distribution of percentages and frequencies of the used request strategies across the twelve situations in the two groups is provided in Appendix C.

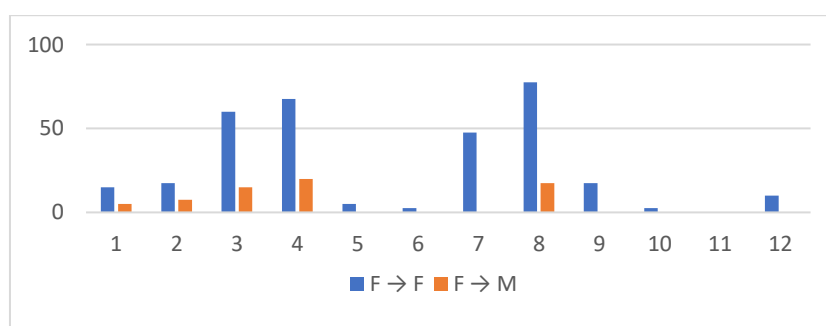
**Table 2.** Distribution of request head act strategies in the F→F and F→M groups

Strategy type	F→F Group		F→M Group	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
D	129	26.87%	26	5.41%
CI	348	72.5%	315	65.62%
N-CI	3	0.625%	5	1.041%
None	0	0%	134	27.91%
Total	480	100%	480	100%

As Table 2 shows, although the two groups were similar in terms of using a number of request strategies, they varied greatly in others. More specifically, indirect request was the most frequently used strategy by both groups; F→F group (72.5%) and F→M group (65.62%). Moreover, the two groups showed a similar pattern in their preference for the use of non-conventionally indirect request which was the least preferred strategy by both groups; F→F group (0.625%) and F→M group (1.041%). On the other hand, the two groups' preference for direct strategy varied greatly. While this strategy was used 129 times in F→F group (26.87%), it was only used 26 times in F→M group (5.41%). Regarding the category of None, there was a huge difference between the two groups. While participants in F→M group stated that they would not make a request 134 times (27.91%), participants in F→F group never resorted to this option (0%).

- Use of Direct Strategy

Figure 1 compares the use of direct request strategy across the twelve situations in F→F and F→M groups. It is clear that there are differences in the use of direct request strategy in the two groups.



**Figure 1.** Use of direct request strategy across 12 situations in F→F and F→M groups

As shown graphically in Figure 1, findings reveal that there are differences between F→F and F→M groups in terms of using direct strategy. While F→F group used high percentages of this strategy in a number of situations, F→M group rarely used it. The highest percentages of using direct strategy by F→F group were in S 8 (type letter) scoring 77.5%, in S 4 (borrow a stapler) scoring 67.5%, in S 3 (mind telephone) scoring 60%, and in S 7 (cancel holiday) scoring 47.5%. On the other hand, the highest percentages of using direct strategy by F→M group were in S 4 (borrow a stapler) scoring 20%, in S 8 (type letter) scoring 17.5%, and in S 3 (mind telephone) scoring 15%.

It is therefore evident that participants in F→F group had stronger preference for direct request strategy than their counterparts in F→M group. The preference for direct strategy by F→F group was evidently affected by variables of power, social distance and rate of imposition. Specifically, direct request was mostly employed by F→F group in situations where the speaker was exerting power over the requestee or when there was no power distance between them. In situations 3, 7, and 8, the speaker was in a higher position than the addressee (+Power) and in situation 4 both interlocutors were at an equal power position (=Power). The relationship between interlocutors in these situations was close (- Distance) except in situation 3 in which interlocutors did not know each other for a long time (+Distance). Regarding rate of imposition, it is low in these situations except in situation 7.

It can be concluded that the more power the speaker in F→F group had over the addressee, the less social distance between interlocutors and the lower the rate of imposition, the more likely it was for speakers to make a direct request. However, this trend was different from F→M group in which participants rarely opted to employ this strategy.

Examples of direct request included the followings:

1. اعطيني الدباسة الله يخليك  
*Ateni al'dabasah Allah yiikhaleek*  
Give me the stapler, May Allah keep you
2. ابغاك تطبع لي هذا الخطاب من فضلك  
*Abghak tatba li hatha alkhetab min fadhak*  
I want you to type this letter please

- *Use of Conventionally Indirect Strategy*

Figure 2 compares the use of conventionally indirect strategy across the 12 situations in F→F and F→M groups. In spite of the fact that conventionally indirect strategy was the most employed strategy by both groups in comparison to other strategies, findings showed that the two groups varied in their preference for using this strategy across the 12 situations.

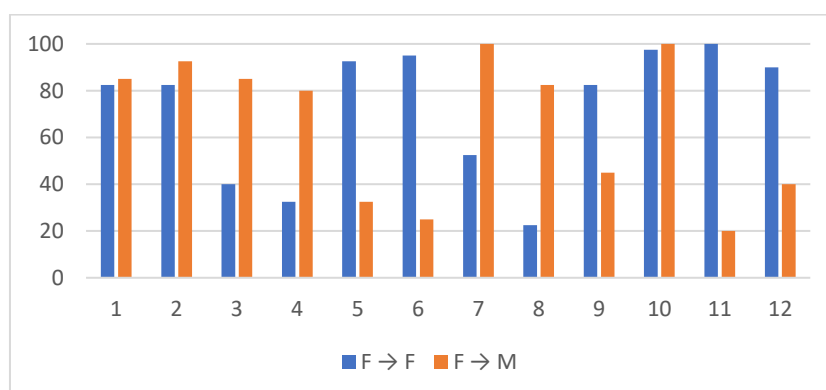


Figure 2. Use of conventionally indirect strategy across 12 situations in the F→F and F→M groups

As illustrated graphically in Figure 2, a conventionally indirect strategy was employed with varying percentages across the 12 situations by participants in the F→F and F→M groups. As a result, three patterns were observed. The first pattern involved situations where both groups used similar percentages of conventionally indirect strategy. The second pattern involved situations where F→M group used more percentages of conventionally indirect strategy than F→F group. The third pattern involved situations where F→F group used more percentages of conventionally indirect strategy than F→M group.

The first pattern was characterized by an agreement in the use of conventionally indirect strategy between participants in the F→F and F→M groups with almost similar percentages in situations 1 (borrow a phone charger), 2 (time-off errands), and 10 (swap seats). In situation 1, 82.5% of F→F group and 85% of F→M group preferred to use conventionally indirect strategy. Regarding situation 2, 82.5% of F→F group and 92.5% of F→M group preferred to use conventionally indirect strategy. In situation 10, 97.5% of F→F group and 100% of F→M group preferred to use conventionally indirect strategy. In situations 1 and 2, the speaker was in a lower position than the addressee, while in situation 10, both interlocutors had the same power position. Moreover, in situations 1 and 10, the interlocutors were socially distant (+Distance) while in situation 2 they were socially close (-Distance). The rate of imposition in all of these situations is low. Based on this, it can be argued that the less power speakers have, the more they are inclined to use conventionally indirect strategy regardless of the degree of social distance between interlocutors as long as the rate of imposition is low. This also applies to situations where power relation between interlocutors is equal, the degree of social distance is high, and the rate of imposition is low.

The second pattern that was observed in the analysis of the category of conventionally indirect strategy is characterized by a difference between F→M and F→F groups in which participants in the former group used more percentages of this strategy than the latter group. Situations that form this pattern are 3 (mind telephone), 4 (borrow a stabler), 7 (cancel holiday), and 8 (type letter). In S 3, 85% of participants in F→M group used conventionally indirect strategy, while only 40% of participants from the other group used it. In S 4, 80% of participants in F→M group used conventionally indirect strategy, while only 32.5% of participants from the other group used it. Regarding S 7, all participants in F→M group (100%) used conventionally indirect strategy, while 52.5% of participants from the other group used it. Finally, in S 8, 82.5% of participants in F→M group used conventionally indirect strategy, while only 22.5% of participants from the other group used it.

Clearly then the two groups showed discrepancy in their preference for using conventionally indirect strategy in the previously four mentioned situations. When the gender of requestee is male, it is more likely for Saudi female speakers to use conventionally indirect strategy in these situations. In these situations, the speaker is exerting power over the requestee except in S 4 in which they are equal, the ranking of imposition is low except in S 7, and interlocutors are socially close except in S 3. As a result, it can be concluded that the less power the requestee in F→M group has, the less social distance between interlocutors, and the lower the rate of imposition is, the more likely it is for speakers to make a conventionally indirect request.

The third pattern that was observed in the analysis of the category of conventionally indirect strategy is characterized by a difference between F→F and F→M groups in which participants in the former group used more percentages of this strategy than the latter group. Situations that form this pattern are 5 (ask for changing the tire), 6 (borrow car), 9 (pick up a parcel), 11 (ask for loans), and 12 (borrow computer). In situation 5, 92.5% of participants in F→F group used conventionally indirect strategy while only 32.5% of participants in the F→M group used it. In situation 6, 95% of participants in F→F group used conventionally indirect strategy while only 25% of participants in the F→M group used it. In situation 9, 82.5% of participants in F→F group used conventionally indirect strategy while 45% of participants in the F→M group used it. In situation 11, all participants in F→F group (100%) used conventionally indirect strategy while only 20% of participants in the F→M group used it. Finally, in situation 12, 90% of participants in F→F group used conventionally indirect strategy while 40% of participants in the F→M group used it.

The common factor between these five situations was the ranking of imposition which was high. For instance, in situation 5, a female was asking a stranger to help change her flat car tire and in situation 6 a female employee was asking her manager to borrow his/her car. Accordingly, the higher the rate of imposition is, the more likely for the female speaker to make a request using conventionally indirect strategy when interacting with females regardless of the power and social distance between them. However, when participants were asked how they would make a request to male requestees in these five situations, they mostly opted not to make a request.

Examples of conventionally indirect request included the followings:

1. ممكن تعطيني شاحن جوالك  
*mumkin tateeni shahin jawalik*  
Can you give me your phone charger?
2. ممكن ترددي على أي مكالمه تجي على بال ما ارجع  
*mumkin tarodi ala ai mukalamah tiji al bal ma arja*  
Can you answer any incoming call till I get back?

- Use of Non-Conventional Indirect Strategy

Figure 3 compares the use of non-conventional indirect strategy across the twelve situations in F→F and F→M groups. Non-conventional indirect request is the least preferred strategy by both F→F and F→M groups. Participants in F→F group used this strategy only three times (0.625%) and participants from F→M group used it five times (1.041%) across the twelve situations.

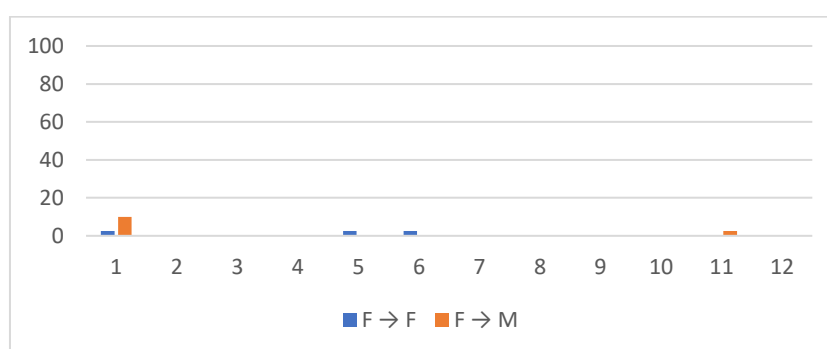


Figure 3. Use of non-conventional indirect strategy across 12 situations in the F→F and F→M groups

Clearly then there is an agreement between F→F and F→M groups on their least preference for non-conventional indirect strategy. Also, even in the few situations where non-conventional indirect strategy was used, no real difference between the two groups was observed.

Examples of conventionally indirect request include the followings:

1. احتاج اغير كفر السيارة بس ما اقدر لوحدي  
*Ahtaj agheer kafar alsayarah bas ma agdar luwahdi*  
I need to change the car's tire, but I cannot do it alone
2. عندي موعد مهم في عيادة الاسنان بعد شوي بس سيارتي خربت  
*endi mawid fi eyadat alasnana bad shawi bas syaariti khirbit*  
I have an important appointment at the dentist very soon, but my car is broken.

- *Use of Non-Strategy*

Figure 4 compares the use of non-strategy across the twelve situations in F→F and F→M groups. This category refers to cases where participants opted not to make a request.

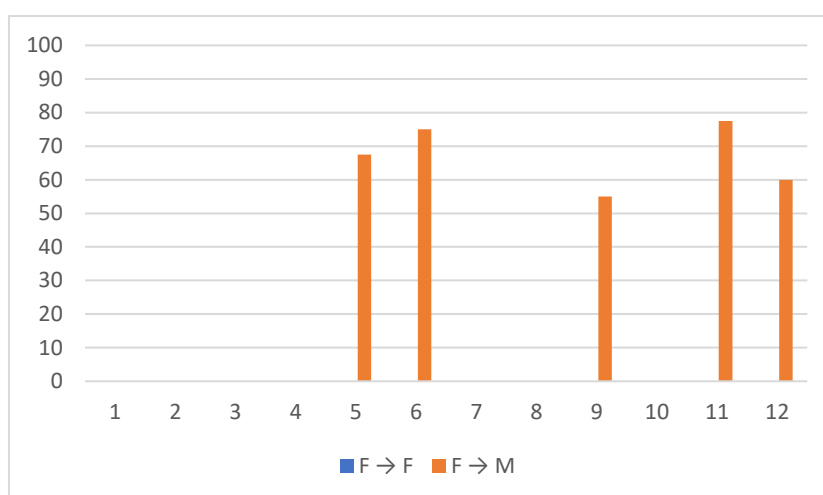


Figure 4. Use of non-strategy across the 12 situations in the F→F and F→M groups

As shown graphically in Figure 4, while a considerable number of participants in the F→M group opted not to make a request in five situations, participants in the F→F group never resorted to this option. The percentages of choosing not to make a request by participants in the F→M group are 67.5% in S 5 (asking for changing the tire), 75% in S 6 (borrow car), 55% in S 9 (pick up a parcel), 77.5% in S 11 (ask for loans), and 60% in S 12 (borrow computer).

The common factor among these five situations is the rate of imposition which is high in all of them. Accordingly, the higher the rate of imposition is, the more likely participants in F→M group choose not to make a request. On the other hand, in the same situations, participants in F→F group showed high preference for using conventionally indirect request strategy as explained earlier.

## Discussion

The analysis of request strategies used by Saudi female speakers in same and cross gender interactions showed a number of similarities and differences. The differences, however, outscored the similarities. The factors of power, social distance and rate of imposition were found to play a major role in determining these similarities and differences. Concerning the similarities, Saudi female speakers seem to have the least preference for non-conventionally indirect request strategy in both same and cross gender interactions. In fact, this strategy is hardly used by Saudi female speakers when making a request either to male or female requestees. Accordingly, the gender of requestee does not really seem to have an impact when it comes to choosing non-conventionally indirect request strategy by Saudi female speakers.

The other similarity relates to the use of conventionally indirect strategy. This request strategy was the most preferred strategy by Saudi female speakers in both same and cross gender interactions. This finding, however, is not consistent with previous studies' results regarding the realization of the speech act of request in Saudi Colloquial Arabic. More specifically, Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012), Alshammari (2015) and Almathkuri (2021) concluded that direct request was the most preferred strategy by native speakers of Saudi Colloquial Arabic. However, knowing that these studies did not account for the variable of gender either of requester or requestee, then such contrasting conclusions would be understandable.



Although conventionally indirect request was in general the most frequently used strategy by both (F→F) and (F→M) groups in comparison to other strategies, distribution of frequencies and percentages of using this strategy across the twelve situations was not consistent. As a result, three different patterns were identified. The first pattern consisted of situations in which both (F→F) and (F→M) groups had similar preference of using conventionally indirect request. The second pattern consisted of situations in which (F→M) had greater preference for using conventionally indirect request than (F→F) group. The third pattern consisted of situations in which (F→F) had greater preference for using conventionally indirect request than (F→M) group.

Regarding the first pattern in which both (F→F) and (F→M) groups showed similar preference of using conventionally indirect request, the common factors between situations involved in this pattern are power and rate of imposition. As explained earlier, when the request is not weighty and the status of requestee is higher than requester or their status is equal, Saudi female speakers are more inclined to use conventionally indirect request strategy in both same and cross gender interactions regardless of the degree of familiarity between interlocutors. Accordingly, gender of requestee in these situations does not really seem to have an effect on the choice of request strategies by Saudi female speakers.

Regarding the second pattern in which (F→M) group showed greater preference for using conventionally indirect request than (F→F) group, requester in situations involved in this pattern was mostly in a higher position than requestee and the weight of request was not heavy as explained earlier. When the speaker exerts power over the requestee, they normally have the options to either request directly or indirectly without the fear of threatening requestee's face especially if the weight of request is not heavy (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). However, in this study, Saudi female speakers varied their request strategies based on the gender of requestee. When requesting male requestees, they preferred to use conventionally indirect strategies. On the other hand, when requesting female requestee in the same situations, female Saudi speakers preferred to use a direct request. An explanation for this contrasting preference relates to the specific nature of the cultural norms of Saudi society regarding gender. Knowing that Saudi Arabia is a gender-segregated society in which individuals from the other sex are expected to keep distance from each other unless they are first-degree relatives, using conventionally indirect request by Saudi females with males even they are in a higher position can be interpreted to achieve this distance.

This explanation is also supported by conclusions reached by previous studies on the speech act of request in Saudi Arabic (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). These studies stressed that directness was the dominant strategy among native speakers of Saudi Colloquial Arabic in comparison to other cultures. In contrast to other cultures in which directness might be seen as impolite, directness in the Saudi culture is seen as 'a way of expressing connectedness, closeness, camaraderie and affiliation' (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). It should be mentioned here that this interpersonal function of directness in Saudi Colloquial Arabic mostly applies to interactions with same gender involving Saudi male interlocutors. Similarly, it could be argued that using directness by Saudi female speakers in same gender interactions can be seen to achieve closeness as well whereas using indirectness with males can be seen to achieve distance.

Regarding the third pattern in which (F→F) showed greater preference for using conventionally indirect request than (F→M) group, the common factor between situations that formed this pattern was the rate of imposition. As earlier, the weight of imposition in all situations involved in this pattern was heavy. While Saudi female speakers in these situations preferred to use conventionally indirect request strategy with females regardless of the power and social distance between interlocutors, most of them opted not to make a request to males. In fact, in all situations that involved weighty request, most Saudi female speakers expressed their unwillingness to make a request to male requestees except in one situation which is S 7 (cancel holiday). In this situation, all participants (100%) used conventionally indirect request strategy. This exception might relate to the nature of this situation. Unlike S 5 (ask for changing the tire), 6 (borrow car), 9 (pick up a parcel), 11 (ask for loans), and 12 (borrow computer) which involve asking for personal favor, S 7 (cancel holiday) relates to work in which a female manager asked a male employee to cancel his holiday.

It is clear then that gender of requestee plays a key role in choosing request strategy by Saudi female speakers in situations where the degree of imposition is weighty. While Saudi female speakers preferred to use conventionally indirectness when requesting female requestees in situations involving weighty requests, most of them opted not to request male requestees. Considering the conservative nature of Saudi society in relation to sex segregation, it is understandable that Saudi females would hesitate to ask males who are not first-degree relatives for weighty personal favors. This would contradict the Saudi cultural norm of keeping distance between the two sexes since asking for heavy personal favors has a potential to contribute to narrowing this distance.

Based on the discussion presented above it is clear that gender of requestee plays a vital role on the choice of request strategies by female speakers of Saudi Colloquial Arabic. More specifically, they varied their preference for the level of request directness based on the gender of requestee along with socio-pragmatic variables of power, social distance, and rate of imposition. In fact, cultural norms regarding relationship between men and women were found to be an influential factor in determining linguistic choices by Saudi

female speakers. This conclusion challenges the universality of the claim that women are politer than men since they are more indirect. This claim, however, must be approached cautiously since the link between (in)directness and politeness is culturally relative especially if the gender of addressee is taken into consideration in a gender-segregated society like Saudi Arabia.

## Conclusion

This study examined the extent to which gender of requestee can have an impact on the choice of request strategies by female speakers of Saudi Colloquial Arabic. It mainly focused on exploring similarities/differences between Female→Female and Female→Male interactions regarding the realization of the speech act of request in Saudi colloquial Arabic. Findings of this study revealed a number of similarities and differences between the two groups. Along with the gender of requestee, the socio-pragmatic variables of power, social distance, and rate of imposition were found to be influential in determining these similarities and differences.

When the ranking of imposition is not heavy and the status of requestee is higher than requester or when there is no power distance between them, Saudi female speakers showed similar tendency regarding the use of conventionally indirect request strategy in both same and cross gender interactions. On the other hand, when the requester has power over the requestee, and the ranking of imposition is low, Saudi female speakers preferred to use conventionally indirect request with males and direct request with females. Finally, when the ranking of imposition is heavy, Saudi female speakers preferred to use conventionally indirect request with females regardless of the power and social distance between interlocutors whereas with males they preferred not to make a request.

In spite of the fact that this study has accounted for a number of socio-pragmatic variables, age and educational level of participants were not considered in the analysis and this might have limited the results of this study especially the age of requestees. Another limitation relates to requestees' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The present study did not consider whether requesting native speakers of Saudi Arabic differed from requesting non-natives. Since this study focused only on examining the speech act of requests in Female→Female and Female→Male interactions, further research examining this speech act in Male→Male and Male→Female interactions is expected to enrich this area. Finally, to have a full understanding of the impact of gender of requestee on request strategies, further research comparing results of this study to a co-educational society is recommended.

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## Appendix A

Questionnaire (A) directed to male requestees--English Version

### Instructions:

You will be asked to read brief situations; you will have to act as you would in an actual situation. Do not think too much and try to be as spontaneous as possible. This questionnaire will be used for research purposes only. Thank you for your cooperation.

Name: (optional):.....Age:.....

**Situation 1:** You are at work and your phone ran out of battery. You need to recharge it but you forgot your charger at home. The only person at work who has the same charger as yours is your manager whom you are not familiar with since you have been in that the job for a short time. What do you say to him?

**Situation 2:** You need to run few errands down town. You think that will take you an hour. You go to your manager's office at work whom you know for a long time and ask him to cover for you. What do you say to him?

**Situation 3:** You have been an employee of a company for some time now. One of your duties is to answer the telephone. You go to the desk of new trainee and ask him to answer the telephone while you pop out for a few minutes to get some things. What do you say to him?

**Situation 4:** You are at work and you need a stapler. Your colleague next to you (whom you know for a long time) has one. What do you say to him?

**Situation 5:** You are in the car park and found out that one of car tiers is flat. You saw a man that you do not know, and you want to ask him to help you change the tire for you. What do you say to him?

**Situation 6:** Your car has just broken down and you need to go to your appointment at the dentist and then come back to work. You go to your manager's office at work, whom you have been working with for a long time, and ask him to borrow his car. What do you say to him?

**Situation 7:** You have been put in charge of a very important project at work. Your colleague has already booked a ticket to go on a holiday. You realize you will be needing all members of the staff to finish the project on time and thus you ask him to stay. You ask him to come to your office to break the news. What do you say to him?

**Situation 8:** You have been put in charge of new project at work. You go to the desk of your colleague to ask him to type a few letters for you. What do you say to him?

**Situation 9:** You need to collect a parcel from a post office which is far away and you don't have a car. You want to ask your colleague at work that you know him for a long time to do that for you. What do you say to him?

**Situation 10:** You are on a bus with a child. There are plenty of seats on the bus but there are not any for two people together. You ask a passenger who is sitting on his own on a two-seater to change seats with you so that you can sit next to the child. What do you say to him?

**Situation 11:** You have received a lot of house bills which are due for payment. You have not got any money. You cannot ask your friends for money since you have got a reputation of never paying back. The company where you work will not give you a cash advance since the last time you asked for one they said that would be the last time. You desperately need to pay these bills otherwise you will not have any electricity, gas or telephone. You go to the office of the recently appointed manager and ask him for the money. What do you say to him?

**Situation 12:** You have been working for a company for some time now. One of the new trainees has brought his new brand laptop to work. You ask him to use it for a while. What do you say to him?

## Appendix B

Questionnaire (B) directed to female requestees--English Version

### Instructions:

You will be asked to read brief situations; you will have to act as you would in an actual situation. Do not think too much and try to be as spontaneous as possible. This questionnaire will be used for research purposes only. Thank you for your cooperation.

Name: (optional):.....Age:.....

**Situation 1:** You are at work and your phone ran out of battery. You need to recharge it but you forgot your charger at home. The only person at work who has the same charger as yours is your manager whom you are not familiar with since you have been in that the job for a brief time. What do you say to her?

**Situation 2:** You need to run few errands down town. You think that will take you an hour. You go to your manager's office at work whom you know for a long time and ask her to cover for you. What do you say to her?

**Situation 3:** You have been an employee of a company for some time now. One of your duties is to answer the telephone. You go to the desk of new trainee and ask her to answer the telephone while you pop out for a few minutes to get some things. What do you say to her?

**Situation 4:** You are at work and you need a stabler. Your colleague next to you (whom you know for a long time) has one. What do you say to her?

**Situation 5:** You are in the car park and found out that one of car tiers is flat. You saw a woman that you do not know, and you want to ask him to help you change the tire for you. What do you say to her?

**Situation 6:** Your car has just broken down and you need to go to your appointment at the dentist and then come back to work. You go to your manager's office at work, whom you have been working with for a long time, and ask her to borrow her car. What do you say to her?

**Situation 7:** You have been put in charge of a very important project at work. Your colleague has already booked a ticket to go on a holiday. You realize you will be needing all members of the staff to finish the project on time and thus you ask her to stay. You ask her to come to your office to break the news. What do you say to her?

**Situation 8:** You have been put in charge of new project at work. You go to the desk of your colleague to ask her to type a few letters for you. What do you say to her?

**Situation 9:** You need to collect a parcel from a post office which is far away and you don't have a car. You want to ask your colleague at work that you know her for a long time to do that for you. What do you say to her?

**Situation 10:** You are on a bus with a child. There are plenty of seats on the bus but there are not any for two people together. You ask a passenger who is sitting on his own on a two-seater to change seats with you so that you can sit next to the child. What do you say to her?

**Situation 11:** You have received a lot of house bills which are due for payment. You have not got any money. You cannot ask your friends for money since you have got a reputation of never paying back. The company where you work will not give you a cash advance since the last time you asked for one they said that would be the last time. You desperately need to pay these bills otherwise you will not have any electricity, gas or telephone. You go to the office of the recently appointed manager and ask her for the money. What do you say to her?

**Situation 12:** You have been working for a company for some time now. One of the new trainees has brought his new brand laptop to work. You ask her to use it for a while. What do you say to her?

**Appendix C**

Distribution of percentages and frequencies of the used request strategies across the twelve situations in the F→F and F→M groups.

Situation	Strategy type	F→F Group		F→M Group	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
S1 Borrow a phone charger	D				
	CI	6	15%	2	5%
	N-CI	33	82.5%	34	85%
		1	2.5%	4	10%
		(40)	(100%)	(40)	(100%)
S2 Time-off errands	D	7	17.5%	3	7.5%
	CI	33	82.5%	37	92.5%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
		(40)	(100%)	(40)	(100%)
S3 Mind telephone	D	24	60%	6	15%
	CI	16	40%	34	85%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
		(40)	(100%)	(40)	(100%)
S4 Borrow a stapler	D	27	67.5%	8	20%
	CI	13	32.5%	32	80%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
		(40)	(100%)	(40)	(100%)
S5 Ask for changing the tire	D	2	5%	0	0%
	CI	37	92.5%	13	32.5%
	N-CI	1	2.5%	0	0%
	None	0	0%	27	67.5%
		(40)	(100%)	(40)	(100%)
S6 Borrow car	D	1	2.5%	0	0%
	CI	38	95%	10	25%
	N-CI	1	2.5%	0	0%
	None	0	0%	30	75%
		(40)	(100%)	(40)	(100%)
S7 Cancel holiday	D	19	47.5%	0	0%
	CI	21	52.5%	40	100%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
		(40)	(100%)	(40)	(100%)
S8 Type letter	D	31	77.5%	7	17.5%
	CI	9	22.5%	33	82.5%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
		(40)	(100%)	(40)	(100%)
S9 Pick up a parcel	D	7	17.5%	0	0%
	CI	33	82.5%	18	45%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
	None	0	0%	22	55%
		(40)	(100%)	(40)	(100%)
S10 Swap seats	D	1	2.5%	0	0%
	CI	39	97.5%	40	100%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
		(40)	(100%)	(40)	(100%)
S11 Ask for loans	D	0	0%	0	0%
	CI	40	100%	8	20%
	N-CI	0	0%	1	2.5%
	None	0	0%	31	77.5%
		(40)	(100%)	(40)	(100%)
S12 Borrow computer	D	4	10%	0	0%
	CI	36	90%	16	40%
	N-CI	0	0%	0	0%
	None	0	0%	24	60%
		(40)	(100%)	(40)	(100%)