

## The Pragmatic Knowledge of Turkish EFL Students in Using Certain Request Strategies

### İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil Olarak (EFL) Öğrenen Türk Öğrencilerinin Belli İstek İzlemlerini Kullanmada Sahip Oldukları Edimsel Bilgi

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#### Abstract

This study investigates the pragmatic knowledge of Turkish EFL students in using certain request strategies. Data were collected through a type of DCT, open item-verbal response only production questionnaire, as categorized by Kasper (2000) from 40 undergraduate students, studying at the Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Education, Middle East Technical University, whose ages range from 18 to 20. The data collected from the questionnaires were statistically analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results showed that the EFL students in this study had the linguistic means in order to operate pragmatically in various contexts while requesting. However, their success in the use of the request strategies in situations requiring certain level of politeness was relatively not satisfactory. In the conclusion part, it is argued that the results can be closely related with learning contexts and textbook contents and some suggestions are put forward regarding the issue.

#### Özet

Bu çalışma, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak (EFL) öğrenen Türk öğrencilerinin belli istek izlemlerini kullanmada sahip oldukları edimsel bilgiyi incelemektedir. Veriler, Kasper (2000) tarafından açık uçlu-sözsözsel yanıt üretim anketi olarak sınıflandırılan metin tamamlama görevi (DCT) yöntemiyle, yaşları 18-20 arasında değişen, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi İngilizce Öğretmenliği Ana Bilim Dalında öğrenim görmekte olan 40 öğrenciden toplanmıştır. Toplanan veriler, tanımlayıcı istatistik kullanılarak çözümlenmiştir. Araştırma sonuçları, katılımcıların çeşitli durumlarda ricada bulunurken edimsel açıdan gerekli dil araçlarına sahip olduklarını göstermiştir. Bununla birlikte, belli bir seviyede incelik gerektiren bazı durumlarda, rica izlemlerini kullanmadaki başarılarının yeterli olmadığı gözlenmiştir. Tartışma bölümünde, elde edilen sonuçların, öğrenme ortamı ve ders kitabıyla ilişkili olabileceği görüşü ileri sürülmüştür ve bu konuda çeşitli öneriler dile getirilmiştir.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Among the many functions of language in a range of contexts, referential and affective functions (commonly accepted by almost everyone, though with different terminology) are seen to be pervasive and basic (Holmes, 1995). The referential function of language is to convey information, facts or content, whereas the affective function refers to the use of language to express feelings and reveal social relationships. Every utterance is to express both functions even though one may be principal. Since every utterance is usually situated in a social context, the resulting linguistic form is predictably influenced. Every utterance communicates social information about the relationship between the participants in the context in which it is articulated. The issue of politeness is concerned with this affective or social function of language. This perspective mainly addresses the social and linguistic interface of pragmatics. In addition, the acquisition and application of politeness has been a major theoretical issue since the 1970s (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Holmes). Various approaches and methodologies have been developed for the analysis of politeness mainly in Anglo-Saxon socio-cultural background (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper). However, the studies on interlanguage pragmatics demonstrated that even relatively advanced language learners are likely to make serious communicative mistakes, which leads to failure in expressing and understanding the intended politeness value of utterances (Kasper, 1990; Thomas, 1983).

The study concerns the description of the ways in which Turkish EFL students show their pragmatic competence in using the speech act of requesting. It will specifically focus on the degree of their success in terms of the level of directness in realizing these acts by gaining information about their pragmatic ability to express themselves in different contexts as to the best knowledge of the author there are very few studies. In brief, the research question addressed in this paper is:

What are the ways in which Turkish EFL students show their pragmatic competence in using convention of means while requesting?

## **II. RATIONALE FOR THE CURRENT STUDY**

Acquisition and learning of politeness strategies as part of learning L2 pragmatics has attracted a lot of attention in second language acquisition (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Brown & Levinson, 1987). For instance, according to Cohen and Olshtain (1993), it is expected that non-native speakers are likely to deviate from native speaker form of speech act realizations. They further state that because of the complexity and cognitive demand of speech act sets such as apologies and requests, they are considered to be of some interest in language learning. What further complicates the situation for language learners in selecting and using certain speech acts is that they are influenced by a set of social, cultural, situational, and personal factors. These factors are in fact quite important in the sense that they may simply shape the eventual linguistic output of L2 learners. For instance, Robinson (1992) found that his Japanese female ESL learners accepted requests rather than refusing them

because their cultural background taught young women in Japan to say yes, or at least not to say no. Similarly, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) argue that second language learners may not always be successful in communicating effectively and even make pragmatic mistakes despite a quite good proficiency level of grammar and lexical knowledge of the target language. They further claim that there is a need for more empirical studies to find out how language learners communicate pragmatically in a second language. Karatepe (1998) suggests that even advanced learners of English (including EFL teacher trainees and post-graduate students studying overseas) have considerable difficulty in adequately expressing themselves pragmatically (the use of some discourse markers and certain request strategies) in certain situations. Similarly, Otu (2000) reporting on the results of Doğancay-Aktuna and Kamışlı (1997) predicts that since Turkish learners of English prove not to be adequately successful in showing pragmatic competence, they have some problems in producing requests in particular, as they are one of the most demanding speech acts. Otu claims that there is scarcity in the number of studies dealing with the pragmatic competence of Turkish students. Therefore, together with Otu and based on the results of the other studies mentioned above, there is a need for further research on the pragmatic competence of Turkish EFL students in all aspects. This study can be seen as an attempt of contribution to fill in this ostensible gap. Further details about the study are provided the method section. Speech acts and politeness are the two terms, which merit some delineation here.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

While knowing which speech act to perform is crucial part of how speakers use language to communicate, the knowledge of how to identify that act is critical to the addressee's understanding. According to Austin (1975) and Searle, the two philosophers who developed the speech act theory, the basic belief of their theory is that language is used to perform actions; how meaning and action are related to language. Austin's series of lectures, compiled in 'How to Do Things with Words', is acknowledged as the first presentation of speech act theory. Austin initially notices that some utterances lack a truth-value, a necessary property of statements. He claims that such kind of statements do not 'describe' or 'report' anything. Austin calls these *performatives* and distinguishes them from *constatives*, declarative statements whose truth or falsity can be judged. However, Austin himself abolished this differentiation. In his book 'Speech Acts', Searle (1975) builds upon Austin's work to propose a systematic framework where he incorporates speech acts into a linguistic theory. Searle also proposes five classes of speech acts: representatives (e.g. asserting), directives (e.g. requesting), commissives (e.g. promising), expressives (e.g. thanking) and declarations (e.g. appointing). Searle also emphasizes that an utterance can do more than one thing at a time. Some utterances have multiple functions because one act is being performed by way of another; these are called 'indirect speech acts'. An indirect speech act is defined as an utterance in which one illocutionary act (the main one) is performed by way of the performance of another act (a literal act). It is commonly accepted that interactants

in a certain linguistic context are able to interpret indirect speech acts by relying on their knowledge of speech acts, along with general principles of cooperative principles (Grice, 1975) in conversations, mutually shared information, and a general ability to draw inferences. Searle emphasizes that directives in general and requests in specific in the area of indirect speech acts are useful to study because everyday conversations normally require indirect means of performing certain acts due to politeness concerns. Searle even suggests that politeness in directives is the major incentive for indirectness. However, indirect speech acts create a problem of an inability on the part of the hearer as well as language learners in terms of properly identifying and understanding them. According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), speech acts are one of the most compelling notions in the study of language use. Their application leads to important social implications (Ervin-Tripp, 1976) and seemingly ruled by the universal principles of cooperation and politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983). They have the connection between speech acts and politeness that are relevant to the present study.

The term politeness describes behavior that is somewhat formal and distancing where the intention is not to intrude or impose (Holmes, 1995). Goffman (1967), and Brown and Levinson, who developed their concept of positive and negative face from Goffman's concept of face, describe politeness as showing 'concern' or 'awareness' for people's 'face', which is a technical term, the self-image of a person. They tend to treat almost every utterance as a potential threat to someone's face. It is commonly accepted that everybody has some face needs and generally cooperates to maintain each other's face. Politeness involves concern for two different kinds of face needs. The first one is negative face which is the need not to be imposed upon, the need to be independent and have the freedom of action. The second one is positive face that is the need to be liked and admired, to be treated as a member of the same group and to know that his/her wants are shared by others. Behavior that avoids imposing on others is portrayed as an indication of negative politeness, whereas sociable behavior expressing naturalness and affection to a hearer is positive politeness (Brown & Levinson). According to Brown and Levinson's approach, any utterance that makes a demand or becomes intrusive of another person's autonomy can be regarded as a potential face-threatening act (FTA). In this connection, even suggestions, advice, and requests can be considered as face-threatening acts as they potentially limit another person's freedom of action. People generally try to either avoid obvious FTAs or reduce the threat of unavoidable acts such as requests by softening them and/or expressing them indirectly.

Requests are described as potentially face threatening acts in Brown and Levinson. Butler (1988) shows a close relationship between the degree of politeness and the degree of indirectness of requests, which suggests that requests require face work to some extent. Aijmer (1996) explains this relationship as follows:

A request is not, in itself, aggressive like a threat, but can be potentially offensive or threatening because it impinges on the privacy of the individual who is requested to do something (p. 139).

Therefore, to overcome this potential threat, strategies are likely to be employed to mitigate the imposition in making requests. It seems that the commonest of these strategies is the use of indirect requests, which are described by Brown and Levinson as one element in a series of politeness strategies. Indirect strategies give the addressee the choice of saying 'no' if it is not convenient to carry out the request (Leech, 1983).

Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) propose different options in terms of the level of directness' for the realization of a request. They identify three major levels of directness that can be expected to be manifested universally by requesting strategies:

- a- the most direct, explicit level, such as imperatives or performative verbs acting as requests;
- b- the conventionally indirect level, in conventionalized uses of language such as could/ would you do it? as requests.
- c- nonconventional indirect level, indirect strategies (hints) that realize the act by reference to object or element needed for the implementation of the act (it's cold in here) requesting for the closing of a window/door or switching the heating on.

Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper further subdivide these three levels into nine separate sub-levels to form a scale of indirectness. However, this sub-division will not be taken up due to its irrelevance for the purposes of this study. One final point to mention here is 'point of view operation' of requests. According to Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, the choice of perspective by the speaker is important in requests. For instance, the difference between 'could you do it' and could we have done it' is the point of emphasis between the speaker and hearer. Since a request is an FTA for hearers, the avoidance in naming the requester and/or requestee declines the impact of the imposition.

Correspondingly, in their proposed model, Brown and Levinson also suggest a scale of directness. In their scale, the negative and positive politeness strategies realized by pragmatically clear ways of doing the act are called *on-record strategies*. In such strategies, there is an obvious reference to the addressee and action to be performed as in the example, 'Can you open the window?' On the other hand, pragmatically unclear, indirect ways of doing the act are called *off-record*. Unlike the on-record strategy, there is no reference to the addressee or the action, as in the example, 'It's hot in here'. The final level is *bold-on-record acts*, which are the most direct and brief way of requesting, as in 'Come in' (Brown and Levinson 1987, p.69-71). Despite the different terminologies used, there is a clear parallel between Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) scales of directness. The most direct level and bold-on-record, the conventionally indirect

level and on record and nonconventional indirect level and off record strategies look very similar.

To be able to request information or services has to do with both knowing how to perform a request in its less face-threatening form and having the ability to use lexical and grammatical resources properly in a specified context. Such forms are by and large conventionalized (Aijmer, 1996) and cannot be produced simply by manipulating one's grammatical knowledge. Thus, learners have to learn about these conventional forms. Therefore, like many other language functions, linguistic realizations of requests have become conventionalized. It would be not be right to take for granted that every learner could produce this type of conventionalized language by making use of his/her knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. That is, it is important to understand the effects of context on linguistic choice. Learners may know explicit categories of pragmatic features such as politeness markers; however, they may fail to use them appropriately, as they might not have yet developed an understanding of the relation between these forms and the context of situation. This is especially important in a language-learning context, since the classroom context is the only source of the target language to which the learners are exposed (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). Analysis of data in the *Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project* (CCSARP) Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989) revealed that indirect requests are the most frequent type of requests in all the languages studied (Australian English, Canadian French, Hebrew and Argentinian Spanish), which is also supported by the findings obtained in the study by Trosborg (1995) and House and Kasper (1987). Moreover, the conventionally indirect strategy while making a request towards the addressee is mostly used by high proficient learners (Rue, Zhang, & Shin, 2007; Byon, 2004), which means that there is a positive and strong correlation between the use of indirect strategy and the level of English. Jalilifar's study (2009), consistent with the findings in the two studies above, revealed that Iranian EFL learners with high level English mostly benefited from the indirect type of requesting, showing a developmental pattern in request strategies. Regarding the use of modalized questions, Butler (1988) found that in modalized questions the degree of politeness that the modals 'would' and 'could' indicate is higher than 'will' and 'can' According to Yule (1996), in most English-speaking contexts, modal verbs in questions are the most typical forms of negative politeness strategy (could you...?, can I...?).

The studies of L2 learners reviewed so far reveal that L2 learners benefit from conventionally or nonconventionally indirect strategies at various levels of proficiency in the target language. However, in terms of effectively performing requests, learners seem to have problems. Language learners could have trouble in learning to use these conventionalized forms. The disparity between form and function of requests may not be of great significance to a native speaker. However, it may cause difficulties in language learning and teaching. In order to understand the extent that language learners are able to handle the difficulty between the form and

function in certain contexts, one needs to empirically look at and assess the linguistic production of language learners related to this particular speech act.

#### **IV. Method**

##### *Participants*

The participants of this study were Turkish EFL students, who were second year teacher trainees and attending Middle East Technical University, where medium of instruction is English. The total number of the participants was 40 and the participants' ages ranged from 18 to 19. The participants included 32 females and 8 males. All of the participants were graduates of Anatolian Teachers Training High schools, where one-year prep class is obligatory and some of the courses are taught in English. They all had 8 years of EFL in total and they are advanced users of English.

##### *Instrument*

The instrument used was a discourse completion task (DCT) originally developed to study lexical simplification (Levenston & Blum, 1978) and used in pragmatics for the first time by Blum-Kulka (1982). The instrument used in the study is a type of DCT, open item- verbal response only production questionnaire, as categorized by Kasper (2000). However, the questionnaire used in this study was adapted from the one produced and used by Blum-Kulka as the original one only consisted of incomplete discourse sequences. The questionnaire used here presented a brief description of certain situations, which specified the setting, the social distance between the interlocutors and their status relative to each other. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions where the Turkish EFL learners (first year teacher trainees) were asked to produce appropriate request utterances for a given context of situation. The aim was to gain information about their pragmatic ability to express themselves appropriately in different contexts. The data was collected by means of a questionnaire that was administered to about sixty EFL students. The important point that needs to be mentioned here is that while sixty students were asked to do the questionnaire, about fifty questionnaires were returned, and out of fifty, forty of them were analyzed as they included incomplete/misunderstood responses.

##### *Procedure*

The participants were asked to produce appropriate request utterances for a given context of situation, as they would do in actual conversations. These contexts were selected as they were thought to occur frequently and seem to potentially represent face-threatening acts to perform in Turkish (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The data collected from the questionnaires were statistically analyzed using SPSS (descriptive statistics, frequencies) for the purpose of showing general tendencies and two native speakers of English, who are ELT specialists, were asked to see and assess the students' use of request strategies.

## V. DATA ANALYSIS

The ten context situations have been chosen to be supposedly familiar to what the participants are likely to experience in their life and most probably with the native speakers abroad. Most of the participants live in the dormitories on the campus and they occasionally interact with other students whose mother tongue or second language is English.

There is actually a certain kind of similarity among these contexts in the sense that they are grouped according to certain amount of power (the relative authority between speaker and hearer in a situation) and distance (the degree of familiarity between speaker and hearer) relationship. For instance, contexts 1, 5, and 9 involve professors, who represent varying degrees of distance to the students (a sociable and a distinguished professor). Context 2 and 6 include relatively informal situations of best friends. The contexts 4 and 8 are two different restaurant situations in which students are expected to use different request strategies. Finally, contexts 3 and 10 are again potentially different situations representing different power and distance relationship. In line with the prospects of this study, the participants were expected to take the relative power and distance relationship between themselves, the addressees, the required actions, and the contexts into consideration and choose and use the appropriate type of strategy when requesting. Figure 1 provides the general overall statistics for the request types used:

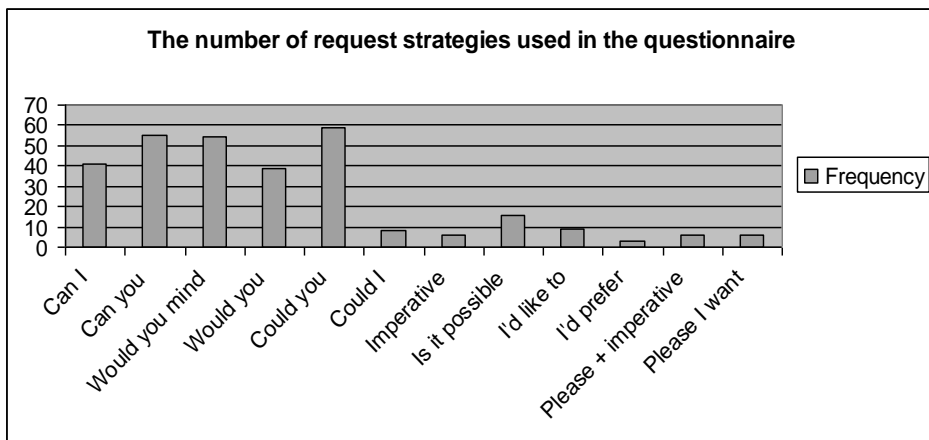


Figure 1. Request strategies used in the questionnaire as a chart

The most frequently occurring request type is 'Could you' in the questionnaire. It was used 59 times. The second most frequent one is 'Can you' with 55 times and the third one is 'would you mind' with 54 times. While the numbers for the rest of the contexts are provided in the Table 1 above, the three most frequent request types used in each context are given below through descriptive statistics. Please note that



the variable 'other' refers to 'imperative', 'is it possible', 'I'd prefer' and 'please, I want'.

In the first context in the questionnaire, 'would you mind' occurred most frequently with 23 times. 'Could you' came second with only 4 times, followed by 'May I' and 'Could I' with 3 times. 'Can I' never occurred in the first context.

'Can you' was at the top of the list in the second context with 26 times. 'Could you' was in the second place with 11 times and Imperative' was the third with only 2 times. 'Would you' 'Can I', 'Could I' and 'May I' did not occur in this context.

In the third context, 'Could you' appeared the most with 12 times; 'Would you' 9 times and 'Is it possible' just 2 times. Again, the following types were never used; 'Can I', 'Could I' and 'May I'.

'May I' was at the top of the list in the fourth context with 10 times, followed by 'Can I' with 8 times and 'I'd like to' with 7 times. 'Would you', 'Could I' were the ones that were not available in this context.

The context five had 'Would you' as the most frequent type with 22 times. 'Would you mind' followed it with 5 times and 'Could you' with 4 times. 'May I' and 'Could I' were not used in this context.

In sixth context, 'Can you' outnumbered the rest of the types with 12 times. 'Can I' and 'Would you mind' were second and third with 8 and 5 times respectively. 'Would you' and 'Could I' did never emerge here.

The context seven saw 'Could you' at the top of the list with 16 times, immediately followed by 'Would you mind' with 12 and 'Would you' 3 times. 'Can I' did not appear at all in this context.

In the eighth context of fast food, mentioning of the food items requested without any imperative verb or mitigator 'Please' was the most frequent request strategy used in this context with 16 times. 'Can I' and 'May I' followed it with 6 and 5 times respectively. 'Would you mind' and 'Would you' were not used at all here.

In the following context of nine, 'May I' was the most preferred type used with 7 times. Other close contenders to 'May I' were 'Could I' with 4, 'Can I', 'Could you' and 'Would you mind' with 3 times. Interestingly, this context saw, though just few, some uses of direct question type of requests such as 'why haven't you made the announcement yet'. Moreover, this was the only context in which the only instance of the type of an off-record request as in the utterance Pardon, 'I did not realize that I had not learnt my exam result yet' occurred. Again, this was the context that was

left unanswered the most by some of the student. That is, few of the students simply did not provide any request for that slot.

The final context of ten had 'Can I' as the most popular strategy type employed by the subjects with 16 times. 'May I and 'Is it possible' followed it with 6 and 4 times respectively. Except the 'Imperatives', almost all request types were used in this context.

## **VI. INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS**

When we look at the results of the analysis, the availability of variety of request types is probably the most noticeable point. The Turkish EFL students, who completed the questionnaire, seem to be able to make use of a certain repertoire of various request types. The table in the data analysis and the following delineation of each context offer the general statistics of the students' requesting repertoire.

The criteria used in determining the levels of directness in the subject use of request strategies were those of Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), and Brown and Levinson (1987). According to their own versions of directness, most of the requests that the EFL students used in this study correspond to conventionally indirect or on-record strategies in which the students made a specific reference to the addressee and the action to be performed. The following are actual utterances provided to the contexts in the questionnaire:

"Would you like to buy a ticket for our party?"

"Is it possible for me to ask for ticket from the passengers?"

"Professor, May I ask why you have not made the announcement yet?"

"Can you lend me some money?"

"Would you mind if I borrowed your book?"

"Would you please keep your children quiet as I have an exam tomorrow?"

"May I see the menu?"

"Can I have you notes just to copy them for myself?"

"A whoper, chips and a coke please."

"Excuse me sir, would you mind if I borrowed your book as I need to prepare for my exam?"

The nonconventional indirect level or off-record strategies almost never occurred, except in one case, as was explained above. The other strategy of the most direct or bold-on-record did occur in certain contexts such as food ordering and best friends. Let us now try to be more specific about these statistics. As was mentioned above, a certain kind of grouping in terms of power and distance relationship was in question in the questionnaire. Although the statistics about each context is provided above, it might be helpful to see the most preferred strategies within the framework of each group, as illustrated below:

The contexts 1, 5 and 9 can be looked at as the first group in which certain kind of formality exists due to the relationship between the professors and their students.

- 1- 'Would you mind', 'Could you', and 'May I' and 'Could I'
- 5- 'Would you', 'Would you mind', 'Could you'
- 9- 'May I', 'Could I' and 'Can I', 'Could you' and 'Would you mind'

The contexts 2 and 6 are in the second group in which certain level of intimacy is expected.

- 2- 'Can you', 'Could you' and 'imperative'
- 6- 'Can you', 'Can I' and 'Would you mind'

The contexts 4 and 8 comprise of another group where food-requesting situation is available.

- 4- 'May I', 'Can I' and 'I'd like to'.
- 8- Direct mention of the items requested, 'Can I' and 'May I'.

The contexts 3 and 10 were in the last group where again a certain level of formality is expected.

- 3- 'Could you', 'Would you' and 'Is it possible'
- 10- 'Can I', 'May I', and 'Is it possible'

For the first group of contexts, we would expect to see more polite forms of requests due to the formality between professors and their students. This indeed seems to be the case since the subject have tended to use the so-called polite forms such as 'Would you mind', 'Could you', 'Would you' and 'Could I' etc. However, there seems to be some discrepancy in their requests in terms of *the point of view of operation*, a feature providing the dimension of request perspective, which eventually helped to soften the impact of the imposition. According to this perspective, the use of the pronoun 'I' instead of 'you' serves to reduce the impact of imposition. We see that students preferred to use 'you' as well, though not many; however, one would expect to see fewer uses of 'you' in this presence of formality of this sort. An explanation for this tendency might be that since the participants think that using the pronoun 'you' makes their utterance polite. Moreover, by using the so-called most polite strategies, they might see no further use softening their utterances any further. Alternatively, they may not be aware of this perspective at all.

In the second group, in line with the intimacy level between best friends, the students popularly used the basic form of politeness strategy with 'Can you'. It seems that students were correctly able to assess the level of politeness. The pronoun 'you' as the request perspective is correctly used here by most of the students. However, we tend to see once again a certain level of fluctuation in other popular choices in terms of politeness level. While some imperatives were suitably used, some more polite forms such as 'Would you mind' and 'Could you' also emerged.

In the third group, students faced two different service contexts of food ordering situations where they were expected to make the requesting of food. With the fast food context, students rightly used the most common way of ordering food by directly mentioning the name of the food items they wanted. This is due to fact that they want efficiency, practicality and pace in their food ordering. In the proper restaurant context, students were divided between directly requesting the food and asking for the menu. This seems to be a valid case for Turkish context since in some restaurants where certain kind(s) of food is served (like Kebab) you directly order the meal. In the proper restaurant context, the basic request forms such 'May I', 'Can I' and 'I'd like to' were used. It seems to be the case that since restaurant context like these are frequently included in the English learning/teaching materials in Turkey (Yalçınkaya et al, 1996), the students were easily able to apply these correct strategies in place.

In the final group, students were offered relatively difficult contexts to handle in terms of politeness strategy. In the neighbor context, students seemingly tried to use more polite forms such as 'Could you', 'Would you' and 'Is it possible'. While trying to be as polite as possible with these forms, the students, on the other hand, preferred the pronoun 'you' since their negative face was also under threat by the children's noise. With the bus context, while the participants tried to keep a certain distance with the bus driver as it was a threat to the driver's negative face and used a basic strategy and the pronoun 'I' in order to decrease the imposition.

When we look at the result of the analysis, we realize that the participants were not very successful in their use of request strategies. However, this does not mean a failure for them. While they were able to correctly assess the requirements of some of the contexts and accordingly use the strategy required, there were not always consistency in their choice of strategy in terms of the optimum strategy type and request perspective. Another point that led to conclude that the students' request productions were not adequately acceptable was the grammatical and lexical mistakes they made while requesting. While few of the requests were produced in the form of statements instead of question form, some students were confused or did not know how to use the verbs 'lend' and 'borrow'.

The results of this study have similarities with Karatepe's and Doğançay-Aktuna and Kamışlı's studies and closely correspond to Otçu's herself where she asked some native speakers to assess the role-play production of requests of Turkish EFL students. The native speakers in Otçu's study, who assessed the students request productions found them 'neither successful nor unsuccessful'. The neutrality assessment by the native speaker judges in Otçu's study was based on the grammatical competence as well as the pragmatic competence of the Turkish EFL students. Looking at the assessments of the judges in Otçu in terms of grammatical competence, my judges rated my subjects lower in the presence of the following requests (though few):

"Professor, we hoped to learn the exam results, what's the matter with them?"

"Do you want to buy our party tickets?" (to the professor)

"Can you bring me a Big Mac, chips and a coke?" (in the fast food context)

"Lend me some money for tomorrow (borrowing money from a best friend)

"Could you mind if you help me?" (asking help from a professor)

"Why haven't you made the announcement yet?" (to the professor)

"Waiter, bring me a whopper, chips and a coke!" (in the fast food context)

(with the restaurant schema, Turkish students have this kind of ordering.)

The judges in the study proposed that some of the students could not assess the appropriate degree of formality as well as the socio-linguistic aspects that the context of situation required. The very first reason behind the way the subject in this study (as well as other EFL students in other studies mentioned above) manage their pragmatic skills seems to be related to the kind of input they are (have been) exposed to throughout their interlanguage development (Kasper, 1990; Karatepe, 1998). The degree of representation of pragmatic elements in EFL materials seems to determine largely how much they will acquire these elements and how successfully they will be able to make use of them when due.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The study aimed to obtain information about certain EFL learners' language learning experience and their ability to perform the pragmatic feature of requesting in certain contexts. The results showed that the EFL students in this study seemed to have the linguistic means in order to operate pragmatically in various contexts in terms of using certain request strategies. According to two kinds of directness scales, the EFL learners tended to go predominantly for the conventional direct level/on-record strategies. While the most indirect level/ bold-on-record strategy also occurred, the nonconventional indirect level/off-record strategy almost never occurred except in one case. As Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) categorization makes clear, the use of nonconventional indirect level might require the language learners to venture beyond the traditional fashion of learning only the linguistic forms and use their functions in the relevant contexts. The findings also revealed that the indirect requests are the most frequently used type, which is in alignment with the findings obtained by House and Kasper (1987), Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Trosborg (1995). Furthermore, the learners in the study mostly benefited from the conventionally indirect strategy while requesting, showing a developmental pattern, which is also stressed by Byon (2004), Zhang and Shin (2007) and Jalilifar (2009). The inconsistency in the use of appropriate strategies in relevant context situations led us to conclude that their success in the use of the request strategies in situations requiring certain level of politeness was relatively not satisfactory. This conclusion should not be considered as surprising given the fact that language learning/teaching textbooks provide very little help for learners to develop pragmatic competence for everyday situations such as making requests, since only a very limited range of forms is presented and practiced (Karatepe,

1998). Kasper (1990) also found that the language of EFL textbooks was another factor in learners' adopting ineffective pragmatic strategies and lack of appropriate materials and input can be seen the main cause of the under-representation of pragmatics, which was stressed by Otçu and Doğançay-Aktuna & Kamyşlı. This problem can be tackled through creating opportunities for ELT teacher trainees to develop pragmatic competence in L2 with different speech act sets in the materials in their curriculum, role-play opportunities in the courses offered in their departments.

### **VIII. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

One point that was intentionally omitted on purpose in this study was the further analysis of students' requests in terms of defining units. The simple reason being that the discourse completion questionnaire here in the existing form seem to have prevented the students from employing authentic-like request forms. In contrast to this optimist thinking- blaming the questionnaire for these results-, it is also possible to conclude that they simply do not know how to request properly. If the production questionnaire had been in a dialogue form instead, we might again have had the chance of more intact request forms.

Another important limitation that affects the validity of the study is the lack of triangulation of the data gathered through the questionnaire since asking participants to write what they would be verbally producing in a naturally occurring manner in various real-life situations may not lead to accurate data. Thus, the data gathered could be triangulated with the recorded data of participants in simulated settings, which would act as a contract with what they would have writing down. Further research can consider this issue while designing the research.

The study did not compare the lower proficiency level learners' use of request strategies with those of high proficiency level learners. This could have revealed interesting developmental implications (Otçu & Zeyrek, 2008).

One final point about the relative weakness of this study is the number of contexts and the number of students. More contexts, together with more participants, would probably have allowed a more manageable data collection and more exhaustive data analysis and results.

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**APPENDIX**

**Request Situations: Modified Verbal Response Only- Production  
Questionnaire**

1. You have to prepare homework. You need a book and you have seen that particular book in the office of a distinguished professor. You want to borrow that book from that professor. How would you request it?  
.....
2. You have a new girlfriend/boyfriend. Tomorrow you are going on a date for the first time; however, you do not have enough money. You want to borrow some money from your best friend. How would you request it?  
.....
3. You have an exam tomorrow morning, but your neighbor's children are making a lot of noise upstairs. You want to ask your neighbor, who is older than you and whom you do not like much, to keep their children quiet at home. How would you ask him to keep his children quiet?  
.....
4. Your friend's father is in town to visit his son/daughter. He invited his son/daughter and you for a dinner. You are having dinner at a restaurant. The waiter came and you are going to order your meal. How would you order?  
.....
5. You have a party. You want to sell tickets of this party to a young sociable professor. How would you ask him/her to buy a ticket for the party?  
.....
6. You have an exam next week. You lost your notes, and you know that your best friend have very good notes. You are going to ask for her/his notes to photocopy. How would you request her/his notes?  
.....
7. You are preparing homework and you need some help. You want to ask for the help of a young sociable professor. How would you request his/her help?  
.....
8. You are at Burger King. How would you order a whopper, chips and a coke?  
.....
9. One of your professors promised to announce exam results, but he did not reveal your mark since he did not finish reading your papers. How would you ask him why he hasn't made the announcement yet?  
.....
10. When you got on the bus, you realize that you have no tickets. How would you request permission from the driver to ask for a ticket from the passengers?  
.....