

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Problem

Communication plays an essential role in the process of learning a foreign language, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. In learning English, students are not only expected to understand grammatical rules but also to be able to use the language appropriately in real communication. Therefore, mastering communication skills becomes one of the main goals of English language learning. As EFL learners, students must be able to use language appropriately when interacting with others. For example, when students want to ask someone to do something, they need to express the request politely so that it does not sound like a command.

This ability is closely related to pragmatic competence, which helps learners understand how language should be used according to the speaker, the listener, and the context of interaction. According to Yule (1996), Pragmatics concerns how speakers convey meaning and how listeners interpret that meaning in context. Therefore, pragmatic competence is important for EFL learners because grammatical knowledge alone cannot ensure successful communication, and without pragmatic awareness, learners may produce grammatically correct sentences that still cause misunderstanding or sound impolite. Pragmatic competence enables language learners to use language appropriately in different social

situations. It involves understanding what to say, how to say it, and when it is appropriate to say it. In the context of classroom interaction, pragmatic competence helps students interact effectively with lecturers and peers, particularly when performing various speech acts such as requesting, apologizing, thanking, or giving suggestions. One type of speech act that may easily lead to misunderstanding in communication is the act of asking someone to do something, which can be expressed either as a command or as a request. Nonetheless, requests are categorized as speech acts that may pose a threat to face (face-threatening act), requiring speakers to employ specific strategies to ensure that requests are communicated courteously and can be accepted by the conversation partner. This type of utterance belongs to directive speech acts, in which the speaker attempts to make the hearer perform an action. Because directive speech acts involve influencing another person's behavior, they carry a certain social risk, especially when the speaker and hearer have different roles, such as students and lecturers in an academic setting.

Therefore, speakers need to use appropriate request strategies that fit the context of interaction so that the utterance does not sound too direct or imposing. By using suitable strategies, speakers can convey their intentions more appropriately and avoid potential misunderstandings in communication. In classroom interaction, students often need to make requests to their lecturers in various situations. For instance, when students do not understand the lecturer's explanation, they may ask the lecturer to

repeat or clarify the material. Some students may say expressions such as “Repeat again, Sir” or “Explain again,” which are understandable but sound too direct in an academic context. Students frequently make requests to their lecturers during various learning activities. For example, students may say expressions such as “Ma’am, share the assignment,” “Ma’am, divide the groups now,” or “Open the material again,” when they want the lecturer to give instructions or repeat information.

Ideally, students could express their requests in a more suitable way, such as “Could you please share the assignment, Ma’am?” or “Could you help explain this part again?” These situations illustrate a common phenomenon in the classroom and raise the question of whether EFL learners have developed sufficient pragmatic competence to choose appropriate request forms when interacting with their lecturers.

Previous studies show that Indonesian EFL learners tend to employ conventionally indirect request strategies in various social situations. Expressions such as *can I* and *could you* are commonly used to soften requests and indicate politeness (Pardede et al., 2025). In addition, many learners combine two or more request strategies in one utterance, suggesting that request production involves pragmatic consideration of social context.

Based on several previous studies, research on request speech acts has been widely conducted in different contexts and with various focuses. A relevant previous study by Abdelfattah (2022) used a mixed-method approach using semi-structured interviews and the Discourse Completion

Test (DCT) to compare the request strategies used by Moroccan EFL learners and American native speakers. The findings showed differences in the level of directness and request orientation between the two groups. Meanwhile, the study conducted by AlTameemy, Alshraah, and Alshammari (2024) used a quantitative descriptive approach with the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) to investigate request-making strategies among Saudi EFL learners with different proficiency levels, namely High Achievement and Low Achievement students. In addition, the study by Pardede, Dirgantari, AS, and Susantiningdyah (2025) explored request strategies used by Indonesian EFL learners by applying qualitative thematic analysis of data collected through written DCT scenarios, focusing on the influence of social status and social distance in selecting request forms.

Although previous studies have provided important insights into request discourse acts, most of them have focused on comparisons between native and non-native speakers, differences in learners' proficiency levels, or the influence of social variables such as status and social distance. However, this study specifically examines the request strategies used by EFL learners in the English department to analyze the types of requests students use and to explore their relationship with social variables. In communication, speakers who make requests differ in their choice of words, expressions, and level of directness when conveying their intentions. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate this so that students understand how

to formulate requests to their conversation partners, taking into account both social distance and power dynamics

Therefore, this research aims to identify the types of request speech act strategies used by sixth-semester EFL learners in the English Department at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and to analyze the social variables reflected in their request expressions. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, and the data are collected through a Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT). The findings of this study are expected to provide a clearer understanding of how sixth-semester EFL learners formulate request speech acts and how social variables influence their choice of request strategies in academic contexts.

B. Identification of the Problem

Based on the above research background, the researcher found several problems related to the use of request sentences among learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in academic interactions. These problems are as follows:

1. Sixth-semester EFL students may use different request speech act strategies when making requests in academic situations, but the types and patterns of strategies they use have not yet been clearly identified.
2. The use of request speech act strategies may vary depending on social variables, particularly power, social distance, and ranking of imposition. However, how these social variables influence the students' choice of

request strategies in different academic situations has not yet been clearly understood.

C. Limitation of the Problem

This study focuses on analyzing the request speech act strategies used by sixth-semester EFL students in the English Department at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang. The analysis is limited to the request strategy classification proposed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) through the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP). The data are collected using a Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT), which consists of academic situations involving different social variables, particularly power, social distance, and ranking of imposition. The study focuses on identifying the request strategies used by the students and analyzing how these social variables influence their choice of request strategies.

D. Formulation of the Problem

1. What types of request speech act strategies are used by sixth-semester EFL learners in the English Department at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang?
2. How do social variables influence the use of request speech act strategies by sixth-semester EFL students at the English Department of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang?

E. Purpose of the Problem

1. To identify the types of request speech act strategies used by sixth-semester EFL learners in the English Department at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang.

2. To identify the social variables influencing the use of request speech act strategies by sixth-semester EFL students at the English Department of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang.

F. Significance of the Research

Through this study, it is anticipated that the findings may offer benefits for various parties, such as students, lecturers, further researchers, and readers, especially in the fields of pragmatics and speech act studies.

1. For Learners

The results of this study are expected to help EFL learners understand the different types of request speech act strategies used in academic interactions. By understanding how requests can be expressed appropriately and how gender may influence the choice of request strategies, students can improve their pragmatic competence and communicate more effectively when interacting with lecturers and peers.

2. For Lecturers

The findings of this study may help lecturers understand how male and female students formulate request strategies in academic contexts. This understanding can assist lecturers in guiding students to develop better pragmatic competence and encouraging the use of appropriate request expressions during classroom interactions.

3. For Future Researchers

This study may serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in pragmatics, particularly in the study of request speech act

strategies. It may also provide insights into how gender as a social variable can influence the use of request strategies among EFL learners, and encourage further research in different contexts or with different social variables.

4. For Readers

This research is expected to enrich readers' knowledge in the field of pragmatics, especially in understanding how request speech acts are used in academic settings. It may also provide practical insights into how social factors, such as gender, can influence language use in communication.

G. Definition of Key Terms

To prevent confusion among readers, the researcher clarifies various terms in the title of this study as follows.

1. Pragmatics

According to Yule (1996), Pragmatics focuses on the study of meaning conveyed through speech or writing and how that meaning is processed by the listener or reader. "According to Levinson (1983), pragmatics is the study of how language is used in context to convey meaning." It focuses on how speakers express intentions and how listeners interpret those intentions based on the situation of communication. Pragmatics helps explain how meaning is influenced by factors such as the speaker, the listener, and the context of interaction.

2. Speech Act

Speech acts pertain to the function of language in communication, as articulated by Austin (1962). Speech acts can be classified into three types: locutionary acts (significant statements), illocutionary acts (the intent or purpose behind a statement, like a plea or caution), and perlocutionary acts (the effect or response generated by a statement).

3. Directive Speech Act

Directive Speech Acts represent a form of illocutionary act intended to instruct the listener to perform a specific action. Searle (1983) states that directive speech acts encompass actions like requesting, suggesting, recommending, considering, and ordering. In education, directive speech acts are utilized by teachers or lecturers to guide students through instructions, inquiries, prohibitions, and suggestions.

4. Request Speech Act

A request speech act is a type of directive speech act in which the speaker asks the hearer to perform a particular action. Requests are commonly used in everyday communication and often require appropriate strategies to maintain politeness and avoid imposing on the hearer.

5. Request Speech Act Strategies

Request speech act strategies refer to the ways speakers formulate requests in communication. These strategies can vary in levels of directness, such as direct requests, conventionally indirect requests, and

non-conventionally indirect requests, as classified by Shoshana Blum-Kulka.

6. EFL Learners

EFL learners refer to students who learn English as a Foreign Language in a context where English is not the primary language of daily communication. In this study, EFL learners refer to students of the English Department at UIN Imam Bonjol, Padang.

