How do Saudis ask for a favor? A Pragmatic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the speech act of asking for a favor in Saudi Arabic due to the lack of studies done on Saudi Arabic in general and favor asking in specific. The core strategy and modification strategies used in each response were investigated. It also examined whether degree of imposition has an influence on the shape of the act. Data were collected using a written discourse completion test (DCT) in which 90 female native speakers of Saudi Arabic were asked to request a favor in 8 situations that varied in the degree of imposition. It was found that both core strategy and modification use in favor asking in Saudi Arabic were significantly influenced by degree of imposition. It is hoped that this study would help to understand some aspects of the spoken language in Saudi society.

Key words: Favor Asking, Speech Act, Saudi Arabic

INTRODUCTION

Favor asking was first explored by Goldschmidt (1988), who defined it as a directive speech act very similar to requests, in which "the motive or purpose behind the act itself is getting an addressee to do a specific task for the speaker" (p.129). It might be because of the similar purpose of both favor asking and requests that they are usually perceived as a single speech act. As a result, the literature is richer regarding requests than favor asking. However, Goldschmidt differentiated between those two speech acts, and encouraged others to examine requests and favor asking separately. Although requests and favor asking have similar goals, which are getting the hearer to do something, favor asking has a greater imposition. As a result, it is more linked to the notion of reciprocity (Goldschmidt, 1988). Speakers may feel obliged to return favors to show their appreciation to those who take the time and effort to do favors for them.

Many researchers have either compared speech acts across two or more languages, or examined the speech acts performed by non-native speakers. For example, Weizman (1989) examined the use of hints in requests in Australian English, Canadian French, and Israeli Hebrew. Another study was done by Félix-Brasdefer (2003) on how invitations are declined among native Spanish speakers, native American English speakers, and American non-native speakers of Spanish. Fatemeh et al., (2021) also studied refusals in the three languages of Persian, English and Balouchi. On the other hand, there are researchers who have focused only on one culture to describe a speech act performed by native speakers of one language (Chen & Yang, 2010; Murphy, 2015; Rezaei, 2021). The research on speech acts in Arabic

has mainly focused on specific dialects including Jordanian, Egyptian, and Yemeni. There have also been investigations of speech acts in Saudi Arabic (Alhojailan, 2019; Ansaif, 2005; El-Dakhs et al., 2019; Salameh, 2001; Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). Little is known about favor asking. It has been studied in a few languages: American English (Goldschmidt, 1988), Korean (Lee & Park, 2011), Kuwaiti Arabic (Alrefai, 2012), and Persian (Saeli, 2016). Paying attention to one speech act, e.g. favor asking, within a single speech community is important in order to understand the interactional style of that community (Al-Fattah & Ravindranath, 2009). It is also helpful in learning about the cultural values and norms in that society.

Further investigation is needed on Arabic speech acts in general, and on favor asking in Saudi Arabic in particular. Moreover, although research has focused on Arabic speech acts in comparison with English speech acts, and on the communicative competence and linguistic transfer among Arabic learners of English, there is little known about speech acts and social communicative standards in a single dialect of Arabic. The goal of this study is to fill these gaps and add to the existing literature on speech acts by exploring the speech act of favor asking in Saudi Arabic. It also examines whether performance of the act is affected by degree of imposition. It is hoped that this study would help linguists and teachers of English and Arabic to become familiar with some of the sociopragmatic knowledge of native speakers of Saudi Arabic. It would also help bilinguals and multilinguals of those two languages to be aware of how Arabic is different from English when asking for a favor to avoid negative language transfer.

To accomplish this, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1) How is favor asking performed in Saudi Arabic?
2) Does degree of imposition influence the use of core and modification strategies when asking for a favor in Saudi Arabic?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theory of Speech Acts

A number of researchers in the field of pragmatics have claimed that when we say something, we do something (Austin, 1962; Geis, 1995; Goffman, 1967; Hymes, 1972; Searl, 1969, 1979). According to Searle (1969), "speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises, and so on..." (p. 16). As a result, performing a speech act involves not only the speaker, but also the hearer or the addressee. Austin (1962) stated that "saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with design, intention, or purpose of producing them" (p. 101). Considerable research has been conducted to investigate the rules that govern performing different speech acts because "talking is performing acts according to rules" (Searle, 1969, p.22).

Politeness

Speech acts are often related to politeness strategies. Being polite is a result of knowing how to say something in a particular way without embarrassing or humiliating yourself and the other interlocutor (Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to Paltridge (2012), politeness choices are not universal and could be culture-specific and language-specific. He further stated that what may be polite in one culture may not be considered the same way in another.

One important component of politeness theory is the concept of *face*. It was defined by Goffman (1967) as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p.5). This concept explains the relationship between interlocutors in a conversation where speech acts are being performed. It explains a speaker's position that "if events establish a face for him that is better than he might have expected, he is likely to "feel good;" if his ordinary expectations are not fulfilled, one expects that he will "feel bad" or "feel hurt" " (Goffman, 1967, p.6).

In cross-cultural studies of speech acts, the notion of face is very important. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), the concept of face involves both the negative face, which is the desire to not to be imposed on, and positive face, which is the desire to be liked or approved of by others. Different cultures have different understandings of what constitutes a positive and negative face. Knowledge of speech acts in different cultures would help the interlocutors to maintain and respect the negative and positive face

of others because each speech act has a degree of threat to the other's face (Wolfson, 1989).

Speech acts that pose a potential threat to either interlocutor's face are called face threatening acts (FTAs). Face could become threatened or lost by not giving the addressee options, imposing on the addressee, and making assumptions about the addressee's needs and interests (Paltridge, 2012). For example, requests are considered to be FTAs because of the imposition they have on the hearer — a threat to the hearer's negative face. In addition, what constitutes an FTA in one culture could be different in another. An example of how a speech act could be a face-threatening act in different cultures is seen in compliment responses (CRs). According to Tang & Zang (2009), a CR in Chinese could be an FTA to the speaker if the hearer directly accepts the compliment because indirect acceptance of the compliment by self- denigration is the expected polite response from the hearer in Chinese. In contrast, a CR in Australian English could be an FTA to the speaker's positive face if the hearer rejects the compliment. Another potentially confusing FTA across cultures may arise in favor asking, as the favor could threaten the speaker's face if it were rejected (Goldschmidt, 1989). It would also threaten the hearer's face if the hearer perceived the favor as an imposition.

Favor Asking

Favor asking is a type of request (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989); however, Goldschmidt (1988) refines that belief by providing in-depth discussion of how favors are different. Unlike requests, favors are characterized by their higher degree of imposition, meaning that a speaker would ask for an act that is beyond what is usual, requiring greater time and effort. Moreover, requests usually place a specific obligation on the hearer, while favor asking, due to its asking for something beyond expectations, is different. According to Goldschmidt (1988), unlike requests, favor asking is extremely imposing and "the addressee is not obligated by role to accomplish the task in question" (p.133). This leads to identifying another major characteristic of favors. They always involve reciprocity. Those who ask favors are aware of their imposing nature, and therefore feel obliged to return the favors to show appreciation (Goldschmidt, 1996).

Methods of Data Collection

Designing a research method that would elicit data on speech acts is difficult due to the fact that "the complexity of speech act realization and of strategy selection requires careful development of research methodology" (Cohen, 1996, p.23). There is considerable debate about the best way to collect data on speech acts. This is because "the study of speech acts in different languages is a complex endeavor, with many factors that could influence the outcome of the research if not carefully attended to" (Demeter, 2007, p.83). For example, any problem in coding or analyzing data could be solved through reexamining the data. However, problems with the instrument can result in flawed data, and this is usually beyond repair (Kasper & Dahl, 1991). The most commonly

used method in data collection on speech acts is discourse completion tests (DCT).

Discourse completion test (DCT)

Discourse completion tests (DCTs) are written questionnaires that produce offline responses. This means that respondents are not currently engaged in the described activities (Kasper, 2008). It is believed that there are problems in using DCTs. Some researchers claim that they miss non-verbal information (Yuan, 2001). Others also find it time-consuming in that respondents take more time in writing their answers than in oral responses (Demeter, 2007). As a result, some respondents might find it easier to write short answers that might not reflect their real reaction to the situation (Beebe & Cummings, 1996).

However, the advantages of using DCTs outweigh the disadvantages, making this method the most widely used method in pragmatics research. Many studies on different speech acts have used DCTs in collecting data, including requests (Altasan, 2016; Al-Momani, 2009; Bella, 2012; House, 1989; Jalilifar, 2009; Sattar et al., 2009; Tabar, 2012), refusals (Al-Eryani, 2007; Al-Issa, 1998; Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Nelson et al., 2002; Raslie & Azizan, 2018), apologies (Almegren, 2018; Abbas et al., 2019; El-Khalil, 1998; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006), complaints (Farnia et al., 2010; Kraft & Geluykens, 2002; Kreishan, 2018), and compliment responses (Al-Falasi, 2007; Ansaif, 2005; Chen & Yang, 2010; Ebadi & Pursiah, 2015; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001). Using DCTs saves time in collecting a large amount of data from a large number of people in a short period of time (Beebe & Cummings, 1996). This method has been proven to help in creating a quick initial classification of semantic formulas and ascertaining the structure of the speech act being investigated (Cohen, 1996). There is also consistency in using DCTs since a researcher could easily control social variables such as age, gender, power and social distance (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The study participants (N=90) were Saudi female students randomly selected from four classes in English department at a university in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. They were all undergraduate students majoring in English and native speakers of Saudi Arabic. They ranged from 19-24 years of age.

Instrument

The data were collected using a written discourse completion test (DCT) in which the participants were asked to answer 8 questions. Each question was a description of a situation/scenario in which a favor needs to be asked. The participants were required to ask a favor in each of these situations, similar to what they would do in real situations. The DCT was administered in Saudi Arabic, not Modern Standard Arabic. This is because using Saudi Arabic would get more natural

and sincere answers since it is the language of daily life conversations.

Many researchers argue that an investigator should have cultural and social knowledge of the community under investigation in order to design an effective DCT (Al-Fattah & Ravindranath, 2009; Alrefai, 2012; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). As a native speaker of Saudi Arabic (SA), the researcher in this study relied on her knowledge of Saudi cultural and social standards in order to carefully construct the DCT to elicit answers as natural as possible. Moreover, in order to enhance the content validity of the DCT, five native SA speakers were consulted to ensure that each situation reflected the cultural and social norms of Saudi society. Based on their feedback, the DCT was revised accordingly.

The DCT focused on the possible impact of degree of imposition as it is considered the most influential factor in performing speech acts (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Wierzbicka, 1991). The degree of imposition (I) that a favor might have could be either high (+I) or low (-I). The scenarios are given in Table 1 below.

DATA CODING

The data were coded using the scheme that was developed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) in their Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP). They were the first to design a significant coding scheme for requests, which has been widely used in the literature. This coding scheme assesses the request's core strategy and any modifying linguistic devices. It is used to analyze favor asking in this study because there are similarities in the strategies used in favor asking and requests (Al-Fattah & Ravindranath, 2009; Alrefai, 2012; Goldschmidt, 1988; Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012).

According to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), the part of an utterance that has the request itself is called the *head act*, which is defined as "the part of the sequence which might serve to realize the act independently of other elements" (p.17). The core strategy can be direct, conventionally indirect, or nonconventionally indirect. There are 5 direct strategies, 2 conventionally indirect strategies and 2 nonconventionally indirect strategies, as illustrated in Table 2 below.

The modification devices could occur either before or after the head act. Sometimes they occur in both places, and combinations of several modifiers are also possible to occur. In this study, the focus was on lexical modifiers in order to have an initial understanding of favor asking in Saudi Arabic. They could be alerters, downgraders, upgraders or supportive moves. An alerter functions to get the hearer's attention, as seen in Table 3. Downgraders function to soften the imposition of the request by making internal changes on the head act using lexical and phrasal elements, as shown in Table 4. Upgraders function to enhance the force of the request, as illustrated in Table 5. A supportive move is an external element that would occur either before or after the head act. It functions to mitigate the impact of the request as displayed in Table 6. Unlike the core strategies, modifications are optional.

The data were coded according to this coding scheme. Statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical

Table 1. Scenarios in DCT

No.	Degree of Imposition	Situation
1	+I	You want to ask a friend of yours to lend you 5000 riyals. Although this would be the second time, you would ask her for help anyway. What would you say to her?
2	-I	You are planning to attend a wedding. You need to ask a friend of yours to take care of your kids while you are gone. What would you say to that friend?
3	+I	You are a teacher. You are going to give your students an exam. You need to ask someone to help you proctor it. You only find one colleague who is busy with a pile of papers to correct. How would you ask her?
4	-I	You have to give a presentation in class. You forgot your laptop. There is a classmate who brought one. You are thinking of asking her if you could use it. What would you say to her?
5	+I	You are a student and you missed an exam. You know that your professor does not accept any excuses. What would you say to her?
6	-I	You are a university professor. You are talking to a student of yours who says she is going to the library. You remember that you need to return a book. You think of giving her the book to return to the library. How would you ask her to do it?
7	+I	You have a conference that you need to attend outside the city. You need someone to take care of your children while you are gone for three days. You are thinking of asking your working mother. What would you say to her?
8	-I	You are supposed to submit a paper to your professor today. You cannot meet this deadline. Your professor is going to deduct two points for each day you postpone the submission. You are thinking of asking her if you could submit it tomorrow. How would you ask her?

Table 2. Core strategies used in making requests

Type	Strategy	Definition	Example from CCSARP
Direct Strategies	Mood derivable	The grammatical mood of the verb indicates the illocutionary act.	*'Leave me alone'*
	Performative	The illocutionary act is explicitly named.	*'I am asking you to clean up the mess'*
	Hedged performative	The naming of the illocutionary act is modified by hedges.	*'I would like to ask you to give your presentation a week earlier than scheduled'*
	Obligation statement	The obligation of the hearer to carry out the act is stated.	*'You will have to move that car'*
	Want statement	The speaker states his/her desire that the hearer carries out the act.	*'I really wish you'd stop bothering me'*
Conventionally Indirect Strategies	Suggestory formulae	A suggestion is made to carry out the act.	*'How about cleaning up?'*
	Query preparatory	A reference to ability or willingness is made using a modal verb.	*'Would you mind moving your car?'*
Nonconventionally Indirect Strategies	Strong hints	Partial reference to object needed for completing the act	*'You have left the kitchen in a right mess'*
	Mild hints	No reference to the object of the act is made. But it is interpreted as a request by context.	*'I am a nun' in response to a persistent hassle.*

package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the Excel software program.

RESULTS

Core Strategy Use

By looking at the results, we can see that direct strategies (324 tokens out of 720 responses) and conventional indirect strategies (315 tokens out of 720 responses) were more frequent than nonconventional indirect strategies (81 tokens out of 720 responses). The participants preferred direct strategies slightly more than the conventional indirect strategies when asking for a favor in Saudi Arabic. A closer look at the

Table 3. Alerter modifiers to core request (CCSARP)

Alerter	Example
Title/role	*Professor, waiter*
Surname	*Johnson*
First name	*Judith*
Nickname	*Judy*
Endearment term	*Honey*
Pronoun	*You*
Attention getter	*Hey, excuse me, listen*

Table 4. Downgrader modifiers to core request (CCSARP)

Downgrader	Definition	Example
Politeness marker	Expressions to get the hearer's compliance	Clean the kitchen, *please.*
Understater	Adverbial expressions to under-represent the element of request	Could you tidy up *a bit?*
Hedge	Adverbial expressions to avoid specification	It would fit much better *somehow* if you did your paper next week.
Subjectivizer	Elements to express the speaker's opinion in order to reduce the force of the request	*I'm afraid* you're going to have to move your car.
Downtoner	Propositional modifier to mitigate the impact of a request	Could you *possibly/ perhaps* lend me your notes?
Cajoler	Lexical items used to increase harmony between interlocutors	*You know,* I'd really like you to present your paper next week.
Appealer	Element to get the hearer's understanding	Clean up the kitchen, dear, *will you?/okay?*
Consultative device	Evoke the hearer's opinion	*What do you think?*

Table 5. Upgrader modifiers to core request (CCSARP)

Upgrader	Definition	Example
Intensifier	Adverbial item to intensify the request	The kitchen is in a *frightful* mess.
Commitment indicator	Items indicating the speaker's commitment to the element of request.	I'm *sure/certain/ surely/certainly* you won't mind giving me a lift.
Time intensifier	Expressions of time	You'd better move your car *right now!*
Lexical uptoner	A negative connotation is given to the element of request.	Clean up that *mess*!
Determination marker	Items indicating a determination on the part of the speaker	I've explained myself *and that's it!*
Repetition of request	A request is repeated literally or by paraphrase.	Get lost! *Leave me alone!*
Emphatic addition	Lexical collocations providing additional emphasis	*Go* and clean that kitchen!

Table 6. Supportive moves (CCSARP)

Supportive move	Definition	Example
Preparator	A phrase preparing the hearer for the request by checking his/her availability or asking his/her permission	*I'd like to ask you something ... May I ask you a question ...*
Getting a precommitment	An attempt to get the hearer's commitment	*Could you do me a favor? …*
Grounder	Giving reasons, explanations or justifications that either precede or follow for a request	Judith, *I missed a class yesterday.* Could I borrow your notes?
Disarmer	Avoiding any potential refusal	*I know you don't like lending out your notes*, but could you make an exception this time?
Promise of reward	Announcing a reward due on fulfillment of the request	Could you give me a lift home? *I'll pitch in on some gas.*
Imposition minimizer	Reducing the imposition of a request	Would you give me a lift, *but only if you're going my way.*

different dynamics of the degree of imposition gives us a better explanation.

The effect of degree of imposition on core strategy use

A binomial test was performed on the frequency number of direct and conventional indirect strategies to see if there are significant differences in their distribution between +I and -I scenarios. Nonconventional indirect strategies were not included in this test because their frequency number was very low. There were some significant differences in the distribution of core strategies across the different kinds of scenarios (see Table 7). The table shows that di-

rect strategies were significantly different in +I from -I (P-value= 0.0397).

Another binomial test was performed on the frequency number of only direct and conventional strategies in order to see if they are significantly different from one another in each different dynamic of I. This test showed that degree of imposition had no significant effects on the core strategy use

Table 7. Core strategy use in+I and -I scenarios

Strategy	All Scenarios (N=720)	+I Scenarios (N=360)	-I Scenarios (N=360)	Exact binomial calculation
Direct strategies	324	143	181	0.0397
Conventional indirect strategies	315	166	149	0.367
Nonconventional indirect	81	51	30	0.0267
Exact binomial calculation	0.752	0.211	0.0878	

(see Table 7). The strategies are not significantly different from one another in +I scenarios and -I scenarios.

Table 7 below shows that in the first binomial test, direct strategies were significantly distributed across +I and –I scenarios (P-value=0.0397). Nonconventional indirect strategies were similarly significant across the two levels of imposition (P-value=0.0267). It was only the conventional indirect strategies that were not significantly distributed across +I and –I scenarios (P-value=0.367). When looking at the strategies all together in each individual kind of scenario, we can see the participants used one kind of core strategies more than the others. However, the difference in their use was not significant as the second binomial test shows. Conventional indirect strategies (166 tokens) were preferred in +I scenarios over direct strategies (143 tokens), but this preference was not significant (P-value=0.211). Direct strategies (181 tokens) were preferred in -I scenarios over conventional indirect (149 tokens), but the test shows the difference between them is not significant (P-value=0.0878). It is noteworthy that nonconventional indirect strategies were the least preferred strategies in the two levels of imposition.

Direct core strategies

In terms of direct strategies, the most preferred two strategies in this category across all scenarios were want statements (e.g., I need you to take care of my kids) (131 tokens) and mood derivables (e.g., Help me proctor my students) (128 tokens). Hedged performatives (e.g., I would like to use your laptop) came third with 60 tokens. The least used direct strategy was performatives (e.g., I am asking you for more time) (5 tokens). The direct strategy of obligation statements was not used by the participants in any of the 8 scenarios. Therefore, this strategy has been omitted from all the following tables.

Conventional indirect core strategies

Conventional indirect strategies consisted only of query preparatory (e.g., Can you lend me 5000 riyals?) (315 tokens), whereas suggestory formulae were not used at all by the participants across all scenarios. Query preparatory turned out to be the most used strategy in this study. It was the most common strategy across all categories of core strategies and all 8 scenarios. Moreover, nonconventional indirect strategies consisted primarily of strong hints (81 tokens), while mild hints did not occur in the data. Therefore, suggestory formulae and mild hints have also been excluded from the following tables.

Table 8. Modifications per favor in terms of degree of imposition

	Modifications per response (mean)	Standard error per group
All+I Scenarios	7.51	0.95
All -I Scenarios	10.38	1.15

T value=3.175
df=203
p<0.05 (0.002)

Modifier Use

A t-test was performed to determine the effect of degree of imposition on the use of modifier strategies. As shown in Table 8, there was a significant difference between their use of modifiers in +I and -I scenarios (P-value=0.002). The respondents used more modifiers in the low imposition scenarios than in the high imposition situations when asking for a favor in Saudi Arabic.

There were certain modification strategies that were more preferred than the others across all 8 scenarios. The most used categories among modifiers were supportive moves (2271 tokens) and alerters (733 tokens). The least used modifiers were upgraders (277 tokens) and downgraders (416 tokens). Study participants also used modifiers that were not mentioned in Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) coding manual. Those were religious marker, appreciation, small talk, apology, affective appeal, and sweetener. They were all considered supportive moves (see Table 9). The most common modification strategies in this study were religious markers (515 tokens), grounders (372 tokens), and politeness markers (299). The least common modifiers were subjectivizers (6 tokens), downtoners (11 tokens), and understaters (19 tokens). Some modifiers mentioned in the literature were not used in any of the scenarios: alerters (surname, first name, nickname, pronoun), downgraders (hedge, cajoler), upgraders (commitment indicator, lexical uptoner, determination marker, emphatic addition), and supportive moves (getting a precommitment). Therefore, they have been omitted from all subsequent tables.

A chi-square test was performed in order to determine if there was a significant difference between the different levels of degree of imposition in terms of the frequency of individual modifiers. For each modifier, Table 10 shows significant difference between their use in +I and –I scenarios. Degree of imposition had a significant effect on the frequency of 13 out of 23 strategies. The significant differences in the following table are highlighted in bold.

DISCUSSION

Core Strategy Use in Relation to Degree of Imposition

Binomial tests showed that degree of imposition significantly affected core strategies. The Saudi female participants showed an overall preference for direct and conventional indirect strategies over nonconventional indirect strategies in all scenarios (see Table 7).

In terms of degree of imposition, conventional indirect strategies were more preferred in high imposing scenarios, whereas direct strategies were strongly preferred in low imposing situations (see Table 11). This suggests that being indirect is expected in Saudi culture when asking a high-imposing favor, and being direct is acceptable when asking a favor with low imposition. This preference can be explained by referring to the extreme imposing nature of favor asking (Goldschmidt, 1988). This speech act is very imposing in a sense that it is not guaranteed that the hearer would be able to comply with it. Thus, it is an FTA to the hearer's negative face. The speaker would be imposing on the hearer's freedom from action unless the speaker minimizes the imposition by using negative politeness strategies, such as indirect favor asking, to respect the hearer's negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This is consistent with results of studies on other languages regarding different speech acts such as Chinese requests (Chen, He & Hu, 2013) and Korean favor asking (Lee & Park, 2011). There was also a study on Yemeni Arabic. The participants were found to prefer using indirect requests in high-imposing situations, whereas they preferred using direct requests when the imposition was low (Al-Fattah & Ravindranath, 2009; Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010).

Table 9. Modifiers found in this study

Modifier	Definition	Example
Religious marker	A phrase includes a reference to God as a sort of a prayer to get the hearer's compliance	*May Allah help you May Allah protect your kids*
Appreciation	Expressing gratitude	*I would be thankful*
Small talk	Starting a conversation with informal discourse exchange	*How are you?*
Apology	A statement of regret for imposing on the hearer	*I am sorry for interrupting you*
Affective appeal	Engaging the hearer's feelings	*You are the only one I trust*
Sweetener	Complementing the hearer	*You have a beautiful office*

Table 10. Significant difference between modifier and + I/-I

Modifier	+I scenarios (N = 360)		-I scenarios (N = 360)		Significant?		
	No	%	No	%	Yes/No	X²	P-value
Religious marker	287	79.7	228	63.3	Yes	72.14	0.000
Grounder	243	67.5	129	35.8	Yes	72.82	0.000
Apology	156	43.3	43	11.9	Yes	88.67	0.000
Appreciation	149	41.4	122	33.9	Yes	4.31	0.038
Endearment term	144	40.0	139	38.6	No	0.15	0.730
Politeness marker	135	37.5	164	45.6	Yes	4.81	0.028
Title	132	36.7	142	39.4	No	0.59	0.443
Affective appeal	118	32.8	11	3.1	Yes	108.12	0.000
Promise of reward	111	30.8	17	4.7	Yes	83.96	0.000
Imposition minimizer	110	30.6	103	28.6	No	0.33	0.568
Intensifier	105	29.2	56	15.6	Yes	19.21	0.000
Small talk	91	25.3	93	25.8	No	0.03	0.864
Sweetener	80	22.2	29	8.1	Yes	28.12	0.000
Attention getter	79	21.9	97	26.9	No	2.44	0.119
Disarmer	53	14.7	59	16.7	No	0.51	0.473
Consultative device	36	10.0	19	5.3	Yes	5.69	0.017
Repetition of request	36	10.0	25	6.9	No	2.17	0.141
Preparator	15	4.2	24	6.7	No	2.20	0.138
Appealer	13	3.6	13	3.6	No	0.00	1.000
Downtoner	11	3.3	0	0.0	Yes	12.20	0.000
Understater	8	2.2	11	3.1	No	0.49	0.485
Time intensifier	4	1.1	51	14.2	Yes	43.21	0.000
Subjectivizer	0	0.0	6	1.7	Yes	-	0.031*

Table 11. Core strategy use in relation to degree of imposition

Strategies	+I Scenarios (N=360)		-I Scenarios (N=360)	
	%	No	No	%
Direct				
Mood derivable	56	15.6	72	20.0
Performative	0	0.0	5	1.4
Hedged performative	30	8.3	30	8.3
Want Statement	57	15.8	74	20.6
Conventional indirect				
Query preparatory	166	46.1	149	41.4
Nonconventional indirect				
Strong hints	51	14.2	30	8.3

Modifications

The data show that every response (N=720) contained modifications (N=3697) to the core strategy or the head favor. The most used modification device in the whole study was religious marker (515 tokens). This high usage shows that Saudi society is religious. The high reference to God (or Allah) can be seen as a way to emphasize solidarity through the Muslim group identity of the interlocutors.

T-tests and an ANOVA F-test showed that the overall use of modifications significantly varied from +I to –I (see Table 8). Chi-square tests were used to examine the significant different individual modifiers across all of those different dynamics of imposition (see Table 10).

Degree of imposition had a significant effect on the overall use of modifications (see Table 8). One would expect the participants to use more modifications in +I than in –I scenarios in order to redress the threatening and imposing nature of favors (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goldschmidt, 1988). However, the participants used an average of 7.51 modifications in high imposing scenarios, whereas they used an average of 10.38 in low imposing scenarios. This can be explained by referring to the kind of core strategies they used across these two different dynamics of imposition. The participants preferred conventional indirect strategies in high imposing scenarios, and direct strategies in low imposing situations. Thus, the lower numbers of modifications in high imposing scenarios can tell us that the participants might think that the use of indirect core strategies is sufficient in terms of minimizing the imposition of favor asking. By contrast, the higher numbers of modifications in low imposing situations can show us that the participants, who mostly used direct core strategies in those situations, might be considering the need to employ more modifications to reduce the threat of favor asking.

Degree of imposition had also a significant effect on the use of individual modifiers across all situations (see Table 10). The use of some modifications was significantly higher in high imposing scenarios than in low imposing ones, including religious markers, grounders, appreciation, apologies, intensifiers, promises of reward, affective appeals, sweeteners, consultative devices, and downtoners. Most of these modifications are supportive moves, which have the function of mitigating the favor being asked. This explains that the participants tended to use these modifications, mostly supportive moves, more in high imposing scenarios as strategies to mitigate the extra imposition found in those scenarios. In contrast, the use of some modifiers was significantly higher in low imposing scenarios including politeness markers, subjectivizers, and time intensifiers. Politeness markers and subjectivizers are downgraders, which have the function of softening the imposition of the favor being asked. To explain this higher usage, we have to refer to the fact that the participants used more direct core strategies in these low imposing scenarios. Therefore, downgraders were used more in these scenarios in order to mitigate the direct favor being asked. In addition, there were modifications that were not significantly affected by the different degrees of imposition, including alerters (titles, endearment terms, attention getters), downgraders (understaters, appealers), upgraders (repetition of requests), and some supportive moves (imposition minimizers, disarmers, small talk, preparators).

CONCLUSION

The first question that this study attempted to answer is about how favor asking is performed in Saudi Arabic. The data showed that Saudi female participants preferred direct and conventional indirect core strategies over nonconventional indirect strategies when asking for a favor. The most used direct strategy was want statement. Conventional indirect strategies consisted only of query preparatory, whereas nonconventional indirect strategies comprised only strong hints. The participants showed a preference for using modifications in every response, even though their use is considered to be optional (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). The most used category of modifications was supportive moves, of which religious markers were the most common in the study.

The second question asked whether degree of imposition would affect the performance of favor asking in Saudi Arabic. It was found that degree of imposition had significant effects on both core strategies and modifications. The participants tended to be more indirect and used fewer modifiers in +I scenarios, while they tended to be more direct and used more modifiers in -I scenarios.

The study had limitations that could suggest topics for future studies. The data were collected using only one method, a DCT. Using a DCT enabled the researcher to collect a large number of responses in a short period of time, and to be consistent by controlling the social variables. However, one might want to enhance the ability to generalize the findings over the examined population in a study by using another source of data beside the DCT such as follow-up interviews or natural observation. Using an implicit association test (IAT) is also another option. The responses collected using a DCT could be used to construct judgment questions for the IAT test. The participants, for example, would judge different ways of favor asking as acceptable or unacceptable, and present the reasons behind such judgments. It is argued that the participants would react more automatically and quickly to the stimuli in these judgment questions, since they are already associated with certain attitudes in their mind. Thus, more implicit and natural ways of performing favor asking would be tapped.

This study focused only on Saudi Arabic female speakers. It could be replicated with both females and males in order to see if favor asking in Saudi Arabic is different in female-female interactions from that in male-male interactions. One might also examine favor asking in cross-gender interactions. Moreover, further studies should recruit a larger number of respondents in order to be more confident in making generalizations about favor asking in Saudi Arabic. Furthermore, this study focused only on degree of imposition. This suggests focusing on other possible factors such as age, education, occupation, social distance, and social power.

The study had the goals of examining favor asking in general, and that of Saudi Arabic in particular. However, favor asking still remains the least studied among speech acts since it has been studied only in American English, Kuwaiti Arabic, Korean, and Saudi Arabic. This suggests further research to strengthen our understanding of favor asking across different languages and cultures. Moreover, research on Arabic speech acts in general, and on Saudi Arabic speech acts specifically, is still evolving. To widen the scope of research on speech acts in Arabic, one might examine other speech acts performed by speakers of other Arabic varieties. Further research should focus on other speech acts in Saudi Arabic as well.

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