

Requests and Linguistic Politeness Strategies: A Case Study of Igbo English Speakers in Nigeria

Chinomso P. Dozie^{1*}, Chioma N. Chinedu-Oko², Patricia N. Anyanwu³, Favour O. Egwim¹, Emeka J. Otagburuagu⁴

¹Use of English Language and Communication Unit, Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology Owerri, Nigeria

²Department of Humanities, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri

³Department of English and Communication Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Federal University Otuoke, Nigeria

⁴Department of English and Communication skills, School of General Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nsukka Campus, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: Chinomso P. Dozie, E-mail: chinomso.dozie@futo.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT

This article examined the Igbo native speakers' perception of request act as well as the linguistic politeness strategies used to achieve this communicative intention in their conversational English as bilinguals. The study participants were 2748 undergraduate Igbo native speakers purposively selected from different Federal and State Universities in the core Igbo-speaking states of South-east/South-south Nigeria. To elicit data, a 10-item discourse completion task (DCT) with guided options written in English and designed to evoke politeness strategies in request discourse projecting hypothetical situations was administered to the participants. The results showed that the study samples brought to fore their sociocultural expectations as Igbo by adopting principally the directness strategy in performing the request act. Also, findings revealed that the participants paid attention to certain sociolinguistic variables such as hierarchy, extent of familiarity, which contributed to the variance, observed in their choice of strategies in some contexts. Furthermore, the study noted a measure of linguistic transfer of a tinge of the native language to the target language (English language) as participants tried to fulfill the communicative goals of the request act in the target language. Notably, the findings demonstrated the possibility of communication breakdowns arising from grammatically correct but pragmatically inappropriate utterances from learners hence the need to further emphasize pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic consciousness - the dearth of which has been implicated in the study.

INTRODUCTION

Diverse cultures and languages of the world have been found to perceive and engage in conversational exchanges in diverse ways with each mirroring the specific beliefs and ideology of the people otherwise referred to as social norms. In the same vein, different speech communities convey, interpret and negotiate meanings based on shared practices which drive mutual communication and understanding among the people. In other words, language can only be effectively operative when used among people who share similar ideals, customs, tradition and even culture. It therefore follows that different language groups must align with specific strategies, practices and norms (overt or covert, expressed or implied, linguistic or non-linguistic) which govern language use and facilitate seamless conversation within the geographical location. Hence the notion of linguistic politeness plays a vital role in human interaction as it is believed that all of the daily interactions of people are directly anchored on the principles of politeness which according to Brown and Levinson (1987) helps to lessen or soothe the impact of an

otherwise compelling utterance. For Brown and Levinson, certain acts such as requests are essentially face-threatening because they cause some degree of infraction and threaten the addressee's negative face which loosely translates to a violation of his/her right of action and freedom from imposition.

Request is a directive speech act which aims to get the addressee to do something- particularly a favour to the speaker because he/she believes that the addressee would oblige (Searle 1969). Although Brown and Levinson (1987) strongly believe that requests are inherently demanding and imposing and must be made with utmost caution if at all it becomes expedient but Searle (1975), Leech (1983) and Blum-Kulka (1989) argued that adopting some forms of indirectness in request act was a preferred polite behaviour since it increases the degree of optionality as well as cushions the force of the illocutionary act by providing the hearer a platform to weigh available options without necessarily losing face. The Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness which derives from their concept of face and public self-image elaborately stresses the need to attend to the speaker's/hearer's

face needs to avoid imposition. In some cultures of the world e.g., the Igbo culture, this notion would be tantamount to not making a request at all which contrasts with Igbo hospitality and sociability. To this end therefore, the study seeks to investigate the Igbo native speakers' perception of Request act as well as note their expression of same act and strategies adopted to accomplish the demand in their conversational English in daily interactions as bilinguals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the renowned theory of politeness by Brown and Levinson with the attendant claim of the universality of its reach and applicability as well as the face-threatening potentiality of every utterance, it becomes imperative to study the accomplishment of request act of Igbo native speakers in English alongside other reported studies in other cultures. This is in a bid to try to find a point of either confluence or divergence in the established theory across languages and cultures as speech (language in general) is believed to work well within the purview of specific community/culture.

The Igbo and Request

The Igbo are the inhabitants of South-east and part of South-south Nigeria. They have one common language- Igbo although varying but mutually intelligible dialects. According to Nwoye (1989, 1992), the Igbo society is largely unstratified and her language is marked by statistically fewer linguistic forms for expressing class stratification suggestive of respect and terms of address or titles - honorifics. Similarly, the society has been described as a verbal one with its profound history and culture transmitted by word of mouth hence the value placed on words among the people. In addition, the Igbo revere eldership and accord regard to whoever it is due in the community as a distinct mark of respect. Societal accomplishment/attainment is also recognized as a sign of fulfillment in one's chosen endeavour and for which it is commonplace to attract even an acknowledged title. The traditional Igbo society thrives on communal living and the principle of oneness deeply rooted in symbiotic sociability, gracious hospitality and unquantifiable reciprocity as the kernel for her group-oriented form. This accounts for the peaceful co-existence that characterizes them as a people and makes such acts as reprimand, offers, apology, thanks, criticisms, requests etc become speech acts that neither causes an infraction nor imposes on the speaker or hearer. Accordingly, requesting in the robust and gregarious Igbo culture is a routine occurrence devoid of every streak of imposition because the society is founded on the concern for the collective good and image of everyone as opposed to cultures where atomistic individualism is the norm. The ease with which the request act is made does not preclude the possibility of discomfort or inconvenience on the part of the addressee but in keeping with the spirit of one good turn, communal life and societal cohesion which binds the Igbo life and living, the request is borne, regardless. Among the Igbo and similar cultures,

“acts requiring aid and cooperation of others are solicited, in fact demanded, from others, as a social right accruing to the person requesting or demanding the act as a member of the society” (Nwoye 1992). The implication therefore is that there are unwritten/unspoken but existing symbolic rights and obligations which the Igbo culture evenly spreads across her people and which every member recognizes as a way of life and conforming to social expectations.

Previous Studies

Nwoye (1989, 1992) whose pioneering works on the Igbo and linguistic politeness informed further studies and generated a lot of concern in the discipline particularly in the universality of the politeness theory reviewed Linguistic politeness in Igbo and Sociocultural variations of the notion of face respectively. Nwoye's study examined the operations of politeness, notion of face and cultural perception of what constitutes being polite in Igbo society and confirmed that politeness phenomenon was essentially perceived and manifested differently by various cultures of the world. In Nwoye's analysis of request act in Igbo, the study made it abundantly clear that request among the Igbo was a routine occurrence and that no member of the community ever considered the act as an affront rather, as a social norm, it was often demanded by anyone requiring aid in different circumstances. Also, the group-orientedness of the society anchored on common sharing of goods and services makes the request act and response to it only compliance to social expectations which implies that people should respond to others' needs. However, Nwoye noted that request can be made by implicature, directly or indirectly but maintained that within the Igbo cultural milieu, directness remained the favoured and most effective request strategy not marred by societal demarcations. Finally, the study found evidence to establish that the Brown and Levinson's claim for the universality of politeness principles was only operational within specific speech community as different cultures manifest politeness differently.

Also, Garcia (1993) studied Peruvian-Spanish speakers' way of making requests as well as responding to requests by adopting role-play interaction in a longitudinal study design with 40 participants in three situations- (1) requesting a service, (2) obliging a request for service and (3) refusing a request for a service. The study reported that the degree of involvement generally depended on the situation as Peruvian Spanish speakers showed deference, respect and the desire to not impose on the hearer while making a request as well as refusing the request. Also, the study showed that participants opted for solidarity rather than deference politeness strategies when accepting a request. Although Garcia's study focused on three role-play situations, realizations varied largely by the participants who represented different speech communities/cultures and gender was also a factor as there were striking male-female differences in strategies used.

Takezawa (1995) studied requesting in Japanese as a second language drawing production data by means of Discourse Completion Task from Japanese native speakers and non-native speakers. The study indicated that the Japanese

subjects used sociolinguistic strategies such as nominalizers, unfinished sentences as well as honorifics to express politeness and tone down an infraction while the Canadian subjects were found to use only honorifics. The study concluded that honorifics were used to express politeness in formal request situations, while other more subtle linguistic devices such as nominalizers and unfinished sentences were also used to minimize the scale of infraction as well as create feelings of empathy and understanding between the requester and the requestee.

In another study, Umar (2004) did a comparative survey of the request strategies used by Arab learners of English with strategies used by native English speakers with the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) as data collection tool. Results of the study demonstrated that both groups used similar strategies of indirectness when addressing their equals or individuals in higher rank. The Arabic subjects were found to use more direct request options for addressees of lower status while the Native English speakers' requests appeared more polite as a result of their use of more semantic and syntactic modifiers in the act.

Similarly, Felix-Brasdefer (2005) examined Indirectness and Politeness in the speech act of requests among Native speakers of Mexican Spanish using formal and informal role-play situations. Results showed that indirectness was commonly used for requesting in situations which projected +Power or +Distance while directness strategy was common in situations where interlocutors shared a close relationship. The study further remarked that on-record or direct requests were situation-dependent and were considered a social norm among the Mexican subjects and not in a way impolite.

Jalilifar (2009) conducted a cross-sectional study of Iranian EFL learners and Australian native speakers request strategies using 69 BA and MA Persian EFL learners and 10 Australian native speakers of English by means of a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Results showed that participants' use of direct request strategies was significantly reduced as they advanced in English proficiency level although lower level learners adopted mainly direct request strategies and conventionally indirect requests with mid-level learners. Similarly, there was appreciable increase in their choice and use of conventional and non-conventional request strategies in daily interaction.

In a Cross-Cultural study, Hilbig (2009) surveyed request strategies in Lithuanian and British English using the Discourse Completion Test and an open-ended questionnaire to draw data from 100 Lithuanian and 100 English undergraduates. Findings showed that although both groups used conventionally indirect request strategies, the Lithuanians were more inclined to direct strategies and non-conventionally indirect and positive politeness strategies.

Furthermore, Shahidi-Tabar (2012) explored Cross-Cultural speech act realization: the case of requests in the Persian and Turkish speech of Iranian speakers using a Discourse Completion Test with ten scenarios as a data collection tool. Findings of the study revealed that politeness strategies were dissimilar in different languages as participants as Iranian-Turkish subjects and Persian-Turkish subjects

responded differently in their choice of politeness strategies in similar scenarios. Also, female subjects were reported to use less direct strategies in Persian and more direct strategies in Turkish as compared to males. The study concluded that there were a few hints on choice of strategies by males based on socioeconomic reasons which was proof of recourse to status symbol/hierarchy in the request act.

In an interlanguage study, Memarian (2012) studied Persian graduate students' use of request strategies in English with the view to pointing out any form of pragmatic transfer from native/first language to the target language. Through a Discourse Completion Task, the author sampled one hundred (100) graduate students and two groups of British English native speakers and Persian native speakers. Findings indicated possible signs of transfer and development of interlanguage by Persian subjects and the need for education on the choice of strategies with emphasis on social power and social distance variables.

Yazdanfar and Bonyadi (2016) investigated request strategies in everyday interactions of Persian and English Speakers observing and transcribing requestive utterances in English and Persian TV series. The study reported that speakers of both languages opted for the direct level as their most frequently used strategy but whereas the English speakers used more conventionally indirect strategies, the Persian speakers used more non-conventionally indirect strategies in conversations. Also, results indicated that American English speakers used more mitigators in their daily interactions with family and friends than Persian speakers.

Although a lot has been done on the speech act of request by researchers across cultures in general and particularly by Nwoye (1989 and 1992) on request by Igbo in Igbo, the present study is an attempt to empirically understudy linguistic politeness in the English language conversations of Igbo native speakers. In other words, the study focuses on the Igbo native speaker's ability to fulfil this interactional need by means of the target language.

METHODOLOGY

As part of an existing and larger research carried out in the course of our Doctoral study on politeness forms and hedging strategies in English among Igbo bilinguals in Nigeria conducted in the second/rain semester of the 2016/2017 academic session using Igbo native speakers as subjects, the study on a large scale explored various indices of politeness such as appreciation, request, greeting, offer, reprimand, apology, excuses, breaking bad news etc and the Igbo views and expression of politeness in English language as well as its implication as a discourse strategy hence methodology remains the same (Dozie, 2017).

Population

The subjects were Nigerians of Igbo extraction and that is to say that the study targeted only Igbo native speakers who are learners of English as a second language (ESL). They were male and female undergraduate students, between the ages of 17 and 25. These subjects were purposively drawn

from various Federal and State Universities in the five core Igbo-speaking states that make up the South-Eastern Nigeria, namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo state and the Igbo-speaking areas of Delta and Rivers States in the South-South Nigeria (Dozie, 2020)

Sampling Techniques

Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike (MOUAU) Abia State, Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU) Awka Anambra State, Ebonyi State University (EBSU) Ebonyi State, University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) Enugu State, Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO) Imo State, Delta State University (DELSU) Delta State and University of Port-Harcourt (UNIPORT) River State were the seven institutions selected through a Systematic Sampling Process (SSP) for the study. Similarly, the SSP was also applied to select faculties represented for all institutions of study. A pretested and validated 10-item request discourse questionnaire was administered to a total of three thousand (3 000) respondents. Five hundred (500) participants were drawn from each of the five institutions that make up the core Igbo speaking states of the South-East zone. Similarly, two hundred and fifty (250) participants were drawn from each of the two institutions in the South-South zone. This study focused on the English language conversation of Igbo native speakers particularly as they employed politeness strategies in request discourse which are influenced by sociolinguistic variables as social status, social distance and cultural variations (Dozie, 2020)

Instrumentation

The major instrument for data collection was a ten-item pretested Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaire. The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was adopted as the production data collection method to capture the details of a cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey. The questionnaire was in two parts, while the first part focused on socio-demographic characteristics of participants, the second part addressed ten situations designed to elicit politeness strategies in form of request which are: (1) As a lecturer, you need to ask your students for a change in the teaching schedule in order to meet up with an appointment. What would you say to them? (2) You are a lecturer in a particular department and you haven't been able to cover your course outline for the semester and exams are at hand. You need to request your students to read up the outstanding chapters. What would you say to your students? (3) In your workplace, you are entitled to a day off monthly, but you are not due yet. How would you request your colleague to allow you have her/his place in exchange for yours in time? (4) As a spouse, you couldn't make a hospital appointment with your partner and you are requesting for a change in time. What would you say to your partner? (5) As a parent, you wish to request your nanny/house keeper to work an extra hour on a particular day because of a prior engagement. What would you say to her? (6) You suddenly had a flat

tyre on the highway. How would you request a passer-by for help? (7) You are trudging along with two heavy shopping bags and you obviously need help. How would you request the shop attendant for assistance? (8) As a novice, you just couldn't use the Automated Teller Machine (ATM). How would you request for assistance? (9) You are cash strapped and you require some money immediately. How would you request a colleague to loan you some money? (10) You are in need of a particular textbook to help with an assignment and you found out that the only person who owned such a textbook was a certain professor in your department. How would you ask for the book?

As with previous studies which worked on the same samples and adopting same methodological sequence (Dozie, 2017 and 2020), all items on the questionnaire were followed by three guided options marked alphabetically from A – C. These options were structured to show that all options were polite but at varying degrees. Hence all option A was polite, all option B was more polite and all option C was most polite. The participants were expected to go by any option which best typified their own in similar situations. The DCT represented various contexts of situations simulating the imagined role-play between interactants. Thus, sociolinguistic variables like social status of speakers and social distance between speakers were posited in each situation.

Data Collection

Data were collected at the seven (7) institutions selected for the study in the second/rain semester of 2016/2017 academic session by means of a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). As this study focused on human subjects ethical concerns were considered in data collection. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the study institutions and willing students who indicated interest after the objectives of the study were highlighted and assured of anonymity of questionnaire were assembled in the lecture halls. The researchers made the respondents realize that they could only participate voluntarily and as such were permitted to withdraw from the study at will. Willing members of staff were enlisted as research assistants in the distribution and collection of questionnaire. Having obtained verbal consent from the participants, they completed the DCT taking approximately 15 minutes.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis was used to evaluate respondents' expressed opinions on politeness strategies employed in request discourse derived from the DCT and are presented in frequency tables and simple percentage calculations.

RESULTS

Gender Distribution and Return of Questionnaire by Respondents According to Institutions

Table 1 shows that out of the 3000 copies of questionnaire distributed, 2748 representing 92% was returned consisting

Table 1. Gender distribution and return of questionnaire by respondents

Institutions	No. of Questionnaire distributed	No (%) of Questionnaire returned	Male		Female	
			Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)
MOUUAU	500	440 (88.0)	200	45.5	240	54.5
NAU	500	461 (92.2)	198	43.0	263	57.0
EBSU	500	464 (92.8)	204	44.0	260	56.0
UNN	500	446 (92.2)	257	58.0	189	42.0
FUTO	500	478 (95.6)	148	31.0	330	69.0
DELSU	500	227 (90.8)	70	31.0	157	69.0
UNIPORT	500	232 (92.8)	76	32.8	156	67.2
TOTAL	3,000	2748 (92.00)	1153	42.0	1595	58.0

Key:

MOUUAU = Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike

NAU = Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka

EBSU = Ebonyi State University

UNN = University of Nigeria Nsukka

FUTO = Federal University of Technology Owerri

DELSU = Delta State University

UNIPORT = University of Port Harcourt

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to level of proficiency in English

Level of Proficiency in English	Frequency	Percentage
Weak	23	0.8
Fair	700	25.0
Good	1320	48.0
Very good	604	22.1
Excellent	101	4.1
Total	2748	100

of 42% males and 58% females from various institutions of study.

Respondents' English Proficiency Level

Table 2 indicates respondents' self-assessment of proficiency level in English Language. Results show that the highest percentage (48.0%) was of the good proficiency level while the least percentage (0.8%) was of the weak proficiency level.

Responses on Request Discourse

Table 3 shows the frequency of Respondents' responses on Request Discourse observing the situations projected by different scenarios and working with the guided option provided.

Assessment of Overall Respondents' Discourse on Request

Table 4 shows that 55.44% of the polite responses were by the males and 44.56% were by the females. Also 51.12% of the more polite responses were by the males and 48.88% were by the females. However, 44.42% of the most polite responses came from the males and 55.58% were recorded by the females.

DISCUSSION

Request discourse entails the act of asking politely or formally for something. In human existence and relations, it is only natural that at one point or another in daily interactions or exchange, one may require another's aid, support or assistance either in the form of words, goods and services or even physical help to ease a burden. Request is a symbolic act which transcends the moment of discourse as it is not usually easy to predict the situation which would impel a request and it is almost impossible to tell whose help or assistance one might require in matters of urgent attention. A fact of basic importance still remains that everyone needs one another in the business of life which is always a process of compromise largely achieved by asking- Request.

Findings on request discourse establish the fact that Igbo bilinguals perform the act in various contexts as determined by different circumstances. Based on our knowledge, experience and studies on Igbo culture, it is recognized that request act is only a way of life in the traditional Igbo society anchored on mutual exchange of goods and services and every member is socially bound to reciprocate. That explains why request act is not considered an imposition and there are no bounds as to who is entitled to; make a request, oblige a request, and/or give in return or equal measure when requested in Igbo culture. Result of this study shows that in line with the speech act of request, certain social variables (Social distance i.e. scale of familiarity between interlocutors and Social status i.e. social class/hierarchy of interlocutors) are believed to be taken into account when performing the act hence the scenarios posited in situations in the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). In other words, situations 1 2 5 7 portrayed interlocutors in a vertical relationship where the speaker is higher than the hearer. Also situations 3 4 9 presented interlocutors in a horizontal relationship and that is to say that speakers and hearers in those instances were equals. In addition, situations 6 and 8 projected interlocutors whose

Table 3. Summary of Respondents' Responses on Request Discourse

Situation	OPTION APOLITE					OPTION BMORE POLITE					OPTION CMOST POLITE										
	MOUAU	NAU	EBSU	UNN	FUTO	DELSU	UN	IPORT	MOUAU	NAU	EBSU	UNN	FUTO	DELSU	UN	IPORT					
11	175	183	184	177	190	90	92	192	202	203	195	209	99	101	73	76	77	74	79	38	38
12	131	137	138	132	142	67	69	250	262	264	254	272	129	132	59	62	62	60	64	30	31
15	104	109	110	105	113	54	55	273	286	288	277	297	141	144	63	66	66	63	68	32	33
17	69	72	73	70	75	36	36	280	293	295	284	304	144	148	91	95	96	92	99	47	48
13	79	83	83	80	86	41	42	84	88	88	85	91	43	44	277	290	292	281	301	143	146
14	20	21	21	21	22	10	11	60	63	63	61	65	31	32	360	377	380	365	391	186	190
19	41	42	43	41	44	21	21	95	99	100	96	103	49	50	305	319	321	309	331	157	161
16	235	246	248	238	255	121	124	74	77	78	75	80	38	39	132	138	139	133	143	68	69
18	227	238	240	230	247	117	120	41	42	43	41	44	21	21	172	180	182	174	187	89	91
20	48	50	50	49	52	25	25	51	53	53	51	55	26	27	342	358	360	346	371	176	180
Total	1129	1181	1190	1143	1226	582	595	1400	1465	1475	1419	1520	721	738	1874	1961	1975	1897	2034	966	987

Key: MOUAU = 440

xNAU = 461

xEBSU = 464

xUNN = 446

FUTO = 478

xDELSU = 227

UNIPORT = 232

TOTAL = 2748

Table 4. Assessment of Respondents' Reponses on Request Discourse (n = 2748)

Situation	Social Status	Social Distance	OPTION APOLITE				OPTION BMORE POLITE				OPTION CMOST POLITE									
			Freq	%	Male Freq	Female %	Freq	%	Male Freq	Female %	Freq	%	Male Freq	Female %						
11	S > H	OSD	1091	15.48	601	8.53	490	6.95	1201	13.74	561	6.42	640	7.32	455	3.89	215	1.84	240	2.05
12	S > H	OSD	816	11.58	404	5.73	412	5.85	1563	17.89	760	8.70	803	9.19	368	3.15	196	1.68	172	1.47
15	S > H	+SD	650	9.23	311	4.41	339	4.81	1706	19.52	778	8.90	928	10.62	391	3.34	216	1.85	175	1.50
17	S > H	-SD	431	6.12	234	3.32	197	2.80	1748	20.00	901	10.31	847	9.69	568	4.86	206	1.76	362	3.10
13	S = H	OSD	494	7.01	253	3.59	241	3.42	523	5.99	338	3.87	185	2.12	1730	14.79	719	6.15	1011	8.65
14	S = H	+SD	126	1.79	68	0.97	58	0.82	375	4.29	186	2.13	189	2.16	2249	19.23	912	7.80	1337	11.43
19	S = H	OSD	253	3.59	175	2.48	78	1.11	592	6.78	296	3.39	296	3.39	1903	16.27	896	7.66	1007	8.61
16	S θ H	+SD	1467	20.82	792	11.24	675	9.58	461	5.28	284	3.25	177	2.03	822	7.03	470	4.02	352	3.01
18	S θ H	OSD	1419	20.14	875	12.42	544	7.72	253	2.90	179	2.05	74	0.85	1075	9.19	474	4.05	601	5.14
20	S < H	-SD	299	4.24	193	2.74	106	1.50	316	3.62	184	2.11	132	1.51	2133	18.24	890	7.61	1243	10.63
Total			7046	100.00	3906	55.44	3140	44.56	8738	100.00	4467	51.12	4271	48.88	11694	100.00	5194	44.42	6500	55.58

S = Speaker; H = Hearer; SD = Social Distance
 < = Lower; = equal; > higher; θ = not established
 + = close; - = distant; 0 = neutral

statuses were not established i.e. diagonal/seesaw relationship. Finally, situation 10 equally depicted a vertical relationship but in this case, the speaker is of a lower status than the hearer.

Data show that in situations 1 2 5 and 7 which dealt with lecturer-students/parent-nanny/customer-attendant relationships respectively, the requests thereof were made adopting the more polite option B; a positive politeness strategy as the requester tries to lessen the threat arising from the act to the hearer's positive face. This is an indication that even though the speakers were higher than the hearers, there was still need to make a direct request which demonstrates the exigency of such request and its associated compliance. This finding corroborates Nwoye's (1992) earlier study that although requests can be made by implicatures (indirectness) but directness remains the favoured and most effective request strategy regardless of the social status variable at play as against Searle (1975), Leech (1983) and Blum-Kulka (1989) who argued that adopting some forms of indirectness in request act was a preferred polite behaviour. Also, previous study by Felix-Brasdefer (2005) reported that direct requests were not impolite but situation-dependent and were considered a social norm among the Mexican subjects. This goes to confirm that politeness is a culture/context-bound phenomenon and people generally express and achieve same differently.

Also, the evidence from this study show that in request acts among interlocutors who are equals (situations 3 4 and 9) the majority of the responses were anchored on the most polite option C. The preponderance of the most polite option C in contexts among equals signals a negative politeness/indirectness strategy as there is a potential for awkwardness and speaker might be imposing on the hearer while still maintaining the directness attached to the demand. The choice of the most polite option lacing the directness with a tinge of negative politeness/indirectness strategy partly demonstrates a transfer of the nuances of respondents' first/native language to the target language. This significant finding had been earlier reported by Memarian (2012) that in interlanguage studies, there is tendency for interference in the use the target by non-native speakers since in trying to learn a second language learners imbibe some elements of the culture of the target language and this plays up in instances requiring a test of communicative competence in the target language.

On the other hand, results of the present study show that in request acts among speakers whose statuses are not established (situations 6 and 8), respondents showed tendency to the polite (option A) responses which reflects a bald-on-record strategy as the speakers in these situations made no effort to mitigate the imposition on the hearer but relied on the exigency of the circumstances that the request must be made. This depicts utter directness as choice of strategy arising partly from the urgency of the situation. Again, considering the nature of the traditional Igbo society and the unwritten/unspoken right to in fact demand such assistance and assurances of having one's needs met, directness remains the ultimate request strategy. Additionally, this

notion of directness had been highlighted in prior studies (Umar 2004, Jalilifar 2009) where subject were found to adopt mainly direct strategy in performing the request act which was attributable to factors such as cultural influence, language identity, emergence of interlanguage etc.

In addition, findings from the study equally show that in request acts among interlocutors where speaker is lower than hearer i.e. student-professor relationship (situation 10), respondents were largely drawn to the most polite (option C) response which depicts negative politeness/indirectness strategy and the need to mitigate threat to the hearer's face which strengthens Brown and Levinson's (1978:66) concept of 'face' as "something that is emotionally invested and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction". The above context which gave rise to the choice of the most polite option demonstrates that hierarchy as well as age played a major role in the request act strategy adopted which confirms Nwoye's (1989) assertion that eldership is revered in the traditional Igbo society and culture and further substantiates Felix-Brasdefer's (2005) claim that indirectness was commonly used for requesting in situations which projected + Power or +Distance.

Lastly, results obtained from the current research show that given the different scenarios projected in the Request Discourse situations across relationships, the Male respondents were much more disposed to the polite (option A) responses unlike their female counterparts who preferred the most polite (Option C) responses (Table 4). Their choice of options is indicative of the fact there are differences in strategies adopted and this finding supports previous studies by Garcia (1993) that gender was also a contributory factor as there were clear male-female dissimilarity in strategies used in the speech act of request. Also, another equally important finding is that since the majority of the female respondents chose the most polite option C while the majority of the males went by the polite option A, we may thus infer in support of previous studies (Lakoff, 1975 and Fishman, 1978, 1980) that females in the study population are more linguistically polite than their male counterparts.

CONCLUSION

This study has given impetus to the need for proper understanding of language as a functionally significant tool of communication which draws meaning essentially from socio-cultural/contextual parameters and the need for an enhancement of language learners' socio-pragmatic knowledge. By adopting an empirical approach, the study focused on the Igbo native speakers' perception of Request act and strategies adopted to accomplish the demand in their conversational English as bilinguals. It was noted that Request for the study group was simply a way of life and did not constitute an infraction in any way which explains their non-hesitancy in performing the request act. It was equally demonstrated that there was a significant difference in the way the study samples realized the act by adopting majorly the bald-on-record or direct strategy. Furthermore, giving the social variables of status and distance which were key

considerations among other variables in linguistic politeness, the study samples yielded partly to these parameters and opted for the negative politeness/indirect strategy to fulfill the conversational demand. In addition, the study relies on its findings as evidence to further reiterate the culture-context specificity not universality of the politeness theory. Therefore, the present conclusions continue to drive an increasing body of literature which helps shape our reasoning and appreciation of the correlation between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge and recommends an inclusion of the key findings of this work into syllabi for a holistic teaching, learning and application of target language in conversation.

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