| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Pragmalinguistic Analysis of Request External and Internal Modification Strategies: The case of Moroccan University Students of English

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| ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Moroccan university students of English use modification strategies to either mitigate or aggravate their requests as compared to American native speakers of English. The data were collected by means of a written discourse completion task and were analyzed quantitatively based on Faerch and Kasper's (1989) typology of request modification categories. The analysis showed significant differences between American native speakers and Moroccan university students at the level of external and internal modification. While Americans used more mitigating supportive moves, Moroccans' requests displayed more lexical/phrasal downgraders. However, the differences at the level of alerters, syntactic downgraders, upgraders, and aggravating supportive moves were not significant. The study concludes with some implications about the importance and relevance of modification categories in the acquisition and teaching of requests in a foreign language.

1. Introduction

Research in the field of interlanguage pragmatics has mainly focused on non-native speakers' production of various speech acts as compared to native speakers. Various studies have investigated numerous speech acts from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. One of the most studied speech acts in the field is the request speech act (Abidi, 2022; Blum-Kulka and House,1989; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008; Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Idriss and Ismail, 2023; Jorda, 2005; Latif, 2001; Lee, 2011; Talay, 2022; Trosborg, 1995; Weizman, 1989). The latter is an illocutionary act whereby a speaker asks a hearer to perform an act for the benefit of the speaker (Trosborg 1995). Requests can have various goals, such as information, favor, service, and right. For a learner to appropriately produce requests in a foreign language, they need both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). While sociopragmatics studies the aspects in which pragmatic performance is influenced by the underlying socio-cultural perceptions of participants, Pragmalinguistics, which is the focus of the present study, can be applied to "the more linguistic end of pragmatics" and refers to the particular resources that a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions (Leech, 1983:11). Such resources, as Kasper (1997) points out, include pragmatic strategies, such as directness and indirectness, routines, and a range of linguistic forms, which can mitigate or intensify speech acts. when first language procedures and linguistic strategies of speech act performance are transferred to the learner's interlanguage, pragmatic failure is likely to happen. In the case of requests, these pragmalinguistic strategies comprise linguistic forms , which can be used to produce direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect head requests. Furthermore, these resources also involve modification categories which are externally or internally added to the head-request to either mitigate or reinforce its impact on the hearer. The production of these elements by non-native speakers is greatly affected by their linguistic

proficiency and linguistic and cultural background.

These various pragmalinguistic strategies need to be chosen and combined carefully to maximize hearer compliance since most request types involve a degree of imposition on the hearer as the request generally calls for an immediate verbal or non-verbal action from the requestee. The request speech act is, therefore, classified as one of the most face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987) since the requestee may lose face if they are obliged to comply (negative face) and the requester too may feel the same if the hearer chooses not to comply with the request (positive face) (Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to Brown and Levinson (ibid.), politeness strategies are developed in order to save the hearer's face, a notion similar to self-esteem. It refers to the respect that an individual has for themselves and to the maintaining of that self-esteem in various situations. The notion of `face' has been divided into two types, which the authors call `positive face' and ` negative face'. In his explanation of the two concepts, Grundy (1995) describes positive face as a person's desire to be well thought of, to have what one admires admired by the others and the desire to be treated as a friend and confident, whereas, the negative face is one's wish not to be imposed on by others, to have one's action unimpeded; and to have one's freedom of action intact. The growing interest in such phenomena culminated in many cross-cultural and cross-linguistic studies. These studies reported that what is considered polite in one language may not sometimes be polite in another. For example, the notions of directness and indirectness have been found to work differently in certain cultures, such as the Greek, compared to the American culture (Tannen 1981, Economidou- Kogetsidis 2008, 2009). Brown and Levinson (1987) contend that speech act realization strategies, along with politeness and mitigation of forms, are mostly similar across languages and cultures. However, Wierzbicka (1985) criticizes this view, attributing the differences between the Polish and the English in the area of speech acts "to deep-seated cultural norms and values". She maintains that language differences are due to basic differences in "cultural ethos" and that any claims to universality in the politeness of speech act performance are nothing but "ethnocentric Anglo-Saxon claims".

The present study examines the pragmalinguistic external and internal modification elements which Moroccan EFL learners and American native speakers use to soften or intensify their requests in order to reveal the potential similarities and differences that exist between native speaker language and non-native speaker interlanguage. The study will particularly seek to answer the following research questions:

1.   How similar or different are Moroccan university students' and American native speakers' requests at the level of internal modification categories?
2.   How similar or different are Moroccan university students' and American native speakers' requests at the level of external modification categories?

2. Literature Review
2.1 The Request speech Act

Requests are usually associated with a number of interactional, illocutionary, and sociolinguistic characteristics (Ellis, 1994:167-8). At the interactional level, requests usually come as discourse initiators since they are attempts to have the hearer perform a certain action. Requests, however, are not always performed in one conversational turn; they can be preceded by preparatory acts considered as pre-requests (Levinson, 1983: 356).

At the illocutionary level, there is a set of conditions that must be met for the request to be appropriate. The speaker must first be sincere in his or her wish that the hearer performs the act. Second, the speaker believes that the hearer is able to perform the act. Third, the speaker does not believe the act will be performed without the request (Ellis, 1994:167). In previous work by Searle (1969, 1979), the conditions of requests are summarized as follows:

Preparatory condition: Hearer is able to perform action; sincerity condition: Speaker wants the hearer to do action; propositional content condition: Speaker predicates a future action of hearer; and essential condition: which counts as an attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to do action.

White (1993) believes that not all the above-mentioned conditions need to be fulfilled when requesting. Fukushima (2000) suggests excluding a condition such as "A request is a future act of hearer," since "requests are always pre-event acts: requests are made in an attempt to cause an event or change one" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Fukushima (2000) suggests only the following two conditions of requests: Speaker believes/assumes that hearer can do action, and speaker wants hearer to do action for some reason.

Blum-Kulka (1991:255) suggests that every speaker possesses a general pragmatic knowledge, which allows the inference of indirect meaning, and the realization of speech acts in non-conventional ways and which supplies an awareness of contextual restrictions in the selection of linguistic options. She posits that the general pragmatic knowledge of requests is organized as a request schema. This schema contains relevant information concerning request goals, the linguistic encoding of requests, the

situational variables, and the social meanings conveyed by requests. All these components are filtered in the case of non-native speakers through a cultural filter.

At the level of linguistic encoding, most relevant to the illocutionary aspects of requests, choices must be made on at least three levels: strategy type, which varies from direct to indirect; perspective of the request, which can be speaker-oriented, hearer-oriented, inclusive of both interlocutors, or just impersonal; and external or internal modification of requests by mitigating or aggravating elements added to the head act. More details about the three levels mentioned above will be given in the following subsection.

Requests are face-threatening indeed because usually the speaker wants the hearer to do something for him/her, which the hearer might consider imposing and therefore might not comply with. This in turn might be threatening for the speaker's face. To preserve both the speaker's and hearer's faces, native speakers resort to various head-act and modification requesting strategies which appeal to the hearer's and speaker's positive or negative politeness wants (Brown and Levinson, 1987). However, Economido-Kogetsidis (2008) points out that some requests are not face-threatening, particularly in many Greek contexts such as in shops, on the phone, or in the family (Sifianou, 1992; Pavlidou, 1994; Antonopoulou, 2001) where participants have "fixed, culturally and situationally specific roles" or in service encounters where the result of the request benefits the hearer. In many of these situations, mitigation is almost not needed as there is no imposition involved (Antonopoulou, 2001).

2.2 Request Modification categories

Modification categories are optional linguistic elements subordinated to request head-acts in order to mitigate (soften) or aggravate (increase) the impact of the request on the hearer. These extra elements can either come at the beginning of the requests as alerters to establish contact between the speaker and the hearer, be added to the request as supportive moves or be internally embedded in the middle of the request. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008) explains that Internal modification 'appeals to positive politeness by stressing in-group membership, affect and involvement', whereas external modification 'appeals to the interlocutor as a rational agent in need of persuasion as required by the principle of independence tenet of negative politeness." Numerous typologies of modification request strategies have been reported in different studies and adopted as a framework of analysis by researchers in interlanguage pragmatics (House and Kasper, 1981, Faerch and Kasper, 1989, Trosborg, 1995, Soler, Jorda, and Martinez-Flor, 2005). In the present study, Faerch and Kasper's (1989) classification is adopted because first it is well suited to the pragmalinguistic analysis of request modification strategies and second because it has gained worldwide popularity among researchers in the field since it was part of the cross-cultural speech act realization project. The following sub-sections describe the various modification categories within this classification.

2.2.1 External Modification

External modification can either be post-posed (head act + supportive move) or (pre-posed: supportive move + head act). Mitigating supportive moves can, for example, be in the form of reasons or justifications for the request, a statement preparing the hearer for the main request, or an imposition minimizer, whereas aggravating supportive moves serve to increase the impositive force of the request such as threats, insults, and moralizing statements. In the framework adopted in this paper, mitigating supportive moves comprise six categories, which all aim to soften the impact of the request and increase its politeness. These mitigating categories include preparator, getting a pre-commitment, grounder, disarmer, promise of reward, and imposition minimizer.

The 'Preparator' prepares the hearer for the request by letting the hearer know about the speaker's intention to make the request or by asking about the potential availability of the hearer for carrying out the request, such as in 'Can I ask you something?' Or 'Aren't you leaving now (preceding a request for a ride)? 'Getting-a-pre-commitment' is another supportive move whose function is to avoid a possible refusal, by trying to commit the hearer to do something for the speaker before making the request, such as in 'Could you do me a favor?' The third mitigating category is the 'grounder'. It consists of providing reasons, explanations, which justify the request, such as in 'John, I missed the class yesterday. Could I borrow your notes?' Another important mitigating device is the 'disarmer'. When using one, the speaker recognizes the potential hearer's objections to the request and tries to remove or minimize them, such as in 'I know you don't like lending your notes, but could you make an exception this time?' Furthermore, the 'Promise-of-reward' is often used to mitigate requests by promising some kind of reward to the hearer in order to persuade them to comply with the speaker's request, such as in 'Would you mind driving to the airport to pick up Mary? I'll pay for the petrol. / You can take my car. 'Finally, the 'imposition minimizer' is used when the speaker tries to minimize the imposition placed on the hearer by his request, such as in 'Would you mind giving me a lift, but only if you're going my way.'

On the other hand, only three aggravating supportive categories can be used to externally modify requests. Their function

is to increase the impact of the request but tend to be impolite and unpopular with the speech act of requesting. The three categories include insult, threat, and moralizing. The 'Insult', such as its name suggests, is a very impolite and face-threatening external modification strategy, which is used sometimes to amplify the impositive force of the request. The second aggravating supportive category is the 'threat'. In such a situation, the speaker threatens the hearer with potential negative consequences of his/her non-compliance to force him/her to comply. The last aggravating strategy is 'moralizing'. In order to maximize hearer compliance, the speaker reminds the hearer of general moral principles, which gives more credence to the request. Example of these aggravating categories are respectively presented below:

Insult: You are a dirty pig! clean this mess!

Threat: Move the car if you don't want a ticket!

Moralizing: If one shares a flat, one should help with cleaning, so get on with washing up!

2.2.2 Internal Modification

On the other hand, internal modification categories perform the same functions by internally modifying the head act. The first category includes downgraders. They can mitigate the head act either syntactically or lexically, whereas the second category includes upgraders, which are comprised of syntactic and phrasal modalities. Upgraders are less relevant to requests than downgraders because of their face-threatening nature.

Syntactic downgraders generally make the request more polite and tentative. By decreasing the speaker's expectations as to the fulfillment of the request, syntactic downgraders help the speaker not to lose face easily if the request is refused. At the same time, it makes it easier for the hearer to refuse. The syntactic downgraders used in the analysis of the data in this paper (the CCSARP categories) are past tense/negation, aspect, conditional, conditional clause or embedding, and interrogative.

The first internal modification category is the past tense or negation: Past tense forms are considered as syntactic downgraders only when used with present time reference. The second one is 'aspect'. The continuous aspect counts as softening only if it can be replaced by a simple form. The third syntactic downgrader is the 'conditional'. It has to be optional to be considered as downgrading. Furthermore, the 'Conditional clause or embedding' is another popular syntactic downgrader. The requester can begin the request with a clause in which the request is embedded, conveying his/her attitude to the request by expressing tentativeness, hope, delight, and thanks. Finally, the 'Interrogative' mode is also considered a syntactic downgrader because a question is often more tentative than a statement. The above-explained syntactic downgraders are illustrated in the following examples:

Negation: Can't / Could you give me your notes tonight?

Past tense: I wanted to ask you to present your paper a week earlier.

Aspect: I was wondering if you could give me a hand

Conditional: I would suggest that you leave now

Conditional clause or embedding: I wonder if you would be able to give me a hand, I hope you'll be able to give me a hand, I'd really appreciate it if you'd be able to give me a hand, I'd be so grateful if you'd be able to give me a hand, I thought that maybe you wouldn't mind giving me a hand.

Interrogative: Will you do the cooking tonight? Vs. You will do the cooking tonight.

The second type of internal modification strategies are lexical phrasal downgraders. They also soften the impact of the request by modifying the head act internally through specific lexical and phrasal devices. The six categories widely used in the CCSARP studies and adopted here are politeness marker, understater, hedge, downtoner, cajoler, and appealer.

The 'politeness marker' is an optional element added to a request to plead for cooperative behavior, whereas the 'understater' decreases the imposition exerted on the hearer by minimizing some aspects of the desired act. In addition, the 'hedge' is a kind of adverbial which is used to avoid a precise specification of the requested act. Adverbials like "kind of", "sort of", "somehow", "so on", and "more or less" are typically used. Furthermore, 'downtoners' include modal sentence adverbials which can be used to soften the impositive force of the request. Typical downtoners are "simply", "perhaps", "possibly", "rather", "maybe", etc. A 'Cajoler' is also another type of lexical phrasal downgraders, which is some kind of conventionalized interpersonal marker which serves to maintain a good interpersonal relationship. Phrases such as "you know", "you see", "I mean", etc., help to attract the hearer's interest and understanding. The last type of downgrades is the 'appealer'. It is used by a speaker to appeal to a hearer's understanding and usually comes in a final position. Tags are a common example. Various examples of the six types of lexical phrasal downgraders are presented below:

Politeness marker: Could you close the window, please?

Understater: Would you wait just a second? Is there a little room for me in the car?

Hedge: Could you kind of put it off for a while?

Downtoner: Could you possibly let us know by tomorrow?

Cajoler: You know, I'd really like you to present your paper next week.

Appealer: Could you do that for me, okay? You wouldn't mind helping me, would you?

On the other hand, upgraders have the opposite function of downgraders. Their function is to increase the impact of an utterance on the hearer and put more pressure on him/her in order to obtain compliance. However, the face-threatening nature of requests make their use very limited because they don't save the face of the hearer and are usually impolite. The five categories of upgraders are intensifier, commitment indicator, time intensifier, lexical uptoner, and pejorative determiner.

'Intensifiers' are usually adverbs or adjectives which increase the intensity of the request. Typical intensifiers are "so", "very", "quite", "really", "terribly", "awfully", "absolutely", etc. Second, 'commitment indicators' are sentence modifiers which increase the speaker's commitment towards the proposition. Examples of these are I'm sure, I'm certain, I'm positive; it's obvious, surely, certainly, positively, etc. Another type of upgrader is the 'time intensifier'. It is an adverbial which highlights the urgency of the requested act. The 'lexical uptoner' is also an upgrader which is often used as a marked lexical choice whereby an element of the request is given a negative connotation. Similarly, the 'pejorative determiner' is a determiner which has a negative connotation. To illustrate these five types of upgraders, consider the following examples.

Intensifier: The kitchen is in a terrible mess.

Commitment indicator: I'm sure you won't mind giving me a lift.

Time intensifier: You'd better move your car right now/ immediately.

Lexical uptoner: Clean up that <u>mess!</u>

Pejorative determiner: Clean up <u>that </u>mess.

2.3 Previous Research on Request Modification

In one of the earliest and most important studies about request modification, Faerch and Kasper's (1989) investigated the request productions of Danish learners of English and German. More particularly, they investigated the use of modification categories by learners in their requests. The objectives of the study were to determine whether situational variables influenced the choice of modification categories, whether there was any systematic relationship between external and internal modification, and whether these patterns of modification varied cross-culturally or between native speakers and non-native speakers. The results of this investigation revealed that the trend for intermediate to advanced learners was to produce requests that were more

transparent, over-complex, explicit, with longer procedures of request modification. Their requests were marked by the presence of many politeness markers, syntactic downgraders, and supportive moves. This tendency towards verbosity by intermediate learners was accounted for through the principle "the more the better", which is an indication of caution on the part of learners and a desire to distinguish themselves from beginning learners. External modification was found independent of context internal factors. Its use was more related to the external situational variables. Moreover, the use of external modification was also independent of the occurrence of internal modification. Finally, internal modifiers were preferred over external modifiers because they are self-sufficient in conveying communicative intentions in terms of politeness and request compliance.

In another equally important study, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008) investigated Greek ESL (English as a second language) speakers' use of internal and external request modification in three power-asymmetrical situations. She chose this type of situations because they are more pragmatically demanding and difficult for non-native speakers. The learners displayed some deviations in terms of the type and amount of modification used, which the researcher attributes to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer, as well as to "the different politeness orientations of the two groups."

In a similar study, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2009) focused on the potential deviations present in Greek interlanguage modification of requests in English. The study was more interested in examining and comparing the use of lexical/phrasal downgraders and mitigating supportive moves by Greek ESL learners and British native speakers. The study revealed learners' underuse of lexical/phrasal downgraders (internal modification), and a general use of more supportive moves and their combinations (external modification) as compared to native speakers.

Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) compared the status-unequal requests of advanced English-as-a-foreign language (EFL henceforth) learners and British native speakers using a discourse completion task. There were significant differences between the groups in terms of modification and perspective. The EFL learners showed a preference for zero marking in internal modification and overuse of preparators in supportive moves. Native speakers used more requests employing impersonal perspective in association with a variety of elliptical and formulaic devices.

Economidou-Kogetsidis (2013) compared naturally occurring requests with written discourse completion requests at the level of directness, perspective, and internal modification. The questionnaire requests were more direct, whereas the naturally-occurring requests displayed more conventionally indirect requests and hints. However, the distribution of the sub-strategies under each directness level and across internal modification was found to be largely similar. Furthermore, in natural data, there was a noticeable preference for hearer-oriented perspective and longer, more syntactically complex requests, whereas in the discourse completion task data, the speaker-oriented perspective was favored.

Similar studies EFL learners' requests in Jordan and Morocco. Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010) investigated the mitigating devices used by Jordanian EFL learners as compared to American English native speakers using a discourse completion task. The results showed some differences in "the structure of requestive acts, type, frequency, and linguistic realizations used" although both groups used almost similar strategies. The researchers concluded that language ability, first language pragmatic knowledge, and cultural norms' transfer influence Jordanian EFL learners' requestive choices. American native speakers used more syntactic mitigating devices than Jordanian EFL learners, whereas the latter tended to be more verbose using long requestive structures full of justifications (grounders) to soften the imposition of their requests. According to Al-Ali and Sahawneh (2008), this could be explained by Jordanians' preference for interpersonal elements, such as "apologizing and justifying their delayed requests."

Using a discourse completion task, Abdou (1999) investigated how Moroccan learners of English realized the speech act of requesting. The results showed that "Moroccan EFL learners' requesting behavior is shaped to a large extent by their native socio-cultural norms". Modification categories displayed some transfer of native language categories.

Latif (2001) also investigated EFL Moroccan learners' requesting strategies as compared with native speakers and the

learners' underlying perceptions of some contextual variables on requesting performance. The results revealed that Moroccan learners used more direct strategies and modification categories than native speakers. Fourth year university Moroccan learners showed more directness, verbosity, and syntactic proficiency than their first-year counterparts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Instruments

The data for the present study were elicited through a written discourse completion task (DCT henceforth), which is composed of ten situations. Each scenario includes a short description of the request situation and its goal, along with the participants' roles. The subjects are then provided with a blank space and instructed to write the appropriate utterance as they would do in real life. The power, social distance, imposition, and request goal contextual variables were systematically built in the ten scenarios of the DCT in order to approximate the variability inherent in naturally occurring requests.

The biggest advantage of this research instrument, which made it extremely popular among researchers in interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics, is that it makes it possible to collect data from a large sample of subjects in a relatively short period of time (Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Johnston et al., 1998; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Rose, 1992, Sasaki, 1998). Unlike ethnographic observation or even role plays, this technique is well adapted to situations where researchers have access to informants for only a short period of time, such as is the case with language learners in their classrooms. Furthermore, the discourse completion task yields perfectly comparable data across different groups since it is an efficient tool to control all the contextual parameters relevant for any study (Rintell and Mitchell, 1989:250). Thus, the instrument constitutes a valuable tool for interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics research, which uses subjects from different speech communities. With this research method, it is quite simple to compare the data obtained in different cultures because the situations can be controlled (Blum-Kulka, 1989; Johnston et al., 1998). Because of the above-mentioned reasons and because the objective of this study is to analyze and compare the pragmalinguistic modification strategies used by Moroccan EFL learners and American native speakers of English in their requests, the written discourse completion task was chosen. Below is a sample situation from the discourse completion task administered to native speakers of English:

> You are a young tourist, and you want to go to the beach, which is six kilometers away. You are on a tight budget, so you decide to take the bus. You want to ask a woman at the bus stop for information. What would you say?
>
> You:...
>   ....

3.2. Participants

Two samples of Moroccan EFL learners and American native speakers of English volunteered to take part in this study. The Moroccan sample counted 122 undergraduate university students majoring in English Studies from three Moroccan public universities located in Agadir, Rabat, and Eljadida, whereas the American sample was made of 36 Americans present for various reasons in Morocco at the time of the study. Only Americans were sampled to represent native speakers of English in order to bring more homogeneity to the native speaker data, although the existence of one single system of pragmatic values within the same society was much questioned (Thomas, 1983).

3.3 Procedure

The discourse completion task was first piloted with a small sample of both Moroccan learners and American native speakers. This process allowed me to come to grips with data collection procedure and challenges. First, only ten situations were kept in the final version of the instruments in order to cut down the time needed for the completion of the tasks since most informants became very uncooperative when the tasks were long. This was one of the biggest problems observed during the piloting phase, with the questionnaires containing 16 situations. Therefore, some role combinations were omitted. Second, there were some adjustments in the wording of some items. Thus, Moroccan EFL learners' questionnaire was simplified to ensure complete understanding of the situation context. Other modifications included the choice of some lexical items and the layout of the questionnaire.

Collecting American native speaker data was the most difficult stage of this research investigation. Initially, the target was to collect about 100 discourse completion tasks. Only slightly more than a third of that number was collected in the end. This was mostly due to the limited number of American English native speakers in Morocco and their uncooperative behavior in a good deal of cases. Most of the time, the researcher could not have direct access to American native speakers because of bureaucratic reasons

related to where they work or study.

On the other hand, the Moroccan EFL learners were directly accessible and available to the researchers in various Moroccan universities. Those who accepted to participate in the study completed the DCT together face-to-face. They were monitored during the task completion and given the appropriate instructions and assistance. The process of data collection lasted approximately thirty minutes.

3.4 Data Analysis

The pragmalinguistic analysis of the internal and external request modification categories follows the widely popular typology of Faerch and Kasper (1989). The subjects' responses were analyzed for three major categories: Alerters, external modification, and internal modification. The external modification includes various supportive and aggravating moves, whereas the internal modification was comprised of syntactic downgraders, lexical/phrasal downgraders, and upgraders. Although the data were coded using Faerch and Kasper (1989)'s scheme, there were some tokens attested in the data which the scheme could not account for. Some additions were therefore needed. All the coding values which come after the 'combinations' value were added. These include, for instance, attention getter + title combination and the Greeting category for alerters.

To data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The percentages and distribution of the various modification categories are presented. The inferential non-parametric Chi-square test was used to test the significance of the differences between the two groups of Moroccan EFL learners and American native speakers.

4. Results
4.1 Alerters

The following graph describes the preferences of both groups relative to the use of alerters in their requests. Only four types of alerters were most frequently used by both groups. However, only two were commonly produced by the two groups, namely the attention getter, and the title or role of the hearer. The attention getter was the most preferred alerter by American native speakers (21%), followed by the title (9%), and the greeting (8.8%). It should be noted, though, that nearly 55% of American Native speakers' requests were not introduced by any alerters.

Figure 1: Rank Distribution of Top three Alerters by American Native Speakers and Moroccan EFL Learners
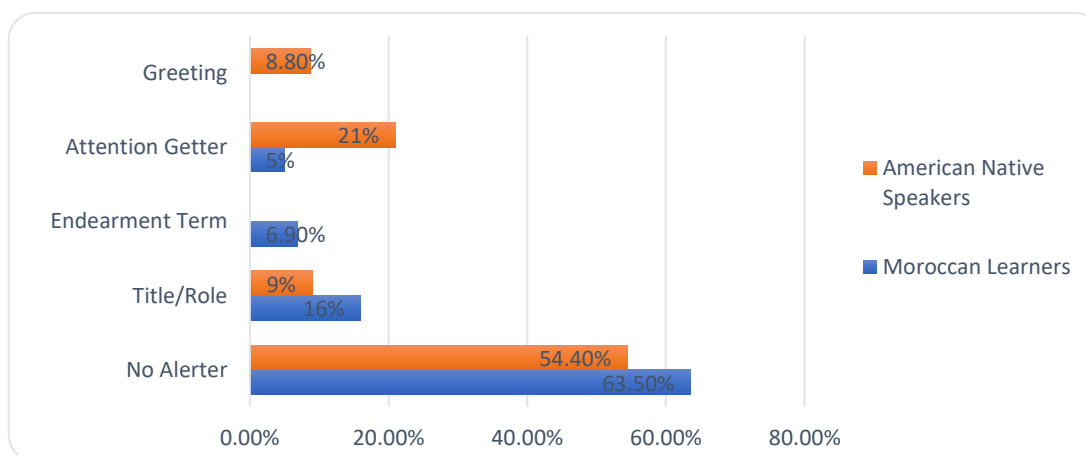

On the other hand, Moroccan EFL learners mostly preferred the use of titles or role terms (16%). Endearment terms came second with about 7% use. The attention getters ranked third (5% only), in contrast with their use by American native speakers. Finally, Moroccan EFL learners left almost two thirds of their requests unmodified by alerters, contrarily to Americans (63.5 Vs 54.4% respectively).

4.2 Internal Modification

The current sub-section presents the different internal modification categories used by both Moroccan EFL learners and American native speakers. Internal modification categories are classified into lexical and syntactic modifiers which soften (downgraders) or increase (upgraders) the impact of the request.

At the level of lexical/phrasal downgraders, three interesting observations emerge from the graph below. First, the same top three lexical downgraders were used by both groups, namely politeness markers, understaters, and combinations of different lexical/phrasal downgraders. Second, the three categories followed quite an opposite pattern across the two groups. While Moroccan EFL learners overused the politeness marker (35%), American native speakers preferred to use the understater more than any other lexical/phrasal downgrader (15.1%). Finally, Contrary to their use of alerters, American native speakers

Figure 2: Top Three Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders by American Native Speakers and Moroccan EFL Learners
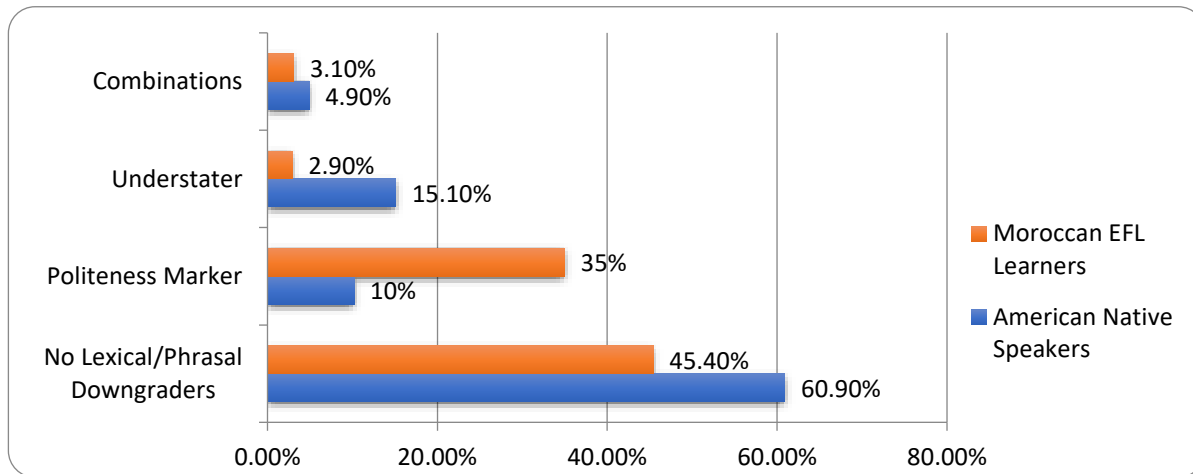
Outnumbered Moroccan EFL learners in not opting for lexical/phrasal downgraders since nearly 61% of American native speakers did not use any lexical/phrasal downgrader compared to almost 46% of Moroccan EFL learners. Table 1 below reports the results for the relationship between informant status and the use of lexical/phrasal downgraders. The Chi-square results show a highly significant relationship between informant status and the use of lexical/phrasal downgraders ($\chi2$ = 40.32; df = 1; p = .005), suggesting the differences between the two groups were significant.

Table 1: Chi-Square Test for the Relationship between Informant Status and Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders

Pearson Chi-square	Value	df	Sig
	40.326	1	.005

The second type of internal modification is syntactic downgraders. Syntactic downgraders modify the request head act internally by means of syntactic choices, such as the use of the conditional, conditional clause, tense, and aspect. The syntactic downgraders used by both groups of American native speakers and Moroccan EFL learners are reported in figure three below.

One particular characteristic of the use of syntactic downgraders by both groups is the almost equal number of Moroccan EFL learners and American native speakers who did not use these categories (approximately 60% of both groups). In addition, the most used strategy by both groups was conditional, with American native speakers using it more frequently than Moroccan EFL learners.

Combinations of different syntactic downgraders ranked second for both groups, though with varying degrees. In the third place, Moroccan EFL learners used the 'tense' marker, whereas American native speakers opted for "the conditional clause".

Figure 3: Top Three Syntactic Downgraders Used by American Native Speakers and Moroccan EFL Learners
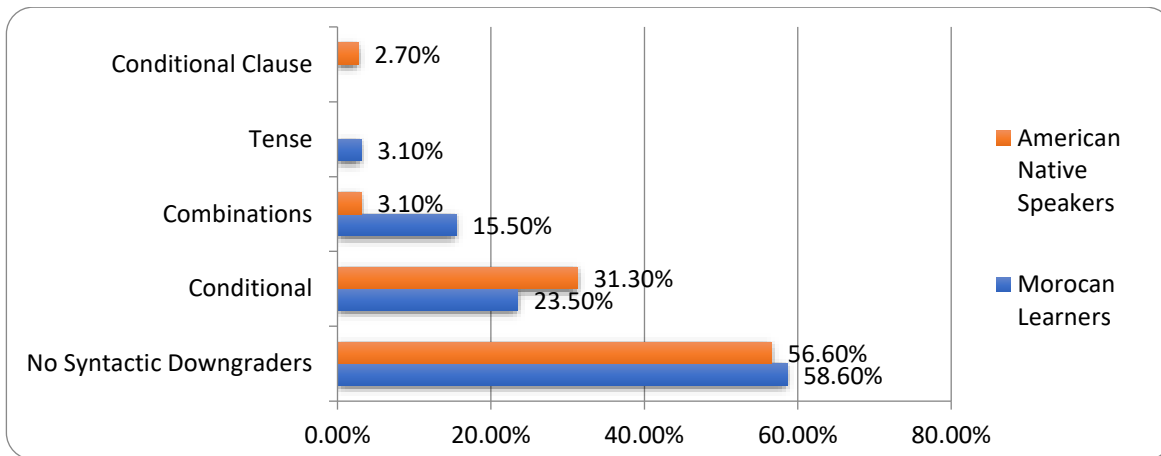
The last type of internal modification is upgraders. Given the aggravating and therefore, impolite nature of upgraders, it was not expected to find many informants using them since requests are by definition face-threatening acts which need to be softened rather than aggravated. The next graph summarizes the use of upgraders by Moroccan EFL learners and American native speakers.

The results shown in Figure 4 confirmed the previous expectations. The sweeping majority of both groups did not use any upgraders although Moroccan EFL learners slightly used more upgraders than American native speakers. The remaining minority in both groups opted both for intensifiers and repetitions of requests as upgrading strategies.

Figure 4: Rank Distribution of Upgraders by American Native Speakers and Moroccan EFL Learners
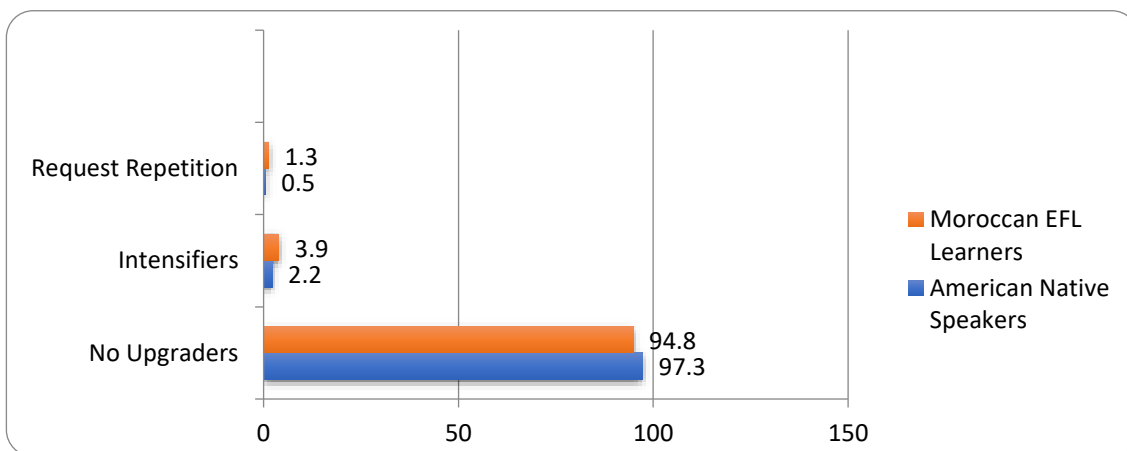
4.3 External Modification

Figure five below summarizes the percentage distribution of mitigating supportive moves by Moroccan EFL learners and American native speakers. The first remark that can be made about this graph is that more Moroccan EFL learners (more than 50%) did not modify their requests with mitigating supportive moves than American native speakers. The most popular mitigating supportive category among members of both groups is 'the grounder'. The percentage of "grounders" modifying both groups' requests is remarkable (approximately 25%). "Combinations" ranked second for both groups despite a more consistent use by American native speakers. "Disarmers" and "thanking" categories respectively came last for both groups of Moroccan EFL learners and American native speakers.

Figure 5: Rank Distribution of Mitigating Supportive Moves by American Native Speakers and Moroccan EFL Learners
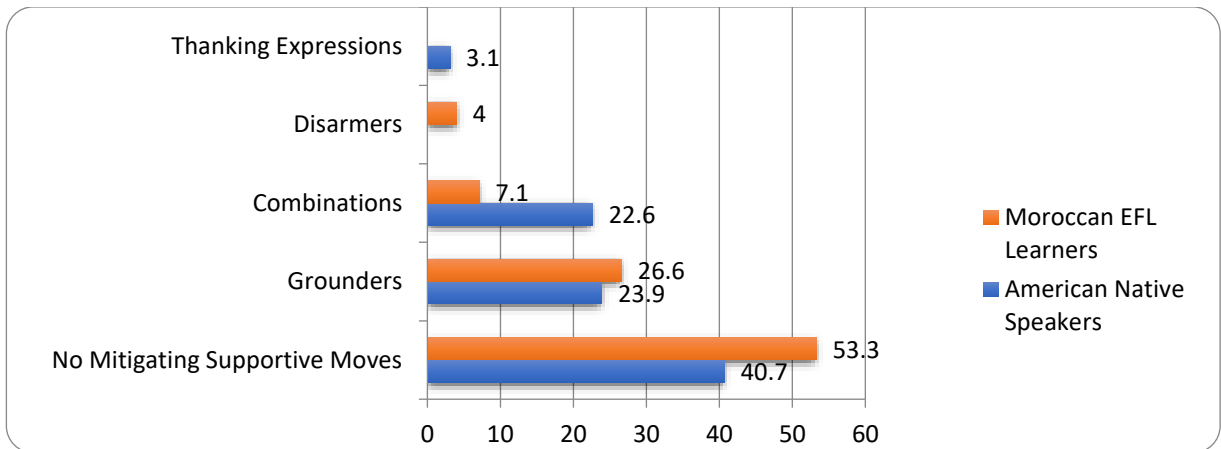
A Chi-square test was run to compare the use of mitigating supportive moves by the two groups. Table two below gives the results for the relationship between informant status and the use of mitigating supportive moves by Moroccan EFL learners and American native speakers.
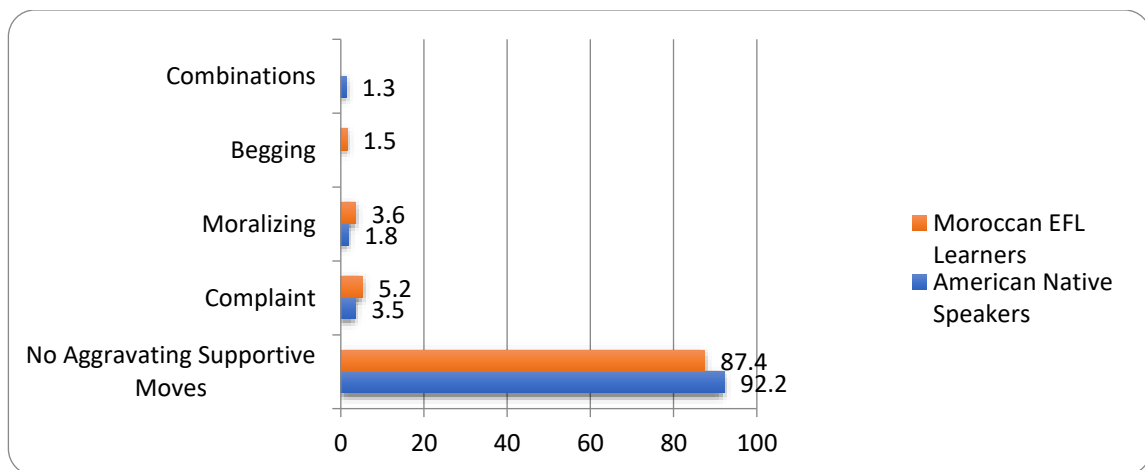
Table 2: Chi-Square Test for Relationship between Informant Status and Mitigating Supportive Moves

Pearson Chi-square	Value	df	Sig
	20.208	1	.005

The results showed that there was a significant relationship between the two variables ($\chi2 = 20.208$; df = 1; p = .005), reflecting existent differences between Moroccan EFL learners and American native speakers at the level of the use of mitigating supportive moves.

Similar to the use of upgraders reported earlier, aggravating supportive moves were not frequently used by both groups. In fact, more than 87 % of the participants in both groups did not opt for these moves in their requests. The following graph illustrates the distribution of aggravating supportive moves across the groups of Moroccan learners and American Native Speakers.

Figure 6: Rank Distribution of Aggravating Supportive Moves by American Native Speakers and Moroccan EFL Learners

Another equally interesting observation was the use of the "complaint" and "moralizing" categories as the first and second most frequently used aggravating moves by both groups.

A Chi-square test was run to measure the significance of potential differences between American Native Speakers and Moroccan EFL learners at the level of aggravating supportive moves. The results are summarized in the table below:

Table 3: Chi-Square Test for Relationship between Informant Status and Aggravating Supportive Moves

Pearson Chi-square	Value	df	Sig
	1.130	1	.568

There was no relationship between informant status and the use of aggravating supportive moves (χ2 = 1.13; df = 1; p = .568), suggesting that the differences between the two groups were insignificant.

5. Discussion

With regard to the results of the use of requestive modification categories reported above, the use of syntactic downgraders, upgraders, and aggravating supportive moves displayed a number of similarities across the two groups. First, the production of upgraders and aggravating supportive moves was scarce. This might be due to the nature of the request speech act which necessitates some face-saving strategies and respect of positive or negative politeness norms. These two modification categories are face-threatening by definition, and therefore, using them might damage the face of either the speaker or the hearer. The Chi-square tests run to test the relationship between these categories and the informant status variable were not significant, suggesting that both groups showed converging tendencies. Second, although the differences in the use of syntactic downgraders between the two groups were also insignificant, American native speakers seemed to use "the conditional" more than Moroccan EFL learners. Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010) reached different conclusions relative to the use of syntactic downgraders. In their investigation of the mitigating devices used by Jordanian EFL learners, they found out that American native speakers used more syntactic mitigating devices than Jordanian EFL learners.

On the other hand, some divergences in the use of modification categories were also noted in the data. First, alerters and mitigating supportive moves were more frequently used by American native speakers. In this perspective, "attention getters" were far more used by American native speakers at the beginning of their requests compared to Moroccan EFL learners, who opted more for the title or role of the interlocutor. Typical attention getters used by American native speakers are "excuse me" or "hey". This might indicate a pragmatic transfer from Moroccans' first language, Moroccan Arabic, in which titles and roles may be used as attention getters.

As for mitigating supportive moves, "grounders" emerged as the most frequently used mitigating supportive move for both groups. This might be due to the redressive face work that should be done to soften the speech act of requesting, especially when the speaker is requesting a favor. The Chi-square test run to test the relationship between the use of mitigating supportive moves and informant status revealed significant differences between the two groups of American native speakers and Moroccan EFL learners.

These findings do not support both House and Kasper's (1987), and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) conclusions when comparing native speakers to non-native speakers. In their data, all non-native groups produced more supportive moves than native speakers (e.g. grounders). Similarly, Faerch and Kasper's (1989) study revealed learners' tendency to produce more transparent, over-complex, explicit requests with longer modification categories. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2009) also reported the same tendency in Greek ESL learners. The study revealed the learners' tendency to use more supportive moves than British native speakers. The same conclusion was reached by Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010) who reported that Jordanian EFL learners tended to be more verbose. They used requestive structures full of grounders, which Al-Ali and Sahawneh (2008) attributed to "Jordanians' preference for interpersonal elements such as apologizing and justifying".

However, in his investigation of Moroccan EFL learners' requests, Latif (2001) concluded that American native speakers used more mitigating supportive moves than Moroccan EFL learners, especially the lower-level group. Therefore, there seems to be a different tendency regarding the use of mitigating supportive moves by Moroccan EFL learners.

By contrast, the results showed a diverging tendency regarding the use of lexical/phrasal downgraders by both groups. Moroccan EFL learners used more lexical/phrasal downgraders than American native speakers. This could be attributed to the overuse of the politeness marker "please" by Moroccan EFL learners. This tendency to overuse "please" was also reported by Mouaid (1996). However, she claims that the use of this downgrader with the imperative leads to pragmatic failure. Her claim seems to be unverified because it is not based on any empirical or ethnographic study to assess the appropriateness of such requests. In the present study, typical Moroccan EFL learners' requests showed the politeness marker associated with the imperative or the preparatory condition sub-strategies.

Latif (2001) also concluded that Moroccan EFL learners used more lexical/phrasal downgraders than American native speakers due primarily to the overuse of the politeness marker "please". However, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2009) reported an opposite tendency by Greek ESL learners. The study revealed learners' underuse of lexical/phrasal downgraders. Similarly, Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) pointed out that the EFL learners showed a preference for zero marking in internal modification.

The Chi-square tests run to test the relationship between the use of lexical/phrasal downgraders and mitigating supportive moves and the informant status reflected significant differences between American native speakers and Moroccan EFL learners at the level of mitigating supportive moves and lexical/phrasal downgraders. The differences at the level of alerters, syntactic downgraders, upgraders, and aggravating supportive moves were insignificant.

6. Conclusions

The present study has shown that Moroccan non-native speakers of English have access to most request modification strategies used by native speakers. The pragmalinguistic analysis of external and internal request modification strategies presented and discussed above has revealed various insightful diverging and converging tendencies in the use of these categories by Moroccan non-native speakers of English and American native speakers of English. However, it is recommended that future studies focus on the sociopragmatics of requesting in English. In this regard, a sociopragmatic analysis of request modification strategies would examine whether these observed similarities and differences persist regardless of the variability of the contextual variables, such as power, social distance, and imposition, which are inherent in various situations. In addition, the results of this study have a bearing on whether or not and how these request modification strategies are taught to leaners of English in academic contexts worldwide. Investigating how textbooks of English present requests and whether or not they highlight modification strategies is highly needed and recommended because there is a close relationship between what students learn in class and the development of their pragmatic competence. The insights gained from the present study can indeed help textbook writers and EFL teachers select and teach the various requesting strategies which native speakers use.

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