

Request Strategies in the American TV Series *Full House*

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the request strategies used in an American TV Series entitled *Full House* season 7 episodes 1-12. The main characters are family members from three different age groups (adult, teenager, and children). This research attempts to see if there is any difference on the choice of request strategies used by the three age groups. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) theory on request directness level is used to classify the requests. Relative power and social distance are also studied to see how they influence the characters in making their requests. The results show that mood derivable is the most frequent strategy used by all age groups. Specifically, direct request is highly used by the adult age groups. On the other hand, indirect request is mostly used by the younger age groups. The results also show that all age groups tend to use direct strategy when the social distance is negative. However, when the social distance is positive, the choice of strategy depends on the authority of the speaker.

Keywords: *age groups; relative power; request strategies; social distance; TV series.*

INTRODUCTION

Request is one of the forms of communication that is used in everyday life. It is essential in human life because through requests people are able to ask for help from others. In making a request, the choice of appropriate strategy must be taken into account. The failure of having the request granted may occur if the request strategy used is not appropriate. There is a possibility that what the speaker intended might not be achieved as the request made does not apply the required strategy.

For that reason, it can be concluded that requests are very important in communication as they are effective means for making requests. However there are several factors that make them complex. The first one is that requests are made and vary according to the situations in which they are made. The second factor which affects the making of requests is age. Different age groups might use different request strategies. Another factor, social

variables, such as relative power and social distance, also influence how someone makes requests. Requests made by a close friend will be different from those made by a staff to a manager. Therefore, this research explores how request strategies are used between people in different age groups and in various situations.

This research investigates the directness level of request strategies made by the characters in an American TV series entitled *Full House* (Franklin, Miller, Boyett, Rinsler & Warren, 1993-1994). In this paper, the requests were produced by three different age groups, namely adults, teenagers, and children. The requests were observed to find the different strategies used by each age group. The TV series was chosen because of the range of age and personality of the characters that enable us to analyze various request strategies. Furthermore, the story revolves around family members; hence most of the requests uttered were natural and close to real life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several researches on request strategies conducted by previous researchers. One research was conducted by Nadar (1998). The paper investigates requests made by Indonesian learners based on speech act theories. It attempts to find the characteristics of the requests, and discusses the findings based on forms of politeness strategy. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's theory (1984) is used to investigate the characteristics of requests, along with Sifianou's (1992) theory on internal and external modifier of requests. The politeness strategy is analyzed by applying Brown and Levinson's theory on positive and negative face of requests. The result shows Indonesian learners' preference in using interrogative request forms and adopting negative politeness strategy in making requests.

Félix-Brasdefer (2005) examined the notions of indirectness and politeness in the speech act of requests, including head acts and external modifications, among Mexican university students in formal and informal role-play situations. It is found that conventional indirectness, mostly realized by means of 'query preparatory', is the most common means of request in situations which display + Power or + Distance, whereas directness is more common as the relationship between the interlocutors is closer (-Distance). These results lend support to Blum-Kulka's (1987) observation that unlike non-conventional indirectness (e.g., hints), there seems to be a relationship between conventional indirectness and politeness. The study suggests that conventional indirect requests increase levels of deferential politeness and are used to express respect or distance between the interlocutors.

Jalilifar (2009) dealt with request strategies used by Iranian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Australian native speakers of English. He used Discourse Completion Test (DCT) to collect the request utterances of each group. There are two social factors that are selected in the request situation, which are relative power and social distance. The result shows that learners with higher proficiency overuse indirect request; while the native group uses a balanced variety of the

strategies. Meanwhile, the lower proficiency learners overused the direct strategy type. In terms of the influence of the social variables, the findings of this research reveal that as far as social power is concerned, EFL learners display a closer performance to native speakers. But considering social distance, it seems that Iranian EFL learners have not acquired sufficient sociopragmatic knowledge to display proper social behavior.

Tytar (2015) presented an analysis of pragmatic features of email request composite parts: email openings and closings, request Head Acts, and supportive moves elicited from native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (Non-NSs) of English, in two different email request situations. The analysis on email requests uses Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's theory (1984) on request head acts and perspectives. The results show that: (1) neither NSs nor Non-NSs use more politeness features in the email requests in the situation of higher imposition than in that of lower imposition, (2) non-NSs of English approximate native-like proficiency in their use of appropriate request strategies, and supportive moves that elaborate the request Head Act externally, and (3) in both email situations, NSs tend to follow the expected request perspective and also maintain a lower level of coerciveness whereas Non-NSs tend to conform to the expected request perspective, but to disregard the level of request coerciveness. As a result, Non-NS email requests might be perceived as more imposing than NS email requests.

Prakoso (2016) investigated request strategies in an American comedy film *Sandlot* by David M. Evans. He identifies and classifies request head acts and external modifications expressed by a group of early male adolescents, the main characters of the movie. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) theory is used to analyze and classify the data of request head acts. For request external modification, he uses a theory proposed by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) to identify the data. The result shows that direct strategy by means of mood derivable is the most frequent head acts strategy used by the main characters to minimize the hearer's misunderstanding. External modification strategy by means of grounder proved to be the most frequent strategy applied by the characters in the movie to soften the requests.

Most of the researches mentioned above deal with the making of requests by English learners or students (Nadar, 1998; Brasdefer, 2005; Jalilifar, 2009). Meanwhile, the others deal with native speakers and non-native speakers (Tytar, 2015), and male adolescent (Prakoso, 2016). None of the researches above compare speakers based on their age, but based on proficiency, native speakers/non-native speakers, and formal/informal situations. The research conducted by Prakoso (2016), in fact, did not provide any comparison. Unlike previous researches, this research attempts to provide a different case study on the comparison between three age groups within the Tanner family of *Full House*. This research attempts to find the difference of request strategies and the influence of relative power and social distance on the directness level of the requests made by three age groups.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research mainly uses the theory proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). According to the theory, there are three directness levels of request: direct, conventional indirect and nonconventional indirect request strategy. The directness level is then subdivided into nine strategy types which are from the most direct to the most indirect strategy: mood derivable (MD), explicit performatives (EP), hedged performatives (HP), locution derivable (LD), scope stating (SS), language specific suggestory formulae (SF), reference to preparatory conditions (PC), strong hints (SH) and mild hints (MH).

Brown and Levinson (1987) consider requests as Face Threatening Acts (FTA). They assert that face is “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 311). If face is threatened, there is a notion that the person will lose face (humiliated). When the speaker performs an FTA like request, he imposes his will towards the hearer and therefore threatens the hearer’s face.

There are several strategies that the speaker applies in FTAs in order to avoid or minimize the imposition. The choice of strategies is affected by social factors. In this research, two social variables are employed to observe their influences on making

requests, namely: social distance (D), i.e., a degree of familiarity between speaker and the hearer, and relative power (P), i.e., a level of authority between the speaker and the hearer.

METHODS

The primary data in this research were collected through observation. The first step taken was watching episodes 1-12 of *Full House* (Franklin, Miller, Boyett, Rinsler & Warren, 1993-1994), Season 7, while reading the downloaded transcripts. After that, the dialogues containing requests were observed. If there is a discrepancy between the transcript and the dialogues, it is the dialogues from *Full House* which is used as the data source because the transcript is only meant to help the writer understand unclear words uttered by the characters. Then, a list of utterances containing requests to be analyzed is made. After that, the requests were classified based on three age groups (children, teenager, and adult).

The primary data were analyzed by using qualitative and quantitative method. The qualitative method produced data in the form of descriptive information. Whereas the quantitative method produced data in the form of tables that display the frequency of request strategy and the combination of social variables used by the characters.

There are several steps taken in analyzing the data. First, the data from the three age groups are classified into nine strategy types of request based on the theory proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). After that, the data are listed from the most direct to the most indirect strategy types. The listed data are computed and presented in a table that shows the number of occurrences of each strategy type. Then, an explanation of the results presented in the table and the classification of each strategy are presented below the table. Next, the classified data are used to analyze the relation between directness level of request and power and social distance. The result of the analysis is also presented in a table. Finally, explanations of the relation of directness level, power, and social distance follow the table.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that MD is the most frequent strategy used by the characters with a total of 69 occurrences (51.5%). This strategy is followed by PC with a total of 19 occurrences (14.2%) and SH with 17 occurrences (12.6%). LD follows with a total of 9 occurrences (6.7%) and followed by SS and SF with a total of 6 occurrences each (4.5%). The least frequently used strategies are HP and MH with 4 occurrences each (3%). Explicit performatives are not used by the characters.

Mood Derivable

- (1) S07E07 | Children | MD #47 | Comb. B #22
00:07:13 → 00:07:24

Context: Jesse tried to re-open Smash Club. He was flipping through a wallpaper sample book trying to choose the right wallpaper for the club, when his sons asked him to tell them a story.

Alex: Tell me a story, please.

Jesse: Ooh boys, this is not a story book. It's a sample book

Nicky+Alex: Please, Daddy.

Jesse: Okay, alright, alright.

The utterance “*Tell me a story, please*” is classified as MD. The illocutionary force is shown from the grammatical mood of the verb ‘tell’. The direct request is used by Alex and Nicky, two-year-old toddlers, who cannot speak fluently yet. They still find difficulties in pronouncing words, let alone making long sentences. Consequently, they can only make simple and direct requests.

Jesse, Nicky, and Alex are family members; therefore, the familiarity among the characters is negative (–D). On the other hand, Nicky and Alex are Jesse’s children. Thus, they have a lower authority than their father (–P). Alex uses MD strategy in his request as he is close to his father (–D). Besides, it is also due to his inability to speak fluently. He can only utter simple sentences since he is still a little child. However, he adds the word ‘please’ to increase the politeness of the request as he has no power over his father (–P). As a result,

Jesse complies with the request to read the children a story.

Hedged Performatives

- (2) S07E11 | Teenager | HP #4 | Comb. F #7
00:16:37 → 00:18:08

Context: D.J., Stephanie, and Michelle tried to distract the crime catchers (Mrs. Caruthers and Kimmy) from seeing them taking out the bikes Joey, Danny and Jesse stole. Stephanie did some card tricks for Kimmy and Mrs. Caruthers to see.

Kimmy: Blondie that was the worst card trick I ever saw.

Stephanie: Okay, Kimmy. **If you would, please check your pockets.**

Kimmy: All I have here is some gum.

Stephanie: Thank you and goodnight.

The request in example (2) is classified as HP because the utterance made by Stephanie contains the phrase *if you would* which softens the request. Instead of saying “please check your pocket”, Stephanie adds ‘if you would’ to modify the request. Stephanie tried to distract Kimmy and Mrs. Caruthers by showing a card trick. She acted as a magician who wanted her audience’s full attention. Stephanie used Hedged Performative to sound more formal and convincing so that Kimmy and Mrs. Caruthers would pay their full attention to the card trick and hence be distracted. Therefore, Kimmy and Mrs. Caruthers did not see D.J. and the others taking out the stolen bikes.

The familiarity between Kimmy and Stephanie is positive since they often mock and insult each other (+D). The power between them is equal because both Stephanie and Kimmy are teenagers (=P). Since the two are of the same age (=P), Stephanie makes a direct request strategy by using HP. However, since she is not too close to Kimmy (+D), Stephanie uses a minimizer by saying “if you would...” to soften her request.

Locution Derivable

- (3) S07E11 | Children | LD #5 | Comb. B #10
00:15:57 → 00:16:12

Context: Michelle's bike was missing. Uncle Jesse helped her look for the bike and mistakenly took Davey's. His father came to the Tanner's house to look for Jesse.

Michelle: **Okay, we gotta get Davey's bike back before his dad smooshes Uncle Jesse.**

Stephanie: You should see this guy. There'll be nothing left but a puddle of mousse.

Steve: So how do we get the bikes out of here?

D.J.: I've got a plan.

The phrase *gotta* indicates the use of LD. Michelle uses LD in example (3) without the intention of being impolite but she wants to intensify her request because it is a serious matter.

The familiarity between the characters in the example is negative because D.J. and Stephanie are sisters (-D). The power is equal because D.J. belongs to the same age group with Stephanie (=P). These social variables (-D =P) influence D.J. to use direct request strategy. LD strategy is used because the tone of this strategy is imperative. It intensifies the requests made by D.J. Since there is no gap between the interlocutors (-D =P), it is acceptable for D.J. to ask Stephanie directly and also increase the intensity of the request.

Scope Stating

(4) S07E11 | Adult | SS #6 | Combination C #7
00:05:06 → 00:05:15

Context: Michelle's bike was missing. Jesse and Michelle went around in Jesse's car to look for it. Suddenly, Michelle spotted her bike and told him to pull over. She thought her bike was taken by Davey.

Jesse: Hold it there, Son. **I want to talk to you about this bike.**

Michelle: Be careful, Uncle Jesse. That's Steven Schultz. He's a big bully.

Davey: Hey, look. It's 'Toothless Tanner'!

The use of this strategy is signaled by the use of the phrase *I want* in the utterance "*I want to talk to you about this bike*". The request is clearly stated that Jesse wants Davey to talk to him.

Davey is Michelle's classmate whom she suspects of stealing her bike. Jesse and Davey are not familiar with each other because it was their first time to meet (+D). However, Jesse has power over Davey because he is older (+P). The two variables (+D +P) influence the way Jesse addresses Davey. He calls Davey 'son' because Jesse does not know Davey's name yet (+D) and Davey is much younger than him (+P). The power he has over Davey also influences the choice of request strategy. Jesse uses direct request strategy by using SS to point out his intention clearly, which is to talk about the bike.

Language Specific Suggestory Formulae

(5) S07E07 | Children | SF #3 | Comb. E #24
00:09:22 → 00:09:43

Context: It was break time at Michelle's school. She and her friends, Denise and Derek, played Frisbee. However, when Derek threw the Frisbee, it landed on top of a very tall fence.

Derek: Okay, here it goes. [*Throws the Frisbee*]
wow...just floating right up there.

Michelle: **Why don't you float up there and get it?**

Denise: I'll go. I'm not afraid of climbing that.

The request in the dialogue is also classified into this strategy type because the phrase 'why don't you' is used. Derek was proud of himself because he could throw the frisbee higher than Michelle and Denise. However, Michelle was annoyed because the frisbee landed on a high fence. She used language specific suggestory formulae strategy to show Derek her deep annoyance. Michelle responded to Derek's utterance "...*just floating right up here*" by saying "*why don't you float up there...?*" She did not literally ask Derek to float, but she used the word to show her annoyance and to mock Derek who is proud of himself.

The distance between Michelle and Derek is negative since they are close friends (-D). The authority is equal because Derek and Michelle are of the same age (=P). Combination E (-D =P) influences the way the request is made. The inexistence of gap between Michelle and Derek makes Michelle use the hearer oriented perspective by using 'you' in her request. It intensifies the

request by showing that the burden is fully Derek's responsibility. The influence of combination E is also shown by the choice of strategy. Michelle uses SF because this strategy makes her request sound sarcastic.

Reference to Preparatory Conditions

(6) S07E04 | Adult | PC #4 | Comb. A #26
00:07:36 → 00:07:53

Context: After the family found out that Nicky and Alex had destroyed Michelle's galaxy diorama for her science project, Danny wanted to talk to Jesse and Becky about their children's behavior. He sent Michelle downstairs so that he could talk to Jesse and Becky privately.

Danny: **Now, do me a favor would you?** Run downstairs and put this on the juicer okay? I'll be down just a minute.

Michelle: [*nods*]

There is no distance (-D) between Danny and Michelle as they are close family members. However, since Danny is the father, he has higher authority than his daughter (+P). The request is uttered indirectly by using PC strategy. It is signaled by the use of "would you?" Danny uses this strategy because he found that Michelle was sad because her science project was destroyed. Therefore Danny wants to lessen the force by making the request less direct. However, because of his close relationship and higher authority (-D +P), it influences how the request is made. Unlike other requests made by using PC, this request is quite similar to that using MD. The illocutionary force in "do me a favor" comes before the question, producing a request with an imperative tone.

Strong Hints

(7) S07E12 | Teenager | SH #16 | Comb. E #38
00:10:04 → 00:10:23

Context: D.J. went home with Kimmy and Steve. She just got a ticket because Kimmy was airing her socks and obstructed her view. Unfortunately, Stephanie and Michelle heard the conversation. They used this information to force D.J. to lend them her clothes and accessories.

Stephanie: You mean...you want us to keep something from father?

Michelle: We couldn't.

D.J.: Okay, what do you guys want?

Stephanie: Well...for starters, **how about taking a little tour of your closet?**

D.J.: Okay, you little rats can borrow my clothes.

D.J. and Stephanie are siblings, so they have a close relationship (-D). They are both teenagers, therefore they have equal power (=P). In the dialogue, Stephanie wants to borrow D.J.'s clothes. It is explained earlier that D.J. does not want to lend her clothes to her sisters. Unfortunately, her sisters find out about D.J.'s traffic ticket. They will keep their mouth shut if D.J. allows them to use her clothes. SH is used in the utterance "...how about taking a little tour of your closet?" Since there is no gap between them (-D =P), Stephanie uses SH as it contains a teasing tone because D.J. did not allow them to use her clothes previously but now she has no choice but fulfill Stephanie and Michelle's request. Furthermore, the inexistence of gap is also shown as the three sisters share the same background information of 'taking a little tour of D.J.'s closet.'

Mild Hints

(8) S07E02 | Teenager | MH #2 | Comb. B #7
00:16:46 → 00:16:56

Context: After Danny found out that D.J. overslept in Steve's apartment, he never let the two alone by themselves. When the couple was in D.J.'s bedroom to talk about the incident, Danny entered the room to vacuum D.J.'s carpet.

D.J.: Dad, I really need to talk to Steve.

Danny: Oh go on and talk. I'm just counting down to the next bag change.

D.J.: Well, don't let us bother you.

The utterance above is classified as MH because there is no reference to the request element. D.J.'s utterance "Dad, I really need to talk to Steve" does not clearly state her intention and he request to her dad. D.J. was annoyed with Danny's presence in her room. She needed to have a private

conversation with Steve, but her father would not leave them alone. Danny actually understood his daughter's hint; "well, don't let us bother you." This means that D.J.'s request was successfully made. However, Danny pretended that he did not understand as he did not want to leave D.J. alone with her boyfriend.

D.J. and Danny have a close relationship as they are family (-D). However, since D.J. is Danny's daughter, D.J. has a lower authority than her father (-P). Since they are close to each other (-D), D.J. uses an intensifier 'really' in the utterance "I really need to talk to Steve". By adding the intensifier, D.J. emphasizes the urgency of giving Steve and her some time alone. However, since she has no power over her father (-P), D.J. makes an indirect request by using MH to sound more polite.

CONCLUSION

This research deals with request strategies in an American TV series entitled *Full House* season 7 episodes 1-12. There are 134 requests made by the main characters from three age groups: the adult, teenager, and children age group.

The results show that the most to the least frequently used request strategies are, respectively: MD, PC, SH, LD, SS-SF, and HP-MH. The tendency of using mood derivable in most situations applies to all age group because most of the requests found in this TV series are made between family members. The directness of the request does not show impoliteness, but it shows closeness between the characters. The result also reveals that direct strategies are mainly used by the adult age group, meanwhile indirect strategies are mainly used by the teenager and children group. This shows that although the younger age groups have a close relationship with the adult age group, they still show politeness in some occasions.

Related to the influence of social variables, the result shows that negative social distance tends to influence all age groups to use direct strategy. In a situation where the social distance is positive, the choice of strategy depends on the power of the speaker. When the power is equal, the speakers tend to use direct strategy. However when the

power is positive, there is a more balanced choice of strategy. Only when the power is negative, the speakers use indirect strategy.

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