

A Discourse Completion Test Analysis of Email Request Strategies as Used by Tunisian Postgraduate Students

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Abstract : The aim of the present study is to analyze the performance of requests in emails among a group of Tunisian postgraduate students. It also seeks to determine the influence of the social factors on the participants' requests performance. For this purpose, the data were collected using a discourse completion test (DCT). Accordingly, 42 Tunisian postgraduate students were asked to respond in English to eight different situations in which they carried out the speech act of request in emails. The data were analyzed based on the degree of directness. A detailed analysis of the head acts found in the DCT revealed that Tunisian Postgraduate students use a varied repertoire of request strategies (direct, conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect) but at the same time rely heavily on direct request strategies. They tended to address their requestees directly except for distant superiors. DCT results suggest that the participants are to some extent aware of the influence of the ranking of imposition and social distance but fail to acknowledge the weight of social power when performing requests in emails. The preference of the participants to use direct strategies may be the result of the effect of Tunisian culture and the negative transfer of Tunisian communicative strategies. Accordingly, this study suggests some pedagogical implications and suggestions for Tunisian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instructors. They are required to pay closer attention to the pragmalinguistic nuances of the ways in which requests in emails are realized. Teachers can also help students understand academic email etiquettes by explicitly explaining what they expect in the student email. Thus, EFL teachers and syllabus designers should devote more attention to developing EFL learners' pragmatic competence through teaching L2 pragmatics.

Keywords : directness, ranking of imposition, request strategies, social distance, social power

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