

## Gender Differences in Request Strategies among Graduate Students

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#### ABSTRACT

Proficiency in request strategies is key in handling social hierarchies and managing interpersonal communication. It is also essential in reducing misunderstandings and enhancing communication efficiency in both educational and professional settings. This quantitative survey investigated the request strategies employed by graduate students in different hierarchical contexts. The sample population consisted of 100 B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education) major English students from ten campuses affiliated to Tribhuvan University (TU). The sample was selected employing stratified simple random sampling method. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire with nine closed-ended questions in the year 2081 BS. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics technique of quantitative data analysis. The result revealed distinct patterns in request strategies when addressing individuals of varying ranks. In higher-to-lower rank scenarios, male respondents predominantly used mood derivable strategies, while females showed a preference for performatives and hedge performatives. For equal-to-equal rank situations, males favored direct mood derivable strategies, while females used a more varied approach with higher incidences of indirect strategies. In lower-to-higher rank contexts, males again showed a preference for direct approaches, whereas females exhibited a higher use of indirect and polite strategies. These findings highlight significant gender-based differences in communication strategies which emphasize the need for personalized approaches in educational and professional settings.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of language learning and teaching today is to develop learners' communicative competence (Daskalovsk et al., 2016). Communicative competence involves knowing what to say to whom in what circumstances and how to say it. In other words, it is an ability to use

linguistic knowledge in communication, which requires possessing social and cultural knowledge as well (Mills, 2003). Furthermore, learners need to know how to use their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary appropriately depending on the context and the people they are speaking

too. This type of competence is called pragmatic competence and it is an integral part of one's communicative competence. Pragmatic competence can be seen through the realization of speech acts. Speech acts are the utterances that a speaker makes to achieve an intended effect some of the functions or actions performed by speech acts are requests, offering apologies, greetings complaints, invitations, and so on Yule (1996). Austin (1962, as cited in Al-Ageel, 2015) identified three types of actions in every utterance. They are locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Locutionary speech act implies the actual act of uttering utterances. For example, please do the dishes. Similarly, illocutionary speech act refers to the social function of what is said. For example, the speaker requests the addressee to wash the dish by uttering the utterance 'please do the dishes'. Perlocutionary speech acts on the other hand indicates the resulting act of what is said. For example, the utterance 'please do the dishes' uttered by the speaker leads the addressee to wash the dishes. Searle (1976) classified illocutionary speech act into five distinct categories. These categories are assertive, directive, commissive, expressive and declaration. Assertive is the type of illocutionary speech act in which the speaker expresses the belief about the truth proposition. Some of the examples of assertive speech acts are suggesting, boasting, swearing, etc. In directive speech act the speaker tries to make the addressee perform the action, e.g. request, order, invitation, etc. Similarly, in commissive speech act in which the speaker commits the speaker to do something in the future, e.g., committing, vowing, planning, etc. In the same way in expressive speech act the speaker expresses his/ her feelings or emotional reactions, e.g. thanking, apologizing, etc. Declaration speech act on the other hand brings changes in the external situations, e.g. blessing, baptizing, firing, etc.

This research emphasizes the critical role of pragmatic competence second or foreign language. It reveals the necessity of

comprehending and adeptly employing speech acts, such as requests, apologies, and invitations, as fundamental components of communicative competence. The study also highlights the imperative for language learners to attain proficiency in both the linguistic and sociocultural dimensions of communication. This dual mastery is essential for facilitating successful interactions across diverse contexts.

### 1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Request is one of the categories of illocutionary speech act which is repeatedly and frequently used in daily interactions. It is one of the directive speech acts which is defined as the act of the act of asking for something to be given or done, especially as a favor or courtesy; solicitation or petition. According to Khalib and Tayeh (2014), a request is a way of asking someone to do something, especially when it is not clear if they would normally do it on their own. When making a request, the person asking believes that the other person can do the task. So, a request is a way to try to get someone to act in a certain way. Al-Marrani and Sazalie (2010) have defined requests as face-threatening acts in which both the speaker's and hearer's faces are at risk, because by making a request, the speaker impinges on the hearer's claim to freedom of action and freedom from imposition. Fibri (2017) considered requests as an attempt to get hearer to do an act which speaker wants hearer to do, and which it is not obvious that hearer will do in the normal course of events or of hearer's own accord. According to Watts (2003), a request is realized when the requester expresses a wish that can be performed by the addressee. In a similar vein, Mills (2011) defines request as the act of requesting is a speech event that gives the addressee a choice as to whether to carry out the desired act or not, and it does not assume the speakers control over the person addressed.

Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) define request strategy as the necessary or compulsory choice of the level of directness

in which the act of requesting is realized. Directness means the extent to which the speaker's illocutionary intention is clear from the locution. They divided the request strategies from direct to indirect in the following nine categories.

- a. Mood derivable utterances in which grammatical mood of the verb indicates illocutionary force, e.g. give me the remote.
- b. Performatives Utterance in which illocutionary force is clearly stated, e.g. I am asking you to give me the remote.
- c. Hedge performatives Utterances in which statement of the illocutionary force is modified by hedging expressions, e.g. I would like to ask you for the remote.
- d. Obligation statements Utterances which state the hearer's obligation to perform the act, e.g. You will have to give me the remote
- e. Want statements Utterance, which indicate the speakers desire that the hearer performs the tasks, e.g. I would like you to give me the remote.
- f. Suggestive formulas Utterances which include a suggestion to do something, e.g. How about handing over the remote? Why do not you hand me the remote?
- g. Query preparatory Utterances containing a reference to preparatory conditions (e.g. ability, willingness) as conventionalized in different languages, e.g. could you give me the remote? Would you mind handing me the remote?
- h. Strong hints Utterances containing a partial reference to an element needed for the performance of the act, e.g. My favorite show will begin soon
- i. Mild Hints Utterances that make no reference to the request proper but can be interpreted as requests by context, e.g. It has been a long time since I watched my favorite show.

Request strategy types can be grouped into three main strategies. The first one is direct strategies, which are defined as

utterances in which the meaning of the utterance is consistent with the speaker's intention (Miura, 2017). They are usually used when the speaker is dominant or in a position of authority, and they communicate only one propositional meaning. There are five direct requesting strategies: mood derivable, explicit performative, hedged performative, obligation, and want statements. The second one is conventionally indirect request strategies, which refer to the act of requesting something indirectly. In these strategies, the requester's meaning and the propositional content are not the same, and they imply more than one meaning. In this respect, Hussain (2020) defines conventionally indirect strategies as strategies that realize the act by reference to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance, as conventionalized in a given language. The conventionally indirect request strategies include two types: suggestive formulae and query preparatory. The third one is non-conventionally indirect request strategies, which refer to the requesting acts that can take any linguistic form or hints (Wojtaszek, 2016). Strong hints and mild hints come under non-conventionally indirect strategies. The first five strategies belong to the direct level, the next two belong to the conventional indirect level, and the last two belong to the non-conventional indirect level (Robson, 2002).

People usually change their request from being the most direct to the most indirect depending on social power, social distance, and degree of imposition. However, it is not clear whether there is a difference in the use of request strategy according to the gender in Nepalese context. Therefore, the main objective of the study is to find out gender differences in the use of request strategies among the B.Ed. major English students studying at graduate level in the affiliated campuses of TU in Baktapur and Bardia districts.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative survey research method. The population consisted of B.Ed. major English students

studying graduate level at TU affiliated campuses of Banke and Bardiya districts. I selected Banke and Bardiya districts as the site of the study based on the accessibility and convenience. The sample population consisted of 100 graduate level major English students studying B.Ed. (academic year 2080/081) at TU affiliated campuses of Banke and Bardiya districts. I used stratified simple random sampling method to select the sample. First, I compiled a list of affiliated campuses in each district. Then, I chose five campuses from Banke and five from Bardiya using the fishbowl technique of simple random sampling. Subsequently, I visited the selected campuses and gathered the names of major English students of the graduate level from the first, second, third, and fourth years for the academic year 2080/081 BS as provided by the campus chiefs. I created separate lists for female and male students from each campus. Using the fishbowl technique of simple random sampling again, the researcher selected five female and five male students from each campus. This process resulted in a total sample population of 100 students (50 boys and 50 girls). The researcher used questionnaire as a research instrument in the study. The questionnaire consisted of nine closed ended questions. Each question had nine options of request strategies. The options of request strategies in each question were placed in direct to indirect order. Among the total nine questions, in first three questions i.e. question number one, two and three, the participants were asked to choose the strategy which could to be used when requesting higher to the lower rank, same to same rank and lower to higher rank people respectively. The data were collected accurately because the questionnaire was prepared and designed in Google Form in such a way that no more than one option could be chosen in one question. Questionnaires were sent and collected via email. The collected data were

interpreted and analyzed using of descriptive statistics technique of quantitative data analysis and the results obtained from interpretation and analysis were presented descriptively using table.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 HIGHER TO LOWER RANK

The respondents were asked to respond to the following three situations to explore how they employ different request strategies from higher to lower rank:

- i. **Situation 1 (S1):** You are feeling cold in your room and need your younger brother to turn up the heater for you. This situation assesses how directly or indirectly one might request a simple adjustment from a family member, reflecting personal comfort and urgency.
- ii. **Situation 2 (S2):** You have purchased a jacket for your friend, but they do not like it. You wish to exchange it for a different one. This scenario explores how individuals approach requests for customer service, particularly when altering a previous decision and seeking assistance from a store manager.
- iii. **Situation 3 (S3):** You want to order a delivery for a sushi platter and need to call the restaurant to place your order. This situation evaluates how people structure their requests in a transactional context, focusing on clarity and specificity in service-related interactions.

The data in table 1 presents the frequency of request strategies used in these situations, ranked from higher to lower based on their prevalence and effectiveness. This analysis provides insight into the most commonly employed strategies and how they vary across different contexts of requesting.

Table1: Request Strategies Used in Higher to Lower Rank

S.N.	Request Strategy	Male						Female					
		S1	%	S2	%	S3	%	S1	%	S2	%	S3	%
1	Mood derivable	36	72%	0	0%	1	2	22	44	0	0	9	18
2	Performatives	3	6%	5	10%	12	24	0	0	1	2	12	24
3	Hedge performatives	0	0%	6	12%	2	4	9	18	2	4	13	26
4	Obligation statements	7	14%	2	4%	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	6
5	Want statements	0	%	21	22%	8	16	6	12	4	8	7	14
6	Suggestive formulas	2	4%	8	16%	10	20	5	10	5	10	3	6
7	Query preparatory	1	2%	5%	10%	6	12	6	12	26	52	1	2
8	Strong Hints	1	2%	2	4%	9	18	0	0	2	4	1	3
9	Mild Hints	0	%	1	2%	2	4%	0	0	10	20	1	2
Total		50	100%	50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100

The analysis of request strategies reveals distinct patterns between male and female respondents. Males predominantly used the mood derivable strategy, with 72% of their responses falling into S1, while females showed a more varied approach, with 44% in S1 and 18% in S3. This suggests that females were more diverse in their use of mood derivable strategies compared to males. In terms of performatives, males displayed a more balanced distribution with 6% in S1, 10% in S2, and 24% in S3. Females, on the other hand, had no responses in S1, minimal presence in S2 (2%), and a stronger inclination towards S3 (24%). This indicates that females are more likely to use performatives in indirect or less direct forms compared to males.

The use of hedge performatives varied notably between genders. Males did not use S1 at all, while females used it significantly (18%). Additionally, females had a higher percentage in S3 (26%), suggesting they preferred to hedge their statements more indirectly than males, who had 12% in S2 and 4% in S3. For obligation statements, males exhibited a preference for S1 (14%) and had no responses in S3, while females had no responses in S1 and a modest presence in S3 (6%). This difference

highlights a potential gender-based variation in expressing obligations, with males using obligation statements more directly.

In the case of want statements, males showed a significant preference for S2 (22%) and S3 (16%), whereas females had 12% in S1, 8% in S2, and 14% in S3. This indicates that males might express their wants more directly than females. Suggestive formulas were used more frequently by males, with 4% in S1, 16% in S2, and 20% in S3. Females had 10% in S1 and S2 and a lower 6% in S3, suggesting a more conservative use of suggestive strategies compared to males. Query preparatory was notably dominant in S2 for females (52%), while males had a more balanced distribution across S1 (2%), S2 (5%), and S3 (12%). This substantial preference for S2 among females indicates a higher tendency to use preparatory strategies in their communication. The use of strong hints was more prevalent in S3 for males (18%), whereas females had no responses in S1 and only 4% in S2, indicating a lower overall use of strong hints.

Finally, mild hints were sparsely used by both genders, with females showing a

notable increase in S2 (20%). This suggests that while both genders use mild hints infrequently, females may employ them slightly more.

**3.2 EQUAL TO EQUAL RANKING**

The respondents were asked to respond to the following three situations to explore how they use request strategies of equal rank across different contexts:

- i. **S1:** You are trying to concentrate on an important work project at home, but your neighbors are having a loud party and the noise is distracting you. How would you ask them to lower the volume so you can focus?
- ii. **S2:** You are attending a movie with a friend who is taking their time getting ready. You want to

leave quickly because you don't want to miss the start of the film. How would you ask your friend to hurry up?

- iii. **S3:** You are standing at the entrance of a building with your hands full of groceries, and you can't open the door. What would you say to the person nearby to help you open the door?

The following table 2 shows the frequency of request strategies used in these scenarios, where the level of urgency and politeness required is similar. This examination helps identify common patterns in how people formulate their requests when faced with comparable situations of equal importance.

*Table 2: Request Strategies Used in Equal Rank*

S.N.	Request Strategy	Male				Female							
		S1	%	S2	%	S3	%	S1	%	S2	%	S3	%
1	Mood derivable	22	44	0	0	1	2	22	44	0	0	9	18
2	Performatives	7	14	5	10	12	24	0	0	1	2	12	24
3	Hedge performatives	0		6	12	2	4	9	18	2	4	13	
4	Obligation statements	7	14	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	26
5	Want statements	0	0	21	42	8	16	6	12	4	8	7	14
6	Suggestive formulas	2	4	8	16	10	20	5	10	5	10	3	6
7	Query preparatory	1	2	5	10	6	12	6	12	26	52	1	2
8	Strong Hints	1	2	2	4	9	18	0	0	2	4	1	2
9	Mild Hints	0	0	1	2	2	4	0	0	10	20	1	2
Total		50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100

The analysis of request strategies reveals pronounced differences between male and female respondents in their communicative behaviors. For the mood derivable strategy, males demonstrated a significant preference for S1, accounting for 44% of their responses, while only a small percentage (2%) fell into S3, indicating a tendency towards direct forms of

expression. In contrast, females also favored S1 with 44%, but their use of S3 was more pronounced at 18%, suggesting a more nuanced application of this strategy. When examining performatives, males exhibited a relatively even distribution with 14% in S1, 10% in S2, and 24% in S3, whereas females showed no responses in S1, a minimal presence in S2 (2%), and a

stronger inclination towards S3 (24%), reflecting a preference for more indirect performatives. In the case of hedge performatives, males did not use S1 at all but had 12% in S2 and 4% in S3. Conversely, females used 18% in S1, 4% in S2, and 13% in S3, indicating a higher preference for indirect communication methods among females. Obligation statements revealed that males utilized S1 (14%) and S2 (4%) but had no responses in S3, while females had no responses in S1 and a substantial 26% in S3, demonstrating a greater tendency among females towards indirect expressions of obligations. Want statements were notably used by males with no responses in S1, a significant 42% in S2, and 16% in S3, suggesting that males tend to express their wants more directly compared to females, who had 12% in S1, 8% in S2, and 14% in S3. Suggestive formulas were employed more by males, with 4% in S1, 16% in S2, and 20% in S3, while females had 10% in both S1 and S2 and 6% in S3, indicating a more conservative use among females. For query preparatory, females demonstrated a notable preference for S2, with 52%, whereas males had a more balanced distribution with 2% in S1, 10% in S2, and 12% in S3, highlighting a higher tendency for females to use this strategy. Strong hints were more prevalent among males with 2% in S1, 4% in S2, and 18% in S3, while females had no responses in S1, 4% in S2, and 2% in S3, suggesting that males use strong hints more frequently. Finally, both genders used mild hints infrequently, with males showing no responses in S1, 2% in S2, and 4% in S3, and females having no responses in S1, a notable 20% in S2, and 2% in S3, indicating that while both use mild hints rarely,

females might employ them slightly more in S2. These findings underscore the considerable differences in communication strategies between genders, with males generally favoring direct approaches and females showing a greater inclination towards indirect and varied forms of expression, highlighting the importance of considering these gender differences for effective communication.

Lower to Higher Ranking

The respondents were asked to respond to the following scenarios to explore how they utilize request strategies across different levels of authority and formality, ranging from

### 3.3 LOWER TO HIGHER RANK:

- i. S1: You are doing homework and need a pencil. You notice that your younger sibling has one. How would you ask your sibling to lend you the pencil?
- ii. S2: You are in a classroom and need to use a teacher's stapler because yours is broken. How would you request the teacher to use their stapler?
- iii. S3: You need to request your department head to approve your application for a special academic program. How would you ask them to review and approve your application?

Table 3 below presents the frequency of request strategies used in these scenarios, illustrating how request strategies vary depending on the rank or status of the person being addressed.

Table 3: Request Strategies Used in Lower to Higher Rank

S.N.	Request Strategy	Male						Female					
		S1	%	S2	%	S3	%	S1	%	S2	%	S3	%
1	Mood derivable	36	72	0	0	1	2	22	44	0	0	9	18
2	Performatives	3	6	5	10	12	24	0	0	1	2	12	24
3	Hedge performatives	0	0	6	12	2	4	9	18	2	4	13	26
4	Obligation statements	7	14	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6
5	Want statements	0	0	21	42	80	16	6	12	4	8	7	14
6	Suggestive formulas	2	4	8	16	10	20	5	10	5	10	3	6
7	Query preparatory	1	2	5	10	6	12	6	12	26	52	1	2
8	Strong Hints	1	2	2	4	9	18	0	0	2	4	1	2
9	Mild Hints	0	0	1	2	2	4	0	0	10	20	1	2
Total		50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100

The analysis of request strategies reveals significant differences between male and female respondents in their communication preferences. Males predominantly employed the mood derivable strategy, with 44% of their responses in S1 and a minimal 2% in S3, suggesting a strong inclination towards direct expressions. Conversely, females also showed a notable preference for S1 (44%) but utilized S3 more (18%), indicating a more varied approach. When examining performatives, males displayed a balanced distribution with 14% in S1, 10% in S2, and 24% in S3, whereas females had no responses in S1, only 2% in S2, and a significant 24% in S3, implying that females tend to use performatives in less direct forms. For hedge performatives, males did not use S1, but had 12% in S2 and 4% in S3. Females, on the other hand, used 18% in S1, 4% in S2, and 13% in S3, reflecting a greater preference for indirect communication. Obligation statements were used by males with 14% in S1 and 4% in S2, showing no responses in S3, while females had no responses in S1 and a substantial 26% in S3, indicating a higher inclination towards indirect expressions of obligations among females. Regarding want statements, males

had no responses in S1, a significant 42% in S2, and 16% in S3, whereas females had 12% in S1, 8% in S2, and 14% in S3, suggesting that males express their wants more directly. The use of suggestive formulas was more frequent among males, with 4% in S1, 16% in S2, and 20% in S3, while females had 10% in both S1 and S2 and only 6% in S3, indicating a more conservative approach by females. In terms of query preparatory, females showed a substantial preference for S2 with 52%, while males had a more balanced distribution with 2% in S1, 10% in S2, and 12% in S3, highlighting a stronger tendency for females to use query preparatory. Strong hints were more prevalent in S3 for males (18%), with only 2% in S1 and 4% in S2, whereas females had no responses in S1, 4% in S2, and 2% in S3, suggesting that males use strong hints more frequently. Finally, both genders used mild hints infrequently, with males showing no responses in S1, 2% in S2, and 4% in S3, while females had no responses in S1, a notable 20% in S2, and 2% in S3, indicating that females might employ mild hints slightly more in S2.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study on request strategies among ESL/EFL (English as Second or Foreign Language) graduate students provides insightful revelations about gender-based communication preferences across hierarchical contexts. The analysis reveals a clear distinction between male and female respondents in their approach to making requests, highlighting different strategies used in interactions ranging from lower to higher ranks and equal-status scenarios. Males predominantly favored direct, mood derivable strategies, reflecting their preference for straightforwardness and clarity, particularly in hierarchical contexts and urgent situations. This directness was evident in their approach to lower-status individuals and in peer interactions where immediacy was essential, such as asking neighbors to reduce noise or urging friends to hurry. Conversely, females demonstrated a more varied use of strategies, including performatives and hedge performatives, indicating a tendency toward politeness and nuance. This inclination towards indirect communication, especially in interactions with peers and individuals of higher status, suggests a greater sensitivity to social dynamics and a desire to maintain relational harmony. Females also showed a preference for query preparatory, highlighting their collaborative approach to framing requests and engaging in cooperative dialogue. When addressing higher-status individuals, females employed polite and indirect strategies like hedge performatives and query preparatory, reflecting a desire to show respect and align with social expectations. The consistent patterns in gender-based preferences underline the importance of recognizing and adapting to these differences in educational and professional settings, where effective communication is crucial. Understanding these variations allows for the creation of more inclusive environments that accommodate diverse communication styles and improve interpersonal interactions. Educators and professionals can benefit from these insights by considering gender-based differences when

designing communication training and interactions. Thus, the study underscores the significance of request strategies and their impact on communication, offering valuable guidance for developing effective practices and strategies. Future research could build on these findings by exploring request strategies in different cultural and professional contexts to deepen the understanding of how these dynamics operate across various settings.

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