

How Do American Bilinguals Make a Request in Indonesian and English?

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Abstract

Being able to speak a foreign language fluently is not enough in cross-cultural communication. In order to avoid miscommunication, the speaker needs to have the target language culture knowledge. Several utterances can be found rude by some cultures, while some culture might find it common. This could happen due to the differences of cultures and value. In small talk such as making a request, different culture has their own strategy, and some culture might find it rude when the speaker do not share the same the value and culture. This study aims to analyze American bilinguals in making a request in Indonesian and English. The data were collected based on DCT request scenarios and observation. There were five American participants who were involved in this study. The findings showed that American participants tended to be indirect when they made requests in English even though some of them were direct and they changed into direct strategies when they made a request in Indonesian. This study also reveals that in terms of making a request, Americans are more indirect when it comes to making a request. Therefore, it is suggested that having intercultural knowledge is important in learning a language in order to avoid misunderstanding.

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INTRODUCTION

Being bilingual and able to speak another language is not main key to be successful in mastering the target language culture. Having a language as the most common language in the world does not make some Americans to stop learning another language. Interestingly, there are some Americans who are able to speak Indonesian fluently. It is also not easy for Americans to speak Indonesian language since it is not used in the United States of America. Indonesian language also is taught as a foreign language in United States of America and it is called BIPA (Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing) which

means Indonesian for foreigners. There are several universities in the United States of America that offer permanent Indonesian language courses to its students. However, there are also some American who consider the Indonesian language as their second language because they stay, live, and are married to an Indonesian.

The interaction between Indonesian and American is called cross-cultural communication and in the cross-cultural communication, a conflict may appear due to different norms, value, culture, and beliefs. Lack of knowledge of the differences can create problems in intercultural communication. There are several phases that people might face

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when they are in cross-cultural situation such as speech and behaviour similarities and dissimilarities, manner, language and behaviours, denial, defence reversal, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and finally integration (Salsabilla and Keliat, 2023). Martin and Nakayama (2011) also classified several conflicts that might be encountered in cross cultural communication, such as: (i) ambiguity, (ii) language issues, and (iii) contradictory conflict styles. They also added several types of conflict that usually occurs in intercultural communication, first is value conflict where it usually occurs when people have different ideologies, second is cognitive value where two or more people become aware that their perceptions are different, and third is goal conflict when people disagree about an outcome. These conflict may occur during small interaction such as making a request. Some Americans may sound rude to some Indonesian when they make a request and it can create misunderstanding and miscommunication.

Several studies have been conducted related to this study. A study conducted by Linde (2009) found out that Spanish and Moroccan EFL students tended to transfer their L1 form when they made a request in English using a multiple choice DCT. Another study conducted by Kim and Lee (2017) also revealed that power is a more prominent factor when Korean employees make a request in an email compared to American employees since American employees are more into familiarity than power. Different from the previous studies where they were mostly analysed using DCT only, this study focuses on analysing Americans' request strategy in Indonesian and English using DCT and also observation.

The Americans

A country can be called as a country when they have citizens, governments, and language that they speak to communicate with each other since the national language is designed as the identity of the country itself. Also it unifies people who speak different dialects or even other local or native languages within the country. As we know, The United States of America's common language has been English since the beginning of British colonialism in The United States and also since eight of ten white Americans in 1790 were of British descent who migrated to the United States of America (Gleason, 1980). The United States of America is a country where many people from around the world migrate to this country and some of them brought their own native language. However, since the founding fathers of the USA did not design an official language, there was no movement to make English the official language until 1981 (Ray, 2007).

According to Levine and Adelman (1993), American values are personal control over environment, change is healthy, control over time, equality and egalitarianism, individualism and privacy, self-help, future orientation, action and work orientation, informality, directness, openness, and honesty, and materialism. Samovar, et al (2010) also stated that American cultural patterns are individualism, equal opportunity, material acquisition, science and technology, progress and change, work and play, and competitive nature. In line with Schiffman and Kanuk (2010), American values are achievement and success, efficiency and practicality, progress, material comfort, individualism, freedom, fitness and health, humanitarianism, youthfulness, and external conformity. Meanwhile, according to Idris and Muftia (2021) American values in verbal communication are direct, enthusiastic, assertive, persuasive, showing modesty, speaking at a higher volume, and following low-context culture and in non-verbal communication, they tend to use eye contact, avoid physical contact, appreciating private space, using gestures, smiling, and using basic greetings. In low-context culture, verbal communication is more appreciated than non-verbal communication (Bao & Charoenroop, 2023). Bakic-Miric et al. (2023) also claimed that Americans are using low power distance, individual, masculine, low uncertainty avoidance society, long-term orientation.

In line with that Morand (2003 as cited in Warchulski, 2021) claimed that Americans are most likely to use direct and positive politeness, meanwhile Asian countries are most likely to be more indirect and use negative politeness. Moge (2023) claimed that people from China, Vietnam, and Saudi Arabia are high-context cultures in which they emphasize nonverbal and subtle situational cues when they are communicating with others. In this country, a person's title, social status, and reputation are important to be considered. On the other hand, people from Europe and North America reflect a low-context culture in which body language or titles or designations are secondary to spoken and written words. In a high-context culture, age, seniority, and position are highly valued, while in low-context cultures, valid contracts will tend to be written, worded in detail, and legalized. It can be drawn that Indonesia has high-context culture, while America has low-context culture.

Request

A request is an illocutionary directive speech act which intends to get the hearer to do something in particular circumstances which will make the hearer

do the action in the normal course and as a kind of directive, requests have a competitive illocutionary function because it seeks an accommodation in competing goals (Leech, 2014). According to Leech (2014), request is normally considered a speech event that gives a hearer a choice to whether to do the act and he also added that there is no clear boundary between order/command and requests, but rather a continuous option from several options to no option given for a hearer. Meanwhile, according to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1989), requests are face threatening acts because because the speaker affects hearer's claims to freedom of action and Brown and Levinson (1978 as cited in Alzahrani, 2022) also stated that speakers may use between direct and indirect strategies depending on the social distance, relative power, and degree of imposition. Leech (2014) also defines request as a speech act with several types of felicity condition rule as follows; (i) propositional content condition refers to future act of the hearer; (ii) preparatory conditions refers to someone who is able to do something and the speaker believes that hearer is able to do the action; (iii) sincerity condition deals with circumstance where speaker wants hearer to do something; and (iv) essential condition counts as an attempt to get the hearer to do something.

Meanwhile, Leech (2014) proposed several parameters of request territory such as i) O-focus and S-focus in request when a request is seen as an O-oriented speech event, but it appears there can be an S-focused request, for example when someone is requesting for permission; ii) On-record and off-record strategies when Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed five strategies of face threatening act of requests such as; (1) bald on record, without redress for example by saying "*get me something to eat*"; (2) do it on record with positive politeness, for example by saying "*dear, get me something to eat*" (endearment is seen as a form of positive politeness); (3) do it on record with negative politeness, for example by saying "*Could you get me a sandwich?*"; (4) do it off record, for example by saying "*I am so hungry. Are you going anywhere near the sandwich bar?*"; and (5) do not do the FTA or silence. Blum-Kulka (1989) also classified three strategies of request according to the level of inference, such as direct request, conventionally-indirect strategies (on record), and non-conventionally indirect strategies (off record or indirect request). He also explained that the most direct strategies are in explicit level and they are marked as imperative and performative, while the conventional indirect refers to the act of reference to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance, for example "*Would you mind to open the door for me?*" and non-conventional indirect refers

to open-ended groups of indirect which determine the request based on either object, element, or contextual clues such as the word "*It is hot in here*"; (iii) A digression on non-discreteness such as direct strategies, on-record indirect, non-sentential strategies, and hints.

Several studies have been conducted related to this matter. Litvinova and Larina (2023) revealed that Americans tend to be more indirect and verbose and also use both positive and negative politeness strategies, in contrast, the Russians used politeness strategies with less regularity, more direct and were more focused on the clarity of their response to invitation rather than considerations of face. In line with what Jazaeri (2022) revealed that English native speakers tend to use negative politeness more than Iranian EFL learners in refusing something. Meanwhile, Chinese-English bilinguals flexibly switched and adapted the way they give or respond to compliments based on the community in which they were participating (Eslami & Yang, 2018). These findings show that every language and speakers have different ways to convey their message and intention based on their culture and of course some speakers may change their politeness strategies when they speak a different language when they acquire L2 cultural awareness. In comparative study, Ardiati (2023) found out that the strategy of apologizing in Indonesian tends to be direct and obeying the Cooperative Principles using the irony principle. While, Japanese obeys more on the Politeness Principles because it has an expression of consideration. Another study conducted by Kim and Lee (2017) was aimed to investigate how and why politeness strategies are realized similarly and/or differently in and around the speech acts of requests in English. They used both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect the data. There were 73 participants (23 American employees, 25 Korean employees with minimal experience in writing English and 25 Korean employees with good experience in writing English). The researchers used a pilot study and an e-mail discourse completion task (DCT) as a research tool. The findings showed that power is a more prominent factor when Korean employees make a request in an email compared to American employees since American employees are more into familiarity than power. In terms of directness, Abidi (2022) also found out that Moroccan EFL learners used direct strategies more than American native speakers of English. However, there are many different ways of making requests in different languages and that is why it is difficult for some people to decide which polite form to use in some situations when they speak second languages (Supriatnaningsih et al, 2023).

Cross-cultural Communications

Since the beginning of human's life, human beings have travelled to gain and search for something new including culture and language. In the search of culture and language, that is when they are attached to cross-cultural interaction. Cross-cultural interaction usually occurs when someone from a different country, culture, and language moves to different circumstances that force them to adapt to a new environment such as international students, abroad workers, exchange programs, or even married to a foreigner. Cross-cultural communication is defined as communication (verbal or non-verbal) between people who have different cultures including cultural values, attitude, communication style, beliefs, perceptions, and behaviour (Levine & Adelman, 1993). People from different cultures may react differently to one particular situation depending on their background.

In accordance with that, people need to acquire three important cultural competencies such as being motivated, having knowledge to draw on, and possessing communication skills in order to connect with others which also means that they need to have communicative competence in using the language according to the norms and appropriateness in certain context (Samovar, 2017; Savignon, 2017). Other than communicative competence, people also need to have cross-cultural understanding so that they can recognize cultural differences and react according to a given situation. In cross-cultural communication, comparing and contrasting differences and similarities between cultures are part of the key to the success of the communication so they can analyze, observe, and listen so they can adapt it (Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva, 2020). In line with that, Li (2023) suggested that having a good pragmatic competence in cross-cultural communication is important to have by the speakers of the target language.

It seems that speaking the target language without any grammatical mistakes is not the only thing that needs to be acquired by the speakers since the failure of having cultural awareness and L2/L3 pragmatic input can be vital in cross-cultural communication. People from different cultures can perceive speech acts differently since speech acts can be influenced by sociolinguistic context and contextual and situational norms in the speech community. This theory has been proven by a study conducted by Zand-Moghadam and Adeh (2020) that Turkmen-Persian bilinguals who speak English were more better in using appropriate speech acts than monolingual Persian who speak English since they had more pragmatic and metapragmatic awareness. So, it is important to have pragmatic

awareness in cross-cultural communication. Another study also found out that people whose English as their second/third language had pragmatic awareness were able to make a request appropriately and even better than native speakers of English in terms of politeness (Winans, 2020). When someone from different cultures are interacting, it is required to understand the differences because different cultures have different opinions and values towards everything. It is important to be aware in order to avoid conflict because cross-cultural communication can create several conflicts in socio-cultural environments. Hall (1973, as cited in Moge, 2023) stated that low-context culture is characterized by verbal and explicit messages and direct speech style, meanwhile a high context culture is more implicit, indirect, and not straightforward. Nurullayevna (2023) also stated that people from Australia and the US are more forward looking or focus on the future compared to China or India that prefer to review past performance. She also added that some people may behave the way they behave in their own culture but unintentionally, it causes offense just because they are not aware of different norms and rules in other cultures. So, it can be seen that communicating with other people from different cultures can be very challenging for some people who do not have cultural competence since speaking another language is not enough.

However, in inter-cultural communication, pragmatic failure and error can occur during the interaction due to the differences of social rules of one culture. Pragmatic failure may also result more serious misunderstanding since pragmatic errors can be considered offensive by some people. This pragmatic failure can be caused by pragmatic transfer from L1, L2 pragmatic overgeneralization, limited proficiency of L2, and teaching induced errors (Linde, 2009; Cohen, 2011). She also claimed that interlanguage pragmatic transfer involves pragma-linguistic that refers to the process where the learner choose certain strategies based on their L1 and socio-linguistic transfer that refers to different perceptions of the importance of context variables. However, when the interlanguage pragmatic transfer is positive, it may raise some difficulties in resulting to assumption of universal general pragmatic knowledge, while negative transfer can lead to inappropriate projection and socio-pragmatic failure especially in

making a particular speech act such as refusal, requests, apologizing, etc.

METHODS

This study aimed to investigate how American make requests using Indonesian and English language and how they use the strategies and also their difficulties when speaking another language in terms of making a request. This study used a qualitative case study design where it is used in order to investigate what really happens in real-life events. According to Hamied (2017), quantitative research is empirical research which also believes that knowledge is gained by conducting an observation. He also explained that qualitative constructivism believes that the truth and meaning are created by the subjects' interaction with the world since the same phenomenon is perceived differently by different people. Inductive reasoning is used in this method.

The researcher relied on qualitative research methods since the truth and meaning are created by the subjects' interaction with the world. The researcher began with giving DCT scenarios to the participants and conducted observation and began to detect patterns and regularities, formulates some tentative hypothesis to explore, and finally ends up developing some general conclusions or theories (Hamied, 2017). There were five American participants who were involved in this study and all of them were able to speak Indonesian fluently. The researcher started to analysed and interpret data found from DCT request scenarios and observation. First of all, the data from DCT was analysed and generalized. Then, the data from observation was also analysed and generalized. Lastly, the result was analysed whether it confirms or contradicts the data collected on DCT.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DCT Result

The DCT was designed to have 10 request scenarios below:

Table 1. Request Scenarios

No.	Power/Social Distance	Situation
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1.	-D	Your close friend did not return your camera as he'd agreed to do
2.	+D	You are in the middle of nowhere and your car broke down
3.	+P	Your student borrowed a different book from the library than the one you needed
4.	-D	A close friend played music too loudly and you could not get to sleep
5.	=P	Your colleague put too much sugar in your coffee and you do not like it
6.	-P	You missed your last exam and you ask for a make-up exam to your professor
7.	+D	You are in a restaurant and asked for more ketchup to the waiter
8.	=D	Your friend broke your cup when you go for a camp together.
9.	-P	You have been working so hard on your paper, but you got C and you ask your score detail to your professor
10.	=P	You came to your colleague house and you ask for some water

According to those 10 scenarios, all five American participants responded differently and based on the DCT result, it can be seen that the responds were varied (see table 2).

Table 2. American Participants DCT Analysis

Participants	Scenario	Type of Request in English	Type of Request in Indonesian
PA1	1	Direct request	Direct request
	2	Direct request	Direct request
	3	Direct request	Direct request
	4	Direct request	Direct request

PA2	5	Indirect request	Direct request	PA4	1	Direct request	Direct request
	6	Direct request	Direct request		2	Direct request	Direct request
	7	Indirect request	Direct request		3	Direct request	Direct request
	8	Direct request	Direct request		4	Direct request	Direct request
	9	Indirect request	Direct request		5	Direct request	Direct request
	10	Indirect request	Direct request		6	Direct request	Direct request
	1	Direct request	Direct request		7	Direct request	Direct request
	2	Indirect request	Direct request		8	Direct request	Direct request
	3	Direct request	Direct request		9	Direct request	Direct request
	4	Direct request	Direct request		10	Direct request	Direct request
PA3	5	Direct request	Indirect request	PA5	1	Indirect request	Direct request
	6	Direct request	Indirect request		2	Indirect request	Direct request
	7	Indirect request	Indirect request		3	Indirect request	Direct request
	8	No FTA or Silence	No FTA or Silence		4	Indirect request	Direct request
	9	Indirect request	Indirect request		5	Direct request	Direct request
	10	Direct request	Indirect request		6	Indirect request	Direct request
	1	Indirect request	Indirect request		7	Direct request	Direct request
	2	Direct request	Indirect request		8	Indirect request	Direct request
	3	Direct request	Direct request		9	Indirect request	Direct request
	4	Direct request	Direct request		10	Indirect request	Direct request
5	No FTA or Silence	No FTA or Silence	<p>According to the analysis, it can be seen that American participant 1 tended to use direct strategies when he spoke in Indonesian and English. He constantly used direct strategy when he used Indonesian, while in English he used indirect strategy when he talked to someone who had more power than him or someone who had social distance with him such as a waiter. Different from American participant 1, American participant 2 tended to use more indirect strategies in Indonesian while he tended to be more direct when he spoke English. The changes from indirect request in English to direct request in Indonesian occurred only in situation 2 when he asked for help from a stranger,</p>				
6	Indirect request	Direct request					
7	Indirect request	Direct request					
8	No FTA or Silence	No FTA or Silence					
9	Indirect request	Direct request					
10	Indirect request	Direct request					

while the other way around from direct request in English to indirect request in Indonesian occurred in situation 5, 6, and 10 when he talked to his colleagues and professor. Meanwhile, American participant 3 also changed from indirect request in English to direct request in Indonesian in the situation 6, 7, 9, and 10 when she talked to her professor and colleagues, while in the other situation where she talked to a stranger, she used direct strategy in English and changed into indirect strategy when she used Indonesia, however she used direct strategy in both languages when she talked to close friends or someone who had less power than her. Interestingly, American participant 4 tended to be more direct in both languages and in every situation, while American participant 5 changed his indirectness in English to direct request strategies when he used Indonesian, except in the 5th and 7th situation where he used direct strategy in both languages.

Based on this analysis, it can also be seen that American participants tended to be more direct in particular situations. However, surprisingly, American tended to be more direct when they were making a request in Indonesian and some of the participants constantly used direct request strategies. This could mean that any request they received when they learned Indonesian was mostly in direct strategies. However, this does not mean that he did not receive any indirect strategies. This also happened to American participant 4 and 5 in which they used direct requests more often when he spoke Indonesian.

The politeness changes can be seen in several situations in which Americans tended to change their politeness strategies from indirect to direct when they experienced situations such as when they were talking to their students, colleagues, and closest friends. In these situations, most American participants tended to use indirect strategies when they made a request in English, while they used direct requests when they switched the language to Indonesian. This means that Americans tended to do what Indonesians do when they made a request in Indonesian.

Observation Result

The observation result also shows the same pattern as DCT result as follows:

Table 3. Observation Results

Participant	Situation and the request in English	Situation and the request in Indonesian
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PA1	Asking for another bottle of beer - <i>“Could I have another one?”</i>	Asking for another bottle of beer - <i>“Mas, minta satu botol lagi?”</i>
PA2	Asking a friend to go together with him - <i>“Could I go with you instead?”</i>	Asking a friend to close the door - <i>“Tutup pintunya, I need a ride!”</i>
PA 3	Asking a friend to change the music - <i>“May I play a song?”</i>	Asking his friend to sing - <i>“Saya nyanyi”</i>
PA4	Asking a friend to drive him home - <i>“Can you do me a favor? I need a ride!”</i>	Asking for another bottle of soda - <i>“saya minta I satu lagi ini?”</i>
PA5	Asking his mom for some money- <i>“Could you send \$30?”</i>	Asking one of his friends for some money - <i>“Saya mau minta uang!”</i>

According to observation results, there were three conventional indirect preparatory questions conducted by American participants 1, 2, and 5. While American participant 3 tended to use conventional indirect permission and American participant 1 tended to be more direct when they made a request in English. In contrast to when they spoke Indonesian, all American participants tended to be more direct or bald on record. In this case, the intercultural pragmatics occurs when they speak different languages and all participants tend to apply the target language culture into their language use.

The observation results were surprisingly different from what the theories said about the direct value that Americans have as what Idris and Muftia (2021). As it is mentioned before that Americans are more direct compared to Indonesian because Indonesians should act and say something indirectly in order to avoid conflict with others and also Americans are more into directness, openness, and honesty (Samovar, et al, 2019; Levine & Adelman, 1993). There is a possibility that the directness of American values that the experts have mentioned is not including the language matter such as making a request and also the indirectness of Indonesian values do not include this type of speech acts. According to a study conducted by Syahrin (2015), in which she did a research about directness in politeness of Indonesian children’s requests by analyzing 118 request letters written by the participants, found out that from the age of 9-12, Indonesian children tended to use direct strategy and it was not seen as impoliteness since the children

felt that it was easier to understand and due to the degree of closeness between the children and the hearer. Based on this study, it can be seen that Indonesians have used directness in making a request since they were young.

Discussion

Based both DCT and observation result, it can be seen that Americans tended to use indirect strategies when they made a request in English, while they switched to direct strategies when they used Indonesian. This finding contradicts Idris and Muftia (2021) findings which claimed that American use direct communication, not only that, but Morand (2023 as cited in Warchulski, 2021) also claimed that Americans are most likely to be direct, while Asian countries tended to be more indirect. Meanwhile in this study, the opposite happened in which Americans tended to be more indirect when they made a request in English and they became direct when they made a request in Indonesian. As it is mentioned before that Americans are more direct compared to Indonesian because Indonesians should act and say something indirectly in order to avoid conflict with others and also Americans are more into directness, openness, and honesty (Samovar, et al, 2019; Levine & Adelman, 1993). There is a possibility that the directness of American values that the experts have mentioned is not including the language matter such as making a request and also the indirectness of Indonesian values do not include this type of speech acts. According to a study conducted by Syahrin (2015), in which she did a research about directness in politeness of Indonesian children's requests by analyzing 118 request letters written by the participants, found out that from the age of 9-12, Indonesian children tended to use direct strategy and it was not seen as impoliteness since the children felt that it was easier to understand and due to the degree of closeness between the children and the hearer. Based on this study, it can be seen that Indonesians have used directness in making a request since they were young.

CONCLUSION

This study has come up with a conclusion that almost all American participants tended to be more indirect when they made a request in English and they chose to change it to direct request strategies when they made a request in Indonesian. However, there was one American participant who preferred to use the direct requests strategy in every situation in both languages. Almost all American participants also could differentiate the use of 'can' and 'could' depending on the social-distance and power. This conclusion may contradict with the values of

indirectness of Indonesian in which it is said that Indonesians tend to be more indirect. Interestingly, American participant 2 tended to use indirect requests when he was requesting in Indonesian, while he used more direct when he used English. This study has also some flaws due to small sample size and the categories of the participants are still general and did not refer to any gender, age, and educational background of the participants as a consideration. The future study is expected to fill the limitation of this study that can be more explored related to their age, gender, and also educational background.

The use of request strategies may vary depending on what they were comfortable to use. However, according to the data, the changes mostly happened from indirect request strategy in English to direct request strategy in Indonesian even though the changes from direct request strategy in English to indirect request strategy in Indonesian appeared sometimes. The preference of the use of direct and indirectness are also influenced by power and social-distance as mentioned before. Based on the data, it can be seen that in order to avoid misunderstanding and miscommunication, people who intensively communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds need to have cultural or intercultural knowledge since mastering a target language is not enough.

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