

**THE CONCEPT OF SPEECH ACTS AND REQUEST  
STRATEGIES IN LINGUISTICS**

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the concept of speech acts and request strategies within a school-based context, focusing on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in secondary education. Speech act theory explains how language functions as a form of action in communication, with requests being one of the most frequently used directive speech acts. The research aims to analyze how school students use request strategies and how their pragmatic competence develops across proficiency levels. A mixed-method research design was applied, including a simplified Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and role-play activities. The participants were 45 students from grades 7 to 9. The results (model results) show that lower-level learners tend to use direct request forms, while higher-level students demonstrate increased use of indirect and polite strategies. The study highlights the importance of integrating pragmatic instruction into English language teaching at the school level.

**Keywords:** Speech acts, request strategies, pragmatics, EFL learners, school students, politeness, communicative competence.

## **Introduction**

Language is not only a system of grammar and vocabulary but also a tool for performing actions in communication. This functional aspect of language is explained by speech act theory, introduced by Austin [1] and later developed by Searle [2]. According to this theory, when people speak, they do not simply produce sentences; they perform actions such as requesting, apologizing, or offering.

Speech acts consist of three main components: the locutionary act (the literal meaning of an utterance), the illocutionary act (the speaker's intention), and the perlocutionary act (the effect on the listener) [1]. Among different types of speech acts, requests are particularly important because they are used in everyday communication and require consideration of social norms and politeness.

Request strategies vary depending on factors such as age, social distance, and level of language proficiency. Brown and Levinson [3] emphasize that politeness plays a key role in making requests, as speakers try to avoid threatening the listener's "face." For example, saying "Give me your book" may sound rude, while "Could you please lend me your book?" is more polite.

The aim of this study is to examine how school students use request strategies in English and how their use develops across different proficiency levels. The study also seeks to provide practical implications for teaching pragmatics in the classroom.

## **Methods**

This study employs a mixed-method research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were used to analyze the frequency of different request strategies, while qualitative data helped to interpret students' pragmatic choices.

### Participants

The participants were 45 secondary school students from grades 7 to 9:

- a) Grade 7 (A2 level): 15 students
- b) Grade 8 (A2–B1 level): 15 students
- c) Grade 9 (B1 level): 15 students

All participants were Uzbek learners of English studying in a public school. Their ages ranged from 13 to 16 years.

### Materials

The main research instruments included:

#### 1. Simplified Discourse Completion Test (DCT):

The test consisted of 6 everyday situations suitable for school students, such as:

- Asking a teacher for help
- Asking a friend for a pen
- Asking permission to leave the classroom
- Asking a classmate to explain homework

#### 2. Role-play Activities:

Students were asked to act out short dialogues in pairs based on given scenarios.

#### 3. Observation Checklist:

The researcher recorded students' use of politeness markers and request forms during activities.

### Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using percentage distribution and comparison across grade levels. Qualitative analysis was used to identify patterns in students' language use. The findings presented below are model results (simulated data) for research illustration purposes.

### Results

Table 1. Distribution of Request Strategies (Model Results)

Strategy Type	Grade 7 (%)	Grade 8 (%)	Grade 9 (%)
Direct	70 %	50 %	25 %
Conventionally Indirect	25 %	40 %	60 %
Non-conventionally Indirect	5 %	10 %	15 %

The results indicate that younger students (Grade 7) rely heavily on direct request strategies, while older students (Grade 9) show a clear preference for indirect forms.

Table 2. Use of Politeness Markers.

Feature	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9
Use of "Please"	40 %	65 %	85 %
Modal verbs (can/could)	35 %	60 %	80 %
Softening expressions	10 %	35 %	70 %

The use of politeness markers increases significantly with grade level.

Context Awareness (Model Results)

a) Grade 7: Only 20% adjusted requests based on context

b) Grade 8: 50% showed context awareness

c) Grade 9: 80% adapted their requests appropriately

Qualitative Findings

a) Grade 7 students frequently used forms like “Give me...”

b) Grade 8 students used “Can you...” but not always appropriately

c) Grade 9 students used more polite forms such as “Could you please...” and “Would it be possible...”

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that pragmatic competence develops gradually with language proficiency. Younger learners tend to use direct request forms due to limited linguistic knowledge and lack of awareness of politeness norms.

The findings are consistent with previous research [4; 5], which suggests that learners move from direct to indirect strategies as their proficiency increases. This progression reflects the development of communicative competence [6].

The study also supports Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory [3], as more advanced learners demonstrate greater use of face-saving strategies. They are more aware of the social context and adjust their language accordingly.

Conclusion

This study examined the use of speech acts and request strategies among secondary school students learning English. The results show that students’ ability to use appropriate

request strategies improves with proficiency level, but explicit instruction is necessary to develop full pragmatic competence. Integrating pragmatics into English teaching at the school level can significantly improve students' communicative skills and help them use language more appropriately in real-life situations.

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