

Politeness strategies in requests by Norwegian learners of English in comparison with native English speakers

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Abstract

This study focuses on the politeness strategies that are found in requests made by Norwegian speakers and native speakers of English. Specifically, it looks at whether the learners of English would transfer the politeness strategies from their first language to their second language. The participants were asked to role-play requests based on scenarios that focused on different power relations, social distance, and cost of imposition. The results show that politeness strategies can transfer from the learners' first language to their target language.

Introduction

Understanding pragmatic transfer is important because it can help us see how and why people from a different language background might be mistaken for being rude or disrespectful. In this paper, I start with reviewing what politeness is and the different types of face wants specified in politeness theory. I then discuss different factors that affect how we choose different politeness strategies, particularly in the speech act of request. Subsequently, I report on a small-scale empirical study on how native speakers of Norwegian make requests in English in comparison with native speakers of English and native speakers of Norwegian requesting in Norwegian, with a focus on possible transfer patterns from the learners' L1. The paper concludes with a discussion of implications for language teaching.

Politeness Theory

Politeness is defined by Meyerhoff (2011) as “the actions taken by competent speakers in a community in order to attend to the possible social or interpersonal disturbance” (p. 312). In Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, face is the fundamental of politeness. By being aware of and guarding our face against possible damage, we choose to be polite in order to maintain our face (as cited in Meyerhoff, 2011, p. 88). Face can be seen as standards of behavior, personality, status, dignity, honor, and prestige (Ho, 1976, p. 867). Brown and Levinson suggested that the reason why we choose to be polite is that we are concerned about maintaining two different types of face: (a) *negative face*, the want of every competent adult member of a community that their actions be unimpeded by others, i.e., “don't tread on me” (p. 88), and (b) *positive face*, the want of every competent adult member of a community that their wants be desirable to at least some others, i.e., “love me, love my dog” (Meyerhoff, 2011, p. 88). In social interaction, the positive and negative face wants of each participant determine our choice of words and how polite we choose to be, for example, in requests. In a request, the addressee face is threatened, which will influence the participant's choice in using the appropriate level of politeness (Meyerhoff, 2011, p. 93).

Meier (1995) characterized the negative strategies as expressions of formality, distancing, and restraint. Expressions of solidarity, informality, and familiarity are tied to positive strategies (p. 346).



Salvesen, K. E. (2015). Politeness strategies in requests by Norwegian learners of English in comparison with native speakers of English. *Hawaii Pacific University TESOL Working Paper Series 13*, 53-69.

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In a society where interaction between strangers pays more attention to the negative face wants, it would be rude to ignore the distance between the speaker and the addressee and talk as if we know him better than we do (Meyerhoff, 2011, p. 89).

In cultures such as the Japanese and German, it is very important to address a professor correctly by paying attention to the negative face and use terms such as *sensei* (Japanese), *professor* or *dozent* (German), etc. to show distance between the speaker and the addressee. In other societies, the interaction between strangers is more friendly and casual. This means that people in these societies tend to pay more attention to positive face wants. It would be considered impolite to talk to an addressee in such a way that it draws attention to the distance between the interlocutors. Australians are a good example of this positive face want because they are generally very informal and friendly, which tends to separate them from other English speakers (Meyerhoff, 2011, p. 89).

What is considered to be polite or impolite depends on three different factors that have been identified by Brown and Levinson, mentioned in Meyerhoff (2011): power, social distance, and the cost of the imposition. It is generally known that we put more effort into being polite and respectful to people that have more social power than ourselves. If you know that the person you are addressing holds some sort of power over you, it will affect the politeness you apply in the conversation (p. 91).

Meyerhoff (2011) explained that the social distance between the speakers will impact what type of politeness strategy they choose to use. We might feel the importance of being more polite to people we do not know as opposed to the people we see as our friends. The last factor, which is caused by imposition, looks at the social weight of different types of requests (p. 92). Meyerhoff used the example that asking someone for the time is not considered a big imposition. However, if you have to ask someone to lend you money, that might be considered a greater imposition (p. 92).

Brown and Levinson proposed a universal theory that would apply to different languages and cultures to explain the reasons for polite behavior (Johansen, 2008, p. 23). Meier (1995) discussed how the fundamental idea of positive and negative face wants is universal. This means that everyone has mutual knowledge about face wants and how to pay attention to these wants in different speech acts (p. 346).

However, Watts (2003) suggested that polite behavior and polite language need to be taught. He stated that politeness is not something we are born with but rather it is learned in social contexts. A language learner may need to learn the social rules in order to be able to develop communicative competence. When children learn their first language, they learn the rules and the pragmatics that should be applied in their culture, as well as the language (p. 9). Second language learners may not have the background knowledge of the nature of the target language culture, and the rules for speech-acts might differ from their own language and culture. Cultures may differ in the degree of directness tolerated in speech-acts. What is accepted in one culture might not be accepted in another culture (Blum-Kulka, 1980). This type of intercultural contact mentioned in Meyerhoff (2011) can create dilemmas for participants if they do not know whether to remain true to the politeness norms of their own culture or if they should adopt the new culture's politeness norms (p. 100).

The Speech Act of Request

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) defined request as an utterance or segment(s) that may include (a) address terms, (b) head act, (c) and adjunct(s) to head act (p. 200). There are different strategies when it comes to the realization of the request and the level of directness that will play a part in how politely the request is made. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain specified three levels of directness that could be seen as universal (p. 201):

1. Explicit level, the most direct form of request, which includes imperatives.
2. Conventionally indirect level, which includes contextualized predictions that include *could* and *would* in the request form.
3. Nonconventional indirect level in which the request will be made more as a hint.

These three levels of directness were divided into nine request categories, illustrated in Table 1 (reproduced from Blum-Kulka, 1987, p. 133 -134; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 201-202), which form an indirectness scale starting with the explicit type of requests and ending with the most indirect requests.

Table 1

Examples of Nine Request Categories

	Descriptive Category	Examples
Explicitly	1. Mood derivable ¹	Clean up the kitchen. Move your car.
	2. Performative	I'm asking you to move your car.
Conventions in the wording.	3. Hedged Performative	I would like to ask you to move your car.
Conventions regarding semantic content. These can be potential requests by social convention.	4. Obligation Statement	You'll have to move your car.
	5. Want statement	I would like you to clean the kitchen. I want you to move your car.
	6. Suggestory Formulae	How about cleaning up? Why don't you come and clean up the mess you made last night?
Conventional indirect.	7. Query Preparatory	Could you clean up the mess in the kitchen?
	8. Strong Hints (A)	You've left the kitchen in a right mess.
Least direct: Hints	9. Mild Hints (B)	We don't want any crowding (as a request to move the car).

In requests, Dittrich and Johansen and Kulinskaya (2011) speculate that face may be lost when the request is made in a less-than-polite manner (p. 3808). According to Brown and Levinson, cited in Dittrich, Johansen, and Kulinskaya (2011, p. 3808), indirectness in requests lowers the face threat that may occur. Thus, requests might not be made by using the literal meaning but more as an utterance and hints. Brown and Levinson's formula for calculating indirectness in requests is:

$$\text{Indirectness} = \text{Request size} + \text{Power (of hearer over speaker)} + \text{social distance}$$

(cited in Dittrich et al., 2011, p. 3809)

"Request size" refers to the type of request that is made and how much of an imposition it has. "Power" refers to the status distance between the hearer and the speaker. "Social distance" indicates whether the listener and speaker know each other well on a personal level or if they are strangers (Dittrich et al., 2011, p. 3809). To make a request more indirect and polite, the word *please* may be added and the

request itself will be made in an indirect manner rather than explicitly. The usage of formal titles when addressing the listener to emphasize the social distance will seem more polite in an indirect manner.

However, the use of politeness and indirectness in requests will differ between cultures. Dittrich et al. stated that individualistic culture—in which the concern of the people is self, family, and freedom—use more formal titles when making face threatening requests (p. 3809). On the other hand, the focus of communal-oriented cultures lean more towards the society or group they are a part of, and, therefore, the formal titles seem to be used less. In communal-oriented cultures, there is a stronger feeling of equality between people and a stronger concern of belonging to a group. Whereas in individualistic cultures the focus is more on achievement and power.

Dittrich et al. compared the USA and UK to Sweden and Norway (p. 3809). They found that the Nordic countries, Norway and Sweden, scored much lower on the individualistic scale than the USA and UK. This means that the Nordic countries did not use formal titles; rather, they reduced the power and social distance when making requests and interacting with others.

Research Question

Given the importance of an understanding about pragmatic transfer in language learning and teaching, and given the scant amount of research on requesting behaviors by Norwegian speakers of English, I chose to look at requests made by Norwegian speakers of English and compare them to requesting behaviors in Norwegian and in English by native speakers. My research question is: Do Norwegian speakers apply their Norwegian politeness strategies in English requests or do they follow the politeness norms found in the English speaking culture?

Methodology

In this small-scale study, I chose to interview three English L2 speakers from Norway and three native speakers of English. I set up the interview as a role-play where I informed the interviewees about a scenario in which they needed to direct a request towards either a friend (Appendix A) or a professor (Appendix B). In the scenarios, I varied the factors that Brown and Levinson posited to have different impacts on politeness. I chose the factors of power and social distance between a friend and a professor. In regard to the cost of imposition, I chose to have the participants borrow a bike from a friend or a book from a professor. For a bigger imposition, I chose to have the students ask to borrow money from a friend and to ask for an extended deadline on their term paper from their professor.

This is an overview over my participants. To make it easier to keep track of the participants, I have given them fictive names so that they can remain anonymous (Table 2).

The role-play was conducted orally, face to face or via Skype, in order to record the participants. The time it took for the participants to get through the scenarios varied from 10 to 20 minutes. After collecting the recordings, I transcribed the participants' requests.

I explained the scenarios to the participants and had them reply with a request. The English speakers had to produce six requests, which were all in chronological order starting with requests toward a friend and ending with requests made to a professor. For the Norwegian speakers, I went through the questions a little differently. I started with the requests to a friend first, similar to the English speakers, but I began the questions in Norwegian. I did this to ease the participants into the role-play since some of my Norwegian participants showed signs of anxiety when it came to speaking English in front of me. Instead of moving on to produce the English request to a friend, I asked them for the requests they would direct to their professor in English. Conducting the scenarios like this, I was hoping that they would not think too much about their Norwegian request to a friend when it came time for them to make the same requests in English. I finished by asking them to produce the requests for their professor in Norwegian.

Table 2
Participants' Profiles

Origin	Gender and Age	Pseudonym	Background
Norway	M, mid 20s	Pete	Has studied in the US for 2 years.
Norway	F, mid 20s	Sofia	Has not been in the US, has traveled in Europe.
Norway	F, mid 20s	Lucie	Has been to the US on vacation, has traveled and studied in the UK for 3 months.
USA, Oregon	M, mid 20s	Nick	
USA, Oregon	M, early 30s	Steve	
USA, Virginia	M, early 30s	Roy	

Findings

As mentioned earlier, Watts (2003) is under the impression that polite behavior and polite language need to be taught (p. 9). He states that politeness is not something we are born with; rather, it is learned in social contexts. With this in mind, I believe that Norwegian speakers of English have to be taught about this phenomenon and live in a social context where the politeness is applied to be able to gain the deeper meaning of why it needs to be applied in an English speaking context.

Requests to a Friend

Request Strategies

There were some differences based on the explicitness of the request among the participants' requests for a friend in English. This can be illustrated in Table 3. This table shows what type of requests strategies the participants made in all three scenarios aimed at a friend, based on Blum-Kulka & Olshtain's (1984) categories (see Table 1 above).

Table 3
Request Strategies Used When Making A Request to A Friend

		Sofia		Lucie		Pete		Native English speakers
		N*	E*	N*	E*	N*	E*	
1.	Mood derivable							
2.	Performative	2	3	3	2	2		3
3.	Hedged Performative					1		
4.	Obligation Statement							
5.	Want statement							
6.	Suggestory Formulae							
7.	Query Preparatory	1			1		3	4
8.	Strong Hints(A)							2
9.	Mild Hints(B)							

*E= Answer in English, N= Answer in Norwegian

Table 3 shows that the Norwegian speakers tend to have a more explicit form of request while the native speakers of English tend to apply a less direct request form. As mentioned earlier, the more indirect a request is, the more polite it seems to be. This can show evidence of how native English speakers have a more polite request form than Norwegian speakers do when it comes to making requests to a friend in English. The results of how Norwegian speakers ask the same question in Norwegian and English, as illustrated in the table, show that two of the Norwegian participants change their request strategies when

making the request in English. These two participants have lived in an English speaking environment and may have adapted the politeness form in a social context.

The Norwegian participants would ask to borrow a bike from a friend in Norwegian by using positive politeness strategies, such as:

Lucie: *Kan jeg låne sykkel din?*
can I borrow bike your
(can I borrow your bike)

Sofia: *Kan jeg låne sykkel din full fart ned til butikken?*
can I borrow bike you full speed down to store
(can I borrow your bike real quick down to the store)

Pete: *Kan jeg få låne sykkel din tror du?*
can I get borrow bike your think you
(do you think I could borrow your bike)

These same participants switched to incorporate some negative politeness strategies when they requested in English, for example:

Lucie: Can I borrow your bike please? I need to get something in the store before dinner.

Pete: Peter, would you mind if I borrow your bike real quick? I have to go to the store for 10 minutes and I'll be right back.

Sofia: I forgot something; can I borrow your bike to the store?

Sofia's request shows similarities to her Norwegian request, where she uses the positive politeness strategy. The three participants' variation in their request strategies may be tied to the fact that both Lucie and Pete have acquired the social norms of the English language more than Sofia has.

The native English speakers in this study would ask to borrow a bike from a friend by using both positive and negative politeness strategies, such as:

Nick: Hey, I got to run to the store really quick. Can I please borrow your bike? I'll be right back.

Steve: Hey, I need to go to the grocery store real quick, I will be back in 10 minutes because I need to be back I have things I have to take care of. May I please use your bike?

These requests show the negative politeness strategy of adding to the question. The participants minimize the request by adding *really quick*. However, one for the English speakers chose to use the positive politeness strategy, which is closer to the Norwegian speakers approach:

Roy: Hey can I borrow your bike really quick?

His choice may be based on the fact that he is speaking to a friend, and he does not feel the need to consider his friend's negative face.

Request Components

Comparing the differences in Norwegian and English requests becomes more interesting when looking at the components of the requests. By considering what type of components the Norwegian speakers use when composing a request to a friend in Norwegian (Table 4.1), and comparing it to the components they use in their English request (Table 4.2), we can see that the participants use the same amount of components in requests made in both languages, but they change what type of components they use.

Table 4.1

Request to A Friend in Norwegian

	Pete			Sofia			Lucie		
	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts
Borrowing a bike		1			1			1	
Asking for a ride	1	1			1		1	1	
Borrowing money	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1

Table 4.2

Request to A Friend in English by Norwegian Speakers

	Pete			Sofia			Lucie		
	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts
Borrowing a bike	1	1	1		1	1		1	1
Asking for a ride	1	1	1		1			1	1
Borrowing money	1	1	1		1	1		1	

The only participant that sticks out by applying more components is Pete. This participant has also been a part of an English speaking society for a longer period, and this may be why he applies more components to his English requests. By adding more components, his requests seem more indirect, which reflects a more polite request manner.

Comparing the results of the Norwegian speakers to those of the native English speakers in Table 4.3, we can see that the native English speakers use more adjunct components in one request than the Norwegian speakers of English.

Table 4.3

Request to A Friend by Native English Speakers

	Nick			Steve			Roy		
	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts
Borrowing a bike		1	1		1	2		1	
Asking for a ride		1	2		1	1	1	1	2
Borrowing money		1	1		1	3	1	2	2

Requests to A Professor

Request Strategies

Comparing the request strategies used when making a request to a professor in Norwegian and English is interesting. Table 5 shows what strategies the learners used in all three scenarios for making requests. It does not show much of a transfer from the Norwegian strategies to the English strategies. Lucie completely changes her strategies from one language to another, so her requests provide us evidence of little transfer. In Norwegian, she makes indirect requests, while in English she seems to make requests that are more explicit. If we look at the English speakers' requests to a professor, we see evidence of how they seem to use more strategies that are indirect. By being more indirect, the participants are applying more politeness in their requests.

Table 5

Request Strategies Used When Making A Request to A Professor

		Sofia		Lucie		Pete		Native English speakers
		N*	E*	N*	E*	N*	E*	
1.	Mood derivable							
2.	Performative	2	1	1	3			1
3.	Hedged Performative					1		
4.	Obligation Statement							
5.	Want statement							
6.	Suggestory Formulae							
7.	Query Preparatory	1	2	2		2	3	5
8.	Strong Hints(A)							3
9.	Mild Hints(B)							

*E= Requests in English, N= Requests in Norwegian

It seems that Norwegian speakers who have been living in an English speaking society were able to more successfully apply the politeness strategies that can be found in English. The difference between the participants Pete and Sofia is an example. Pete has been studying and living in the United States for some years, and the strategies that he used suggest that he seems aware of the politeness strategy that is found in this type of context after looking at the strategies he uses. He pays attention to the negative face wants between himself and the professor he is addressing when asking to borrow a book in English:

Pete: Dr. Johnson, may I speak with you for a minute? I know you are busy and everything, but you mentioned that book about communicative performance that I may want to use in my paper, and I see that I really, really need that book, and do you think I could borrow it, please?

The same participant chose to incorporate both positive and negative politeness strategies in his Norwegian request:

- a. *Du Arve, tror du jeg kan få låne den derre boka som du snakka*
you Arve think you I can get borrow that there book that you talked
(Arve do you think I could borrow that book you talked)
- b. *Om i forhold til den oppgaven jeg skulle skrive om*
about in relations to that assignment I should write about
(about regarding that assignment I'm writing about)

- c. *kommunikativ kompetanse og sånt, ser ut som jeg trengte den*
communicative competence and such see out as I need that
(communicative competence, it looks like I could)
- d. *veldig mye så det hadde vært veldig greit om jeg kunne få lånt den.*
very much so it had been very okay if I could get borrow that
(really use it so it would be great if I could borrow it)

This request shows more awareness of the positive face wants because Pete is addressing the teacher by first name, which makes it more personal, and the power distance between them is not as large as in the English request he made. This is common in Norwegian society where there is a greater focus on belonging to a group rather than individual status. In contrast to this, Sofia's requests, which are based on the same scenario, use positive and negative politeness strategies when requesting something of her professor in English:

Sofia: I know you have that book about those cars I'm interested in; can I please borrow it for some day?

What is interesting about Sofia's request is that she chose the positive politeness strategy when addressing the teacher as *you* instead of a formal term, which is a more friendly approach and does not pay attention to the power difference between her and the professor. The participant then applies the negative politeness strategy by adding *please* to the request. However, even though she is not familiar with how to address someone at a social distance, she knows that she should apply *please* in her English request. In Sofia's Norwegian request she uses the positive politeness strategy:

Sofia: Du, om jeg kunne lånt den derre boka som du har om det der?
you whether I could borrowed that there book which you have in that there
(you could I borrow that book that you have about that topic)

This request shows clear signs of how Sofia uses the form 'you' to address the professor in her Norwegian request too, similar to the request she made in English. I consider this evidence of how she carries over her Norwegian politeness strategies and applies them in an English context. By looking at the request components, this evidence becomes clearer.

The native English speakers incorporate both the positive and negative politeness strategy when making the same request to their professor:

Steve: Hey, I have a writing paper that I need to do. The topic relates specifically to this book that I know that you have. May I please borrow it for a reference to write my paper? It will be returned to you in a timely fashion.

Roy: Hey, Professor Smith, can I borrow that book you were talking about in class for my project?

In these requests, both participants address the negative politeness strategy where they consider the power and social distance between themselves and the professor. However, both of them also use *hey* which can be linked to a more positive politeness strategy. This may relate to the fact that they do not feel that this is a request of great imposition, and they are still on friendly terms with their professor.

Looking at a similar type of request, but with a greater imposition when having to ask the professor for an extension on a term paper, we can see that two of the Norwegian speakers use positive politeness strategies in making their requests:

Lucie:

Ville det vært mulig å få en forlenga frist på denna oppgaven her,
would it be ability to get one extend deadline on this assignment here
(would it be possible to get an extended deadline on this assignment)

du vet jeg har jobba så hardt gjennom hele semesteret men nå
you know I have worked so hard through whole semester but now
as you know I have been working hard through the semester but now)

sliter jeg litt og trenge noen ekstra dager.
struggling I little and need some extra days
(I'm struggling and I need some extra days)

Sofia:

Du, jeg har ikke sjans til å bli ferdig med det innen fristen
you I have not chance to become done with that within deadline
(you I have no chance to get done with it within the deadline)

er det noen mulighet for at jeg kan få utvidet den fristen en dag eller to?
is it some chance for that I can get extended that deadline one day or two
(is there any chance that I could get an extended deadline for a day or two)

I consider these two requests made in Norwegian similar. They are both addressing the positive face wants in a way because they do not focus on the distance or power in the relationship to their professors. However, in Lucie's request there is an attempt to minimize the request by adding that she has worked hard this semester and that the professor should know that. This, together with the fact that the request is not formulated as explicitly as Sofia's request, can indicate that Lucie is paying more attention to the professor's negative face wants.

When the same two participants make the request in English, we can see that both of them apply more of a negative politeness strategy.

Lucie: Can I please get a couple of days extra on my paper?

Sofia: I can see that I will not be finished in deadline, so I was wondering if I could have one extra day to write the assignment.

In this case Sofia seems to transfer her request form from Norwegian to English. Lucie, on the other hand, is much shorter in her request in English and does not include as many components as she did in her Norwegian request.

The native speakers of English apply negative politeness strategies in their requests for an extension on their paper:

Nick: So I've been working really hard lately but I'm just really struggling to get this paper done. And I was hoping I could have a little bit of an extension 'cause I don't think I'll be finished with it by the time it's due. May I please have an extension?

Roy: Hey, Dr. Wilson, can I talk to you for a moment? I know I have a paper due, and it's due in 3 days, but I don't think I can be able to finish in time, and I was wondering if I could get an extension on the time. . . . I have a very busy semester; I'm taking 19 credits, . . . and I've just fallen behind. Is it at all possible that I can get an extra day or two to finish up this report?

Both participants try to minimize the request. Especially noticeable is Roy's attempt to minimize the request when he asks, '*Can I talk to you for a moment?*' Roy also seems more concerned about the power and social relationship between himself and the professor than Nick does.

Request Components

Table 6.1 and 6.2 display the request components used by Norwegian speakers of English, and Table 6.3 displays the request components used by native speakers of English.

Table 6.1

Request to A Professor in Norwegian

	Pete			Sofia			Lucie		
	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts
Borrowing a book	1	1	1		1			1	
Asking to be excused from class	1	1	1		1	1		1	1
Asking for extended deadline	1	1	1		1	1		1	1

Both Tables 6.1 and 6.2 show that there is little change in the request components in either the Norwegian or the English requests. Pete is the strongest participant; he shows exactly the same usage of components in his requests made in both languages. Since the other two participants show that they do not use address terms in their requests, there might be a possibility that Pete, who has been living in an English speaking environment for a longer period, may be transferring his English politeness theory and request components into this Norwegian requests.

Table 6.2 and Table 6.3 show that Norwegian speakers and English speakers use similar components. The only difference is the number of adjuncts that is used in the requests. The English speakers tend to use more adjuncts than Norwegian speakers.

Table 6.2

Request to A Professor in English by Norwegian Speakers

	Pete			Sofia			Lucie		
	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts
Borrowing a book	1	1	1		1	1		1	
Asking to be excused from class	1	1	1		1	1		1	1
Asking for extended deadline	1	1	1		1	1		1	

Table 6.3

Request to A Professor by Native English Speakers

	Nick			Steve			Roy		
	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts	Address terms	Head act	Adjuncts
Borrowing a book		1	1		1	2	1	1	1
Asking to be excused from class		2	1		1	2	1	1	2
Asking for extended deadline		1	2		1	2	1	2	3

It is clear that the Norwegian speakers do not address their professor by *professor* or similar professional terms. They will address professors as *you* or by their first name. This does not necessarily show that these students are impolite, but it may show that they have not learned how to apply politeness in an English speaking context. However, the reason for the Norwegian participants not addressing the power and social distance between their professor and themselves may reflect the Norwegian society where the focus is more communal oriented and not as much individualistic.

In Scandinavia, there is something called ‘Janteloven’, which translates into English as ‘The law of Jante’. This is not an actual law but something that is fundamental in the Norwegian society. It is somewhat fundamental in the culture when it comes to showing power and greatness. ‘Janteloven’ has the effect that it is not good to stand out among others and that you should not compare yourself to anyone other than yourself. This is the opposite of ‘keeping up with the Joneses’, which pushes people to constantly be better than everyone around them (Gratale, 2014).

In contrast, ‘the law of Jante’ has ten “rules” that came from the book, ‘En flyktning krysser sitt spor’ (A fugitive crosses his tracks), written in 1933 by a Norwegian-born Danish author, Aksel Sandemose. The ten rules of ‘the law of Jante’ (Avant & Knutsen, 1993) are:

1. Thou shalt not believe that thou art something.
2. Thou shalt not believe that thou art as good as us.
3. Thou shalt not believe that thou art more than us
4. Thou shalt not fancy thyself better than us.
5. Thou shalt not believe thou knowest more than us.
6. Thou shalt not believe thou art greater than us.
7. Thou shalt not believe that thou art a worthwhile human being.
8. Thou shalt not laugh at us.
9. Thou shalt not believe that anyone is concerned with thee.
10. Thou shalt not believe thou canst teach us anything. (p. 3)

These rules have an impact on how people in Norway interact with each other. Norwegians generally seem to treat everybody as equals and do not judge people based on their role in society. At least this is how it has been for years, but nowadays this might be changing in some parts of the society and there are a lot more people fighting against 'the law of Jante' than before. The data in this paper seem to support the idea that 'the law of Jante' still has an impact on the Norwegian participants' requesting behaviors.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study a slight difference was found between the Norwegian speakers of English and the native speakers of English in the request strategies applied to make a request towards a friend. My data show that the English speakers use more indirect strategies and hints when the Norwegians tend to use an explicit form of request strategies. According to Brown and Levinson, mentioned in Ditttrich and Johansen and Kulinskaya (2011, p. 3808), using a more indirect form of request will lower the face threat. An indirect request will seem more polite than an explicit request.

Regarding the components of the English and Norwegian requests towards a friend made by Norwegian speakers, there is little change in the amount of components. There is only one participant that changed the number of components, and he added more adjuncts in his English request compared to his Norwegian request. The English speakers' data show that overall they add more adjuncts in their requests. When making the request to borrow money, one English speaker used one head act and three adjuncts.

Regarding request strategies used in requests to a professor, the data again show that the English speakers use more implicit request strategies than the Norwegian speakers. When comparing the components of the requests made in Norwegian and in English by the Norwegian speakers, the study shows that there is little change in their components. The difference between the Norwegian speakers and the English speakers' requests in English is that the English speakers use adjuncts more frequently than the Norwegian speakers. Overall, the use of more adjuncts can indicate that the request is made more indirect by adding several components to delimit the head act (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 200). The study shows that the Norwegian speakers' usage of requesting components was almost similar in their Norwegian requests and their English requests in all the scenarios. This can be interpreted as a sign of transfer from their first language to their second language.

The study also raises a question about Brown and Levinson's "universal" politeness theory (Johansen, 2008, p. 23). It seems that Norwegian culture and American culture hold different views on what counts as politeness, and each culture weighs the factors of power and distance slightly differently. In Norwegian culture, the power asymmetry and social distance between professors and students seem to be less important than in American culture. This study concurs with Ide (1989), who, speaking from a Japanese perspective, suggested that Brown and Levinson's politeness theory cannot be applied to every culture. Specifically, the politeness values in an individualistic society cannot be expected to be found in a collective society. In a collective society, there will be more focus on politeness towards people's interdependence than their individualism (Meyerhoff, 2011, p. 104).

To raise students' awareness of these differences, politeness strategies have to be taught. As mentioned in the literature review, Watts (2003) was in support of this view. However, we all have the right to choose how we want to speak. It should not be expected that learners from different language backgrounds know how to apply politeness in their second language without being aware of the pragmatics found in the target language. The learners' cultural aspects may transfer into the target language and give the impression that learners are being impolite when in fact they are not aware of this. With this in mind, the learners should be able to apply the language form they prefer.

One of the limitations of this study was the small number of participants. If I had had more participants, I might have found different answers to how politeness is applied in both Norwegian and English. One of the Norwegian participants found it hard to speak English to me which might have had an effect on the requests she made. The participants may have felt that I was judging their English and were afraid that they were not using it correctly. Because of this, they thought more about how to provide the correct version of English rather than to give me a more spontaneous answer, which would have been more useful for the study.

Another limitation was that the study was supposed to be a role-play context. However, I did not manage to enact the role-plays with the participants, so the protocol ended up being an oral survey, in which I read a scenario, and then the participants replied with what they would have said to make the requests. It may have worked better if I had played the role of the friend and the professor to make it closer to real-life conversations.

For future research, I would be interested in looking into other power relations and how participants would apply politeness theory in request based on other scenarios. I would have the participants make requests to a parent to see how that would differ from the requests made to a friend or a professor and if the politeness strategies would be more explicit or implicit based on the power relation and social distance. It would also be interesting to see how different cultural backgrounds would affect the participants' contributions to this type of request. If I had the opportunity, it would be appealing to carry out this study with speakers of languages other than Norwegian.

Note

- ¹ Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) stated about *mood derivable (imperative)* that "the grammatical mood of the verb in the utterance marks its illocutionary force as a request" (p. 202).

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Appendix A

Scenarios for Requests to A Friend in English and Norwegian

Norwegian:

1. Du må på butikken før middag men du må være tilbake innen 10 min. Du spør vennen din om du kan låne sykkelen hans/hennes.
2. Du vett at vennen din har en hektisk helg men du trenger skyss til flyplassen tidlig lørdag morgen. Du spør vennen din om å kjøre deg til flyplassen klokken 5 om morgenen.
3. Du har problemer med å betale leia denne måneden og du vet at vennen din nettopp fikk 1250 kr av bestemoren. Du vet at vennen din har lite med penger men du spør om å få låne 1000 kr til å betale leia di.

English:

1. You need to go to the store before dinner but you have to be back in 10 minutes. You ask your friend if you can borrow his/her bike.
2. You know your friend has a busy weekend, but you need a ride to the airport early Saturday morning. Ask your friend for a ride to the Airport at 5 AM.
3. You are struggling to pay rent this month, and you know that your friend just got \$150 from his/her grandmother. You know money is tight for your friend as well, but you ask to borrow \$100 to be able to pay your rent.

Appendix B

Scenarios for Requests to a Professor in English and Norwegian

Norwegian:

1. Du har en oppgave som skal levers om to uker, og professoren din har nevnt en bok hun/han har som omhandler temaet du skal skrive om. Du spør professoren din om å låne boken.
2. Du har et viktig møte med en organisasjon du er involvert i på universitetet tirsdag. Møtet skal holdes når du egentlig skulle vært i timen. Du spør professoren din om du kan få fri fra timen p.g.a møtet.
3. Du har jobbet flittig gjennom hele semesteret men du strever med å bli ferdig med en semester oppgave. Du har 3 dager igjen til innleveringsfristen og du har liten tro på at du vil klare å bli ferdig i tide. Du spør professoren din om en forlenget frist på oppgaven.

English:

1. You have an assignment due in two weeks, and your professor has been mentioning a book he/she has about your topic. You ask to borrow the book from your professor.
2. On Tuesday you have an important club meeting at your university during class time. You ask your professor if you can be excused from class this one time.
3. You have been working hard this semester, but you are struggling with finishing one of your papers. Now it's three days before the deadline and you don't think you will finish it on time. You ask your professor for an extended deadline on your term paper.