

An Exploratory Study on Politeness Strategies in Requests by Korean Learners of English and American English Speakers

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Abstract

This study presents an analysis of politeness strategies in requests made by Korean speakers and native speakers of English. In particular, it focuses on whether Korean learners of English transfer their politeness strategies to the second language context or whether they follow the norms of politeness found in English. Analysis of the participants' responses to a DCT (discourse completion task) in role-play format shows that politeness strategies varied with social distance, power, and imposition. The results suggested politeness strategies can transfer from learners' first language to their target language, and in some cases this process could lead to problems in communication for ESL learners.

Introduction

English as a global language is spoken by people who have different cultural backgrounds. Since it is spoken interculturally, there may be misunderstandings which arise between speakers who have different cultural backgrounds. These misunderstandings may be the cause of unintentional offenses to hearers because of the difference in their cultural backgrounds. In this study, I examined politeness, and how different cultures express politeness in different ways. In particular, I conducted a small-scale comparative analysis between Korean learners of English and native speakers of English to see the differences between politeness strategies in the speech act of requests, focusing on possible pragmatic transfer patterns on learner's first language. This paper concludes with a discussion of teaching implications for second language teaching.

Politeness Theory

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness is a universal feature. Watts (2003) also claimed that all languages have the means to indicate politeness (p. 12). Brown and Levinson's Politeness theory is based on the notion of face. Every competent individual has face and they are aware that others also have face. Brown and Levinson (1978) stated that an individual has two types of face: positive and negative. Positive face is the want to be appreciated in social interaction, and negative face is the want to be unimpeded from action and imposition (Vilki, p. 324). Vilki explains that most conversational events will naturally threaten hearer's and speaker's



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face, and politeness strategies will be used in face threatening acts (FTA)s to mitigate the threat. There are three main politeness strategies: positive, negative, and off-record. Meyerhoff (2011) mentioned that positive politeness strategies direct attention to positive face wants of an interlocutor, aiming to show friendliness. Negative politeness strategies direct more attention to negative face wants, aiming to show deference or respect to interlocutors' freedom of action and freedom from imposition (p. 90). The last strategy, off-record politeness, implies or hints at meaning to interlocutors without expressing the speech act directly. Moreover, Vilkki added that there are three social factors which determine how speakers formulate their speech acts: the perceived social distance between the hearer and the speaker, the perceived power relationship between them, and the cost of imposition. The latter is defined according to the degree that the FTA is perceived as threatening in a specific culture (p. 324).

Korean Politeness Strategies

Politeness in Korean culture is generally known for valuing courtesy, harmony, indirectness, and modesty. According to Song (2014), “Korean culture is highly collectivist. Koreans tend to be communal, hierarchical, formal, deferential-oriented and emotional” (p. 61). Song (2012, p. 53) added that in Korea, people’s relative power is important in interpersonal relationships because of the hierarchical nature of the society and culture (as cited in Hwang, 1990). Therefore, Song (2014) explained that sociocultural factors such as social power, kinship, status, occupation, and age have great impact on communication (p. 61). Also, the social distance among interlocutors may be considerable, but it has a marginal impact compared to other factors.

In Korean, honorifics are widely used to express respect. The Korean honorific system uses honorific endings (suffixes) and syntactic forms such as negation, questions, and conditionals to express deference (p. 63). The Korean politeness system is regarded as discernment politeness, which refers to the fact that there are fixed ways of expressing politeness that are encoded in the language system (p. 62), but the utilization of these means of discernment politeness depends on the social relationship between the speaker and the addressee. “Politeness is socially prescribed,” meaning that the speaker, as a member of society, does not entirely make his/her own choices (Song, 2014). In discernment politeness, the social power of the addressee in relation to the speaker is the main factor in determining the level of politeness used in expressions. The speakers’ options are limited to a certain level of politeness based on their social status in the society. People from a discernment politeness culture are expected to show, according to Song (2014), consideration regarding the addressee’s status and the use of honorifics which are linguistic speech strategies (i.e., negative politeness or a conventionally indirect form of speech).

American Politeness Strategies

Generally, in America, politeness is related to social etiquette and is used to avoid conflicts. Americans tend to be “individualistic, quality-oriented, [and] rational” (Song, 2014, p. 61). Speakers usually focus on how they deliver their message with regards to verbal abilities, reasoning, and expressing politeness. According to Watts (2003), because of an individualism-centered culture, American politeness is normally based on personal autonomy and how one maintains conversation etiquette. As a result, individuals are usually endowed with more rights to

choose which politeness strategy he/she will use in order to maintain each other's autonomy in the conversation. For this reason, the use of interrogative sentences is utilized as a politeness strategy to avoid imposition (Watts, 2003).

Also based on the willingness or volition of the speaker is strategic politeness. In accordance with his/her perception of the addressee and the situation, the speaker will choose his/her politeness strategy and appropriate degree of politeness. Strategic politeness utilizes various strategies with a specific communicative goal in the speaker's mind, so speakers are mainly constrained by the costs and benefits of their speech acts, which are perceived and determined by the speaker's rationality (Watts, 2003).

It appears that in American culture, social factors such as power and status tend to be not as important as in Korean culture. Most Americans show the tendency to change the degree of politeness depending on the given situation, in pursuit of having smooth conversations with addressees (p. 61).

Indirectness

Indirectness is often expressed in indirect speech acts. According to Searle (1985), indirect speech acts occur when a speaker's utterance means what is said but also contains an additional meaning or illocutionary act. In contrast, direct speech acts occur when a speaker explicitly states the literal meaning or intention of the utterance (p. 30). Indirect speech acts are universal in languages because they serve the purpose of maintaining politeness in a conversation (Brown and Levinson 1987; Scollon and Scollon 1983). Katriel (1986) explained that indirect speech acts originate from the concern of the addressee's face, while a direct speech act comes from concern for the speaker's own face. Leech (1983) added that it is feasible "to increase the degree of politeness by using a more and more indirect kind of illocution. Indirect illocutions tend to be more polite (a) because they increase the degree of optionality, and (b) because the more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be" (p. 108). According to Scollon and Scollon (1983), the indirectness level will go up based on the social distance between the two speakers and also with higher social power of the addressee. Lastly, Olshtain (1993) suggested that indirectness is a measure that a speaker uses to leave some freedom of action for the addressee. He agreed that the relative power, status, and social distance between the speaker and hearer is important in determining the level of an indirect speech act.

Requests

Request is a frequent speech act in daily communication in most languages. Requests "involve a threat to the face of the speaker or the hearer" in the sense that "they impose on the freedom of action of the hearer. The hearer has to make a choice, either to accept or refuse" (Richards 1982, p. 66). The listener has the right to decide whether or not he or she would like to do what the person is requesting. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) explained that the utterance of a request may include (a) address form, (b) head act, and (c) adjunct (p. 200). The address form serves as either an attention getter (e.g., "Excuse me") or addresses the person to whom the request will be made to (e.g., "Mr. Lee"). The head act is a main part of the speech act where the request is expressed (e.g., "I'd like to request an extension"). The adjunct is the softener of the speech act

and can come before or after the head act. (e.g. “I apologize for asking this”). Also, the strategies used when people make requests are meant to reduce the imposition of the request in any cultural context. House and Kasper (1981) considered the level of directness as an indicator of politeness, and their work defined a request as the act of a “pre-event” with “anti-addressee Y.” In other words, one of the requirements for a speech act to be a request is that the utterance of the speech act takes place before the event, that is, before the action the speaker wants addressee Y to perform (as cited in Song, 2014). Their work suggested a scale which postulates degree of transparency in speaker’s speech act. The scale has nine levels ranging from the most direct level to the least direct level as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Blum-Kulka and Olshtain’s Transparency Scale

Descriptive category	Explanation
1. Mood Derivable	Utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb delivers illocutionary force as a request (e.g., “Close the door.”)
2. Explicit Performative	Utterances in which the illocutionary intent is explicitly expressed (e.g., “I ask you to close the door.”)
3. Hedged Performative	Utterances in which the expression of the illocutionary intent is hedged by using a modal auxiliary (e.g., “I would like to ask you to close the door.”)
4. Obligation Statement	Utterances which state the obligation of the addressee to perform the illocutionary act (e.g., “You should close the door.”)
5. Want Statement	Utterances which state the speaker’s desire that the addressee perform the illocutionary act (e.g., “I would prefer if you closed the door.”)
6. Suggestory Formula	Utterances which contain an assertion of a preparatory condition or a suggestion for the execution of the act (e.g., “You can close the door.”)
7. Query Preparatory	Utterances that are conditioned by the addressee’s ability or willingness to accept the request, using conventionalized speech patterns (e.g., “Can (Could) you close the door?”)
8. Strong Hints	Utterances which do not state the illocutionary point but contain a partial reference to the element needed for the implementation of the act (e.g., “Why is the door open?”)
9. Mild Hints	Utterances that have no reference to the illocutionary point but are interpretable as requests by context (e.g., “It’s very cold here.”)

As the scale shows, being indirect entails that a speaker's utterance is less informative, less clear, less truthful, and/or less relevant than it otherwise could have been with respect to conveying the speaker's understood intention (this will be discussed further in the next section).

In addition to the scale, Carrell and Konneker (1981) provided a hierarchy of request acts as below;

0. Imperative-elliptical
1. Imperative
2. Declarative with no modal
3. Declarative with a present tense modal
4. Declarative with a past tense modal
5. Interrogative with no modal
6. Interrogative with a present tense modal
7. Interrogative with a past tense modal

These two typologies offer a useful start for looking into politeness in one's request in terms of the level of directness.

Requests by Second Language Learners

There has been much research on requests in a second language, but given the focus of my paper, I will focus on two studies. Salvesen (2015) investigated requests made by Norwegian learners of English and Americans with a focus on the possible transfer of politeness strategies from learner's first language to the second language context in terms of the level of directness and politeness strategies. Her findings suggested that the native speakers of English applied more indirect strategies such as hints when Norwegian speakers utilized direct request strategies. In addition, comparing the English requests made by the Norwegian speakers and the native English speakers, the English speakers produced less direct requests with more adjuncts, while the Norwegian learners of English used more direct requests with less adjuncts. Her study showed that the Norwegian speaker's request strategies were nearly similar in both their Norwegian and English requests in all given situations. This implies that the politeness strategies in their first language transferred to the second language.

Also, Byon (2004) provided another study on requests made by second language learners. He analyzed the socio-pragmatic features of Korean requests. In his study, 50 female American KFL (Korean as Foreign Language) learners were asked to make a request in Korean in 12 different situations. Those performances were compared with requests made by 50 female native Korean speakers and 50 female American English native speakers. The data were collected by a DCT (discourse completion task). His study reported that 'query preparatory' type, in table 1, is the most frequently used by the American KFL learners as for the native American English speakers in all situations. In particular, the American KFL learners and American English native speakers showed limited usage in the Mood-derivable category, whereas the Korean native speaker made significant use of Mood-derivable in cases where a hearer's power is less or equal to a speaker's power. On this point, Byon described Koreans as being more hierarchical, collectivistic, roundabout, and formalistic than Americans. He also pointed out that the tendency

to use indirect requests for native English speakers is due to the influence of western culture. According to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), “western language usage is fundamentally associated with negative politeness” (cited in Byon, 2004, p. 1698). Therefore, the considerable amount of use of Preparatory by the KFL learners can be interpreted as first language transfer.

After reviewing the studies on the speech act of requests by second language learners in regards to first language transfer, I aim to explore comparisons of requests made by Korean learners of English and American native speakers of English, taking into consideration the possible pragmatic transfer from the first language into the second language.

Research Questions

Taking into account the importance of the politeness in intercultural communication and pragmatic transfer in speech acts in second language learning, I chose to compare requests made in Korean and English by Korean learners of English and requests made by native English speakers. I aim to explore the answer to this question: Do Korean learners of English apply Korean politeness strategies in English requests, or do they follow the politeness norms in English culture?

Methodology

Data Collection

In this small-scale study, I interviewed ten Korean learners of English and ten native speakers of English. The Korean learners of English have different lengths of residence in the United States; from no residence to 10 years of residence experience. The native speakers of English are from the United States mainland and Hawaii.

In the scenarios used for the interview, I provided three different variables that Brown and Levinson posited to have different impacts on politeness. To vary the power relationship, I chose two hearer types: a classmate and a professor. Then, I varied the two agents with respect to social distance to observe how this factor affects politeness strategies: a close friend vs. a classmate; and a familiar professor vs. a new professor. Lastly, I varied the cost of imposition: to borrow class notes vs. to ask for help with moving into a new apartment vs. to borrow money (with a friend or classmate); to ask for more reference sources for a research paper vs. to ask for a letter of recommendation vs. to ask for an extension to the deadline of an assignment (with a familiar (current) or new professor). The six scenarios found in Appendix A and B are summarized below:

Situation 1: request to borrow class notes from a friend or close friend

Situation 2: request for help with moving in from a friend or close friend

Situation 3: request to borrow money from a friend or close friend

Situation 4: request to ask a recommendation of reference books for your research paper
from current professor or new professor

Situation 5: request to ask for a letter of recommendation for admission of a university
from current professor or new professor

Situation 6: request to ask to extend the deadline of your assignment from current
professor or new professor

With all the interview subjects, I used pseudonyms to indicate the participants so that they can remain anonymous. The interview was conducted orally, face to face or via Skype. It took an average of 20 to 30 minutes to complete for each participant. I recorded the interviews with four Americans and one Korean who agreed to be recorded and took notes of the responses with those who preferred not to be recorded.

In the interviews, I explained the situation to the interviewees and did the role-play with them including a request. I asked the American subjects to reply with a request towards classmates first and then a close friend, and then make a request towards their current professor and then a new professor. For the Korean subjects, I asked them to do a role-play with me in Korean first, and then in English in the same sequence.

While the participants' utterances are not actual spontaneous requests in real-life conversations, the interviews can effectively help an investigation of cross-cultural differences in a short period of time. As Hill et al (1986) stated, this method is recommended for a cross-cultural comparative study since it displays the speaker's sociolinguistic adaptations to specific situations. Blum-Kulka and House (1989) concurred that this method can be used to elicit linguistic and cultural norms in language (as cited in Song, 2004).

Analytical Procedure

To analyze the data collected from the Korean and American subjects, I used the scale Song (2014) created based on the House and Kasper (1981) and the Carrell and Konneker (1981) scales of request acts, which I described earlier. Song (2014) supplemented the scale of House and Kasper (1981) with level 7- 'query preparatory types.' She expanded the level 7- 'query preparatory types' into three different levels, with no modal, a present tense, and a past tense modal, according to Carrel and Konnerker (1981). Thus, Song's scale consisted of eleven levels that range from the most direct to the least direct types of request (below), and her scale will be used in this study.

1. Mood derivable
2. Explicit performative
3. Hedged performative
4. Obligation statement
5. Want statement
6. State preparatory
7. Query preparatory with no modal (e.g., "Are you willing to open the door?")
8. Query preparatory with a present tense modal (e.g., "Can you close the door?")
9. Query preparatory with a past tense modal (e.g., "Could you close the door?")
10. Strong hint
11. Mild hint

This qualitative analysis aims to see whether Korean subjects would transfer their politeness strategies from the norms of politeness in their first language to the second language

context or if they would change or modify their politeness strategies following the norms of politeness found in the second language.

Findings

The findings show that cultural differences play a crucial role in the type of request strategy applied in regards to directness level and politeness strategies. Different social factors affected the two groups' politeness strategies. Overall, American subjects' politeness strategies were more affected by the cost of imposition, whereas Korean subjects' politeness strategies were more influenced by the social power relationship. These different patterns reflect the cultural differences and linguistic backgrounds of their first languages. In addition, the data shows that Korean learners of English exhibited the tendency to follow the norm of politeness in English in their English requests. This may be explicable in light of the fact that nine of ten Korean subjects have years of residency experience in the United States. However, some Korean learners of English revealed first language interferences in their requests in English. These interferences may have been the product of insufficient understanding of polite formulaic expressions in second language context or direct transfer of cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their first language.

Request to a Classmate

Korean and American participants exhibit differences in terms of directness level in their requests for a classmate. This is shown in Figure 1, which reveals the request strategies with a classmate based on Song's (2014) categories.

Level of Directness (from most direct (1) to least direct (11))		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total
Request		Md	Ep	Hp	Os	Ws	Sp	Qp1	Qp2	Qp3	Sh	Mh	
Borrowing class notes	K(Korean)	2	1						7				10
	K(English)								7	3			10
	A(English)							6	3	1			10
Asking for help with moving	K(Korean)	1				2	1	1	4				10
	K(English)						1		5	4			10
	A(English)							4	1	5			10
Borrowing \$200	K(Korean)	1						1	8				10
	K(English)								4	6			10
	A(English)							2	3	5			10

Figure 1. Request Strategies Used When Making a Request to a Classmate

As Figure 1 shows, the data shows Korean subjects produced more direct form of requests in Korean requests; level 1, 2, or 5, while American subjects tend to use less direct forms of requests. American subjects show a strong tendency to apply the ‘query preparatory type’—level 7, 8, and 9—which are conventionally indirect request types in Song’s scale. One notable point is that the American subjects tend to decrease their directness according to the weight of the

requests (cost of imposition); the heavier requests were, the more indirect request forms they produced.

When it comes to English requests made by the Korean subjects, the level of directness in their requests significantly decreased, and most of them used ‘query preparatory types’ in their English requests. This result indicates that the Korean subjects are aware of the politeness strategies commonly used in the second language context and adapt these strategies in their use of the second language. Partial extracts from the requests of Korean subjects and American subjects when making a request to borrow class notes from their classmates are found below (all names are pseudonyms):

Korean subject 5 (Glenn)

Korean request: 연아야 저번에 노트 필기 한 것 좀 보여줘. (directness level 1)

Literal translation: *Yuna, last class, (your) class notes little bit show (me).*

English request: Hey bro, Can I borrow your note? Because I missed my class.
(directness level 8)

American subject 2 (Fabiana)

English request: Hey Peter, Can I see your note from last week because I was sick?
(directness level 8)

The Korean subject 5, Glenn, shows that he switched his request strategy in his English request towards patterns similar to native speakers of English by making it less direct and using the conventionally indirect request type. He followed the norm of politeness in the English context and applied it to his request. Below is another example of a Korean subject that exhibits errors from English learners in this transition process to the second language context.

Korean subject 2 (Jack)

Korean request: 야 연아야 너 모하냐? 지난 번에 필기한거 적었냐? 사실 지난번에 필기를 못 해서 그런데 나중에 커피 사줄테니까 좀 빌리자. (directness level 2)

Literal translation: *Hey, Yuna, you what doing? Last time, (you) your class notes wrote? Actually, last time (I) writing class notes could not, next time (I) coffee buy (to you), (let) (me) little bit borrow it.*

English request: Excuse me sir, I did not write note last time. Can I borrow your note?
(directness level 8)

As the example above shows, the Korean subject Jack, produced more indirect forms in his English request. He followed the politeness strategies found in the English context and tried to apply them by switching his request type to be less direct. However, he applied the deferential address term ‘sir’ to refer to his classmate in his English request, whereas he used the plain ending (not an honorific) in his Korean request and with the casual address term, ‘야(hey)’. This indicates that the learner overgeneralized the use of politeness by using the address form with a classmate, and this may be seen as inappropriate in the given situation. Considering that he has lived in the United States for a relatively short period of time, this suggests that the

overgeneralization of politeness strategies may come from the lack of understanding of how to speak at an appropriate directness level of politeness with certain addressees, including ones of equal status as shown above, in the second language context.

Request to a Close friend

The Korean and American subjects tended to produce more direct request forms with a close friend than with a classmate. This shows that social factors such as social distance can have some influence on politeness strategies in requests for the both groups; the less social distance speakers have with a hearer, the more direct forms they produce. However, there was also a difference in terms of the directness of their requests with a close friend between the two groups. This can be illustrated in Figure 2, which summarized request strategies with a close friend found in the data, based on Song’s (2014) categories.

		Level of Directness (from most direct (1) to least direct (11))											
Request		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total
		Md	Ep	Hp	Os	Ws	Sp	Qp1	Qp2	Qp3	Sh	Mh	
Borrowing class notes	K(Korean)	9						1					10
	K(English)	5							5				10
	A(English)	3							4	3			10
Asking for help with moving	K(Korean)						1				1		10
	K(English)	8					1		1	2	1	1	10
	A(English)	3	1					4	1	1			10
Borrowing \$200	K(Korean)	3	1					2	2		2		10
	K(English)	2				1			6		1		10
	A(English)							1	7	2			10

Figure 2. Request Strategies Used When Making a Request to a Close friend

As Figure 2 shows, this data reveals that more Korean and American subjects produced direct forms of requests with a close friend. In particular, Korean subjects show a strong tendency to use the most direct request type, ‘mood derivable’. American subjects also produced the ‘mood derivable’ request type a lot more than the requests with a classmate, but they tended to be less direct when it came to the situations with higher cost of imposition in their requests. Taking into account that the Korean subjects applied the direct request types regardless of the higher cost of imposition in their requests, this indicates the American subjects display more sensitivity to the social factor of cost of imposition in terms of politeness strategies.

As for the Korean subjects’ English requests, some Korean subjects also applied similar direct request types in English to those they employed in their Korean requests. However, some of the Korean subjects tended to use more indirect forms in their English requests with a close friend. This can be seen as they tried to switch their politeness strategies in the English context and employed the politeness norms in the English context into their second language use. Partial

extracts from the requests of Korean subjects and American subjects when making a request to borrow class notes from their close friends are found below:

Korean subject 8 (Shane)

Korean request: 연아야, 노트줘봐. (directness level 1)

Literal translation: *Hey, (your) note give (me).*

English request: Hey, Can I borrow your note? As you know, yesterday I was sick so absent. Do you have your note now? (directness level 8)

American subject 10 (Michael)

English request: Hey man, Can I see your notes from last week? I was out sick (directness level 8)

As the example above illustrates, the Korean subject 8, Shane, used similar request strategies as native speakers of English by choosing to be less direct. Given that he has 10 years residency experience in the United States, this suggests that the Korean learner acquired request strategies in English and employed the politeness strategies in his English request.

Request to a Current Professor

When it comes to issue a request to a current (familiar) professor, who has more social power than the subjects, the two groups of subjects exhibited interesting patterns in their requests. In particular, the Korean subjects utilized much more indirect requests types with a professor in their Korean requests. Comparing the requests with those made of a classmate or close friend, their choice of request types became much politer with a professor. On the other hand, American subjects mostly employed ‘query preparatory’ request types, as they did with a classmate and a close friend, although some of them produced even more direct forms of request with a current professor. This suggests that social power is a more crucial factor affecting politeness strategies of requests for the Korean subjects than the Americans subjects. This is reported in Figure 3, which summarizes the request strategies with a current professor, based on Song’s categories.

According to Figure 3, Korean subjects applied more indirect request types, such as the ‘query preparatory’ (level 7, 8, 9) and ‘hint’ type (level 10) in their Korean requests whereas the American subjects mostly used the ‘query preparatory’ request type (level 7, 8, 9). American subjects again revealed the same pattern of using more indirect requests with the crucial variable being higher cost of imposition. This supports the point that American subjects are more influenced by cost of imposition with respect to their politeness strategies.

		Level of Directness (from most direct (1) to least direct (11))											
Request		1 Md	2 Ep	3 Hp	4 Os	5 Ws	6 Sp	7 Qp1	8 Qp2	9 Qp3	10 Sh	11 Mh	Total
Asking for Recommendation of reference book	K(Korean)								7		3		10
	K(English)			1					5	3	1		10
	A(English)							7	1	2			10
Asking for Letter of recommendation	K(Korean)					2		1	4	2	3		10
	K(English)		2	1		1			3		1		10
	A(English)					2		4	1	2			10
Asking for deadline extension	K(Korean)						2		6		2		10
	K(English)	1		1					3	5			10
	A(English)							5	2	2	1		10

Figure 3. Request Strategies Used When Making a Request to a Current Professor

As for the English requests by the Korean subjects with a current professor, some of the Korean subjects tended to use more direct request types in their English requests, whereas they employed more indirect forms of requests in their Korean requests. This data was counterintuitive, considering that Korean subjects are more influenced by social power in regards to their politeness strategies due to a strong orientation to hierarchy in their culture. Partial extracts from the requests of Korean subjects and American subjects when making a request to ask to extend the deadline of their assignment to their current professor are found below:

Korean subject 2 (Jack)

Korean request: 교수님 저 수업을 듣는 학생인데요. 교수님이 그저께 숙제 내주셨잖아요. 근데 내일까지 인데, 저희 어머니께서 갑자기 아프셔서, 병문안을 자주 가느라 숙제 할 시간이 없었거든요. 혹시 2-3 일만 연장 할 수 있을까요? 좋은 결과물을 내보도록 하겠습니다.

(directness level 8)

Literal translation: *Professor, I taking (your) class student am. Professor (you) a day before yesterday assignment gave (us). But, (I know) (it's) due tomorrow, my mother suddenly got sick, (I) visited her in the hospital often, so (I) doing assignment time not have. Perhaps, (I) just 2-3 days extend can.? (I) better result try to submit it.*

English request: Professor. I know the assignment due tomorrow. Three or four days ago, my roommate Anderson got into car accident. I always stay with him for 2 to 3 days, so in the hospital, I couldn't finish your assignment. I know it is unfair. You give same opportunity. So, extend one time for me please. (directness level 1)

American subject 1 (Jordan)

English request: Ms. Lee, I apologize for asking this, but I haven't completed it yet. May I have an extension for the paper? (directness level 8)

As the examples show, Jack produced the most direct request type in his English request, whereas he used a more indirect request type in Korean request with a professor. He used the most direct type 'mood derivable' with a professor in his English request while adding 'please' after it. This could be interpreted as the Korean learner trying to use 'please' after the direct sentence to express politeness as a substitute for honorifics (honorific suffixes) in his first language. This shows that some measure of linguistic transfer is taking place. In some cases, this transfer can lead errors in the second language context, so politeness strategies in the second language context need to be taught to such learners.

Request to a New Professor

Similar results emerged from the data when comparing requests towards a current (familiar) professor with those towards a new (unfamiliar) professor. That is, social distance has a marginal influence for both two groups. This can be seen in Figure 4, which reveals the request strategies with a new professor based on Song's categories.

Level of Directness (from most direct (1) to least direct (11))													
Request		1 Md	2 Ep	3 Hp	4 Os	5 Ws	6 Sp	7 Qp1	8 Qp2	9 Qp3	10 Sh	11 Mh	Total
Asking for Recommendation of reference book	K(Korean)							3	2	4	1		10
	K(English)	1						2	3	3	1		10
	A(English)							6		4			10
Asking for Letter of recommendation	K(Korean)				2	1			4	3			10
	K(English)		2						2	5	1		10
	A(English)				1	1	2		1	5			10
Asking for deadline extension	K(Korean)					1	1		1	4	3		10
	K(English)		2	1		2			1	4			10
	A(English)							4	2	4			10

Figure 4. Request Strategies Used When Making a Request to a New Professor

As Figure 4 illustrates, as it was with a current professor, American subjects mostly employed the 'query preparatory' request types (level 7, 8, 9), and Korean subjects often utilized politer forms of requests in Korean requests with a new professor. However, some Korean learners of English also produced errors when it comes to expressing politeness in requests in English. Below are partial extracts from the requests of Korean and American subjects when making a request to ask to extend the deadline of an assignment:

Korean subject 8 (Shane)

Korean request: 교수님 안녕하세요. 저는 셰인 입니다. 과제 기한이 내일까지 인데, 제가 제출기한을 내일까지 맞추지 못 할 것 같습니다. 그 이유는 정보 수집을 할 시간이 더 필요합니다. (directness level 10)

Literal translation: *Professor, how are you? This Shane is. (I know) due date tomorrow, I deadline until tomorrow complete cant. The reason (is) (I) gathering information time more need.*

English request: Professor, this is Shane. Honestly, I need more time to organize it and for grammar check. I need a little more time. I am here to ask to postpone the due date for assignment. (directness level 2)

American subject 9 (Ethan)

English request: Hi professor, I am sorry but I am running out of time and won't be able to complete the assignment by the deadline. Would I be able to get an extension? (direct level 9)

In the example shown above, the Korean subject produced the direct request type (level 2, explicit performative) with a professor to express politeness in his English request even though he used the indirect request type (level 10, hint) in his Korean request. His English request might be interpreted as inappropriate for a professor. This inappropriateness in expressing politeness might come from the fact that the learner has an insufficient idea of indirect request types that are conventionally used in certain speech acts with a certain addressee in the second language context. In this case, the cultural and linguistic differences between their first and second language need to be informed, and politeness in the second language context also should be taught.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored the differences of the politeness of requests with consideration of the cultures between the two subject groups: Korean ESL learners and native American English speakers. The results of the analysis show that different politeness norms in Korean and American cultures emerged, namely discernment and strategic politeness were present, and different patterns of politeness strategies are found for requests. Learners of English may end up expressing politeness in inappropriate ways in a second language context if there is not enough understanding of social and cultural values and the conventional way of performing requests in the second language context.

Therefore, when it comes to English teaching as a second language with Korean learners, teachers need to make their students aware of the differences and provide instruction on the politeness strategies and formulaic expressions of politeness in the target language. Teachers should not assume incompetence on the part of their students without understanding the possible transfer of cultural values and linguistics backgrounds from their first language. As for the learners of English as second language, teachers should teach not only linguistic forms and

grammar, but also pragmatic strategies and social values with respect to politeness in the second language context. This will enable them to communicate in more comprehensible ways with American speakers of English and express themselves according to their own desires and preferences. It is important to note that although this study identified differences between learners' pragmatic patterns compared to native speakers of English, the analysis by no means suggest that learners conform to native speakers' norms. It is the learners' preferences that should guide their choice of language and politeness strategies.

This study is not without some limitations. One limitation relates to the English background of Korean subjects. Nine out of ten Korean subjects already have residency experience in the United States. In other words, there was less chance that the Korean subjects would transfer directly from their first language to their second language, since many of them already understood the norm of politeness in the second language context and were able to act in accordance with it due to this familiarity. Another limitation was the level of the directness scale that I have used to analyze the data. There were a lot of variations in actual speech, so it was difficult to categorize every actual speech into one exact directness level. Many of the actual requests of the subjects did not clearly fit into a given level on the scale. The nuances of the requests were such that the requests apparently could have been categorized at multiple, overlapping politeness levels. As a result, I had to make my own decisions for those ambiguous requests based on the scale. The last limitation relates to the discourse completion task (DCT), which I used as during the interviews in this research. The DCT has its own weaknesses. According to Beebe and Cummings (1996), DCTs are not explicit with respect to actual wording, range of formulas and strategies, length of responses, or number of turns necessary to fulfill a function. Also, DCTs are not enough to represent the depth of emotion and general psychosocial dynamics of naturally occurring speech. This is because respondents were addressing an anonymous fictional character and had no motivation to establish or preserve a relationship (as cited Kim, 2007). That is, since the given scenarios in the interview were fictive, the responses from the subjects would be less likely to be as authentic as their actual speech.

For future research, I hope to investigate politeness in other speech acts, such as apologies or refusals, and then compare the politeness strategies used by Korean learners of English and native English speakers in each speech act. It would be valuable to see whether the speech acts have pragmatic transfer patterns from the Korean learners of English as they did in the current study. In a future study, I would expand my research to a larger scale and have two groups of Korean learners of English, one with residency experience in the United States and the other with no residency experience in the United States.

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Appendix A

Scenarios for Requests to a Friend and Close Friend in Korean and English

Korean:

1. 당신은 지난 주에 아파서 결석을 하게 되었습니다. 다음주에 시험이 있으므로, 지난 주 수업을 공부하려면 친구의 필기 노트를 빌려합니다. 친구에게 필기 노트를 빌려달라고 부탁드립니다.
2. 당신은 이번주 까지 기숙사를 나가서 새로운 아파트로 이사를 가야합니다. 당장 짐이 너무 많아서 누군가의 도움이 필요한데, 친구에게 이사짐을 같이 옮길 수 있는지 부탁드립니다.
3. 당신은 방금 지갑을 잃어버려서 수중에 돈이 하나도 없는 상태입니다. 당장 음식, 물, 렌트값 돈이 들어갈 데가 많은데, 친구에게 당장 필요한 돈 20 만원을 빌릴 수 있는지 부탁드립니다.

English:

1. You were sick last week, so you were absent the last class. Since the test is coming next week, ask your friends to borrow his/her class notes from the last class.
2. You need to move out of your dormitory by this weekend and move into the new apartment. Since you have got a lot of stuff to carry, ask your friends to help carry your stuff together to your new apartment.
3. You have just lost your wallet/got pickpocketed, so you don't have any money to pay for anything. However, you need money for your food, water, text-book, rent, etc. as soon as possible. Ask your friends to borrow 200 dollars.

Appendix B

Scenarios for Requests to a Current Professor and New Professor in Korean and English

Korean:

1. 당신은 학기 중에 리서치 페이퍼를 쓰고 있습니다. 페이퍼를 쓰면서 참고 자료를 많이 찾을 수가 없는 문제에 직면하게 되었습니다. 교수님께 찾아가서 참고 서적이나 자료에 대한 조언을 부탁드립니다.
2. 당신은 대학원 (혹은 대학교) 입학 을 준비하고 있습니다. 대학원을 지원하려면 교수님들의 추천서가 필요하므로, 교수님을 찾아가서 추천서를 부탁드립니다.
3. 당신은 이번 학기 동안 프로젝트 혹은 과제를 준비하고 있었습니다. 하지만, 개인적인 이유로, 과제를 마감 기한까지 제출 하지 못 할 상황에 놓였습니다. 교수님을 찾아가서 과제 제출 기한 연장을 부탁드립니다.

English:

1. While you are writing your research paper, you could not find enough sources. Visit your professor office and ask your professor if there is any recommendation for reference books or sources.
2. You are preparing for admission of a university. Ask your professor to write a letter of recommendation for you.
3. You are preparing term-long assignment or project. However, due to your personal reasons, you can't finish the assignment by the deadline. Ask your professor to extend the due date of your assignment.

About the Author:

Milang Shin is a candidate in the MA TESOL program at Hawaii Pacific University. Her research interests include teaching English as second language, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and corpus linguistics.