

The Use of Discourse Completion Task (DCT) as Explicit Instruction on Indonesian EFL Learners' Production of Suggestion Acts

Bahagia S.¹, Barli K.², Aika S.³, Erika Novalia S. S.⁴, Khairiah P. Z.⁵, Lulu O. S.⁶, Nabila R.⁷, Safira A.⁸

Faculty of Language and Art
University of Medan State

Alamat e-mail : ¹goldenboy@unimed.ac.id, ²barlikifli@unimed.ac.id,

³aikasalsabila89@gmail.com, ⁴erikaa129867@gmail.com, ⁵owipz2103@gmail.com,

⁶luluoliviadrive2@gmail.com, ⁷Nabilaramayani5@gmail.com, ⁸abitasafira01@gmail.com

No Telp: 085184214660

ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify pragmatic strategies used by EFL students in peer communication, particularly in the speech acts of requesting, refusing, and apologizing. A descriptive quantitative method was applied using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) instrument adapted from Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989). Ten students were selected as respondents through purposive sampling. The results indicate that EFL students tend to use Conventionally Indirect strategies in requesting and refusing situations, while in apologizing situations, students lean toward Softened Indirect to Full Apologetic strategies. These findings suggest that students possess adequate pragmatic awareness in maintaining politeness during informal peer communication.

Keywords: *Pragmatic strategies, speech acts, DCT, EFL students, peer communication*

A. Introduction

Effective communication skills not only depend on mastery of grammar, but also in pragmatic competencies, namely the ability to use the language appropriately according to the social context. In the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), pragmatic

competence is one of the important aspects that need to be developed, because pragmatic failure can cause misunderstandings in communication even though the grammatical grammar is correct (Nurdiana, 2019; Zulianti & Nurchurifiani, 2021).

Pragmatik is a linguistic branch that studies the use of languages in

context, including how speakers delivered the intention and how the return interpreted the speech (Yule, 1996). One of the main studies in pragmatik was speech acts, which was introduced by Austin (1962) and was developed by Searle (1969). In daily communication, the most commonform acts of the students, among students include the action of asking (requesting), refusing), and apologizing (apologizing).

Research on the Pragmatik Student EFL strategy has been carried out, including Aufa (2014) who examined the use of DCTs in EFL Indonesia students, Alfghe and Mohammadzadeh (2021) which examined the realization of speech acts on Libyan students, as well as Afifah et al. (2025) that analyzes digital speech acts in Indonesian teenagers. However, research specifically examines the Pragmatic Strategy of EFL students in three types of speech acts at once (requesting, refusing, apologizing) in the context of informal communication between peers is still limited.

Therefore, this study aims to describe the dominant pragmatic strategy to

be used by EFL students in the situation requesting, refusing, and apologizing to peers, and examining their pragmatic awareness in the context of informal communication.

B. Literature Review

2.1. *Pragmatics and pragmatic competence*

Pragmatics is the study of the meaning of language in relation to the context in which it is used (Thomas, 1983). In the context of English language teaching, pragmatic competence is defined as a speaker's ability to convey and interpret meaning and use language appropriately in context (Nurdiana, 2019). Thomas (1983) divides pragmatic competence into two main aspects: sociopragmatic competence and pragmlinguistic competence. Sociopragmatic competence relates to understanding social norms in language use, while pragmlinguistic competence relates to mastery of linguistic forms to convey specific pragmatic functions. Pragmatic failure can occur when a speaker is unable to use language appropriately to the social context. Therefore, an understanding of pragmatics is crucial

for EFL students to communicate effectively and politely in various situations (Zulianti & Nurchurifiani, 2021).

2.2. Speech acts

Speech acts were first introduced by Austin (1962) in his work *How to Do Things with Words*, which stated that when someone speaks, they not only convey information but also perform an action. This theory was later developed by Searle (1969), who classified speech acts into five main categories: representative (stating something), directive (requesting or commanding), expressive (expressing an attitude or feeling), commissive (promising or offering), and declarative (changing the status of something through speech). In this study, the focus is directed at three types of directive and expressive speech acts that most frequently appear in informal student communication: requesting, refusing, and apologizing. These three speech acts were chosen because of their relevance to students' daily lives and their potential to illustrate the politeness strategies employed by speakers.

2.3. Pragmatic Strategies in Speech Acts

Pragmatic strategies in speech acts can be categorized based on the level of directness of the utterance. Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), within the framework of the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), classified request strategies into three levels: (1) Direct Strategy, where the speaker directly conveys their intention; (2) Conventionally Indirect Strategy, where the speaker uses expressions commonly understood as requests; and (3) Non-Conventionally Indirect Strategy or Softened Indirect Strategy, where the speaker uses subtle hints or signals. In addition, Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced politeness theory, which explains that in communication, speakers tend to pay attention to the face of their interlocutors. Positive politeness strategies are used to strengthen social relationships, while negative politeness strategies are used to respect the autonomy of the interlocutor.

2.4. Discourse Complexion Task (DCT)

The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) is the most widely used research instrument in cross-cultural pragmatics studies. The DCT presents respondents with a situational scenario and asks them to select or write the response that best fits the situation (Aufa, 2014). The advantages of the DCT are its ease of administration and its ability to collect diverse data in a short time (Alfghe & Mohammadzadeh, 2021). This study used the Multiple-Choice DCT (MDCT), in which respondents are presented with four response options reflecting different pragmatic strategies: (a) Direct, (b) Conventionally Indirect, (c) Softened Indirect, and (d) Avoidance. The multiple-choice format was chosen because it is easier for respondents with varying English proficiency.

C. Research Method

This study used a quantitative descriptive approach to describe the tendencies of EFL students' pragmatic strategies in peer communication situations. This approach was chosen because it

aligns with the research objectives, which are descriptive in nature and do not aim to test causal relationships.

This study used a quantitative descriptive approach to describe the tendencies of EFL students' pragmatic strategies in peer communication situations. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objectives. The instrument used was the Multiple-choice Discourse Complexion Task (MDCT) adapted from Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989). The instrument consists of 10 situations divided into four parts: Part A (Requesting, 3 questions), Part B (Refusing, 3 questions), Part C (Apologizing, 3 questions), and Part D (General Perception, 1 question). Each question presented four answer choices representing different pragmatic strategies.

The data were analyzed descriptively by calculating the frequency and percentage of respondents' answer choices in each situation. The results of the analysis were then interpreted based on the pragmatic strategy categories developed by Blum-Kulka

et al. (1989) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Part A: Requesting Strategy

Table 1 below presents the distribution of respondents' answers to the requesting section:

No	Situation	Direct (A)	Conv. Indirect (B)	Softened Indirect (C)	Avoidance (D)
1	Borrow a friend's book	10%	20%	70%	0%
2	Request lecture notes	0%	80%	20%	0%
3	Ask for assignment help	0%	70%	30%	0%

Table 1. *Distribution of Pragmatic Strategies in Requesting Situations*

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that in requesting situations, the most dominant strategies used are Conventionally Indirect (b) and Softened Indirect (c). In situation 1 (borrowing a book), 70% of respondents chose the Softened Indirect strategy, expressing "Sorry, could I possibly borrow your book?" This indicates that when requesting something direct, respondents tend to use more polite and polite language.

In situation 2 (requesting lecture notes), 80% of respondents chose

the Conventionally Indirect strategy, expressing "Can you send me the notes?" This situation demonstrates that EFL students are familiar with the use of the modal auxiliary "can" as a polite but modest request. A similar pattern was seen in situation 3, where 70% of respondents chose Conventionally Indirect.

These findings align with research by Alfghe and Mohammadzadeh (2021), who found that EFL students tend to use indirect request strategies in social interactions. Aufa (2014) also confirmed that the use of conventionalized forms is the most common strategy used in academic contexts.

4.2. Part B: Refusing Strategy

Table 2 below presents the distribution of respondents' answers in the refusing section:

No	Situation	Direct (a)	Conv. Indirect (b)	Softened Indirect (c)	Avoidance (d)
4	Refuse to lend money	0%	80%	20%	0%
5	Decline a hangout invitation	0%	70%	30%	0%
6	Refusing to cover shift work	0%	0%	100%	0%

Table 2. *Distribution of Pragmatic Strategies in Refusing Situations*

In the refusing section, an interesting

pattern was found in situation 6 (refusing to cover a work shift), where 100% of respondents chose the Softened Indirect strategy with the expression "I'm so sorry, I already have something scheduled that day. This is a situation with a higher level of imposition because it involves the interests of a friend's work, so respondents felt the need to use a more subtle strategy and provide clear reasons.

In situation 4 and 5, the majority of respondents (80% and 70%) chose shorter Conventionally Indirect strategies such as "Sorry, I can't right now" and "Sorry, I can't. I have an exam." This indicates that the level of politeness chosen is adjusted to the level of imposition (burden) felt by the respondents in each situation, as explained by Brown and Levinson (1987) in their politeness theory.

These findings confirm that EFL students possess good sociopragmatic awareness in distinguishing situations that require different levels of politeness. The higher the imposition level of a situation, the more subtle the refusal strategy used (Nurdiana, 2019).

4.3. Part C: Apologizing Strategies

Table 3 below presents the distribution of respondents' answers in the apologizing section:

No	Situation	Avoidance (a)	Minimal (b)	Softened (c)	Full Apology (d)
7	Spilling a friend's drink	0%	0%	60%	40%
8	Forgot to return the book 2 weeks ago	0%	0%	80%	20%
9	Spreading friend's secret	0%	10%	10%	80%

Table 3. *Distribution of Pragmatic Strategies in Apologizing Situations*

A very interesting finding was found in the apologizing section. In situation 9 (spreading a friend's secret), 80% of respondents chose the Full Apologetic strategy with the phrase "I'm really sorry, I know that was wrong of me and I won't do it again." This is the highest percentage of use of the most polite strategy in the entire instrument. This indicates that students are very aware that a breach of trust is an action that requires the most sincere and complete apology.

In situations 7 (spilling a drink) and 8 (forgetting to return a book), respondents predominantly used Softened Indirect (60% and 80%), indicating that for less serious

offenses, a clear but moderate apology is sufficient. No respondents chose the Avoidance strategy in all apologizing situations, indicating that all respondents understood the importance of verbally acknowledging mistakes.

These results align with research by Afifah et al. (2025), who found that expressive speech acts, including apologies, are among the most frequently used in social interactions among Indonesian students. These findings are also consistent with those of Zulianti and Nurchurifiani (2021), who stated that the use of positive politeness strategies reflects closeness and social concern between individuals.

4.4. Part D: General Perceptions of Politeness

In a general question about the importance of being polite when speaking with close friends, 50% of respondents stated that politeness is very important, followed by 20% stating that it is quite important, 20% stating that it is slightly important, and 10% stating that it is not important at all. These data indicate that the majority of students (70%)

consider politeness important even in informal communication with peers. This finding reinforces the interpretation of the data in the previous section, where respondents consistently chose more subtle and polite strategies in various communication situations.

4.5. General Patterns of EFL Students' Pragmatic Strategies

Overall, this study found three main patterns of EFL students' pragmatic strategies in peer communication. First, in requesting situations, students tended to use conventionally indirect or softened indirect strategies, avoiding direct expressions that could be perceived as impolite. Second, in refusing situations, the level of politeness of the strategy chosen correlated with the level of imposition of the situation. Third, in apologizing situations, more serious offenses prompted the use of more complete and sincere apology strategies.

These patterns indicate that EFL students possess good pragmatic competence, particularly in the sociopragmatic dimension, namely

the ability to understand social norms that apply in informal communication. This finding supports Nurdiana's (2019) view that understanding pragmatics is crucial in developing EFL students' communicative competence.

E. Conclusion

This study concludes that EFL students tend to use polite and indirect pragmatic strategies in peer communication. In requesting and refusing situations, the Conventionally Indirect strategy is the dominant choice, while in apologizing situations, the severity of the offense determines the politeness of the strategy used.

These findings imply that EFL students possess a fairly good pragmatic awareness in maintaining social relationships through appropriate language choices. However, given the limited number of respondents (n=10), generalizations of these findings should be approached with caution. Further research with a larger number of respondents and more diverse contexts is recommended to strengthen these findings.

The pedagogical implication of this study is the importance of integrating pragmatics learning into the EFL curriculum, particularly through contextualized communication simulations, to enable students to develop more comprehensive pragmatic competencies.

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