

REQUEST STRATEGIES IN BURMESE*

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Abstract: This study investigates request strategies in the Burmese language. The main data come from a questionnaire and are supplemented by observations. Burmese requests were analyzed based on the model of Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989). The results show that there are three main request strategies in Burmese: direct, conventional indirect, and non-conventional indirect. In terms of the preference strategy, both direct and conventional indirect requests are preferred in Burmese. This does not support the universal request phenomena proposed by Blum-Kulka et al. Although direct requests may be considered impolite in other languages, this is not necessarily the case in Burmese, because Burmese people modify their request by using internal modifications.

Keywords: requests strategy, Burmese, speech acts, Tibeto-Burman.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Austin (1962), utterances are grouped as **constatives** and **performatives**. The former are utterances that are employed to say something, while the latter are utterances that are designed to do something. The word **performative** indicates that the utterance is being used to perform an action (Austin 1962). Therefore, a speech act refers to an utterance that performs an act at the time it is uttered. Searle (1979: 12-17) regroups Austin's speech acts and proposes five categories of speech acts: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Requests fall into the group of directives and can be broadly divided into two categories: requests for information and requests for action. Requests can be performed with a variety of constructions, such as imperatives, interrogatives, negatives, declaratives, or elliptical constructions (Sifianou 1992).

Requests are speech acts which "...express the speaker's expectation of the hearer with regards to prospective action, verbal or nonverbal" (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989:11). A number of request studies have been conducted in various languages, especially in Western languages such as Dutch, French (Mulken 1996), Turkish (Pair 1996), German (Hong 1998), Danish and some varieties of English (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). There have also been studies on

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requests in non-Western languages, such as Japanese (Fukushima 1996; Rinnert & Kobayashi 1999; Aoyama 2002), Chinese (Dong 2008; Hong 1999; Kong 1998), Korean (Byon 2004), Thai (Wiriya 2001; Khahua 2003; Sungkaman 2001; Deepadung & Khamhira 2005; Wiroonhachaipong 2000), and Kinnauri (Tibeto-Burman; Himachal Pradesh, India), hitherto the only language in the Tibeto-Burman language family in which requests have been studied (Saxena 2002).

The most influential study of requests is the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) by Blum-Kalka et al. (1989), which investigated the speech acts of requests and apologies across three varieties of English (Australian, American and British English), Canadian French, Danish, German and Hebrew. Three types of request strategies in the CCSARP, i.e. the direct strategy, the conventional indirect strategy, and the non-conventional indirect strategy, are claimed to be universal, and the conventionally indirect request strategy is the most preferred in making a request in most languages investigated. Most request studies on non-Western languages report these three strategies of requests, but different preferred strategies were found. For example, in Japanese and Korean requests, both direct and conventional indirect request strategies are preferred (Fukushima 1996; Aoyama 2002; Byon 2004), in Chinese (Hong 1999; Kong 1998; Lee 2005), Thai (Wiriya 2001; Sungkaman 2001), and Kinnauri (Saxena 2002) the direct strategy is preferred. However, the study of requests in Thai by Wiroonhachaipong (2000) confirms the results of the CCSARP, namely that conventional indirect requests are preferred when making requests.

It is interesting to find in Burmese culture the preferred strategies in making a request. It may be a direct strategy, as in Chinese or Kinnauri, which belong to the same language family, or both conventional and direct strategies may be used, as in other languages of the Eurasian region such as Thai, Japanese, or Korean. Therefore, requests in Burmese will be the subject of the present study, and it will use the same model as the reviewed studies.

In Charney's bibliography of Burmese (Myanmar) research (2004), studies of Burmese language and linguistics concentrate on the three aspects: phonology, morphology, and historical studies. Currently, Burmese language studies are being carried out on a variety of topics, such as syntax (Arnonla 2003), discourse markers (San San Hnin Tun 2005), topicalization (Hopple 2005), and language contact (Jenny 2011). While present studies on Burmese have widened in focus to include more issues than in the past, they tend to focus on structural topics of the language. Since pragmatics has been neglected in the past, there are a number of different issues in this area—such as speech acts, conversational implicature, deixis, conversational structure and politeness etc.—that are deserving of greater attention.

The present study aims to investigate the strategies used in the speech act of request in Burmese in order to discover if the universals of the CCSARP are applicable, and it will expand the cross-cultural study on requests by adding the Burmese language (which has never been studied before) to corpus of languages examined. Studying Burmese language in a particular aspect, such as speech acts

of requests in various contexts, not only helps us gain a better understanding of Burmese language usage, but also helps us gain a better understanding of the Burmese culture.

2. DATA

The Burmese request data for this study were collected through open-ended questionnaires. The questionnaire has two parts: Part I consists of personal questions about the respondents (i.e. their age, sex, nationality, education, mother language and other languages spoken), and Part II consists of short descriptions of situations specifying a setting and the social distance between the participants, and their status relative to each other. The respondents were asked to be participants. They were asked to read carefully and imagine themselves as described in each situation and write down what s/he would say in the space provided. The situations provided in the questionnaire had been discussed with Burmese native speakers to ensure that they were in accordance with culture, norms, lifestyle and everyday usage by Burmese people, so the data from the questionnaires can be seen as similar to real conversations.

Each questionnaire contains 12 situations of positive requests for actions that generated a combination of three factors: distance (D), power (P), and rank of imposition (R). The distance variables are treated as familiar (–Distance) and unfamiliar (+Distance). Family members and close friends are considered as having no social distance. In the work place, the social distance of the participants depends on how long they have known each other, or the length of time they have worked together. Power refers to the social status of the speaker. Power of the participants varied in three values as higher status (+Power), lower status (–Power) and equal status (=Power). Higher status speakers include, for example, a teacher who requests something from a student, or a boss who requests something from his/her staff. Equal status speakers are, for example, friends and colleagues. Lower status speakers are, for example, a child who requests something from his parents, or a student who requests something from a teacher. As for the rank of imposition, there are two relative degrees of imposition involved in the situations: high (+Rank) and low (–Rank) degrees of imposition. The rank of request imposition in each situation is based on consultations with a native speaker. For example, when borrowing a large amount of money, even between close friends, the rank of imposition is considered high. Another example of a high rank is a child asking his/her father to buy a new car. These factors were considered based on subjective feelings after consulting with Burmese native speakers to create the situations for the questionnaire.

Since the questionnaire is the main research instrument for this study, respondents with competency in writing and reading were required. Therefore, university students were chosen as respondents for the present study. The questionnaires, which were completed by 120 students (60 male and 60 female) at universities in Yangon, Myanmar, are the main data for this study. Data from observations were also used to confirm the validity of the questionnaire results. A

total of 1,320 request utterances were collected and analyzed according to the CCSARP model.

3. REQUEST STRATEGIES IN BURMESE

Based on CCSARP's model, Burmese request strategies can be grouped according to a directness scale into three main strategies: direct, conventional indirect, and non-conventional indirect. The frequency of request strategies was made in order to determine whether the universal claims of Blum-Kulka et al.—that there are three types of request strategies and that the conventional indirect strategy is the preference—are true or not in Burmese. The percentage of request strategy usages found in this study was counted from a total number of 1,545 request head-acts (a head-act is the core unit of a request utterance). Each strategy, including sub-strategies, will be presented in turn.

3.1 *Direct request*

The direct strategy refers to utterances in which the illocutionary act is explicitly stated. There are four sub-strategies, ordered on a scale of directness from the most direct to the most indirect: (1) mood derivable, (2) performative, (3) obligatory, and (4) want statement strategies.

3.1.1 *Mood derivable strategies*

Mood derivable strategies are “utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force” (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 18). Here, the mood derivable strategy is a request with imperative mood. Among all request strategies, mood derivable is regarded as the most direct strategy. From my data of direct request strategies, Burmese speakers generally prefer the mood derivable strategy. It was used in 45% of all request head-acts. A verbal phrase without a verbal final particle is the common form of the mood derivable strategy. From my data, most of the mood derivable strategies were modified by the politeness marker ဝါ /bà/. The mood derivable strategy may be considered impolite in other languages, but when they are modified by a politeness marker ဝါ /bà/, or some other elements (such as polite tags ရှင် /ʃɪN/, ခင်ဗျာ /kʰəmjà/, or agreement particles such as ငန့် /nò/ etc.), they are not considered impolite in Burmese culture. These elements function to mitigate the imposition of the request or to make the request more polite.

In example (1) below, the speaker wants to borrow a book from his unfamiliar teacher in order to work on a report. The request head-act is in the imperative form, which is the mood derivable strategy for making the request. Even in this situation where the participants are not on familiar terms, the speaker has less power than the hearer and the imposition is low. The speaker chooses to use the mood derivable strategy but modifies it by a politeness marker ဝါ /bà/, the polite tag ခင်ဗျာ /kʰəmjà/ and a temporal understater ခဏ /kʰəŋə/ ‘moment’. The syntactic structure of the verb phrase + ဝါ /bà/ + ခင်ဗျာ /kʰəmjà/ is considered appropriate in Burmese culture for making a polite request.

- (1) ကျွန်တော့် ကို အဲဒီ စာအုပ် ခဏ လောက် ငှား
 tɛəñ gò ʔé-di sàʔouʔ kʰəŋə lauʔ ṅá
 1SG.M.DEP OBJ ANA-this book moment as.much.as borrow
 ပါ ခင်ဗျာ
 bà kʰəmjà
 POL PTAG
 ‘Lend me this book for a moment please.’ [6/M14/WBMI]

3.1.2 Performative Strategies

Performative strategies refer to “utterances in which the illocutionary force is explicitly named” (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 18). In this study, two verbs function as the performative verbs of requests: (a) တောင်း ~ တောင်းဆို /táUN~ táUNS^hò/ ‘to ask for’, and (b) ခိုင်း /kʰáIN/ ‘to order’. Their literal meanings illustrate the speech act of requests. The use of the request performative in Burmese is limited, since it can only be used in the declarative structure.

Only five examples of the performative strategy are found in the data of my study (0.2% of 1,545 request head-acts). Example (2) shows the use of a performative verb in a declarative sentence.

- (2) ...ငါ က အရေးကြီး အလုပ်ကိစ္စ တစ်ခု ပေါ် လာ
 ṅà gə ʔəjédzɪ ʔəlouʔkeiʔsə tə = kʰu pə là
 1SG SBJ important work one=CLF occur come
 တော့ မင်း ကို ငါ ခိုင်း ရ တာ ပါ။
 dɔ mɪN gò ṅà kʰáIN jə dà bà
 CTR 2SG OBJ 1SG PER:order GET NFUT.NOM POL
 ‘...An important thing happened. I ask you to do this for me.’ [9/M5/UFL]

Example (2) reflects the use of the performative verb ခိုင်း /kʰáIN/ ‘to order’ in a situation where the participants are familiar with each other, but where the speaker is of higher rank. After giving some reasons for why he cannot perform the act, the speaker asks his inferior to do the act for him. The politeness marker ပါ /bà/ is used to mitigate the imposition of the request, since the action is not regarded as the requestee’s responsibility.

Sometimes, the performative verb of requests in Burmese is modified by a modality expressing subject desire ချင် /dʒIN/ ‘want’ to convey the speaker’s desire for the action. The occurrence of the performative verb lets the hearer know the speaker’s intention explicitly, while the use of the modal verb ချင် /dʒIN/ ‘want’ helps to decrease the force of the request. There are only two examples of this usage found in this study.

- (3) ...ဆိုင်ရှင် ခင်ဗျာ၊ ကျွန်တော့် ကို ဒီ လ အတွက်
 s^hainʃɪN k^həmjà, tɕəŋɔ̃ gò dì la ʔətweʔ
 shop.owner PTAG 1SG.M.DEP OBJ ANA month for
- လစာ ကြို ထုတ် ပေး ဖို့ တောင်းဆို ချင် ပါ
 lazà tɕó t^houʔ pé bɔ̃ táuns^hò ɕɪN bà
 salary advance take.out BEN PURP PER:ask.for DES POL
- တယ် ခင်ဗျာ။
 dè k^həmjà
 NFUT PTAG
- ‘...Boss, (I) would like to ask you to give me salary in advance...’

[11/M6/UFL]

In example (3), after giving the background of the request, the speaker uses a combination of the performative verb တောင်းဆို /táuns^hò/ ‘ask for’ and the modal verb ချင် /ɕɪN/ ‘desire, want’ to express that the requested action is his own desire and not the hearer’s. He is the one who asks for help and threatens his own face. He also makes the request more polite by adding the politeness marker ပါ /bà/ and polite tag ခင်ဗျာ /k^həmjà/.

3.1.3 Obligatory Requests

An obligatory request is a strategy the speaker uses when s/he wants to avoid a refusal by the hearer. In the Burmese language, the particles strategy (both noun particles, such as ဝဲ /bɛ́/ ‘only,’ and sentence particles, such as ပေတော့ /bèdɔ̃/) play the most important role in this. The speaker chooses the appropriate particle for his/her utterances depending on the literal meaning. There are six examples of the obligatory strategy (0.4%) found in this study (five by male respondents and one by female respondents).

- (4) ... မင်း ဝဲ သွား ကြို ခဲ့ ပေတော့။
 mɪN bɛ́ θwá tɕó gɕ bèdɔ̃
 2SG FOC go pick.up DSPL IMP
- ‘...**Only you**, go to pick her up.’

[3/M80SEA]

In example (4), the focus particle ဝဲ /bɛ́/ ‘only’ is attached to the pronoun မင်း /mɪN/ ‘you’ to indicate that the hearer is the only person requested to do the desired action. This utterance ends with the particle ပေတော့ /bèdɔ̃/, which conveys a sense of an imperative that is often brusque (Okell & Allot 2001: 118). In this situation, the speaker has more power than the hearer and they are on familiar terms, so the use of ပေတော့ /bèdɔ̃/ is not considered impolite. The use of ဝဲ /bɛ́/ ‘only’ to focus on the actor in the request utterance shows that the speaker already has specified the requestee in order to avoid the refutation. In this example, မင်းဝဲ /mɪnbɛ́/ ‘only you’ indicates that the referent ‘you’ is the only

person who can do the requested action, so that the hearer cannot refuse the request.

3.1.4 Want Statement

The speaker can make a request using “utterances which state the speaker’s desire that the hearer carries out the act” (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 18). In this strategy, the speaker uses the modal verb ချင် /*d̥ɪ̃n*/ ‘desire, want’ after the main verb to express his/her desire for the requested action to be undertaken by the hearer.

- (5) ဆရာ ကျွန်မ သုံး စရာ ပိုက်ဆံ မရှိ လို့
s^həjə tɕəmə θón zəjə paɪʔs^hàN mə = ʃi lɔ̃
 teacher 1SG.F use NOM money NEG=have SUB
- လခ ကြို ထုတ် ချင် လို့ ပါ ရှင်။
laxa kɔ̃ t^houʔ d̥ɪ̃n lɔ̃ bə ʃɪN
 salary advance take.out DES SUB POL PTAG
 ‘Boss, I want to take my salary in advance because I don’t have
 money to use.’ [11/F28/UFL]

In example (5), the speaker asks her boss for her salary in advance. They are not on familiar terms because the speaker has been working for only one week and she is in a position of lower authority than the hearer. The imposition of this situation is considered high because the speaker has been working for only a short time, and the interlocutors are unfamiliar. The speaker chooses to state her desire by using the modal verb ချင် /*d̥ɪ̃n*/ ‘desire, want’ rather than verb phrase with ပါ /*bə*/, which is commonly used in requests because the want statement strategy is less direct. The want statement strategy was used in 5.5% of the 1,545 request head-acts.

3.2 Conventional indirect requests

Conventional indirect strategy refers to utterances in which the illocutionary act is indirectly stated. There are three sub-strategies: (1) suggestory formulae, (2) hedging, and (3) query preparatory sub-strategies. Among these, the query preparatory strategy is used most frequently, followed by hedging and suggestory formulae respectively.

3.2.1 Suggestory formulae

The speaker may request someone to do something indirectly by suggestion. In Burmese, the use of an if-clause together with a short sentence like မကောင်းဘူးလား။ /*mə = káUN bú lá*/ ‘Isn’t it good?’ is considered as a suggestion to the hearer. In the data from this study, there are only six examples of this strategy (0.4%), all by male respondents.

- (6) ...ကား=လေး: တစ်=စီး: လောက် ဝယ် ထား ရင် မ=ကောင်း
 ká = lé də = zí lau? wè t^há jìN mə = káUN
 car=DIM one=CLF as.much.as buy keep COND NEG=good

ဘူး လား။
 bú lá

NEG Q

‘...wouldn’t it be good if you bought a car?’

[2/M75/SEA]

In example (6), a son asks his father to buy a new car for him. Because of his lower rank, he uses the suggestion formula in order to make the request. The attachment of the negative sentence မ=ကောင်းဘူးလား။ /mə=káUN bú lá/ ‘isn’t it good?’ suggests to his father that if he buys his son a new car, it would be good.

3.2.2 Hedging

The speaker can also use a request utterance that contains a hedge expression to ask someone to do something. Hedge expressions convey that the speaker does not assume the hearer is able or willing to do the action (Brown & Levinson 1987: 146). In Burmese, the expression မသိဘူး။ /mə=θi bú/ ‘I don’t know’ is an example of hedging. It is normally placed after a yes/no question.

- (7) ဆရာ ကြီး၊ သမီး စာတမ်း ရေး တာ၊ စာအုပ်
 s^həjà dʒí, θəmí sàdán jé dà, sà?ou?
 teacher big, daughter essay write NFUT.NOM, book

တစ်=အုပ် လို နေ လို့ ခဏ တွဲး လို့ ရ
 tə = ?ou? lō nè lō k^həŋə ŋá lō ja
 one=CLF need STAY SUB moment borrow SUB able

မ=လား၊ မ=သိ ဘူး။
 mə = lá, mə = θi bú
 FUT=Q, NEG=know NEG

‘Teacher, I’m writing an essay and need a book. **I don’t know** if you could lend one to me for a moment.’

[6/F47/UFL]

Example (7) shows the use of the negative sentence မသိဘူး။ /mə=θi bú/ ‘I don’t know’ after a yes-no question, which expresses the desired action of the speaker. By using this kind of negative sentence, the speaker indicates uncertainly as to whether the hearer will perform the requested action or not. Hedging strategies were used in 1.5% of the total number of request head-acts in this study.

3.2.3 Query Preparatory Strategies

The query preparatory strategy refers to “utterances containing reference to preparatory conditions (e.g., ability, willingness) as conventionalized in any specific language” (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 18). According to Searle (1979),

there are two illocutionary acts: the primary illocutionary act and the secondary illocutionary act. The first one is the literal meaning of the utterance, the second one is not the literal meaning of the utterance but it is the intended meaning of the speaker. The hearer can decide which of these to respond to. Questions make the request more polite than directly stating the request because the pressure on the hearer to do the act is diminished. It provides two options: to answer the question, or to perform the act. The hearer can choose whether or not to do the requested action. There are three types of query preparatory strategy found in my data: (a) asking about the hearer's willingness to do the act, (b) asking about the hearer's ability to do the act, and (c) asking about the possibility to do the requested action.

(a) *Asking about the hearer's willingness to do the act*: the speaker can make a request indirectly by asking whether the hearer is willing to perform the requested action. Example (8) is a question about the hearer's willingness to do the requested act.

- (8) တောပင် တစ်=ချောင်း လောက် ခဏ ငှား ပါ လား။
 bɔ̀pìN tə = tɕʰáUN lau? kʰəŋə ɲá bà lá
 pen one=CL as.much.as moment lend POL Q
 'Would you please lend me a pen?' [8/F46/UFL]

This request is made by a student who wants to borrow a pen from someone she is not well acquainted with. The speaker uses a yes/no question, ending with the question word လား /lá/, seeking to determine the hearer's willingness to lend a pen.

(b) *Asking about the hearer's ability to do the act*: the speaker asks about the hearer's ability to perform the action, mostly using modal verbs such as ခိုင် /nàin/ 'win', ရ /ja/ 'get', တတ် /taʔ/ 'be able' and the yes/no question word လား /lá/ with the future marker မ /mə/ (a reduced form of မယ် /mè/). Example (9) shows the use of the query preparatory strategy, which asks about the hearer's ability to perform the action.

- (9) သူဌေး ကျွန်တော် ပိုက်ဆံ သုံး ဖို့ မ=လောက် လို့
 θətʰé tɕənò paiʔsʰàN θón bɔ̃ mə = lau? lɔ̃
 rich.man 1SG.M money use PURP NEG=enough SUB

 တစ်=လစာ ကြို ထုတ် ပေး ခိုင် မ=လား။
 tə = ləzà tɕò tʰou? pé nàin mə = lá
 one=salary advance take.out BEN WIN FUT=Q
 'Boss, **are you able** to give me my salary in advance because I don't
 have enough money.' [11/M35/UFL]

The speaker in example (9) uses a question that indicates future action and a modal verb ခိုင် /nàin/ 'win' in order to ask about the hearer's ability to perform the action. This request is directed to an employer by an employee. The speaker is of

lower status than the speaker, the imposition of the request is considered high, and they are not on familiar terms.

(c) *Asking about the possibility to do the requested act*: the data shows that the conditional marker ရင် /jìN/ ‘if’ plays an important role in this strategy, and it is accompanied by auxiliary verbs denoting ability. For example, the conditional expression ဖြစ်နိုင်ရင် /p^hji? nàiN jìN/ ‘if it is possible...’ is mostly used with other strategies to make an indirect request by asking whether the requested act is possible on the part of the hearer.

- (10) ...ဖြစ် နိုင် ရင် ကူညီ ပါ ဆရာ ရယ်။
 p^hji? nàiN jìN kùjì bà s^həjà jè
 be WIN COND help POL teacher APP
- | | |
|-------------|----------------|
| Possibility | Mood derivable |
|-------------|----------------|
- ‘...if it is possible, please help, teacher.’ [12/M29/WBMI]

In example (10), the speaker states the possibility by using the conditional clause ဖြစ်နိုင်ရင် /p^hji? nàiN jìN/ ‘if it is impossible...’ accompanied by the imperative with a politeness mark ပါ /bà/ and appended appellative ဆရာရယ် /s^həjà jè/ ‘teacher,’ which function to mitigate the imposition of the request.

The query preparatory strategy represents the highest percentage of use (46% of 1,545 request utterances) among all request strategies found in my study. Among query preparatory strategy sub-types, my data reveals that asking about the hearer’s willingness is most common, followed respectively by asking about the ability of the hearer to perform the action and asking about the possibility to do the requested action.

3.3 NON-CONVENTIONAL INDIRECT REQUESTS

A non-conventional indirect strategy features an utterance in which the illocutionary act is implicit. The speaker may mention only a part of the act. In other words, a non-conventional indirect request gives a hint to the hearer. With hints, the speakers do not make their requests known explicitly; they only refer to something related to the requested act. The context helps with the interpretation of the request. Especially when the participants know their statuses and roles, the non-conventional indirect request or hint can be interpreted more easily (Aoyama 2002). As for the data in this study, all respondents expressed their intention to comply with requests, which may have led most of the utterances to reveal the requests overtly. Therefore, the number using hints was small. There are two types of hints: strong and mild.

3.3.1 Strong Hint

Giving a strong hint provides a strong clue for the hearer to do the requested action, but the intention of the request is not overt. Only nine examples of hints

were found in this study (1%) and all of them were interpreted as strong hints. Example (11) shows the use of a strong hint from one questionnaire.

- (11) တာ သူငယ်ချင်း ရေ ငါ ဘောပင် မ=ပါ
 bà θəŋɛdzɪN jè ñà bɔ̀pɪN mə = pà
 what friend APP 1SG pen NEG=bring.along
- ဘူး ကွာ... မေ့ကျန် ခဲ့ တယ်။ မင်း မှာ အပို
 bú kwà... mẽtɕaɴ ɕɛ̀ dè míN mə ʔəpò
 NEG NTAG ... forget DSPL NFUT 2SG LOC extra
- ပါ တယ် မှတ် လား။
 pà dè m̩ou? lá
bring.along NFUT NOT.TRUE Q
 ‘What! My friend, I didn’t bring a pen...I forgot it. **You have an extra pen, right?**’ [8/M37/UFL]

In this example, the speaker mentions that he did not bring a pen and asks the hearer if he has an extra one. This utterance is considered a request because it is a question about the precondition of the feasibility of the requested act. The speaker just states his problem (that he forgot to bring a pen) and asks the hearer: ‘You have an extra pen, right?’ In this case, if the hearer has an extra pen with him, then he may be able to lend one to the speaker; if he does not have an extra pen, he cannot lend one to the speaker.

3.3.2 Mind hint

Giving a mild hint provides fewer clues for the hearer to do the requested action. The speaker may refer to only one related component, and the interpretation is left to the hearer. From my observation of everyday conversation, Burmese speakers sometimes use mild hints in making requests. They mostly are used in situations where the speaker believes that the imposition of the request is high. Example (12) shows the use of a mild hint collected from a natural conversation (T=teacher, S=student).

- (12) T1: သမီး ဆရာ-မ သူငယ်ချင်း တွေ က ဆရာ-မ
 θəmí sʰəjə-mə θəŋɛdzɪN dè ɡə sʰəjə-mə
 daughter teacher-F friend PL SBJ teacher-F
- အီးမေးလ် ကို ခိုး ဖွင့် တယ်။
 ʔímẽ ɡò kʰó pʰwɪN dè
 email OBJ steal open NFUT
 ‘My daughter, my friends have accessed my email.’

S: ပတ်(စ်)ဝတ်(ဒ်) ကို ပြောင်း ပါ။
 paʔwu? gò pjáun bà
 password OBJ change POL
 ‘Change your password, please.’

T2: အေးလေ အဲ-ဒါ ဘာ လုပ် ရ မလဲ၊ မသိ ဘူး။
 ?élè ?é-dà bà lou? ja mə=lé, mə=θj bú
 that's.it ANA-that what do able FUT-Q, NEG=know NEG
 ‘I know, but I don’t know how to do that.’

Example (12) is a conversation between a teacher and her student; they are familiar with each other. The teacher has more power than the student. The teacher asks her student to teach her how to change an email password. Her first utterance is ‘My friends have accessed my email’ (T1). She does not refer to the requested act or even the object of the act. All she mentions is the problem she is facing. From this utterance, the hearer cannot interpret it as a request. Therefore, the student suggests the teacher change the password. The phrase အေးလေ /?élè/ ‘That’s it’ at the beginning of the teacher’s utterance (T2) indicates that what the student has said is what she already knew, but the point is that she does not know how to do it. So, it may then be interpreted that the first utterance by the teacher (T1) was a mild hint of request. In this situation, even though the speaker is of a higher position than the hearer, the speaker uses a mild hint to make the request. The speaker assigns high value to the request imposition because she is asking the hearer to do something not concerning the hearer. This may not be the first time the speaker has requested this task.

From the examples of strong and mild hints above, we can see that there are no specific linguistic forms of these strategies. They are concerned with the meaning of the utterances. The utterances can be interpreted as requests depending on the hearer’s interpretation and the request’s context.

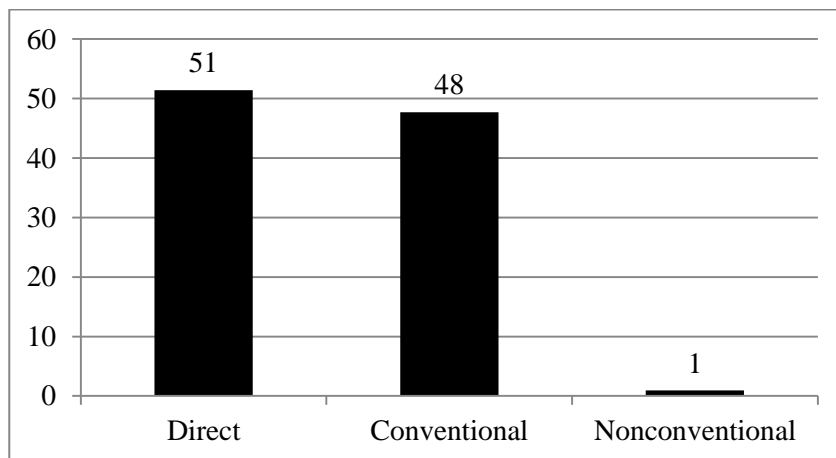


Figure 1. Percentages of the frequency of request strategies used by Burmese speakers (%) from the total number of 1,545 request utterances.

According to Blum-Kulka et al., the conventional indirect request strategy is proposed to be universal (i.e. the conventional indirect request is the most preferred strategy in making requests). In order to find out whether this is the same in Burmese, the frequency of each strategy used by Burmese speakers was counted and the results are shown above in Figure 1.

From Figure 1, based on the total number of 1,545 request head-acts, the direct strategy had the highest percentage of usage (51%), followed by the conventional indirect strategy (48%), and the non-conventional indirect request (1%). However, the uses of direct and conventional indirect strategies are not very different. When sub-types of each strategy are considered, (as shown in Figure 2), the query preparatory strategy of conventional indirect requests has the highest percentage of use (46%), whereas the mood derivable strategy of the direct requests was the second highest (45%). Figure 2 also illustrates that it seems both mood derivable and query preparatory strategies are common in requests in Burmese culture, as revealed by the fact that they are used in almost equal frequency.

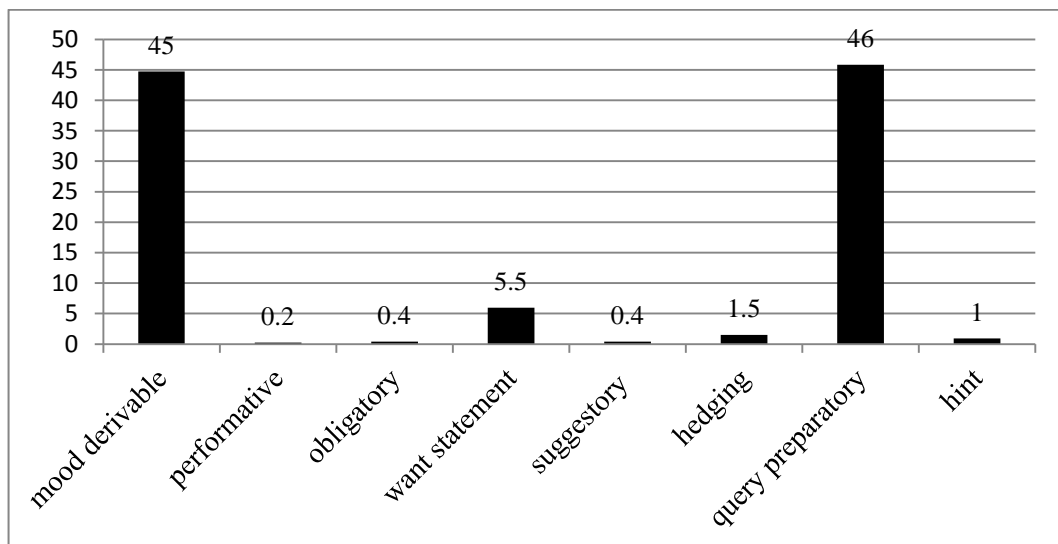


Figure 2. The frequency of request sub- strategies used by Burmese people (%).

The questionnaires were assigned according to the respondent's gender in order to investigate the influence of gender on request strategies. I counted the frequencies of request strategies used by Burmese speakers, differentiated by gender; the results are presented below in Figure 3.

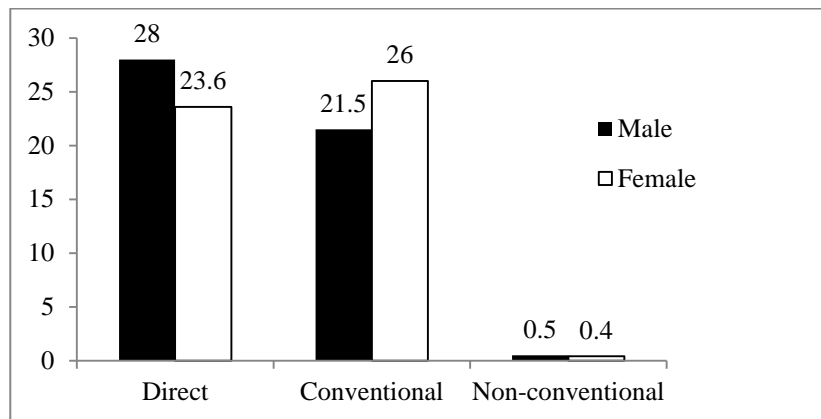


Figure 3. Request strategies used by different genders as a percentage.

Considering the gender of the request respondents, as shown in Figure 3, male and female respondents used a slightly different number of strategies. Male respondents tended to use direct strategies more often than female respondents, while female respondents used conventional indirect strategies more often than male respondents. As for the non-conventional indirect strategy, male respondents used it more than female respondents did. However, the difference in percentages is not enough to claim that male use is generally more direct than female use in Burmese culture. This aspect still requires further study.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study is an attempt to investigate the speech act of requests in Burmese in order to expand knowledge of this speech act by adding Burmese to the list of languages studied. The results of the study show that three types of request strategies (direct, conventional indirect, and non-conventional indirect) found in Burmese requests are the same as proposed by Blum-Kulka et al., and also in other languages. Therefore, the results confirm the universality of requests in terms of the patterns used. As for preferred strategies, the conventional indirect strategy was proposed to be universal. In Burmese, the frequency of the request strategies used by Burmese speakers reveals slightly different percentages for direct and conventional indirect strategies (51% and 48% respectively). In addition, the frequency of the uses of mood derivable and query preparatory strategies are almost the same (45% and 46% respectively). It can be said that both direct and conventional indirect requests are preferred and common in Burmese. This result does not support the results of Blum-Kulka et al., but it is in the line with the studies of Fukushima (1996), and Aoyama (2002), who studied Japanese requests, and the study of Byon (2004), who studied Korean requests. The results of these two studies also show that both direct and conventional indirect requests are preferred. The other studies on requests in non-Western languages, such as Chinese (Hong 1999; Kong 1998; Lee 2005), Korean (Rue & Zhang 2008), Thai (Wiriya 2001; Sungkhaman 2001) and Kinnauri (Saxena 2002) show that only the direct strategy is preferred. This also does not support the

universals of Blum-Kulka et al. However, the study of Thai requests by Wiroonhachaipong (2000) reported that Thai speakers prefer a conventional indirect request, and this does support the findings of Blum-Kulka et al. We can see that in Burmese, Japanese, Thai, and Korean, both direct and conventional indirect strategies are the preferred strategies in making requests, while in Kinnauri and Chinese the direct strategy is preferred.

Even though the results of the study show that Burmese speakers prefer both direct and conventional indirect strategies, the most common form of requests in Burmese, which can be used in every situation, is the imperative construction, i.e. a verb phrase plus the politeness marker ဝါ /bà/. This form has been taught as a polite request in Burmese culture. Even though it is in an imperative construction, the influence of the politeness marker ဝါ /bà/ can soften the force of the imperative, as a verb phrase plus ဝါ /bà/ can be used to make requests in any context. Therefore, it can be said that ဝါ /bà/ is a request marker in Burmese because it changes an order to a request. Besides a politeness marker, there are elements that function to reduce the force of a request, such as the agreement particle ငနံ /nò/, the time understater ခဏ /k'həŋə/ 'moment', and the appended address term at the end of the sentence (address term + ရာ /jà/). Imperative requests in Burmese can therefore be used appropriately in different contexts depending on the downgraders, especially for the politeness marker ဝါ /bà/, which can be used in any situation regardless of social factors. The characteristics of Burmese requests are the same as in the Chinese and Kinnauri languages. In Chinese, the significant feature of requests is the basic action verb, which is used together with 'please' (Lee, 2005; Hong, 1999; Kong, 1998). This is the same as Kinnauri: requesting, commanding, suggesting, or advising depends on the choices of markers used in imperative (Saxena 2002). Also, in Japanese and Korean, the honorific system is influential in making a request appropriate for different contexts.

As for social factors involved in making requests, social distance, power, and rank of imposition are important in Burmese society. Even though the data from the questionnaires cannot reveal clearly which social factor is the most significant, from the observation of natural conversations, power seems to be the most significant factor in social interactions in Burmese. People who have more power are people in higher positions in each particular situation. For example, in the classroom, the teacher is the most powerful person; in a family setting, the father has the most power; among siblings, the eldest is the most powerful. To make a request of a person of higher status, the speaker has to be aware of his/her action and utterance with regard to the distance value between them. The speaker of lower power can use a direct request to a person in a higher position of power, but they must be on familiar terms.

In terms of the gender of the participants, female speakers prefer conventional indirect strategies while male speakers prefer direct strategies, but there is only a slight difference in usage frequency between them. The result does not indicate clearly that Burmese males are more direct than females because male

respondents also used non-conventional indirect strategies more often than female respondents. In Burmese society, males seem to have more power than females; in the case of requests, gender is not an important factor in making requests because there is a form of request that can be used in every situation, as noted above: a verb phrase plus the politeness marker ဝါ /bà/. With this form, Burmese people can make an appropriate request in all contexts. Therefore, it is difficult to identify which factor is the most influential.

Even though the results of this study are based on a particular group of Burmese speakers (university students), they nevertheless represent the way Burmese people make requests, because the observed natural conversations confirm the findings in terms of request strategies. As for the social factors involved in the requests, further studies are needed.

ABBREVIATIONS

1	1st person	M	masculine
2	2nd person	NEG	negative
ANA	anaphora	NFUT	non-future
APP	appealer	NOM	nominalization
BEN	benefactive	NTAG	negative tag
CLF	classifier	OBJ	object
CTR	contrastive	PART	particle
DEP	dependent	PER	performative
DES	desire	PL	plural
DIM	diminutive	POL	politeness
DSPL	displacement	PTAG	polite tag
F	feminine	PURP	purposive
FN	final particle	Q	question word
FOC	focus	SBJ	subject
FUT	future	SG	singular
HON	honorific	SUB	subordinate
IMP	imperative	TOP	topic
LOC	locative		

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