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How Appropriately Do Korean College Students Make Email Requests in English?*

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The present study examined email requests made by Korean college learners of English in terms of the level of directness, the amount and type of internal and external modifications used to soften the requestive force, and the types of request perspectives taken. For this study, 151 emails were collected over a period of three years. Data analysis reveal that in making email requests the students relied more on direct strategies, which are considered less polite, than conventionally direct or indirect strategies. Among several subcategories of direct strategies, *imperatives* and *want statements* were the two most frequently used ones. On the other hand, the students frequently used both internal modifiers and external modifiers with preference for internal modifiers, which helped to soften the requestive force. Of external modifiers, the grounder or a combination of the grounder and the *sorry* statement was frequently used. Results of the study indicated that an inappropriate use of imperatives, upgraders, or aggravating moves could lead to pragmatic failures by making the email requests sound impolite and coercive. Finally this study calls for an instruction for appropriate use of politeness features in making requests.

**[request/emails/speech act/pragmatics/status incongruent language/
요청/이메일/화행/화용론/지위불일치언어]**

I. INTRODUCTION

Study of speech acts has attracted a growing attention in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). The growth is partially due to a shift in focus in SLA from linguistic

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competence to communicative competence. With a conviction that Chomsky's (1965) notion of *competence* is too limited to explain language abilities, Hymes (1972) proposed an expanded notion of *communicative competence* defined as an ability to convey and interpret messages interpersonally in social contexts. He claimed that linguistic competence alone is not sufficient for communicative competence. He also highlighted the need to pay due attention to the actual language use as opposed to mental grammar, and also the social and functional rules of language. Later, Canale and Swain (1980) suggested four components of communicative competence (i.e., grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence), which still serves as the reference point for many discussions surrounding communicative competence. Accordingly, increasing attention to sociolinguistically appropriate language use gave impetus to the study of speech acts. To date a great number of studies of speech acts have attempted to identify differences between native and non-native speakers of English performing various speech acts, including requests (Blum-Kulka, 1991; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989), compliments (Billmeyer, 1990), apologies (Cohen & Olstain, 1993; Rose, 2000), complaints (Murphy & Neu, 1996), and refusals (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990). Those studies showed the ways L2 speakers' speech act performance deviates from native speakers' norms. They commonly reported that second language (L2) learners tend to fail to communicate effectively for lack of pragmatic competence, even when they have a good grammatical command of the target language (Blum-kulka, 1991; J. Suh, 2011).

Of the speech acts examined to date, request is one of the most widely studied ones in a variety of L1 and L2 language contexts (Hendricks, 2008; Kasper, 1997). Fraser (1978) accounted for reasons why the request speech act has attracted great attention as follows:

> Requests are very frequent in language use (far more frequent than, for example, apologizing or promising); requests are very important for the second language learner; they have been researched in more detail than any other type of speech act; they permit a wide variety of strategies for their performance; finally, they carry with them a good range of subtle implications involving politeness, deference, and mitigation (p. 6).

According to the studies of request speech act, L2 learners tend to use comparatively little modification devices, heavily rely on *please* for softening the requestive force (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006; Blum-Kulka & Levenston, 1987) Although the studies contributed to an understanding of L2 learners' request performance, however, the vast majority of the studies relied on data obtained primarily through a discourse completion test (DCT) but have rarely used actual requests for examination (Beebe & Cummings,

1996; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Bou-Franch & Lorenzo-Dus, 2005). Thus calls for examinations of request performance in more naturally occurring data have been raised.

This study is a response to such a call. The present study analyzes 151 English email messages that Korean college students wrote to their professors. Emails are naturalistic and authentic, and represent "data from authentic interactions…available for analysis without the presence of the researcher biasing the data collection process (Herring, 2002, p. 145). It is expected that the current study will illuminate how English learners, particularly Korean college learners of English, perform the speech act of request from a pragmatic perspective.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Earlier, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) conducted a series of cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP) in order to establish the similarities and differences in the realization patterns of two speech acts – requests and apologies - across eight languages or varieties, such as American English, Australian English, Danish, German and Hebrew, and also between native speakers and non-native speakers. They collected data from groups of different language users through a DCT. The test consists of incomplete discourse sequences, each of which contains a short description of a situation and an incomplete dialogue. Participants were asked to complete the dialogue by performing the target speech act as in the following (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 198):

1. At a students' apartment
Larry, John's room-mate, had a party the night before and left the kitchen in a mess.
John: Larry, Ellen and Tom are coming for dinner tonight and I'll have to start cooking soon; _____
Larry: OK, I'll have a go at it right away.

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) established a coding scheme, which allows for analysis of request in terms of direct and indirect request strategies (e.g., imperatives are direct while *could/would you* constructions are indirect); request modification realized by lexical items (e.g., *please, a little*) and syntactic elements (e.g., *I will appreciate if you can help me*); and request perspective (from hearer's or speaker's perspective). This CCSARP coding scheme was used as an analytical framework of many subsequent studies of the request speech act (e.g., Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, 2007; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011)

Making a request, which is a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1978), requires a certain degree of politeness in order to save a face on the part of both a requester and a requestee that the requester is asking. According to previous request research, impolite requests are characterized by such features as the use of direct strategies, intensifiers (e.g., *right now, as soon as possible*) and aggravating moves (e.g., emphasis on urgency), and lack of softening devices (e.g., *possibly, a little bit*). In contrast, polite requests are associated with the use of indirect strategies, devices that mitigate requestive force (e.g., *please, some, sort of*), and non-hearer oriented perspective (e.g., *can I/we* as opposed to *can you*).

Of the few studies of email practice from pragmatic perspective, L2 learners' email requests to professors have recently received increasing attention. Much of the previous research on email requests focused on comparisons between native speakers (NSs) of English and non-native speakers (NNSs). Earlier, Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) compared email requests sent by international graduate students and the U.S. graduate students to two faculty recipients. Their study reported that compared with the NSs', the NNSs' emails were featured by pragmatic failures, such as inappropriate and insufficient use of politeness features, lack of acknowledgment of the degree of imposition to the faculty, emphasis on students' personal needs and unreasonable time frames, and a lack of status-congruent language. Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig pointed out that such email features were negatively evaluated by the professors.

Similar findings were reported by subsequent studies of NNSs' email requests. Chen (2001) investigated the differences in email request practices between Taiwanese (NNSs) and American (NSs) graduate students. Her study revealed that both groups of students preferred query preparatory strategies (e.g., *can/could you*?) and want statements (e.g., *I want/would like to…*) but that the NS students used more lexical/syntactic modifiers (e.g., *please, possibly, I was wondering if*), which eventually made their requests more indirect and polite. Biesenbach-Lucas (2006, 2007) examined the degree of directness and the politeness features of NSs' and NNSs' email requests to faculty using the CCSARP framework. Her study showed that the student groups realized far more requests through direct strategies and hints than conventionally indirect strategies, which is somewhat inconsistent with the findings of Chen's (2001) study; that few lexico-syntactic modifiers were used in frequently occurring request patterns; that NSs tended to use greater resources in making their requests more polite; that NNSs employed internal modifications that did not show sensitivity and linguistic flexibility appropriately according to request types. Similarly, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) examined the degree of directness, type of lexical/phrasal modifiers, and forms of address employed in the emails Greek college students sent to their professors. Data analysis revealed that the NNS students' emails were regarded as impolite or pragmatic failure because of such features as significant directness

and an absence of lexical/phrasal downgraders. Regarding forms of address, the NNSs frequently were found to use inappropriate forms of address and omit greetings and closing.

Meanwhile, in order to investigate how an L2 learner develops email literacy, Chen (2006) conducted a longitudinal case study of a Taiwanese graduate student's email practice in English during her studies at an American university. Her early emails showed a number of pragmatic failures, such as unclear, delayed purpose statements with irrelevant details, which is recognized as typical indirect Chinese rhetorical style (Chang & Hsu, 1998; Chen, 2001, Warshauer, 1999), requests from a student's perspective, and lack of status-appropriate politeness. In her later emails, however, these features positively changed as her identity changed from a needy, self-centered student to an independent competent student.

To date several research studies have been conducted to examine how Korean learners of English realize the request speech act, particularly in comparison with native speakers of English. Realization patterns adopted by the Korean learners include brief and simple request due to their low English proficiency (J. Suh, 2011), indirect organization patterns in which topic-unrelated contents come before the head act (E-M. Yang, 2001a), frequent use of direct strategies (S. J. Chun, 1992), and less use of downgraders and syntactic modifiers (E-M. Yang, 2001b).

Though these studies contributed to an understanding of Korean learners' request realization patterns to some extent, their findings are somewhat limited as they used data artificially elicited from the participants, instead of using naturally occurring emails. The present study intends to examine how appropriately Korean college students make email requests in English based on naturally occurring data. This study is guided by the following research question: How do Korean college students make email requests in terms of level of directness, modifications, and request perspectives?

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Data Collection

Data of the current study comprised of 151 email request messages that students attending a woman's university in Seoul, Korea sent to five professors over a period of three years between 2010 and 2012. At the time of data collection, the students were enrolled in one of the five courses – *Language and Intercultural Communication, Practices in Language Assessment, Teaching Models of English, Discussion and Presentation,* and *Reading and Writing*. The first three courses were offered in the English department mostly for juniors and seniors. They were English-medium courses where the

instructor delivered instruction through English and students were required to complete all the classroom activities and assignments in English. The instructor, who is the researcher of the current study, asked the students to use English when writing emails to her. Given the courses were English medium ones, the students' English proficiency was mostly at or above the intermediate level. The other two courses were required English courses offered as part of general education program at the university. Students usually took the courses in their freshman year though they were free to postpone taking the courses. In these mandatory courses, students' English language proficiency level widely varied from rudimentary to advanced level.

The recipients of the email messages were one Korean researcher-professor and five foreign professors. The foreign professors with two to 11 years of teaching experiences were full-time teaching faculty in the General English Program department of the university. Three of them were native speakers of English from the U.S.; one with Korean origin was born and grew up in Canada, and had rudimentary Korean proficiency; one also with Korean origin lived in the U.S. for more than 15 years and was bilingual. Four of the foreign professors were female and one male. Their ages ranged from 35 to 50.

2. Data Analysis

Analysis of the email data collected proceeded on the basis of a revised version of Blum-Kulka and Olhstain's (1984) coding scheme. The current study analyzed the data in terms of level of directness, amount and type of modifications, and request perspective.

At the first stage, the present study identified the head act in each email that contained any type of request for, for example, meeting and feedback. Request head act is defined as "the utterance(s) that constitute the nucleus of the speech act…i.e., that part of the sequence which might serve to realize the act independently of other elements (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984, p. 200). Based on the definition, the head act excludes "those parts of the sequence which are not essential for realizing the request (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 275). The current study then coded the identified head acts into nine request strategies, which represent one of the three directness levels: direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect. Direct requests tend to be recognized as a request more quickly than conventionally indirect requests followed by nonconventionally indirect ones. Accordingly, direct strategies tend to be associated with impolite requests whereas indirect strategies with polite ones. Table 1 shows the directness levels and the request strategies coded under each level.

TABLE 1

Level of Directness

Directness Level	Request Strategies	Explanation
Direct Strategies	Imperative	The grammatical mood of the verb in the utterance marks its illocutionary force as a request (e.g., Leave me alone/Clean up this mess, please.)
	Performative	The illocutionary force of the utterance is explicitly name by the speakers. (e.g., I'm asking you to give me a help.)
	Hedged Performative	Utterances embedding the naming of the illocutionary force (e.g., I would like to ask you to write to me soon.)
	Locution Derivable	The illocutionary point is directly derivable from the semantic meaning of the locution. (e.g., Madam, you'll have to move your car.)
	Want Statement	The utterance expresses the speaker's intentions, desire of feeling vis-à-vis the fact that the hearer do X. (e.g., I want you to reply before the exam.)
Conventionally Indirect Strategies	Suggestory Formula	The sentence contains a suggestion to X. (e.g., Why don't you clean up?)
	Query Preparatory	Utterance contains reference to preparatory conditions (e.g., ability or willingness, the possibility of the act being performed) as conventionalized in any specific language. (e.g., Could you tell me where I have to put it?)
Nonconventionally Indirect Strategies	Hints[1]	Utterances that make partial or no reference to the request proper but are interpretable through the context as requests (e.g., I have to complete it by tomorrow.)

(Adapted from Blum-Kulka and Olhstain, 1984, p. 202)

Analysis of the data according to level of directness was followed by an examination of internal or external modifications made. Internal modifiers refer to devices made within a request head act in order to mitigate the requestive force and thus to enhance the politeness level, such as politeness marker (e.g., *please*) and downtoner (e.g., *maybe, perhaps, possibly, rather*). According to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), internal modifications happen with "elements within the request utterance proper (linked to the head act), the presence of which is not essential for the utterance to be potentially understood as a request (p. 60). Internal modifiers can be categorized into lexical/phrasal modifiers (e.g., *please, a little, some, a kind of*) and syntactic ones (e.g., interrogative, past tense).

[1] In Blum-Kulka and Olhstain's coding scheme (1984), *hints* were divided into *strong hints* and *mind hints*. In this study, they were combined together into one category, *hints*, because distinctions between the two were frequently obscure.

TABLE 2

Internal Modification

Level	Modifiers	Explanation/Example
Lexical/Phrasal Downgrader	Consultative Device	Elements by which the speaker consults the interlocutor's opinion on the proposition of the request (e.g., *Do you think* I could borrow your lecture notes?)
	Understater	Elements by which the speaker minimizes parts of the proposition (e.g., Could you tidy up *a bit* before I start?)
	Please Marker	An optional element added to a request to bid for cooperative behavior (e.g., Could you open the window a little bit *please*?)
	Downtoner	Modifiers which are used by a speaker in order to modulate the impact his or her request is likely to have on the hearer (e.g., Will you be able *perhaps* to drive me?)
	Hedge	Elements by which the speaker avoids specification in making a commitment to the illocutionary point of the utterance (e.g., It would really help if you can give me *some* help)
	Subjectiviser	Elements in which the speaker explicitly expresses his or her subjective opinion vis-à-vis the state of affairs referred to in the proposition, thus lowering the assertive force of the request (e.g., *I'm afraid* that I made a mistake, so could you please help me?)
Lexical/Phrasal Upgrader	Intensifier	Elements by which the speaker over-represents the reality denoted in the propositions (e.g., I *really* need your help)
	Time-intensifier	Intensifiers by which the speaker explicitly expresses the urgency of the request (e.g., Please answer me *as soon as possible*)
	Expletive	Lexical intensifiers by which the speaker explicitly expresses negative emotional attitudes (e.g., You still haven't cleaned up that *bloody* mess)
Syntactic Modifier	Past Tense	(e.g., I *wanted* to ask for a postponement)
	Interrogative	(e.g., *Could you do* the cleaning up?)
	Negation	(e.g., Look, excuse me. I wonder if you *wouldn't* mind dropping me home?)
	Embedded *if* Clause	(e.g., I would appreciate it *if* you left me alone)

(Adapted from Blum-Kulka and Olhstain, 1984, pp. 203-204)

In contrast, external modifiers appear either before or after a request head act indirectly modifying the request speech act (e.g., Could you give me one more chance? *I promise I'll do my best.*). External modification does not affect the utterance associated with requests but rather the context where the speech act is occurring, and it thus indirectly modifies the requestive force. It either supports or aggravates the request as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

External Modification

Moves	Modifiers	Explanation
Supportive Moves	Grounder	Elements by which the speaker indicates the reasons for the request (e.g., *I really don't understand this topic.* Could you explain it one more time?)
	Disarmer	Elements by which the speaker indicates his/her awareness of a potential offence, thereby attempting to anticipate possible refusal (e.g., *I hope you don't think I'm being forward,* but is there any chance of a life home?)
	Sweetener	An utterance used to flatter the interlocutor and to put him/her into a positive mood (e.g., *You have beautiful handwriting.* Would it be possible to borrow your notes for a few days?
	Getting a Precommitment	An utterance that can count as an attempt to obtain a precommital (e.g., *Will you do me a favor?* Could you perhaps lend me your notes for a few days?
	Sorry Statement	An utterance containing 'sorry' by which the speaker apologizes for posing the request and/or for the imposition incurred (e.g., *I am sorry to say this*, but can you help me?)
	Checking on Availability	An utterance intended to check if the precondition necessary for compliance holds true (e.g., *Are you going in the direction of the town?* And if so, is it possible to join you?)
	Cost Minimizer	Elements by which the speakers indicates consideration of the 'cost' to the interlocutor (e.g., Pardon me, but could you give me a lift, *if you're going my way*, as I just missed the buss and there isn't another one for an hour)
Aggravating Moves	Emphasis on Urgency	An utterance by which the speaker explicitly highlights the urgency of the request (e.g., I need your answer before the exam)
	Emphasis on Positive Answer	An utterance by which the speaker explicitly expresses an expectation of positive answer from the interlocutor (e.g., I will expect your positive answer)
	Complaint	An utterance by which the speaker is making a complaint (e.g., I did my best, but I received a low grade)

(Adapted from Blum-Kulka and Olhstain, 1984, pp. 204-205)

Finally, the present study examined the request perspective the students took in terms of the following four options:

You (hearer) perspective (e.g., *Could you* let me know where I should post my assignment?)
We (speaker/hearer) perspective (e.g., *Could we* meet together for some time?)

I (speaker) perspective (e.g., *Can I* visit your office?)
Impersonal perspective (e.g., *It* may be a good idea to have a meeting.)

'Could *you*..' emphasizes the role of the hearer, 'could *we*..' that of the speaker and hearer, and 'could *I*..' that of the speaker. Since in requests the hearer is 'under threat,' an attempt to avoid addressing the hearer as the main performer of the act is regarded as having mitigating effect. Thus the four perspectives above are arranged from least to most polite in terms of the effect on perceived politeness.

For more reliable data analysis, the researcher and a doctoral student in the field of English language education coded 15 emails for a test, which showed 91 percent of agreement.

IV. RESULTS

1. Level of Directness of Email Requests

As presented in Table 4, analysis of the data revealed that in making email requests the students used direct strategies (120 occurrences) most frequently followed by conventionally indirect strategies (62 occurrences). Nonconventionally indirect ones were used only eight times. This result is in line with previous studies (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Chen, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011) which found that their nonnative speakers of English favored direct strategies most.

A comparison of all the subcategories across the three main strategies showed that *imperatives* rank the first (63 occurrences, 33%), *query preparatory* the second (61 occurrences, 32%), *want statement* the third (42 occurrences, 22%). Imperatives were typically phrased in the form of 'please + imperative,' query preparatory in the form of '*Can I*' or '*Can you*' and *want statement* in the form of '*I want you to*.' Worth noting is that, *query preparatory*, which belongs to the category of conventionally indirect strategies, was adopted second most frequently. Earlier, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) similarly reported that the participants in her study frequently used not only direct strategies but also conventionally indirect strategies, particularly for making requests for action, such as requests for lecture notes and handouts. Meanwhile, the other subcategories (performatives, hedged performative, locution derivable, suggestory formula, hints), each of which was used less than 10 times, accounted for 24 occurrences (13 %).

A closer look at subcategories of each strategy type showed that, in case of direct strategies, the most frequently used substrategies were *imperatives* followed by *want statement*. Occurrences of these two substrategies account for 87 percent of the total

occurrences of direct strategies (55 out of 63). The remaining direct strategies, (performatives, hedged performatives, and locution derivables), all taken together, occurred 15 times. Of conventionally indirect strategies, *query preparatory* occurred most frequently accounting for 61 cases out of 62 (98%) while *suggestory formula* occurred only once. Nonconventionally indirect strategies, *hints*, occurred eight times in total.

TABLE 4

Level of Directness

Directness Level	Request Strategies	Examples	N(%)
Direct Strategies	Imperative	-Let me know when you are possible. -Please look over my grades again and reconsider.	63(33)
	Performative	-I eagerly ask you to accept my request. -I beg you to forgive me.	4(2)
	Hedged Performative	-I want to ask you to give me feedback. -So I would like to ask you to help me.	5(3)
	Locution Derivable	-What is the problem in my test? -Do you know the name of any good English book?	6(3)
	Want Statement	-I want to know when you are available. -I hope you to respond soon.	42(22)
Sub-total			120(63)
Conventionally Indirect Strategies	Suggestory Formula	-Why don't you help me?	1(1)
	Query Preparatory	-Could you give me some examples? -Can you explain to me?	61(32)
Sub-total			62(33)
Nonconventionally Indirect Strategies	Hints	-I don't know what to do. -I send my homework by e-mail.	8(4)
Total			190(100)

*Note: Examples are taken from email data of the present study.

2. Internal Modification

Table 5 presents the results of the analysis of internal modifiers used in the level of words, phrases, or syntactic structures. With regard to lexical/phrasal modifications, the students used downgraders, which serve to mitigate the requestive force, more frequently (97 occurrences, 42%) than upgraders, which may strengthen the request (25 occurrences, 11%). Among the subcategories of downgraders, *please* was predominantly used (71 occurrences), followed by consultative devices (10 occurrences) with a gap of 61. The finding of predominant use of *please* is consistent with previous studies of email requests (e.g., Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Chen, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). Except for *please* and consultative devices, the other types of downgraders were sparingly used: hedges, such as *some* and *sort of*, were used seven times, and understater, such as *a little*

bit and *just*, and subjectivisers, such as, *I wonder* and *I think*, four times respectively; downtoners (e.g., *maybe*) were not found in any emails examined.

Regarding the use of upgraders, which tend to strengthen the effect of the request, time-intensifiers were used most frequently of the three different types of upgraders. The most typical time-intensifiers identified were *as soon as possible* and *soon*.

Compared with lexical and phrasal modifications (123 occurrences), syntactic modifications occurred less frequently (110 occurrences). In adopting syntactic modifications, which soften the effect of request along with lexical/phrasal modifications, the students relied on interrogatives (61 occurrences) most and then past tense (30 occurrences). Embedded *if* clauses were used 10 times.

TABLE 5

Internal Modification

Level	Modifiers	Examples	N(%)
Lexical/Phrasal Downgrader	Consultative Device	-*Would you mind* rechecking my grade? -*Is it possible* for me to get an exemption from Monday's class?	10(4)
	Understater	-I *just* want to want why I received C+.	4(2)
	Please Marker	-*Please* let me know what to do.	71(31)
	Downtoner		0(0)
	Hedge	-Could you give me *some* examples? -We wondered that if there is *any* chance we can do to make up for our marks?	8(3)
	Subjectiviser	-*I wonder* if there is no self-study guide for this week.	4(2)
Lexical/Phrasal Upgrader	Intensifier	- I *really* want you to change my grades. -I will *deeply* appreciate if you let me know about homework.	8(3)
	Time-intensifier	-Please let me know *before tomorrow*. -Please reply to me *as soon as possible.*	18(8)
	Expletive		0(0)
Sub-total			123(53)
Syntactic Modifier	Past Tense	-*Could* I make an appointment with you on Monday? -*Would* you check mine?	39(17)
	Interrogative	-*Can you* tell me what time you'll be free in your office?	61(26)
	Negation		0(0)
	Embedded *if* Clause	-I'll be so glad *if you give me a chance to make up the mistake.* -I'll appreciate *if you can help me.*	10(4)
Sub-total			110(47)
Total			233(100)

*Note: Examples are taken from email data of the present study.

3. External Modification

External modification, which occurs either before or after the request head act and indirectly modifies the request speech act, occurred 131 times in total representing about a half of the occurrences of internal modifications (233 occurrences). As shown in Table 6, the vast majority of external modifications (115 out of 131) occurred through supportive moves, which are claimed to support the request. In terms of the frequency of supportive moves, *grounder* occurred most frequently (52 occurrences), accounting for 40 percent of all external modifications used. *Sorry statement* comes the second with 36 occurrences (27%), followed by *checking on availability* (12 occurrences, 9%) and *disarmer* (10 occurrences, 8%). *Cost minimizer* occurred five times in total. In case of *sorry statement*, the students had a tendency to repeat *sorry*, for example, *'I didn't know it on Friday so that I couldn't tell you. I'm really sorry. I'm really really really really sorry. Please tell me how can I make up for the absent. Sorry again.'* In this short segment of the email, the student used *sorry* three times along with an intensifier, *really*. This student may have felt that repetition of *sorry* could help to mitigate the requestive force.

Also worth noting is that the students sometimes used a couple of supportive moves together for the same request, particularly a combination of *grounder* and *sorry statement* as in the following: '....*I forgot to bring my picture of one girl eating icecream. It's my total fault not preparing the picture so I am very very sorry to interrupt your free time but do you mind sending me the picture?...'* Such combination practice possibly softened the impact of the request to a larger extent.

Data analysis also revealed that email requests also contained 16 occurrences of aggravating moves, which have the potential to aggravate the request by emphasizing urgency, complaining, or emphasizing a positive answer. Among the three aggravating moves, *emphasis on positive answers* was predominantly used (14 out of 16) with *emphasis on urgency* and *complaint* occurring one time each.

TABLE 6

External Modification

Moves	Modifiers	Examples	N(%)
Supportive Moves	Grounder	-I really want you to look through my scores and grades again. *I strongly believe that my grade is better than C0.*	52(40)
	Disarmer	-*I know you are busy*, but I eagerly ask you to accept my request. -*If this request is the difficult matter*, please allow me to leave at 2:50 pm.	10(8)
	Sweetener		0(0)
	Getting a Precommitment		0(0)

	Sorry Statement	-*I am sorry,* but would you keep them until the vacation ends?	36(27)
	Checking on Availability	-*If you are okay*, I want to ask you to help me with my writing. -*If you have time,* I would love to get response from you.	12(9)
	Cost Minimizer	-Could you feedback my speaking script? *It will not take long time.*	5(4)
	Sub-total		115(88)
Aggravating Moves	Emphasis on Urgency	-*This is an urgent situation*. Please help me.	1(1)
	Emphasis on Positive Answers	-*I look forward to your positive answer*. - *Thanks in advance for your response.*	14(10)
	Complaint	-*I didn't receive your reply yet.*	1(1)
	Sub-total		16(12)
	Total		131(100)

*Note: Examples are taken from email data of the present study.

4. Request Perspective

Table 7 presents the results of the data analysis in terms of request perspectives taken. The students used you-perspective most frequently (99 occurrences, 52%) closely followed by I-perspective (82 occurrences, 43%). These two perspectives together accounted for 95 percent of all the perspectives taken. The other two perspectives, we-perspective and impersonal perspective, were taken rather sparingly with one and eight occurrences respectively.

TABLE 7

Request Perspective

Perspective	Example	N(%)
You-Perspective	-Can you help me?	99(52)
We-Perspective	-Could we meet on Monday or Tuesday?	1(1)
I-Perspective	-I want to get a advice from you about my midterm exam.	82(43)
Impersonal Perspective	-Is it okay that I keep sending my speaking journal homework in this way?	8(4)
	Total	190(100)

*Note: Examples are taken from email data of the present study.

In an earlier part of this study, it was mentioned that these four perspectives can be arranged in a continuum with you-perspective being least polite and impersonal perspective most polite in that avoiding the hearer as the main performer tends to mitigate the requestive force. In light of this, less polite perspectives (you- and we-perspectives)

were taken more frequently than more polite ones (I- and impersonal perspectives) by 10 occurrences.

V. DISCUSSION

The current study revealed that in making email requests the students relied more on direct strategies than conventionally direct or indirect strategies. Among several subcategories of direct strategies, *imperatives* and *want statements* were the two most frequently used ones. It is claimed that the use of direct strategies is frequently an inappropriate strategy as it can aggravate the face-threatening nature of making a request (Brown & Levinson, 1978). In particular, *imperatives* can make a request sound coercive and rude, thus leading to pragmatic failures, because *imperatives* are associated with instructions or orders. This can indeed get worse when it comes to institutional email correspondences between students and professors as in the present study. Using *imperatives*, for example, '*Solve this problem as soon as possible*,' and '*Let me know when you are available*,' puts students out of status and eventually makes professors negatively perceive the students and the request, which represents pragmatic infelicities (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996).

Significantly, even with a *please* marker, *imperatives* do not always mitigate the effect of request. In other words, imperatives with *please*, if there is no adequate modifier accompanied, do sometimes make requestees negatively evaluate the requests. Earlier, Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) claimed that the use of *please* alone does not sufficiently soften the force of the imperative in student-faculty communication. Also, in Economidou-Kogetsidis's study (2011), some of the foreign professors commented that "the use of imperative always sounds harsh even when a 'please' is added (p. 3206) and that the "imperative with 'please' added always irritates (p. 3206).

Want statements can also cause pragmatic problems by reflecting students' misunderstanding of students' rights to request and professors' obligations to act upon the request. According to Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig(1996, p. 58),

> "in an institutional setting such as academic, the use of unmitigated, speaker dominant 'I want' and 'I need' forms by lower status requesters seems to elevate both the right of the requesters and the obligation of the requestee…makes it even less likely that the faculty member has the obligation to grant the request.

The present study also found that the students frequently used both internal modifiers and external modifiers to soften the requestive force. Comparing the two types of modifiers

in terms of frequency revealed that the students favored internal medications (232 vs. 131), although previous studies documented NNSs' preference of external modifications (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009, 2011; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001). This can be partially explained in relation to the students' underdeveloped language abilities in that internal modification can be easily achieved by adding one- (e.g., *please, somehow*) or two-word (e.g., *a little, a bit*) expressions, whereas external modification usually occurs through longer ones. Or the students possibly felt using internal modifiers was more handy and comfortable. Whether it is an internal modifier or external modifier, its appropriate use as a politeness feature could mitigate the requestive force to some extent as claimed in the request speech act studies (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006; Chen, 2001; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996).

Another interesting finding of this study is that the *grounder* was one of the most widely used external modifiers as a mitigation device. This finding is in line with many previous studies in this field (e.g., Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001; Schauer, 2007; Woodfield, 2004). The students in this study attempted to give reasons or explanations for their requests to their professors with an expectation that this effort would elicit the professor's understanding and cooperation. This attempt was likely to generate positive politeness in the professors.

The present study further found out that several different modifiers were used at the same time for the same request as in the email below:

> Andrew :)
> I'm Youngmi~!
>
> I heard that you will put your feedback paper in office 651 at tomorrow (Friday) 3 pm but *I have to go Daegu at 2 pm, and I am going to come back to Seoul in Sunday*
>
> So… *would you* give me feedback paper *little* earlier, *please*??
>
> I will wait for your answer~~

In this email, in order to make one request (i.e., give me feedback paper earlier), Youngmi is using four modifiers: a grounder as an external modifier (*I have to go Daegu at 2 pm, and I am going to come back to Seoul in Sunday*), past tense as an internal syntactic modifier (*would you*), understater as an internal lexical modifier (*little*), and *please* marker as an internal lexical modifier (*please*).

Similarly, the students sometimes repeated the same request using different strategies as shown in the following email:

> Dear Teacher!!!
>
> How teacher! how are you? i sent email to you already but i didn't see your reply. So i sand email to you again….*So now can you help me teacher? Please help me*, i am really need your help. Now my Korean professor they are help me already. Now only you that i am waiting for. *Please help me*. i am waiting for your word…..

This student is desperately appealing for help for a certain reason which she must have explained in a previous email. She is making the same request for help three times differently: one time with a query preparatory (i.e., *So now can you help me teacher?*) and two times with imperatives with a *please* marker (i.e., *Please help me*).

One possible explanation for this co-use of different modifiers or repetition of the same request is that the students, who were aware of their status as English language learners, may have been afraid of making mistakes in email requests and being perceived rude by their professors; they accordingly tried to avoid such unpleasant situations by repeatedly making modifications to the request being made. Indeed, the students sometimes expressed their concern that their email might sound rude as in the following: '*Anyway I am afraid that my e-mail looks rude. Please understand because my English skill is not that good and I don't know well about English culture*.' Thus the students possibly attempted to overcome any possible pragmatic infelicities arising from their lack of language abilities by using multiple modifiers. Such excessive modification sometimes made their email requests verbose and clumsy, but in terms of politeness, they served to make their requests sound polite to some extent. This interpretation is supported by Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011), who found that native speakers of English did not negatively perceive even imperatives when they were accompanied by a grounder or a 'thank you' marker.

Results of this study also showed that the students sometimes used lexical/phrasal upgraders and aggravating moves, which strengthen the impact of the request. For example, they often used time intensifiers, as in '*please check me and answer me as quickly as you can!!*,' and '*I hope to get your answer soon*.' This put pressure on professors regarding the need to respond to the request urgently, which reveals the students' inconsiderateness of the professors' time and superior status. The students also sometimes highlighted their expectation of positive answers from their professors by saying, for example, '*I expect your positive reply*,' '*I look forward to your positive answer*,' and '*Thanks in advance for your response*.' Such use of upgraders and aggravating moves, which is a token of status-incongruent language use, tends to make the request sound rude and coercive. It might

eventually lead the professors negatively evaluate the students and their email requests, causing pragmatic failures.

VI. CONCLUSION

The current study investigated email requests made by Korean college learners of English to their professors. In order to understand how appropriately the students made requests in English, this study focused on the level of directness, types and frequency of internal and external modifiers, and request perspectives for data analysis.

This study revealed that the students frequently attempted to mitigate the effect of their request with various types of lexical or syntactic modifiers (e.g., *please, somehow, a little bit, just, I'm wondering if, could you?*). They further tried to soften their request by externally modifying the request, for example, explaining reasons for the request, saying *sorry*, or checking if a precondition for responding to the request holds true. This attempt for modification is an indicator that the students were more or less aware of the need to show a certain degree of politeness in making a 'face-threatening' request speech act. However, the students still showed pragmatic shortcomings that should be urgently addressed. For one thing, the students made requests directly to a large extent with a heavy reliance on *imperatives* and *want statement.* As indicated earlier, using imperatives even with *please* can make the email request sound impolite and thus cause pragmatic failures. *Want statement* is also generally regarded as status-incongruent language use, which can lead to pragmatic infelicities. Furthermore, the students were sometimes found using upgraders and aggravating moves, which is also likely to bring about similar pragmatic problems.

Based on these findings, this study claims that EFL learners should be helped to raise awareness of the importance of pragmatic competence. Specifically, as far as request is concerned, they need to develop sensitivity toward the degree of politeness required according to the context and thus use appropriate politeness features. To make it happen, an explicit instruction should be carefully prepared and given to the learners. This study lends support to previous studies' call for instruction for better speech act performance.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Secondary, Tertiary

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