Cross-cultural Differences in Using English Requests During Synchronous Computer Communication[*]

Nari Lee[**]

Korea University

Eunha Hwang

Korea University

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The main purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of nationality and gender difference, which are distinctive features in the cross-cultural communication, on the use of request strategies during synchronous computer chatting. In order to describe natural communication requests, 435 tokens were selected from 180 chatting sessions between 172 university students (97 South Koreans and 75 Japanese) are analyzed. The coding scheme from the Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) was modified and applied in order to examine the characteristics of the request tokens. Mood derivable (i.e., imperatives) is observed to be the most popular strategy among the participants. The findings show that nationality affects the preference of using request strategies, whereas gender does not bring about significant differences. In addition, mitigated expressions are explored; the results demonstrate that Japanese students' reliance on lexical mitigation is stronger than that of Korean students. In terms of pedagogical suggestions, a need of request strategy instruction and vocabulary practice are seen to be required for EFL students in order to promote their abilities to use appropriate requests.

[English request/computer-mediated communication/cross-cultural difference/
영어 요청화행/컴퓨터 매개 의사소통/문화간 차이]

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most commonly studied areas in pragmatics is speech acts (Bardovi-Harlig, 2002), which is largely framed by two principle researchers: Austin (1962) for classifying locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary force; and Searle (1976) for designating illocutionary acts into the five categories of *representatives, directives, expressives, commisives*, and *declarations*. These classifications have invited other scholars to investigate more deeply into the directiveness of a speech act (Alcón & Safont, 2001; Haverkate, 1984; M. W. Lee, 2013; Schmidt & Richard, 1980; Thomas, 1995; Usó-Juan, 2010), recognizing that request and suggestion are types of direct speech acts which impose a burden on the hearer to do something. However, the former brings a benefit to the speaker whereas the latter emphasizes the benefit of the hearer. Request is clearly defined by Trosborg (1995) as "an illocutionary act whereby a speaker (requester) conveys to a hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act which is for the benefit of the speaker" (p.187).

Since Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that speech acts are face threatening, and therefore speakers employ a politeness strategy to soften the imposition on the hearers, some researchers have confirmed the necessity of applying politeness strategies to reduce the burden on interlocutors (Martínez-Flor, 2005; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2010; Usó-Juan, 2010; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2008). In addition, these authors suggest that EFL learners should develop pragmatic means to cushion the impact of a direct speech act. To investigate request forms, some researchers have focused on variables such as nationality, gender, age, distance, and so on (S. Chung, J. Lee, & Y. Chung, 2010; Fukushima, 1996; H. M. Kim, 2003; Konakahara, 2011; K.-J. Park, Nakano, & H. Lee, 2003). The related research results demonstrate the different strategy usage as affected by such variables. Speakers display their identities using various expressions, and nationality and gender are clear-cut variables to illustrate cultural differences among interlocutors; each item is mutually exclusive, which explains that people cannot have several nationalities or both genders at the same time. On the other hand, many of the variables such as age and social distance are relatively depend on individual differences. So that it is worthwhile to display cultural differences between EFL learners; for this cross-cultural study between South Korean and Japanese college students, nationality and gender, which are distinctive variables in groups, were chosen. The following section is intended to speculate on the previous studies regarding one of the most face-threatening categories of act: request.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The study of the speech act—request—was predominantly developed through Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP), which suggests mutually exclusive groups of request: (1) Mood derivable is a grammatical structure (i.e., imperatives) that is issued in order to deliver a speaker's intention. (2) Explicit and hedged performative use certain types of verbs such as *ask*, *recommend*, and *suggest*. In other words, the verb itself performs the speech act. (3) Locution derivable is heavily dependent on the semantic role of the modals. (4) Scope stating is also known as a *want/need statement* since these two verbs are mainly employed to express a speaker's desire or wish. (5) Language specific suggestory formula means that specific types of formulaic sequences (e.g., *why don't you…*, *how about…*) are applied to inspire hearers to complete the desired speech acts. (6) Reference to preparatory condition is considered an indirect and polite way of delivering a speaker's intention using culturally preferred expressions (e.g., *would/could you…*). (7) Strong and mild hints are non-conventionally indirect manners to offer a cue to a hearer and capture the speaker's original purposes. Introducing the taxonomy, Blum-Kulka (1987) adds that level of directiveness is organized according to the hearer's perspective; it is considered a more indirective way of requesting when the hearer requires greater effort to understand the speaker's intention.

Previous studies on request can be largely divided between five categories. First of all, a number of studies focus on comparison of the reactions between native and non-native speakers of English to a given situation (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum-Kulka, 1987; Fukushima, 1996; M.-S. Kim & Wilson, 1994; Konakahara, 2011; M. W. Lee, 2013; K.-J. Park et al., 2003). In most studies, language learners from different linguistic backgrounds are asked to perform a number of speech acts in both their native and the target language, and the data are compared to those of native English speakers. The main goals of these studies are to support that the differences are caused by L1 transfer, differing cultural backgrounds, and the lack of linguistic proficiency in a target language.

Second, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) CCSARP provides guidelines to succeeding researchers in applying the same procedure to different languages which were not studied through CCSARP. Their results support the findings of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984): situational, cross-cultural, and individual differences exist (Félix-Brasdefer, 2010; Fukushima, 1996; Iwasaki, 2008; Konakahara, 2011; M. W. Lee, 2013; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2003; Macaulay, 2001; J. Shim, 2009). However, their research method became identical through the use of a discourse completion test (DCT) which is relatively lacking in terms of the nature of daily conversation. Such tests are

intended to provoke certain answers within a given situation, even though the test itself is designed to reflect real conversations; some of the cases are seen as too artificial to represent natural communication, although the items do include different social and power distances. Hinkel (1994, 1997) takes a different approach to collecting data by creating a multiple choice test (MCT). Respondents are guided to select their favorite choices in completing a role-play narrative. This might reduce the burden on the respondents, but it restricts them in making a more natural reaction to each situation. Similarly, H.-M. Kim (2003) proposes distribution of a questionnaire to elicit speech act data; however, the related design does not incorporate diverse communications. M.-S. Kim and Wilson (1994) used another method to judge the appropriateness of the speech act—a test was given in which respondents rank the effectiveness of requests. This proves that there is a wide discrepancy in selecting effective request types according to respondents' respective cultures. As Kasper (2004) insists that natural conversation should be studied in order to describe the main characteristics of a speech act, the features of speakers' everyday communication must consequently be identified by exploring authentic conversation data. However, few studies regarding natural communication have been pursued due to the difficulty of collecting pure authentic data (Macaulay, 2001). Recently, a number of researchers have used synchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) data to reveal the characteristics of various speech acts, asserting that it portrays the naturalness of the conversation (Carr, Schrock, & Dauterman, 2012; E. Hwang & N. Lee, 2014; Nastri, Pe a, & Hancock, 2006; Twitchell, Nunamaker Jr., Burgoon, 2004).

Third, the gender differences in the making of requests are a popular topic, but researchers have not reached consensus regarding strategy use. Some insist that individual differences are more crucial compared to gender differences (Ishikawa, 2013; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2003), others argue that gender-specific preferences exist; females prefer to mitigate their requests using indirect forms (E. Hwang & N. Lee, 2014; Macaulay, 2001; J. Shim, 2009). In addition, there are very few studies that investigate the relationship between nationality and gender; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch's (2003) study concludes that both genders of Spanish and British student subjects show no differences in using request strategies.

Fourth, few Korean and Japanese researchers have shown an interest in request studies; it would be more accurate to say that their main interests are limited to apology, compliment, thanking and refusal (Ishihara, 2010; J. Jeon, 2009; H.-M. Kim, 2003; Kondo, 2001, 2010; K.-J. Park et al., 2003). When they investigate request, their methods are almost identical: collecting data using DCT, and listing the frequency of request types (Fukushima, 1996; Iwasaki, 2008; Konakahara, 2011; Kondo, 2001; M. W. Lee, 2013; K.-J. Park et al., 2003; J. Shim, 2009). Therefore, need exists to elaborate

more empirical studies illustrating the features of natural conversation.

Last, in terms of pedagogical approach, few specific teaching methods are introduced in the literature. Most of researchers continue to repeat that strategy teaching and practice will improve students' awareness of the target forms and will eventually help learners addressing proper types of speech acts (Fukushima, 1996; Ishihara, 2010; Iwasaki, 2008; Konakahara, 2011; J. Shim, 2009; K.-A. Yu, 2004). On the one hand, Martínez-Flor (2005) and Usó-Juan (2010) claim that explicit instruction on the speech act taxonomy would spark learners' curiosity. This, therefore, provides more chances for students to recognize the forms and increase their use in communication. These authors also insist that learners need to encounter a variety of situations in which speech acts are used and allow them to practice in an authentic environment. On the other hand, high school English textbooks have been analyzed to display the number of teaching items included to promote learners' understanding of the speech acts (S. Chung et al., 2010; J.-W. Hahn, 2010). All of these findings reveal that English textbooks for Korean high school learners lack sufficient opportunities for learning speech acts. To bridge the gaps in the previous studies, the researchers establish the following research questions:

    1) What are the overall tendencies of nationality and gender in request realization?
    2) Do Koreans and Japanese show different preference in using request forms?
    3) Is there a nationality difference in applying mitigation?
    4) Do male and female interlocutors employ different strategies of request?
    5) Does the frequency of applying mitigation differ by gender?

III. METHOD

1. Data Collection

1) Chatting program

The chatting data was collected through Korea-Waseda Cross-Cultural Distance Learning Project (KWCCDLP)[1], a program had launched in February, 1999 by South Korea's Korea University (KU) and Japan's Waseda University (WU). It is designed to promote the language skills of non-native English, and features two types of class activities: video conferencing during class and out-of-class computer mediated chatting.

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[1] See K.-J. Park et al. (2003).

Both chat programs were specially designed for KWCCDLP by Waseda University and a Japanese software company. Undergraduate students can choose to participate—in either voice or text chatting, both of which are synchronous and allow participants to view their partners through a web-based camera. After each chat session, participants are able to freely exchange further ideas through the Bulletin Board System (BBS), which is an asynchronous method of communication. In this study, only the English text chats are analyzed for national differences in using request forms between South Koreans and Japanese. Ten to twelve classes take part in the project each semester. There is a five- or six-week chatting program in each semester that requires forty to fifty minutes per session. It takes a form of group chatting with four to six students commonly allocated to one group. Once the groups are formed, the participants chat within these group members.

Several topics are provided to help participants maintain their conversations, for example self-introductions, school life, part time employment, topics from pop culture, and so on. Basically, however, they are free to exchange any ideas they may wish to share.

2) Participants and chatting data collection

To specify the characteristics of the chatting data, three KU groups and a matching number of their counterparts were selected; two South Korean lecturers participating in the KWCCDLP were responsible for three English courses (Freshmen English 1, English Reading, and English Grammar), while two Japanese lectures took charge of three English courses (Seminar on Second Language Learning and Teaching, and two Practical Writing in English Classes). The total number of participants for this study was 182—with 50 students in the first term and 132 in the second. Most of them are South Koreans (N=96) and Japanese (N=76), but ten international students studying at KU from home countries mainly in Asia participated. These international students are not included in the data analysis, for the number is very small and their nationalities too varied to identify specific nationality differences. Therefore, the actual number of participants to analyze the data became 172. Table 1 provides detailed information on the students.

TABLE 1

Number of Participants

	KU		WU		International	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1st term	12	9	13	15	2	0
2nd term	27	48	19	29	2	6
Total	39	57	32	44	4	6

All of the participants are undergraduate students and their majors vary widely—English Language and Literature, English Education, Division of International Studies, Business Administration, Law and so on. Participants' English proficiency was not measured before the chat program, but the researchers speculate that participants would have attained a high level of academic English since all Korea University students are able to complete English-mediated courses: two 50 to 75-munite English only classes in each week which consist of advanced level of lecturing and discussion. Their counterparts seemingly had appropriate English proficiency for taking KWCCDLP related courses.

The data were collected during two semesters in 2013; the first running from May 6 to June 13, and the second from October 28 to December 5. There were 12 chat groups in the first term, and the number of chat groups in the second term was 21. Most of the groups were of mixed genders, but the first term included three homogeneous groups: two male-only groups, and one female-only group.

The weekly chatting data were saved after each chatting session, and the 33 groups completed four to six chats in each semester. All of the chatting data were collected and overlapped items were eliminated; 180 chatting sessions were finally selected and analyzed. In the first term, 62 chatting sessions were available, and 118 chats were collected for the second term.

2. Data Analysis

1) Coding scheme

The grounded coding scheme was created by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and it has been modified to represent the characteristics of KWCCDLP data. Table 2 outlines nine different types of request based on the directness of the speakers' utterance. Four categories are modified from Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) original version. First, to specify the directness of mood derivable, *let's* imperative has been added, which is considered less direct than the imperative forms. Nevertheless, *let's* type and mood

derivable share similar characteristics, syntactically with both of them requiring the basic form of the verb, although the former type simply appends the verb *let* to the beginning of the statement. In addition, their semantic interpretation is almost identical, although *let's* imperative statements reduce the burden on the hearer by inviting the speakers to perform the same action. It sounds like a proposal but as Trosborg (1995) pointed out, the ultimate goal of a speech act containing *let's* forms is to realize the benefits for the speakers. Second, the term, performatives, merged two categories: explicit performatives and hedged performatives. This is because two performative types depend on the specific verbs, and the actual usage of these verbs rarely appeared in the chatting data. Third, strong hints and mild hints are combined under the term of hint, mainly because data is not available to distinguish the interlocutors' original intention. Last, the category of other was established—those tokens which do not belong to any types from the original version. The other-category forms may appear similar to hints but they depict speakers' intention more clearly.

TABLE 2
Modified Version of Request Types

Types	explanation (example)
Mood derivable	imperatives (Give us a joke.)
Performatives	main verb containing "ask, recommend, suggest…" (I recommend you to search after this discussion.)
Locution derivable	subject + modal (We should exchange email.)
Want/need statement	main verb containing "want, need, wish…" (I want to know what your major is.)
Suggestory formula	why don't you/how about…? (Why don't we introduce ourselves?)
Preparatory	could you/would you…? (Could you show us again?)
Hints	strong and mild hints (I can't see you on the cam right now.)
Let's	let's imperatives (Let's talk about something else.)
Other	items not included in the above categories (For example? How about you? Shall we/Should we…?)

Note. The sentences in the parenthesis are examples from the KWCCDLP database.

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) divide request types into "the most direct, explicit

level," "the conventionally indirect level," and "nonconventional indirect level." We recategorized the modified coding scheme with direct and indirect groups. The former contains mood derivable, performative, locution derivable, want/need statement, while the latter includes rest of the strategies: suggestory formula, preparatory, hints, *let's* imperative, and other. Simple information-seeking questions were not included in the analysis since they do not require a change of action on the part of hearer.

The researchers gathered the chatting data and independently selected target forms and identified them through the modified coding scheme. The selected requests were then allocated into the nine modified categories. After the independent process, we compared the data and discussed in order to ensure classification. There was less than 5% disagreement and all the disagreed upon items were allocated upon discussion. Additionally, mitigated forms, which soften the face-threatening acts, were analyzed; however, this is not within the main scope of this study and it only shows the tendency of mitigation usage.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Overall Tendencies in Using Requests

Exploring the first research question, during the six weeks of chatting, most of the participants issued request forms during their chats. Table 3 illustrates the number of speakers who produced request tokens among the 182 participants—66% of the students made requests in total. The proportion is higher in the first semester (74%) and relatively low in the second (64%). This suggests that South Korean and Japanese participants commonly elicit the requests during their online communication.

TABLE 3
Number of Speakers Using Requests

	KU (%)		WU (%)		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
1st term	11 (92)*	8 (89)	7 (58)	11 (73)	37 (74)
2nd term	22 (81)	36 (73)	12 (41)	14 (48)	84 (64)
	33 (85)	44 (76)	19 (61)	25 (57)	121 (66)

* The numbers in parenthesis describe the percentage of students issuing requests among the 172 participants of the study (cf. Table 1).

There were 435 requests found in 180 chat sessions, and Korean learners of English used twice the number of request tokens than did Japanese learners (297 and 140, respectively). The ratio between males' and females' token was almost equal (217 vs. 218). To show the overall tendency in using requests, Figure 1 depicts the proportion of participants who made requests among all of the participants. Korean males made requests more than did the other groups, and only slightly more than half of the Japanese females issued a request to their partners.
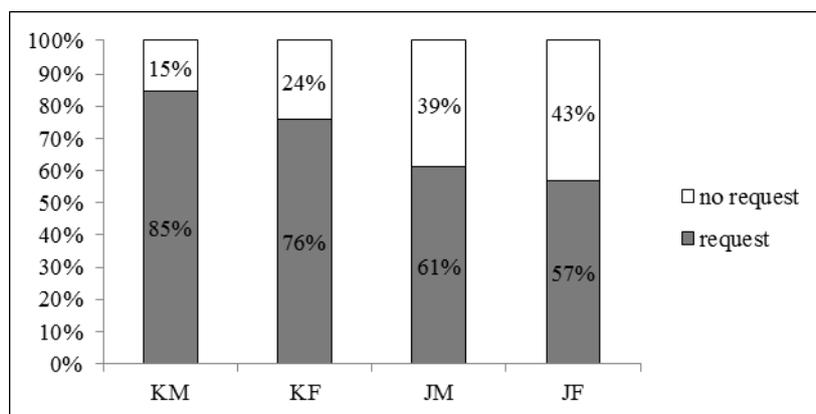

FIGURE 1 Overall Tendency in Using Requests

Most participants employed request tokens, regardless of nationality or gender. However, it can be seen that Koreans used more request tokens overall than did Japanese. More than three-quarters of Korean males and females employed requests, whereas only roughly 60% of Japanese did so. This indicates that Koreans have a tendency to make face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987) more than do their Japanese counterparts.

Comparing the males' and females' use of requests, in each nationality group the former used more requests than the latter. This demonstrates that females tend to lay fewer burdens on their partners compared to the male group. Even though females were reluctant to express requests compared to males, Korean female groups addressed more requests than did Japanese males, which illustrates that rather than a gender difference, the nationality variable might affect the use of request token answering the first research question.

As shown in Figure 2, the most favored strategy is mood derivable (36%) followed by *let's* imperative (20%). These two strategies occupy more than half of the entire body of requests, which means that online communications usually require immediate reactions and these two strategies can be effective ways to deliver a speaker's intention.
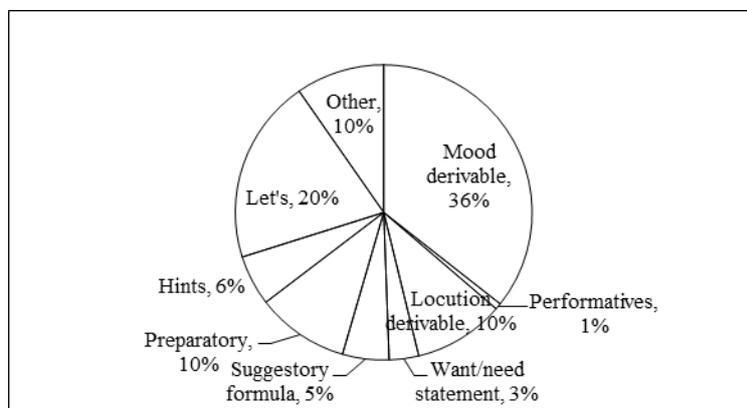
FIGURE 2 Distributions of Request Types Used

The least popular type, in contrast, is performative (e.g., *I recommend you to search after this discussion in the Internet.*) making up only three out of 435 tokens, because it requires particular types of verb and eventually this group of lexicon limits the use of the strategy.

2. Analysis of Request Tokens and Mitigation

1) Cross-cultural differences

To examine the second research question, nationality difference and request strategy use, the tokens were analyzed by nationality groups. The numbers of request types are displayed in Table 4. Analyzing the selected tokens, we find that requesters often asked their partners to join in the chatting or to focus on the topics. The most favored type is mood derivable, which is a direct and explicit strategy according to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) classification. It is plausible to claim that students predominantly employ direct requests because they are unaffected by social and power distance: firstly, the chatting was a course requirement and it equalized all participants; secondly, all participants were in the same age group as university students, which means they were freed from any power distance caused by age. Some tokens applying the mood derivable are ungrammatical or imperfect, but they are comprehensible considering the format of synchronous online communication. For example, verbs are switched to a present participle (e.g., *googling!*) or omitted (e.g., *one more please*).

TABLE 4

Number of Request Tokens by Nationality

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Koreans	96	2	39	6	18	30	20	54	31	296
Japanese	59	1	4	8	4	14	4	34	11	139
Total	155	3	43	14	22	44	24	88	42	435

1. Mood derivable 2. Performative 3. Locution derivable 4.Want/need statement 5. Suggestory formula 6. Preparatory 7. Hints 8. Let's 9. Other

Let's imperatives are also favored by both nationality groups, and they are often used to introduce a new topic (e.g., *Let's talk about*…, 26%) or initiate the chatting (e.g., *Let's start*…, 25%).

Locution derivable (e.g., *We have to wait*.), preparatory (e.g., *Could you continue, Li?*), and other are comparably used. The examples in the category of other show certain patterns: first, verb-ellipsis is frequent (e.g., *more opinions? anything to say?*); second, should/shall is used with the first person pronoun *we* to entice hearers to join the chatting (e.g., *Should we start?*). They appear similar to a hint or suggestion, but the hearers respond immediately to the tokens to attain the speakers' desired effect.

Comparing the frequency of tokens (Table 4), Koreans addressed more requests than did Japanese with the exception of want/need statement, but the distributions (Figure 3) indicate that the Japanese were heavily dependent on mood derivable and *let's* imperatives. Although the Korean data shows relatively diverse types of strategy being used to issue their demands, they were inclined to use simple grammatical structures (i.e., mood derivable, locution derivable, and *let's* imperative) and avoid those strategies which demand rich vocabularies (performative, want/need statement, and suggestory formula). This advocates for vocabulary instruction being essential for Korean EFL students in improving their ability to create more productive request strategies.
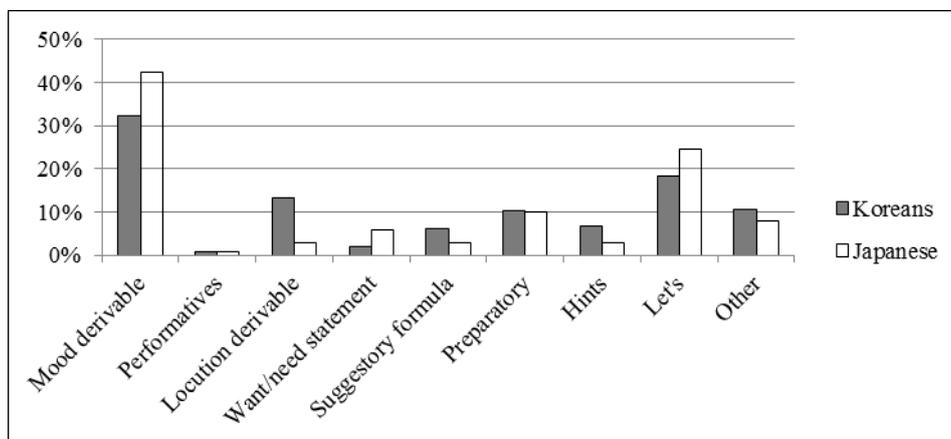
FIGURE 3 Distribution of Request Use by Nationality

Nationality (i.e., cross-cultural variability) brings different preferences in using request strategy. Both Koreans and Japanese prefer to use direct requests through mood derivable, but the percentages describe that Japanese have a strong preference for using mood derivable and *let's* imperative, even though their actual number of uses is smaller than that by Koreans (cf. Table 4). To add a statistical point of view, the first research question that nationality difference affects the use of requests is statistically significant, as a chi-square test reveals that there is a relation between nationality and the distribution of request types [X^2 (df 8, $N = 435) = 23.845, p < .05$]. In short, cross-cultural differences cause different usage of strategies.

In an effort to examine the mitigation, most of the tokens from Japanese are mood derivable with downgraders (42 out of 59, or 71%), and interestingly 41 mitigated forms use *please* and only one token contains a representation of embarrassed laughter (e.g., *hehe*). This illustrates that a large portion of Japanese requests appears very direct but the directness level becomes reduced through mitigated expressions. In contrast, only 36% (35 out of 96) of Korean requests contain lexical (e.g., *please*) and syntactic downgraders (i.e., past modal such as *would*). This does not indicate that Koreans are ruder to their partners; Korean participants issue various forms of request and sometimes they are flexible in a given situation in terms of showing pragmatic knowledge, whereas Japanese use simple structure with fixed forms of mitigation. These findings introduce the concept that Japanese depend heavily on lexical downgraders, and that strategic instruction with vocabulary practice is required to help Japanese students initiate proper speech act patterns.

Besides mood derivable, the overall mitigation between Koreans and Japanese is 29% (86 among 296 tokens) and 41% (58 out of 139), respectively. This suggests that

Japanese try to soften their requests more often. This also supports the third research question, that of a cross-cultural difference in using mitigated forms. As far as nationality differences, Japanese tend to mitigate a direct request or employ less direct strategies such as *let's* imperative. In contrast, Koreans issue more direct forms such as mood derivable and locution derivable.

2) Gender differences

The fourth research questions deals with gender variability and the use of request strategy. Table 5 and Figure 4 depict different request strategies by gender. Both males and females show a strong preference for using mood derivable, followed by *let's* imperative, in the same pattern of overall strategy preference. For the purpose of comparing gender difference, males use more directive requests, mood derivable and locution derivable; females, however, have a tendency to use less direct request strategies (e.g., hints, *let's* imperative, and other). The rest of the strategies are nearly similarly used by both genders.

TABLE 5
Number of Request Tokens by Gender

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Male	83	2	27	8	10	23	10	37	17	217
Female	72	1	16	6	12	21	14	51	25	218
Total	155	3	43	14	22	44	24	88	42	435

1. Mood derivable 2. Performative 3. Locution derivable 4.Want/need statement 5. Suggestory formula 6. Preparatory 7. Hints 8. Let's 9. Other

In gender comparison, the distribution of request strategy (Figure 4) appears to mirror the frequency representation (Table 5). Even though both genders clearly illustrate their preference of request strategy, there is no statistical relation between gender and the distribution of request $[X^2$ (df 8, $N = 435$) = 8.902, $p = 0.351$], which means the fourth research question is not statistically supported.
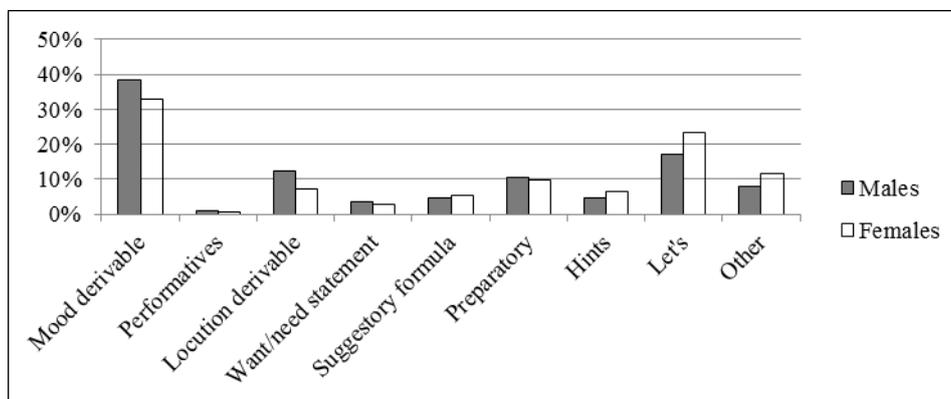
FIGURE 4 Distribution of Request Use by Gender

Additionally, the frequency of mitigated expressions is calculated to prove the final research question: the realization of mitigated expression by gender. First, a third of males' request tokens (74 out of 217, or 33.9%) contain mitigation: the utterances of Korean males at a rate of 31% compared to 42% for Japanese males. Next, females' tokens illustrate similar frequencies as do those of male students' (70 out of 218, 32.3%); the fewest examples of mitigation were collected from Korean females' utterances (34 out of 130, or 26%), whereas 41% of Japanese females' tokens (36 out of 87) featured softening expressions with their requests. In summary, the numbers of mitigated expressions from both genders are almost equal and it is not possible to identify a gender difference.

V. CONCLUSION

It is noteworthy that the present study outlines cross-cultural and gender differences in natural discourse via computer chatting. Request tokens and mitigating expressions are mainly analyzed. There is a statistical significance between nationality and request strategy use, which illustrates that South Koreans and Japanese show different request-making behaviors. However, there is no proof that gender plays a statistically important role in the application of request strategy. In terms of relationship between nationality and gender, South Korean males dominantly apply request forms whereas Japanese females adopt relatively small number of request. Mitigated expressions are often used to reduce the burden on the requestee, and Japanese students make heavy use of lexical downgrader (e.g., *please*) in mood derivable. In contrast, Koreans' reliance on mitigating expressions is relatively smaller than that of Japanese.

Both Korean and Japanese students show imbalanced use of request strategies; limited types of strategy (mood derivable and *let's* imperatives) are much more frequently employed than are others. Moreover, the participants tend to use simple structures and avoid complicated ones. This suggests pedagogical implications for teaching strategies to issue diverse forms of request. In addition, vocabulary instruction should be emphasized in order to employ less popular strategies, such as preparatory.

Certain limitations need to be noted. First, the sample size was insufficient for generalizing the relationship between nationality and gender for request use, even though this study describes the overall tendencies of the target variables. Probing the interaction between nationality and gender on the request forms should be included in the following research. Second, English proficiency levels of the participants were not officially measured and this might skew some findings caused by different language proficiency. Last, the frequency analysis presents pragmatic aspects of request realization; nevertheless, it should explore cultural background to achieve in-depth understanding of various request strategies. It is to say that more cultural and pragmatic explanations may enhance the comprehension of the cross-cultural differences involved.

For further study, more detailed analysis on mitigation is necessary as a means to describe the nature of computer mediated chatting. Speculation based on individual data would explain better the discrepancies between participants. Finally, more request studies using natural communication among a larger EFL population should be delivered in order to clarify the features of non-native English speakers' request strategies.

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Nari Lee
The Institute of Foreign Language Studies
Korea University
145, Anam-ro, Seongbuk-gu, Seoul, 136-701
Tel: (02) 3290-1341
E-mail: lee_nari@yahoo.co.kr

Eunha Hwang
Department of English Language and Literature
Korea University
145, Anam-ro, Seongbuk-gu, Seoul, 136-701
Tel: (02) 3290-1980
E-mail: fuga95@korea.ac.kr