

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **A. Background of the Study**

The concept of speech acts shifts the focus of linguistic study by demonstrating that language is not only used to describe facts but also to perform actions. Studies in speech acts have summarized that the core analysis focuses on how statements are classified as locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts: locutionary as the statement conveying true/false information, illocutionary as specifying the speaker's inferred intent, and perlocutionary as indicating the hearer's subsequent action (Mukhroji et al., 2019). Language goes beyond the mere expression of reality to shape social reality through performative acts framed into five categories (directives, declarations, commissives, expressives, and assertives) that appear in EFL learners' informal communication. Whether making a commitment, issuing a command, or asking a question, every utterance carries a function beyond its literal meaning. As such, language serves as a powerful tool for shaping social interaction rather than merely transmitting information.

One category of illocutionary acts is exercitives, which involves attempts by the speaker to prompt the listener to take action; making a request is an example of this type of speech act (Amelia & Firdaus, 2018). The act itself conveys the speaker's intention and the listener's anticipated response, especially when making requests. These behaviors demonstrate how language

enters into intentional communication, which is essential to understanding pragmatic abilities.

A request is a speech act in which a speaker asks a hearer to act, typically for the speaker's benefit. Prayogo & Tedjaatmadja (2013) stated that every day, people make requests to ask for information, ask for help, ask for permission, and ask the relevant party to do something for them. However, each person uses a different method to make these requests. According to Alfghe and Mohammadzadeh (2021), requests necessitate a response and often employ direct or indirect strategies to mitigate imposition. The authors categorize these strategies into four distinct types: direct, indirect, conventionally indirect (hearer-based), and typically indirect (speaker-based). Mastering these variations in firmness and politeness is essential for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students; developing an awareness of these tactics is crucial for achieving communicative competence in real-world settings.

English for Foreign Language (EFL) aims to equip students with the concept of communicative competence, which encompasses both pragmatic and grammatical understanding. Amumpuni et al. (2025) stated that environmental barriers and the many additional cultures exacerbated the challenges faced by EFL students. This pragmatic and grammatical competence enables learners to use language appropriately in different contexts. However, EFL learners face greater difficulty in developing pragmatic competence and communicating effectively in various social situations due to limited exposure to language functions and cross-cultural

nuances (Nugroho & Rekha, 2020). As a result, research on the development of pragmatic competence, especially on request speech acts in EFL learners, has become an intriguing topic. As Darong (2024) emphasizes, teaching speech acts can improve students' language practice by integrating cultural elements and significantly enhancing communication skills. This underscores the importance of studying how students develop the ability to use language appropriately in social situations. Examining how students respond to requests can provide insight into their overall communication development.

Several researchers have investigated EFL students' use of request speech acts. Hamdani (2021) states that pragmatics is the study of speech activities, which includes not only the act of speaking but also the situation in which communication occurs, which determines meaning. Hardiyanti (2015) finds in their study that students balance politeness with directness, using positive, negative, and bald-on-record strategies depending on the context. Thus, these studies show that EFL students' use of request speech acts is strongly influenced by context and politeness considerations in communication.

Several previous studies have examined the request strategies used by EFL students in different sociocultural contexts. Pardede et al. (2025), in their study, found that EFL students strongly prefer conventionally indirect request strategies. They use strategies to demonstrate their efforts to maintain politeness and harmony in interpersonal relationships. Nugroho et al. (2021) find that students prefer indirect request strategies over direct and non-conventional ones due to cultural considerations, politeness, and social distance

between interlocutors. The varied findings across previous studies have motivated the researcher to conduct the present study.

This study aims to understand how Indonesian EFL students formulate requests in English, particularly with respect to their familiarity with others. The concept of social distance here pertains to the diversity of closeness or formality between speakers, shaping how they express their needs. In making requests, this distance is reflected in word choice, tone, and the social setting in which the interaction takes place. To examine this phenomenon in a focused and meaningful way, this study will involve students from the Department of English Education at Universitas PGRI Madiun, who are expected to have achieved a sufficient level of English proficiency and academic maturity to observe language use. These students will serve as valuable participants in examining how familiarity and social dynamics influence their request strategies in English.

## **B. Research Focus**

The focus of this study is on students in the Department of English Education at Universitas PGRI Madiun to identify the types of strategies and functions employed in request speech acts across various contexts.

## **C. Research Problems**

The research problems of this study are:

1. What request speech act strategies are used by students of the Department of English Education at Universitas PGRI Madiun?

2. What social functions of the request speech act are used by students of the Department of English Education at Universitas PGRI Madiun?

#### **D. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is:

1. To explore the distance-based speech act of request strategies used by students of the Department of English Education at Universitas PGRI Madiun.
2. To examine the social functions of the distance-based speech act of request employed by students of the Department of English Education at Universitas PGRI Madiun.

#### **E. Significance of the Study**

This study provides valuable insights into the social-situational language use of Indonesian EFL students, particularly in the context of making requests in English. Teachers develop more effective teaching strategies by understanding how students modify their requests in response to social distance and familiarity. Students who possess this information can interact more clearly and with less worry in both academic and real-world contexts. Additionally, students' pragmatic competence improves through learning request tactics, which enable them to participate in discussions more responsibly and assertively. Students can thereby enhance their language abilities, build stronger interpersonal relationships, and make valuable contributions to a variety of communication scenarios.

## F. Definition of Key Terms

### 1. Speech Act

Speech act theory explains that language is not just about sharing information; it is also a means of performing actions. Utterances are tools that speakers use to achieve goals like making promises, requests, or claims. This theory shifts the focus from the literal meaning of words to the intentions behind them. In social interactions, language influences others and guides conversations. Each statement is made with a specific intention to get a desired response; for instance, asking “*Can you pass the salt?*” is not just a question about ability but a request for action. Overall, speech act theory shows that communication is driven by the speaker’s aims and by how their words affect the listener’s behavior and attitudes.

### 2. Speech Act of Request

In the study of pragmatics, requests are recognized as essential elements of communication that function as directive speech acts, particularly intended to prompt a listener to provide information or perform a task. Requests are, by their very nature, complex social acts that strike a balance between the speaker’s instrumental aims and the need to preserve interpersonal harmony, rather than straightforward commands. This is frequently accomplished by using indirect language, which implicitly offers the listener the choice to reject, thereby maintaining courtesy and protecting the listener’s autonomy. Requests

are a complex linguistic device that balances the need to express a personal desire with the need to protect the listener's "negative face," or their independence. In the end, requests enable speakers to accomplish their goals while also navigating complicated social dynamics, such as politeness, power structures, and the relative distance between interlocutors.

### 3. Distance-based

Social distance theory explores how perceived closeness or separation between individuals or groups shapes interpersonal interaction, commonly conceptualized through emotional, physical, and cultural dimensions. Within this perspective, social distance is often categorized as distance positive (D+) for formal interactions with strangers and distance negative (D-) for more intimate and familiar relationships. These distinctions are not fixed but are mediated by cultural norms and individual preferences, influencing how speakers manage formality, politeness, and interpersonal engagement.

### 4. EFL Students

Students who study English in a country where it is not the primary language spoken are known as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. They often learn in academic settings. Their primary goal is to build vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and communication skills, rather than acquiring them through everyday interactions.