

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Speech Acts Found in EFL Students' Talks

The concept of speech act is explored in Austin's book "*How to Do Things with Words*" (1962). Through the distinction between constative and performative utterances, Austin was the first to propose that language might be utilized to carry out actions. As a result, declarative statements may be correct or incorrect. Even if the performative utterances are not entirely inaccurate, the activity still includes saying the statement. A speech act is any act that a speaker may perform to communicate an utterance. Pragmatics considers the context of utterance, including the participants in the speech, the spatiotemporal environment, and intentions, to define the types of acts performed by speakers (Wijana, 2021). In addition, speech act theory highlights the dynamic and interactive nature of language use in real-life communication. This theory emphasizes that meaning depends not only on the words spoken but also on how, when, and by whom they are spoken.

This study focuses on illocutionary acts, examining the intended functions behind utterances. The term "*illocution*" describes an utterance's intentional power or purpose. According to Egoro and Gunn (2021), Illocutionary acts describe the actions performed by speech acts. Language is used for these purposes: the power or impact that an utterance or linguistic unit will have when it is delivered, the message that the speaker wants to transmit, or the

action that has to be carried out. Therefore, an illocutionary act serves as a tool through which a speaker expresses emotions, conveys attitudes, and communicates intentions. In this way, language becomes more than just a means of conveying information; it is also a dynamic tool for action and interpersonal engagement.

Every statement in illocutionary perspectives involves pragmatic factors that allow addressees to deduce, rather than merely state, what the speaker is directly, explicitly, and implicitly doing through their utterance (Wijana, 2021). These pragmatic elements help reveal the function of the speech, such as making a request, offering a suggestion, or issuing a command. As a result, communication becomes an interpretative process that goes beyond surface meaning.

Speech act theory, as proposed by Austin (1962), emphasizes that language is not only used to convey information but also to perform actions. Through utterances, speakers can make judgments, give orders, express attitudes, and commit themselves to future actions. In this framework, Austin classifies illocutionary acts into five categories. Verdictives are speech acts used to deliver judgments or evaluations, such as a verdict, an estimate, a grade, or an appraisal. Exercitives involve the exertion of authority, influence, or control and include acts such as appointing, ordering, requesting, warning, and advising. Commissives commit the speaker to a future course of action, for example, through promising or vowing. Behaviors reflect social norms and attitudes and are expressed through actions such as apologizing, congratulating,

blessing, cursing, or challenging. Finally, expositives are used to clarify, interpret, or explain reasoning, arguments, or language use in discourse.

Several studies have examined the role of speech acts in educational settings, particularly in EFL classrooms, to enhance communication and student engagement. Basra and Thoyyibah's (2017) analysis of 673 teacher utterances in an Indonesian EFL classroom using Searle's taxonomy revealed a predominance of directive speech acts, indicative of a teaching style consistent with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. Their findings emphasized that choices of speech acts significantly influence classroom interaction and the development of speaking and writing skills. Meanwhile, Budiasih's (2019) study of the illocutionary acts of international students learning Indonesian identified assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive acts, with assertives being the most frequent.

These actions make it easier for students to interact in the classroom, thereby demonstrating improved pragmatic abilities in the second language. A collective examination of these studies shows that the use of speech acts by teachers and students substantially influences the dynamics of classroom environments. While teachers primarily employ directives to facilitate learning, students tend to rely on assertive acts to express understanding and challenges. This underscores the significance of speech-act awareness in fostering effective and interactive language-learning environments.

In conclusion, speech act theory, particularly the study of illocutionary acts, provides an important perspective for understanding the complexity of

human interaction. By going beyond the literal meaning of words to analyze the speaker's hidden intentions, it becomes clear that language is a dynamic tool for social action. The transition from Austin's basic categories to observations in modern classrooms shows that the effectiveness of the educational environment is highly dependent on pragmatic competence. Whether through teacher instruction or firm student responses, the strategic use of speech acts not only transmits information but also shapes the dynamics of learning and interpersonal interactions, making pragmatic awareness an essential component of language mastery.

Ultimately, speech act theory offers more than a taxonomy of utterances; it offers a lens for understanding how language functions as social action. Austin's original framework, refined through decades of pragmatic research, reveals that meaning is never purely literal; it is shaped by context, intention, and the relationship between speaker and listener. The classroom studies discussed here demonstrate this principle in practice, showing how teachers' directive-heavy speech and students' assertive responses together construct the interactive fabric of language learning. Recognizing these patterns is not merely an academic exercise; it has real pedagogical value, as awareness of illocutionary force can help educators design more communicative, learner-centered classrooms. In this sense, speech act theory bridges linguistic theory and educational practice, reminding us that to speak is always, in some sense, to act.

B. Speech Act of Request Found in Students' Talks

Desire constitutes a form of communication that enables the expression of a polite or formal request for action from others. In the theory of speech acts, requesting is one of the key illocutionary acts that reflects the speaker's intention. When making a request, the speaker assumes that the hearer has the ability, willingness, or opportunity to perform the desired action. The term "ask" is used to request that someone do something (Karina et al., 2021). The context of the request demonstrates how language functions not only to communicate ideas but also to influence others' behavior in a socially appropriate manner.

Requests are classified as "*face-threatening acts*" by Brown & Levinson (1987). As Herget & Pérez (2019) explain, such acts "*run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker,*" threatening either party's desire for autonomy or approval. This classification highlights the social sensitivity of requests, as they often impose on the listener's autonomy or demand their willingness to act. According to Singh et al. (2024), maintaining social harmony and showing respect in conversation requires the use of both positive and negative politeness strategies. Hammani (2019) states that the speech act of requesting requires the listener to provide information and/or perform an action for the speaker's benefit. As a result, speakers commonly use politeness strategies to soften the impact of a request and maintain social harmony.

The degree of imposition, the environmental context, and the relationship between the speaker and listener are the sociopragmatic factors that determine

the effectiveness of a request. Requests are sensitive to subtleties of entitlement, contingency, and the addressee's ability to comply, as Khafaga (2024) points out. As a result, the speaker's initial anticipation of a response is just as important to the communication process as the listener's willingness and capacity to comply. The speaker's objectives and the listener's perceived autonomy and resources must ultimately be carefully balanced for these acts to be successful.

In pragmatic studies, requests are widely recognized as a central type of directive speech act because they play a crucial role in regulating interpersonal interaction. Through requests, speakers attempt to influence others' actions while attending to issues of politeness, power, and social distance. As such, the act of requesting not only serves a functional communicative purpose but also reflects the speaker's intentions, desires, and awareness of the hearer's autonomy. In this regard, Trosborg (1995) characterizes a request as an illocutionary act in which the speaker (the requester) informs the hearer (the requested) that he wishes the requested party to take a certain action to benefit the speaker. According to Saud (2024) the appropriate use of requests will help students improve their pragmatic skills in a second language and a foreign language. To communicate successfully, people who make requests engage in culturally specific social actions and speak in a particular language. Speakers must understand both the linguistic and cultural aspects of making requests. In other words, the speech act of requesting expresses the speaker's intention or desire for the listener to bring about the situation described in the proposition.

Taken together, these perspectives show that requesting is far more than a simple bid for action, it is a socially delicate act that requires speakers to negotiate politeness, power, and the listener's autonomy simultaneously. Literature converges on a central insight, from Brown and Levinson's description of requests as face-threatening acts to Trosborg's description of requests as an expression of the speaker's desire for the listener to act, that successful requests depend on a careful balance between the speaker's intentions and the listener's willingness and capacity to comply. This balance is deeply cultural and requires speakers to use both pragmatic skills and linguistic skills.

1. Speech Act of Request Strategies

Request strategies have been widely examined in pragmatic studies as they reflect how speakers express intentions while considering social norms and interpersonal relations. One influential framework for analyzing request strategies was proposed by Trosborg (1995), who categorized requests based on their level of directness and the speaker's perspective. Trosborg categorized request strategies into four types:

a) Direct requests

A direct request is one in which the speaker makes their intention known straightforwardly and unambiguously. The request has an explicit illocutionary power and frequently employs imperative or performative forms. Among the tactics employed are imperative and performative.

b) Indirect requests

Indirect requests lack an explicit illocutionary force. In these situations, neither the intended action nor the hearer's role as the agent expected to perform it is explicitly stated by the speaker. Rather, the speaker uses hinting tactics to communicate the request.

c) Conventionally indirect requests (hearer-oriented conditions)

The speaker of this kind of request concentrates on the hearer's ability or willingness to cooperate. The request frequently uses ability-, willingness-, or permission-based tactics, and the hearer is viewed as responsible for the activity.

d) Typically indirect requests (Speaker-based conditions)

These requests draw attention away from the hearer and onto the speaker's own needs, wants, or desires. As the speaker focuses the speech act on their own condition, the request gets more straightforward. Expressions of needs, wants, or desires are frequently used in this tactic.

2. Speech Act of Request Functions Found in Indonesian EFL Students

Requests can serve various communicative functions depending on the speaker's intention and the hearer's expected response. In pragmatic studies, these functions are often categorized to explain how requests operate in different interactional contexts. One such classification was proposed by Tsui (1994:101) who classifies requests into five main functions:

a) Request for Action

This type of request asks someone to perform a specific action that benefits the speaker. The expected response often requires the hearer to carry out a verbal or nonverbal action. Requests for action commonly use modal verbs such as “*can you...?*” or “*could you...?*”. Additionally, “*will you...?*” and “*would you...?*” can also be used to ask someone to do something politely.

b) Request for Permission

This request seeks approval or permission from someone to carry out the future action, usually for the speaker’s own advantage. Because the action primarily benefits the speaker and is not overly burdensome, permission requests are often difficult to refuse.

c) Offer

An offer is a request in which the speaker proposes to provide something to the hearer, who can accept or reject it. This action benefits the hearer, and the response often includes appreciation or thanks. Common expressions for offers include “*Can I help you?*” or “*Let me get a chair for you.*” Such utterances indicate the speaker’s willingness to perform future actions for the hearer's sake.

d) Invitation

An invitation invites the hearer to go or come to a place or event. The hearer has the option to accept or refuse the invitation, which is

generally considered beneficial to them. Invitations are frequently phrased as “*would you like...?*”

e) Proposal

Proposals request suggestions and imply that both the speaker and the hearer engage in a mutually beneficial verbal or nonverbal action. Typical expressions used for proposals include “*can/could/shall we...?*”, “*let’s...*”, and “*why don’t we...?*”

Requests may serve different communicative purposes in practical research, depending on the speaker's intent and the listener's anticipated reaction. Tsui (1994) groups requests into five primary functions: proposal, invitation, offer, request for authorization, and request for action. As these two request categories are the most pertinent to the data being studied, this research, however, concentrates on two particular aspects of requests: requests for permission and requests for action. An utterance in which the speaker uses verbal or nonverbal cues to ask the listener to take a specific action that would be advantageous to the speaker is known as a request for action. A request for permission, on the other hand, entails the speaker asking to perform a future action that primarily benefits the speaker and is often less intrusive on the audience. The goal of this research is to provide a more targeted examination of how speakers express demands and manage interpersonal relationships in the chosen interactive setting, focusing on these two request functions.

In summary, request acts are complex sociopragmatic tools that balance the speaker's desires with the listener's social "*face*". By analyzing these acts through Trosborg's levels of familiarity and Tsui's functional categories, it becomes clear that successful requests require more than just linguistic accuracy; they also require a keen awareness of power dynamics and politeness. Although the literature provides a broad spectrum of request types, this study's specific focus on action and permission requests among Indonesian EFL students highlights the critical functions they serve in navigating classroom and interpersonal boundaries. Ultimately, understanding how these students select and soften their request strategies provides valuable insights into their developing pragmatic competence and their ability to influence others socially appropriately.

C. Distance-based in Request Speech Act

Regardless of who starts the conversation, social distance (D) has a symmetrical link between speaker and hearer. According to López (2021), the degree of familiarity or unfamiliarity between the speaker and the hearer is referred to as social distance (D), which takes the form of gradients from formal "*stranger*" encounters (D+: positive distance, marked by out-group perceptions and normative separation) to intimate "*We*" relationships (D-: negative distance, characterized by close emotional bonds and shared cultural patterns). This dimension plays a crucial role in shaping the linguistic form and level of a speech act, particularly by calibrating formality, indirectness, and interpersonal engagement to navigate zones of strangeness or closeness.

A key factor in determining how speakers formulate requests to reduce interpersonal conflict is managing social distance. The frequency of interaction and the degree of shared resources, values, and experiences between interlocutors are commonly used to measure social distance (Marshall & Wilks, 2024). A request inherently involves coercion and is categorized as a face-threatening act (FTA) because it compels the listener to act in the speaker's interest. Therefore, the choice of request strategy is heavily influenced by the degree of social distance. Participants frequently rely on established reciprocity and exchange patterns when in close social proximity. Viewing interaction as a balance of mutual support rather than a heavy imposition helps this regular give-and-take both reflect and maintain existing intimacy.

Requests may be more direct and casual when the speaker and listener have a close social relationship (negative distance) and interact frequently. A speaker may say, *"Help me carry this,"* among close friends without worrying about destroying the relationship. On the other hand, speakers typically use more formal, indirect, or polite techniques to reduce the risk of making listeners feel uncomfortable when the social distance is quite large (positive distance), such as between strangers or people of different social status. The statement *"Would you mind helping me carry this, please?"* might be used in similar situations. The speaker's awareness of social conventions and the need to maintain respect during the exchange is evident in this indirectness.

In conclusion, social distance (D) is a fundamental regulator of linguistic behavior, determining the balance between assertiveness and politeness in

language use. As speakers navigate the spectrum from intimate “*We*” relationships to formal encounters with “*strangers*,” they attach to their demands. While proximity allows for the efficiency of direct command, greater social distance necessitates indirectness to preserve the listener's dignity and maintain social harmony. Ultimately, the success of an utterance depends not only on grammatical accuracy but also on advanced sociopragmatic awareness, where the chosen strategy reflects the speaker's appropriate adjustment to interpersonal bonds.

D. Review of Relevant Research

The area of interlanguage pragmatics has become more attentive to how non-native individuals manage the intricacies of social exchanges. Several researchers have looked into the speech acts related to requests among learners of English as a foreign language, revealing subtle patterns in their pragmatic abilities. Hamdani (2021) points out that pragmatics involves examining speech acts, extending beyond basic statements to encompass the communicative environments that shape their understanding. In the end, these insights imply that language proficiency requires not only grammatical correctness but also a profound understanding of the social subtleties that govern meaningful interactions.

Research shows that EFL learners frequently use a variety of advanced strategies to achieve both clarity and social cohesion. Hardiyanti (2015) reveals that these learners skillfully navigate the complexities of politeness and straightforwardness, employing strategies such as positive politeness, negative

politeness, and bald-on-record approaches in response to the demands of distinct contexts. Nugroho et al. (2021) likewise note a significant inclination to prefer indirect request strategies, particularly conventionally indirect ones, over direct or less conventional approaches, shaped by cultural practices, politeness conventions, and the social distance between the speakers. These results illustrate the connection between language use and interpersonal relationships in the context of second-language acquisition, showing that the selection of a request strategy is seldom random but rather reflects the learner's sociocultural identity.

The studies show that while there are common politeness patterns, how these are applied can vary and needs more research. There are gaps in understanding how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, especially from Indonesia, make requests based on their familiarity with others. This study aims to explore how Indonesian EFL learners, especially those in the Department of English Education at Universitas PGRI Madiun, express their needs in English, considering the social distance between speakers. It combines speech act theory with intercultural communication studies to offer new insights into how regional identities influence communication among Indonesians in the global English-speaking community.

In conclusion, existing research shows that pragmatic competence is as important as grammatical accuracy, especially in complex actions such as making requests. Although previous studies have consistently highlighted a preference for conventional indirect strategies among learners of English as a

foreign language (EFL), there is still a need to explore how these patterns emerge in specific regional and academic contexts. Focusing on students in the Department of English education at Universitas PGRI Madiun, this study aims to address this gap by going beyond general theories to explore the lived experiences of Indonesian learners. Investigating how these students adjust their requests according to social distance will not only reveal their level of pragmatic proficiency but also shed light on how their unique cultural identities shape their interactions within the global English-speaking community.

E. Theoretical Framework

This research is founded on the knowledge base of an illocutionary act, the speech act of request occurs when the speaker tries to get the hearer to do something. These behaviors are inherently interactive and depend on the speaker's comprehension of interpersonal dynamics, contextual appropriateness, and social standards, as well as their language choices. Requests frequently exhibit varying degrees of directness and politeness, reflecting the speaker's aim and awareness of the social context.

The degree of formality or familiarity between interlocutors is referred to as the distance-based dimension, and it has a big impact on how requests are phrased. To preserve harmony and avoid imposition, speakers typically employ more formal, indirect, and courteous language when social distance is large (high distance). On the other hand, requests are often more straightforward and informal when social distance is minimal (e.g., between close friends or peers).

The scope of this research is specifically limited to sixth-semester students in the Department of English Education at Universitas PGRI Madiun. They are intended to develop both pragmatic competence, the capacity to use language effectively and properly in a variety of social contexts, and grammatical competence as English language learners in a foreign language setting. Their comprehension of language structures and cultural standards is demonstrated by their ability to perform speech acts, especially requests. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the extent to which Indonesian EFL students can generate appropriate request speech acts across different levels of social distance. The study aims to shed light on their pragmatic skills and potential difficulties with interpersonal communication in English by examining the strategies they employ and the function of their requests. Understanding how social context, language ability, and communicative purpose interact in the speech acts that EFL learners engage in requires knowledge of their interrelationships.

To provide a clear picture of the research flow concept, this study uses the following conceptual framework:

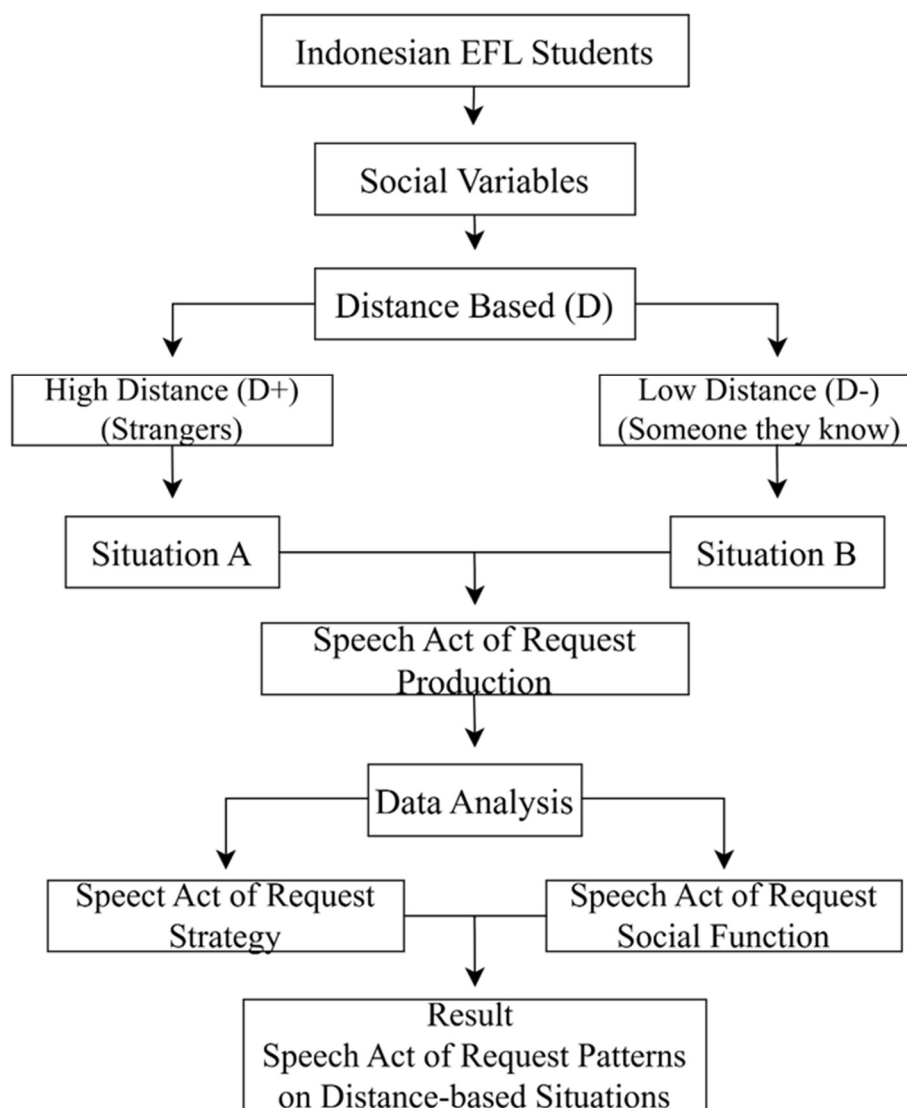


Figure 2.1 The Concept of Speech Acts of Request in Indonesian EFL Students

The figure above is a concept of speech acts of request among Indonesian EFL students. Indonesian EFL students possess distance-based socialization skills (D). This distance-based approach is divided into two categories: high distance (D+) and low distance (D-). High distance (D+) here describes the

relationship between a person and a stranger, while low distance (D-) describes those who already know one another.

Based on these two distance categories, students would be presented with scenarios and asked to respond to each as data for this study. Based on the students' responses, the researcher analyzed which request strategies and social functions of the speech act of request the students use when interacting with their conversation partners. This study identifies forms of the speech act of request influenced by distance-based interactions.