

Difference in Requests between Koreans and Americans

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This paper examines "Difference in Requests." The study of speech acts is a crucial area in sociolinguistics and ethnolinguistics, and has aided in the development of TESOL. It also provides a useful means of relating linguistic form and communicative intent. This paper concentrated on 3 request strategies, which were requests made with an explanation, requests made without an explanation and no requests. The purpose of this study, and of concern in TESOL, was to discover whether Koreans framed their requests differently under different conditions. Based on these differences, I wanted to ascertain whether Koreans who spoke English as a second language, and who have lived in the United States, frame their requests as they would in their native tongues thus creating the potential for sociolinguistic failure, or use American sociolinguistic style.

As the results of the study, it was found that in the majority of cases, Americans made an explanation with a request. In many cases the Koreans living in Korea would not give an explanation when making a request. Rather, they were direct in request. In many cases the Korean speaking English and living in the US had adopted the American request strategy of giving an explanation.

[speech acts/request methods/sociolinguistics]

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of speech acts is a crucial area in sociolinguistics and ethnolinguistics, and has aided in the development of TESOL. What is a speech act? In general, speech acts are acts of communication. To communicate is to express a certain attitude; the type of speech act being performed corresponds to the type of attitude being expressed (Bach, 1979). John Searle states that the speech act is made up of three

parts: uttering the words, or performing the “utterance act”; referring and predication, or performing a “propositional act”; and stating, questioning, commanding, etc. or performing the “illocutionary act” (Searle, 1969). The last of these acts, the “illocutionary act,” was named by Austin, who distinguished between “the performance of the act of saying something”, which he called a “locutionary” act and “the performance of an act in saying something,” which he called an “illocutionary” act (Austin, 1962). In other words, the locutionary act is the utterance of words and the illocutionary act is the meaning behind the utterance. There are many verbs that denote illocutionary acts, such as “to state,” “describe,” “assert,” “warn,” “remark,” “comment,” “command,” “order,” “request,” etc. (Searle, 1969). This research will concentrate on the final illocutionary act listed, the request.

The study of speech acts provides a useful means of relating linguistic form and communicative intent (Achiba, 2003). Studies conducted by Blum-Kulka (1987), Takahashi & Beebe (1987), and other researchers have shown that speech acts vary between cultures. A speech act, whether it is apologizing, thanking, scolding, complementing, inviting, greeting or parting has important cultural information embedded in it (Wolfson, 1989). This can provide a good insight into the way people from different cultures think. Speech acts can be a window into the values and norms of a particular culture or speech group.

These variances are also a huge disadvantage to second language acquisition. The disadvantage comes in the form of both the structure of the speech act (grammar) and its appropriateness in relation to its timing and the interlocutors involved (sociolinguistic). A grammatical error can be forgiven as it makes it obvious that the second language learner (L2) is still acquiring the language and has made an error in his or her speech. If the L2 learner speaks the target language well, or is grammatically competent, but causes a sociolinguist failure, by saying something which, though appropriate in his native tongue, is not appropriate in the target language, will then cause a communication breakdown, offence or, in the worse case scenario, a communication conflict. It is these sociolinguistic failures that are of concern to those both teaching and learning a second language. It is important to unearth these sociolinguistic differences in order to highlight and make L2 learners and speakers aware of them to prevent any communication breakdowns or conflicts.

A good speech act to research is requests. These are important for L2 speakers, as they are one of the most commonly used speech acts. For people who are new to a country or culture, it is absolutely vital to be able to make requests appropriately and without offence in order to progress. What is the definition of a request? 'Request' refers inclusively to an utterance that is intended to indicate the speaker's desire to regulate the behavior of the listener – that is, to get the listener to do something (Becker, 1982). To put it more simply, "...requests are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something" (Achiba, 2003, p. 6). There are several factors that affect the way a request is formulated, and these include: age, social distance, social status and the work involved in meeting the request (Wolfson, 1989). For example, if you are requesting help in repairing your car, this favor will almost certainly be quite physically demanding, and time consuming. As a result, you will ask the favor in the most polite way possible in order to obtain a positive response from the hearer. In certain cultures, age is a significant factor. Many Asian cultures are influenced by Confucianism which holds older people in high regard (Byon, Chun & Thomas, 1999), and so again, this would affect the way a request is phrased.

This research concentrated on 3 request strategies, which were requests made with an explanation, requests made without an explanation and no requests. The aim of the research was to discover how the factors discussed above affect the way Koreans and Americans phrase their requests. The Hypothesis was as follows:

- Americans would most likely make a request without giving an explanation and this would not be influenced by age or status of hearer.
- Age and Status would influence the way Koreans speaking Korean would make a request.
- Koreans speaking English, when speaking to other nationalities would adopt the US strategy of making requests.

The first part of the hypothesis is based on assumptions that Americans are more direct when making a request and because of the value they place on equality and individualism, they would be less likely to differentiate between hearers in their request methods. The second, concerning Koreans, is again based on social factors, this time where Korean society traditionally puts emphasis on age and social status, which is based on the Confucian philosophy, where 'relationships were constructed

on hierarchical pattern with the senior member accorded with a wide range of prerogatives and authority with respect to the Junior member' (Bond & Hwang, 1987). On the third and final part of the hypothesis, if Koreans have been studying in the United States, it is assumed that they have acquired some American speech strategies through the classroom and daily interactions.

The purpose of this study was to test this hypothesis by asking the following questions: first, were there any differences in how Americans and Koreans make requests? If so, what were these differences and in which situations did they occur? Finally, did the Koreans, who spoke English and lived in the United States, adopt the American request methods?

The overall aim, and of concern in TESOL, was to discover whether Koreans framed their requests differently under different conditions, taking into account the factors discussed by Wolfson (1989). Based on these differences, I wanted to ascertain whether Koreans who spoke English as a second language, and who have lived in the United States, frame their requests as they would in their native tongues thus creating the potential for sociolinguistic failure, or use American sociolinguistic style. If sociolinguistic failure did occur then there would be the potential for these Koreans making inappropriate requests under certain conditions, thus possibly causing offence. If this was the case, then this problem would have to be remedied.

II. METHOD AND PROCEDURE

To do the research in the simplest, quickest and most affordable way, I created a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). This questionnaire was comprised of five scenarios with 4 questions per scenario. The scenarios and questions covered different factors that I thought would influence the way the respondents would make a request. These factors were based on the listener's social status, gender, social distance, family relationship and age. The first one was prompting the respondent to request a ride from four types of people of different social status, social distance and gender. The different people were an immediate supervisor, a female work colleague, a male work colleague and a new employee. The second scenario prompted the respondent to

request a neighbor to turn down his or her loud music late at night. The neighbors varied in age, gender and social status. These were an older man, a younger female, a rich man and a mechanic. The third scenario was a request to borrow money from four kinds of people: a close friend, parents, a work colleague and a fellow student. The fourth scenario was a request to make an appointment via e-mail to types kinds of people—an older male, a younger male, an older female and a younger female. The last one was request to borrow a car from a father, a good friend, a younger sibling and an older sibling.

Each question had 4 multiple-choice options as possible answers. This would help control and simplify the responses and place them into three categories. These were requests with an explanation, requests without an explanation, no requests and others.

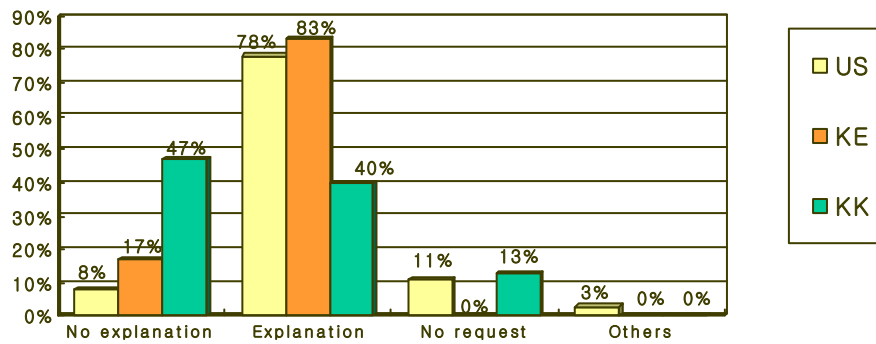
The sample was made up of 90 respondents (45 males and 45 females) and was split up into three groups of 30 respondents. These were Americans (US), Koreans who spoke English fluently and were living in the United States (KE), and Koreans who lived in Korea and spoke Korean only (KK). By having three groups, I hoped to ascertain whether there were differences in how the US and KK made requests and to discover if the KE group made requests in a similar way to the US or the KK group. If the KE respondents used the US request methods in the same scenarios then they had adopted the US sociolinguistic style but if they were similar, or identical, to the KK group then there would be a high likelihood of sociolinguistic failure when the KE respondents make requests to members of the target culture. Due to time and other limitations, I was unable to control the age factor and so the ages of each group vary and are not consistent throughout the sample. The breakdown was as follows: the average age of the US group was forty and over; the KE group was early thirties and the KK group was between twenty and thirty years of age. In some scenarios this was an important factor.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following results are from the questions where noticeable differences occurred in the responses. A copy of the questionnaire is provided at the end of this paper.

Scenario A is set in a work place and requires the respondents to consider the factors of social status and age in their request. In this scenario, only question two showed any significant difference in responses between the groups.

FIGURE 1



Note P=0.001

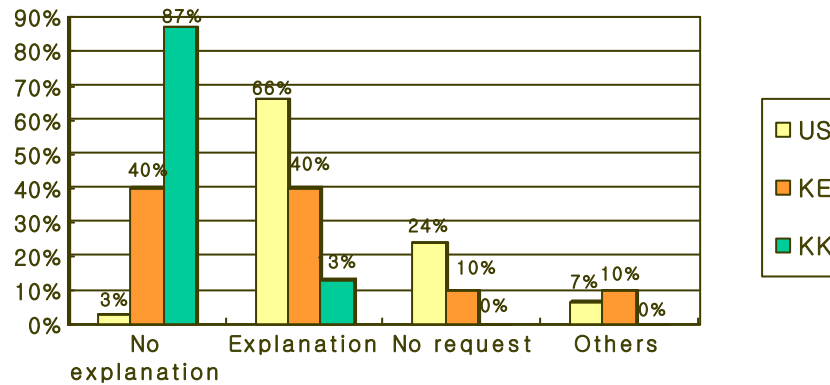
FIGURE 1. Your child has become sick at the kindergarten. You are at work but have no personal transportation. You require your female work colleague to take you to the kindergarten to pick up your child and to take you both back home. What would you say?

Here the respondent was asked how they request a ride from a female work colleague. As seen in FIGURE 1, a high percentage of US and KE respondents gave an explanation when making a request but 47% of KK did not give an explanation. It is interesting to note that there is a significant difference in responses from KK and KE. It would appear to show that the KE respondents were using the US request method in this situation. This results from the KK respondents might be a reflection of the KK sample itself, which was predominantly made up of females in their twenties, some of which had little experience working in an office. Here I also see that instead

of giving a direct request, without an explanation as hypothesized, the US sample did give an explanation.

In scenario C, the next scenario with significant responses, I wanted to see how the factor of social distance affected the request strategies of the respondents. All the questions had responses that were of significance.

FIGURE 2

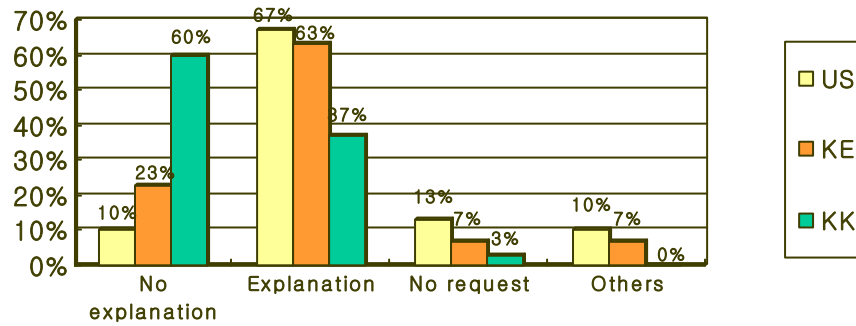


Note P=0.000

FIGURE 2. You need to buy two textbooks for a night class but you have little money until you are paid in 3 days. How would you ask to borrow the money if the lender were a close friend?

The results of question 9 (seen in FIGURE 2) show that 66% of US and 40% of KE would give an explanation when requesting to borrow money from a close friend. Nearly 90% of KK would give no explanation. As with before, I see that KK were least likely to give an explanation but KE would adopt the US method of giving an explanation. The results show that the KK respondents would feel comfortable in making a request without an explanation to someone who is socially close.

FIGURE 3

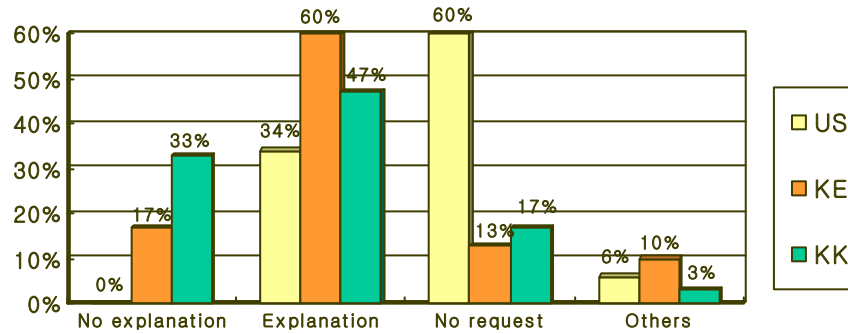


Note P=0.002

FIGURE 3. You need to buy two textbooks for a night class but you have little money until you are to be paid in 3 days. How would you ask to borrow the money if the lender was your parents?

The results of question 10 (FIGURE 3) show that 67% of US and 63% KE would give an explanation when borrowing money from their parents. Only 10% of the US respondents would make a request directly. For the KK respondents, more than half would make a request directly to their parents. So far I see that the majority of both the US and KE respondents have consistently given an explanation when making a request. Again, the results show a tendency for the KK group not to give an explanation to someone who is socially familiar.

FIGURE 4

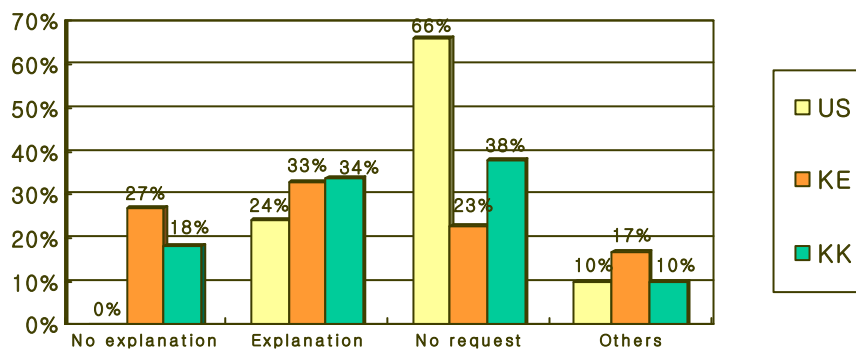


Note P=0.000

FIGURE 4. You need to buy two textbooks for a night class but you have little money until you are to be paid in 3 days. How would you ask to borrow the money if the lender were your work colleague?

Question 11 (FIGURE 4) shows the request made to a work colleague. Not one US respondent would make a request without an explanation. Significantly, nearly two thirds of U.S. respondents would not make a request to borrow money, while both Koreans groups would give an explanation. There is a break with the KK group's pattern, where there is a small percentage of respondents that will make a request without an explanation. This might be explained by Wolfson's Bulge Theory (Wolfson, 1989), which basically says that in uncertain relationships a person is less likely to make a demand on the another as they are uncertain of the outcome and do not wish to offend the receiver of the requests.

FIGURE 5



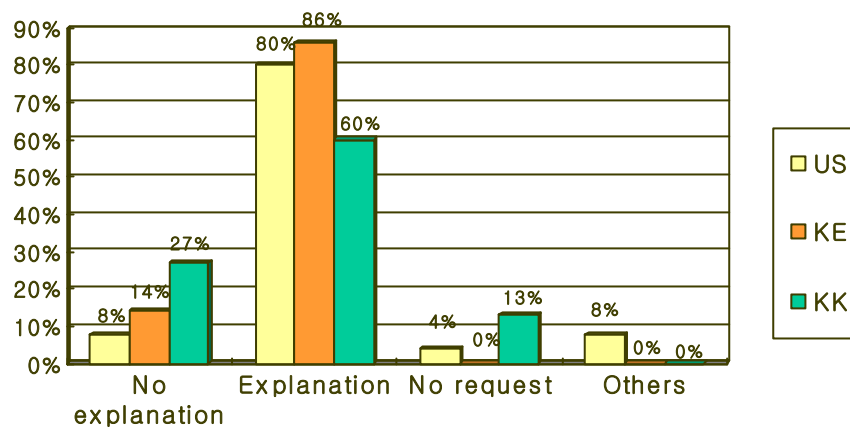
Note P=0.025

FIGURE 5. You need to buy two textbooks for a night class but you have little money until you get paid in 3 days. How would you ask to borrow the money if the lender were a fellow student?

In question 12 (FIGURE 5), I can see a similar result to question 11, when requesting to borrow money from a fellow student in the night class. The results here show that no US respondents would make a request without any explanation, while 66% of US respondents would not make a request to borrow money. One third of the KE respondents and one third of the KK respondents would give an explanation while nearly 40% of the KK group would not make a request when borrowing money from fellow students. This is significantly higher than when requesting from a work colleague. This might be that there is less social distance between Korean students than with U.S. students.

In scenario D, I was trying to ascertain how a combination of social status, age and gender would influence the formulation of requests by the different groups. All four questions showed significant responses in that they broke with the trends shown in the other scenarios.

FIGURE 6

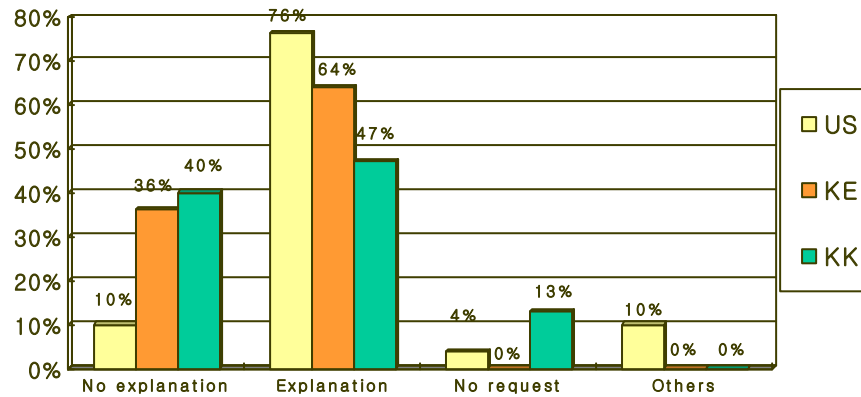


Note P=0.023

FIGURE 6. You would like to make an important appointment with your employer to discuss a pay rise but have to make it via e-mail, as the employer is neither in the office or available by phone. If the employer is an older male, how would you make your request?

Question 13 (FIGURE 6) shows the responses made when requesting an older male employer. The result shows that 80% of US respondents, 86% of KE respondents, and 60% KK respondents would give an explanation when making an appointment with an older male employer. With Americans this was consistent with their request strategy thus far. The Korean result, which in this research has not typically given an explanation, might be a reflection of their value of respecting both age and social status, which has been discussed earlier.

FIGURE 7

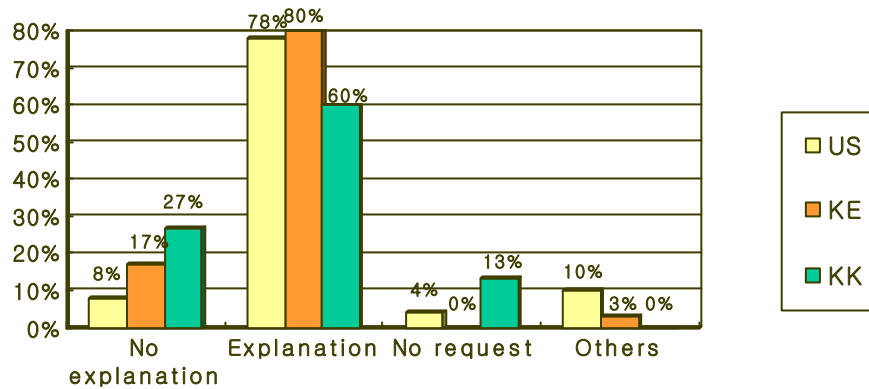


Note: $P=0.023$

FIGURE 7. You would like to make an important appointment with your employer to discuss a pay rise but have to make it via e-mail, as the employer is neither in the office or available by phone. If the employer is a younger male, how would you make your request?

Question 14 (FIGURE 7) is concerned with making a request to a younger male employer. Only 10% of US respondents would not give an explanation. A majority of the US and KE respondents would give an explanation when making an appointment. Nearly half of the KK respondents would make a request with an explanation, while 40% did not. Here age plays a role with the KK group, as might be expected from Asian cultural attitude towards age.

FIGURE 8

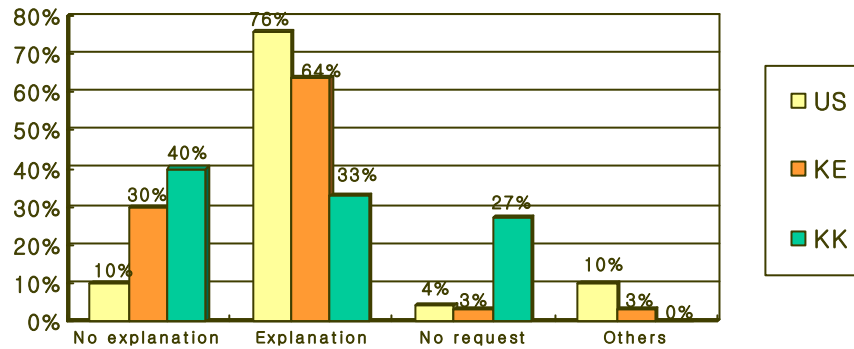


Note: $P=0.040$

FIGURE 8. You would like to make an important appointment with your employer to discuss a pay rise but have to make it via e-mail, as the employer is neither in the office or available by phone. If the employer is an older female, how would you make your request?

Question 15 (FIGURE 8) shows the responses made when requesting an older female. As the result shows here, the majority of respondents in all groups would give an explanation to an older female employer when making an appointment. A low percentage of Americans would not make any request. These results are very similar to those when requesting an older male employee, again, probably a reflection of the Asian attitude towards age. Gender would also appear to be a factor here as the overall percentages are lower, which could be a reflection on both Eastern and Western attitudes toward superiority of females in the work environment.

FIGURE 9



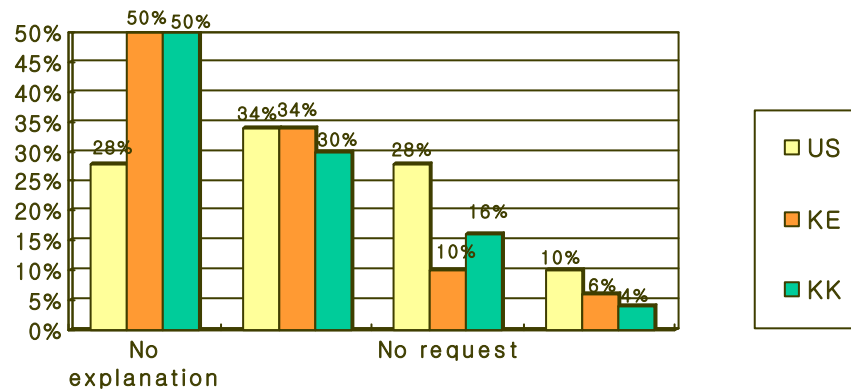
Note: $P=0.001$

FIGURE 9. You would like to make an important appointment with your employer to discuss a pay rise but have to make it via e-mail, as the employer is neither in the office or available by phone. If the employer is a younger female, how would you make your request?

Question 16 (FIGURE 9) shows the responses made when requesting a younger female employer. Forty percent of the KK group would not give an explanation. More than half of the US and KE respondents would give an explanation. Twenty-seven percent of the KK respondents would not make any request, which shows the Asian discomfort in asking for a pay increase, which they might feel is inappropriate to discuss with a younger female. Again, in general, age was a factor with both Korean groups.

In Scenario E, I wanted to see how the factors of family relationships and social distance affected the request method of all three groups. Only two questions had significant responses.

FIGURE 10



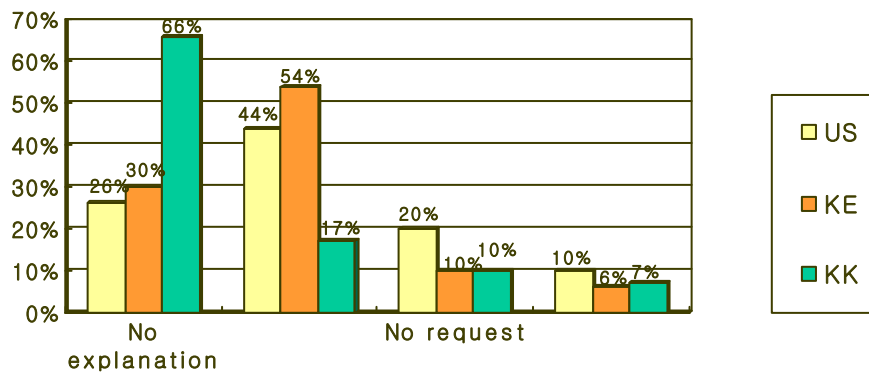
Note: $P = .0417$

FIGURE 10. You would like to ask someone out to a party but, unfortunately, your car is being repaired so you need to borrow a car from your father. How would you make a request?

Question 17 (FIGURE 10) shows the responses made when requesting to borrow a car from the father. As the results show here, both Korean groups would respond in the same way. The majority felt comfortable in requesting to borrow the car from their father without an explanation because they saw their father's property as their family's property. Twenty-eight percent of Americans would not give an explanation and 34% would give an explanation. Significantly, Twenty-eight percent of US respondents would not make a request. This is probably a reflection of the American attitude of individual ownership, where the US respondent would feel that they would not impose on their father. This is the reverse of the Korean value of collective property. This issue was discussed by Byon, Chun and Thomas(1989) who suggested that, 'the greatest cultural contrast exists between the American and Chinese/Korean cultures-between the American preoccupation with individual freedom

(individualistic orientation) and the Chinese preoccupation with social order (collectivist orientation).’

FIGURE 11



Note: $P=0.016$

FIGURE 11. You would like to ask someone out to a party but, unfortunately, your car is being repaired so you need to borrow a car from your good friend. How would you make a request?

Question 18 (FIGURE 11) shows the responses made when requesting to borrow a car from a good friend. Sixty-six percent of the KK respondents felt comfortable in asking to borrow a car from their friends without explanations. Both the US and KE respondents were similar, where 44% of US and 54% of KE respondents would make the request with an explanation. The percentage of both Korean groups that would not make any request is same. The attitude toward individual ownership might also be seen when requesting to borrow a car from a good friend. Again, I see that the US respondents would give an explanation and the KK respondents would give no explanation. It can also be seen that 20% of the US respondents would make no

request. Interestingly, the Koreans who live in the States do give an explanation thus adopted the American strategy in this case.

IV. CONCLUSION

The focus in this study has been on investigating requests of Korean speakers of English, living in the United States, by comparing their request realizations with those of the Americans. As the results of the study indicate, it was found that in the majority of cases, Americans made an explanation with a request, which did not support the hypothesis. In many cases the Koreans living in Korea would not give an explanation when making a request. Rather, they were direct in request. In one scenario, age and gender did influence the way Koreans formulated their requests. In many cases the Korean speaking English and living in the US had adopted the American request strategy of giving an explanation which would suggest that in this particular sample the Korean had learned some of US norms in communication.

Concerning the limitations of the study, though the DCT has numerous advantages, informants' responses to the DCT did not necessarily represent what they would say in actual communicative situations. So in order to better understand the Korean learners' use of making requests, it would be desirable to conduct further research in which the DCT data from this study would be compared with data from other methods, such as an open role play and audio recordings, which would allow the subjects to interact in an open-ended context. It would also be of value if all the respondents throughout the sample were of roughly the same age so that a determination, and could be made on request methods in any given age group.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire on Requests

Nationality: _____ Language Spoken for Survey: _____

Gender: ____ Male ____ Female Age: ____ 20-29 ____ 30-39 ____ 40 and Over

Instructions

This questionnaire contains 5 scenarios. Each scenario describes a situation that will result in a request being made. Carefully read through each scenario and answer the multiple-choice questions that follow the scenario. The multiple-choice options are shown after the first question of each scenario. Circle the option that matches the way you would make the request in each situation. If you should choose “other” as your response, please write in detail how you would phrase your request.

Scenario A – Requesting a Favor

Your child has become sick at the kindergarten. You are at work but have no personal transportation. You require someone to take you to the kindergarten to pick up your child and to take you both back home. What would you say?

1. If the person is your immediate supervisor?

A. “Can you take me to my daughter’s kindergarten and drop us off at home after?”

B. “My daughter is sick at the kindergarten and I was wondering if you could please take me there, so that I can pick her up, and then take us home.”

C. I would not make a request.

D. Other: (Please write your response in the box provided below):

2. If the person is a female work colleague?

A

B

C

D:

Write response for D here:

3. If the person is a male work colleague?

A

B

C

D:

Write response for D here:

4. If the person is a new employee?

A

B

C

D:

Write response for D here:

Scenario B – Requesting your neighbor to be silent.

You are working late on a project and your neighbor is playing music loudly. It is after 11 pm and you have only half completed the work which is due the next morning. However, you can not concentrate on the work as the music is very loud. You do not know your neighbor very well but decide to ask your neighbor to turn the music down. What would you say?

1. If you're neighbor is an older man?

A. "Can you turn the music down?"

B. "I am working on an important project and was wondering if you wouldn't mind turning your music down"

C. I would not make a request.

D. Other: (Please write your response in the box provided below):

2. If the neighbor is a younger female?

A

B

C

D:

Write response for D here:

3. If your neighbor is a rich man and is throwing a party for his friends?

A B C D:

Write response for D here:

4. If your neighbor is a mechanic and is having drinks with his motor biking friends?

A B C D:

Write response for D here:

Scenario C – Request to Borrow Money

You need to buy two textbooks for a night class but you have little money until you get paid in 3 days. One book is cheaper than the other. How would you ask to borrow the money?

1. If the lender were a close friend.

A. "Please could I borrow some money?"

B. "I am a little short of money until I get paid in 3 days. I was wondering if you could lend me some money to buy 2 text books for my night class."

C. I would not make a request.

D. Other (Please write your response in the box provided below):

2. If the lender were one of your parents.

A B C D:

Write response for D here:

3. If the lender were a work colleague.

A B C D:

Write response for D here:

4. If the lender were a fellow student in the night class?

A B C D:

Write response for D here:

Scenario D – A Request for an Appointment Via E-mail.

You would like to make an important appointment with your employer to discuss a pay rise but have to make it via e-mail, as the employer is neither in the office or available by phone. How would you make your request?

1. If the employer is an older male?

A. "Can we make an appointment? I want to discuss a pay rise with you"

B. "I was wondering if it would be possible to make an appointment with you so that I can discuss something important."

C. I would not make a request.

D. Other (Please write your response in the box provided below):

2. If the employer is a younger male?

A B C D:

Write response for D here:

3. If the employer is an older female?

A

B

C

D:

Write response for D here:

4. If the employer is a younger female?

A

B

C

D:

Write response for D here:

Scenario E – Request to Borrow a Car

You would like to ask someone out to a party but, unfortunately, your car is being repaired so you need to borrow a car from someone. How would you make the request?

1. If the person is your father?

A. "Can I borrow your car?"

B. "I was wondering if I could please borrow your car so I can go to a party"

C. I would not make a request.

D. Other (Please write your response in the box provided below):

2. If the person is a good friend?

A

B

C

D:

Write response for D here:

3. If the person is your younger sibling?

A

B

C

D:

Write response for D here:

4. If the person is your older sibling?

A

B

C

D:

Write response for D here:

Examples in: English

Applicable Language : English

Applicable Levels: College

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