Group Communication in Work-related Instant Messaging (IM): Request Strategies Among Adult Malay Speakers of English

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ABSTRACT

A large majority of Malaysia's 34.9 million online users are active online communication participants, making offline communication progressively obsolete. This high penetration figure allows online communication apps to be unlocked countless times a day, as thousands of text messages are sent regularly by online users. Nevertheless, unlike offline communication, online communication, like instant messaging (IM), does not normally transmit non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, touches, or voices as they are primarily text-based. As a result, it takes more time and effort for users to understand one another in order to make up for the lack of non-verbal cues. Our study focused on analysing material and non-material want requests used by adult Malay speakers of English in IM contexts related to work. We categorised these requests into directness, conventional indirectness, and non-conventional indirectness, employing a modified version of Hassall's (1999) analytical framework for request classifications. The results disclosed that participants preferred directness more than indirectness when making requests. The direct strategy within the imperative sub-strategy was favoured the most when non-material want requests (such as asking other participants to join online meetings) were performed. Nevertheless, when material want requests (like wanting to buy food containers) were carried out, the direct strategy under the want statement sub-strategy emerged as the most preferred method. Our research revealed that in IM, where non-verbal cues were insufficient, directness was predominantly adopted to convey certainty, clarity, and efficacy, implying directness as non-imposed. Hence, it is suggested to make work-related IM requests directly, as it allows speakers to present requests clearly, which subsequently creates quality relationships and maintains productivity.

Keywords: Adult Malay speakers of English; instant messaging (IM); request Head Act; request strategies; work-related group communication

INTRODUCTION

Asking someone to perform a task in regular online communication may be referred to as making a request. According to Kahraman and Akkus (2007), requests are made when speakers want something from hearers in order to benefit from hearers' efforts, either physically or psychologically. Conversely, requests are statements that reveal speakers' wishes to impose on hearers to do something (as cited in Achiba, 2003; Becker, 1982), and the costs incurred by hearers in fulfilling the requests are sources of benefits for speakers. When speakers make requests, their request styles are affected by culture through aspects such as the choices of words, phrases, or languages. For example, in the Malay culture, native Malay speakers are expected to be polite when interacting with other interlocutors, allowing relationships to be preserved and the face of others to be saved (Daud, 2002). Therefore, using online platforms can be challenging, particularly when dealing with face-threatening acts like making requests, whereby politeness and clarity are mandatory.

Based on several request studies, native Malay speakers value directness over indirectness in social interactions. These studies found that native Malay speakers at higher learning institutions in Malaysia/Japan used direct strategies in role-plays (Maros & Rahim, 2013), instant messaging group interactions (Noor, 2016) and discourse completion tasks (Ahmad et al., 2020), indicating preferences for directness in various request scenarios which might have been affected by imposition (R), distance (D) and/or power (P). As claimed by Brown and Levinson (1987), R, D, and P will establish the degree of politeness speakers use while performing acts that have the potential to threaten their own face, or to cause hearers to lose face. Speakers' acts will increase according to the degrees of face threats posed by the variables: R, D, and P. For instance, if something costly is requested by speakers, hearers may bear significant financial burdens. In this situation, the hearers are considered to be highly imposed on, and due to that, the speakers might want to employ request strategies that are supported by reasons to make sure that the hearers accept the requests and do not refuse them. As proposed by Holtgraves and Yang (1992), requesting objects like a large quantity of money, requesting individuals with high social distance, like customers who come to stores, or requesting people with powers, such as superiors or lecturers, will escalate the' consequences of requests, allowing for more politeness to be employed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

INSTANT MESSAGING (IM)

Instant messaging (IM) is preferred due to its efficiency and speed, allowing rapid exchanges without offline conversations. Its visibility helps receivers to stay alert. IM is often used in management work, permitting detailed information to be gathered quickly. It eliminates geographical barriers (Darics, 2014) and supports a wider audience (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2020). IM is also employed to connect friends and families (Whittaker & Bradner, 2000), facilitate educational communication among geographically separated (Eisenstadt et al., 2003) or hearing-impaired (Bowe, 2002) students, and perform teacher-student advising (de Siqueira & Herring, 2009).

To fulfil a request, social interaction is necessary, either offline or online. In offline settings, people communicate through face-to-face interactions, but in online settings, communication occurs via technology aids like mobile phones (Tan & Tan, 2006). According to

Sacks et al. (1974) and Garfinkel (2023), conversations follow distinct rules in different cultures/contexts. For instance, in offline conversations, request and request response adjacency pairs are displayed through turns carried out by a speaker and related actions conducted by another speaker. Nevertheless, in online conversations (like IM), adjacency pairs may display separate features. Examples of offline and online conversations are provided as follows:

(At school)	
S: **If possible, I would like you to give my daughter some Biology classes.**	(Request)
H: *No, no, no.*	(Request Response)

FIGURE 1. Utterances in offline conversations (Garcia, 1993)

Extract 4.6: (2013/11/15) in the LINE app			
275	M25:	Tomorrow, who wants (to order) *Nasi Lemak*?	
276		(The price is) 450 Yen.	
277		(I will) send (it) in the morning.	
278		(It will be sent within) Saijo area only.	
279	M03:	(I) want 2 packs (of *Nasi Lemak*), please.	
280	M01:	**Can I have it for free?**	**(Request)**
281	M25:	Reply before 8 o'clock.	
282	M09:	(I) want.	
283	M01:	**Can (I have it) for free? (Laugh).**	(Request)
284	M25:	*(You can have it for) free, next time. (Laugh).*	(Request Response)

FIGURE 2. Utterances in online conversations (Noor, 2016)

As shown in the extracts, request and request response adjacency pairs in offline conversations follow a series of actions by two interlocutors. However, in online conversations, requests could not be followed by request responses, indicating that adjacency is not necessary.

Lexical features in online communication, like IM, differ from offline interactions as well. IM transmission units are 5.4 words long on average (Baron, 2013), traditional letters average 8.4 words, and informal conversations average 6.2 words (Chafe & Danielewicz, 1987). This suggests that IM resembles informal speeches. IM transmission units are short due to sequences, with nearly half having two or more transmission units (Baron, 2013), as exemplified below:

Transmission 1:   Hey, Paul [utterance 1]
Transmission 2:   Can I borrow your physics notes [utterance 2]

IM has average turn lengths, similar to speech. It uses more contractions than formal writing, and its emoticons substitute for spoken prosody (Baron, 2013). Although IM is popular, it lacks non-verbal cues such as visual, physical, and auditory cues (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2020), which affect accurate assessments of communicators' true feelings (Hall & Mast, 2007; Kruger et al., 2005). Nevertheless, IM's potential to contribute to one's life is significant because seeing communicators' faces in addition to hearing their voices will not enhance the accuracy of understanding communicators' true feelings (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2020). In addition, IM may improve offline interactions, providing support when offline interactions are impossible (Waytz & Gray, 2018), like reducing anxiety during unpleasant experiences. This is in line with Guillory et al. (2015), who claim that IM can be used to increase social support, too. Therefore, in workplace settings, IM usage is beneficial as issues can be discussed and shared for better solutions.

REQUEST DIRECTNESS LEVELS

Request strategies can be categorised into three different categories. Hassall (1999) groups request types into direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect. Direct requests use imperative mood, explicit verbs, or desired goals. Conventional indirect requests utilise query preparatory modals, while non-conventional indirect requests employ question/statement hints. Hassall's (*ibid.*) analytical framework was used by Ahmad et al. (2020) to categorise requests in the Malay language, and the study revealed that requests were employed predominantly in directive acts. Sifianou (1995) provides the request types as follows:

1. "Take him there, please."
2. "Can you take him there?"
3. "I really need him."

Sifianou (*ibid.*) reveals that direct utterances have one literal meaning, but indirect utterances carry both literal and implied meanings. As exemplified above, instance (1) is direct due to its literal meaning, but instances (2) and (3) are conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect, respectively. The interrogative in instance (2) is intended to be a request, and the information in instance (3) is meant to be interpreted as a request. Conventional indirectness has stronger forces when conventionalised methods and linguistic styles are combined, but in non-conventional indirectness, no restrictions are displayed in terms of linguistic styles and methods (Blum-Kulka, 1989). Examine the following native Malay speakers' request utterances suggested by Sattar and Farnia (2014):

1. "Can I have some more?"
2. "I want to take some more (food)."

In the Malay culture, native Malay speakers are expected to communicate politely. The utterance in (1) is indirect and more polite than in (2), which is direct and deemed impolite. According to Fukushima (2000), when food is requested, it signals a material want request which occurs when speakers ask for goods from hearers. However, if non-material wants are requested, speakers will ask hearers for anything besides goods such as in, "Would you mind to move a bit?". The use of indirectness among native Malay speakers is supported by literature and the Individualism Index Values (IDV) proposed by Hofstede (1991). Malaysia is classified as a collectivist nation based on its low IDV score, implying indirectness in communication (Fukushima, 2000). However, three request studies conducted by Maros and Rahim (2013), Noor (2016), and Ahmad et al. (2020) showed that native Malay speakers predominantly prefer directness when making requests in role-plays, instant messaging, and discourse completion tasks, respectively. This contradicts the traditional belief that indirectness is more preferred in Malay-speaking cultures, and the preference for directness could be influenced by imposition, distance, or power. In addition to that, Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory was employed in these three studies, signalling its systematic way to analyse directness levels in interactions.

REQUEST STRUCTURES

Requests made in offline and online interactions can be split into two main sections. These two sections are known as Head Acts and Supportive Moves (Sifianou, 1992). The Head Act is the primary act that fulfils a request, while the Supportive Move is the external component that

mitigates or aggravates it. Speakers may use Head Act only structures or with Supportive Moves. Supportive Moves modify requests' impacts, but cannot change requests' directness levels. The next diagram illustrates a request structure:

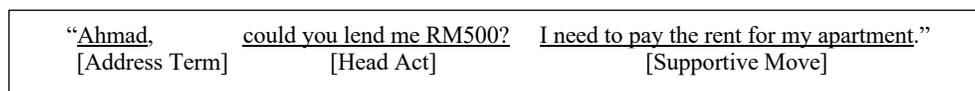| "Ahmad,	could you lend me RM500?	I need to pay the rent for my apartment."
[Address Term]	[Head Act]	[Supportive Move]

FIGURE 3. The structure of a request

In the context of the above request situation, normally, native Malay speakers may consider these two types of directness levels; (1) direct; and (2) conventionally indirect. Using directness, they may utter, "Ahmad, I *want* to borrow RM500 to pay the rent of my apartment," or, in indirectness, "Ahmad, *can* I borrow RM500 to pay my apartment rent?" The use of a direct utterance may happen when the social distance between the speaker and the hearer is low, or when the imposition of the request is moderate, but when it is vice versa, an indirect utterance may occur. Nevertheless, in modern Malays like adult Malay speakers of English, we believe that direct strategies are to be used together with politeness markers (such as the word "please") or external modifications (such as giving reasons) to the stated request act. Put differently, adult Malay speakers of English may employ certain linguistic cues to make requests appear polite, or external modifications may be used to lessen the impact of requests so that the requests can be fulfilled by other interlocutors. Therefore, this study was designed to delve into patterns and norms of request utterances demonstrated by adult Malay speakers of English in instant messaging work-related group communication.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVE

In offline interactions, non-verbal cues are important in politeness contextualisation. When someone asks questions, he/she could use rising intonations, complementing Brown and Levinson's (1987) claim, which suggests that negative politeness strategies are often accompanied by higher voice pitches. However, in online interactions, such cues are scarce, which could lead to misinterpretations. Commonly, misinterpretations are linked to insufficient social context cues, including non-verbal behaviours. In some instances, misinterpretations appear from messages that are polite in offline interactions but face-threatening in online interactions due to a lack of non-verbal cues in online settings. Nowadays, many groups use online interactions as people in groups are allowed to be connected the whole day, creating a sense of co-presence among members. However, there are yet specific styles of creating requests online, making people sometimes clueless on how to make appropriate ones (Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018).

Although request studies among native Malay speakers are a common phenomenon, limited research has been done, particularly to uncover request strategies in online interaction platforms, such as instant messaging (IM). Prior studies were performed mainly via discourse completion tasks (DCTs) (Ahmad et al., 2020; Thuruvan & Yunus, 2017; Yassin & Razak, 2018) or role-plays (Maros & Rahim, 2013) to collect data on requests. However, in a study carried out by Noor (2016), request and request response data were compiled by using an IM app called *Telegram,* which is a type of computer-mediated communication (CMC) tool.

Hence, this study aimed to identify the strategies of requests manifested by adult Malay speakers of English in IM work-related group communication, and the strategies conducted could be directly, indirectly conventional, and/or indirectly non-conventional. Alternatively put, its purpose was to examine request behaviours occurring in IM group conversations by using Hassall's (1999) request directness levels adapted from Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and Cross-cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP, 1989). The request strategies demonstrated could act as suggested strategies to make requests in workplace environments, specifically in environments with insufficient non-verbal cues on online platforms like IM.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study was based on the theoretical perspectives of politeness strategies by Brown and Levinson (1987), as they provide a framework that allows communicative acts between interlocutors to be analysed. The theory explains that people present a particular face (image) when interactions occur, depending on situations and relationships with other interlocutors. For instance, the way people interact with superiors at work may be different from the way they interact with similar positions' office colleagues.

Generally, the theory tries to address the question, "Why do people interact indirectly or vaguely?", as people are seen to be motivated by behaving in certain manners due to face, politeness strategies, and face-threatening acts. Fukushima (2000) claims that Brown and Levinson's Face-saving View provides a precise formula for politeness, intriguing us to investigate request strategies employed by adult Malay speakers of English in instant messaging. Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study, which we outlined, is illustrated as follows:
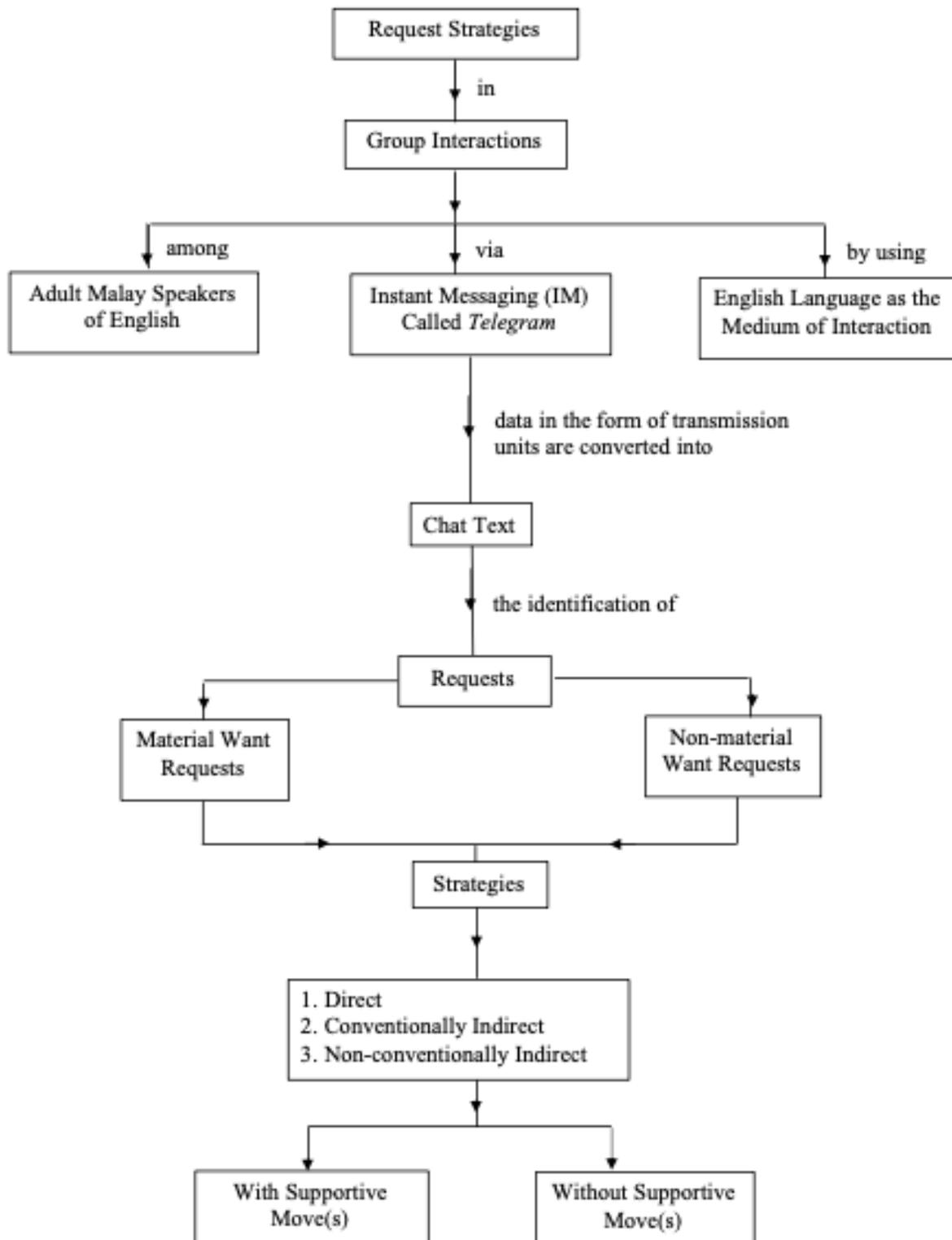
FIGURE 4. The conceptual framework of this study

METHODOLOGY

We utilised Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory to examine request strategies, as it offers a robust framework for analysing communicative acts between interlocutors. The theory is considered one of the most productive, effective, and definitive works on linguistic politeness (Haugh, 2013), which proves its relevance in today's society (Thuruvan & Yunus, 2017), and many recent studies are still using it, like in Gagne (2018), Wijayanti et al. (2019), and AlMujaibel and Gomaa (2022). Request strategies carried out by adult Malay speakers of English in instant messaging (IM) group communication were examined through a qualitative approach, and the methodological foundation was based on content analysis. The IM data were collected, compiled, and identified via request Head Acts and request Supportive Moves at sentence levels based on Hassall's (1999) primary types for requests, namely; (1) direct; (2) conventionally indirect; and (3) non-conventionally indirect. Then, the sub-strategies for each primary type were determined. For instance, in directness, the sub-strategies identified were; (1) imperative; (2) explicit performative; (3) hedged performative; (4) goal statement; and (5) want statement. Conversely, in conventional indirectness, the sub-strategies involved were; (1) asking for ability; (2) asking for permission; and (3) asking for availability. Lastly, in non-conventional indirectness, the underlying sub-strategies were; (1) question hint; and (2) statement hint. Upon the completion of this identification, simple frequency counts and percentages were tabulated according to the strategy types preferred by participants while making requests. Generally, direct strategies occur when imperative or declarative statements are used through words such as "want", "need", "request", or "ask". However, when conventional indirect strategies are employed, statements are typically interrogative via words such as "can", "could", or "do". In non-conventional indirectness, participants will use hints through declarative or interrogative statements. These categories have been summarised in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Request strategies based on the levels of directness by Hassall (1999)

Directness Level	Sub-strategy	Example
Direct	Imperative	"Please iron my clothes."
	Explicit Performative	"I just ask for spicy noodles."
	Hedged Performative	"Can (I) ask for boxes to send to Japan?"
	Goal Statement	"I try these flip-flop, size 39."
	Want Statement	"I want to hear the latest song by Titi DJ."
Conventionally Indirect	Ability	"Can you sit over there, Mister?"
	Permission	"May I borrow your pencil?"
	Availability	"Is there any extra cake left?"
Non-conventionally Indirect	Question Hint	"We will walk together, huh?"
	Statement Hint	"I do not have a pencil."

The IM data selected were naturally occurring instead of researcher-generated. According to Potter (1996, as cited in Lester et al., 2017), naturally occurring data are a type of data that would have occurred regardless of the role the researcher holds; even if the researcher were not able to record it, the data would naturally occur. Only text-based request utterances were collected over a period of approximately two months, continuing until saturation was achieved. Then, they were translated according to semantic meanings. We employed a convenience sampling method as the 99 request utterances were easily accessible, and the extraction occurred via an IM app called *Telegram*.

Request strategies were classified into direct, conventional indirect, and non-conventional indirect strategies based on Hassall's (1999) request strategy types. Nevertheless, there were times when intuition-driven approaches were used to successfully interpret the request strategies, and participants were used to re-validate the strategies interpreted earlier. Apart from that, classified requests were re-visited three times to ensure internal validity. Results were presented in a table in order to see clearly the strategy preferences for material and non-material want requests. Material want requests involve speakers requesting goods from hearers, while non-material want requests involve speakers requesting anything other than goods from hearers (Fukushima, 2000). These findings were elaborated further to see how the strategies were manifested and connected with facts from previous research. Stated differently, this study involved identifying, classifying, analysing, interpreting, and describing the strategies of requests in IM work-related group communication conducted by adult Malay speakers of English.

Participants were in the form of an online community known as "Maher English Teachers". *Maher* was selected as it represented the name of the institution the participants worked at, and the phrase "English Teacher" denoted their roles as English language teachers. This online community was created in January 2018 and in the form of computer-mediated communication (CMC) via IM, which was synchronous and multimodal. In order to become a member of the community, the prospective member must receive an invitation from an existing member first, and it is available to all adult speakers of English who teach English at the institution.

The online community allowed every member to have an equal status. This equal status indicated that every member was permitted to post any unit of transmission to the group's IM system without having control over any posting. The aim of this virtual conversation group was to act as a platform for discussion on English language education-related matters at the institution, which signalled communication in the workplace. Eight female speakers who lived in Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia made up the IM group's participants with an age range between 40 and 59 years old. As a medium of communication, the language employed in this online community was English, with some code-switches occurring in the Malay language. Prior to initiating the study, approval was obtained from the English Language Panel Head and subsequently communicated to all members of the group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We categorised the requests based on the directness levels evident in the request Head Acts. Additionally, we analysed the distribution of these Head Acts for both material and non-material wants, quantifying them through basic frequency counts. The findings are presented in the following table:

TABLE 2. Request Head Act strategies for material and non-material wants.

Strategy Types	Sub-types	Material Want Requests	Non-material Want Requests
Directness	Imperative	-	39 (39.4%)
	Explicit Performative	-	1 (1.0%)
	Hedged Performative	-	2 (2.0%)
	Want Statement	7 (7.1%)	11 (11.1%)
	Goal Statement	2 (2.0%)	16 (16.2%)
	Total	9 (9.1%)	69 (69.7%)

Conventional Indirectness	Ability/Permission	1 (1.0%)	1 (1.0%)
	Availability	2 (2.0%)	-
	Negative Politeness in Stating S's Desire	-	10 (10.1%)
	Positive Politeness in Stating S's Desire	-	2 (2.0%)
	Total	3 (3.0%)	13 (13.1%)
Non-conventional Indirectness	Statement Hint	-	4 (4.0%)
	Question Hint	1 (1.0%)	-
	Total	1 (1.0%)	4 (4.0%)
	Grand Total	13 (13.1%)	86 (86.9%)

The findings suggest that participants made far more use of non-material want requests as compared to material want requests (86.9% against 13.1%), with three main strategies predominantly selected by the participants, namely directness, conventional indirectness, and non-conventional indirectness. In directness, participants uttered requests mostly in imperative mood via complete sentences like, "Guys, log in now, please." Contradictorily, conventional indirectness allows participants to enquire about availability as exemplified in, "Pert, (do) you have the photo (of) Fadzleen?" Lastly, in non-conventional indirectness, a majority of the participants used Statement Hints to make requests, as illustrated in "If students want to be in the interview, they have to register as soon as possible."

Directness appears to be the most preferred method, which is in line with Maros and Rahim (2013), Noor (2016), and Ahmad et al. (2020), followed by conventional indirectness and non-conventional indirectness. The direct sub-strategy of imperative was favoured the most (39.4%) while requests for non-material wants were being carried out, whereas in requests for material wants, want statements were the most preferred direct sub-strategies (7.1%). The selection of direct strategies shows that direct requests were not viewed as imposing in work-related group communication. Therefore, it is advisable to make work-related instant messaging requests directly, as this enables clear communication, which in turn fosters stronger professional relationships and supports sustained productivity. Further information about the strategies chosen by participants is elaborated in the next section.

DIRECT STRATEGIES

Participants used directness through sub-strategies, which can be further explained as follows:

IMPERATIVES

Imperatives were the most preferred choices in expressing wishes when non-material want requests were made. In line with Hassall (2003), this tactic uses complete and non-omitted sentences in the imperative mood. The underlined request in the following excerpt is regarded as a non-material want request due to the fact that the speaker asked other participants to join the online meeting the moment the speaker made the request. The utterance was carried out by 'I', who was one of the eldest participants in the group.

Request:
939   I: Guys..   *masuk...* Now please
                              [Address Term]   [Head Act]
Translation:
939   I: Guys, log in now, please.

The Head Act of the request, "*Masuk* now, please," which is equivalent to English as "Log in now, please," falls under a direct strategy because of its imperative mood, and the utterance itself is in a complete imperative statement. The speaker started the request by using the address term "guys", which preceded the request Head Act. Following the address term is the Malay lexicon *masuk* or in this context, it means "log in" in English, and it is in the base form of an imperative verb. Usually, when a speaker uses an imperative sentence, the speaker will tell someone what to do and barely leaves opportunities for discussion or questions. The utterance was ended by an adverb/interjection "please" which functions as a linguistic politeness marker. The word "please" is uttered as a style to mitigate the request's directive force on hearers (Alahmad, 2020), and Garcia (1993) suggests that full imperative statements are examples of solidarity. On top of that, the speaker's adoption of directness complements the notions by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Holtgraves and Yang (1990), which claim that people in groups have low social distance, allowing solidarity to be exhibited in their group language.

EXPLICIT PERFORMATIVES

This type of sub-strategy was chosen to make a non-material want request. Utterances that contain performative verbs are known as explicit performatives. According to Huang (2007), by using performative verbs, the acts that are being performed will become clearer. In the following excerpt, the underlined request is regarded as a non-material want request because the speaker asked other participants to tell their students to visit the speaker's students' websites and watch some of their podcast videos too. It was performed by N, who was one of the youngest participants in the group.

Request:
1501	N:	*nnti mintak tlg* yr stds *esok utk melawat* my lower 6 stds *pnya* website
		[Head Act]
1502		and watch some of their video podcasts *ye* tq
		[Head Act (continued)] [Supportive Move]

Translation:
| 1501 | N: | Later, request help (from) your students tomorrow to visit my Lower Six students' websites |
| 1502 | | and watch some of their podcast videos, yeah, thank you. |

The Head Act of the request, "*Nanti minta tolong* your students *esok untuk melawat* my lower six students *punya* website and watch some of their podcast videos *ye*," which holds an equivalent translation in English as, "Later, request help (from) your students tomorrow to visit my Lower Six students' websites and watch some of their podcast videos, yeah," can be classified as directness as the speaker's desire is mentioned clearly through the Malay verb *minta* which can be translated to "request" in English. The word *minta* is an example of a performative verb in Malay that conveys explicitly the speech act type being performed, which is a request. Austin (1962, as cited in Kroeger, 2023) points out that when a speaker uses a performative verb, the speaker intends to perform the force of the performative verb used. Therefore, in this excerpt, N intended to make a request, and it was stated clearly through the word *minta* which carries the same meaning as "request" in English.

This sub-strategy was adopted by participants more in non-material want requests as compared to material want requests. Hedged performatives occur when specific modals such as "can" precede performative verbs, allowing the illocutionary forces of the performative verbs to be attenuated (Fraser, 1975). In the following excerpt, the request was carried out by N, who was one of the youngest participants in the group. She made the request by asking another participant to ask that participant's students to leave comments on podcast videos made by her (the speaker's) students.

Request:

1520	N:	can ask yr students to comment too yeah.		they	
		[Head Act]		[Supportive Move 1]	
1521		don't have to watch all videos	they can select like 6 or 7 maybe		and choose
		[Supportive Move 1 (continued)]	[Supportive Move 2]		[Supportive Move 2 (continued)]
1522		the best 5			
		[Supportive Move 2 (continued)]			

Translation:

1520	N:	Can ask your students to comment too, yeah. They
1521		don't have to watch all (the podcast) videos. They can select like six or seven maybe and choose
1522		the best five.

In this sub-strategy, the performative verb "ask" is embedded in the Head Act of the request, "Can ask your students to comment too, yeah." The illocutionary force was modified by the modal verb "can" which helped the speaker to avoid being specific in creating an obligation to the utterance's illocutionary point. As reported by Fraser (1975), the presence of the modal verb "can" makes a request one less strong than the absence of it, and Fraser (2010) adds that "can" may also be used to establish rapport with other interlocutors as well. Therefore, hedge usages in requests attenuate the strengths of requests' forces by reducing speakers' commitments (Caffi, 2007) so that they appear polite (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

WANT STATEMENTS

When material want requests were made, participants used a lot of want statements to express their desires. As claimed by Hassall (2003), want statements are characterised by speakers' wishes for goals to be accomplished. In the next extract, the underlined request, *"Is, nok hok* green *getek,"* which is equivalent to English as, "Is, (I) want that green (food container) too," is regarded as a material want request, due to the fact that the speaker wanted to purchase a green food container from the hearer. It was carried out by NT, who was one year older than the hearer.

Request:

| 151 | NT: | Is *nok hok* green *getek* |
| | [| Head Act] |

Translation:

| 151 | NT: | Is, (I) want that green (food container) too. |

The speaker started the request by using the address term "Is," which was the nickname of the hearer, followed by the request Head Act. The Head Act falls under directness as it exhibits a want statement through the Malay Kelantanese word *nok*, which is similar to "want" in English. Although want statements are less polite, they are used frequently to convey certainty (Hassall,

2003), clearness and effectiveness (Koike, 1989). Two individuals with a small age difference are considered to be in low social distance and known for mutual informality, validating the speaker's use of a direct approach. In essence, group language conveys a sense of solidarity (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990) and direct tactics are employed to demonstrate members' unity (Fukushima, 1996; Garcia, 1993).

GOAL STATEMENTS

Apart from want statements, participants constructed requests primarily for non-material want requests by using goal statements. As stated by Hassall (2003), a speaker will identify the intended goal in a goal statement, which is exemplified in the following excerpt. The underlined utterance is regarded as a goal statement's non-material want request because Speaker R, who was a year younger than the hearer, wanted to transfer the payment for the food containers that she ordered to the hearer a bit later than the time of speaking.

Request:
176   R: <u>Is *nnt* I transfer to you the payment</u>
                [Head Act]
Translation:
176   R: <u>Is, later I (will) transfer to you the payment.</u>

The Head Act of the request is categorised as a direct tactic due to its statement of goal. The speaker stated her goal, which was to transfer the payment of the purchased food containers to the hearer a bit later, as illustrated in the utterance, "Is, later (I will) transfer to you the payment." It was performed in a declarative statement by using a speaker-oriented request indicating the speaker's role through the "I" pronoun. In a request, the hearer is the one who is "threatened" when a request is made, and due to that, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) suggest that the imposition's impact can be mitigated if the addressee is not named as the primary performer of the action. Although mitigation was present, the directness of the request persisted, aligning with the observations of Brown and Levinson (1987) and Holtgraves and Yang (1990), who noted that direct strategies commonly occur in relationships characterised by low social distance, such as those within groups.

CONVENTIONAL INDIRECT STRATEGIES

Apart from direct strategies, we noticed the adoption of conventional indirect strategies too when requests were carried out, and further information about all sub-strategies employed is clarified as follows:

QUERY PREPARATORY MODALS: ABILITY/PERMISSION

This sub-strategy was popular among participants who made non-material want requests. With this tactic, the speaker may seek permission from the hearer for the speaker to carry out the action (Hassall, 2003). As demonstrated in the following example, speaker E asked for the hearers' permission whether the speaker and the hearers could do the same thing as they did last year, which was sending a lot of entries for English language competitions organised by the State Education Department of Kelantan, and suggested that each class could send probably five excellent entries.

Request:

868	E:	Last year *banyak* entries..	why not this year *kita buat yg sama* maybe 5
		[Supportive Move]	[Head Act]
869		*org ke sekelas*	*cari yg bagus2*
		[Head Act (continued)]	[Supportive Move]

Translation:

868	E:	Last year, (there were) many entries. <u>Why don't we do the same (thing like last year's), maybe (for this year, we could send) five
869		students' (entries) per class?</u> Find good (entries).

The underlined request Head Act is referred to as a non-material want request because the speaker asked for permission from other participants to do the same thing as they did last year. The interrogative strategy asking for a permission can be seen from the utterance, "Why don't we do the same (thing like last year's), maybe (for this year, we could send) five students' (entries) per class," and it was mitigated by two different Supportive Moves which were uttered before and after the Head Act of the request.

Due to the shared group membership, E and other participants were considered to have low social distance, and generally, group language demonstrates unity (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990). However, in this request, a conventional indirect strategy was employed, refraining the speaker from going bold towards others and supporting it with justifications via two Supportive Moves.

QUERY PREPARATORY MODALS: AVAILABILITY

Participants who submitted material and had requests were fond of this sub-strategy. This sub-strategy permits participants to employ query-preparatory modals to enquire about availability (Hassall, 2003). In the example that is illustrated next, the speaker wanted to know if there was a photo available. The underlined request is referred to as a material want request because the speaker asked about the availability of a photo from another interlocutor.

Request:

742	E:	<u>pert u *ada foto* fadzleen</u>
		[Head Act]

Translation:

742	E:	<u>Pert, (do) you have the photo (of) Fadzleen?</u>

The request Head Act, "Pert, do you have the photo of Fadzleen?" is a conventional indirect request using a query preparatory form. While it may seem to ask for information, it functions as a request, not a genuine question (Sifianou, 1995). The speaker, E (one of the youngest group members), used this form to make a material want request while maintaining politeness. Despite group solidarity (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990), E chose indirectness to soften the face-threatening act and show respect.

THE USE OF NEGATIVE POLITENESS IN STATING S'S DESIRE

Participants also expressed their desires indirectly using negative politeness strategies. When requests were made publicly, they used redressive language to soften the imposition and respect others' need for autonomy (Morand & Ocker, 2003). Though not included in Hassall's (1999) framework, this sub-strategy was added to better capture the range of request strategies found in the data.

Request:

865	E:	Just a suggestion	why not *kawan2* just take one slot with our students and
		[Supportive Move]	[Head Act]
866			ask them to take part in the competition by jpn… as above
			[Head Act (continued]

Translation:

| 865 | E: | Just a suggestion, why not friends (all of you) just take one slot with our students and |
| 866 | | ask them to take part in the competition (organised) by JPN as above. |

The underlined request is a non-material want, where the speaker asked others to use a class slot to encourage students to join a competition organised by the State Education Department (JPN). The Head Act, "Why not friends (all of you) just take one slot with our students and ask them to take part in the competition (organised) by JPN as above," shows negative politeness through the avoidance of personal pronouns like "I" or "you." Instead, the speaker used "friends" (*kawan-kawan*), demonstrating interlocutor impersonality, which makes the request less direct and more respectful (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). The speaker, E (one of the youngest group members), opted for indirectness despite the group's camaraderie, using politeness to mitigate the face-threatening nature of the request (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990).

THE USE OF POSITIVE POLITENESS IN STATING S'S DESIRE

While less formal than negative politeness, positive politeness reduces the sense of imposition through solidarity. This sub-strategy, not included in Hassall's (1999) original framework, was added to better categorise the range of requests in the data. The following excerpt illustrates a non-material want request, where the speaker asked for acceptance of any four answers given by students in an exam. The use of "we" by participants reflects positive politeness, signalling inclusion and shared interest among interlocutors (Morand & Ocker, 2003).

Request:

| 481 | N: | *tapi mana-mana 4 dia* mention | *kita* accept *la* | *sebb* text *bagi 4 deh* |
| | | [Supportive Move 1] | [Head Act] | [Supportive Move 2] |

Translation:

| 481 | N: | But, any four (answers) that (a) student mentions, we accept (them) because (in the) text, four (answers were) given. |

The request Head Act, "*kita* accept *la*" ("we accept [them]") reflects positive politeness, as the speaker used inclusive language "we" to reduce imposition (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) and to imply aligned perspectives (Morand & Ocker, 2003). This request was made by N, one of the youngest group members. While younger speakers often use negative politeness when addressing older individuals, N opted for positive politeness, likely due to the group's low social distance and shared camaraderie, an idea which is supported by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Holtgraves and Yang (1990).

NON-CONVENTIONAL INDIRECT STRATEGIES

While requests were being created, we saw the use of non-conventional indirectness among participants in addition to direct and conventional indirect strategies, which are presented as follows:

STATEMENT HINTS

Participants used non-conventional indirect requests for both material and non-material wants through statement hints, which are declarative sentences interpreted as requests based on context (Hassall, 2003). For example, the following utterance urged students to register quickly if they wanted to be interviewed.

> *Request:*
> 1222   I: <u>If students want to be in the interview, they have to register ASAP</u>
>   [Head Act]
> *Translation:*
> 1222   I: <u>If students want to be in the interview, they have to register as soon as possible.</u>

The request Head Act, "If students want to be in the interview, they have to register ASAP," appears as a simple statement but actually functions as a non-conventional indirect request. The speaker, I (one of the eldest group members), used a statement hint to prompt others to inform students about registering quickly. Although group language typically reflects solidarity (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990), this indirect strategy suggests that the speaker avoided responsibility for the face-threatening act by leaving the request's intent for hearers to interpret (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

QUESTION HINTS

In addition to statement hints, participants also used non-conventional indirect requests through question hints. Question hints are interrogative forms that are not typically used as request strategies (Hassall, 2003). In the following example, the speaker asked if the hearer could wait until payday for payment, illustrating this strategy.

> *Request:*
> 106   N: cute*nyo*
>   [Supportive Move]
> 107   <u>*aloh tokleh tggu gaji ko*</u>
>   [Head Act]
> *Translation:*
> 106   N: (That food container is) cute.
> 107   <u>Oh, can't (you) wait (for) the pay (day)?</u>

The Head Act, "Can't (you) wait (for) the pay (day)?" could elicit a yes/no answer, yet in this context, it functions as a non-conventional indirect request. The speaker, N (one of the youngest group members), used this form to ask for a food container payment deferment until payday. While group language often reflects camaraderie (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990), N chose an indirect approach, likely to avoid responsibility for the face-threatening act and leave the request's intent open to interpretation (Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to Sifianou (1995), such indirect statements carry both literal and implied meanings, unlike direct ones.

In total, 99 request Head Acts were identified, with participants mainly using three strategies: directness, conventional indirectness, and non-conventional indirectness. Direct strategies were the most preferred, followed by conventional and non-conventional indirectness. Among sub-strategies, imperatives were most commonly used, while explicit performatives and

question hints were least favoured. For material wants, want statements were preferred (e.g., "I want that green food container too."), whereas imperatives were more common for non-material wants (e.g., "Guys, log in now, please.").

CONCLUSION

Participants engaged in work-related group communication in instant messaging (IM). According to the results, requests made were more non-material than material, and request Head Acts were used to clarify the different strategies made for both types (material and non-material wants). Participants who were adult Malay speakers of English preferred directness as compared to indirectness when requests were constructed. The inclination towards directness shows that requests made through online channels were not viewed as imposing, and this may challenge views proposed by other scholars (Saimon, 2021; Thuruvan & Yunus, 2017; Yassin & Razak, 2018), which claim that native Malay speakers prefer indirectness more when requests are carried out. The results also imply the presence of strong bonds among interlocutors and direct interactions were favoured in formal settings as well, contrary to claims made by Al-Sha'baan (1999) and Agha (2005), which assert that in informal settings, speakers and listeners have closer relationships, and directness is valued more. As stated by Brown and Levinson (1987), choosing direct approaches may reduce the possibility of miscommunication and give speakers recognition for their honesty and boldness.

The results complement previous studies on requests performed by Maros and Rahim (2013), Noor (2016), and Ahmad et al. (2020), which claim that native Malay speakers favour directness over indirectness when requests are performed in both offline (role-plays and discourse completion tasks) and online (instant messaging). Using direct request strategies highlights tension between productivity and cultural sensitivity. As such, speakers might better navigate and balance these two aspects carefully in order to avoid misunderstanding even in otherwise effective digital interactions. This study could have been improved by including interviews and incorporating other groups of native Malay speakers as participants to better understand the adoption of direct strategies in requests.

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