Use of Polite Request Forms by Jordanian Children: Do Age and Gender Have an Impact?

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Abstract—**This study aimed at finding the strategies of politeness in requests as well as the potential differences between Jordanian children in their use of such strategies. The study compared the participants on the basis of two variables: age and gender. According to the age variable, the participants were divided into three groups: 5, 7 and 9 year-olds. Each group contained 24 participants who were then divided into 12 males and 12 females. The researchers used video-recording to elicit the participants' requests while they ask the researchers for some cookies. On the basis of age, the findings support previous research that age has an obvious effect on the use of politeness in requests. It was found that nine-year-olds were more able to use indirect forms of requests than seven and five- year- old children. Although 5 and 7-year-olds were able to use indirect forms, they opted more to direct requests that have a semantic softener. On the basis of gender, the differences between males and females in using direct and indirect requests were irrelevant.**

Index Terms—**politeness, requests, gender, age, directness**

I. INTRODUCTION

Requesting is a speech act that has been intensively investigated by linguists. People use requests in their everyday interactions and for different purposes such as obtaining information, objects or actions from others. Byon (2004) defines the speech act of requesting as "a directive that embodies an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something, generally for a speaker's goal" (p. 1674). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), requests are intrinsically face-threatening acts as they require the addressee to do what the speaker wants. Thus, they threaten the addressee's negative face.

In order for the requester not to threaten the requestee's negative face (i.e. to impose something on the requestee), s/he often tends to soften their requests by using different politeness strategies. The requester can use these strategies in order for the addressee to be free from imposition, and at the same time for the requester to save her/his negative face from any potential refusals which may result from using impolite or direct requests. Leech (1983) argues that the more direct the speech act is, the more degree of politeness will be enhanced. He also argues that this is the case because "(a) they increase the degree of optionality, and (b) because the more indirect the illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be" (Leech, 1983, p. 131). Indirectness can be enhanced by using two types of indirect requests. The first one is non-conventionally indirect requests where the requester can ask for something without using a verb that asks the requestee to directly do something. For example, if the requester wants the requestee to close the window if the room is cold, he can say 'it is too cold here'. The other type of indirect requests is called conventionally indirect requests. Here, the speaker can use suggestions such as 'what about closing the window?'. Even when being direct while requesting, the speaker can use hedged performatives in order to soften his request by saying 'I would like to ask you to close the window'.

The level of directness that is needed while requesting can be determined by contextual factors such as power and social distance between the speaker and the hearer as well as the degree of imposition involved (Brown & Levinson, 1978). The more formal the situation is, the greater degree of indirectness is required. Furthermore, when the request is directed from a person with low-status to one with a higher-status, the request needs to employ a greater degree of indirectness.

There are various factors that affect the way we use language and different speech acts. These include age, gender, socio-economic status and educational background. Linguistic studies, especially those that investigate politeness, are mainly concerned with gender and age more than other factors. In relation to gender, these studies have confirmed many differences between males and females in using different aspects of languages. For example, females are more likely to employ positive politeness in order to minimize the effect of face-threatening acts and to save the hearer's positive and negative face (Fishman, 1978; Tannen, 1990; Holmes, 1995). Coats (1992) reports that females are more

aware and more concerned with the requestee's positive face need. Therefore, they tend to produce indirect requests more than males (Mckelvie, 2000; Macaulay, 2001).

Age is another variable that its effect on language use in general, and on politeness in particular, was investigated. Linguistic studies argue that age has a significant role in the choice and use of different strategies when producing different speech acts (Nippold et al., 1982; Chamni, 2014). For more consideration of the effect of age on politeness, linguists and psycholinguists focused on examining the acquisition of politeness by children in their early childhood. Most of the studies conducted on language acquisition have shown that children seem to use polite phrases as 'please' early in their requests. For example, Bates (1976) has shown that children are able to acquire such early forms of politeness at age three. Furthermore, the older the child is, the more indirect forms of requests will be used (Garvey, 1975; Ervin-Tripp, 1977).

Many studies conducted on politeness acquisition explained how politeness mastery makes progress with age. Thus, at early stages of their childhood, children use non-polite requests. At age four, they begin to use few structures of requests. When they are five and six year old, they produce requests with the appropriate polite tone. By age seven to eight, children are more able to soften their requests based on different contextual factors. To the best of knowledge of the present researchers, no studies have investigated the request forms used by Jordanian children and its development with age. This study addresses this gap by tapping into the use of polite forms used by male and female Jordanian children. More specifically, this study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the request forms favored by Jordanian KG, first and third graders?
2. What are the potential differences between the three age groups regarding the strategies they use when making a request?
3. What are the potential differences between male and female participants regarding the degree of politeness they adopt while requesting?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Relationship Between Age and Politeness

Many studies have shown that children, at their early stages of acquiring their mother tongue, can acquire a wide variety of politeness strategies while making requests. Most of these studies examined the progress in acquiring these strategies by comparing two or more age groups. Other studies examined a single age group in order to investigate the strategies used by the relevant age group.

One of the studies that used the comparative method is that of Garvey (1975). Within this study, Garvey has investigated preschool children's ability to convey requests for actions. The sample was divided into two age groups: three- and five-year-olds. The results showed that direct request forms (e.g. give me the hammer) were frequently used by the two age groups. Other studies showed that children at early ages are able to evaluate a request as polite or non-polite even before they are able to produce such polite requests. For example, Bates (1976) assessed whether children aged four to five could assess the 'niceness' of pairs of requests differing in syntactic directness, the use of semantic softeners such as 'please', and the tone of voice. She has reported that children of the two age groups are already sensitive to all three factors in their evaluation of the niceness of requests. The same result has been revealed by a more recent study conducted by Ucar and Ozden (2015) which investigated requests of Turkish pre-schoolers. Data was gathered from 24 Turkish speaking children aged between four and five and divided as girls and boys. The study has indicated that children use direct requests more frequently, especially in low power situations.

As studies conducted on adults' use of polite strategies, language acquisition studies took into consideration some contextual factors that may affect this use. For example, James (1978) has conducted a study in order to examine the effect of the listener age on the children's use of polite requests. The sample was twenty-one children between the ages of four and five years who ought to make requests to an adult, a peer and a younger listener in request situations. The results have shown that the listener age effect diminished in the request situations. Thus, the children were very polite to all three listeners.

All studies mentioned above have examined two different preschool age groups. Other studies have compared three different age groups including pre-schoolers as well as school children. An example on these is the study of Nippold and her colleagues (1982) who have conducted a study on children at age 3, 5 and 7 year-old. All children participated in a production task, requesting candy from an old lady hand-puppet. The analysis of the subjects' requests has revealed several developmental patterns. It has been observed that by age 3, children already showed some use of 'please' as well as the interrogative. By age 5, the use of 'please' was rarely seen in requests of imperative form. The use of interrogatives also increased with age, beginning after age 5. The use of the interrogative and 'please' in the same request served as a major focal point of development in the age groups studied. The use of this form increased steadily with age, reaching the approximate level by 7 year-olds.

Other studies suggest that not until age seven children become more polite when making requests. This result has been affirmed by a study conducted by Baroni and Axia (1985). This study has been conducted on different age groups where one group was older than those of Nippold and her colleagues. These children were five, seven and nine-year old. The results of this study have shown that, unlike the other two age groups, only nine-year-olds fully mastered the polite register within their requests.

B. Relationship Between Gender and Politeness

As gender has its effect on the use of the politeness register by adults, psycholinguists have tried to prove that it also affect young age groups' use of politeness. Ratsi (1997) has investigated the use of polite request forms by Iranian first-graders who are 7-year-old. The study intended to identify differences between male and female children. To do so, 29 males and 30 females were asked to report how they would ask for things. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the choice of direct or indirect forms and the gender of the participants. Thus, girls were found to favour more indirect forms, whereas boys opted for direct ones.

The difference between male and female children in their use of polite requests was also confirmed by Ervin-Tripp and Rosenberg (1984). Within this study, the researchers have studied floor-holding behaviour in children by video-taping four middle-class families, collecting 891 control acts by children aged between 2 and 8 years. Only 5 to 8-year-olds were rarely unable to use polite forms. These age groups were frequently able to use polite forms of requests than 2 to 4 year-olds were. In addition, girls provided greater politeness and seemed to gain more parental attention than boys' directives, since parents ignored daughters much less than sons.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Sample and Data Collection

The sample of the study was chosen from a school in a rural area in the city of Al-Ramtha (Al-Bouaida) at the north of Jordan. The sample consisted of 72 school children who are KG1, first and third graders who were divided into different groups based on two variables: age and gender. Based on their age, the participants were divided into three groups: 5, 7 and 9-year-olds. Each age group consisted of 24 participants. Each group was then divided into two groups based on the gender variable as 12 males and 12 females.

The data of the study was collected using video-recording. The researcher offered some cookies for each child and told him that in order to get some of these cookies; s/he has to make nice and polite requests. If the child did not use any polite forms at the beginning, the researcher asked her/him again to ask in a polite way to get what s/he wants.

B. Data Analysis

The participants' requests were analyzed by the researcher. The frequencies and percentages were evaluated for each age group and then for gender groups for comparative purposes. The requests were tallied and classified per the numerical politeness scale developed by James (1978) shown in Table 1 below. The scale was used with some modifications that are relevant to the Arabic requests produced by the participants of this study. The Arabic requests were given values as in James' scale beginning with the most to the least polite requests.

TABLE 1
JAMES (1978) POLITENESS SCALE

Polite form	Example	Politeness value
"May I" + "please"	"May I please have some candy?"	4.070
"May I"	"May I have some candy?"	3.134
"Would/Could/Will you" + "please"	"Could you please give me some candy?"	3.113
"Can you" + "please"	"Can you give me some candy, please?"	2.742
"Can/Could I" + "please"	"Could I please have some candy?"	2.728
"Would/Could/Will you"	"Would you give me some candy?"	2.459
"Can you"	"Can you give me some candy?"	1.886
"Can/Could I"	"Can I have some candy?"	1.755
Imperative + "please"	"Give me some candy, please."	1.688
"Don't" + imperative + "please"	(Not applicable in task)	1.562
Imperative + explanation	"Give me some candy because I'm hungry."	1.206
"Don't" + imperative + explanation	(Not applicable in task)	1.081
"Don't" + imperative	(Not applicable in task)	.161
Imperative	"Give me some candy."	.000

Within the modified scale, the most polite requests are those having the most complex construction among others. These are the strategies that have an interrogative form with a modal verb and a softening expression; they are usually called conventionally indirect requests. Arabic examples on these constructions are *mumkin+a verb+ law samaħt, baqdar+verb+law samaħt,* etc. The difference in politeness value between these constructions could be due to two points: the modal verb used where *mumkin*, for example, is considered more polite than *btiqdar* as *mumkin* is used more as a form of asking for the requestee's permission. It could be the equivalent of the English modal verb *may*. The second difference relates to the form of the verb that the requester uses to accomplish his goal such as *take or give*. Using a verb that immediately asks the requestee to do something for the requester, such as *give*, is considered less polite than using a verb which does not need the requestee to do what the requester asks for by himself such as *take*. So, the construction *mumkin ʔaxuð ilbaskutih law samaħt?* (May I take the cookies, please?) is considered more polite than *mumkin taʕtini ilbaskutih law samaħt?* (Would you give me the cookies, please?).This point is proved via Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy of request realization strategies where he classified different forms of polite requests based on their degree of politeness, i.e. beginning with the most direct to the most indirect. Throughout his classification, he proposed

that the use of a verb that does not require the requestee to do what the requester wants is more polite and gives a sense of getting permission more than requesting. So, he considered the request *"May I borrow your car?"* as a permission which is more polite than *"would you lend me your car?"*

The second set of strategies is similar to those described above. The only difference is the lack of use of the softening expression *law samaħt*. So, the strategies within this group were ordered as those within the first set. The last set of strategies is the most direct and the least polite ones. The constructions here include a sentence form rather than an interrogative form. The construction *ʔaʕtini ilbaskutih law samaħt* (Give me the cookies, please) is more polite than the construction where he asks for what s/he wants with a reason such as *ʔaʕtini ilbaskutih baħibha* (Give me the cookies; I love it) and the latter is even more polite than *ʔaʕtini ilbaskutih* (Give me the cookies). For more clarification of the modified version, see the table of the modified Arabic request strategies in appendix A.

C. Validity of Data Analysis

To validate the division of the Arabic request strategies discussed above, a rating-scale questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was administered to thirty male and female participants. These participants are teachers at two secondary schools in Al-Bouaida. Fifteen male teachers who teach at a secondary school for boys and fifteen female teachers who teach at a secondary school for girls responded to the questionnaire. The age of the participants ranges from 30-45 years old.

Within the questionnaire, the participants had to order the 10 request strategies given by the researcher according to their degree of politeness –from the least to the most polite. Thus, each strategy was given a politeness degree starting with 1 point for the least polite strategy reaching the most polite strategy with 10 points. After rating these requests, the frequencies and percentages the participants' rating were evaluated. The statistical analysis appears to support the order of these strategies already proposed by the researcher. This point is shown in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2
FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES OF MALE AND FEMALE PARTICIPANTS' RATING

Points	Strategy	Freq.	%
10	ممكن+فعل (أخذ)+لو سمحت *mumkin*+verb(take)+*law samaħt* May I take…., please?	19	70%
9	بقدر+فعل (أخذ)+لو سمحت *baqdar*+verb(give)+ *law samaħt* Can I take…., please?	20	67%
8	ممكن +فعل أمر(تعطيني)+لو سمحت Mumkin+imperative verb+ law samaħt Would you give me…, please?	23	77%
7	بتقدر +فعل أمر+لو سمحت mumkin+imperative verb+ *law samaħt* Can you give me…, please?	22	73%
6	(ممكن+ فعل(أخذ mumkin+verb (take) May I take…?	22	73%
5	ممكن+ فعل أمر munkin+imperative verb Would you give me…?	24	80%
4	بتقدر تعطيني بسكوتة؟ btiqdar+imperative verb (give) Can you give me…?	26	87%
3	اعطيني بسكوتة لو سمحت Imperative verb (give)+ *law samaħt* Give me….,please.	24	80%
2	أعطيني بسكوتة جوعان Imperative verb (give)+explanation *ʔaʕtini ilbaskutih dʒuʕan* Give me the cookies ;I am hungry.	20	67%
1	أعطيني بسكوتة Imperative verb *ʔaʕtini ilbaskutih* Give me the cookies	21	70%

The table shows, for example, that the strategy *mumkin ʔaxuð ilbaskutih law samaħt?* (May I take the cookies, please?) which was rated as the most polite form by the researcher was also rated as the most polite by 70% of the participants. The second most polite one *baqdar ʔaxuð* ilbaskutih *law samaħt?* (Can I take the cookies, please?) was also evaluated as suggested by 67%, the least polite strategy was also rated as this by 70%, etc.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results of data analysis for the present study. First, discussion is presented for the results of the used strategies by each group, i.e. considering the age variable only. The frequencies and percentages are presented for third graders, first graders and KG graders respectively. Then, the differences between the results of these groups are discussed. Second, the results are discussed according to the gender variable. These results are discussed within each group, and then across groups.

A. The Potential Differences in Requesting Between Age Groups

Table 3 below presents the request strategies used by third graders when asking for cookies. It should be mentioned here that whenever talking about the request strategy *mumkin ʔaxuð?"* (May I take..?) throughout the discussion, the English equivalent in James (1978) *"May I"* will be used. The same case will be for *"mumkin taʕtini",* where the English equivalent "Would you" will be used instead. As can be seen, three strategies were used by third graders with different percentages. The most used strategies were *"May I" /"mumkin ʔaxuð?"* and *Would you/ "mumkin taʕtini"* with 50% and 42%, respectively. The request form "*tismaħili ʔijaha*" used by the participants of this group was given an equal value to *"May I"* strategy. The reason why this construction considered as an equivalent one to "May I" is that it has no verb that asks the requestee to do what the requester wants. Instead, it is more like asking for the permission of the requestee. So, when the requests were classified, these constructions were given the same value. However, there is not much difference between these two strategies according to their politeness value. The least used strategy was *Imperative+"please"* with only 8%. The difference in the politeness value between this strategy and the latter one is much more significant than between the latter and the earlier one (0.971 and 0. 269, respectively).

TABLE 3
REQUEST STRATEGIES USED BY THIRD GRADERS

Request strategies	Freq.	%	Politeness Value
"May I" "*mumkin ʔaxuð?"*	12	50	2.728
"would you"/ "*mumkin taʕtini"*	10	42	2.459
Imperative+"please"/	2	8	1.688
Total	24	100	0.000

It is also clear from the data above that third graders did not use more complex and more polite constructions, i.e. those that have a softening expression like *"please"* or its equivalent *law samaħt.*

Table 4 below shows the results of the second group, i.e. first graders. The frequencies and percentages were evaluated for this group in order to know the most as well as the least used strategies.

TABLE 4
REQUEST STRATEGIES USED BY FIRST GRADERS

Request strategies	Freq.	%	Politeness Value
"May I" "*mumkin ʔaxuð?"*	8	33	2.728
"would you" "*mumkin taʕtini"*	3	13	2.459
Imperative+"please"	11	46	1.688
Imperative	2	8	0.000
Total	24	100	

From the data shown within Table 4, it is clear that the most used strategy by this group was the direct strategy *imperative+"please"* with 46% followed by *"May I"* strategy with 33%. The least used strategies were *"would you"* and *Imperative* strategies with 13% and 8%, respectively. It is obvious from the table above that the Imperative strategy is the least polite strategy in the taxonomy which was given the value 0.000. The existence of the softening expression *"please"* resulted in a big difference in the politeness value between it and the most used strategy here. The difference in the politeness value is 1.688.

The last group to be presented here is KG graders. The results of this group are presented within Table 5 below.

TABLE 5
REQUEST STRATEGIES USED BY KG GRADERS

Request strategies	Freq.	%	Politeness Value
"May I" "*mumkin ʔaxuð?"*	7	29	2.728
"would you" "*mumkin taʕtini"*	4	17	2.459
Imperative+"please"	11	46	1.688
Imperative	2	8	0.000
Total	24	100	

It can be concluded from the data above that the most used strategy by KG graders is the direct one *Imperative+"please"* with 46%. The strategies *"May I"* and *"would you"* were used with similar percentages (29% and 17, respectively). Again, the least used strategy is the Imperative which was used by 8% of the participants. As shown in the tables above, the only used strategies by the participants of this study were *May I*, *Would you*, *Imperative+please* and *Imperative*.

To answer the second question of this study, a comparative analysis of the results of the three groups is needed. So, Table 6 is mentioned below to present the percentages of the used strategies for the groups of this study.

TABLE 6
FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES OF REQUEST STRATEGIES USED BY ALL GROUPS

Request strategies	Third graders	First graders	KG graders	Politeness Value
	%	%	%	
"May I" "*mumkin ʔaxuð?*"	50	33	29	2.728
"would you" "*mumkin taʕtini*"	42	13	17	2.459
Imperative+"please"	8	46	46	1.688
Imperative	0	8	8	0.000
Total	100	100	100	

From the data presented in table 6, it is obvious that there is an apparent difference between the three groups in their use of the first strategy in the table. i.e. *"May I"*. This difference is much more between third and first graders as well as between third and KG graders than between first and KG graders. It is obvious that this strategy was mostly used by three graders who intended to use the indirect form when requesting. The second apparent difference between the three groups appears in their use of the second strategy *"Would you"*. This strategy was used most by third graders with 42%, followed by KG graders with 17% and least by first graders with 13%. Again, third graders were the most indirect ones in their requests. The difference was much more between the third graders group and the other both groups than between the first and KG graders. Thus, the most polite and indirect requests used by the participants of this study were used more by third graders, but with similar percentages by first and KG graders. This finding goes in line with the finding of Ucar and Ozden. (2015) that the use of interrogatives such as *"would you...?"* or *"may I.....?"* increases with age, beginning after age 5. This is true for the results of this study; KG graders used the interrogative form, but this use increased a little bit with first graders and has been mostly used by third graders within most of their requests.

The least polite and direct requests used by the participants of this study were used most by first and KG graders. This can be shown in the apparent difference in the use of *Imperative+"please"* between first and KG graders on one hand, and third graders on the other hand. This strategy was the least used strategy by third graders, but the most used one by first and KG graders. That is, it was used with equal percentages by first and KG graders. The least used strategy by the three groups was the Imperative. While used with low percentages by first and KG graders, it was never used by third graders.

Although KG and first graders showed some ability of using interrogative forms of requests, they mostly tended to use a direct form with a semantic softener. Unlike KG and first graders, third graders were much more able to use indirect forms, i.e. interrogatives. They rarely used the direct form with a semantic softener. These results were partially similar to those of Nippold et al. (1982). The finding that the use of interrogatives increases with age successfully matches the findings here. The present study and that of Nippold clashes in two results: the first is that the use of "please" was rarely seen in requests of imperative forms. This contradicts with the case of KG graders of this study who frequently tended to use this semantic softener in their requests. Second, their finding that the use of the interrogative with "please" in the same request served as a major focal point of development in 9-year-olds does not match the findings here. It is observed that third graders were not able to use more complex requests, i.e. requests that have interrogative form with a semantic softener. This also contradicts with the same finding of Baroni and Axia (1985) that 9 year-old children fully mastered the polite register within their requests. Many studies also proved the finding that 5 and 7-year-old children tend to use more direct forms in their requests (Garvey, 1975; Ucar & Ozden, 2015). Baroni and Axia (1985) also revealed the same finding. They found that 5 and 7 year-old children were not able to use polite and indirect forms of requests.

To conclude, the assumption that the older the child is, the more able s/he is to use polite requests was true for the third graders compared to first and KG graders. However, this was not the case with KG graders and first graders as there was no apparent difference between both groups. Moreover, it is worth mentioning here that when producing a request at the first time, the participants were asked again to make another request that they think to be more polite than the first one. It appears from the frequencies and percentages, within Table 7, of the requests made for the second time that only few third graders were able to modify their requests from direct to indirect forms. Other participants modified their requests for the same category, i.e. from an indirect to another indirect form which has the same politeness value such as "*mumkin ʔaxuð?*" (May I take?) to "*tismaħili ʔaxuð?*" (Would you allow me to take?). These modifications were

not taken into consideration since the two forms have the same politeness value. Table 7 introduces the frequencies and percentages of the requests modified by the participants for the second time of requesting.

TABLE 7
FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES OF THE MODIFIED REQUESTS BY THE PARTICIPANTS

Grade	Freq.	%	Total
Third Graders	7	29	24
First Graders	0	0	24
KG Graders	0	0	24

B. The Potential Differences in Requesting Between Males and Females

As many studies proved the differences between males and females in using politeness in speech in general, and in requesting in particular, the present study tried to investigate these potential differences between male and female children. To do so, the results of male and female participants are discussed first within groups, and then across groups. Table 8 below shows the differences between male and female third graders.

TABLE 8
REQUEST STRATEGIES USED BY MALE AND FEMALE THIRD GRADERS

Request strategies	Males		Females		Politeness Value
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
"May I" *"mumkin ʔaxu ð?"*	2	17	10	83	2.728
"would you" *"mumkin taʕtini"*	8	66	2	17	2.459
Imperative+"please"	2	17	0	0	1.688
Imperative	0	0	0	0	0.000
Total	12	100	12	100	

Within this group, there is a difference between males and females in their use of two strategies, i.e. *"May I"* and *"would you"*. The former one was used most by females while the latter was used most by males. Though there is a difference between these two groups in their use of these strategies, this difference is irrelevant in terms of the politeness value of these strategies. The apparent difference is that female children were more aware of using a verb that does not need the requestee to be imposed on doing what the requester wants. Regarding the differences within the first graders group, Table 9 presents the percentages and frequencies used by male and female first graders.

TABLE 9
REQUEST STRATEGIES USED BY MALE AND FEMALE FIRST GRADERS

Request strategies	Males		Females		Politeness Value
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
"May I" *"mumkin ʔaxu ð?"*	5	42	3	25	2.728
"would you" *"mumkin taʕtini"*	4	33	0	0	2.459
Imperative+"please"	2	17	9	75	1.688
Imperative	1	8	0	0	0.000
Total	12	100	12	100	

From the analysis above, it is clear that there is an apparent difference between males and females in their use of the *Imperative+"please"* strategy. This strategy was the most used strategy by female participants which is considered as less polite than the strategy that was mostly used by male participants, i.e. *"May I"*. This difference suggests that male children were more polite and more indirect than female ones. Male children were also more polite in their use of the second polite strategy which was never used by females. The most polite requests used by the participants of this study were used mostly by males of this group, whereas the least polite strategies were used mostly by females.

The last results to be discussed here are those of the KG group. Table 10 presents the frequencies and percentages of the strategies used by male and female participants of this group.

TABLE 10
REQUEST STRATEGIES USED BY MALE AND FEMALE KG GRADERS

Request strategies	Males		Females		Politeness Value
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
"May I" "*mumkin ʔaxuð?*"	0	0	7	58	2.728
"would you" "*mumkin taʕtini*"	5	42	0	0	2.459
Imperative+"please"	7	58	3	25	1.688
Imperative	0	0	2	17	0.000
Total	12	100	12	100	

The difference between males and females in this group is apparent in their use of the *imperative+"please"* strategy. This strategy was the most used strategy by male children within this group. The other difference was in their use of the more polite strategy *"May I"*. This strategy was the most used one by female participants. The third difference was with their use of the second strategy in the table above *"would you"* which was used only by male children.

In an attempt to answer the third question of this study, Table 11 was set. Table 11 presents the frequencies and percentages of the used strategies by male and female children across groups.

TABLE 11
REQUEST STRATEGIES USED BY MALES AND FEMALES ACROSS GROUPS

Request strategies	Males	Females	Politeness Value
	%	%	
"May I" "*mumkin ʔaxu ð?*"	19	57	2.728
"would you" "*mumkin taʕtini*"	47	5.5	2.459
Imperative+"please"	31	33	1.688
Imperative	3	5.5	0.000
Total	100	100	

According to the results shown in table 11, it can be seen that the difference between males and females was in their use of two strategies: *"May I"* and "*would you*". Whereas *"May I"* was used much more by females, *"would you"* strategy was used more by male students. This indicates that females in general were more aware of their use of the verb than their male counterparts. The *imperative+"please"* as well as the *imperative* strategy show no apparent differences in their use by male and female participants.

Both male and female participants tended more to use indirect forms of requests. The difference between them was not in the use of direct and indirect forms, i.e. requests that belong to different groups of directness, but in the use of the strategies that belong to the same group, i.e. *"May I"* and *"Would you"* which are interrogatives and belong to the same group of indirectness but have different politeness values. The difference was that females tended to use the more polite form *"May I"* than males with more than the half of their requests. Males, on the other hand, tended to use *"Would you"* strategy which has a less politeness value than the former. With direct forms of strategies, both used these strategies with similar percentages.

These findings contradict with the finding of linguistic studies that showed a difference between males and females in their use of politeness. These studies showed that females are more likely to employ positive politeness in order to minimize the effect of face-threatening acts to save the hearer's positive and negative face (Fishman, 1978; Tannen, 1990; Holmes, 1995). It also contradicts with studies that investigated gender differences in using polite requests (Mckelvie, 2000; Macaulay, 2001). Studies that investigated gender differences in requests of children also revealed contradictory findings to the findings of this study. Ratsi (1997) found that there, i.e. girls were found to favor more indirect forms, whereas boys opted for directness.

To sum up, within groups, males and females showed no obvious behavior in their use of direct and indirect requests for comparative purposes of any potential interference between age and gender. Thus, male KG graders used the direct forms of requests more than their female counterparts. The opposite was true for the first graders; females used the direct forms more often than males. The findings of the third graders were different. Within this group, males and females tended to use indirect forms of requests. It can be concluded that as the ability of these children to use indirect forms of strategies increases, the differences between males and females decline.

Across groups, males and females were similar in their use of the strategies that belong to different groups of directness. Thus, with their use of direct and indirect strategies, the results of males and females showed no apparent differences. This was not the case with strategies that belong to the same group of directness. These strategies are *"May I"* and "*Would you*" which belong to the same group as indirect strategies, but at the same time have different politeness values, whereby the former has a higher politeness value than the latter one. Here, males and females showed a difference in their use of these strategies.

V. Conclusion

The main aim of the present study was to find the differences between Jordanian children in their use of politeness in their requests. Data analysis showed that the strategies used by the participants of this study were very limited. The differences between the age groups were apparent. The apparent difference between the three age groups appears between the third graders on one hand, and first and KG graders on the other hand. Among these three groups, third graders showed more politeness in their requests than the first and KG graders. There was no apparent difference in the strategies used by 5 and 7-year-olds, i.e. first and KG graders. Both groups showed a tendency to use a direct form with a semantic softener.

Data analysis also showed that, within groups, males and females showed no obvious behavior in their use of direct and indirect requests. Thus, male Kg graders used the direct forms of requests more than their female counterparts. The opposite was true for the first graders; females used the direct forms more often than males. Across groups, males and females were similar in their use of the strategies that belong to different groups of directness. Since the findings of this study contradicts with the findings of others in relation to the effect of gender, it would be interesting to study this issue further in similar and different cultural contexts to find if this phenomenon is common in different areas in Jordan as well as other different countries.

APPENDIX. THE ARABIC MODIFIED VERSION OF JAMES (1978) TAXONOMY OF REQUESTS

Strategy	Example	Politeness value
mumkin+verb+law samaħt (ممكن +فعل +لو سمحت) May I take.., please?	mumkin ʔaxuð ilbaskutih law samaħt? (ممكن أخذ البسكوتة لو سمحت؟)	4.070
baqdar+verb+law samaħt (بقدر +فعل+لوسمحت) Can I take…, please?	bagdar ʔaxuð ilbaskutih law samaħt ? (بقدر أخذ البسكوتة لو سمحت؟)	3.134
mumkin+imperative+law samaħt (ممكن+فعل أمر +لو سمحت) Would you give.., please?	mumkin taʕtini ilbaskutih law samaħt? (ممكن تعطيني البسكوتة لو سمحت؟)	3.113
btiqdar+imperative+law samaħt (بتقدر +فعل أمر +لو سمحت) Can you give…, please?	btiqdar taʕtini ilbaskutih law samaħt? (بتقدر تعطيني البسكوتة لو سمحت؟)	2.742
mumkin+verb (ممكن+فعل) May I take..?	mumkin ʔaxu ð ilbaskutih? (ممكن اخذ البسكوتة؟)	2.728
mumkin+imperative (ممكن+فعل أمر) Would you give…?	mumkin taʕtini ilbaskutih? (ممكن تعطيني البسكوتة؟)	2.459
btiqdar+imperative (بتقدر +فعل أمر) Can you give…?	btiqdar taʕtini ilbaskutih? (بتقدر تعطيني البسكوتة؟)	1.886
Imperative+law samaħt (فعل أمر +لو سمحت) Give me…, please.	law samaħt ʔaʕtini ʔijaha? (لو سمحت أعطيني البسكوتة)	1.688
Not applicable	-	1.562
Imperative+reason	ʔaʕtini ilbaskuih bahibħa (أعطيني البسكوتة بحبها)	1.206
Not applicable	-	1.081
Not applicable	-	0 .161
Imperative (فعل أمر)	ʔaʕtini ilbaskuih (أعطيني البسكوتة)	0 .000

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