Open or Traditional Education: Requesting in Interlanguage Pragmatics

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Abstract

This paper is a comparative pragmalinguistic, sociopragmatic study of L2 request performance between learners in - open and classical learning settings in Palestine. With the assumption that learners in both settings are driven by their L1 speech norms (L1 interference), the researcher tried to explain learners' English language performance both pragmalinguistically, in regards to the level of indirectness and types of modification, and sociopragmatically, in regards to the impact of social parameters (status, distance and degree of imposition) on the level of indirectness and amount of modification. Since English and Arabic are distinct linguistically and culturally, the researcher tried to explain the extent of such influence with reference to language learning in both settings. The study was carried out at Al-Quds Open University (QOU) and the Arab American University (AAUJ) in Palestine. Discourse completion task (DCT) was used to collect relevant data, which were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings suggested that while QOU learners approximate L1 requesting norms pragmalinguistically and socipragmaically, AAUJ learners tend to play it safe through preference for norms that are less face threatening and more conforming to the English language traditions. The differences between the request performance of both groups of L2 learners could be attributed to the different methods of instruction and language learning policies at both universities. The study recommends a greater emphasis on face-to-face meetings and the application of more interactive media for teaching and learning English as a foreign language in the open education settings.

Keywords: Interlanguage pragmatics, Open Learning, Competence, Pragmalinguistics, Sociopragmatics

Introduction

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP henceforth) is an interdisciplinary field of study that combines pragmatics and language learning. ILP has been defined as "the study of non-native speakers' comprehension, production and acquisition of linguistic action in L2" (Kasper, 1995, p.141) or the study of "non-native speakers' use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge" (Kasper and Rose, 1999, p.81). The field examines the speakers' ability to adapt to the situation and interlocutors' demands, determining whether it is acceptable to perform a speech act in a given situation and, if yes, selecting one or more semantic formulas that would be appropriate in the realization of the given speech act (Cohen, 1996).

When it comes to pragmatic transfer (L1 interference), interlanguage pragmatics distinguishes between learners' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic abilities. Pragmalinguistics, according to Leech (1983), is the linguistic resources a language encompasses to express a certain illocutionary force. Sociopragmatics, on the other hand, is the "sociological interface of pragmatics" (Leech, 1983, p. 10), or the influence social norms and values have on the choice of linguistic forms to perform a particular illocutionary act. Based on such distinction and in reference to language learning, Thomas (1983) made a distinction between what he called pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failures. Pragmalinguistic failure is conventional and can be avoided with more attention by language learners to grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Sociopragmatic failure, on the other hand, relates to the transfer of L1 social and cultural norms into L2. This kind of transfer could be harmful and face threatening when it violates the L2 socio-cultural norms, eventually leading to misunderstanding and negative stereotyping.

This paper is a comparative cross-sectional case study of language performance at Al-Quds Open University (QOU henceforth) and Arab American University (AAUJ henceforth) in Palestine as different education settings. The paper will examine levels of indirectness and modification in the learners' pragmalinguistic performance of requests and these learners' perception of the social variables of status, distance and imposition with reference to instruction policies at both universities.

Keegan (1990, 1998) outlines five demarcation lines between open education and traditional teaching and learning; namely the quasi-permanent separation between learners and teacher, planning and preparation of learning material, the use of technical media, the provision of two-way communication, and the quasi-absence of learning groups. Students at QOU can attend, though voluntarily, a limited number of face-face-face meetings; almost one-fourth of the number of meetings at a traditional university. Group discussions and two-way communication between students and teachers at QOU are present only through the limited number of meetings, often in the form of lectures. The Open University in Palestine is more faithful to the second line, which provides more organized and highly planned reading materials. Students at the QOU can develop a self-dependent mode of learning. Technology has to bridge the gap resulting from the distance between the teacher and student in time and place. This technology, however, is crippled and unable to fully perform its role due to some possible factors, such as an unreliable internet connection, unavailability of internet connection for some students in their homes, weak computer skills and low incentives by teachers to choose blended or online learning (Ghanem and Hamayil, 2011). Traditional learning and teaching, on the other hand, is characterized by more face-to-face meeting, greater role of group discussion and no separation between teacher and learners, with more choices on the study materials and less application of online learning and interactive media. Under such different circumstances, it becomes necessary to show the extent to which each university group approximates L1 performance of requests in their L2 pragmalinguistically and sociopragmatically so as to test the effectiveness of open education in teaching/learning English as a foreign language. To this end, the study will try to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do L2 learners at the QOU and AAUJ differ in their performance of requesting according to level of indirectness and modification (pragmalinguistics)?
- How do the variables status, distance and degree of imposition (individually and combined) influence the level of indirectness and amount of modification in the performance of requesting by QOU and AAUJ students (sociopragmatics)?

Literature Review

A wealth of research has studied interlanguage pragmatics in formal instruction settings (consider Trosborg, 1995; Gass and Houck, 1999; Barron, 2003; Schauer, 2009, among

others), but very few studies have considered distance or online learning (see Adinolfi, 2011). None, however, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has ever tried to bring together the open education and the traditional one in a study that investigates pragmatic differences and L1 interference in Palestine. One important study is Trosborg (1995). Trosborg outlined the realization patterns, use of strategy, and adaptation of strategy according to the sociopragmatic parameters of dominance, distance, and degree of imposition used by native speakers of Danish, Danish learners of English, and native speakers of English in their performance of requests, complaints, and apology. Trosborg elicited her data by means of role-play in the form of a dyadic conversation. In request, Trosborg found differences between Danish and English native speakers' realization patterns. In her words, "learners requests were less prepared, less well supported, etc. in comparison with native speakers of English (NSs-E) requests" (1995: 306). For example, learners were found to produce a smaller quantity of requests compared to NSs-E. As NSs-E were found to be more reluctant in the production of requests, Trosborg concluded that non-native speakers of English language (NNSs-E) were influenced by their mother tongue in the number of requests produced. However, not every shortcoming was attributable to mother tongue interference. NNSs-E were found to under-use internal modification patterns despite the fact that no significant differences were found between NSs-E and NSs-D.

Other studies have investigated other languages, such as Korean, Spanish, and Dutch. A study by Byon (2004), for example, approached American learners of Korean (KFL), Korean native speakers, and American English native speakers' performance of requests. The study used a DCT, and the data were analysed descriptively to pinpoint any sociopragmatic peculiarities in KFL performance of request. The use of requestive norms was found to be consistent with their mother tongue (English). Another study by le Pair (2002) investigated request in Spanish and Dutch learners of Spanish. The study showed Spanish native speakers to use more direct strategies than Dutch learners of Spanish.

The use of modifiers has been investigated in a study by Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008). The study presented internal and external mitigation in interlanguage request in English and Greek first to find evidence of mother tongue interference and second to reveal the roles of status, distance, and imposition in the use of mitigation by language learners. The results showed that language learners deviated in their use of mitigators from target language standards due to

mother tongue interference as both languages have different politeness orientations and different sociopragmatic/pragmalinguistic means in expressing request.

In Arabic, very few studies have been conducted on pragmatic transfer in request performance. A very recent study in Arabic by Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010) compared mitigation made by American English native speakers versus mitigation made by Jordanians learning English. Using a DCT by 45 native speakers of American English and 45 Jordanian learners of English, the study identified performance differences between the two groups in the structure, type, frequency, and linguistic realization of the act of requesting. The study also reported some cultural differences, specifically in the subjects' responses to higher status interlocutors. While American responses were found more individualistic and less formal, Jordanian learners' responses were collective and more formal.

One last study by Adinolfi (2012) considered request chunks in the open education setting. Adinolfi studied the insights the tracking of input/output might contribute to the acquisition of chunks of 36 learners on an Open University beginners' Spanish course. The chunk used for investigation was requestive ("Can you repeat that?"). The study revealed the important role for the classroom input and output in respect of the same sequence. It also found a correlation between frequency of overall exposure and the learners' tendency to attempt the chunk. This study, with a particular focus on open education, underpins the importance of instruction in language learning, thus portending the influence the different instructional settings could have on the performance of speech acts, such as requesting. What appears to be missing is a more comprehensive consideration of different teaching environments and their influence on language performance, the main scope of this study.

Participants

The participants in this study were divided into four groups, two controlling groups of native speakers (Palestinian Arabic and British English) and two groups of language learners (QOU and AAUJ learners). This study approached only female participants as the majority of language learners in both universities were females. Only very few male students were amongst the participants who responded to the test. For this reason, and to make the study population more homogenous by eliminating the gender variable, male students were

excluded from the study. Native speakers of Palestinian Arabic were 45 participants with an average age of 19.6 years old. The participants in this group came from different places to study at the AAUJ. Native speakers of British English were 44 participants with an average age of 20.7 years old, all were students at Lancaster University and the University of Cumbria. Palestinian language learners of English were 56 female participants from both universities, 29 participants from the QOU with an average age of 25.3 years old and 27 participants from the AAUJ with an average age of 21.3 years old. The average age of the QOU participants was higher as students who join the QOU are usually older, especially those who can strike a balance between work and education. Language learners from both universities were senior students who had almost finished all the requirements and were working on their final graduation projects.

Instrument

The data were collected using a DCT used before by Abuarrah (2013). According to Kasper and Dahl (1991), the DCT is a written questionnaire that is made of short situational descriptions. Data are collected naturally in authentic conversations (cf. Wolfson, 1981, 1986; Kasper, 2000; Bella, 2011). Authentic observation, however, may yield some blemishes with regard to controlling social variables, such as status, distance and degree of imposition. Besides, there is no guarantee that authentic data would yield enough responses of the speech acts under study, and, data, if collected naturally, would be time-consuming and might not be comparable between Palestinian Arabic and British English. Still, comparable data are necessary given the comparative interlanguage focus of this research (cf. Beebe and Cumming, 1996, Kasper, 2000).

After interviewing a number of speakers in both languages to identify some of the most recurring requesting situations they encounter in their lives, the researcher established a DCT with nine scenarios (table 1). To increase the DCT validity , each scenario was fully related to the contextual details necessary for an informant to give more possible, natural, and communicative request responses. I used the questions proposed by Hymes (1972), about naturalness and appropriacy in his article 'On Communicative Competence' to assure the occurrence, naturalness and appropriacy of the situations before language users and learners had to respond to them. A professional translator back translated the Arabic version into

English while two native speakers of English read this translation and compared it with the English version (see Appendices *A* and *B*). The two versions showed to be culturally and linguistically acceptable and comparable. Informants had to evaluate the variables of status, distance and degree of imposition after they had responded to each scenario.

Table 1: Request situations according to status and distance distribution.

Value	Situation
- Equal and Familiar	A friend asking for money to pay his/her share of bill (or taxi fare in the Arabic version as this occurs more often in Arabic).
- Low and Stranger	A student asking his/her supervisor to slow down, and explain some technical terms.
- Low and Familiar	A student asking his/her professor for a term paper deadline extension.
- Equal and Stranger	A student asking his/her classmate for some paper.
- High and Acquaintance	A team leader asking two of his/her team members for a pen.
- Equal and Acquaintance	Asking a friend's friend to move aside in a cinema/in a cafeteria (in the Arabic version).
- High and Familiar	A private tutor asking his/her teenage student for a glass of water.
- High and Strange	A lecturer asking one of his/her students to turn off her mobile phone.
- Low and Acquaintance	A student asking his/her professor to be allowed to leave an hour earlier.

Procedure

L1 and L2 data were collected at the AAUJ and QOU in Palestine and Lancaster University and the University of Cumbria in England. At the QOU and AAUJ, the DCT was distributed in class and students were given 30 minutes to respond to the test items. Students at Lancaster University and the University of Cumbria were asked to fill in the DCT in their free time

while in the library or the learning zone[1] because of limited access to running classrooms. The researcher picked native speakers randomly from both universities. Informants (L1 and L2) were required to provide information about their native language, age, gender, country, and year of study. The researcher stayed in the vicinity of the participants during data collection to answer any questions that could arise or to clarify the variables of status, distance and degree of imposition.

Analysis

Following the scales used in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and Trosborg (1995), the responses were classified according to the level of indirectness, ranging from the most direct, such as elliptical phrases, to the least direct, such as hints and availability questions. Direct strategies show the true intention of the speaker; they explicitly express the intended meaning performed in the form of a speech act. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), and Trosborg (1995) classified requests by degree of directness into three main categories:

1. The most explicit, syntactically marked requests (Direct requests).
2. Conventionally indirect requests that are conventionally realized with reference to certain 'contextual preconditions' in a certain language.
3. Non-conventional indirect requests or 'hints' which are realized through either a reference to the elements necessary for the application of request or the contextual elements needed for the comprehension of the request.

Modification patterns were introduced by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), Trosborg (1995). Modifiers were categorized according to their position in the utterance, either internal (downgraders) or external (supportive moves). The table below demonstrates the kind of syntactic and lexical downgraders used in the coding of the study data.

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[1] The Learning Zone is a facility in the center of the university where students can relax and work solely or in groups.

Table 2: Downgraders and supportive moves used in making requests

Downgraders	Examples from the data
Interrogatives	- Could you open the door? - [mumkin tiftaħ ilbab?]
Negatives.	- I suppose you couldn't open the door, could you? - [ma bidak tiftaħ ilbab?]
Tag questions	- (see the previous example) - [iftaħ ilnaba, btiqdar?]
Past tense.	- I was wondering if you could open the door) - No examples
Embedded 'if' clause	- (see the previous example) - No examples
ing forms	- (Would you mind opening the door?) - No examples
Conditionals	- (Is it alright if I go first? - [lao samaħti ʔiða mumkin tiʕtʕi:ni ʃwayet awraq aktub ʕali:ha]
Modals	- Could …. - [mumkin …..]
Agent avoider	- (Can I be excused for some time?) - No examples
Consultative devices.	- (Would you mind…) - [ʔiða btiftaħ ilbab bakoon mamno:nlak?]
Understaters.	- (a bit, a little) - [ʃwi]
Hedges.	- (somehow) - [yaʕni]
Downtoners.	- (Perhaps…) - [maʕaliʃ]
Scopestaters.	- (I am afraid) - [kunt xayef akoon azʕtak…]
Politeness markers	- (please) - [lao samaðt]
Minus committers	- (I think, I believe - [kunt afakir ʔiða kan mumkin …]

Continued -----

Table 2: Downgraders and supportive moves used in making requests

Supportive Moves	Examples from the data
Alerters	- (Excuse me)
	- [ʕafwan]
Preparators	- (Could I ask you a favour)
	- [mumkin ?aṯ ͨlub ṯ ͨalab?]
Pre-head grounders.	- (I left my wallet at home, could I have £20 to pay my share of the bill?)
	- [nisi:t daftari fi ilbeit, mumkin waraqa?]
Post-head grounders	- (could I borrow £20, I left my wallet at home?)
	- [mumkin waraqa? nisi:t daftari fi ilbeit]
Disarmers	- (I know it is tight, but could I borrow some money to pay my share of the bill?)
	- [baʕrif inak maʃɣo:l, bas mumkin ….]
Expressions of thanks/appreciation	- (thanks)
	- [ʃukran]
Cost-minimizers	- (could I borrow some money to pay my share of the bill, I'll pay you back when we …)
Apology	- No examples
	- [?ana baʕtaðir]

The linear regression analysis and Spearman's correlation coefficients were performed in order to show the level of indirectness and amount of modifications related to status, distance, and degree of imposition. Examples from students' responses are also considered for descriptive analysis of L1 interference in the performance of requests.

Level of Indirectness

The general level of indirectness is an important indication of pragmatic transfer in L2 performance. As can be noticed from table 3 below, the level of indirectness performed by QOU L2 is strikingly similar to the level of indirectness performed by PA L1 speakers (*Mean* = 7.92, *SD*=3.1 and 8.05, *SD*=3.6, respectively). Both groups performed less indirect requests than BE L1 and AAU L2. BE L1 responses and the AAU L2 responses on the other hand showed similar levels of indirectness. Both performed more indirect responses (*Mean* =9.44, *SD*=2.3 and 9.17, *SD*=2.06, respectively). Based on such differences, QOU L2 is the least indirect, followed by PA L1. AAUJ L2 comes third, followed by BE L1as the most indirect.

Table 3: Levels of indirectness in L1 and L2

	BE L1		PA L1		QOU L2		AAUJ L2	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
	9.44	2.35	8.05	3.64	7.92	3.15	9.17	2.06

The linear regression test results suggested that the parameters of status, distance and degree of imposition are more determinant in PA L1 and QOU L2 level of indirectness ($r =.301$, $p = .000$ and $.220$, $p = .013$, respectively) than in BE L1 and AAUJ (respectively, $r = .194$, $p = .010$ and $.118$, p = .458). QOU language learners' consideration of status is thus found to be almost consistent with PA L1. The level of indirectness in both groups (PA L1 and OU L2) is concurrently increasing with the status of the addressee according to the correlation test (PA, $r = .176$, $p = .003$; OU, $r = .167$, $p=.013$). As indicated in the table given below, means of indirectness between PA L1 and QOU L2 are comparable at the different degrees of interlocutor's increasing status. In high status communication (S>H), for example, PA L1 demonstrates a mean of 6.77, SD=4.43. While QOU L2 learners demonstrate a mean difference of 0.25 from PA L1, AAUJ L2 learners show higher and more substantial mean difference (2.28). The difference between QOU and PA L1 starts to diminish in equal status (S=H) and low status (S<H) scenarios (respectively, 0.22 and 0.16). AAUJ L2, on the other hand, demonstrates larger mean differences in comparison to PA L1 in communication with equal and low status scenarios (respectively, 1.04 and 0.64).

Table 4: Level of indirectness according to status in L1 and L2

	BE L1		PA L1		QOU L2		AAUJ L2	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
High	9.05	2.53	6.77	4.43	7.03	7.03	8.81	2.22
Equal	9.06	2.12	8.45	3.63	8.22	8.22	9.49	2.12
Low	10.11	2.28	8.52	2.86	8.35	8.35	9.17	1.83

Distance has a secondary role to status as a marker of pragmatic transfer in L2 performance of level of indirectness. QOU L2 is the only group that significantly correlated the level of increasing distance to the degree of indirectness ($r = .174$, $p=.010$). PA L1, BE L1, and AAUJ L2 established relatively similar curves. While the three groups show a moderate fall in

degree of indirectness in communication with acquaintances, communication with strangers displays a higher level of indirectness (see table 5 below).

Imposition positively affected indirectness in BE L1, PA L1 and QOU L2, but not AAUJ L2 responses. While level of indirectness increased proportionally with the degree of imposition in the first three groups, AAUJ L2 responses showed a slight decline in level of indirectness with the increasing degree of imposition.

Table 5: Level of indirectness according to distance in L1 and L2

	BE L1		PA L1		QOU L2		AAUJ L2	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Familiar	9.85	2.04	7.80	3.81	7.27	3.68	9.26	2.34
Acquaintance	9.01	2.75	7.50	3.65	7.90	2.81	9.05	2.21
Stranger	9.64	2.06	8.71	3.44	8.61	2.75	9.20	1.46

Table 6: Level of indirectness according to Imposition in L1 and L2

	BE L1		PA L1		QOU L2		AAUJ L2	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Non-imposing	9.30	2.22	7.44	4.02	7.71	3.47	9.38	2.01
Imposing	9.64	2.48	9.09	2.60	8.06	2.90	9.05	2.08

In sum, pragmatic transfer is more apparent in QOU L2 through a similar variation of level of indirectness, particularly according to speaker's status. AAUJ L2, on the other hand, demonstrates a more flat level of indirectness following status, and a counter behaviour according to degree of imposition showing more deviation from PA L1 requesting norms. The following section will try to find further evidence of pragmatic transfer in the number and kind of modifiers; and the sociopragmatic perception of status, distance, and degree of imposition.

Modification

The following section will try to explain pragmatic transfer pragmalinguistically and sociopragmatically. Pragmalinguistically, the study will examine the kind of modifiers and amount of modification according to the parameters of status, distance and degree of imposition.

Downgraders

Language learners from both universities used a number of downgraders, some more frequently, such as questions and politeness markers. The use of questions, as appears in the table below, exhibits L1 interference in QOU L2 as both groups were comparable (QOU, 70%; PA L1, 70.6%). AAUJ L2 demonstrates explicit deviations from mother tongue norms approximating BE L1 (AAU L2, 89.4%; BE L1, 86.3%). The second most frequently used modifier is that of politeness markers. Similarly, QOU L2 demonstrates an approximately similar rate to PA L1 (QOU L2, 60%; PA L1, 56.5%). On the other hand, AAUJ L2 and BE L1 responses are very similar; both exhibiting almost the same frequencies (respectively 37% and 36.5%).

AAUJ and QOU L2 learners demonstrate a more frequent and unconstrained use of modal verbs. AAUJ L2 employs the highest proportion of all groups (83.6%). The large number of modals could be attributed to the large number of conventionally indirect strategies (e.g. can you, could you, would you, etc.). BE L1, PA L1 and QOU L2 use modals well comparably with a slight increase in QOU L2 responses.

Some downgraders are not used in PA L1 responses; however, a closer look at such modifiers reveals the extent to which language learners in both groups (QOU and AAU) cognitively echo PA L1 speech performance. PA, for example, does not employ any past tense forms as downgraders like BE. L1, however, is present in QOU L2 and AAUJ L2 learners' performance of past tense. PA L1 does not employ an equivalent to the English past modal *could* for modification.

Nevertheless, it uses the modal [mumkin] (is it possible/can) to signify future time through a present tense. The use of the past tense modal, *could,* preponderates in BE L1, QOU L2 and

AAUJ L2 use of conventionally indirect requests. The frequency of modals' occurrence in QOU L2 is about 66.8% of the general proportion of responses in this group; QOU L2 learners only employ relatively less than half of this figure as past forms (24.1%). The number of past tense cases in comparison to the general number of modals in QOU L2 indicates the mother tongue interference by showing the learners' preference for the present modal *can*. AAUJ L2, despite being very comparable to BE L1 use of past forms, demonstrates similar mother tongue interference by showing a large gap between frequency of modals (83.6%) and past tense forms (47.1). However, the large number of modals used by AAUJ L2 would make it difficult to predict whether AAUJ L2 learners were actually aware of the function of *could* as a softening device or not. In BE L1, on the other hand, the difference between the proportion of modals (64.9%) and past forms (51.5%) is very small. These figures show that English speakers employ less *can* modals than L2 learners; and that L2 learners use *can* modals more frequently probably because the past form of *can* modal does not exist in their L1 (Arabic).

Table 7: Downgraders in L1 and L2

	BE L1		PA L1		QOU L2		AAUJ L2	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Questions	256	86.3	199	70.6	154	70	169	89.4
Negatives	3	1	0	0	1	0.5	1	0.5
Past Tense	154	51.5	0	0	53	24.1	89	47.1
Conditionals	38	12.7	46	16.3	20	9.1	11	5.8
Embedding	12	4	0	0	0	0	1	0.5
'ing' form	16	5.4	0	0	2	0.9	0	0
Modals	194	64.9	177	62.8	147	66.8	153	83.6
Consultative Devices	73	24.4	1	0.4	9	4.1	5	2.6
Agent Avoiders	1	0.3	1	0.4	0	0	0	0
Understaters	41	13.7	43	15.2	7	3.2	8	4.2
Hedges	1	0.3	6	2.1	1	0.5	2	1.1
Downtoners	56	18.7	31	11	3	1.4	2	1.6
Minus Committers	6	4.7	0	4.3	3	2.3	0	0
Scopestaters	4	1.3	2	0.7	0	0	1	0.5
Politeness Markers	109	36.5	159	56.5	132	60	70	37

With regard to the variables of status, distance and degree of imposition, these are only significantly determinant in PA L1 and QOU L2 according to the regression analysis (respectively, $r = .186$, $p = .020$ and $.286$, $p = .000$). The number of downgraders in BE L1, QOU L2 and AAUJ L2 responses increases, though exclusively significantly in QOU L2 ($r = .207$, $p = .002$) following the increasing status of the addressee (see table 8 below). PA L1 responses do not demonstrate a similar increase in the number of downgraders. The responses in this group demonstrated the highest level of modification in equal status scenarios (S=H) and made the least modification in low status ones (S<H).

Table 8: The use of downgraders according to status in L1 and L2

	BE L1		PA L1		QOU L2		AAUJ L2	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
High	3.12	1.46	2.14	1.05	2.06	1.32	2.61	1.05
Equal	3.26	1.43	2.59	1.09	2.38	1.41	2.75	1.21
Low	3.28	1.34	2.28	1.10	2.72	1.16	2.81	1.06

The amount of modification is proportional to the degree of solidarity between interlocutors in the four groups (see table 9 below). The only groups that show significant correlations between modification and degree of decreasing solidarity were QOU L2 and AAU L2 (respectively; $r = .231$, $p = .001$; 0.146, $p = .045$), followed by PA L1, though insignificantly ($r = .92$, $p = .125$).

Table 9: The use of downgraders according to distance in L1 and L2

	BE L1			PA L1		QOU L2		AAUJ L2	
	Mean	**SD**		**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Familiar	3.13	1.22		2.19	1.12	2.05	1.40	2.59	1.20
Acquaintance	3.20	1.57		2.38	1.01	2.41	1.17	2.64	.92
Stranger	3.33	1.35		2.44	1.150	2.80	1.28	3.00	1.13

The degree of imposition plays a similar role in status and distance. If we are to consider the L2 and L1 amount of modification, we would see a broader variation according to degree of

imposition. PA L1 and QOU L2 show the highest degree of correlation between the amount of downgrading and the degree of imposition, though only significantly in PA L1 (respectively, $r =.113$, $p = .096$ and $.143$. $p = .016$).

Table 10: Use of downgraders according to degree of imposition in L1 and L2

	BE L1		PA L1		QOU L2		AAUJ L2	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Non-Imposing	3.21	1.36	2.23	1.10	2.24	1.36	2.65	1.102
Imposing	3.24	1.45	2.56	1.06	2.54	1.27	2.78	1.12

Supportive Moves

Supportive moves, as stated earlier, are external to the head act, the nucleus of the utterance or that part of the sequence which serves to realize the speech act force (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1989). L2 speakers use fewer supportive moves than L1 speakers do in both languages. In accordance with other studies in interlanguage requests (c.f. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1986; Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001; Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010 among others), grounders were found to be the most frequently used supportive moves. One example of pragmatic transfer is in learners' preference for post-head grounders given after the head act is performed. Following their L1 norms, L2 learners, particularly AAUJ L2, used larger numbers of post-head grounders showing more deviation from BE L1 requestive norms.

Table 11: Supportive moves in L1 and L2

	BE L1		PA L1		QOU L2		AAUJ L2	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alerters	110	36.8	76	27	45	20.5	65	34.4
Perpetrators	8	2.7	14	5	11	5	5	2.6
Pre-head Grounders	99	33.1	79	28	31	14.1	34	18
Post-head Grounders	83	27.8	119	42.2	75	34.1	69	36.5
Disarmers	19	6.4	14	5	1	0.5	4	2.1
Thankfulness	10	3.3	6	2.1	5	2.3	3	1.6
Cost Minimizers	33	11	37	13.1	11	5	15	7.9
Apology	76	25.4	8	2.8	14	6.4	16	8.5

QOU L2 employed the smallest number of alerters (e.g. titles, the use of words and expressions like *sorry* or *if you please* to attract attention):20.5% of the number of responses, closely followed by PA L1 with 27% of the number of responses. BE L1 and AAUJ L2, on the other hand, used very comparable numbers of alerters (respectively, 36.8% and 34.4% of the general number of strategies in each group).

The use of supportive moves varies by status and distance of the interlocutors and the degree of imposition. Status, distance, and imposition are more determinant in L1 responses (PA, $r = .552$, $p = .000$; BE, r = .373, $p = .000$) than in L2 responses (QOU, $r = .302$, .000; AAU, $r = .352$, $p = .000$) according to regression analysis. As can be seen from the table below, the higher the status of the addressee in the four groups, the higher the number of supportive moves (PA, $r = .541$, $p = .000$; BE, $r =.372$, $p = .000$; OU, $r =.302$, $p = .000$; AAU, $r = .342$, $p = .000$). An instance of pragmatic transfer appears in the increasing number of supportive moves following the hearer is increasing status in QOU L2 and PA L1. AAUJ L2 and BE L1 follow similar trends in their use of supportive moves according to the hearer's increasing status. Table 12 below shows that while the number of supportive moves increases sharply in communication with equals, it clearly declines in communication with high status interlocutors (S<H).

Table 12: Use of supportive moves by status in L1 and L2

	BE L1		PA L1		QOU L2		AAUJ L2	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
High	.83	.74	.42	.52	.49	.64	.50	.60
Equal	1.76	1.15	1.22	.90	.98	.85	1.44	.93
Low	1.68	.85	1.81	.94	1.08	.79	1.28	.80

There was no significant correlation between the number of supportive moves and distance in any of the groups except for BE L1 ($r = -.180$, $p = .000$). The degree of imposition, on the other hand, did not show any similar evidence of pragmatic transfer to status as the four groups use similar numbers of supportive moves in imposing and non-imposing scenarios.

	BE L1		PA L1		QOU L2		AAUJ L2	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Non-Imposing	1.48	.97	1.11	1	.78	.72	.95	.84
Imposing	1.54	1.05	1.48	.96	.94	.85	1.21	.90

Table 13: Distribution of supportive moves by degree of imposition in L1 and L2

Discussion

From data analysis, pragmatic transfer is performed at the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic levels. Pragmalinguistically, QOU L2 approximates PA L1 more than AAUJ L2 does, particularly by level of indirectness and downgrading. AAUJ L2 learners showed more awareness of the appropriateness of conventionally indirect strategies, which are less direct than elliptical phrases and imperatives, the strategies favoured by QOU L2 learners. Conventionally indirect strategies or preparatory conditions include conventionalized requesting strategies, specifically permission, willingness, and ability (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). AAUJ L2 learners, preferring such strategies, try to play it safe. According to Blum-Kulka (1989), the performance of conventionally indirect strategies is both effective and communicatively safe. To avoid face threats resulting from false choice of strategy, language learners in this group show more awareness of the value of such structures. Other studies concluded with similar findings: learners either increased their verbal output to ensure they were very well understood (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1986; cf. Kasper and Dahl 1991), or strived for clarity and explicitness to avoid uncertainty (Barron, 2003).

Direct strategies, particularly imperatives, are an important part of QOU L2 performance of requests. A possible explanation of direct strategies is that learners felt they were unable to decide on the different situation variations and the appropriate formulas for making a request, and so they favoured syntactically simpler, though less appropriate, formulas (Koike, 1995; Hassall, 2000) such as imperatives and elliptical phrases driven by similar cultural assumptions like positive politeness and meanings of solidarity (Abuarrah, 2013).

Modification exhibits pragmatic transfer in the use of downgraders and supportive moves. QOU L2 is influenced more by PA L1 in the use of downgraders, particularly politeness

markers. Following House (1989) and Faerch and Kasper (1989), learners prefer to use politeness markers because they can be used both as politeness markers and as markers of illocutionary force. Pragmatic transfer is explicit in the number of politeness markers used by L2 learners. The overuse of politeness markers could be explained also with reference to the learners' pragmalinguistic ability. According to Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010), the use of politeness markers as extrasentential mitigators does not require a pragmalinguistic competence higher than that required for using other downgraders like downtoners. The use of explicit lexical downgraders, according to them, requires less psycholinguistic planning at the syntactic level.

QOU and AAUJ L2 learners are found to under-use some downgraders, such as, understaters, hedges and scopestaters. This could be attributed to several reasons. Learners may not have enough of the required proficiency level to use the same range of lexical downgraders as L1 speakers in BE and PA L1 (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Cenoz & Valencia, 1996, Al-Ali and Alawneh, 2010). It might also be the case that learners insist more on the message form than on content, which leads them to a less mitigated, yet more efficient requesting behaviour (Su, 2010).

The use of alerters exposes some instances of pragmatics transfer in form and function of certain formulas such as *my teacher*, *my dear Dr*, and *my professor*. The formula *my+ title* is employed in some responses in PA L1, such as [muʕalimti] (my teacher) and [ʔustaðti] (my professor). Such formulas are considered by Tsuzuki et al. (2005) as benefit-request expressions. This structure shows positive politeness, as more intimate strategy, and negative politeness, as less imposing strategy, concurrently. Positive politeness is achieved by using *my* to designate involvement and solidarity in order to motivate compliance. Negative politeness, on the other hand, is achieved by using the formal titles *teacher* and *professor* in order to save face and keep distance between interlocutors.

In preparators, PA L1 speakers usually describe their feelings and/or state of mind. One of the most frequently used preparators in PA L1 is [wallahi ʔini miniħridʒ minak] (I am really embarrassed). Some L2 responses tend to use very similar responses either by approximating the formula given in L1 or by literally translating it, for example:

a) **In fact I am very shame** (sic.), but can I ask you to lend me 20 pounds and I will give it back when I get home.

b) **Excuse me! I want to tell you something, but I feel embarrassed**. I forgot my wallet while hurrying in the morning, so could you lend me 20 pounds, I will bring them back as soon as possible.

Conclusion

The data analysis and discussion suggest that students from both universities transfer their L1 pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic norms in their performance of requests, but the QOU students did that to a larger extent. What has been stated as a problem right at the beginning of the study, through the demarcation lines between open education and classical education, has been proved as one factor explaining the differences between L2 speakers' performance of requests. The differences between both groups of L2 learners could be attributed to the different conditions of instruction as explicitly stated at the beginning of this research. The findings of this research are expected to raise the awareness of both language learners and language teachers of the possible cultural and linguistic differences between English and Arabic. Face-to-face tutoring is still an indispensable part of language teaching and learning. Though diagnostic in scope, the study has revealed the need for a more instructional approach to teaching and learning to improve language proficiency through more face-to face meetings in distance learning contexts. To improve learners pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic language awareness, QOU should consider curriculum design and implementation of more interactive media. Planners and language teachers in both universities are invited to take advantage of the findings of this research. That would help them find the best teaching methodology, thus avoiding any potential weaknesses in learners' performance.

Appendices
A: "Request" Situations (BE)

1. You are at a restaurant with your boss and colleagues, and you discover that you must have left your wallet at home because you were rushing to get to the restaurant on time. You don't have enough money to pay for your share of the bill and you are reluctant **to ask your friend for £20**; of course you would pay the money back as soon as possible, but s/he had just been complaining about his current cash flow problem. You mull it over in your mind for a while and finally decide to ask your friend for money in order not to feel embarrassed in front of your boss. You say:

2. You are discussing an assignment with your **new supervisor, who has just moved to your department** in your university. **It is the first time you have met him**. He speaks very fast and uses a lot of technical terms that you don't understand. Unfortunately, you can't catch up with everything he says, yet you can't just drop the subject as he is talking about material to be included in the final exam. You feel self-conscious about interrupting him, but as you are becoming increasingly worried about failing the exam, you decide to ask him to slow down.

3. You have to hand in your assignment paper within two days; however, you don't feel very well. So you want to call your professor, **who you know very well,** and ask her to extend your paper deadline for one or two days more. You say:

4. You are attending a lecture when you find that you have run out of paper and you need to take some important notes. You ask your friend, Harry, for some spare paper but he doesn't have any either. On looking behind you, you notice a new classmate who has just transferred to your department. You don't know her name but you need some paper, so you have no choice but to ask her for some. You say:

5. You are a team leader and working on a new project when you get an urgent phone call from a friend. You really need to take a note and a phone number but don't have a pen. **A couple of girls who joined your team very recently** have a pen on their table. You really need that pen and decide to interrupt them and ask if you can borrow it. You say:

6. You are sitting in a cinema with a group of friends. Some of them are sitting in a row in front of you. **One of your friend's best friends, an acquaintance,** is blocking your view. You are trying hard to watch the film, but he is completely blocking your view. You say:

7. You are giving private tuition to **a female teenager who you know very well** in the subject you are studying at university. Because you have been explaining things to her for 30 minutes, you are feeling thirsty, getting a dry a mouth. You ask your student for a glass of water, you say:

8. You are a fourth-year student and have been asked to speak to a class of new students on your course about what the course is all about. You only have half an hour to explain everything; that's why you get annoyed when the mobile phone of **one of the male students, who you have met for the first time,** rings for several times. You say:

9. You made an appointment with your dentist to have your teeth polished. There was no other available time, however the time slot you were allocated coincides with your three-hour lecture and so you may have to leave an hour earlier. You ask your professor (female) who has just been teaching you only for one week for permission. You say:

B: Request (PA)

عزيزي الطالبَ. بعدَ قراءتك لكل موقف من المواقف التالية، أرجو أن تتفضل\ي بملء الفراغ بما يناسبه باللغة الدارجة، مستذكراً/ةً مواقف مشابهة حدثت معك، ومسترشداً/ةً بما قلته في تلك المواقف.

1. أنا كنتْ مِستعجل/ة كثير؛ عشان عِندي مُحاضَرة كَمان نص ساعة في الجامعة. وفي التكسي ألتقيت مَع واحد من زُملائي مَعي بِدرُس بِنَفس التَخَصُصْ مِن فترة طَويلة كان قاعِد بِجَنبي. وأنا بَحاول أَدفع أُجرِة التكسي إتذَكرتْ إني نْسيتْ مَحفظتي في البيت . إلظاهر مفيش حل إلا إنّي أدّيْنْ ألأجرة مِن زَميلي، وبعد هيك بَرجِعُلوا إياها. آلمشكله إنُه انا بعرِف أوضاعة المادية صعبة؛ علشان هوَ دايما كان بيحكيلي عنها، بس كمان أنا ما بَدي أحرِج نَفسي قدام الركاب، واللي كان مِنهم أُستاذي في الجامعة، فقلت لزميلي:

2. أنا بَناقِش بِمَشروع آلتَخرج مع آستاذ جديد عنا في آلدائره بلتقي معاه لأول مَره. آلمشكله إنه آلاستاذ بِحكي بِسُرعَه، وبِيستَخدِم اكثير من المصطلحات إلّي ما بعرَفْ مَعناها، بَس آنا مش حابب آقاطعُه، وبنفسْ آلوقت إلّيْ بحكيّة آلأُستاذ مهم كثير، ومُمكِن يكون من أسئلة آلإمتحان، فقلت :

3. لازِم أسلّم ورقة بَحث خِلال أربعَ وعِشرين ساعة، ولكن المشكله إني شاعر بتعب ومن الصعب أَنْهي المطلوب خلال هالفترة القصيرة، عَشان هيك أنا شعرت إنة لازم أحكي مع أستاذت المادة اللي بعرفها كثير منيح، وأَطلُبْ مِنْها تأجيل آلموعد إلنهائي يوم أويومين. فَقلت:

4. أنا حالياً بمحاضرة في الجامعة، وطلب آلأستاذ من الطلاب إنهم يكتبوا آلملاحظات آلموجودة على آللوح؛ لإنها مهمة كثير. المشكله إنه ما معي أوراق فاضيه، ودفتر الملاحظات مليان. طلبت من زميلي أوراق فاضية، كمان هوي ما معه. وأنا بحاول الاقي حد يساعدني، لقيت طالبة جديده في التخصص أول مرة بشوفها، بس أنا مُضطر أطلب منها شوية أُوراق، فقلت:

ــــ

5. أنا رَئيس\ة لَجنِة طُلابية، وبشتغل على مشروع خاص بالجامعة مع مجموعة من الطلاب. إجتني مكالمه ضَروريه من واحد من أصدقائي، وكان لازم أَكتُبْ مُلاحظة مُهمة، وأسجل رقم تَلَفونْ ضَروري. بس المشكله ما معي قلم. في طالبتين انْضَمينْ للمجموعة اللي انا مسؤول عنها من فترة قصيرة،وأنا بعرفهم معرفة سطحية قاعدات على أحد المقاعد وقدامهن قلم. فقلت:

6. أنا في العادة بَلتقي مع بَعضْ أَصدِقائي في الكفتيريا وقت الغدا، كان على آلتلفزيون آلموجود في الكفتيريا خبر مهم. أنا بَحاوِل أشوف آلتلفزيون، بس آلمشكلة إنه واحِد من أصدقاء اخوي الكبير واقف قدامي، ومش قادِر أشوفْ مِنهْ الخبر، فقلت:

ــــ

7. أنا طالب\ة سنة رابعة وخريج\ة هذا الفصل انشاء الله. انا بدرّس طالبة توجيهي بعرفها كثير ومنيح نفس المادة الّي بَدرُسها في آلجامعة. عشان إلّي بشرح أكثر من نص ساعة، شعرت بالعطش، وبدي أطلب كاسة ميّ، فقلت:

8. أنا طالب/ة سنة رابعة، وانطلب مني أحكي لَبعض آلطلبة آلجدد عن محتوى بعض المواد المطلوبه منهم في آلتخصص. آلمشكلة إنو ما معي إلا نص ساعة حتى أوَضِّح كل شي و في كثير من الأشياء لِسَه ما مريت عليها. واحد من الطلاب الجدد بشوفه لإول مرة رن جواله أكثر من مره، فكان الأمر فيه تضيع وقت كثير ومزعج جدا بالنسبة إلي، فقلت:

ــــ

9. في عندي مَوعِد مع دُكتور الأسنان، بس المشكله إنه هذا الموعد بتعارض مع آلمحاضرة آلوحيده في الأُسبوع من الساعة(1-4) وأنا لازم أغادر المحاضرة الساعة(3)، أي قبل نهايتها بساعة، على شان هيك قررت أحكي مع مدرسة المادة، واطلب منها اذن مغادرة قبل نهاية المحاضرة بساعة ، فقلت:

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