

1. Introduction

1.1 The Objective of the Study

People do things with words, which is a basic tenet of pragmatic approaches to language. Requests are an especially significant aspect of language, because much of what we do in communication revolves around our desire to get someone else to do something (Carroll, 1986). Requests, in Ellis' opinion, “ ..are attempts on the part of a speaker to get the hearer to perform or to stop performing some kind of action” (Ellis,1994:167). For Green(1975:120), it is “the polite method for getting the hearer to do a specific action”. Goffman (1971) defines a request as a type of ritual that asks “license of a potentially offended person to engage in what could be considered a violation of his rights... At the same time, he (the speaker) exposes himself to denial and rejection”. These definitions may be summed up with the broader definition by Blum-Kulka, et al(1989): a pre-event act that expresses the speaker's expectation toward some prospective action on the part of the hearer. Requests, by its very nature, call for mitigation and compensation for their impositive effect on the hearer by means of a polite and tactful behavior. Thereby, the study of requests has attracted more and more attention in the study of speech acts.

Within the previous researches on requests, Blum-Kulka and House have done a cross-cultural pragmatic one focusing on the cross-cultural and situational variations in requesting behaviors in five languages----Hebrew, Canadian French, Argentinian Spanish, Australian English and German. My study wants to be a complementary to their research, with an extension to a typical example of the oriental language----Chinese. My study aims at investigating how the situational and cultural factors affect the choice of request strategies in American English, German and Chinese, attempting to testify whether the conclusions which Blum-Kulka and House have drawn are also valid to the three languages examined in this study and to find out the scale of directness among the three languages.

1.2 The Organization of the paper

This paper consists of four sections:

Section One serves as the introduction, which concerns the objective and the organization of the study.

Section Two is an overview of the correlative theoretical background involved in this study. It first surveys previous studies on speech acts and request. Then describes the situational factors which will affect the choice of request strategy. Finally, the nine types of request strategies are introduced.

Section Three first introduces the instrument and subjects of the study, afterwards analyzes request strategies appearing in all five situations among American English, German and Chinese, attempting to examine the relationship between situational and cultural factors and the choice of request strategies; and to figure out the scale of directness among the three languages.

Chapter Six draws the conclusion and points out the limitations of this study.

2. Aspects of Requests

2.1 Aspects of Requests

Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper gave a concise glance on the historical development of the speech act studies in the introduction of their investigation on cross-cultural pragmatics (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989). They state, speech act studies originate in the philosophy of language. The basic insights offered by the work of the philosophers (Austin, 1962; Grice, 1975; Searle, 1969, 1975, 1979; Searle, Keifer & Bierwisch, 1980) are based on the assumption that the minimal units of human communication are not linguistic expressions, but rather the performance of certain kinds of acts, such as making statement, asking questions, apologizing, requesting. It is well acknowledged that an utterance like “I am tired” could be interpreted under appropriate conditions as a remark on the speaker’s body condition, as a refusal to an invitation, or, as a request for attention. According to the speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), the performance of a speech act involves the performance of three types of act: a locutionary act (the utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference), an illocutionary act (the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence, because of the conventional force associated with it, or with its explicit performative paraphrase), and a perlocutionary act (the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances of utterance).

Searle (1975) distinguished “direct” and “indirect” speech acts. Direct speech acts occur when the speaker says what he or she means, and indirect speech acts occur when he or she means more than, or something other than, what he or she says. In the indirect speech act, there is a transparent relationship between form and function as when an imperative is used to perform a request (for example, “Pass me the salt.”). But when it comes to precisely defining what is meant by the notion of indirectness, the situation becomes much more complex: the illocutionary force of the act is not derived from the surface structure, as when an interrogative form serves as a request (for example, “Can you pass me the salt?”). Searle (1969) proposed four essential conditions based on Austin’s felicity condition that must hold for a successful performance of an illocutionary act. The four conditions are propositional content conditions, preparatory conditions, sincerity conditions, and essential conditions. For instance, the illocutionary act of requesting is successfully realized when both the speaker and hearer recognize that it is a future act of the hearer (propositional content condition), that the hearer is able to perform the request (preparatory condition), that the speaker wants the hearer

to perform the act (sincerity condition), and that the speaker intends the utterance as an attempt to get the hearer to do the act (essential condition). If any one of these conditions is not satisfied or challenged by the hearer, the act may not be performed successfully. Ellis presents a more detailed description of illocutionary features (see 2.3).

2.2 Situational variables

Leech (1983) distinguishes between *pragmalinguistics*, the linguistic end of pragmatics which refers to the particular resources that a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions; and *sociopragmatics*, the sociological interface of pragmatics, which studies the way in which pragmatic performance is subjected to specific social conditions. And Brown & Levinson's politeness theory holds that the realization of a FTA (face-threatening acts) involves the following factors in many and perhaps all cultures: (i) the social distance (D) of S (speaker) and H (hearer) (a symmetric relation), (ii) the relative power (P) of S and H (an asymmetric relation), (iii) the absolute ranking of imposition (R) in the particular culture (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 74).

The first two concern the relationship between the speaker and the hearer's horizontal social distance or solidarity, and vertical social distance or power.

Distance appears to be a symmetric social dimension. It is the social distance between the speaker and the hearer based on an assessment of how much experience they have had in common, how many social characteristics they share (sex, religion, race, age, interests, occupation, etc.), and how far they are prepared to share intimacies, and other factors.

Power normally appears to be asymmetric in social relationships and cases of true equality are the limiting ones. P(H, S) is the degree to which the hearer can control the behavior of the speaker and impose his own self-evaluation (face) with the sacrifice of the speaker's plan and self-evaluation. There are many sources of power---physical strength, wealth, age, sex, institutionalized role in the church, the state, the army or within the family.

The third variable that affects the choice of a FTA concerns the weightiness of the FTA: the degree to which the act is rated as an imposition.

We must bear in mind that, although the function of these three factors in strategy selection is universal, the evaluation of D(S, H), P(H, S) and R is culture-related and context-dependent. Namely, estimates of power and familiarity interact with estimates of imposition in determining the choice of linguistic behavior. The relative importance played by these and other situational factors may differ from culture to culture, varying in the directness of

requesting behavior. Preferences for interactional style can be deeply rooted in ideological origins and be associated with the problematicity of cultural identity.

Besides, Brown and Fraser(1979) provide a wider term of situational variables---- context internal-external factors. In the framework of request behavior, context internal factors include those features of the context which are directly related to its requestive nature, such as the type of request goal, the degree of imposition involved for the speaker relative to the specific goal, and the prerequisites needed for compliance. Included in the context external factors are the categories of social distance and social power and participants rights and obligations, as reflected in the role constellation of the participants. (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989)

With the situational variables in mind, face work of requests calls for considerable linguistic structures on the part of the learner. Linguistic structures will be presented respectively in the following sections.

2.3 Illocutionary aspects of requests

Ellis (1994) summarizes the illocutionary aspects of requests as follows:

- A. The speaker wishes the hearer to perform the request, believes that the hearer is able to perform the act, and does not believe the act will be performed in the absence of the request.
- B. Request can be more or less direct.
- C. Requests are also subject to internal and external modification. Internal modification takes the form of downgraders, which are intended to mitigate the force of the act, and upgraders, which are intended to increase the degree of coersiveness of the act. External modification consists of moves that occur either before or after the head act (i.e. the act that actually performs the request); these moves can also be classified according to whether the purpose is to downgrade or upgrade the force of the act.
- D. Requests can be encoded from the speaker's perspective(for example, "Give me the book."), from the hearer's perspective (for example, "Could you give me the book?"), from a joint perspective("Let's read a book.") or from an impersonal perspective("It would be nice to read a book.").
- E. Requests are "inherently imposing" (Blum-Kulka, House&Kasper, 1989). For this reason they call for considerable face work. The choice of linguistic realization depends on a variety of social factors to do with the relationship between .the speaker and the addressee, and the perceived degree of imposition, which a particular request makes on the hearer (i. e. it involves a choice of politeness strategy).

- F. Although the main sociopragmatic categories of requests can be found in different languages there are pragmalinguistic differences relating to the preferred form of a request that is used in a particular situation. Also, cross-linguistic differences exist in the choice of other linguistic features such as internal and external modification devices.

(Ellis, 1994:167-168)

Ellis' classification has paved the way for a detailed analysis of requests.

2.3.1 Strategy types of requests

There are considerable researches on the linguistic and communicative strategies of requests. The following strategies are mainly based on Blum-Kulka (1984), Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and Ellis (1994). A request sequence may include (i) alerters, (ii) supportive move(s) and (iii) head act.

(i) An **alerter** is an element, which often precedes the requests and whose function is to alert the hearer's attention to the ensuing speech act. Since alerters serve as attention-getters, they are equal in function to all verbal means used for this purpose.

(ii) **Supportive moves**. In using specific types of supportive moves, a speaker intends to mitigate or aggravate his request. Supportive moves are external to the head act occurring either before or after a head act. Based on Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), supportive moves can be subdivided into mitigating supportive moves and aggravating supportive moves.

Despite the classification, it is of course possible, and indeed normal in some situations for the combination of the above to appear.

(iii) **Head act** (the request proper): the head act is that part of the sequence which might serve to realize the act independently of other elements; namely it is the minimal unit which can realize a request: the core of the request sequence. Head acts can vary in two aspects: a) strategy type, and b) perspective.

a) Strategy types

A request strategy is the obligatory choice of the level of directness by which the request is realized. Directness means the degree to which the speaker's illocutionary intent is apparent from the locution. Directness in this sense is a pragmalinguistic category that lends itself to psycholinguistic validation. It is related to, but by no means coextensive with, politeness. Summarized from Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper's (1989) and Ellis' (1994)

classification, a combination of level of directness and strategy types are elaborated in Figure 1.1. The request strategies in the figure are ordered according to decreasing degree of directness. They are mutually exclusive; i.e., a head act can only be realized through one specific request strategy.

Different options in terms of the level of “directness” can be chosen for the realization of the request. There have been several attempts in theoretical, as well as empirical work on the speech act of request (House&Kasper, 1981; Blum-Kulka, 1984) to set up a classification of request strategies that would form a cross linguistically valid scale of directness.

Level of directness	Strategy types	Examples
Direct	1. Mood derivable: utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force	Leave me alone. You shut up.
	2. Performatives: utterances in which the illocutionary force is explicitly named.	I tell you to shut up.
	3. Hedged performatives: utterances in which the naming of the illocutionary force is modified by hedging expressions.	I would like to ask you to shut up.
	4. Obligation statement: utterances which state the obligation of the hearer to carry out the act.	Sir, you' ll have to move your car.
	5. Want statements: utterances which state the speaker' s desire that the hearer carries out the act	I want you to shut up.
Conventionally indirect	6. Suggestory formulae: utterances which contain a suggestion to do X.	How about cleaning up? Let' s play a game.

	7. Query-perparatory: utterances containing reference to preparatory conditions (e.g. ability, willingness) as conventionalized in any specific language.	Would you mind moving your car?
Non-conventionally indirect	8. Strong hints: utterances containing partial reference to object or element needed for the implementation of the act.	The game is boring.
	9. Mild hints: utterances that make no reference to the request proper (or any of its elements) but are interpretable as requests by context.	We've been playing this game for over an hour now.

Figure 1.1 A combination of level of directness and strategy types

On theoretical grounds, there seem to be three major levels of directness that can be expected to be manifested universally by requesting strategies:

- a. Direct level: the most direct, explicit level, realized by requests syntactically marked as such, for example, imperatives, or by other verbal means that name the act as a request, such as performatives (Austin, 1962), “hedged performatives” (Fraser, 1975);
- b. Conventionally indirect: the conventionally indirect level procedures that realize the act by reference to a given language. These strategies are commonly referred to as indirect speech act in speech act literature since Searle (1975), e.g. “Could you do it?” or “Would you do it?”
- c. Non-conventional indirect level: the open-ended group of indirect strategies (hints) that realize the request by either partial reference to object or element needed for the implementation of the act, e.g. “Why is the window open?” or by reliance on contextual clues, e.g. “It's cold in here”.

In Blum-Kulka and House's cross-cultural pragmatic research (1989), they replace the term “direct level” by “impositives”, with the same content. My analysis will be based on the division of “impositive----conventionally indirect----nonconventionally indirect (hints)” used by Blum-Kulka and House in 1989.

b) Person perspective

Choice of perspective presents an important source of variation in requests. Many request realizations include reference to the requestor (“I”, the speaker), the requestee (“you”, the hearer) and the action to be performed. The speaker might choose different ways to refer to any of these elements by his or her choice of the perspective s/he wishes the request to take. For example, the difference between “Could you do it” and “Could we have it done” is one of perspectives---- “Could you...” emphasizes the role of the hearer in the speech event, while “Could we...” stresses that of the speaker. Given the fact that in requests it is the hearer who is “under threat”, any avoidance of naming the addressee as the principal performer of the act serves to soften the impact of the imposition. We call this dimension of the analysis request perspective and distinguish between the following categories:

- (a) Hearer oriented
 - (1) Could *you* tidy up the kitchen soon?
- (b) Speaker oriented
 - (2) Do you think *I* could borrow your notes from yesterday's class?
- (c) Speaker and hearer oriented
 - (3) So, could we please clean it up?
- (d) Impersonal: the use of people/they/one as neutral agents, or the use of passivation.
 - (4) So it might not be a bad idea to get it cleaned up.

3. Research Design and Analysis

Since the related theories and researches have been briefly described, this section will concentrate on the study of cross-cultural and situational variation in requesting behavior in American English, German and Chinese. The following part describes the methods of the study first.

3.1 Methods

3.1.1 Instruments

The study was conducted in the form of questionnaire. Questionnaires, both in English, German and mandarin Chinese, are employed to collect a large number of language data (Appendix I, II and III). The English and German versions comprise respectively five request situations based on discourse completion test; the Chinese version contains five open-ended dialogues, with its content identical to the discourse completion test.

The discourse completion test (DCT for short), also called production questionnaire (Sasaki 1998), is the major means for collecting data. The DCT has been employed by researchers to investigate speech act behavior and pragmatic transfer for more than two decades (Blum-Kulka et al. 1984). It has also been used in many cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics studies (Kasper&Dahl, 1991). Because the researcher can control variables related to a given context (e.g. the relative status and closeness of the respondent and the interlocutor) in a discourse completion test, it's possible to investigate the effect of such variables (e.g. Blum-Kulka&House, 1989). The DCT consists of structured written discourses that provide the context for the speech act being studied. The respondents are required to write down what they would say in the given context.

Previous researches (e.g. Blum-Kulka, 1984; Blum-Kulka, et al., 1989; Ellis, 1994; Sasaki, 1998) have rendered considerable attention to requests in cross-cultural pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics, thus paving the way for further studies. The present study relies heavily on the work of Blum-Kulka and House (1989) in the preparation of the discourse completion test and owes much to CCSARP project. The five request situations in the discourse completion test were taken from Blum-Kulka and House (1989) with minor modifications.

- (S1) A student asks his/her roommate to take out the rubbish in the public kitchen.
- (S5) A student asks another student to lend his/her lecture notes.
- (S7) A woman asks a neighbor living on the same street for looking after her kid.

(S11) A policeman asks a driver to move his/her car.

(S15) A university professor asks a student to postpone the examination.

3.1.2 Subjects

The investigation was conducted from May to September in 2006. First, a pilot study was done among a small group of students in University of Bayreuth (four American exchange students from USA, representing the American English; about twenty German students in Prof. Dr. Grzega's Hauptseminar "Intercultural and Intracultural Pragmatics", representing the German language part; four Chinese students majoring Economics in University of Bayreuth, representing Chinese.) After the three groups of sample subjects completed the questionnaires, we discussed the instrument with them to determine whether there were any ambiguities or inconsistencies. Meanwhile, our supervisor, Prof. Dr. Grzega gave us proposals on the sample questionnaire. After correcting the grammatical mistakes and improving the expression in some situations, 90 finalized DCT questionnaires were emailed to three groups of subjects participated in this study. 79 questionnaires were completed and emailed back to us from the three groups. The first group comprises 24 American students, partly from the Department of Advertising of Michigan State University. Language data from this group represent native American English students' request style. The second group consists of 30 German students learning in University of Bayreuth. They represent the style of request of German students. The third group is made up of 25 Chinese students majoring in Economics in University of Bayreuth. They do the questionnaire in Chinese and provide the Mandarin Chinese data which represent youth's request style in Eastern China.

3.2 Data analysis

Table 3.1 shows the percentages of the distribution of the three main request strategy types in three languages in five situations.

Table 3.1 Percentage Distribution of Main Request Strategy Types in Three Languages and Five social situations

Situation	Strategy type	American English (24)		German (30)		Chinese (25)		Mean strategy type by situations (79)	
		Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
S1	Impositives	8	33.3%	8	26.7%	6	24.0%	22	27.8%

Between

roommates: request

to take out the

	Conventional indirectness	1 5	62.5%	2 1	70.0%	2	8.0%	38	48.1%
	Hints	1	4.2%	1	3.3%	17	68.0%	19	24.1%
S5									
Between classmates: request to borrow notes	Impositives	2	8.35	1	3.3%	5	20.0%	8	10.1%
	Conventional indirectness	2 2	91.7%	2 9	96.7%	19	76.0%	70	88.6%
	Hints	0	0	0	0	1	4.0%	1	1.3%
S7 *									
Between neighbors: request to look after a kid	Impositives	1	4.2%	0	0	7	28.0%	8	10.3%
	Conventional indirectness	2 3	95.8%	2 9	100%	18	72.0%	70	89.7%
	Hints	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
S11 **									
Policeman to driver: request to move the car	Impositives	1 0	41.7%	1 0	34.5%	10	40.0%	30	38.4%
	Conventional indirectness	5	20.8%	3	10.3%	0	0	8	10.3%
	Hints	9	37.5%	1 6	55.2%	15	60.0%	40	51.3%
S15									
From professor to student: request to postpone the exam	Impositives	1 5	62.5%	1 7	56.7%	12	48.05	44	55.7%
	Conventional indirectness	8	33.3%	1 3	43.3%	12	48.0%	33	41.8%
	Hints	1	4.2%	0	0	1	4.0%	2	2.5%
Mean strategy type by language/culture									
AmE: 24x5=120 Ger: 30x5=150 Ch: 25x5=125	Impositives	3 6	30.0%	3 6	24.3%	40	32.0%		
	Conventional indirectness	7 3	60.8%	9 5	64.2%	51	40.8%		
	Hints	1 1	9.2%	1 7	11.5%	31	27.2%		

Notes: * In S7, the valid number of German group is 29, for one student in this group did not give request in this situation.

** In S11, the valid number of German group is 29, for one student in this group did not give request in this situation.

From the Table 3.1, we can see that the use of impositives, conventional indirectness and hints follows a similar trend across the different situations in all the three languages examined. Among the three languages, Chinese shows the highest degree of situational variation in the use of all the three request strategy types. In some situations, the proportion of the three request strategy types in Chinese fluctuates within a wider range than that in American English and German, while the fluctuation range of the latter two is similarly mild and narrow.

The highest degree of cross-cultural agreement in the use of impositives is depicted in professor request (S15) (48.0% ---- 62.5%). The lowest incidence of impositives can be seen in both American English and German in kid request (S7) (4.2% and 0 respectively), while in Chinese it is found in notes request (S5) (3.3%).

Conventionally indirect strategies constitute the most frequently used main strategy type in all languages in three situations. The peak of cross-cultural agreement in the use of conventional indirectness is especially marked in the case of the notes (S5) (76.0%--96.7%) and kid requests (S7) (72.0%--100%). The lowest incidence of conventional indirectness is found in the policeman request (S11), ranging from 0 in Chinese to 20.8% in American English.

The use of hints follows a trend of its own, both situationally and cross-culturally. The degree of cross-cultural variation in the use of hints varies with the situation. It is relatively low for the notes (S5), kid (S7) and professor (S15) requests. The overall difference across the three languages in the three situations does not exceed 4.2%. Unexpectedly, the highest incidence of hints can be found in the policeman request (S11), ranging from 37.5% in American English to 60% in Chinese. Besides, the use of hints in Chinese reaches its another peak in the rubbish request (S1), 68%.

The result depicted in Table 3.1 shows that social situations play a dominant role in determining the request strategy types, and the two dimensions of variability----situational factor and cultural factor----interact with each other. The above analysis of Table 3.1 also confirms the two findings in Blum-Kulka and House's research on the cross-cultural and situational variation in requesting behavior (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989: 124).

- (a) high levels of cross-cultural agreement for trends of situational variation, namely, relatively higher levels of directness are licensed in some situations than in others across all cultures;

- (b) cross-cultural variation in choices of directness levels within some situations, namely, cultures disagree on the specific directness level appropriate for given situations, reflecting overall cross-cultural differences in directness levels.

Next I will talk about the relationship between the choice of request strategies and the two situational variations: context internal and external factors. Figure 3.1 Displays situational variation for the three languages combined in the five situations.

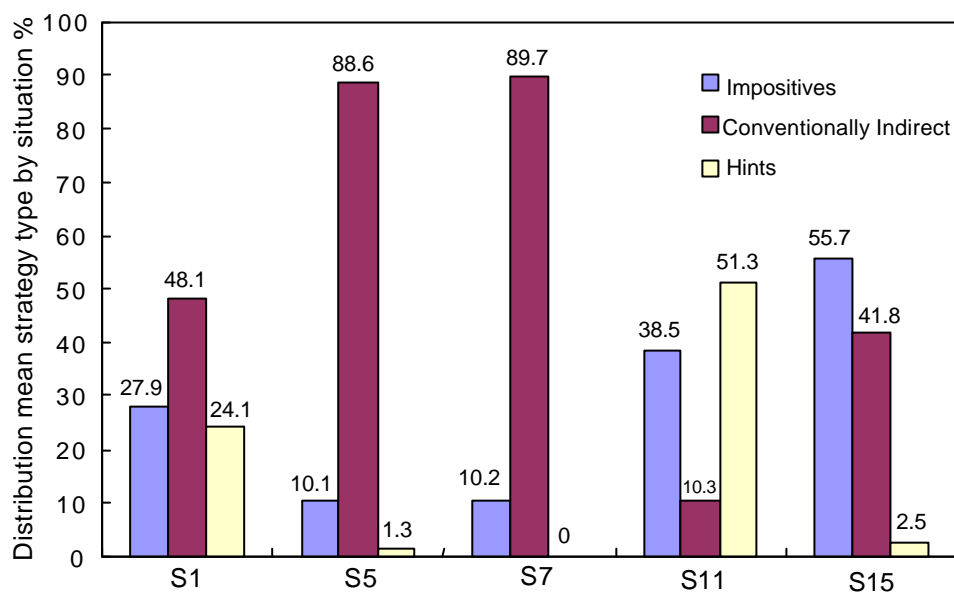


Figure 3.1. Situational Stratification of Request

As seen in Figure 3.1, across all languages indirectness is clearly the dominant strategy type for the notes (S5) and kid (S7) requests. In S5 (notes-borrowing), 88.6% requests are conventionally indirect, and 1.3% are hints. If we combined the two types of indirectness, the proportion of indirectness reaches 89.9%, even higher than that in S7(kid-caring), 89.7%.

To a lesser extent, indirectness is also a preferred strategy type for the rubbish (S1) and policeman (S11) requests. In S1(rubbish-taking), 48.1% requests are conventionally indirect, and 24.1% are hints, so the proportion of indirectness amounts to 72.2%, highly outweighing that of impositives 27.9%. The case in S11 is similar. 10.3% conventionally indirect types combine with 51.3% hints types to form 61.6% indirectness. Compared with the 38.4% impositives types, indirectness still gets the upper hand.

While in the professor (S15) request, impositives outweighs indirectness. More than half of strategy types are impositives.

The result analysed above shows that social situations play a dominant role in determining strategy types of request.

The above analysis also generally confirms the two findings in Blum-Kulka and House's research which has been illustrated in Table 3.1. The social situations play an dominant role in determining request strategy types, and the choice of substrategy types is mutually governed by situational and cultural factors, while the specific proportions in the choices of substrategy types in given situations are cultural-specific. Table 3.2 below clearly give detailed illustrations.

As may be seen in Table 3.2, in the rubbish (S1), notes (S5) and kid (S7) requests, the social power and social distance between the speaker and the hearer are equal, so indirectness is preferred over directness as the request strategy type. In all the three languages, the conventional indirectness is the only choice in the latter two situations, notes (S5) and kid (S7) requests. In the rubbish (S1) request, conventional indirectness is nearly the only choice for American English and German, whereas for Chinese, hints is the dominant substrategy type. I attribute this difference in the choice of substrategy types to such context internal factors: in the notes and kid requests, the request concerns asking for a favor from others, thus in all the three languages the ability, feasibility and willingness of the hearer to comply are important prerequisites for compliance, so conventional indirectness is the only choice in all the three languages in these two situations. In the rubbish request, the request also concerns asking for a favor in American English and German, so checking willingness and feasibility of compliance is the main choice for these two language. In Chinese, the request to take out rubbish concerns more complaining or blaming than asking for a favor, so the degree of imposition in Chinese is higher than that in American English and German, and a more strategy type---hints---is preferred in Chinese over conventional indirectness.

Table 3.2 Occurrences of Conventional Indirectness (CI) and Hints (H) by situations and by languages

situation	American English	German	Chinese
S1 (rubbish)	CI 15 (16) H 1 (16)	CI 21 (22) H 1 (22)	CI 2 (19) H 17 (19)
S5 (notes)	CI 22 (22)	CI 29 (29)	CI 19 (20) H 1 (20)
S7 (kid)	CI 23 (23)	CI 29 (29)	CI 18 (18)

Note: 15(16) means 15 occurrences of conventional indirectness, out of 16 indirectness.

In Blum-Kulka and House's research, they have detected culturally specific interactional styles in the requestive behavior of the speakers of the five languages which they examined. They find out that the Australian English is the least direct, the Argentinian Spanish is the most direct, and German, Canadian French and Hebrew occupy the mid-point in the cross-cultural scale of indirectness (from least direct to most direct). The result they drew has confirmed a previous finding that "German speakers to opt for higher levels of directness in their requestive behavior than speakers of English (House, 1979; House & Kasper, 1981). Consequently, German is proved to be more direct than two varieties of English: British English and Australian English.

As a following study to theirs, I would like to find out the directness level or scale of the three languages I examined. Since American English is a variety of English, I also want to prove an assumption that German is more direct than American English.

The distribution of strategy types along the scale of directness in the three languages examined is presented in Figure 3.2. The result unexpectedly shows that Chinese is the most direct among the three, German is the least direct and American English speakers occupy the middle place in the cross-cultural directness scale. 32% of Chinese requests are phrased as impositives, 40.8% are phrased as conventionally indirect, and 27.2% as hints. If we combine the two types of indirectness, the level of indirectness in Chinese reaches 68%. Speakers of German reach the extreme of the indirectness. In the German requests, direct impositives amount to 24.3%, conventional indirect peaks to 64.2% and hints 11.5%, thus the level of indirectness is 75.7%. Speakers of American English occupy the middle place in the cross-cultural scale of directness. In the American English requests, impositives constitute 30%, conventionally indirect strategies 60.8%----relatively close to that of German speakers, and hints less than 10%. Unfortunately, such a result fails to confirm my assumption about German speakers' higher levels of directness compared to speakers of American English.

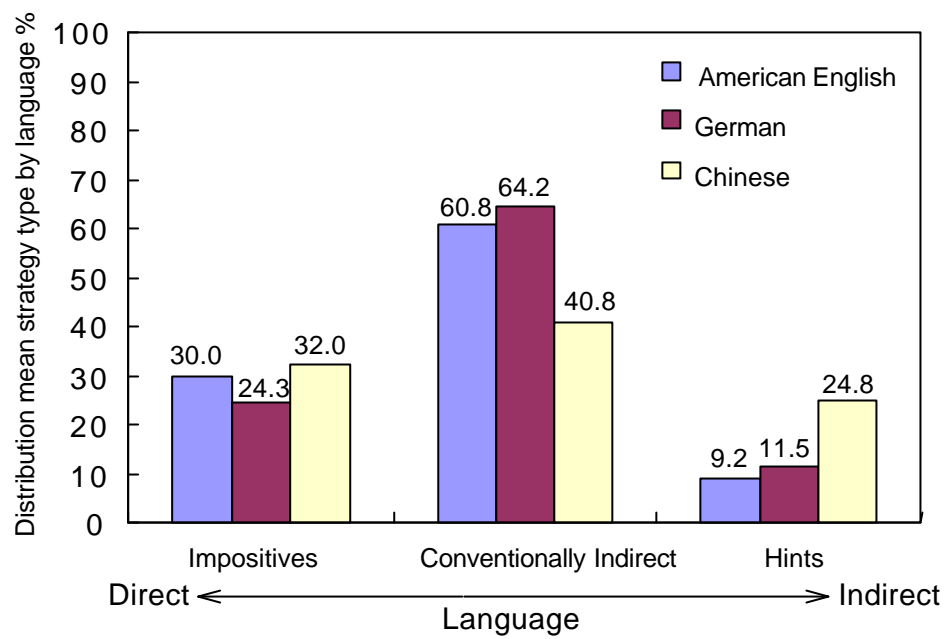


Figure 3.2. Cultural Stratification of Directness Levels

4. Conclusion

In this study I have imitated Blum-Kulka and House's research on cross-cultural and situational variations in requesting behavior. The three different groups of subjects I consider are American English, German and Chinese. I compare the ways that the three groups realize their requests in five similar situations as what Blum-Kulka and House have chosen and the request strategies they take in realization of their requests. The main issue is to find out the relationship between situational and cultural factors in determining request strategies, and to decide the scale of directness among the three languages examined, in order to testify the conclusions Blum-Kulka and House have drawn from their research in 1989.

By means of statistic analysis on the questionnaire, I find out that situational and cultural factors interact with each other when request strategies are decided, situational factors play a dominant role in this process, and the choice of substrategy types is mutually governed by situational and cultural factors, while the specific proportions in the choices of substrategy types in given situations are cultural-specific. Unfortunately, I fail to prove the other conclusion that German is more direct than English. Blum-Kulka and House have successfully illustrated in their research that German is more direct than one variety of English---Australian English. My study unexpectedly shows that among the three languages examined, Chinese occupy the first place on the scale of directness and German is the least direct.

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Appendix I: Questionnaire----English version

Please read the following five conversations. What would you say if you were in their position? Fill in the blanks 😊

Situation 1

Tom and John are roommates. Tom forgot to take out the rubbish and John would like to remind him.

John:

Tom: Ok, I ll do it right now.

Situation 5

Susan and Mary are classmates. Susan missed a course yesterday and would like to borrow Mary s notes.

Susan:

Mary: Ok, but let me have them back before the lecture next week.

Situation 7

Julie and Lina are neighbours. Julie has to go shopping and would like Lina to take care of her little daughter in the meanwhile.

Julie:

Lina: Sure, but make sure you will be back by 6.

Situation 11

Tony accidentally parked his car illegally. A policeman comes and asks him to move the car.

Policeman:

Tony: Sorry, I didn't notice that. I will move it immediately.

Situation 15

Prof. Smith cannot supervise an upcoming exam this week, and therefore would like to postpone it to next week. He is talking with the examinee now.

Prof. Smith:

Examinee: Ok. I ll see you next week.

Thanks a lot for your time and help!

Appendix II: Questionnaire----German version

Lies dir die folgenden fünf Gespräche auf dieser Seite durch. Die Situation wird jedesmal kurz vorgestellt, darauf folgt ein kleiner Wortwechsel zwischen zwei Personen. Was würdest Du anstelle der jeweils ersten Person sagen?

Situation 1

Tom und John sind Zimmergenossen. Tom hat vergessen den Müll raus zu bringen und John möchte ihn daran erinnern.

John:

Tom: Ok, mach ich sofort.

Situation 5

Susan und Mary besuchen die selben Kurse. Susan hat die gestrige Vorlesung verpasst und möchte Marys Notizen ausborgen.

Susan:

Mary: Kein Problem. Ich brauche sie aber wieder vor der nächsten Vorlesung.

Situation 7

Rachel and Lina sind Nachbarn. Rachel muss einkaufen gehen und hätte es gerne wenn Lina währenddessen auf ihre kleine Tochter aufpasst.

Rachel:

Lina: Mach ich. Sei aber bitte bis 6 Uhr wieder da.

Situation 11

Tony hat sein Auto versehentlich in der Halteverbotszone abgestellt. Ein Polizist kommt vorbei und möchte, dass Tony sein Auto wegfährt.

Polizist:

Tony: Oh, tut mir leid, das hatte ich nicht bemerkt. Ich fahre es sofort weg.

Situation 15

Professor Smith kann das Examen diese Woche nicht abnehmen und möchte es deshalb um eine Woche verschieben. Hier spricht er mit dem Student der sich für das Examen angemeldet hatte.

Professor:

Student: OK. Ich sehe Sie dann nächste Woche.

Vielen Dank für deine Mitarbeit! ☺

Appendix III: Questionnaire----Chinese version

请根据下面的场景提示完成对话

场景 1: 甲和乙是室友。本周轮到甲做值日,可是他忘了倒公共厨房的垃圾,乙想要提醒他。

乙:

甲:噢,我马上去。

场景 5:

丙和丁是同学。丙昨天缺了课,于是想向丁借课堂笔记。

丙:

丁:好的。不过下周上课前记得还给我。

场景 7:

小赵和小钱是邻居。小赵着急出门买点东西,想托小钱帮忙照看一下女儿。

小赵:

小钱:没问题。但最好你能 6 点之前回来。

场景 11:

小孙违章停车了,一个交警走过来让他把车开走。

交警:

小孙:真抱歉,我没注意到,我马上开走。

场景 15:

李教授本周因故无法主持考试,想将考试推迟至下周。他在跟受试者说。

李教授:

受试者:好,下周见。