# Gender Based Differences in Request Realization

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This entry aims to give a compact overview over the findings of a 2017 study on gender-based differences in the respondents requestive behavior. It is heavily based on the study of Breuer/Geluykens (2007) where the differences between American and British English were investigated. The data collection done here takes another variable into consideration: Gender. There will be a look at (1) the directness of the respondent's behavior and (2) the usage of modifications in their utterances under the assumption that there is no major difference between gender specific requestive behavior.

## *Method*

The database in use consists of 138 requests uttered by 17 participants (10 Male, 7 Female). They where each given eight situations which triggered a requestive action by the participant (see Table 1). For comparison sake, the situations created where very similar to those used by Breuer/Geluykens as the same two variables, social distance (SD) and severity of request (SEV) where altered. To control context internal factors, the gender of the addressee was also varied. The questionnaire was distributed to a group of German students between the age of 18 and 25 that all had finished their formal school education. To compensate for possible learner variabilities, it was made sure that every participant had at least 8 years of English classes at the same type of school. For every participant the L1 was German and the L2 English.

| Situation | Variables |
|---|---|
| You are in line for a coffee and realize you are missing some money. You ask the girl behind you for some spare change. | **SEV**+/**SD**+ |
| You forgot your pens at home. You ask your friend John to lend you some. | SEV-/SD- |
| You are in the library and have trouble finding a book. You ask the library officer Ms. Miller for help. | SEV-/**SD**+ |
| You are going on holidays for three weeks and you need someone to water your plants. You ask your neighbor Inga for help. | **SEV**+/SD- |

**Table 1 | Excerpt of the situations presented to the participants and their variables**

## *Directness*

The results show, that by a clear majority both male and female participants use conventional directness as their go-to tactic to request (see Table 2).

*|I am missing some money can you lend me some money for my coffee please? (M, 19) |*

Out of 136 requests only 5 times a different tactic was used.

| Directness \| % | Male | Female | Directness \| N | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Direct | 2,5% | 0% | Direct | 2 | 0 |
| ConventionallyIndirect | 95% | 98,2% | ConventionallyIndirect | 76 | 55 |
| Indirect | 2,5% | 1,8% | Indirect | 2 | 1 |

**Table 2 | Employment of the different directness tactics**

There was a closer look taken at the kind of conventional directness in use and close to all sentences were hearer-oriented utterances (Table 3). Those numbers aresimilar to those found by Breuer/Geluykens, although here even a bit more extreme. A possible explanation is, that *our* participants did not have the tools at hand to use different strategies as they were L2 learners of English.

| Conv. Indirectness \| % | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|
| (Suggestory) | 0% | 3,6% |
| (Speaker-oriented) | 0% | 3,6% |
| (HearerOriented) | 87,5% | 89,2% |
| (Question f. Info.) | 12,5% | 3,6% |

| Conv. Indirectness\| N | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|
| (Suggestory) | 0 | 2 |
| (Speaker-oriented) | 0 | 2 |
| (HearerOriented) | 70 | 50 |
| (Question f. Info.) | 10 | 2 |

**Table 3 | Employment of the different conventional directness tactics**

**Modification**

Just like the Breuer/Geluykens study there was a look at the modifier usage in the two groups. In this study there was a major difference found in the usage of external modifiers between genders, but similarities in the usage of internal modifications (see Table 4). Syntactic as well as lexical usage of internal modification was very low around the 0.5 per head act mark and unsurprisingly the range of tactics used was also little (when looking at the range of tactics used it was taken the groups size differences were taken into consideration). That said, there was neither a range difference nor a difference in employment numbers found between genders. The difference that was found concerns external modifier usage. There is a huge gap between the external modification per utterance, as male participants modified 1.58 times and female participants only 0.91 times. Consequently, male participants also used every single type of the ten external modifiers we looked at but females only four.

It was found to be true that both genders value the severity of request and social distance in the same way, whereas the severity matters more than the distance (see Table 5). When there is a high severity of request a lot more words are used (around +2,6 for both genders) than if there is a low severity of request. However, social distance matters less for both groups as here the word gain that we connect here to modifier usage is less high (+1,1 for both genders). Those findings are again in line with those from 2007.

| Modification | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|
| Internal | 0,43 | 0,53 |
| External | 1,58 | 0,91 |
| COMBINED | 2,01 | 1,44 |

**Table 4 | Modifications per Utterance**

| SEV+ | SEV- | SD+ | SD- |
|---|---|---|---|
| 14,3 | 11,7 | 13,5 | 12,4 |
| +2,6 | | +1,1 | |

**Table 5 | Utterance Length in Words for All Sentences with the Same Variable**

It was assumed that there is no major difference between genders in their request realization at least not if the only variables are those used here. Although there was a huge gap found in the employment of external modifiers, these results must be verified by a larger sample size in the future. Other studies found other differences in the language use between genders and concerning request realization further research must be done. One could, for instance, vary the gender of the addressee, instead of severity and distance, and investigate if same gender requests differ from non-same gender requests. The data presented here can be used as a foundation and a point of reference.

Breuer, A. & Geluykens, R. (2007): "Variation in British and American English requests. A contrastive analysis". Kraft, B. & Geluykens, R. (eds.): Cross-cultural Pragmatics and Interlanguage English. Munich: Lincom Europa, 107-126.