



## MAKING SENSE OF THE HOTEL TRAINEES' INTERNAL REQUEST MODIFICATION IN JORDANIAN HOST-GUEST INTERACTION

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### Abstract:

This paper examines the language of requests among the hotel trainees in Jordan. It seeks to explore the ways in which the trainees formulate requests in English as a foreign language at the service counter. Specifically, it discusses the extent to which the Jordanian trainees' use of internal modifiers when managing interpersonal and cross-cultural communication diverges from that of the native speakers who are also the hotel supervisors and to relate any such divergences to politeness and cultural factors. The data collected include conversations between the trainees and hotel guests. The findings demonstrate that trainees underuse internal modifiers to mitigate the imposition of the requests and they favour the marker 'please' more than any other modifiers. The findings also reveal that the trainees deviate from the native speakers' performance in terms of volume and types of modifiers. Some of these deviations might refer to Arabic language influence, pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer or to insufficient linguistic and pragmatic competences.

**Keywords:** language of request, request modifiers, pragmatic competence, host-guest interaction, Jordan

### 1. Introduction

Researchers in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) have examined a myriad of linguistic issues related to second language (L2) learners' performance. They analysed the

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production of discourse in various settings (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 2005). They have also studied interpersonal and relational issues in the development of interlanguage pragmatic (Leech, 2014) and how L2 learners' comprehension skills and speech realization develop across time (Cruz, 2013b). Nevertheless, L2 learners' linguistic behaviour in various service encounters has not received equivalent attention (Fernández-Amaya and Hernández-López, 2015).

Too much concern for speech act realisation and comprehension has perhaps caused ILP researchers to focus on limited aspects of performing and understanding speech acts appropriately. Rather, researchers should focus on how learners effectively engage in longer conversational exchanges such as in the service encounter context (Ventola, 2005).

The pioneering work by Merritt (1976) on service encounters has triggered service encounter research. Many researchers were motivated to study specific speech acts such as requests and thanks in these service encounters (Kuroshima, 2010). Some of these researchers focused on relational talk in both interpersonal and mediated encounters (Carmona-Lavado and Hernández-López 2015; Kong 1998; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2005).

In the service encounter realm, the focus has been typically on some settings such as restaurants, corner shops, cafés, or medical consultations (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2006; Kuroshima, 2010; Traverso, 2001, 2006). Some researchers have examined cross-cultural differences and gender variances (Félix-Brasdefer 2012), pragmatic variation among different variations or languages (Placencia, 2005, 2008; Yates 2015), the role of nonverbal language (Sundaram & Webster, 2000) or mediated service encounters and interaction on e-commerce platforms (Placencia, 2015, 2019).

As in the hospitality and tourism industry domains, research has mainly focused on one angle, that is, the marketing-oriented perspective. Some studies examined tourists' satisfaction with hotel encounters (Yung and Chan, 2002), and efficiency and the management of service encounters (Kuslivan, 2003). Studies on request speech acts are also numerous. Among these, however, request strategies in the hotel interaction have not been fully explored. A few studies focused on the role of communication in service encounters (Blue and Harun, 2003; Yuen, 2009). There are thus limited studies on service encounters in the hotel context from the linguistic perspectives. An exception to this include Blue and Harun's (2003) study which emphasised language and politeness, in particular, the language of hospitality, Yuen's (2009) study on the linguistic behaviour of Chinese hotel service encounter staff and Solon's (2013) work on the negotiation tactics exploited by souvenir salespersons in an archaeological site.

Indeed, service encounter needs to be looked at from an interactive angle. This paper seeks to contribute to the hotel interaction by examining how trainees, who are English foreign learners, interact with guests during hotel service encounters in Jordan. It explores the language of requests given that such speech acts occur very frequently in hotel encounters. The inappropriate use of the requestive acts by foreign language learners of English can make them look rude or even impolite and every so often

communication breakdown may occur (Trosborg, 1995). Native speakers may consider pragmatic errors to be more serious than grammatical or phonological errors (Koike, 1994). In this regard, learners need to possess sufficient sociopragmatic knowledge such as the effect of social factors on speech acts production in the target culture, and pragmalinguistic knowledge including the politeness expressions to avoid being considered offensive or impolite by native speakers. The paper shares the insights into the Jordanian hotel staff members' use of internal modification in their requests in hotel service encounters. The research question (RQ) posed by the study is as follows:

RQ: How do Jordanian trainees use internal modification of requests in their interaction with hotel guests compared with the hotel supervisors who are the native speakers of English?

## 2. Requests and Modification

In the spoken discourse, requests have been widely investigated particularly in cross-cultural pragmatics and politeness. They are frequent in daily interactions, and can be realized by a variety of linguistic forms that vary across languages and cultures which makes them an interesting topic to be studied (Schauer, 2009). Additionally, requests are potentially face-threatening (Brown and Levinson, 1987) where the speaker tends to employ linguistic and non-linguistic communicational means to indicate his respect for and awareness of his status and his addressee's position as well. The speaker often tends to modify his requests internally and externally to diminish the degree of face-threat and avoid what might be seen as rude by the addressee. This can be expressed through various ways, for instance, using politeness markers, thanking the addressee, giving explanation, and using alerters as attention-seekers (Blum-Kulka, 1989). Learning how to use such mitigating devices appropriately represents a vital aspect of L2 learners' pragmatic competence. As a result, a good portion of ILP research has focused on investigating the linguistic forms and structures that are used to make requests by L2 learners of numerous target languages (e.g., Al-Gahtani and Röver, 2012; Barron, 2008; Byon, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008, 2011; Felix-Brasdefer, 2007; Ogiermann, 2009; Shively, 2011; Taleghani-Nikazm and Huth, 2010; Woodfield, 2008; Yu, 2011).

Faerch and Kasper (1989) investigated external and internal mitigating devices in the requests of Danish learners of English and German. They found that learners used fewer internal modification strategies than external modifiers and when internal modifiers were used, lexical/phrasal downgraders were more frequent than syntactic ones. Hill's (1997) cross-sectional study of Japanese learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) at three different proficiency levels found that the advanced learners displayed an increase in using downgraders per request; however, they still fell short of target norms of the native speaker's production. The learners' overuse of syntactic downgraders in Hill's (1997) study (e.g., interrogative, negation, continuous and conditional forms) compared to the native speaker group indicates a move away from native speakers' norms.

Chen (2001) examined Taiwanese (NNSs) and American (NSs) graduate students' requests performance when they ask for appointments, and recommendation letters. The study revealed that the groups varied in the volume of lexical and syntactic modification used. The NS students used more lexico-syntactic modification which resulted in more indirect and polite requests. Hassall's (2003) study of external and internal modifiers in the requests of Australian learners of Indonesian found that learners underused internal modifiers but used external modifiers more frequently.

Biesenbach-Lucas (2006) examined the politeness features of students' request to university faculty. Her analysis of NSs and NNSs' use of lexico-syntactic modification indicated that NNS tended to modify their requests largely through the use of the past tense and the politeness marker 'please' whereas NSs tended to use syntactic modifiers in high imposition requests. Considerably, the NNS did not show much flexibility in the use of internal modification as NS did (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006). Felix-Brasdefer (2007) studied the development of requests in American learners of Spanish as a foreign language. He found that beginners favoured using direct requests while intermediate and advanced learners tended to use more conventionally indirect requests and used more external and internal modification devices than the beginners. This further suggests the cultural diversity of language of request.

Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) examined modification of requestive act in the performance of advanced ESL Greek learners. They found that learners seemed to underuse internal mitigators due to the difficulty in using them. In addition, they underused consultative devices which suggest L1 influence as Greek is a culture that values solidarity, and in-group relations. Learners also underused apology which is L1-driven, since Greek culture, unlike the British culture, is oriented to positive-politeness that boosts spontaneity and involvement. On the other hand, learners overused grounders as they are acquired early and do not involve idiomatic forms. Goy et al. (2012) studied the development of internal modification of Turkish learners of English compared with those produced by English NS. The authors found that Turkish learners underuse syntactic and lexical mitigating devices as compared to NS.

The above studies indicate that higher-proficiency learners show more nuanced development in the production and comprehension of requests through using more native-like pragmatic behaviour. Learners tend to use more conventional indirect strategies and employ more mitigating devices as their pragmatic competence develops. Furthermore, a great deal of research shows that L2 learners tend to overuse external modification strategies and underuse internal mitigation devices.

So far, the studies that examined IL requests of learners from Arabic-L1 background are rather limited. Alfattah and Ravindranath (2009) studied the politeness strategies in requests as performed by Yemeni EFL learners. They found that learners favoured query preparatory along with mood derivables and want statements. The learners also used direct forms heavily, with or without softeners, which indicates a transfer from L1, given that Arab native speakers use direct forms to express solidarity

and closeness. Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010) studied mitigating devices in requests performed by Jordanian learners of English. They stated that there are three main factors that influence IL performance: language ability, L2 pragmatic knowledge and L1 transfer. Pragmalinguistic transfer occurred by over-initiating the requests by expressions like 'excuse me' (from Arabic *afwan*) and 'hello' (from Arabic *marhaba*). Learners also transferred certain cultural conventions through using expressions of gratitude, well-wishing, and obligation which are typical to the Arab culture.

Due to the limited studies that address request modifications by Arab learners of English as a foreign language, specifically in natural conversational setting, this paper attempted to explore the internal modifications in spoken requests by Arab Jordanian trainees in hotel service encounters in Jordan.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Participants

Participants in this study were NSE hotel staff and NNSE trainees who are students from a public university. The trainees received training in five-star hotels in Jordan as a prerequisite for their graduation. These participants represent two groups: native speakers of English (foreign hotel staff) and non-native speakers of English (Jordanian hotel service counters trainees). The NSs staff sample consists of sex participants who work as floor supervisors in hotels in Jordan. The non-native sample comprises university students who study and receive training in five-star hotels in Jordan for one semester. Training is a requisite for graduation so they have to spend one semester being trained in different hotel service counters. The study utilized purposive sampling based on particular criteria of respondents which include (i) having taken *English for specific purposes* (ESP) and *English in tourism* courses, (ii) being able to communicate with tourists in hotel service counters, and (iii) having had the experience of interacting with the foreign hotel guests. The criteria for that native speakers sample include (i) being hotel staff members, and (ii) being born and having grown up in an English speaking country, for instance, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

**Table 1:** Participants' Profile 1 (Hotel Trainees)

Participants	Nationality	Program	Year of study	Gender	Hotel experience
P1	Jordanian	Hotel management	4	Male	4 months
P2	Jordanian	Hotel management	4	Male	4 months
P3	Jordanian	Hotel management	4	Male	4 months
P4	Jordanian	Hotel management	4	Male	4 months
P5	Jordanian	Hotel management	4	Male	4 months
P6	Jordanian	Hotel management	4	Male	4 months
P7	Jordanian	Hotel management	3	Male	4 months
P8	Jordanian	Hotel management	3	Male	4 months
P9	Jordanian	Hotel management	3	Male	4 months
P10	Jordanian	Hotel management	3	Male	4 months
P11	Jordanian	Hotel management	3	Male	4 months
P12	Jordanian	Hotel management	3	Male	4 months

**Table 2:** Participants' Profile 2 (NSs staff)

Participants	Nationality	Program	Gender	Hotel experience
P13	American	Hotel management	Male	9 years
P14	American	Hotel management	Male	8 years
P15	American	Hotel management	Male	10 years
P16	American	Hotel management	Male	11 years
P17	British	Hotel management	Male	9 years
P18	British	Hotel management	Male	11 years

### 3.2 Procedure and Instrumentation

The paper is based on the study of interactions among hotel staff and guests in a hotel in Jordan. The data consist of audio-recordings of hotel staff and guests exchanges, gathered in situ, in service counters in three five-star hotels. The service counters workers normally have their own desks to handle guests' requests and enquiries. To fully grasp the scene, the first author used a digital recorder that was placed on service counters in the area close to the staff and guests. The verbal exchanges in the natural setting of the study participants and the way they behaved as they spoke were observed. The interactions ranged in length from one minute to five minutes. The audio-recordings were done on different days and different times to ensure a varied representation of the sample of study.

Ninety encounters were recorded for each group (180 encounters for both groups). The focus was on one-on-one encounters between the workers (the NSs workers and Jordanian trainees) and foreign guests which contain requests. The observed employees responded to guests' enquiries and provided them with services including checking-in, checking-out, offering advice and information. Prior to the actual recording process, the participants gave their consent and showed their desire to participate in the study. They were then asked to fill out the written consent. They were also informed that their names would remain anonymous and the conversations would be treated as confidential and solely for research purposes.

### 3.3 Data analysis

The spoken data were transcribed using the conventions introduced in conversation analysis (Jefferson, 1984). Although the analysis draws on CA concepts, it mainly relied on the pragmatic frameworks outlined in section 2. The analysis of the data involved the identification of requests, and the internal modifiers used in each request. Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) and Economidou-Kogetsidis' (2011) taxonomy of external and internal modifications were used as reference to identifying the politeness devices or markers in the data. The notion of a speech act modifiers can be illustrated with reference to a request from the data as follows. A trainee asks a guest to wait at the bus stand as in '*Can you just wait at the bus stand, please?*'. Within the head act, the minimiser '*just*' and the politeness marker '*please*' were used to modify the force in the request. They are termed as internal modifiers (House and Kasper, 1981; Faerch and Kasper, 1989).

## 4. Results

The trainees used varied syntactic forms to make their requests. Some of these requests were to some extent forceful and impositive while some others were less forceful and less impositive. The trainees were motivated to use the different forms of requests based on the contextual factors or work circumstances. The data demonstrated that the NSs staff made 255 requests in the ninety encounters while the trainees made 220 requests in ninety encounters. They used different types of direct requests, conventional requests and unconventional indirect requests as presented here (Table 3).

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Internal Modification

The data analysis shows that the trainees used internal modifiers in 241 situations of their requests whereas the NSs staff used them in 468 situations of their requests (see table 3). The politeness marker 'please', modal-interrogatives, downtoners, consultative devices, understaters, subjectivisers, appealers, time-switch, personal-switch, conditionals and adverbial hedges were the most frequent internal modifiers used by the participants.

**Table 3:** Summary the quantitative analysis of internal modification used in requests

Internal modifier	Trainees	Native speakers staff
Zero marking	25/220 (11%)	10/255 (4%)
Marker 'please'	66/220 (30%)	112/255 (44%)
Modal hedges	99/220(45%)	153/255 (60%)
Downtoners	26/220 (12%)	43/255 (17%)
Consultative devices	7/220 (3%)	20/255 (8%)
Understaters	6/220 (3%)	18/255 (7%)
Subjectivisers	6/220 (3 %)	18/255 (7%)
Appealers	5/220 (2%)	28/255 (11%)
Cajolers	9/220 (4%)	18/255 (7 %)
Time-switch	6/220(3%)	20/255 (8%)
Personal-switch	6/220 (3%)	23/255 (9%)
Conditionals	5/220 (2%)	15/255 (6%)
	Total 241	Total 468

Source: First Author Research data (2019).

#### 4.1.1 Zero Marking

The results revealed that trainees overused zero marking by failing to modify their requests internally as compared to NSs staff. While the NSs staff did not use internal modifiers in 10/ 255 of their requests, the trainees didn't use lexical or phrasal and syntactic modifiers in 25/220 of their requests (zero marking see table 3). Consider the excerpt from the data below which illustrates this.

Excerpt 1

- 1 Trainee: *good morning si::r.[ Do you need any help?*
- 2 Guest: *[ good morning sir.*
- 3 *The way to:: the beach is (.) from here*
- 4 Trainee: *go straight, [you (.)*
- 5 Guest: *[straight*
- 6 Trainee: *yes, ask the person at the corner (.) there*
- 7 Guest: *okay, thank you::*
- 8 Trainee: *welcome si::r*

The encounter began through a brief opening phase where interactants acknowledge their presence through routinized greetings and the trainee showed readiness to help. The second structural element, the transactional phase, has conversational turns that accomplish functional acts which displayed the participants' intentions (Cruz and Lopez, 2017). Such acts are informative as the trainee merely adhered to business and was restricted to giving details and comments (Edmondson and House 1981).

The trainee asked the guest to go straight without using any kind of internal modifiers. This is considered a very direct request as the trainee did not attempt to mitigate the force of his request (Brown and Levinson, 1987). He used an imperative without being modified which might be considered rude. The trainee may see himself authoritative to ask this routinized request and thus it did not require any face redressives to mitigate. It seemed that he was going to use a grounder to externally modify his request but the guest's prompt answer made him stop there. The offered information was sufficient to satisfy guests' needs as well it was objective, accurate, clear, and concise. It was pertinent to the guests' interests, and given in a well-organised manner. Remarkably, the dispense of the information was the only fundamental issue.

#### 4.1.2 Modal-Hedges/Interrogatives

Modal requests were used by trainees in 99 situations out of 220 and NSs staff in 153 requests of the 255. In the following excerpt, a trainee asked a guest to give him his passport.

Excerpt 2

- 1 Guest: *I'd like to:: check-out.*
- 2 Trainee: *your room number is 1303, right?*
- 3 Guest: *yes, 1303.*
- 4 Trainee: *Can I have your credit card, please?*
- 5 Guest: *(gave his credit card).*
- 6 Trainee: *I recommend you to:: use another card (.)Can you?*
- 7 Guest: *ohh, there was a problem with this one.*

The trainee in excerpt 2 asked the guest to give him his credit card through using the modal 'can' because he realized that his forceful request might be face-threatening so



he employed a modal to minimize the strength of the illocutionary force. The request was formed in this way to call for cooperation and compliance. Using a modal gives the hearer an option to reject or ignore the suggestion generated by the request (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Through using interrogative structure, the trainee did not intend to ask a genuine question, which aims to elicit informative reply, but it was used as a down-grader that minimizes a potential threat inherent in the request (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that interrogatives with proper intonation can mitigate the force of illocutionary act.

Remarkably, the trainees' use of modals when making requests implicates their orientation to treat guests deferentially because of their status. Using modal-interrogative made the requests sound hesitant and tentative, and thus the trainee avoided imposition over the guests. Thus, the modal assisted the trainee to address the guest's face. Additionally, the use of the politeness marker '*please*' soften the force of the requests and indicates deferential treatment to the guests.

In line 6, the trainee used a performative verb explicitly followed by modal-interrogative when he made his request. This might have been motivated by the trainee's desire to maintain his face as service provider by presenting himself as an expert who can offer informative directives and addressed his own face and kept distance through the use of conventionally indirect requests. This indicates attention to face in which the trainee showed willingness to help and readiness to offer help.

#### 4.1.3 Politeness Particle 'Please'

The results showed that the marker 'please' was the second most commonly used mitigator by all groups to soften the force of requests. It was used in 66 requests by trainees and in 112 requests by NSs staff. Significantly, as can be seen from table 3, although 'please' was the most frequent internal modifier used by the trainees, it was found to be considerably underused by the trainees in comparison with NSs staff's use. Consider excerpt 2 from the data below.

##### Excerpt 3

- 1 Guest: *what time do you:: serve lunch?*
- 2 Trainee: *come at (.) 12.*
- 3 Guest: *that's fine.*
- 4 Trainee: *come here early please.*
- 5 *To find what you:: want.*
- 6 Guest: *of course, thanks.*
- 7 Trainee: *welcome.*

The trainee in excerpt 3 asked the guest to go down early by using the imperative structure '*Come here early please*' (L4) and defused it by the politeness marker '*please*' as well with the grounder '*to find what you want*'. The marker '*please*' was used as a down-grader that moderated the impact of an illocutionary act. It minimizes the threat of request acts and heightens the level of formality between the interactants (Skewis, 2003).

According to Sato (2008), using 'please' in the medial position functions as a real politeness marker. It was probably used to show deference and summoned the guest to cooperate and achieve the transaction.

#### 4.1.3 Appealers

Appealers or adverbial particles were underused by trainees in 5 situations. They are still far from the NSs staff's production which was in 28 situations. In excerpt 4, a guest had encountered a problem with his key card and wanted to replace it with another one.

##### Excerpt 4

- 1 Guest: *there is a problem with this*
- 2 Trainee: *a pro::blem?*
- 3 Guest: *cannot open (.)the door.*
- 4 Trainee: *right now, take this(.) card*
- 5 Guest: *this works*
- 6 Trainee: *we will fix the problem soon, okay.*
- 7 Guest: *no problem*

The guest told the trainee about a problem in his key card and the trainee assured him that his problem would be sorted out soon. The trainee used an internally post-posed adverbial modifier 'okay' to highlight the matter of time and seek agreement for confirmation from the guest. Leech (1983) pointed out that the strategy of agreement elevates the importance of the raised question.

#### 4.1.4 Aspect/Time-Switch

This modification was used by trainees in 6 situations while the NSs used it in 2 situations. In the following encounter, the guest wanted to check out and the trainee asked him how he would pay.

##### Excerpt 5

- 1 Guest: *I want to ask about my bill, please!*
- 2 Trainee: *it's 120 dollars.*
- 3 Guest: *I see.*
- 4 Trainee: *How are you going to pay?*
- 5 Guest: *credit card.*
- 6 Trainee: *nice.*

The trainee asked the guest about a financial-related subject 'how are you going to pay?' which could be a face-threatening act. He used the future tense in present continuous form which indicates a deictic distance from the present time reference to express irresolution and indirectness and thus minimizes the impact of the illocutionary force (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), transferring the deictic centre from the present to the past or the future is a negative politeness strategy.

#### 4.1.5 Personal-Switch

Personal-switch was used by trainees in 6 requests while the NSs staff used it in 23 situations. In the following encounter, a guest wanted to go downtown and the staff asked her to go to the opposite desk to help her.

Excerpt 6

- 1 Female Guest: *I want to go downtown, please.*
- 2 Trainee: *okay madam (.) go to that [desk].*
- 3 Female Guest: *[that one].*
- 4 Trainee: *tell him that I want to:: go downtown.*
- 5 Female Guest: *okay::.*
- 6 Trainee: *they will help you.*

The trainee managed to assist the guest. He asked her to go to the opposite desk and tell the person there 'I want to go downtown' speaking in the tongue of the trainee. The trainee made himself a model to explain what the guest had to do. Taking the role of the hearer is a positive politeness strategy because it enhances the hearer's wants and interests and conveys that the speaker shares common ground with him and thus softens the request force through showing involvement and care (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

#### 4.1.6 Conditionals

Conditional clauses were used 5 times by trainees and 15 times by NSs staff. In the following encounter, a guest asked the trainee about the timetable of the courtesy shuttle.

Excerpt 7

- 1 Guest: *excuse me si::r.*
- 2 Trainee: *welcome, mada::m.*
- 3 Guest: *at what time the free bus goes [downtown?]*
- 4 Trainee: *[at eight, madam.*
- 5 Guest: *looks ni::ce.*
- 6 Trainee: *I want to ask if you can come early.*
- 7 Guest: *yes of course.*
- 8 Trainee: *you can find a good seat.*

In replying to the guest's inquiry, the trainee used a conditional clause 'I want to ask if you come early' to indicate lack of certainty so the request is left more tentative (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In using conditionals, the trainee gave the guest the freedom to consider the options so he was not forced to follow the issued request. Additionally, the trainee in line 8 added a grounder which softens his request.

#### 4.1.7 Consultative Devices

Consultative devices are internal modifiers that minimise impositions and can be seen as negative politeness devices (Brown and Levinson, 1987). They were in 7 requests by trainees and in 13 requests by NSs staff. In the following encounter, the trainee asked the guest about the trip time

Excerpt 8

- 1 Guest: *what time we have to:: come.*
- 2 Trainee: *do you (.) think you can (.)come before eight.*
- 3 Guest: *yes, it's ok.*
- 4 Trainee: *good. Eight or five minutes before.*

The trainees used the consultative device '*do you think you can come before eight*' (L2) to mitigate his request.

### 5. Discussion

The present study aimed to gain insights into the performance of the communicative act of request acts by Jordanian hotel trainees who are non-native speakers of English. Specifically, it aimed to study from a sociopragmatic approach the internal modifiers which are used by Jordanians in producing requests in hotel service encounters. The hotel employees entertain the institutional power to ask for information or actions; nevertheless, giving requests is still a face threatening act (Brown and Levinson, 1987) because the employees endeavour to get the guests do something that they would not otherwise do. As a result of the nature of institutional communication, negative politeness is typically expected to be observed through using internal and external mitigation. Comparing the NNSs interlanguage production to native speakers' use, the findings revealed that there were some divergences in their use of internal modifiers as discussed below.

The results have shown that the trainees sometimes fail to make appropriate level of politeness by underusing internal modifiers. Noticeably, the trainees' use of internal modifiers is of low salience. This finding mirrors previous findings in the literature (e.g., Al-Ali and Alawneh, 2010; Bataller, 2010; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008, 2009; Li, 2014; Shively, 2011; Woodfield, 2015). Kasper and Rose (2002) pointed out that internal modifiers are more difficult than external modifiers to be observed, so their pragmatic functions are more difficult to be understood and learned. Thus, they pose greater difficulties for learners (Hassall, 2012).

The significant underuse of internal modification especially the politeness marker 'please' and consultative devices such as 'would you mind' by the trainees may refer to the fact that these devices are very conventionalized in English, thus, they might be automatically used by NSs of English but they are less readily employed by NNSs. It could also be suggested that NNSs underused these markers because they can be seen as distancing devices in the Eastern and Mediterranean cultures as they are associated with

formality rather than politeness (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008, 2011), and therefore do not conform to the Arabic Jordanian society which is found to be orientated to positive politeness (Al-Ali and Alawneh, 2010; Atawneh, 1991).

Remarkably, the trainees were found to prefer lexical devices and use less syntactic mitigating devices than NSs. Syntactic devices, according to Edmondson and House (1981), require language proficiency. This deviation from native-like production may refer to insufficient proficiency in English. Learners may not be able to find the appropriate lexicon to express their intent, or perhaps lack the linguistic liveness to select lexico-syntactic modifiers (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). Trainees may also lack to knowledge of using the proper mitigating linguistic items in the appropriate context. Another factor is potential pragmalinguistic transfer from learners' L1 (Kasper, 1992). This negative influence is revealed through using English expressions equivalent to Arabic formulas. For instance, Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010) found that Jordanians often use the apologetic term '*afwan*' (i.e., excuse me) in their native Arabic language as an attention getter and this knowledge is transferred to English by using 'excuse me' as an alerter upon making requests.

Sociopragmatically, these deviations rooted in the different politeness orientation of Arabic and British culture where Arabic culture exhibits a tendency towards positive politeness, and British culture exhibits a negative politeness tendency (Kádár and Mills, 2011). Most of the internal modifiers examined in this paper could be seen as imposition minimizers that function as negative politeness devices. That is why English native speakers favoured such devices which go with their negative politeness ethos (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008, 2011).

Significantly enough, modal hedges/interrogatives were underused by trainees compared with NSs staff's production. The trainees' underuse of modals may due to negative pragmatic transfer. That is, Arabic language lacks to modals. The only modal available in Arabic is '*mumkin*' (literally, is it possible) that can carry possibility, probability, and capability functions (Abdel-Fatah, 1984). Second, using modals in Arabic may imply humbleness and thus Arabic speakers might prefer not to humble themselves too much (Samarah, 2015). The trainees are, presumably, in place of authority and the guests probably have less power as they are the information-solicitor (Merritt, 1976), thus, using interrogatives on the part of the superior may threaten his feeling of self-dominance. Instead, the employees may use other modifiers to mitigate their requests to save their own face and their addressee's face.

Third, in Eastern cultures, according to Krolak and Rudnicka (2006), Locher (2005) and Larina (2008), using modal-interrogatives may indicate the speaker's insincerity and his hesitancy in performing the proposition thus they were less preferred than direct strategy. A further explanation offered here is that the employees possibly consider using modal-interrogatives or polite markers when addressing guests is not necessary because the workers would give precedence to offering rapid service over politeness language. Extraordinarily, this finding is not consistent with previous studies which found that English native speakers and non-native speakers prefer modal

interrogative as downgrading modifier in their query preparatory requests in extensive variety of situations (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1991; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011, 2013; Hassall, 2003; Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010).

A further explanation comes from Aijmer (1996) who pointed out that the native speakers' reliance on modal hedges or syntactic devices may be due to the fact that they are conventionalized formulae part of their speech routines that are unconsciously acquired as part of the native speakers' pragmatic competence. In contrast, language learners might be unconscious of the pragmatic functions of these conventionalized formulas. Another explanation offered here is that trainees prefer to modify their requests lexically by the politeness marker 'please'. Faerch and Kasper (1989) explained that learners have the tendency to use lexical devices over syntactic devices as they are both obvious and easier to process than syntactic structures. They added that the mitigating function of syntactic devices does not lie in the grammatical meaning of syntactic structures but it is a pragmatic "acquired" meaning that necessitates an extra inference capacity on the part of the hearer. Thus, learners usually tend to modify syntactic structure such as 'would you mind...' with the lexical marker please (e.g., would you please...).

The findings showed that the trainees preferred to use the politeness marker 'please' more than other internal modifiers such as downtoners (e.g., possibly, just, perhaps, etc.). This finding goes in line with Faerch and Kasper (1989), House (1989) and House and Kasper's (1987) findings that found interlanguage learners tend to use the marker "please". House (1989) and Faerch explained that 'please' is a transparent mitigator and an illocutionary force indicator that can easily mark an utterance as having a request force. A plausible explanation of this behaviour is that 'please' can be effortlessly injected in different places of an utterance and, thus, entails less psycholinguistic planning capacity whereas downtoners require higher pragmatic competence. Faerch and Kasper (1989) stated that learners, especially of low proficiency, generally tend to adhere to Grice's (1976) principle of clarity by using unequivocal and explicit means of expressions which can be attained through the use of the marker "please".

The finding also revealed that the trainees underused consultative devices compared with NSs staff. This goes in line with Sifianou's (1992a) and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008) findings. According to Sifianou (1992a), consultative devices such as 'would you mind' are conventionalized in English and consequently they can effortlessly be used in everyday requests. However, learners of English need much effort to process and employ them which explains the trainees' deviation from the appropriate level used by NSs.

Overall, the lack to internal modification may be due to the urgency involved or to the staff maximization of their rights to give requests and overestimation of the level of obligation on the part of the guests to comply with their requests (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). Using unmitigated forms by the trainees could be a result of conflict of rights and obligations between the trainees and the guests. That is, the trainees may

believe that they have more rights due to their institutional power whereas guest may think that they have power too because the sustainability of the institution depends on them. However, lack of internal modifies can cause pragmatic infelicities and add a negative effect to the encounter. This finding goes in line with Hardford and Bardovi-Harlig's (1996) results that students and lecturers' use of unmitigated forms is due to conflict of rights and obligations between the them.

To sum up, non-native speakers' pragmatic performance may deviate from that of native speakers'. This can cause communication breakdown when NNSs interact with speakers of the target language. The hotel service workers, by virtue of communicating with English speakers, need to achieve successful interaction and accomplish their communicative goal efficiently. The trainees' requestive deviations in the target language can cause social misunderstandings and it can also lead to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure (Woodfield, 2010).

## **6. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications**

This paper has pointed out that giving requests appropriately remains a demanding task especially for non-native speakers who often find it difficult to accomplish their communicative purposes and demonstrate politeness in first place. Hotel workers in Jordan, before they enrol in hotel industry jobs, normally have limited contact with other English culture and casual language. Jalilifar (2009) argued that lack of exposure to casual English make learners' pragmalinguistic competence regarding contextualization conventions of the interactive implications of informal expressions limited. In addition, workers in hotels use Arabic to communicate with Arab guests and English with foreign guests, thus, they are often caught between their own culture's politeness norms and the guest' cultural politeness norms. As a result, they might find it confusing as to which norms they should follow or give priority. It is therefore problematic for them whether to follow their local politeness norms or the guests' politeness norms. This paper suggests that the trainees could benefit from explicit hotel service instructions and activities that help to raise their meta-pragmatic awareness (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). It is also necessary to design EFL/ESL books that have explicit hotel encounters instructions.

This paper contributes to the field of interlanguage pragmatics by highlighting the sociopragmatic features of internal modifications used by trainees upon issuing their requests to guests. This paper can be useful in supplying L2 teachers and materials designers with authentic data of how Jordanian learners of English of varying proficiency levels deviate from NSs' requestive behaviour. Najafabadi and Paramasivam (2012) suggested that language teachers could use the advanced learners' strategies of making request behaviour as part of their English lessons when teaching NNSs because trying to imitate the nicety and nuances of a native speakers' performance can sometimes be disheartening to learners who may not reach native-like performance. The goal of teaching pragmatic practices may not require language learners to achieve

native-like speech proficiency. NSs norms are assumed to be an ideal target for non-native speakers; nonetheless, privilege constructs of nativeness are contentious on the cross-cultural and pragmatic ground (Canagarajah, 1999; Kachru, 2001; Seidlhofer, 2005). Najafabadi and Paramasivam (2012) suggested that L2 learners should be provided with both native as well as competent non-native speaker's forms and usages to assist them realize what is appropriate and what is not. However, if they markedly overuse or underuse some modifiers, the instructor should spotlight their deviation from the English norms because high level of directness and the underuse of internal mitigation in English can cause pragmatic infelicities as this does not give the addressee a space of freedom to comply or not with the requests and fails to acknowledge the imposition involved.

One of the pedagogical implications concerning the findings of this study is the inclusion of pragmatics in language teaching and designing textbook materials that highlight the pragmatic aspects of language. Textbooks often lack a sufficient emphasis on the pragmatic aspect of language rather they focus on grammar (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). Several researchers recommend for instructions in pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig, 2019; Rose, 2005). According to Bardovi-Harlig (1996), pragmatic awareness can be facilitated by the use of data which provides authentic materials discussion and classroom practice. Kasper (1997) also suggested consciousness-raising activities to promote the pragmatic development of language learners in the classroom. She argued that such activities let learners develop their sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence and help them to *"make connections between linguistic forms, pragmatic functions, their occurrence in different social contexts, and their cultural meanings"*.

Kasper (1982) pointed out that learners should not be instructed to correct L2 sociopragmatic use because this is in part culture-specific which reflects learners' system of values and beliefs. For that reason, learners should be made aware of cultural differences between their own culture and those of NSs. Teachers should instruct students that teaching sociopragmatics does not force morals and beliefs on learners, but it enlightens differences in sociopragmatic norms across cultures and their influence on language use.

Certainly, the area of politeness of hotel communication still has too much further research. As hotel service encounters can offer precious authentic data, it is hoped that more interlanguage studies will focus on study of hotel encounters in order to expand the inquiry scope of NNs' speech act production. Further studies may inspect request acts in the light of nonverbal features of speech and can also use reflective interviews with the guests to establish the extent to which these requests might be viewed as polite or impolite.

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#### Appendix A: Internal modification

Modifier	Explanation	Devices
<b>Marker 'please'</b>	<i>"An optional element added to a request to bid for cooperative behaviour"</i> (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 283).	'please'
<b>Consultative devices</b>	<i>"Expressions by means of which the speaker seeks to involve the hearer directly bidding for cooperation"</i> . (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 283).	'would you mind', 'do you think',
<b>Downtoners</b>	<i>"...modifiers which are used by a speaker in order to modulate the impact his or her request is likely to have on the hearer"</i> (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 284).	'possibly', 'perhaps', 'just'
<b>Understates/hedges</b>	<i>"...adverbial modifiers by means of which the speaker underrepresents the state of affairs denoted in the proposition"</i> (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 283).	a bit', 'a little', 'sort of'
<b>Subjectivisers</b>	<i>"elements in which the speaker explicitly Expresses his or her subjective opinion vis-a-vis the state of affairs referred to in the proposition, thus lowering the assertive force of the request"</i> Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 284).	'I'm afraid', 'I wonder', 'I think/ suppose
<b>Cajolers</b>	<i>"conventionalized, addressee-oriented modifiers whose function is to make things clearer for the addressee and invite him/her to metaphorically participate in the speech act"</i> (Sifianou, 1992, p. 180).	'You know', 'You see. . .'
<b>Appealers</b>	Addressee-oriented elements occurring in a syntactically final position. They may signal turn-availability and <i>"are used by the speaker whenever he or she wishes to appeal to his or her hearer's benevolent understanding"</i> (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 285).	'Clean the table dear, will you? . . . . . ..Ok/right?')

Adapted from Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis' (2010) taxonomy of internal modifiers.

**Appendix B: Internal modification: The classification scheme-syntactic downgraders**

Name	Example
<b>Conditional structures</b>	"Could you give me an extension for a few days?"
<b>Conditional clause</b>	"... if it's possible to have an extension for the assignment."
<b>Tense1</b>	'Is it all right if I asked for an extension?'
<b>Aspect2</b>	"I was wondering if it's possible to have an extension for the assignment."
<b>Interrogative3</b>	"Will you do the cooking tonight?" Negation of preparatory "I don't suppose there's any chance of an extension?"

Adapted from Woodfield and Economidou-Koetsidis' (2010) taxonomy of external modifiers.

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