A Comparison of Natural and Elicited Internal Mitigators of Request inan EFL Context

By
Asst. Prof. ShurooqAbboodi Ali (PhD)
Department of English, College of Arts, University of Baghdad
shurooq_eng@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study aims tocompare the pragmaticdevelopment inusing the internal mitigators of request vianatural and elicited data over four years of study. To this end, 202 naturalmessages and 192 elicited messagesare collected from 24 Iraqi university learners. The syntactic downgraders are coded based on Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) and Pan's (2012) classification of syntactic devices. The lexical/phrasal downgradersare identified based on Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) and Economidou-Kogetsidis's (2011) taxonomy of lexical/phrasaldevices. The data are collected by WhatsApp, Viber, and Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The data are analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Overall, the findings significantly uncover a clear developmentin the learners' production of internal mitigators in both types of data, but that development is more evident in the natural data. Despite the issue that the elicited data approximates the natural data in revealing similar categories of syntactic downgraders, the natural data unveils more categories of lexical/phrasal downgraders. Thus, the DCT should be used alongside other research instruments to make sure of its validity in revealing real results of pragmatic development. Finally, the study provides some pedagogical implications which could be useful for teachers and researchers of English as a second and/or foreign language.

Keywords: Internal mitigators, syntactic downgraders, lexical/phrasaldowngraders, natural data, elicited data.

1. Introduction

Successful interaction requires knowledge of structure and text organization alongside pragmatic features of a second language. Pragmatic competence is particularly defined as the individual's knowledge and use of politeness rules which direct his/her way to understand and express speech acts (Koike, 1989). Scholars interested in investigating their learners' pragmatic competencehave also studied their development in performing the

speech actsby either longitudinal or cross-sectional research designs (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Theformerfocuses on examining the same individuals' development over a specific period of time (Rose, 2009; Barron, 2003). But, the latter investigates two (or more) groups' development in different stages of their learning at one period of time (Kasper & Rose, 2002).For instance, the learners of lower proficiency or who have no experience in the ESL (English as second language) setting would respectively become higher proficiency learners or with experience in the ESL community in time (Barron, 2003). However, the longitudinal research design is valuable because one can follow the long-term development in the production of the same participants and the variation at the micro level (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

Literature concerned with interlanguage pragmatic development by longitudinal research design has remained somehow limited (e.g.Woodfield, 2012;Schauer, 2009; Chen, 2006; Barron, 2003). The paucity of pragmatic study on the development of the same Arab EFL (English as a foreign language) learners over a definite period of time is important pedagogical concern that entails further attention.Thus, the current study fills a gap in developmental pragmatics in that it aims to compare the development of Iraqi university learners in using the syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders of requestby natural and elicited data over four years of study. Hence, this study looks for answers to the following research questions:

1. What types of syntactic and lexical/phrasaldowngraders do Iraqi university learners use in their natural and elicited requests over four years of study?
2. To what extent does the DCT approximate the natural data in revealing an evidence of pragmatic development in using theinternalmitigatorsof request by Iraqi university learners over four years of study?

2.Literature Review/ Theoretical Background

2.1 Speech Acts with Special Reference to Requesting

Scholars of pragmatics have provided much concern to study the speech act theory which focuses on what is intended from an utterance (Fairclough, 1989; Cutting, 2002). Austin (1962) is the father of speech act theory who states that language users use language not only to produce expressions but also to accomplish actions. That theory is later

developed by Searle (1969, 1976) into certain taxonomies alongside classifying the speech acts into direct and indirect categories. The speech act of request is one of the face damaging acts (Brown and Levinson, 1987) that is related to Searle's (1979) taxonomy of directives (Woodfield, 2012). It is an illocutionary act which shows the speaker's efforts to get the addressee to perform an action (Searle, 1979). Besides, the request is one of the most challenging speech acts for learners of English as a second and foreign language because they should have adequate linguistic norms and cultural values to produce it properly (Abdul Sattar, CheLah, and Suleiman 2009).The speech act realization project (CCSARP) is designed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) to examine the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of request. The first aspect is concerned with the linguistic strategies and modifiers while the second aspect focuses on the social variables that decide the appropriateness of using thelinguistic aspects in certain context. The linguistic strategies are either direct or (non)conventional indirect and politeness is associated with the conventional indirect strategy. The modifiers are internal and external devices which either soften or aggravate the face threatening of requesting.The internal devices are syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders and upgraders occurring within the head act of requesting. The external devices can be used before or after the head act of request.

Studies on requesting have adopted or adapted Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) CCSARPto study the learners' pragmatic knowledge. For instance, Pan (2012) applied that project to examine 180 elicited requests written by 15 Chinese learners of English and 15 English native speakers. It is found out that while the native speakers are more flexible in producing their requests from direct to indirect, the Chinese learners tend to be more conventional indirect. They compensate for the syntactic downgraders by the lexical/phrasal downgraders and external devices. The learners have not developed their pragmalinguistcs repertoire as native speakers do.

Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) also applied the CCSARP originally proposed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and adapted by Biesenbach-Lucas (2006, 2007) to investigate the requestvia200 natural e-mails sent by Greek learners of English. With regard to the request mitigators, they are coded based on Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) and Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) models together withEdmondson's (1981) taxonomyof internal modifiers. The direct requests are more often used in request for information while conventional indirect

requests are more frequently used in request for action. The lexical/phrasal devices are underused while the upgraders are overused. The learners more often resort to the external devices than the internal devices. However, the e-mails include a coercive tone and they are inappropriate pragmatically.

Moreover, Woodfield (2012) studied the development in producing the request mitigators by 8 postgraduates in an academic setting in England. That development is compared with native speakers' performance. The study examines the request strategy with regard to internal and external mitigators and the influence of situational variables on determining the modifiers. A role-play is conducted over 8 months. The comparison shows (dis)similarities with the native speakers' forms of mitigators over time. A linear decrease is revealed in the occurrence of internal modifications by the learners who also prefer to use the lexical/phrasal downgraders over the syntactic downgraders. As for the external modifications, the learners approximate the norms of native speakers in producing them.

In this vein, Schauer (2009) states that learners who study abroad can have a broader knowledge of downgraders and they approximate the native speakers' norms at the end of their stay in the second language context. The lexical downgrades are used by most of these learners in the early sessions. The syntactic downgraders are also produced but they are less varied than the lexical devices in the initial and following data collection periods. It is suggested that the syntactic downgraders could be developed after acquiring the lexical downgraders.

However, thedearth of study into pragmatic development via longitudinal research design in an Iraqi EFL context requires more attention by the researchers. Thus, it is necessary to study that development in that context in producing the internal modifiers of request by natural and elicited data.

2.2 Speech Act of Request by Natural and Elicited Data

The natural data refers to the natural expressions spontaneously produced in authentic settings (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 2005). This type of data reveals the linguistic and pragmatic aspects produced naturally by second language learners in diverse occasions (Ellis, 1992). The elicited data such as discourse completion test (DCT) refers to the elicited utterances produced by learners in artificial situations (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008).

Both natural and elicited data are majors in data collection methods. Yet, the utterances have genuine-world condition in the natural data and display what characters say other than what they think of saying as in the DCT. The lattermight not be rich in data because the participants might not answer all the situations (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993).Despite the issue that the DCT is regarded the most general instrument in data collection due to its advantages, still its validity and reliability are often controversial when compared to authentic data (Dombi, 2019).The necessity of conducting the most effective method of collecting valid and reliable data for measuring the pragmatic competence has directed scholars to compare available methods to determine the most valuable ones.

One of therecent studies is conducted by Hosseinpur,Nevisi, andLowni (2019)to compare elicited data (written DCT, oral DCT, and role-play) withnatural data (talk-in interactions). The participants are 27 EFL learners at the intermediate level. Two types of requests are made by the participants in the elicited data: 'request of low-status and low-imposition' and 'request of high-status and low-imposition'. The findings unveil that the role-play approximates the natural data with regard to the dependent variables and the differences are less considerable between them than those available in the other elicited data.

Dombi (2019) compared the requests made by Hungarian advanced EFL learners via elicited and natural e-mails. The natural data comprises 81 requests while the elicited data includes 78 requests. The data are analysed using Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) CCSARP. The findings reveal that longer request sequences and more lexical devices available in the natural data while identical categories of syntactic downgraders and external devices are used in both data sources.

Economidou-Kogetsidis (2013) conducted study to show the degree to which the DCT approximates the natural data of telephone calls. The natural data includes 110 requests while the elicited data involves 87 requests. An adapted version ofBlum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) taxonomy of request strategies is used to analyse the data. The researcher also follows Hassall's (1999) scale of directness. The internal downgraders are coded basedmainly on Blum-Kulka etal.(1989),Blum-Kulka andOlshtain(1984) andEdmondson (1981). The findings show that the two data sources have significant diversity in a number

of aspects and they have similar tendency with regard to directness and lexical devices. However, the DCT should be used with other instruments to confirm greater validity.

A review of previous research uncovers that comparing natural with elicited methods of data collection to assess the learners' pragmatic competence is still under-research. Moreover, it looks to be scarcely any investigation that studies the extent to which the DCT approximates the natural data in revealing the pragmatic development longitudinally (with regard to the internal modifiers) in an Iraqi EFL context. Therefore, this study focuses on investigating that development in using the syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders of request by Iraqi EFL learners and shows which method of data collection that best reveals it over time.

3. Methodology

3.1 Instruments andSubjects

The natural datais provided by Iraqi professors via theirWhatsApp and Viberover four years of study (2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018). Thus, 300 naturalmessages are collected but only202 messages are considered after filtering them. This study only takes into account the academic messages which are about feedback and meeting. After collecting the natural data in each year, the DCT is designed (refer to Appendix A). It consists of two parts: The aim of DCT and the situations. The situations of DCT are related to the natural situations of the natural data. The DCT is applied to 12 participantsand they have given 30 minutes to answer the situations. Hence, 192 elicited messages are collected by DCT over four years of study.

Moreover, personal information are provided by the participants via a background questionnaire before applying the DCT (refer to Appendix B).For confirming homogeneity, all the participants in both types of data have similar features about their cultural and educational background.Theyare MA and PhD university learners majored in English language and literatureat Colleges of Arts and Education-IbnRushd, Baghdad University. They are native speakers of Iraqi-Arabic and their parents as well. Their place of birth is Iraq and their ages range between 27 and 35 (the mean age is 21.7).Thus, 24 Iraqi learners have participated in the natural data and DCT divided equally into 6 males and 6 females for each data. In fact, the qualitative research does not require a large number of participants

(Creswell, 2012)due to saturation principle whereby no new patterns are disclosed any longer in the data analysis (Streubert and Carpenter, 2011). Therefore, the number of participants and their messages is representative enough in this study. All of these participants and their professors have approved on participating and a consent form is provided by each one of them.

However, the DCT is piloted to another 5 learners from Department of English,College of Education-IbnRushd,University of Baghdad. They are identical in their characteristics to the learners of the main DCT. Two inter-raters interested in pragmatics have confirmedthe validity of DCT. Test-retest is applied to confirmits reliability and the result is 81%. After piloting the DCT, the main DCT is applied.

3.2 Data Analysis

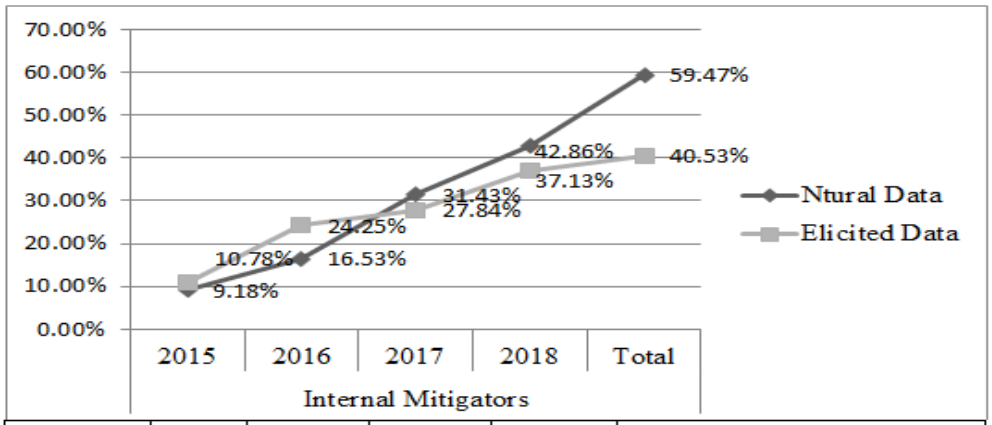
Qualitative and quantitative approaches are used for analysing the data in this study. Qualitatively the syntactic downgraders are coded based on Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) and Pan's (2012) classification of syntactic devices(refer to Appendix C). As forlexical/phrasal downgraders, they are identified in terms of Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) and Economidou-Kogetsidis's (2011) taxonomy of lexical/phrasal categories (refer to Appendix D). The syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders are internal mitigators occurring within the head act of request. The former includes 'interrogative', 'conditional', 'aspect', 'past tense', 'past tense modal', and 'embedding'. As for lexical/phrasal downgraders, they encompass 'politeness marker', 'hedged downtoner', 'subjectivizer', 'consultative device', 'cajoler', and 'appealer'. The function of these mitigators is to soften the illocutionary force of request internally. However, the same aforementioned inter-raters have participated in coding the data and their reliability is 84%.

A word worth mentioning is that the natural and elicited data are equal in word count and thus they are more comparable. All the naturally occurring internal mitigatorsare compared with those available in DCT to show if there is an evidence of pragmatic development in producing them from 2015 to 2018. Besides, the time the learners have started their MA studyis considered the dividing point of comparison due to the issue that the pragmatic changes could be more evident after that point. Furthermore, both datasets are

analysed quantitatively based on Chi-square test to show if there is any statistically significant differences between them in the use of internal mitigators.

4. Results and Discussion

Faerch and Kasper (1989) discuss that the internal mitigators function like sociopragmatic strategies which influence the social impact of the expression on the addressee. Therefore, their occurrence is vital in fulfilling the favorite illocution.Figure 1 illustrates that Iraqi EFL learners produce the internal mitigators to modify their requestsin their natural and elicited data. Overall, the use of these mitigators increases with the increased study yearsin both types of data. But, there are statistically significant differences ($\chi^2$17.827, p= 0.006; $\chi^2$23.023, p= <0.001; $\chi^2$24.659, p= <0.001; $\chi^2$51.571, p= <0.001) between the two data in 2016, 2017, 2018 andover four years of studyrespectively. These learners produce more internal devices in their elicited thantheir natural data in 2016 (24.25% vs. 16.53%). Yet, they increase the use of these devices in their natural data more than in their elicited data in 2017 (31.43% vs. 27.84%), 2018 (42.86% vs. 37.13%), and overall (59.47% vs. 40.53%). However, there is nostatistically significant difference in the use of internal devices between the two datasetsin 2015.



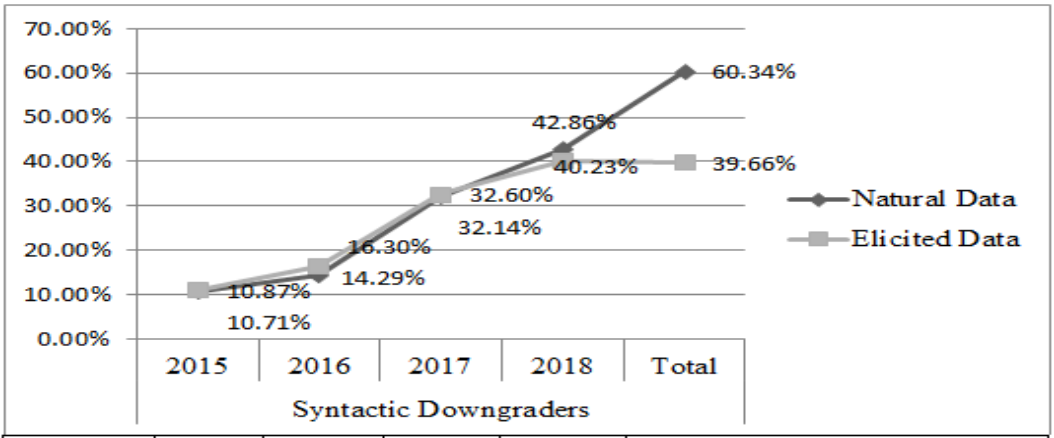
Pearson Chi-square	2.568	**17.827**	**23.023**	**24.659**	**51.571**
***p* value**	0.109	**0.006**	**<0.001**	**<0.001**	**<0.001**

Figure 1: Percentages and Chi-square Values of Internal Mitigators inNatural and Elicited Data

These results show a pragmatic development in the learners' production of these mitigators with preference for natural data in the last two years and overall.This might be

due to the issue that Iraqi learnersconsider the elicited requests not genuine and thus they reduce their elicited internal devices.These learners evidently use more internal devices in their requests when they produce them naturally. Hence, they soften the threatening nature of theserequests and encourage their professors to comply with them.

Besides, Figure2discloses that there is a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2$19.841, *p*= 0.001) between the two data in the use of syntactic downgraders overall. That use increases in the natural data more than in the elicited data (60.34% vs. 39.66). But, there are no statistically significant differences between the two data sources in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018. The use of syntactic downgraders increases in the two types of data with the increased study years. This unveils that Iraqi learners have developed their use of these mitigators to downgrade the threatening nature of their requests. This is related to the tendency of using the structurally oriented approach in teaching these learners by which the structural and grammatical aspects are focused on. Thus, these devices become part of their pragmalinguistic repertoire.



Pearson Chi-square	1.477	2.941	2.162	2.568	**19.841**
***p* value**	0.224	0.086	0.141	0.109	**0.001**

Figure 2: Percentages and Chi-square Values of Syntactic Downgraders in Natural and Elicited Data

Moreover, Figure3showssix similar types of syntactic downgraders used by Iraqi learners in their naturaland elicited requests over four years of study. These devices involve 'interrogative', 'conditional', 'aspect', 'past tense', 'past tense modal', and 'embedding'.

This is in line with Dombi (2019) who reveals similar categories of syntactic downgraders used by EFL learners in their natural and elicited requests.

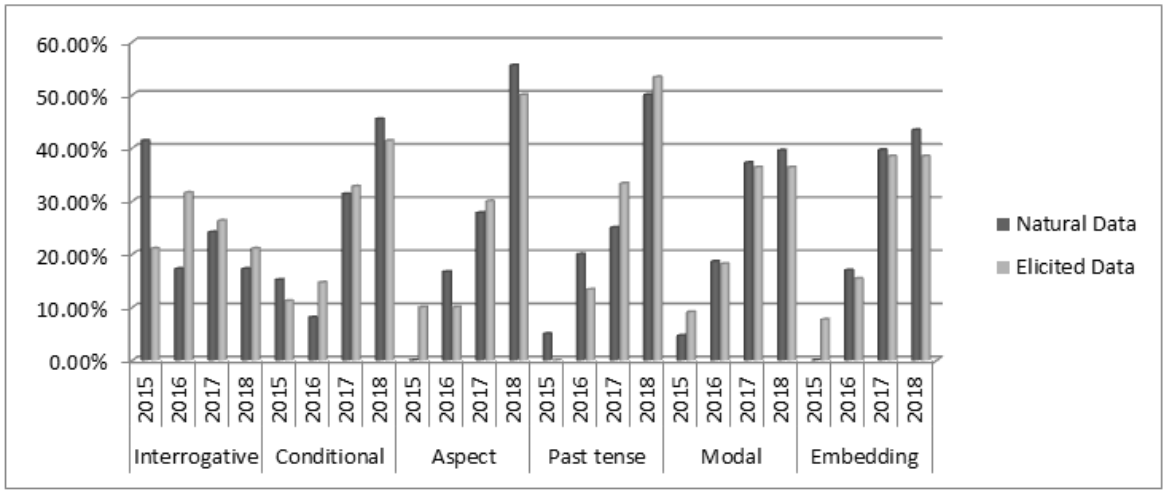


Figure3: Percentages of Syntactic Downgraders in Natural and ElicitedData

The use of syntactic downgraders increases with the increased study years in both types of data. Iraqi learners have developed their use of these devices particularly in their natural data in 2018 except for‘interrogative’. The percentages of‘interrogative’ in the natural data are41.38%, 17.24%, 24.14%, and 17.24%in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. The percentages of ‘interrogative’ in the elicited data are21.06%, 31.57%, 26.31%, and 21.06%in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018respectively. These results reveal that these learners have learned the pragmatic function of ‘interrogative’but they have not increasedthe use of it in 2018. This is due to their preference for other syntactic mitigators becausethey have developed their pragmatic abilities in using them. Here are some examples of ‘interrogative’from both types of data:

Natural data: *Will you give your comments on this topic?*
Is it fine to add another poem?
Elicited data: *Do I need to criticize the writer or just to present his ideas*
Is it OK to see you tomorrow?

Besides, thepercentages of ‘conditional’ in the natural data are15.15%, 8.08% ,31.32%,and 45.45%in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. Thepercentages of ‘conditional’ in the elicited data are11.20%, 14.66%, 32.76%, and 41.38%in 2015, 2016,

2017, and 2018 respectively. These results uncover that these learners increase the use of 'conditional' particularly in the last two years in both datasetsbut in favor of natural data in 2018. Thatdevelopment could be related to the point that the 'conditional'is already used in the learners' native language and thus it is easily used in their data. Moreover, this syntactic device implies an option of refusing by which the request is not imposed on the professor and hence his/her face is maintained. Some natural and elicited examples of 'conditional' are presented below:

Natural data: *...I want it today if you do not mind*
...I wonder if it is possible to give me your opinion about the last three novels you have given to us in the first semester…
Elicited data: *...Can you write it on my chapter if you have time so that I can finish it as soon as possible*
...Could I see you next week if you have time ....

In addition, the percentages of 'aspect' in the natural data are0.00%, 16.67%, 27.78%, and 55.55%in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. The percentages of 'aspect' in the elicited dataare10.00%, 10.00%, 30.00%, and 50.00%in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. These results show that these learners have been developed in using 'aspect' in both types of data particularly in their natural requests in 2018. That device is unavailable in the learners' native language but they have learned its pragmatic function by time in their study.Here are some examples of 'aspect' from natural and elicited utterances:

Natural data: *I'm wondering if it is possible to give me your advice on my topic…*
Elicited data: *I'm Kindly asking you to highlight the weakest points in my paper*

The percentages of 'past tense' in the natural data are5.00%,20.00%, 25.00%, and 50.00%in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. The percentages of 'past tense' in the elicited dataare0.00%, 13.33%, 33.33%, and 53.34%in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively.These results display thatIraqi learners increase the use of 'past tense' over four years of study particularly in the elicited data in the last two years. Some natural and elicited examples of 'past tense' are shown below:

Natural data: *I was hoping to provide your critical opinion on my last criticism*
I asked to see you in Monday to give you my thesis…
Elicited data: *I wanted to know if it is convenient in my discussion of the 10 poems*

Moreover, the percentages of 'past tense modal'in the natural data are4.65%, 18.60%, 37.21%, and 39.54%in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively.The percentages of 'past tense modal' in the elicited data are9.10%, 18.18%, 36.36%, and 36.36%in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively.Iraqi learners have learned the pragmatic function of 'past tense modal' and increased the use of it in both data particularly in the natural one in 2018. Here are some examples:

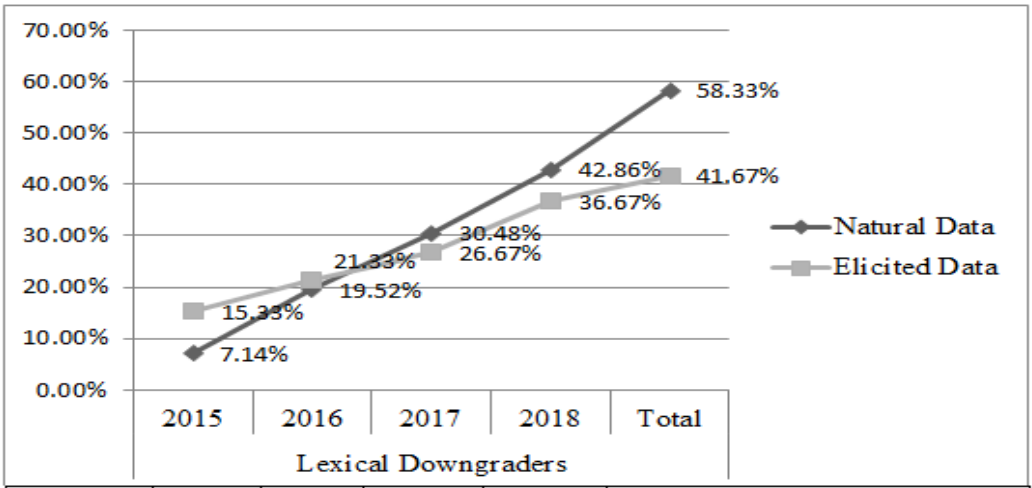
Natural data: *I would like to have your opinion on my paper*
...I'd like to meet you please...
Elicited data: *... Would you provide them this week?*

The percentages of 'embedding' in the natural data are0.00%, 16.98%, 39.63%, and 43.39%in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively.The percentages of 'embedding' in the elicited data are7.69%, 15.39%, 38.46%, and 38.46%in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively.That device is more complex grammatically and requiring more time in production. Accordingly, the learners' pragmalinguistic competence has been developed over four years of study and the use of 'embedding' increases with the increased study years in the two data sources particularly in the natural data in 2018. Here are some examples:

Natural data: *Do you think it would be rich?*
... . Please, I would be very grateful if you give your point of view on my proposal...
Elicited data: *... Please I will be thankful if you give me an hour from your time on Monday ...*

Furthermore, Figure 4 shows that there are statistically significant differences ($\chi^2$4.663, p= 0.013; $\chi^2$8.090, p= 0.006; χ^2 10.570, p= 0.031; $\chi^2$16.695,p= 0.002) between the two types of data in the use of lexical/phrasal downgraders in 2015, 2017, 2018 and over four years of studyrespectively. Iraqi learners tend to use more lexical/phrasal devices in their elicited than their natural data in 2015 (15.33% vs. 7.14%). Yet, they produce more of these devices in their natural than their elicited datain 2017(30.48% vs. 26.67%), 2018(42.86% vs. 36.67%), and overall (58.33% vs. 41.67%). These results disclose that these learnershave been developed in using these devices particularly in their natural requests in 2017 and 2018. That unveils thelearners' awareness oftheir natural and genuine utteranceswhich require more lexical/phrasal devices to be modified and mitigated.This is

comparable with Dombi (2019) who finds outthat EFL learners consider the elicited requests (by DCT)insignificantwhen compared to the natural requests. Thus, these learners tend to mitigate their natural requests by using morelexical/phrasal downgradersin their relationships with their professors. However, there is no statistically significant difference between the two datasets in the use of lexical/phrasal downgraders in 2016.



Pearson Chi-square	**4.663**	3.175	**8.090**	**10.570**	**16.695**
***p* value**	**0.013**	0.075	**0.006**	**0.031**	**0.002**

Figure 4: Percentages and Chi-square Values of Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders in Natural and Elicited Data

Figure 5 demonstrates the types of lexical/phrasaldowngraders used by Iraqi learners in their natural and elicited data. These devices are more varied in the natural data in comparison to the elicited data. The natural data includes‘politeness marker’, ‘hedged downtoner’, ‘subjectivizer’, ‘consultative device’, ‘cajoler’, and ‘appealer’. The elicited data involves the same aforementioned devices expect for ‘cajoler’ and ‘appealer’.

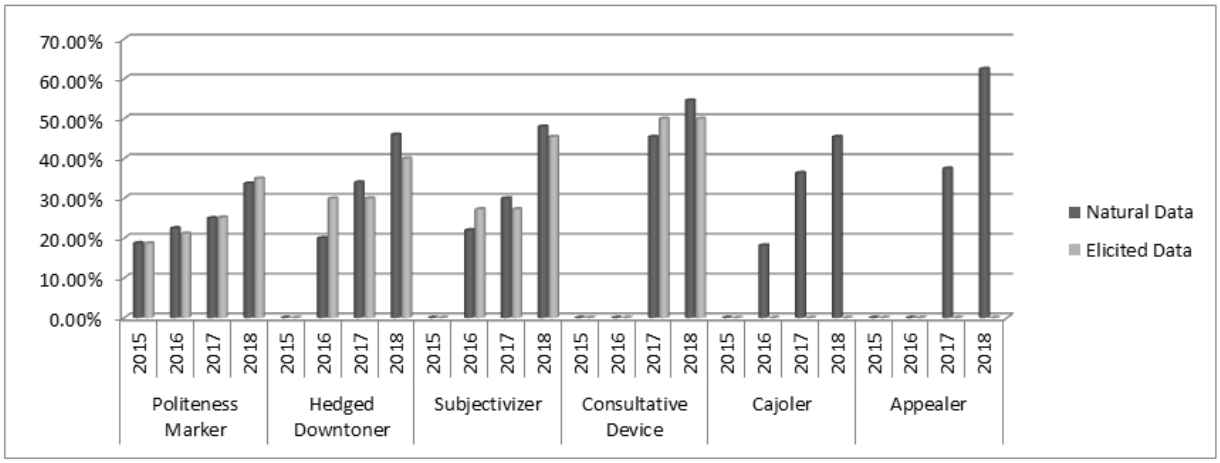


Figure 5: Percentages of Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders in Natural and Elicited Data

The percentages of 'politeness marker' in the natural requests are 18.75%, 22.50%, 25.00%, and 33.75% in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. The percentages of 'politeness marker' in the elicited requests are18.7%, 21.14%, 25.20%, and 34.96% in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. The use of that device increases with the increased study years in the two data sources particularly in 2018. The 'politeness marker' does not need a high pragmalinguistic competence in requesting. It could be easily learned by Iraqi learners; besides, it is already usedin their Iraqi-Arabic. Italso has an illocutionary force indicator and a vivid softening device which promote the learners to use it in requesting (Faerch and Kasper, 1989). Here are some examples of 'politeness marker' from natural and elicited data:

Natural data: ….. *Please, I would be very grateful if you give your point of view on my proposal…*
…Can you clarify? please. …
Elicited data: *…Is it Okay now, please*
… Please I will be thankful if you give me an hour from your time on Monday…

In addition, the percentages of 'hedged downtoner'in the natural data are0.00%, 20.00%, 34.00%, and 46.00% in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. The percentages of 'hedged downtoner' in the elicited data are0.00%, 30.00%, 30.00%, and 40.00% in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. Based on these results, it is clear that Iraqi learners do not know the pragmatic function of this mitigator to use it in their natural and elicited

requests in 2015. But, it could be then learned by them in their academic study and its use increases with the increased study years particularly in their natural requestsin 2017 and 2018. Some examples of 'hedged downtoner' from natural and elicited data are presented below:

Natural data: ...*If there is possibility just clarify the last point of it.*
... *I kindly ask you to have a look at them ...*
Elicited data: ...*Kindly I want to see you please*

The percentages of 'subjectivizer' in the natural data are 0.00%, 22.00%, 30.00%, and 48.00% in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. Yet, the percentages of 'subjectivizer' in the elicited data are 0.00%, 27.27%, 27.27%, and 45.46% in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. It is evident that this device is not used by Iraqi learners in 2015 because they haven't learned thepragmatic function of it. Due to the learners' pragmatic development, the use of 'subjectivizer' increases in the two datasetsparticularly in the natural one in 2017 and 2018. Here are somenatural and elicited examples of 'subjectivizer':

Natural data: *I'm wondering if it is possible to give me your advice on my section...*
...I'm afraid you're going to to read this additional page, ...
Elicited data: *I suppose I need more comment.*

Moreover, thepercentages of 'consultative device'in the natural data are 0.00%, 0.00%, 45.45%, and 54.55% in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. The percentages of 'consultative device' in the elicited data are 0.00%, 0.00%, 50.00%, and 50.00% in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. The 'consultative device' requires ahigher pragmalinguistic ability in requesting and Iraqi learners might not have that ability to usesuch mitigator in the two data in 2015 and 2016.It is then used in later years (2017 and 2018) due to the learners' pragmatic development. Accordingly, its use increases in the two types of data particularly in the naturalone in 2018. Here are some examples of natural and elicited 'consultative device':

Natural data: *Is it all right if you send it to me next week so that I can adapt based on your comment…*
…Would you mind reading it and comment on
Elicited data: *…Do you think* it is comprehensive
Is it alright tomorrow or you don't have time

Furthermore, the 'cajoler'and 'appealer' are used by Iraqilearners in their natural requests only. On the one hand, the percentages of 'cajoler'are 0.00%, 18.18%, 36.36%, and 45.46% while the percentages of 'appealer'are 0.00%, 0.00%, 37.50%, and 62.50% in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. These results reveal that these learners haven't learned the pragmatic function of these devices at the beginning but they could learn that in later years. Their use of these devices increases with the increased studyyears particularly in 2018. On the other hand, these devices have no occurrence in the elicited data in the all four years. Iraqi learners do not prefer to use them because they resort to other lexical/phrasal devices in their elicited data. In addition, the elicited data cannot show the real use of constructions as the natural data does. Such devices are produced in the natural setting where the performance is genuine. Here are some examples of 'cajoler' and 'appealer' from the natural data:

…, you know I actually like you to read my proposal … (Cajoler)
…You see I really need your comments (Cajoler)
I suppose you already read it and it is ready now, right? (Appealer)
… The topic is "The image of revenge as a character in Hamlet's play", Ok? (Appealer)
…Tomorrow I need to see you…Ok? (Appealer)

Based on what has been discussed, it is evident that the natural data can provide more categories of internal mitigators and the DCT requires an additional instrument to confirm its results and arrive at valid conclusions.

5. Conclusion

This longitudinal research designcompares the pragmatic development of Iraqi EFL learners in the use of internal mitigators of requestby natural and elicited data over four years of study. Overall, these learners reduce the face damaging of their natural and elicited requests by syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders from 2015 to 2018. The use of these

devices increases with the increased study years in both types of data, but thedevelopment is significantly more evident in the natural data. Though the elicited data approximates the natural data in revealing identical categories of syntactic downgraders, the natural data uncovers more categories of lexical/phrasal downgraders. This unveils that the DCTis not as rich as the natural data in revealing these devices to show the pragmatic development. Iraqi learners tend to spontaneously produce natural and genuine utterances in their natural setting. They consider the elicited requestsartificial and not as serious as the naturalrequests by which they express their utterances with no restrictions. Therefore, the DCTcannot show quite valid conclusions unless it is used along with other research instruments.

Accordingly, this study displays the value of performing the syntactic and lexical/phrasaldowngraders in the natural and elicited contexts. It can benefit ESL and EFL researchers by considering the natural data in investigating their learners' pragmatic competence and that more than one elicited data should be conducted to confirm their results. This study also highlights the development in producing the internal mitigators and their effect on softening the request and other face damaging acts. It informs the curriculum designers on the internal devices to integrate them in ESL/EFL curricula. This would develop ESL and EFL learners' pragmatic repertoire in producing these mitigators to ameliorate and soften the imposition of their face threatening acts.

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Appendix A. Description of DCT

Dear Participant:

This study aims to examine the speech act of request in authentic and elicited data. This questionnaire includes three situations. Please carefully read each situation and imagine as if you are in the same situation. After that, answer naturally and utilise the same language that you use when you communicate with your professor by WhatsApp and/or Viber.

Please do not hesitate to contact the researcher in case you have any question.

Thank you very much.

Shurooq A. A.
Department of English
College of Arts
University of Baghdad
Shurooq_eng@yahoo.com

Situation 1
You are writing your research and in need for your professor's comment. You decide to send him/her a message by WhatsApp and/or Viber and say
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Situation 2
You are thinking of a topic on your research. You decide to send him/her a message by WhatsApp and/or Viber and say
---

Situation 3
You want to send a file related to your research by WhatsApp or Viber. You decide to send it and say
---

Situation 4
You want to meet your professor to discuss issues related to your research. You decide to send him/her a message by WhatsApp and/or Viber and say
---

Appendix B: The Background Questionnaire

Gender: M / F
Age:
Place of Birth:
Country of Origin:
Native Language:
University where currently enrolled:
Major:
College level:
Do you Speak Languages Other than English? Yes No. If yes
How long have you studied the Language?
Have you ever lived in a foreign country? . If yes
Where How long?
The parents' nationality:

AppendixC: Classification Scheme of Syntactic Downgraders

Name	Function	Device
Interrogative	A modifier used to downgrade the illocutionary force of requesting. Formulas of 'can/could I/you' are not considered syntactic downgraders because the interrogative is unmarked in these forms.	'*Is*', '*Will*', '*Do*', '*Wh-questions*'
Conditional	A modifier that distances the request from reality and it has an option of refusing.	*'if you can', 'if you have time', 'if it is possible'*
Aspect	An indicator that can be substituted by a simple form (e.g. 'I am wondering' vs. 'I wonder'). It is utilised to decrease the influence of an utterance on the requestee.	'*I am wondering*', '*I am* kindly *asking*'
Past tense	It is typically in the form of past tense but indicates a present time reference. It can be changed by a present tense formula with no need to change the semantic meaning of the utterance (e.g. 'I wanted' vs. 'I want').	'I *wanted*', 'I *was hoping*…'
Past tense modal	It is used to give the addressee an extra option to refrain from fulfilling the request.	'I *would* like…', '*Could* you…'
Embedding	It is a clause within which the request is embedded. It often occurs in association with a conditional clause.	'*Do you think it would be rich*?' '*I would be very grateful* if you…', '*I will be thankful* if you …', '*I would appreciate it* if you…'

Appendix D: Classification Scheme of Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders

Name	Function	Device
Politeness marker	An optional modifier added to promote cooperative behaviour.	'*Please*'
Hedged downtoner	It is used to mitigate the effect of the request on the hearer.	'*Kindly*', '*Just*'
Subjectivizer	An element used to clearly state the subjective view via the state of affairs referred to in the proposition to tone down the assertive force of requesting.	'I *wonder*', 'I *think*', 'I *suppose*', I am *afraid*'
Consultative device	It is used to involve the hearer and call for his/her collaboration.	'*Is it all right*', '*Would you mind*', '*Do you think*'
Cajoler	A modifier used to make the things clearer for the hearer and involve him/her to participate in requesting.	'*You know*…', '*You see*…'
Appealer	It is used in a syntactically final position of the request to appeal to the requestee's understanding.	'……, *Ok*?', '…… *right*?'

About the author:

Dr.ShurooqAbboodi Ali is an assistant professor at College of Arts, University of Baghdad. She got PhD in Applied Linguistics from UniversitiSains Malaysia, Malaysia. She has a number of published papers nationally and internationally. Her research interests are in the areas of pragmatics and discourse analysis.