

# Request Modifications as Produced by Moroccan EFL Learners and Native Speakers of English

Abidi Abdelfattah<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Sultan Moulay Slimane University, Beni Mellal, Morocco

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to investigate the production of request modifications by native speakers of English (NSE) and Moroccan EFL learners (MEFLs). With this aim in mind, the researcher employed two research instruments, namely a discourse completion test and a semi-structured interview. The former was the main research instrument, whereas the latter was mainly used to explore the motives behind the participants' use of certain modification strategies. Furthermore, sixty-seven informants participated in the current study. Thirty MEFLs and thirty NSE responded to the ten given situations, while four MEFLs and three NSE were interviewed. This study adopted Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) coding scheme. The findings revealed that NSE preferred syntactic downgraders, whereas MEFLs selected lexical/phrasal downgraders. With regard to external modifiers, the two groups significantly differed in their use of mitigating supportive moves. That is, MEFLs preferred combination and preparators, while NSE favoured combination and grounders. The two groups used few aggravating supportive moves, and they did not display any significant differences in their use of external modifiers. However, they were used by NSE more than MEFLs. This paper ends with some recommendations for textbook designers and EFL teachers.

**Keywords:** Request modifications, syntactic downgraders, internal modifiers, external modifiers

## 1. Introduction

It was not until the seventies when researchers realized the significance of the rules governing language use, especially with the emergence of Hymes' (1972) communicative competence. The latter brought to attention the fact that appropriate language use cannot be ensured by only depending on the linguistic (grammatical) rules. Hymes (1972) points out that language use is a complex phenomenon that requires not only the knowledge of micro-linguistic of a certain language, but it necessitates awareness of the various cultural norms governing language use. Knowledge of language form is not sufficient for speakers to communicate effectively in various situations. In fact, as Hymes (1972) claims, a child does not acquire a language as only grammatical but also as appropriate. Simply put, a normal child's competence is not limited to awareness of grammatical structures of a language but also encompasses a complex knowledge of language use. Indeed, this multifarious knowledge is what allows language users to produce and comprehend it appropriately. Due to the fact that EFL teachers do not pay enough attention to the pragmatic aspect of the language, EFL learners have been found to struggle with the pragmatic

\* Corresponding Author: [abidiabdelfattah93@gmail.com](mailto:abidiabdelfattah93@gmail.com)

rules of the target language. Therefore, they are likely to fall into communication breakdowns. Actually, many previous studies concluded that EFL learners are pragmatically incompetent (Kasper & Rose, 1999; Deveci, 2015; El Hiani, 2015; Loutfi, 2016; Perez, 2017; Ezzoua, 2021; Abidi, 2022; Talay, 2022). Speech acts are one of the most pragmatic behavioral aspects that have been thoroughly researched (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010).

The speech act of request is one of the most face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson 1987) that requires careful choice of politeness strategies. Therefore, EFL learners need to be pragmatically competent to produce such a speech act appropriately. With this in mind, it is necessary to investigate EFL learners' realization patterns of this speech act. In fact, in the Moroccan context, various studies have been conducted on the speech act of request (EL Hiani, 2015; Loutfi, 2016; Hammani, 2019; Hmouri & Hdouch, 2021; Abidi, 2022). Most of these studies, however, focused mainly on request main strategies. Therefore, the current research aimed to fill in this gap by investigating and comparing Moroccan EFL university students' request modifications to those produced by native speakers of American English.

What makes the current study significant is its contribution to the field of interlanguage pragmatics. Additionally, the findings of this research can help textbook designers include the different internal and external request modification strategies used by native speakers of American English in their textbooks. EFL teachers would also be able to provide their students with authentic examples of both internal and external request modifications, and, therefore, they would be able to know when, with whom, and how to mitigate and aggravate their requests using the different types of request modifications, including syntactic downgraders, lexical downgraders, upgraders, mitigating and aggravating supportive moves.

## **2. Literature Review**

A variety of studies have been conducted on speech acts since the eighties. One of the most face-threatening acts is the speech act of request (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The latter was first thoroughly studied, along with the speech act of apology, by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) in their project on Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns. The speech act of request is "an illocutionary act whereby a speaker (requester) conveys to a hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act which is for the benefit of the speaker" (Trosborg, 1995, p. 187). In other words, speakers use the speech act of request to get hearers to do or stop doing something. Performing this speech act properly does not only require knowledge of the grammar of the target language but also necessitates sociopragmatic awareness. The latter differs from one language to another. Therefore, in order to perform any speech act, EFL learners need to be aware of not only the linguistic differences between their L1 and the L2 but also the pragmatic variables that govern the L2. If EFL learners are not equipped with that knowledge, they will certainly fall into communication breakdowns. As a matter of fact, a variety of contextual factors affect how a request is to be performed. Such contextual factors include social distance, relative power, and degree of imposition (Kasper & Rose, 2001).

Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) conclude that speakers use three main request strategies. The latter are direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect strategies. On the one hand, direct request strategies are performed in a very explicit manner. They involve mood derivable, explicit performative, hedged performative, obligation statement, or want statement. On the other hand, conventionally indirect requests either involve a suggestory formula or query preparatory. Finally, mild and strong hints are the two different sub-strategies via which a non-conventionally indirect request can be performed (see Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). As a complementary work of Abidi's

(2022) study that mainly focused on request main strategies, sub-strategies, and request orientations, the current research aimed to investigate how request modifications are produced by Moroccan EFL learners and native speakers of English.

## 2.1. Internal and External Modifiers

Not only can speakers minimise or maximise the imposition involved in requests by selecting one of the strategies mentioned above, but they can also use other verbal mechanisms to produce this speech act; that is, they can modify the intensity of the act performed either internally or externally (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Internal modifications include lexical/phrasal downgraders, syntactic downgraders, and upgraders, while external modifications encompass supportive moves.

Phrasal/ lexical downgraders and syntactic downgraders are used to soften and minimise the degree of imposition triggered by a request by means of lexical terms and/or syntactic devices, while, upgraders are employed to deepen the effect of a request. Furthermore, supportive moves occur either before or after the head act; they can be used to mitigate or aggravate this speech act (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). These mechanisms are presented in the tables below:

**Table 1.** Syntactic Downgraders

Syntactic Downgraders	Examples
Interrogatives:	Ex. <i>Can I</i> have your pen?
Negation of Preparatory Condition:	Ex. You <i>could not</i> give me your pen, could you?
Subjunctive:	Ex. Might be better if you <i>were to</i> give me your pen.
Aspect:	Ex. I'm <i>wondering</i> whether you could give me your pen.
Tense:	Ex: I <i>wanted</i> to ask you to give me your pen.
Conditional Clause:	Ex. It would fit in much better <i>if you could</i> present your paper a week earlier.
Combination:	Ex: I <i>was wondering</i> if you <i>could not</i> give me your pen.

Note. Adapted from Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies, by Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 281-283.

**Table 2.** Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders

Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders	Examples
Politeness Marker: An optional term added to a request to tender for the addressee's cooperation.	Ex: Give me your pen, <i>please</i> .
Understater: Adverbial modifiers by which the speaker decreases the effect of the act.	Ex: Could you scoot over <i>a bit</i> ?
Hedge: Adverbial modifiers that are used to avoid imposition on the hearer.	Ex: It would fit much better <i>somehow</i> if you did your paper next week.

Subjectivizer: Elements that the speaker explicitly employs to lower the effect of the request on the addressee. Ex: I *wonder* if you could postpone the exam to the next week.

Downtoner: Propositional modifiers that reduce the impact of the request on the hearer. Ex: Could you *possibly* edit this paper?

Cajoler: Conventional expressions that the speaker uses to establish harmony with the addressee. Ex: *You know*, I really want you to repair my car.

Appealers: Item that speakers use to increase the possibility that the hearer will accept the request. Ex: Bring me the umbrella, dear, *will you*?

Combination: Use of more than one phrasal downgrader. Ex: You know, I wonder if you could edit this paper.

Note. Adapted from Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies, by Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 283-285

Table 3. Upgraders

Upgraders	Examples
Intensifiers: Adverbial modifiers employed by the speaker to increase particular elements of the proposition of the utterance	Ex: The kitchen is in a <i>terrible</i> mess.
Commitment Indicator: Sentence modifiers that the speaker employs to convey his/her intensive degree of commitment in relation to the state of affairs in the proposition.	Ex: I'm <i>sure</i> you won't mind giving me that pen.
Expletive: Items that show the speaker's negative feelings about the situation.	Ex: Why don't you close that <i>damn</i> door?
Time intensifier: Adverbs of time that show exactly when the speaker wants the act to be performed.	Ex: you'd better open the window <i>now</i> .
Lexical Uptoner: A marked term that gives a negative connotation to a certain element of the proposition.	Ex: clean up that <i>mess</i> !
Determination Marker: An element by which the speaker harshly emphasises his/her determination on the addressee.	Ex: I've explained myself and <i>that's that</i> .
Repetition of Request:	Ex: Get lost! Leave me alone!
Orthographic/Suprasegmental Emphasis: Mechanisms by which speakers achieve a dramatic impact on the hearer. Such elements include, in the written mode, underlining, exclamation marks or, in the spoken mode, intonation, stress, and pauses.	Ex: Cleaning the kitchen is your business!!!
Emphatic Additions: Lexical collocations that add more emphasis on the request.	Ex: <i>Go and clean</i> the kitchen!
Pejorative Determiners: Determiners that have a negative effect on the hearer.	Ex: Clean up <i>that</i> mess (there)!

Combination: Use of more than one upgrader.	Ex: Why don't you clean up that <i>damn</i> mess <i>now</i> ?
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Note. Adapted from Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies, by Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 285-286

**Table 4.** Mitigating Supportive Moves

Mitigating Supportive Moves	Examples
Preparator: Request' openings that speakers use to prepare the addressee for the request or to ask him/her for permission to make the request.	Ex: <i>May I ask you a question?</i>
Getting a Pre-commitment: Request' openings that speakers use to make sure whether the addressee is ready to cooperate or not.	Ex: <i>Could you do me a favour?</i>
Grounder: Means by which the speaker justifies his/her need for accepting the request.	Ex: <i>I'm out of cash.</i> Could you lend me some money?
Disarmer: The speaker mentions some reasons why the hearer might refuse the request or eliminates any possible objections the hearer might confront.	Ex: <i>I know you don't like postponing the exams,</i> but could you make an exception this time?
Promise of Reward: The speaker shows that the hearer will get something in return if he/she accepts to cooperate.	Ex: Would you give me a lift home? <i>I'll pitch in on some gas.</i>
Imposition minimiser: The speaker softens the degree of imposition on the hearer.	Ex: Could you give me your pen, <i>but only if you have another one.</i>
Sweetener: The speaker reduces the effect of the request by exaggerating his/her appreciation of the hearer's ability.	Ex: <i>You have beautiful handwriting,</i> would it be possible to borrow your notes for a few days?
Apology: The speaker apologises to the addressee before making a request.	Ex: <i>I'm sorry</i> but I want you to give me your pen.

Note. Adapted from Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies, by Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 281-283. Sweetener mitigating supportive move is taken from Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 205. Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns

**Table 5.** Aggravating Supportive Moves

Aggravating Supportive Moves	Examples
Insult: the speaker increases the degree of imposition on the hearer by insulting him/her.	Ex: <i>You have always been a dirty pig</i> , so clean up!
Threat: To increase the probability that the hearer will do the act, the speaker threatens the addressee.	Ex: Move your car <i>if you don't want a ticket!</i>
Moralizing: To make the hearer feels his/her duty to perform the act, the speaker uses some general maxims.	Ex: <i>If one shares a flat one should be prepared to pull one's weight in cleaning it</i> , so get on with the washing up!
Combination: Use of more than one aggravating supportive move.	Ex: You have always been a dirty pig, and you know if one shares a flat one should be prepared to pull one's weight in cleaning it. So go clean up!

Note. Adapted from Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies, by Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 287-288

## 2.2. Previous Studies

Several studies have explored the production of request modifications by EFL learners and native speakers of English (Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008; Halupka-Rešetar, 2014; Schauer, 2007). Faerch and Kasper (1989) compared Danish learners of English production of request modifications to those of native speakers of English. They found that Danish learners of English heavily used the politeness marker “please”, and opted for more complex syntactic downgraders. With regards to external modifiers, Danish learners preferred grounders over the other external modification strategies.

As opposed to Faerch and Kasper's (1989) findings, Economidou-Kogetsidis' (2008) results of her study of Greek learners of English internal and external mitigation in interlanguage request production revealed that Greek learners of English used all the main mitigating strategies. Nevertheless, they deviated from native speakers in their production of internal and external modifiers. They rarely used the marker “please”. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008) explains that Greek learners' underuse of this politeness marker is due to its scarcity in Greek informal speech. She states that Greek speakers rarely use the marker “parakalo”, which is the equivalent of “please” in Greek language. Their avoidance of the politeness marker is, then, due to language transfer. However, Greek learners of English frequently produced preparators and disarmers.

Schauer (2007) compared the pragmatic development of nine German university students studying in England to thirteen German learners of English in Germany and fifteen native speakers. She found that, unlike at-home learners, learners who study abroad employed a variety of external modifiers in their production of requests. Their repertoire was found to be rich in modifications because they had more exposure to the target language in its natural setting; their motivation to establish personal relationships with British native speakers was also an affecting factor in their acquisition of more modifications.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Research Design

As mentioned earlier, the current research examines NSE and MEFLs' request modifications. It aims to compare the frequencies and percentages of the different request modification strategies used by the two groups. In other words, the researcher's objective was to investigate whether and to what extent MEFLs deviate from or conform to NSE in their production of internal and external modifiers. With this aim in mind, this study adopted a mixed-methods approach by collecting data through two research instruments, a semi-structured interview and a DCT. The semi-structured interview was mainly used to explore participants' comments on the choices of request modifiers they made, whereas the DCT was the main research instrument. Following Abidi (2022), this study adopted Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) DCT which was also modified by Khamam (2012). Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) coding scheme of request modifications was also adopted.

#### 3.2. Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do MEFLs' request internal modifiers compare to those of NSE?

This research question is divided into three sub-questions

1. How do MEFLs' syntactic downgraders compare to those of NSE?
2. How do MEFLs' lexical/ phrasal downgraders compare to those of NSE?
3. How do MEFLs' upgraders compare to those of NSE?

2. To what extent do MEFLs and NSE differ in their use of request external modifiers?

This question is divided into two sub-questions

1. To what extent do MEFLs deviate from or conform to NSE in their use of mitigating supportive moves?
2. To what extent do MEFLs deviate from or conform to NSE in their use of aggravating supportive moves?

#### 3.3. Research Participants

A total number of sixty-seven informants have participated in this study. Thirty MEFLs and thirty NSE were asked to fill in the DCT. Half of each group were males. MEFLs' age ranged from 19 to 40 years old, while NSEs were aged between 20 and 45 years old. Additionally, 3 NSE and 4 MEFLs were interviewed. MEFLs were randomly selected from various Moroccan universities. As they confirmed, MEFL participants have never lived in any English-speaking country, which implies that their exposure to the L2 is somewhat limited.

#### 3.4. Research Instrument

To increase the reliability of this study, the researcher opted for two research instruments, namely a DCT and a semi-structured interview. The DCT was adopted from Blum-kulka et al. (1989) and modified by Khamam (2012). It consists of ten situations clearly describing the social distance and power of interlocutors. In fact, the DCT is one of the most extensively used instrument in cross-cultural studies (e.g. Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Chen, 1996; Altheeby, 2018; Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Marti, 2006; Khamam, 2012; Morkus, 2009; Loutfi, 2016,

Almadani, 2021; Khammari, 2021). This research instrument assisted the researcher in practically answering the research questions, as it helped in collecting data in a short period of time. The researcher administered the DCT online and shared it with the participants who willingly responded to different situations. As stated earlier, this study also adopted a semi-structured interview. The aim of using this research instrument was mainly to get more insights into the participants' choices of certain request modifiers over others. It was primarily based on the situations in the DCT.

### 3.5. Data Analysis Techniques

In this research, data were analysed by using Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) manual coding scheme. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS) was employed to calculate the frequencies and percentages of syntactic downgraders, lexical/ phrasal downgraders, upgraders, mitigating, and aggravating supportive moves used by NSE and MEFLs. Furthermore, the Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) was used to measure the extent to which MEFLs deviate from or conform to request modifiers chosen by NSE.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Internal Modifiers

The aim of this section is to present the findings of internal modifiers used by MEFLs and NSE participants. Additionally, after presenting the overall use of internal modifiers by the two groups, each internal modifier type will be presented separately.

**Table 6.** Frequencies and Percentages of Internal Modifiers Used by MEFLs and NSE in all Situations

		Internal Modifiers			
		SD	LPD	UP	Total
Groups	MEFLs	180	129	29	338
		53.3%	38.2%	8.6%	100%
	NSE	186	108	23	317
		58.7%	34.1%	7.3%	100%
Total		366	237	52	655
		55.9%	36.2%	7.9%	100%

Note. MEFLs = Moroccan EFL learners, NSE = native speakers of English, SD = syntactic downgraders, LPD = lexical/phrasal downgraders, UP = upgraders.

As illustrated in the table above, the two groups varied in their use of internal modifiers. That is, MEFLs used more internal modifiers than NSE. Syntactic downgraders were the most selected internal modifier by the two groups, while upgraders were the least frequently used. Both groups slightly differed in their use of syntactic downgraders. That is 58.7% of NSE's internal modifiers were syntactic downgraders, whereas 53.3% of MEFL's internal modifiers belonged to this type. Additionally, lexical/phrasal downgraders were employed by MEFLs more than NSE. Out of 38.2% of MEFLs' internal modifiers were lexical/phrasal downgraders, whereas they were chosen by NSE with only a percentage of 34.1%. Concerning the least used internal modifier, MEFL selected upgraders more than NSE (8.6% vs. 7.3%). Finally, the differences that the two groups displayed in their overall use of internal modifiers were not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 1.98$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.37$ ). So far, we have presented the overall use of internal modifiers. Now, we will compare the two groups' production of each internal modifier separately.



#### 4.1.1. Syntactic downgraders.

Syntactic downgraders are used to decrease the intensity of requests. Speakers can use one or more than one syntactic downgrader. The latter includes interrogatives, negotiation of preparatory condition, subjunctive, aspect, tense, and conditional clause.

**Table 7.** Frequencies and Percentages of Syntactic Downgraders used by MEFLs and NSE

		Syntactic Downgraders				
		INT	NPC	CC	TNS	Total
Groups	MEFLs	165	3	12	0	180
		91.7%	1.7%	6.7%	0%	100%
	NSE	154	1	29	2	186
		82.8%	0.5%	15.6%	1.1%	100%
Total		319	4	41	2	366
		87.2%	1.1%	11.2%	0.5%	100%

Note. MEFLs = Moroccan EFL learners, NSE = native speakers of English, INT = interrogatives, NPC = negation of preparatory condition, CC = conditional clause, TNS = tense.

From Table 7, we notice that interrogatives are the most preferred syntactic downgraders by both groups. However, they were used by MEFLs more than NSE (91.7% vs. 82.8%). Moreover, NSE outperformed MEFLs in their use of conditional clauses with a rate of 15.6%, whereas they were produced by MEFLs with only a percentage of 6.7%. Besides, negation of preparatory condition was rarely used by both groups. However, it was chosen by MEFLs more than NSE (1.7% vs. 0.5%). Moreover, only 1.1% of NSE's syntactic downgraders were tenses. The latter, however, were not used by MEFLs at all. Last but not least, neither subjunctives nor aspects were used by the participants. Therefore, they were not presented in the table. The differences that MEFLs and NSE participants displayed in their production of syntactic downgraders were statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 9.93$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ).

Similarly, the interview findings showed that interrogatives and conditional clauses were the only utilised syntactic downgraders by the subjects of both groups. However, interrogatives were the most frequently chosen by the two groups, while conditional clauses were used by only one NSE interviewee on two occasions.

“Would you make me a cup of coffee?” (Interrogative) (An MEFL respondent)

“I know this is a big ask, but you are normally so well prepared... It would be great if you could present one week earlier than planned.” (Conditional clause) (An NSE respondent)

“I'm calling for the job you advertised in the newspaper and I'm wondering whether it is still available?” (Aspect) (An MEFL)

“Sir, I just wanted to tell you that smoking isn't allowed here. In case you don't know.” (Tense) (An NSE respondent)

#### 4.1.2. Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders.

Lexical/phrasal downgraders are a set of items that speakers use to internally modify their requests in order to minimise the intensity of their requests. They include politeness markers, understaters, hedges, subjectivizers, cajolers, appealers, and downtoners. Like syntactic downgraders, speakers can use one or more lexical/phrasal downgraders in a request. The following table presents the use of this type of internal modifiers by MEFLs and NSE participants.

**Table 8.** Frequencies and Percentages of Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders Used by MEFLs and NSE in all Situations

		Lexical/Phrasal Downgraders						Total
		PM	UND	SUB	APP	DOW	COM	
Groups	MEFLs	118	2	1	0	7	1	129
		91.5%	1.6%	0.8%	0%	5.4%	0.8%	100%
	NSE	88	4	7	1	6	2	108
		81.5%	3.7%	6.5%	0.9%	5.6%	1.9%	100%
Total		206	6	8	1	13	3	237
		86.9%	2.5%	3.4%	0.4%	5.5%	1.3%	100%

Note. MEFLs = Moroccan EFL learners, NSE = native speakers of English, PM = politeness marker, UND = understater, SUB = subjectivizer, APP = appealer, DOW = downtoner, COM = combination.

The results presented in Table 8 show that both MEFLs and NSE subjects frequently used the politeness marker. The latter, however, was preferred by MEFLs more than NSE (91.5% vs. 81.5%). In addition, 6.5% of NSE's requests involved subjectivizers, which were used by MEFLs at a lower rate (0.8%). Similarly, understaters were chosen by NSE more than MEFLs (3.7% vs. 1.6%). Furthermore, downtoners were used by the two groups with almost the same percentage (NSE 5.6% vs. MEFLs 5.4%). Last but not least, rarely did the two groups use a combination of two or more syntactic downgraders (NSE 1.9% vs. MEFLs 0.8%). Although the groups differed, to some degree in their use of syntactic downgraders, the Chi-square test results showed that these differences were not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 9.06$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p = 0.06$ ).

The interview results revealed that the politeness marker '*please*' was the most frequently selected lexical/phrasal downgrader by the two groups. However, MEFLs overused this lexical/phrasal downgrader. In fact, it was the only chosen lexical/phrasal downgrader by MEFLs interviewees. NSE, however, varied their use of this mitigating internal modifier type between politeness marker, subjectivizers, and understaters.

"Sir please stop smoking, it's not allowed here and prohibited." (Politeness marker) (An MEFL respondent)

"I'd like to know a little bit more about the job." (Understater) (An NSE respondent)

"Hi there! You may not know me, but we live in the same street. I wonder if you would be kind enough to give me a lift home?" (Subjectivizer) (An NSE respondent)

"I've been absent last session. Could you please lend me your notes for a while?" (Combination of politeness marker and understater) (An MEFL respondent)

#### 4.1.3. Upgraders.

As opposed to syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders that soften the intensity of requests, upgraders are used when speakers aim to maximize the face-threatening act of their requests. This type of internal modifiers is often used when the speaker is in a position that is more powerful than

the addressee. The table below shows the frequency and percentages of the upgraders used by MEFLs and NSE respondents.

**Table 9.** Frequencies and Percentages of Upgraders used by MEFLs and NSE in all Situations

		Upgraders							Total
		INT	EX	TI	LU	RR	OSE	COM	
Groups	MEFLs	0	3	2	1	1	18	4	29
		0%	10.3%	6.9%	3.4%	3.4%	62.1%	13.8%	100%
	NSE	1	0	5	4	0	2	11	23
		4.3%	0%	21.7%	17.4%	0%	8.7%	47.8%	100%
Total		1	3	7	5	1	20	15	52
		1.9%	5.8%	13.5%	9.6%	1.9%	38.5%	28.8%	100%

Note. MEFLs = Moroccan EFL learners, NSE = native speakers of English, INT = intensifiers, EX = expletive, TI = time intensifier, LU = lexical up-toner, RP = repetition of request, OSE = orthography/supra-segmental emphasis, COM = combination.

The table above reveals that MEFLs used upgraders more than NSE. More specifically, MEFLs' preferred upgrader is orthography/supra-segmental emphasis. Additionally, NSE selected lexical up-toners more than MEFLs. What is more, out of 21.7% of NSE's upgraders were time intensifiers, while only 6.7% of MEFLs' upgraders involved this type. More interestingly, none of NSE used time expletives. The latter, however, represented 10.3% of MEFLs' overall upgraders. Finally, NSE combined upgraders more than MEFLs; to illustrate, 47.8% of NSE's upgraders were a mixture of two or more upgraders, while only 13.8% of MEFLs' upgraders were combined. The differences that these groups displayed in their use of upgraders were statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 23.71$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

"You could not park here! Move your car now!" (Combination of time intensifier and orthographic/supra-segmental emphasis) (An MEFL respondent)

"Leave me alone!!!" (Orthographic/supra-segmental emphasis) (An NSE respondent)

"Go and leave me alone" (Repetition of request) (An MEFL respondent)

#### 4.2. External Modifiers.

Unlike internal modifiers that take place within the head act, external modifiers occur either before or after a request. They are mainly used to support the head act by either mitigating or aggravating the intensity of a certain illocutionary act (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). Each type of supportive moves encompasses a variety of sub-types. In this section, we will present the overall use of external modifiers by MEFLs and NSE, then, we will present the two groups' selection of mitigating and aggravating supportive moves separately.

**Table 10.** Frequencies and Percentages of External Modifiers Used by MEFLs and NSE in all Situations

		External Modifiers		Total
		MSM	ASM	
Groups	MEFLs	171	16	187
		91.4%	8.6%	100%
	NSE	185	20	205
		90.2%	9.8%	100%
Total		356	36	392
		90.8%	9.2%	100%

Note. MEFLs = Moroccan EFL learners, NSE = American native speakers of English, MSM = mitigating supportive moves, ASM = aggravating supportive moves.

Table 10 shows that NSE generally used external modifiers more than MEFLs. The two groups frequently employed mitigating supportive moves more than aggravating supportive moves. The latter represented only a percentage of 8.6% of the overall use of MEFLs external modifiers, whereas 91.4% of their external modifiers were mitigating supportive moves. Furthermore, 90.2% of NSE's use of external modifiers involved mitigating supportive moves, while only 9.8% of their external modifiers included aggravating supportive moves. The Chi-square test results showed that MEFLs and NSE did not demonstrate any statistically significant differences in their overall use of main external modifiers ( $\chi^2 = 0.16$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.68$ ).

#### 4.2.1. Mitigating Supportive Moves.

As previously mentioned, mitigating supportive moves are external modifiers that soften the force of requests. These mitigating supportive moves can take several shapes (see Table 4). The table below presents the frequencies and percentages of the use of mitigating supportive moves by the two groups.

**Table 11.** Frequencies and Percentages of Mitigating Supportive Moves Used by MEFL and NSE in all Situations

		Mitigating Supportive Moves											Total
		PR	GPC	GR	DIS	PRR	IM	SW	APP	TH	AP	COM	
Groups	MEFLs	44	0	36	1	2	11	2	2	1	19	53	171
		25.7%	0%	21.1%	0.6%	1.2%	6.4%	1.2%	1.2%	0.6%	11.1%	31%	100%
	NSE	28	1	71	0	1	1	1	1	2	8	71	185
		15.1%	0.5%	38.4%	0%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	1.1%	4.3%	38.4%	100%
Total		72	1	107	1	3	12	3	3	3	27	124	356
		20.2%	0.3%	30.1%	0.3%	0.8%	3.4%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	7.6%	34.8%	100%

Note. MEFLs = Moroccan EFL learners, NSE = native speakers of English, PR= preparator, GPC = getting a pre-commitment, GR = grounder, DIS = disarmer, PRR = promise of reward, IM = imposition minimiser, SW = sweetener, APP = appreciation, TH = thanks, AP = apology, COM = combination.

From the results above, we observe that NSE and MEFLs used a variety of mitigating supportive moves. However, NSE employed them more than MEFLs. The most preferred devices of NSE's supporting moves were grounders and a combination of more than one mitigating supportive move. That is, 38.4% of their mitigating supportive moves were a combination of two

or more mitigating mechanisms, and they chose grounders with the same percentage. These devices were used by MEFLs at different rates. To illustrate, 31% of their mitigating supportive moves were a mixture of two or more mechanisms, whereas 21.1% of their overall use of mitigating supportive moves were grounders. In addition to this, MEFLs' second preferred mitigating supportive move was preparator, which had a ratio of 25%, while this mitigating supportive move represented only 15.1% of NSE's mitigating supportive moves. Moreover, NSE used the promise of reward, imposition minimiser, sweetener, appreciation, and getting a pre-commitment with the same percentage (0.5). Furthermore, MEFLs utilised promise of reward, sweetener, and appreciation with the same ratio (1.2%), but they did not use getting a pre-commitment at all. Additionally, 6.4% of MEFLs' mitigating supportive moves involved imposition minimiser. The two groups differed also in their use of thanks and appreciation. That is, MEFLs used appreciation more than NSE (11.1% vs. 4.3%). Although the two groups did not display any statistically significant differences in their overall use of external modifiers, the Chi-square test results showed that these groups exhibited statistically significant differences in their use of mitigating supportive moves ( $\chi^2 = 33.86$ ,  $df = 10$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The interview findings revealed that NSE used a variety of mitigating supportive moves. In fact, in most of the situations, they combined two or more than one mitigating supportive move. For instance, in the seventh situation, they all used grounder, appreciation, and apology at once. MEFLs, however, limited themselves to grounder in most of the situations, and they scarcely used promise of reward, sweetener, and apology.

"Please move your car, it's illegal to park here." (Grounder) (An NSE respondent)

"Please, sir could I have an extension, I'm really sorry for asking for the second time" (Apology) (An MEFL respondent)

"Can you do me a very great favour? Could I borrow your notes from yesterday lecture, I missed it" (Combination of getting a pre-commitment and grounder) (An MEFL respondent).

#### 4.2.2. Aggravating Supportive Moves.

As opposed to mitigating supportive moves, aggravating supportive moves are used to maximize the force of request effect on the hearer. As stated above, these optional modifiers occur either before or after the head act. Aggravating supportive moves include insults, moralizing, and threats. Sometimes, speakers combine two or more aggravating mechanisms in their requests. The following table presents the aggravating supportive moves used by MEFL and NSE participants.

**Table 12.** Frequencies and Percentages of Aggravating Supportive Moves Used by MEFLs and NSE in all Situations

		Aggravating Supportive Moves			
		INS	THR	COM	Total
Groups	MEFLs	6	10	0	16
		37.5%	62.5%	0%	100%
	NSE	3	15	2	20
		15%	75%	10%	100%
Total		9	25	2	36
		25%	69.4%	5.6%	100%

Note. MEFLs = Moroccan EFL learners, NSE = native speakers of English, INS = insult, THR = threat, COM = combination.

From the results presented in Table 12, we notice that aggravating supportive moves were slightly used by NSE more than MEFLs. Firstly, threats had the highest percentage of the overall aggravating supportive moves used by the two groups. However, they were selected by NSE more than MEFLs (75% vs. 62.5%). Secondly, insults were remarkably preferred by MEFLs more than NSE. In fact, they represented 3.7% of MEFL's use of aggravating supportive moves, whereas they were produced by NSE with only a percentage of 15%. Thirdly, 10% of NSE's aggravating supportive moves were a mixture of insult and threat, whereas MEFLs did not combine them at all. Although the two groups differed in their use of aggravating supportive moves, the Chi-square test results confirmed that these differences were not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 3.15$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.18$ ).

Rarely did interviewees of both groups use aggravating supportive moves to illustrate, they were not used by MEFLs interviewees at all. Furthermore, NSE used threat only in the last situation, where they were required to ask someone pestering them in the street to stop misbehaving.

"Please, get away from me or I will call the police." (Threat) (MEFL respondent)

"Move your car or you'll get a ticket" (Threat) (An NSE respondent)

## 5. Discussion

In their overall use of internal and external modifiers, MEFLs and NSE displayed some differences. For instance, syntactic downgraders were chosen by NSE more than MEFLs. Both groups preferred interrogatives more than the other syntactic downgraders. On the one hand, interrogatives were selected by MEFLs more than NSE. On the other hand, conditional clauses were used by NSE more than MEFLs.

In addition, MEFLs outperformed NSE in their use of lexical/phrasal downgraders. More specifically, in line with Faerch and Kasper's (1989) findings, MEFLs overused the politeness marker "please" more than NSE. These results, however, are contrary to Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008) who found that Greek learners underused the politeness marker "please". The reason behind MEFLs' overuse of lexical downgraders is due to negative transfer, as Alaoui (2011) found in her comparative study of English and Moroccan Arabic requests, offers, and thanks that Moroccan Arabic native speakers chose lexical/phrasal downgraders especially politeness markers such as "Allah yxelik" (may God keep you), and "Allah yrdi 'lik" (God bless you), whereas English native speakers preferred syntactic downgraders more than lexical downgraders.

Furthermore, most of NSE's intensified requests involved a combination of more than one upgrader (47.8%), whereas only 13.8% of MEFLs' aggravated requests were a mixture of more than one upgrader. More interestingly, the most extensively selected upgrader by MEFLs was the orthography/supra-segmental emphasis type. This upgrader was rarely used by NSE. The extensive reliance of MEFLs on the orthography/supra-segmental emphasis may be due to its simplicity, as it requires, in the spoken mode, only a change in intonation, stress, pauses, or, in the written mode, underlining, and exclamation marks.

NSE outperformed MEFLs in their production of external modifiers. However, the two groups preferred mitigating supportive moves more than aggravating supportive moves. In their use of mitigating supportive moves, MEFLs used fewer combinations than NSE. The latter's majority of requests that involved mitigating supportive moves were a combination of more than one mitigating mechanism, including appreciation, thanks, apology, grounders, disarmers, preparators, and sweeteners. Likewise, they preferred the use of grounders as the only mitigating supportive move in most of their overall mitigated requests, while MEFLs showed a preference to

preparators more than the other mitigating supportive moves. Hence, these results, as found in several studies (Kasper, 1981; House & Kasper, 1987; Faerch & Kasper, 1989), show a great preference for grounders. The latter's extensive use lies in its ability to enable speakers to persuade their interlocutors by providing them with certain motives behind their requests; in this way, they soften the intensity of their requests and increase the likelihood that their interlocutors would accept to cooperate.

With regard to aggravating supportive moves, both groups preferred threats over insults. The latter was the second preferred aggravating supportive move in the scale. Actually, they were used by MEFLs more than NSE. Moreover, a few NSE's abusive requests were composed of both insults and threats, whereas this combination was not used by MEFLs. Besides, it was observed that the moralizing aggravating supportive move was not selected by both groups. Participants' preference for threats over the other aggravating supportive moves may be due to its faculty to make the request more offensive, as the addressee is likely to get frightened of the speaker's threat. The use of threats was mainly observed in the sixth situation (police), whereas insults and threats were frequently selected in the tenth situation (street). These findings show that aggravating supportive moves are perceived by both MEFLs and NSE as highly damaging to the hearer's face. Therefore, they opted for them only in contexts where they felt obliged. By having a general look at the two groups' use of external modifiers, we noticed that both MEFLs and NSE heavily used mitigating supportive moves more than aggravating supportive moves. More than 90% of each group's external modifiers were mitigating supportive moves. Finally, in their overall use of modifications, it was noticed that the two groups preferred internal modifiers over external modifiers. The latter, however, were produced by NSE more than MEFLs. The reason behind the extensive reliance on internal modifiers more than external modifiers is due to the complexity of the latter. Therefore, speakers often choose to modify their requests internally. In this regard, Faerch and Kasper, (1989) state:

[External modifiers] demand conscious attention of both speaker and hearer: Selecting efficient supportive moves involves conscious planning decisions on the part of the speaker, and the hearer has to attend to their semantic and pragmatic meaning in order to assess their persuasive force and decide on his or her own response. (p. 244)

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

This paper compared the production of request modifications by MEFLs and NSE. The results showed that MEFLs deviated from NSE in their use of some request modifiers. MEFLs infrequently used syntactic downgraders compared to NSE. Also, NSE outperformed MEFLs in their use of conditional clauses. However, MEFLs overused lexical/ phrasal downgraders, especially the politeness marker "please". Additionally, unlike NSE who frequently preferred to combine upgraders, MEFLs rarely chose more than one upgrader. More interestingly, MEFLs used fewer external modifiers compared to NSE. Nevertheless, both MEFLs and NSE employed mitigating supportive moves more than aggravating supportive moves. This study provides EFL teachers and textbook designers with the different request modifiers that native speakers use in various contexts. This study suggests that textbook designers include the most frequently used internal and external modifiers by NSE in their textbooks, and EFL teachers expose their students to some different real situations and show them which kind of request modifiers to use under certain contextual conditions. EFL learners are likely to lack some external modifiers. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to explicitly teach the students the pragmatic aspect of the target

language. In this way, EFLs would be able to know when, with whom, and how to mitigate or aggravate their requests.

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