

### 7.0 Introduction

This chapter continues with further analysis and discussion of face-threatening acts by focusing on the speech act of requesting. Requests can be performed directly or indirectly or by using a strategy that falls within these two extremes. According to B and L (1987), the choice is dependent on a speaker's assessments of his power relative to that of the addressee (P), their level of familiarity (D), and the size of the request ( $R_x$ ). B and L also suggest that the similarities in linguistic realizations of requests that exist across diverse cultures and languages can be explained in terms of a universal concern with face which in turn motivates the use of language to convey these face concerns. The politeness theory also states that cultural differences in politeness levels for requests are a result of differences in the way a society perceives and attaches a value to the sociological variables within a specific social situation and across such situations in general. This chapter attempts to examine the request forms identified from the corpus in order to uncover these similarities and differences as proposed by the theory.

## 7.1 Requests as FTAs

A speaker who utters a request expects some form of action, verbal or nonverbal or both, from the addressee. Thus, a request is intrinsically face threatening because it imposes on H. This form of imposition threatens H's negative-face want, i.e. "the want that his actions be unimpeded by others". By making a request, S impinges on H's want for "freedom of action and freedom from imposition". Therefore, S will minimize the imposition by using appropriate request strategies. The choice of strategy is determined by the seriousness or weight of the request ( $W_x$ ) which is assessed using the three sociological variables of P (relative power), D (relative social distance), and  $R_x$  (rate of the imposition in a particular culture).

The degree of imposition ( $R_x$ ) of a request varies by the type of activity or compliance required from H. Blum-Kulka et al. (1985:118) list four types of requests which they call "request goals":

1. Requests for action – Cases where compliance requires action on the part of H, e.g. a request to open the window.
2. Requests for goods – Cases where compliance demands handing over material goods (which might be small or large, handed over temporarily or permanently), e.g. a request for a loan.

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3. Requests for information – This “request goal” differs from the rest in that it is aimed solely at verbal goods.
  
4. Requests for permission – Such requests are speaker- rather than hearer-oriented on two accounts: If granted, a request for permission activates S and not H, and it constitutes a threat to the requestor’s rather than to the requestee’s face.

B and L (1987) name another type of request as requests for “free goods” which they define as “those goods and services (like a match, or telling the time, or giving directions) that all members of the public may reasonably demand from one another” (p. 80). Using Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) above list, this request type can be described as a combination of request for information and request for goods (where the value of the material goods is small or negligible). Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) predict that requests for permission are lower in imposition than requests for action while the degree of imposition involved in requests for goods is dependent on “the real or symbolic value of the goods requested” (p. 118). The varying degrees of  $R_x$  combined with the values of P and D determine the type of polite strategy for each request goal.

## 7.2 Sociological Variables and Request Strategies

The degree of imposition associated with each request type is one of the “social parameters” that determines the weight ( $W_x$ ) of the face threat and consequently the type of request strategy that will best minimize the threat to negative face. B and L (1987) have observed that in many languages the size of a request is encoded in the strategy type which is linguistically realized as follows: “language that stresses in-group membership and social similarity” is used for small requests, “the language of formal politeness (the conventionalized indirect speech acts, hedges, apologies for intrusion, etc.)” signals somewhat bigger requests, and “indirect expressions (implicatures)” are preferred when making a request that one doubts should be made at all (p. 57).

Related to the above observation, politeness studies have examined this relationship between the size of a request and request strategies in different cultures. One such study was by Holtgraves and Yang (1990) who recorded American and Korean subjects’ perceptions of request size and request strategy. The results of the study showed that subjects from both nationalities perceived bald-on-record and positive-politeness requests as less likely for large than for small requests. This outcome supports B and L’s claim of the similarity in the use of politeness strategies to encode the size of imposition across cultures, at least in North America and Korea. The results also indicated that “Koreans perceived hints to be significantly more likely for small than for large requests”

(Holtgraves and Yang, 1990:723). This finding could also be attributed to politeness theory which “predicts differences between certain cultures in their preferences for the use of particular strategies” (ibid:725).

Another study that focused on requesting strategies was conducted by Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) for Israeli society. The authors studied the association between request goal/type (which is related to request size) and request strategy. They found that the aim of the request was significantly associated with the choice of strategy where requests for action were the most direct and requests for permission were the most indirect. Most requests for action in this study were those that were uttered in cases of urgency or desperation (e.g. entreaties and warnings) or for efficient communication (e.g. instructions and recipes in “task-oriented interaction”). This explains the choice of direct strategies “by the use of imperatives or elliptical forms” (Blum-Kulka et al., 1985:129). The study, however, did not examine other types of requests for action where the need for “maximum efficiency” did not arise.

As for requests for permission which were found to be the most indirect (use of negative-politeness (conventional indirectness) and off-record strategies), the authors concluded that this strategy choice “might be related to power differences, since one was more apt to seek permission from a person of higher power than from a person of lower power” (Blum-Kulka et al., 1985:130). Thus,

the degree of imposition, which for requests is associated with request size, does significantly affect the choice of a requesting strategy in Israeli Hebrew.

Apart from request size, requesting strategies are also determined by social status and social distance (B and L's P and D, respectively). In examining the effects of these social variables, Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) defined P as the power of S over H in a given role relationship and D as the degree of familiarity between S and H which "was assessed on the basis of social network membership" (p. 118). Therefore, "D was considered to be high for members of a nuclear family, medium for friends and relatives, and low for strangers" (ibid.). The results indicated that requests made by people in positions of power were mostly direct and those made by people in powerless positions were indirect (i.e. conventional and nonconventional indirect requests). As for the effect of varying degrees of social distance on the choice of request strategies, the results showed "more directness with an increase in familiarity" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1985:127).

Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) also studied the combined effect of P and D on strategies and found that a speaker in power (+P) was "equally likely to choose a direct strategy regardless of whether he was acquainted with his addressee" while a speaker in low power (-P) was equally likely to choose an indirect strategy regardless of social distance (p. 128). In short, "the role of power overrides that of variation in social distance in asymmetrical situations", at least

in Israeli society (ibid.). In situations of equal power, preliminary findings showed that shifts in social distance affected the choice of requesting strategies, i.e. requests between strangers of equal P were indirect and those between friends were direct.

Holtgraves and Yang (1990) analyzed American and Korean subjects' perceptions of P and D given a request strategy. Both Americans and Koreans associated high power with the use of bald requests and low P with the use of off-record hints, "with the negative and positive politeness requests falling between these two extremes" (Holtgraves and Yang, 1990:725). As for perceptions of distance, both nationalities associated the greatest distance (rather than the least distance) with bald requests. Also, Koreans perceived the positive politeness requests as indicating lower D than the negative politeness requests and hints while Americans' perceptions of these strategies as a function of D did not differ reliably.

Holtgraves and Yang (1990) also studied the simultaneous effect of P and D on strategies by analyzing the politeness ratings of requests as judged by Americans and Koreans. An interesting outcome was the finding that negative politeness requests were judged as more polite in the low-P conditions (i.e. low P low D and low P high D) than in the high-P conditions (i.e. high P low D and high P high D).



In a later study, which again involved American and Korean subjects, Holtgraves and Yang (1992) found that “the politeness of requests varied more as a function of P and D the smaller the size of the request” (p. 250). Conversely, “as the size of the request increased, P and D mattered less” (ibid:252). Furthermore, this finding was more significant for Korean requests than American requests. Holtgraves and Yang (1992) suggested that this could be attributed to greater weighting of P and D, i.e. “the interpersonal elements of situations”, by Koreans.

These studies support B and L’s claim that cultural differences in the use of politeness strategies are due to the perceptions and weighting of the power, distance, and imposition variables within and across social situations. For example, in the study of the language of requesting in Israeli society, Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) found that the relatively high level of directness used by Israelis in making requests was a result of the perception of social distance: “in Israeli society relative distance is never assessed as very great” (p. 135). The studies by Holtgraves and Yang (1990, 1992) revealed that the American and Korean differences in likelihood and politeness ratings of requests were significantly due to the weighting of P and D. Specifically, the greater weight that Koreans placed on these variables resulted in greater variability in politeness judgments between these cultures.

Given these cultural variations, it is assumed that each culture will have its own “repertoire of requesting strategies”. However, as Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) point out, “there are ... a small number of identifiable distinct request strategy types [which] form a continuum of directness and...that the main cutting points along this continuum are shared across languages” (p. 115). The next section looks at this continuum that is formed by request strategies and their corresponding levels of directness.

### **7.3 Request Components and Directness Levels**

A request can be linguistically realized by a short or long stretch of utterance(s) and the choice of either means is largely dependent on how imposing the request is on the addressee. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), in an attempt to delimit the part of the utterance(s) that constitutes the request proper, i.e. “that part ... which might serve to realize the act independently of other elements”, have identified three request components (p. 200). These are 1) address term(s), 2) head act (request proper), and 3) adjunct(s) to head act.

Holtgraves and Yang (1992) have modified these components to be consistent with B and L’s (1987) typology. Specifically, address terms are coded as informal (e.g. first name), formal (e.g. title), or no address terms while head act/request proper is coded in terms of B and L’s five superstrategies. These request strategies are (Holtgraves and Yang, 1992:249):

- 1) Bald strategy : use of imperatives.
- 2) Positive-politeness strategy : use of any of the positive-politeness strategies described by B and L (1987); the most common strategies are to ask for reasons (e.g. Why don't you lend me a quarter?), to be optimistic (e.g. You'll lend me a quarter, won't you?), and to use slang, contractions, or ellipsis (e.g. Got the time?).
- 3) Negative-politeness strategy : from B and L's (1987) list of negative-politeness strategies the most common are the use of conventionally indirect forms such as questioning the hearer's ability (Could you...?) or willingness (Would you...?) to perform the act.
- 4) Off-record strategy : use of nonconventional indirect forms such as asserting a need (e.g. I need to call my roommate so he can bring my paper and I don't have a quarter).
- 5) No request strategy : no request is made.

The use of one of these strategies to perform the request proper corresponds to a particular level of directness. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) have proposed "three major levels of directness which can be expected to be manifested universally by requesting strategies" (p. 201). These are:

- 1) the most direct, explicit level, realized by requests syntactically marked as such by the grammatical mood of the verb in the utterance, i.e. imperatives (e.g. Close the door) or by other verbal means which name the act as a request, such as performatives (e.g. I'm requesting you to close the door) and hedged performatives (e.g. I would like you to close the door);
- 2) the conventionally indirect level, realized by procedures that refer to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance, as conventionalized in a given language. These strategies are known as indirect speech acts, e.g. Could you close the door? or Would you close the door?;
- 3) nonconventional indirect level, which realize the request by either partial reference to object or element needed for the implementation of the act (Why is the door open?) or by reliance on contextual clues (It's cold in here).

In addition, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) have subdivided these three levels into nine distinct sub-levels called "strategy types". According to the authors, "the distribution of strategies ... is meant to yield the relative degree of directness preferred in making requests in any given language, as compared to another, in the same situation" (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984:201). The strategy types that are categorized as nonconventionally indirect are hints, specifically strong hints and mild hints. Under B and L's typology of strategies,

giving hints is an off-record strategy. Weizman (1989) has examined the use of hints when performing a request. A brief discussion of Weizman's "requestive hints" is necessary at this point because it provides background information for an analysis of its use when making requests in Malay.

In the study, Weizman (1989) describes the types of hint or hint sub-strategies that are available on the propositional and illocutionary dimensions. The hint sub-strategies on the propositional dimension can be described as strong hints while that on the illocutionary dimension are mild hints. On the propositional dimension, the sub-strategies are (Weizman, 1989:82-3):

- (1) reference to the requested act: whereby S explicitly refers to the act, but does not name H as the person responsible for its performance. Example: "I haven't got the time to *clean up the kitchen*" (the phrase in italics is the requested act);
- (2) reference to the hearer's involvement: whereby S refers indirectly to H's responsibility, but does not name the requested act. By uttering "You've left the kitchen in a mess", S refers to H's responsibility for the state the kitchen is in (a mess);
- (3) reference to related components: whereby S refers to some object related to the requested act. In "The kitchen is in a mess", S refers to the object to be cleaned (kitchen) and to the reason for cleaning (It's in a mess).

On the illocutionary dimension, the sub-strategies are (Weizman, 1989:83-6):

- (1) questioning hearer's commitment: whereby S "checks for" H's commitment to carry out some act where the beneficiary is the speaker. The nature of the act is neither stated nor implied. Examples: "Are you going to give us a hand?" or "Are you going to do something for me?";
  
- (2) questioning feasibility: whereby a reference is made to some precondition for the feasibility of the requested act. In "Do you have a car?", if H does not have a car, then he certainly cannot give S a ride. Similarly, in "Have you got your notes with you?", if H does not have her notebook with her, she cannot lend it to S;
  
- (3) stating potential grounders: whereby a statement made by S, in a given situation, may count as an argument in favour of the (implied) requested act. It is also the very reason for making the request. Examples: "It's cold in here" or "I've just missed my bus and I live near your place".

#### **7.4 Request Forms in Bahasa Melayu (BM)**

Requests in BM can be linguistically expressed in two ways: direct (*langsung*) and indirect (*tak langsung*). The direct form is realized by two structures (Asmah Haji Omar, 1993:403):

- i) Perm – Predicate – (Object) – (Adjunct)
- ii) Complex sentence (with object clause)

In (i), **Perm** denotes the request word (*kata permintaan*) *tolong* which is equivalent to English “please” but unlike “please”, *tolong* can only appear in initial position. *Tolong* literally means “help” and it is used “when you are asking someone to do something, usually for your benefit, and not for theirs” (Mintz, 1990:44). Examples of requests with this structure are:

- (1) *Tolong diam.*  
Please be quiet.
- (2) *Tolong buka pintu.*  
Please open the door.
- (3) *Tolong panggil dia ke sini.*  
Please call him/her here.

Similar to offers, the emphatic particle *lah* can be added to *tolong* for emphasis (syntax-wise) as in:

- (4) *Tolong**lah** diam.*
- (5) *Tolong**lah** buka pintu.*

Politeness-wise, the addition of *lah* immediately after *tolong* (which already works at minimizing the imposition involved in the speech act) further softens the face threat of the request. The above examples are bald-on-record requests under B and L’s (1987) typology of politeness strategies. However, the linguistic elements *tolong* and *lah* are usually present in bald requests in BM.

According to Asmah Haji Omar (1993), direct requests that are formed using complex sentences are both polite and formal. This suggests that, unlike English, the term “direct”, which describes the request type, does not correspond with the degree of politeness or level of formality of a request in BM. A possible explanation for the “formal” tag on such forms could be the use of a formal pronoun when addressing the requestee, i.e. the use of *tuan* (“sir”) in (6) and (7) below. In addition, the verbs *minta* and *mohon* are normally used in formal contexts. *Mohon* also implies the manner in which the request is made, i.e. with humility and seriousness, much like the verb “entreat” which is a rough equivalent of *mohon*. Examples of requests with structure (ii) are as follows:

- (6) *Saya minta tuan serahkan gambar-gambar itu.*  
I am asking/requesting you to hand over the photos/pictures, sir.
- (7) *Saya mohon tuan menandatangani borang ini.*  
I am requesting/entreating you to sign this form, sir.

As evident from the English glosses, this type of request form is similar to English requests with explicit performatives.

Indirect requests take the form of a question with the modal *boleh* in initial position such as the following:

- (8) *Boleh tuan semak ini?*  
Can/Could you correct this, sir?
- (9) *Bolehkah puan tunggu sebentar?*  
Can/Could you wait awhile, madam?



*Boleh* has two different meanings in BM; it can express “the subject’s ability to perform an action” or it can be used to grant “permission for some activity or event to happen” (Imran Ho Abdullah, 1993:38-9). Similar to conventional indirect requests in English using “can” or “could”, *boleh*, when used in requests, questions the addressee’s ability to perform the act requested. The particle *kah* (as in (9)) is required when a request is made in written form while verbal requests usually drop this particle (Nik Safiah Karim et al., 1992).

The availability of this linguistic form to perform an indirect request in BM lends support to the notion of the universality of conventional indirectness in terms of the use of “Can/Could you...?” as a politeness strategy. In a contrastive study of conventionally indirect request patterns, Blum-Kulka (1989) found that questioning H’s ability as a means of making an indirect request was used with high frequency in Hebrew, Canadian French, Argentinian Spanish and Australian English. Furthermore, the use of this strategy type in the languages studied was similar on the three dimensions of means (choice of semantic devices), form (the linguistic form used) and degree of conventionality (the degree to which both means and form are used in the same way in these languages).

In Bahasa Melayu, this request strategy also uses the same means and form to encode conventional indirectness. This strategy type was also found by Hassall (1999) in his study of request strategies in Indonesian (which belongs under the

same language group as Malay), thus lending further support to this universality claim. In making this indirect request in Indonesian, the modal verb *bisa* is used to phrase the question about H's ability to perform an act. Blum-Kulka (1989) suggests that the preference for this strategy type over other strategies of conventional indirectness is due to its potential for "maintaining a balance between the literal and the requestive interpretation" (p. 52). Thus, it is an "efficient means for achieving the requestive goal while maintaining ... face-saving optionality" (ibid.).

In Malay, a conventionally polite request realized by the use of a question-form with *boleh* can be further marked for politeness by the words *tumpang*, *minta maaf*, and *kalau tak keberatan*. Consider the following examples:

- (10) *Boleh saya tumpang bertanya?*  
Can/Could I be permitted to ask a question?
- (11) *Minta maaf, boleh saya bertanya?*  
Forgive me, can/could I ask a question?
- (12) *Kalau tak keberatan, boleh saya bertanya?*  
If it's alright, can I ask a question?

In the examples above, the speaker's request for information is conventionally realized by questioning the hearer's willingness to have a question put forth to him rather than by questioning the speaker's ability to ask the question. In addition, S seeks H's permission to question H's willingness in (10) by the use of the word *tumpang* which is defined as "asking for permission" (Kamus Dewan, 1991). In (11), S apologizes for having to do so by using the phrase

*minta maaf*, and S employs a hedging expression, i.e. *kalau tak keberatan*, in (12). In short, the use of these words/phrases further marks a request as polite.

Linguistic realizations of requests in BM are not limited to the above forms as the findings will show. Thus, the request forms above are typical or conventional examples of how requests are made in BM. Forms that fall under either of the two levels of directness (*langsung* and *tak langsung*) share similar structural patterns with those in English. However, they differ from those in English in terms of degree of politeness and formality. The following sections will examine request forms and identify strategy types used in relation to the assessment of P, D, and R variables.

## 7.5 Strategies for Requesting

A search of the corpus was conducted to find utterances with the illocutionary force of a request. Each request found was categorized using the relative power (P) x social distance (D) interaction of S and H. This exercise yielded requests for each of the six levels of PxD interaction. Table 7.1 shows the distribution of requests over the six levels. A total of 167 requests were found and a majority of these (132 tokens) were made to people close to S (low D). From this majority, more than two-thirds were made to individuals whose relative power over S was either low or equal (47 and 68 tokens, respectively). Only a small number of requests were made to high P individuals. Not surprisingly, requests made to

mere acquaintances or strangers (high D) were few, i.e. 35 tokens from the total of 167 request tokens. These were mostly made to those who had either low or high P over S; 17 and 13 tokens, respectively for a total of 29 request tokens. The number of requests to status-equals was very small (5) and therefore, will not be discussed since the number is too small to provide a reliable analysis of the relationship between this type of PxD interaction (equal P high D) and request strategy.

**Table 7.1 – Request tokens for six levels of PxD interaction**

Social distance (D) Relative power (P)	low	high	Total
low	47	17	167
equal	68	5	
high	17	13	

Apart from categorizing the requests using levels of PxD interaction, the nature of each request (i.e. request goal/type) was also identified. Table 7.2 shows the frequency of occurrence for each request goal:

**Table 7.2 – Frequency count for each request goal**

Request goal	Frequency of occurrence
Action	132 (79%)
Goods	0 (0%)
Information	10 (6%)
Permission	25 (15%)
Total	167 (100%)

As can be seen from the table, 79% of requests made were requests for action while requests for permission and information constituted only a small percentage of the total (15% and 6%, respectively). Request for goods was not found in the corpus. The absence of this request goal can be explained by the nature of the data. The data were obtained from plays where, most of the time, situations involved conversations taking place in the living room. There were no service encounter situations typically relevant for requests for goods. The choice of strategy in performing a request goal given the type of PxD interaction is discussed in the sub-sections below.

### *7.5.1 Effects of low P low D relations on choice of strategy*

Requests which were grouped under this type of PxD interaction were targeted at the children, younger siblings, relatives (by marriage), or employee (domestic

help) of the speaker. These addressees low P over S was due mainly to their position within the family structure which also correlated with their age. Most of the requests required some form of physical action from H. Politeness theory predicts that the effects of low P low D will result in bald-on-record requests. The findings here support this prediction to some extent. The following examples are direct requests:

- (13) [mother to daughter]  
*Mari sini duduk sekejap, Shamsiah.*  
Come here and sit a while, Shamsiah.
- (14) [mother to adopted daughter]  
*Mari Murni, tolong ibu memasak.*  
Come and help me cook, Murni.
- (15) [employer to domestic help]  
*Bawakan sahajalah kami kopi.*  
Just bring us coffee.

The requests above are made using an imperative clause. Utterances (13) and (14) use the imperative verb *mari*, i.e. a colloquial term (roughly equivalent to “come”) while *bawa(kan)* (lit. “bring”) is used in (15). (13) and (14) consist of two requested acts: to approach S and to sit down in (13) and in (14), to go with S (presumably into the kitchen) and to cook. It is the second form of action that S intends to effect in H while the first is a means or a natural step to achieve it. Thus, in (13), this second form of action is hedged using the adverb *sekejap* (a while). As for example (14), the verb *tolong* (help) serves to mitigate the intended action.

The bald request in (15) also contains an adverbial hedge, i.e. *sahaja(lah)* (just). Its use suggests that the requested act is a simple act that can be performed with little difficulty, and thus minimizes the imposition ( $R_x$ ). Clearly, the low P low D relations present in the above requests do not necessitate mitigating elements. The fact that these elements are present in them and render them polite (though still direct) suggests that the power differential and the low social distance do not necessarily result in unredressed requests. However, some requests for information are baldly made such as the following:

- (16) [mother to son]  
*Ada yang lain pulak yang menarik hati kau Din? Cakapkanlah pada mak.*  
Is there someone else that you like, Din? Do tell me.
- (17) [elderly lady to young lady]  
*Eh, apa pulak ni?...Katakan semuanya pada Mak Mah.*  
Hey, what's this?...Tell me everything (when embraced by the young lady who started to cry).

The bald-on-record strategy used by S in the utterances above and linguistically realized using the imperative form is most probably due to an urgent need to know what is on H's mind (in (16)) or what is troubling H (in (17)). In addition, H, who is mindful of S's high P, might only volunteer the information asked for when "pressured". Therefore, the bald requests are motivated by urgency more than by low P low D relations.

The corpus also yielded requests that are redressed using positive politeness strategies:

- (18) [sister to stepsister]  
*Melati, adikku, mari ke mari.*  
 Melati, my sister, come over here.
- (19) [mother to daughter]  
*Eh, Rosnah, tolong sapu depan tu, aku nak mandi.*  
 Hey Rosnah, please sweep the front (of the house). I'm going to bathe.
- (20) [father to son]  
*Ramli, kau baliklah ke kampung dulu, supaya dapat kita pakatkan fasal pelajaran yang kau hendak pelajari itu.*  
 Ramli, return to the village first so that we could talk about the kind of study that you want to do.

Utterance (18) above uses a positive politeness strategy that claims in-group membership with H (Strategy 4: Use in-group identity markers) to redress the FTA. It is a bald request that is softened using an in-group address form (i.e. *adikku* (my sister)). B and L (1987) suggest that the use of in-group identity markers with imperatives signals that “S considers the relative P between himself and H to be small” and that the imperative “is not a power-backed command” but a request (p. 108). Below is an example from English (B and L, 1987:108):

- (21) Come here, honey.

The term *adikku* in (18) functions as an endearment and its use with the imperative (i.e. *mari ke mari*) implies that although the request is made baldly, it is made with affection. Thus, low D between S and H is emphasized and H's low P over S is de-emphasized with the use of such address forms.



The direct request in (19) is mitigated by *tolong* (“please”) while that in (20) is not redressed. The direct, bald request in each of these utterances is followed by a reason for the FTA. This is another positive politeness strategy that addresses H’s positive face (Strategy 13: Give or ask for reasons). By giving reasons, S conveys that (s)he and H are cooperators and the request is made in this spirit of cooperation, and it is not made because of S’s high P over H. B and L (1987) observe that “giving reasons is a way of implying “I can help you” or “you can help me””(p. 128). In (19), S indirectly says that H can help her, i.e. the reason that follows the request implies that H’s (the daughter) help (to sweep the floor) will allow S (the mother) to do something else (to take a bath). In (20), S implies that he can help H, i.e. the reason (to discuss future study plans) given to H (the son) supports the request (to return home) by S (the father) and it implies that the request is made to benefit H (i.e. S can help H). In short, although the requests in (19) and (20) are made by parents to their children, the parents have opted to soften the FTA by emphasizing their close ties with the children, i.e. by addressing H’s positive-face want, and simultaneously downplaying their parental power.

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) describe such reasons that precede or follow requests as grounders. According to them, grounder is one of many forms of modification that can be used to support the request proper. It functions as an adjunct to the speech act. Below are two examples with grounders (in italics) (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984:205):

- (22) Judith, *I missed class yesterday*, could I borrow your notes?
- (23) Excuse me, *I've just missed my bus and you live on the same road*. I wonder if I could trouble you for a lift?

Other than the word *tolong* used to soften a direct request, the word *cuba* is also available in BM to perform the same function. Consider the following examples:

- (24) [mother to daughter]  
*...cuba tengok nasi di dapur tu, entah hangus nanti.*  
 ...try checking on the rice in the kitchen, perhaps it's already burnt.
- (25) [employer to domestic help]  
*Hari ini ada orang datang. Cuba tengok pada buku harian di atas meja itu nanti, pukul berapa, berapa orang dan siapa mereka.*  
 There will be people coming today. Try looking in the appointment book on the table later to see at what time, how many of them and who they are.

In using *cuba*, S coaxes or persuades H to make an attempt to perform the act requested. Although S expects H to comply with the request given the power differential, he does not pressure H into compliance. Instead, he asks that H tries to fulfill the request. In (24), the mother coaxes the daughter to check on the rice in the kitchen while in (25), the employer asks the domestic help to check the diary for the day's appointments. In addition, the employer provides a reason as a preface for the request, namely there will be people coming on the said day.

From the perspective of speech act theory, indirect speech act in particular, the use of *cuba* in Malay requests raises the issue of H's ability to perform the act. In short, *cuba* conveys the meaning "Try doing so" rather than "Do so".

Compared to *tolong*, an utterance that is syntactically marked by *cuba* has a weak illocutionary force of a request.

The requests in BM discussed above require H to perform simple actions, i.e. the size of the imposition is small. Thus, these requests are generally direct and are often redressed with positive-politeness markers to emphasize low D between S and H and to de-emphasize low P of H. The examples below are large requests where S asks H to find S's son a job (utterance (26)), and S asks H to meet the parents of the girl S's son wants to marry (utterance (27)).

(26) [elder brother to younger brother]  
*..., abang datang ni nak minta tolong Kadir, carikanlah dia kerja yang patut. Tambi pun tak apalah.*  
..., I've come to ask for your help in finding him (my son) a suitable job. A gofer will do.

(27) [brother-in-law to young sister-in-law and husband]  
*Dalam menghantar cincin pula, tak pernah dibuat orang emak dan bapa yang menghantar, kan? Jadi perkara ini sebenarnya, terpulanglah kepada emak dan bapa saudaranya, iaitu kau Kassim dan Minah.*  
It has never been the practice for the parents (of the man who wish to ask the parents of the girl for their daughter's hand in marriage) to deliver the ring, has it? So, this matter is really up to both of you as his aunt and uncle.

The speaker in (26) uses a positive politeness strategy, i.e. an optimistic expression of the FTA (Strategy 11: Be optimistic). Given that S and H are brothers (low D), "S assumes that H wants S's wants for S and will help him to obtain them" (B and L, 1987:126). Also, using such optimistic expressions of FTAs implies that asking S about a job is a small matter that can be taken for

granted (this strategy minimizes the seriousness of the request). In alluding to the job request as minor, S says in (26), “A gofer will do”. Below are two examples of English requests that are “optimistically expressed” (B and L, 1987:126):

(28) I’ve come to borrow a cup of flour.

(29) Look, I’m sure you won’t mind if I borrow your typewriter.

In terms of P and D, S’s request strategy is more influenced by low D than low P. This is reflective of an aspect of Malay culture where family ties allows one to ask for (almost) anything, i.e. membership in a family grants one request privileges. This belief is echoed by the speaker in (26) later in the conversation when he says, “*Apapun, anak buah sendiri juga*” (“In any case, he is your nephew”).

Utterance (27) also contains a large request made to family members. However, unlike (26), (27) uses an off-record strategy (Strategy 1: Give hints). B and L (1987) observe that indirect (off-record) speech acts are realized by “hints that consist in “raising the issue of” some desired act A, for instance, by stating motives or reasons for doing A” (p. 215). Following Weizman’s (1989) inventory of hint sub-strategies, stating motives or reasons in favour of doing an act is called “stating potential grounders” and is considered a mild hint by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). In (27), the requested act is “raised” in the first utterance when S states that he cannot perform the act of delivering a ring (as a

means of proposing marriage in Malay culture). This is phrased in the form of a statement with a token tag, i.e. *kan* (a contracted form for *bukan*).

In the following utterance, a strong hint is used when S refers to H's responsibility for performing the requested act (which is not explicitly stated), i.e. *this matter is really up to both of you as his aunt and uncle*. Specifically, S alludes to H's role within the family which naturally comes with certain responsibilities. In short, the off-record request in (27) is realized first by a mild hint followed by a strong hint in the second utterance.

Direct or indirect references to family roles and duties when making large requests are not uncommon among Malay people. Malay society, and presumably most societies, strongly believes that as a member of a family unit, one is expected to grant favours, big or small, to other members in the family. Indirect references to one's duties and obligations as a member of a family unit were also evident from the sample data on family discourse collected by Khadijah Ibrahim (1993). Consider the example below:

(30) *Khadijah Ibrahim, 1993:214 (simplified)*  
[between an uncle(A) and his nephew(B)]

A<sub>1</sub>: *Chul, kita orang ni ada hal sikitlah Hari Raya Cina ni.*  
Chul, we (exclusive) are going to have a little something this coming Chinese New Year.

B<sub>1</sub>: *Ya...*  
Yes...

A<sub>2</sub>: *Kita ada buat kerja sikit lepas maghrib. Si Mar nak...nak terima cincin tunanglah. Belah lelaki datang pukul 9:00 katanya. Jadi kalau dapat kita kumpul sebelum maghrib. Baca doa sikit sebelum lepas selesai cerita.*

We (exclusive) are having this little task after dusk. Mar will be receiving her engagement ring. The groom's party says they will be arriving at 9:00 pm. So if we (inclusive) could gather before dusk. Read a little prayer before the end (of the ceremony).

In the example above, A does not make an on-record request. Instead, A relies on B's knowledge of what's required of him during family events to indirectly request B's presence at the engagement ceremony. Given the context, the use of *kita* as a first-person plural pronoun by A in A<sub>2</sub> (line 3) is inclusive of the addressee and it presumes B's participation. Also, it is clear from the context that the use of *kita* in A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub> (line 1) does not include the addressee. In Malay grammar, *kami* is the form used for the first-person plural pronoun (exclusive) and not *kita*. Thus, the use of *kita* in A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub> (line 1) is non-standard.

The examples above show that request strategies used by low P and low D dyads emphasize the close social distance and play down the power differential. This is evident from the use of mostly bald requests for small impositions. Low D (not P) receives emphasis when these requests are mitigated by the terms *tolong* and *cuba* (S's high P over H assumes that requests are made baldly and unredressed). Using in-group address terms and giving reasons are two of the strategies employed by S to address positive face wants of H and to allude to low D. For large requests, strategy choice ranges from positive politeness to off record. However, no conclusion can be drawn from this finding since the number of large requests made under this dyad type is very small (just the two

cited in examples (26) and (27)). Further study is required to determine the effect of large requests on strategy choice for low P low D relations.

To surmise, for low P low D relations, direct requests were mostly redressed with positive politeness strategies in order to draw attention to the level of closeness/familiarity between interactants. The next section will look at the effects of equal P low D on the use of request strategies.

### *7.5.2 Effects of equal P low D relations on strategy choice*

The types of request found in the data were mostly requests for action and permission. These requests were made to either friends or partner/spouse of the requestor. It was found that the requests were made either baldly or conventionally indirectly (a negative politeness strategy). Below are two unredressed bald requests:

- (31) [between two friends]  
*Dengar dulu bicaraku Affandi...*  
Listen to what I have to say first Affandi...
- (32) [between two friends]  
*Aku minta janganlah kau menyebut soal-soal agama lagi.*  
I'm asking you not to bring up religious matters anymore.

The use of the imperative in (31) and an explicit performative in (32) are motivated more by urgency than by P or D. The communicated urgency that is achieved by using a bald request suggests that S is making a plea to H; a plea to comply with the request. In such urgent cases, P and D levels are not taken into

consideration when doing the FTA. Thus, S's use of the imperative and performative in (31) and (32), respectively do not signal a change in either P or D values.

B and L (1987) claim that orders and entreaties that "seem to occur in many languages with ... imperatives" and that, consequently, indicate "inverted assumptions about the relative status of S and H" could be explained by this notion of communicated urgency (p. 96). This claim is illustrated by the use of direct demands in Tamil (by beggars in India) (example (33)) and entreaties in English (example (34)) (B and L, 1987:96-7):

(33) *kaacu kuTu.*  
Give money.

(34) Accept my thanks.

The examples below are also bald requests:

(35) [between a couple]  
*Bukalah kotak ini.*  
Do open the box. (i.e. a birthday present)

(36) [wife to husband]  
*Lekaslah pergi masuk ke dalam, mandi, semua.*  
Do hurry and go in (into the bathroom) to bathe and what-not.

(35) and (36) are cases where doing the FTA without redress is primarily in H's interest (B and L, 1987:98). S performs the request baldly and in doing so, he "conveys that he does care about H (and therefore about H's positive face), so that no redress is required" (ibid.). The use of "imperatives for actions directly



in H's interest" such as in (35) and (36) emphasizes the closeness/familiarity between S and H (low D). In (35), asking H to open the box is in H's interest since the box contains a birthday gift while in (36), asking H to hurry ensures that H will not be late for a dinner party.

Other direct requests between status equals were marked with the word *tolong* which, like English "please", "makes sentences irretrievably into requests" and polite ones at that. Below are two examples:

- (37) [to a group of friends]  
*Mari tolong aku tolak kerusi-kerusi ini semua.*  
Come and help me move these chairs.
- (38) [a wife to her husband]  
*Awak tolong tuliskan sikit ucapan saya, ...*  
(You) help write (a little) my speech,...

The presence of a pronoun immediately after or before the word *tolong*, i.e. *tolong aku* (in (37)) and *awak tolong* (in (38)) shifts the literal meaning of *tolong* from "please" to "help". In other words, the word *tolong* in these utterances does not function as "polite" adverb but it functions as "polite" verb. The above requests can also be made by dropping the pronouns which will then return the politeness marker *tolong* to its syntactic function as an adverb as follows:

- (39) *...tolong tolak kerusi-kerusi ini semua.*  
...please move these chairs.
- (40) *Tolong tuliskan sikit ucapan saya, ...*  
Please write (a little) my speech,...

The request realization in (37) includes reference to the requestor/speaker (i.e. *aku*) and that in (38) includes reference to the requestee/addressee (i.e. *awak*). According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), the choice of agent in encoding point-of-view operations, i.e. request perspective, is dependent on whose role (in a speech event) the speaker wishes to emphasize. “Given the fact that in requests it is H who is “under threat”, any avoidance in naming him as the principal performer of the act serves to soften the impact of the imposition” (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984:203). Thus, the request in (37) is “speaker-oriented”, i.e. with the use of *aku* (equivalent to English “I” or “me”). While the direct request in (37) is softened by avoiding direct reference to H, that in (38) names H as the requestee and leaves H with no “out”. However, the threat of this “hearer-oriented” request is minimized by *sikit* (lit. “a little”). The hedging expression *sikit* implies that the request is small which, in turn, suggests that its presence is motivated by P or D values rather than  $R_x$ . In BM then, bald requests between close status equals are mitigated by choice of pronouns and hedges.

Apart from *tolong* which functions as an illocutionary force-indicating device (IFID), Bahasa Melayu also has the word *cuba*. An IFID refers to the linguistic element that names the illocution; forms of IFIDs that are available in a language include lexical IFIDs (e.g. “please”, and verbs that name illocutions such as “command”, “offer”, “promise”, “suggest”), “morphological IFIDs marking clause-type and politeness levels ... syntactic IFIDs like word order and clause-type (mood)”, and prosody and punctuation IFIDs (Allan,

1998c:931). As previously mentioned (see p. 202), requests with *cuba* as IFID are not as transparent as those with *tolong*. Some examples follow:

- (41) [wife to husband]  
*Cuba dengar. Bila datang puak Shamsuddin dengan tepak sirih tanyanya esok, kita sambut dia orang dengan baik.*  
Try to listen. When Shamsuddin's people come with the *tepak sirih* tomorrow, we'll give them a nice welcome.
- (42) [a wife to her husband]  
*Baik. Sekarang cuba awak jadi tuan rumah dan aku jadi orang datang, ya?*  
Alright. Now you try playing the host and I'll play the guest, okay?
- (43) [same as above]  
*Cubalah buat balik, aku nak tengok.*  
Do try doing it again, I want to see.

The corpus also yielded requests that were made indirectly using modals (e.g. *dapat, boleh*) and adverbial clauses. Consider the following examples that use a negative-politeness strategy (Strategy 2: Question, hedge) to redress the request:

- (44) [between two friends]  
*Kalau dia memberi apa-apa berita pada kau, dapatkah kau menyampaikan pada aku...?*  
If he sends you any news, can/could you let me know...?
- (45) [between two friends]  
*...jika kiranya kau mendengar apa-apa pula daripada...daripada Kuan, bolehkah kau katakan padaku?*  
...if you hear anything from...from Kuan, can/could you tell me?

The request proper is made indirectly by questioning H's ability to perform the act. This is marked by *dapatkah* and *bolehkah* in (44) and (45), respectively. Unlike English, where a choice between "can" and "could" is available in order

to encode the appropriate degree of tentativeness when questioning H's ability to comply with a request, BM does not provide such options. *Boleh* or *dapat* as modals of ability do not have related modals that convey tentativeness.

According to B and L (1987) (citing Heringer, 1972), illocutionary force can be hedged by suspending felicity conditions and using "if" clauses is one way of doing so. In (44) and (45), this is the case. When politeness considerations are taken into account, S's choice of strategy is more likely influenced by request size ( $R_x$ ) than by P or D (participants' equal status and closeness predict bald-on-record strategy). In the above utterances, the request for information (about someone) is considered large since S and H have been warned not to speak to each other.

Other than requests for action, requests for permission were also found in the corpus. These requests were made directly using tags as the following examples show:

(46) [between two close friends]  
*Aziah nak pinjam ini, ya?*  
I want to borrow this, okay?

(47) [between two close friends]  
*Aziah baca, ya?*  
I'll read, okay?

The tag *ya* above functions as an emphatic tag. It emphasizes the statements that precede it. Therefore, the above requests can be described as "presumptuous" or

“optimistic” since they assume permission will be granted to S by H. This “optimistic” nature of the requests, which is characteristic of positive politeness (Strategy 11:Be optimistic) most likely reflects S’s equal status and low distance relative to H. The use of *ya* (lit. “yes”) seems to leave H with no option other than to concede the request. B and L (1987:126) cite a similar example in Tamil with *illeyaa* as the emphatic tag:

- (48) *onka vaNTi kuTukkiriinka, illeyaa?*  
You’ll lend me your bike, right? (said to a very close friend)

Some requests for permission were also made indirectly using the modal *boleh* as in the examples below. In (49), the subject pronoun “I” is a borrowed term from English and is only used in informal conversation.

- (49) [between two friends]  
*Boleh I pinjam Aziah sekejap ya?*  
Can I steal Aziah away for a moment okay?
- (50) [between friends]  
*Bolehkah aku masuk?*  
Can/Could I come in?
- (51) [same as above]  
*Ini ada Khairil Anwar lagi. Boleh Aziah pinjam?*  
Here’s more (books by) Khairil Anwar. Can I borrow them?

In conclusion, preferred politeness strategy used by close status equals was not confined to bald on record. For requests for action, strategies ranged from bald on record to negative politeness. Direct requests were softened by the politeness marker *tolong* and/or hedging words such as *sikit* (a contracted form for *sedikit*) and *sekejap* (lit. “a moment”). Conventional indirectness was also used and

these requests were further redressed by “if” clauses. Requests for permission were either direct or conventionally indirect.

### 7.5.3 Effects of high P low D relations on request strategy

About half of the requests (i.e. 9/17 or 53%) found under this dyad type were requests for permission. This number also represents roughly one-third (9/25) of the total number of request for permission found in the corpus (see Table 7.2). Permission was sought from S’s parent, elder, or employer. Examples on how these requests are realized are:

- (52) [a young man to his elder]  
*Maafkan saya dulu, ya pak, ... Biarlah saya pergi mandi dan bertukar pakaian di bilik saya sekejap.*  
Excuse me for a moment, pak... Let me go bathe and change my clothes in my room for a while.
- (53) [adopted daughter to mother]  
*Ibu, biar Melati pulang dulu...*  
Mum, let me go home first...
- (54) [a son to his father]  
*Bapa, saya minta kebenaran untuk keluar dari rumah ini.*  
Dad, I’m asking for your permission to leave this house (permanently).
- (55) [daughter to father]  
*Bapa, Laili pergi keluar sekejap ya, bapa!*  
Dad, I’m going out for a while, okay!

The examples above show that request for permission is done baldly or directly. This bald-on-record strategy is most probably due to the nature of this request goal which is speaker-oriented. If the request is granted, it is the speaker who

performs the act. Consequently, the request “constitutes a threat to the requestor’s rather than to the requestee’s face” (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984). For these reasons, request for permission is low in imposition and is therefore, more likely to be direct.

In Bahasa Melayu, this request goal is marked by the verb *biar(lah)* which is equivalent to the English verb “allow” or “permit”. The use of *biar(lah)* is shown in utterances (52) and (53) above. In (52), S prefaces his request with a “formulaic entreaty”, i.e. *Maafkan saya dulu* (Excuse me for a moment). According to B and L (1987), such formulaic entreaties convey a sense of urgency. Thus, S’s direct request in (52) is perhaps related to this urgency. Furthermore, the humble nature of the entreaty also communicates S’s concern for H’s high P which in (52) is based on age. In (53), the request is direct with no forms of redress.

Apart from using *biar(lah)*, this request goal can also be made directly by using explicit performatives (as in (54)) or by expressing optimism (a positive-politeness strategy) (utterance (55)). In Bahasa Melayu, requests with explicit performatives are considered formal and polite (unlike English). The formality in example (54) is also suggested by the use of the formal/deferential form of first-person singular pronoun *saya* and the verb *minta* which is normally used in formal contexts. The pronoun *saya* as used here is the formal/deferential form and not the neutral form because its use marks S’s recognition of H’s high P.

The need to be direct yet formal and polite in this example is most probably motivated by the seriousness of the request and H's high P.

The "presumptuous" or "optimistic" nature of the request for permission in (55) signals the closeness between S and H (i.e. father-daughter relationship). S, in making the direct request with the emphatic tag *ya*, assumes that permission will be granted by H due to low D between them. Furthermore, the request size is small (S seeks permission to go out for the evening) compared to that in (54) where S seeks permission to leave the house permanently.

The data also yielded requests for action where strategy choice did not appear to be determined by request size. Consider the examples below:

- (56) [a young man to his elder]  
*Tunggulah di sini sebentar ya, pak, ...*  
Do wait here for a while okay, pak,...
- (57) [domestic help to employer]  
*Cuba encik baca ini kalau encik tidak percaya...*  
Try reading this if you don't believe (me), sir...(a letter)
- (58) [same as (57)]  
*Tolonglah encik. Kalau dapat encik telefonlah pada pegawai yang menjaga tu, biarlah dapat buat rumah sebuah lagi...*  
Please sir. If you could sir, do contact the officer-in-charge so that I could build another house (S is a squatter).

Utterance (56) contains a direct request that is mitigated by a hedging expression (i.e. *sementar*). It is a routine request (S asks H to wait while he summons the person H wants to see) where directness is seen as an efficient means of realizing it. Nonetheless, the word *sementar* is used to minimize this directness



and to address H's high P. In (57), the word *cuba* signals it as a request. However, the illocutionary force is hedged by an "if" clause, i.e. *kalau encik tidak percaya* ("if you don't believe (me)").

According to Heringer (1972) (cited in B and L (1987)), "if" clauses suspend felicity conditions and in doing so hedge illocutionary force. Heringer proposes two felicity conditions which can be seen as "particularizations of face-preserving principles". One is the "deference" condition where S presupposes that he has H's permission to perform the request and the other is the "politeness" condition where S presupposes that H will not mind complying with the request (B and L, 1987:162-3). The "politeness" condition accounts for the following example (ibid:163):

(59) Would you close the window,  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{if you want to help me?} \\ \text{if you don't mind?} \end{array} \right\}$

This felicity condition also appears in the "if" clause for (57), i.e. the presupposition that H will not mind fulfilling the request is suspended. The use of an "if" clause in (57) makes the on-record request a polite one. The same is true for example (58). Here, the request is preceded by *tolonglah* which clearly signals S's communicative intention since it is a request word. The request proper is hedged by the "if" clause *kalau dapat* (if you could).

According to B and L, the standard way of doing on-record polite requests in Tamil is to use “if” clauses as hedges (1987:163): The authors cite the examples below (ibid.):

- (60)    *koncam paNam iruntaa, kuTunka.*  
          If you have a little money, give (i.e. lend) it.
  
- (61)    *muTincaa, koncam paNam kuTunka*  
          If you can, give some money.

It should be mentioned here that the requestor in (58) is asking the requestee, his employer, to do something illegal. Given H’s high P and the seriousness of the request, this request should not have been made at all. The fact that it is made and on-record at that suggests that S places more emphasis on the low social distance between him and his employer than on the high power differential and request size.

To surmise, requests for permission and action for high P low D relations were done on record. The choice of bald-on-record strategy to perform requests for permission could be explained by the nature of such requests. Specifically, this request goal only minimally imposes on H because if H complies with the request, it is S and not H who performs the requested act. Requests for permission were marked using *biarlah*. Request for action was also performed on record but redressed with hedges (a negative-politeness strategy) to allude to H’s high P. Large requests were also on record with negative-politeness hedges

and this suggested that request size did not predict strategy choice. Instead, S relied upon the low-D value in making the bald yet polite requests.

#### 7.5.4 *Effects of low P high D on choice of strategy*

The low-P factor for this dyad type is based on the requestee's age or occupation while high D indicates that S and H are strangers, mere acquaintances, or co-workers. Almost all of the requests found were requests for action (15/17 or 88.2%) and they were bald, on-record ones. Some examples follow:

- (62) [a mother to her daughter's friend]  
*Pergilah engkau balik.*  
Do go home.
- (63) [employer to employee]  
*Eh, tutuplah pintu itu.*  
Heh, do close the door.
- (64) [a visitor to domestic help]  
*Pergi katakan pada Encik Mohd Zain ada orang hendak berjumpa dia.*  
Go and tell Encik Mohd Zain (H's employer) there are people who want to see him.
- (65) [a client to his broker]  
*Taruhkan nama aku untuk dua saham dalam syarikat itu.*  
Put my name down for two shares in that company.
- (66) [same as (64)]  
*Hari sudah malam ini. Bawakan kami minuman yang bermasak, panas. Kopi, ya, kopi.*  
It's night-time now. Bring us a hot drink. Coffee, yes, coffee.

As the examples show, the imperative is used to perform each request. In (62) and (63), the inherent directness of the imperative is softened by the particle *lah*.

In utterances (64) through (66), the request requires H to do something that is within his job scope and hence, redress is unnecessary. Specifically, informing his employer of visitors and making drinks are H's responsibilities as a domestic help (examples (64) and (66)) and carrying out his client's wishes is part of H's job in (65). Furthermore, the explicitness in these requests will ensure that the tasks are understood by H, and they will be performed correctly.

The choice of a bald-on-record strategy in the above utterances suggests that H's low P plays a more significant role than high D between S and H in determining strategy choice (B and L (1987) predict that given the high D value S (and H) would use negative politeness and off-record strategies under this dyad type). The emphasis on this power differential also explains the use of coarse/unrefined address terms, i.e. *engkau* (second-person singular pronoun) in (62) and *aku* (first-person singular pronoun) in (65). However, there are direct requests where S uses formal address terms. Consider the following examples:

(67) [between two fathers whose children are friends; the base of power is social status (the speaker's)]  
*Saya mintalah Encik Salleh datang ke tempat saya ini...*  
I'm asking you (sir) to join me here (to sit together)...

(68) [same as above]  
*Biarlah saya simpan dulu cincin ini hingga pada satu masa yang baik. Mintalah saya bertangguh dulu, Encik Salleh!*  
Do let me keep this ring till a suitable time. I'm asking for a postponement, Encik Salleh!

In both utterances, S uses the formal form of the first-person pronoun (*saya*) when referring to himself, and he uses the form title-plus-last-name (TLN) to

address H. The bald request in (67) is realized by the explicit performative *saya mintalah* (I am asking) while that in (68) is realized by an imperative and an explicit performative (The requestor makes the request twice). Basically, the requestor in (68) is asking for H's permission to defer the decision on whether to accept the marriage proposal on behalf of his daughter, and S has to keep the ring until such a decision can be made (for to return the ring will mean the proposal is declined). The fact that this request for permission is repeated is perhaps due to S's need to make clear his intention, i.e. so that there is no misunderstanding. This need could also be the reason for the choice of bald-on-record strategy. While (67) and (68) are bald requests, the use of explicit performatives and formal address in realizing them make them formal and consequently, polite.

In terms of P and D values, the formality inherent in these requests reflects the high D between S and H rather than S's high social position relative to H. More importantly, the present context warrants the emphasis on high D. Since S and H are meeting for the first time to discuss the possible union of their children, they regard themselves as equals in terms of social standing. Relative power is not a factor in this particular context, leaving only the distance factor. Therefore, the use of formality is deemed appropriate to encode the social distance value.

In summary, request strategies for low P high D relations were bald and direct contrary to predictions that this type of PxD interaction would result in negative-

politeness and off-record strategies. Imperatives (at times mitigated by the particle *lah*), and informal address forms were used to encode this directness. H's low power relative to S rather than their high social distance was seen as the reason for this strategy choice. However, the use of explicit performatives and formal address terms in some bald requests suggested otherwise. In short, while requests were performed baldly and on-record, the choice of syntactic structure and address form indicated which variable, P or D, was given emphasis. Furthermore, context appeared to determine which variable received emphasis.

#### ***7.5.5 Effects of high P high D relations on request strategy***

There were only a small number of request tokens under this dyad type, i.e. a total of 13. Most of the requests between interactants with high P high D relations involved the speaker asking for something that was within the addressee's job scope. The high P differential that existed between S and H was due to their position within a Malay community. This position was tied to the type of job the participants held, i.e. (ex-) government officer, community leader, farmer, broker, and domestic help. The high D relations meant that S and H were either strangers or mere acquaintances. This dyad type, as studied by B and L (1987), would yield requests that used negative-politeness and off-record strategies. The findings showed the use of these strategies for large requests, in particular.

These were requests for action; acts where H had no obligation to comply even though he was capable of doing the act (example (69)) or acts that were not within H's job description (e.g. in (71) below). The high P high D relations was evident from the amount of effort it took to make the request, i.e. S took several turns in realizing the request proper. Consider the request below where the speaker is speaking as a representative of his village community (use of first-person plural pronoun *kami*):

(69) [villager (A) to retired government officer (B)]

A: *Kami di kampung tahu yang encik sudah pencen kerja, bersara.*

We, those in the village, know that you've retired from work.

B: *Apa pula ada kena-mengananya itu dengan mereka?*  
What has that got to do with them?

A: *Encik dahulu seorang pegawai tinggi pentadbiran kerajaan.*

You were before a senior administrative government officer.

B: *Ya, aku tahu!*  
Yes, I know!

A: *Kalaulah encik ada di kampung sekarang, setelah bersara ini, banyaklah kami akan dapat nasihat dan petunjuk daripada encik.*

If you, sir, were back at the village now after your retirement, we would get a lot of advice and guidance from you, sir.

The speaker in (69) acknowledges the power differential (H's high P) by using the deferential and formal address term *encik*. In making the request proper, S uses two turns where the request is realized using an off-record strategy (i.e.

Strategy 2: Give association clues) before shifting to a negative-politeness strategy (Strategy 3: Be pessimistic). The association clues in the first two turns are related to the act required of H (i.e. return to the village and help the people). This implicature is possible if S and H mutually know that H's retirement and work experience are two likely reasons for H to fulfill the request. In other words, the correct interpretation of S's intention involves a "cumulative summing" of the two associative hints by H. However, in (69), H (i.e. B) fails to arrive at the right implicature (either intentionally by opting "out" or unintentionally). Thus, S switches to a less indirect strategy, i.e. be pessimistic, in the final turn. The association clues used can be described as mild hints (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984; Weizman, 1989). The statements made by S in turns 1 and 3 concerning H's retirement and former job may count as "arguments in favour of" and "the very reasons for" the off-record request.

In turn 5, the pessimism is conveyed by S's use of a hypothetical "if" sentence. Specifically, S describes a hypothetical situation using *kalaulah* (if/supposing that) with the particle *lah* lending emphasis. This request strategy allows S to express pessimism about the likelihood of H performing the act. S explicitly expresses doubt that the hypothetical world "is close to" the real one and therefore the conditions for the appropriateness of the requested act do not exist.

B and L (1987) observe that in Tamil, most requests are done with "a cumulative summing of associative hints". They reason that "such hints leave it



up to H to offer, taking the responsibility for the FTA away from S” (B and L, 1987:216). Below is an example where S’s “detailed recounting of expenses ... may serve as an indirect request for a loan” (ibid.):

(70) *paTuttavo neettu poRutukkum poocci. inta vaarom etoo celavukku aayirikku pattu ruupaay atiin kaaNoom.*

Lying down (ill), the whole of yesterday was lost. This week there’s ten rupees of expenses, and that too can’t be seen.

This off-record strategy can be likened to a type of indirectness used in verbal communication among Malay people. Asmah Haji Omar (1992) names this type of indirectness as beating about the bush (B.A.B.). According to the author, when a speaker uses B.A.B., he “takes some few minutes to talk about other things before arriving at his real intention. These ‘other things’ that he talks about may or may not be related to the core of his verbal communication” (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992:176). The following conversation illustrates how beating about the bush is used to indirectly perform a request; in this example, it is a request (from the wife to the husband) to have the curtains replaced (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992:176-7):

Wife: *Langsir ni dah comotlah! Malulah kalau orang datang.*  
The curtains are already worn out! It would be embarrassing if we have visitors.

Husband: *Hai, elok lagi tu.*  
Ha, they still look good.

Wife: *Ah, tengok tu! Tak nampakkah? Sini naik, sana turun. Sakit mata tengoknya.*  
Look here! Can’t you see? One side goes up, the other side sags down. What an eye-sore!

Another request that occurred over several turns is the following:

(71) [villager (A) to government officer (B)]

A: *Kami ni menyusahkan encik saja. Tapi kami ni membawa hajat orang kampung. Nampaknya pada enciklah tempat kami mengadu.*  
We're imposing on you, sir. But we're here to convey the wishes of the villagers. It looks like you're the person we can turn to.

B: *Apa halnya?*  
What's the matter?

A: *Begini encik. Pasal tanah pinggir.*  
Well sir, it's about the land.

(A elaborates on the problems he and others are having with the land)

A: *Kami dah terima notis dari kerajaan. Tanah pinggir kami itu nak diambil balik.*  
We've received a notice from the government. Our land will be taken from us.

(More elaboration on the problems faced)

A: *Itulah kami minta kerajaan memberikan tempoh lagi kepada kami.*  
Well, we're asking the government to give us more time (to work the land).

In the above, S uses a combination of negative-politeness and off-record strategies to redress the FTA. Using first a negative-politeness strategy (Strategy 6: Apologize), S “straight-forwardly apologizes for” the impending FTA to indicate his “reluctance to impinge on H’s negative face and thereby partially redresses that impingement” (B and L, 1987:187). Specifically, S admits the impingement by saying *Kami ni menyusahkan encik saja* where *menyusahkan*

literally translated means “to cause difficulty”. S then dissociates himself from the FTA by explicitly stating that “it is not his own wish to impose on H but someone else’s”, i.e. *orang kampung* (the villagers) (B and L, 1987:187). This is followed by S claiming that he has “compelling reasons” for making the request (there is no one else he could ask) and “thereby implying that normally he wouldn’t dream of infringing H’s negative face” (ibid:189).

B and L (1987) provide similar expressions in English where S “admits the impingement” (examples (72) and (73)) and “gives overwhelming reasons” (examples (74) and (75)):

(72) I’d like to ask you a big favour.

(73) I’m sure you must be very busy, but...

(74) I can think of nobody else who could...

(75) Can you possibly help me with this because there’s no one else I could ask.

Returning to utterance (71), the speaker, in subsequent turns, uses association clues (an off-record output strategy) to build up to the request proper. The clue in turn 3 (i.e. land) is a strong hint since it refers to the object related to the request. By making a reference to “the land”, S strongly hints that the request has to do with “the land”. The request proper is done directly (i.e. use of *mintā*; lit.: “ask/request for”) but the term *kerajaan* implies that it is not H in particular but the government as an entity that is the “target” of the request and thus

dissociates H from the FTA. In short, although S makes a bald request in the final turn, negative-politeness redress is used to distance H from it.

Other requests that are off record are:

- (76) [domestic help to employer]  
*Tolonglah saya mak encik, tolonglah, suami saya sakit.*  
Do help me ma'am, do help, my husband is ill.
- (77) [elderly lady to prospective employer]  
*Tolonglah mak ni, cucu mak sakit, bapanya sakit di hospital, tolonglah mak, apa saja kerja mak buat...*  
Do help me, my grandchild is ill, his/her father is ill and in the hospital, do help me, I'll do any kind of work...

Both requests have to do with a job. In (76), S is asking to keep her job and in (77), S is asking for a job. In (76), although it is clear that S is making a request by saying *tolonglah*, what manner of action is required of H is only implicated. This is an off-record output strategy (Strategy 1: Give hints) where S states a reason, i.e. my husband is ill, that serves as a mild hint which correctly interpreted, means that his illness has made him unable to work and since S is now the sole breadwinner, it is important for her to keep her job. The speaker in (77) uses the same strategy in asking H for a job and she also minimizes the imposition by saying *apa saja kerja* ("any kind of work"). She also attempts to narrow the high social distance (D) between herself and H by referring to herself as *mak* (lit.: mother).

To summarize, the effects of high P high D relations were more evident for large requests than for small ones. More effort went into making the large requests using negative-politeness and off-record output strategies. Off-record strategies included using hints and association clues while negative-politeness strategies included apologizing for and showing pessimism about the requested act. Formal and/or deferential address terms, e.g. *encik* and *mak encik*, were used to signal the power difference brought on by H's high social position.

## 7.6 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has focused on the linguistic realizations in Bahasa Melayu of the speech act "request". These request realizations were studied for the effects of the sociological variables P and D on the choice of a politeness strategy. Specifically, the effects of five levels of P x D interaction (i.e. low P low D, equal P low D, high P low D, low P high D and high P high D) on strategy choice formed the discussion on how requests were made in BM.

For low P low D relations, the results show that H's low power over S and their closeness to each other do not significantly influence S to use totally unredressed bald requests. Instead, the politeness markers *tolong* and *cuba* are used to soften direct requests and to de-emphasize the power differential. The use of positive-politeness output strategies (e.g. using in-group identity markers and giving reasons) for both small and large requests suggests that the speaker

(who has high P over H) places more emphasis on his/her close relationship with H when making these requests.

As for requests between status equals, strategy choices do not clearly indicate the effects of equal P low D (i.e. there was no dominant politeness strategy). Direct requests are redressed with *tolong* and/or hedged with expressions that minimize  $R_x$ . Large requests are made using conventional indirectness which in BM involves the use of *boleh* or *dapat* as modals of ability. In requesting for permission, the findings show the use of direct strategies that are softened by the token tag *ya* and the use of conventional indirectness.

Approximately half of the requests for high P low D relations are requests for permission and since this request goal is low in imposition compared to requests for action, bald on record is the strategy choice when performing them. Here, high P does not appear to influence strategy choice. The same is true for action requests. Nonetheless, these are redressed with negative-politeness hedges. The absence of negative-politeness and off-record strategies associated with high P values indicates the emphasis on low D for this dyad type, at least where requests in BM are concerned.

Also contrary to prediction is S's use of request strategy for low P high D relations. The use of on-record bald requests instead of on-record negative-politeness and off-record ones alludes to H's low P over S and not their

unfamiliarity with and high distance from each other. These direct requests are performed using imperatives and informal address terms. However, when S wants to address high D yet still wants to be direct, explicit performatives and formal forms of address are used to encode formality (associated with high D values). These findings suggest that context plays a significant role in determining whether P or D is dominant.

The effects of high P high D relations on strategy choice are found to be evident for large requests. These requests are made indirectly using negative-politeness and off-record strategies in an attempt to redress H's negative-face wants. Address terms that give deference are used to signal H's high power over S. The fact that S makes his request over several turns suggests the difficulty he has in making the request in the first place and this show of difficulty pays H negative face. This "beating about the bush" manner of requesting that involves apologies and hints is common among Malays.

In conclusion, for low P low D relations, the use of politeness markers and positive-politeness redress stresses S and H's closeness. The emphasis on close ties and group membership regardless of one's relative power as evident in the request strategies used can be attributed to the notion of solidarity. Requests made to a close status equal (equal P low D) are also redressed and not, as predicted, totally direct. However, there is no preferred strategy choice; requests are either direct (with *tolong*), hedged or conventionally indirect.

Looking at high P low D relations, bald-on-record strategy is used for both request goals, i.e. permission and action. This suggests that the low distance between S and H matters more than H's high P over S and the direct requests are means of displaying this closeness/familiarity.

Linguistic realization of requests for low P high D relations suggests context-dependence of P and D. While requests are direct (use of imperatives and performatives), the choice between formal or informal address forms indicates this additional dimension. Specifically, the emphasis on either P or D is influenced by situational factors.

As for high P high D relations, requests made address H's high P over S and their unfamiliarity with each other. This is achieved using negative-politeness and off-record strategies. S shows his reluctance to impose on H by apologizing and giving hints and clues pertinent to the request.

The findings discussed above are schematized in the table below:



**Table 7.3: PxD interaction and strategy choice**

Level of PxD Interaction	Choice of Politeness Strategy
Low P Low D	Bald strategy with positive politeness redress marking low D
Equal P Low D	Bald strategy with politeness marker and hedging expression; Negative-politeness strategy namely conventional indirectness
High P Low D	Bald strategy with no redress or with negative-politeness redress marking high P
Low P High D	Bald strategy with imperatives and informal address marking low P and with performatives and formal address marking high D
High P High D	Negative-politeness and off-record strategies