

Experimental Evidence on *Requests* in English Varieties from the Perspective of Local Grammars

Mengkai Wang

This study investigates the use of one speech act *request* in three English varieties: British English, American English, and Hong Kong English, from the perspective of local grammars. This study employed one experiment involving 50 native speakers from each variety to elicit requests in different contexts. Participants were asked to perform requestive speech acts in response to various scenarios designed to reflect cultural and contextual differences. The study identified key functional terms and strategies frequently used in the requests, which were analyzed using the local grammar framework to uncover underlying patterns specific to each English variety. The results revealed several prominent local grammar patterns of requests. The “Indirectness” pattern was the most widespread across all varieties, but its implementation varied: British English speakers used indirectness with a greater reliance on hedging and politeness markers, American English speakers employed more direct forms with an emphasis on modal verbs (e.g., “could you”), while Hong Kong English speakers integrated both indirectness and deference, influenced by local politeness norms. In addition to this, other significant patterns emerged, such as politeness strategies, mitigation forms, and the use of modal expressions like “would” and “please.” These patterns varied significantly in each variety, reflecting the differing cultural norms regarding request-making and politeness. The study’s findings are significant because they highlight how the local grammar approach can provide deep insights into speech acts across various English varieties. The findings suggest that request-making in English is not only influenced by linguistic structures but also deeply rooted in sociocultural context. This insight is critical for understanding intercultural communication and offers practical implications for teaching English as a second language, particularly in understanding the subtleties of politeness and indirectness. Additionally, the analysis challenges the notion of a universal approach to request-making and underscores the importance of considering local grammar when studying cross-cultural language use. However, the study also faced challenges, such as ensuring the comparability of data between varieties, accounting for variability in individual speakers’ behavior, and the complexity of interpreting culturally-specific strategies. Despite these challenges, the findings demonstrate that the local grammar approach is a powerful tool for analyzing speech acts, offering more nuanced and culturally sensitive interpretations of request behaviors in English. Overall, this study enhances our understanding of the intercultural and local variations in requests within English, and further highlights the value of local grammars in speech act research.

Keywords: Speech acts, Requests, English Varieties, Local grammars