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Cross-Cultural Politeness: A Comparative Analysis of Request and Apology Strategies in English and Pashto Languages

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ABSTRACT

Politeness is an essential component of intercultural communication as it shapes the manner in which speakers realize various speech acts such as making requests and offering apologies within diverse cultural settings. This research explores the realization of the strategies used in making requests and offering apologies in British English and Pashto languages, with the aim of analyzing the impact that culture has on politeness behaviors. Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) serves as the theoretical foundation for this research. In addition, the framework utilized in the analysis of the data will be the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984; 1989). A qualitative comparative methodology was applied in collecting the data from native speakers of both languages through semi-structured interviews. The findings show that both English and Pashto speakers use three main types of request strategies such as direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect requests, as well as five types of apology strategies like expressing regret, accepting responsibility, explaining, offering repair, and promising forbearance. Nevertheless, cultural differences have been observed. In particular, English speakers preferred to use conventionally indirect requests and used many types of apology strategies in order to avoid face threats, while Pashto speakers tended to combine direct requests with expressions of respect and explanation of the context from the perspective of cultural values of respect, solidarity, and personal relations. Thus, it can be concluded that despite being a universal feature of communication, politeness is realized through culturally-specific patterns.



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1. Introduction

Language is more than just a form of communication; it is also an embodiment of culture, identity, and relations. Language is an instrument that allows individuals to convey their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and intentions, as well as to create and maintain social relations. According to Hymes (1974) and Gumperz (1982), language is used as a cultural and social instrument by individuals who use it to create and negotiate meanings, as well as to establish social relations. In addition, according to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (1929), linguistic differences can be viewed as differences in values, beliefs, and worldview of different cultures. Thus, language is not only used for exchanging information but is also important as a way of expressing cultural identity and social norms. Therefore, it is essential to understand the ways of using language in different cultural settings in order to analyze communication practices.

The analysis of language in context is pragmatics since this branch of linguistics looks into how speakers communicate meanings through social interactions. In contrast with the field of semantics that deals with meaning, pragmatics concentrates on the process by which speakers' interpretations and uses of language depend on context, convention and cultural expectation (Levinson, 1983). Pragmatics looks at how speakers use language to pursue communicative ends and build and maintain social harmony through negotiation of their social relationships (Yule, 1996). Therefore, pragmatics offers valuable insight into the way in which speakers adjust their uses of language depending on social factors, including social distance, power and cultural expectations. The theories of politeness, including Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), reveal how speakers make use of linguistic means to avoid face threats (Watts, 2003).

Language performativity is also accounted for by Speech Act Theory that was created by Austin (1962) and further improved by Searle (1969). Austin believed that language does something instead of representing what is real, and Searle differentiated between direct and indirect speech acts to show how people use language in order to accomplish their communicative intentions. Speech acts of request and apology are considered

to be some of the most widely researched ones due to their interpersonal and negotiating nature, where speakers need to find the right balance between efficiency and politeness of communication.

Language behavior too can be described through sociocultural aspects. It has been found through sociolinguistic studies that social class, gender, ethnicity, age, and cultural values have a considerable impact on language and communication behaviors (Labov, 1972; Eckert, 2000). The point that has been made by Ochs (1990) is that social hierarchies and cultural values affect the way in which people make requests, apologize, and negotiate their interrelationships. Likewise, Spencer-Oatey (2008) and House (2013) hold that intercultural communication can only be made successful when one understands the cultural appropriateness of linguistic behavior.

Research conducted pragmatically has shown that there are varying ways in which politeness is achieved in different cultures. Politeness Theory by Brown & Levinson (1987) has been among the most effective models used to explain how people perform face-threatening acts during communication. As per the theory, individuals have the positive face which refers to the desire for appreciation and acceptance and the negative face which refers to the desire for autonomy and absence of imposition. As requests threaten the freedom of action of the hearer and apologizing involves accepting responsibility for offending someone, these speech acts have the potential of threatening the face. In order to reduce the threats to the face, people use positive politeness strategies involving expression of solidarity and approval or negative politeness strategies involving respect and deference (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Within different types of speech acts, requests can be seen as the type of directive act in which speakers ask for help, information or cooperation from other people. Requests can either be direct or indirect based on the communication setting and cultural expectations (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). Comparative analyses of the use of pragmatic acts suggest that there is significant cross-cultural variation in the way requests are made. Whereas some cultures value directness as it indicates clarity and efficiency, other cultures

value indirectness in order to maintain harmonious relations and not to threaten the other person's face (Ogiermann, 2009). Lack of comprehension of the right level of directness in certain cultures may lead to communication failure, negative impressions or poor personal relationships (Mao, 1994).

Another type of speech act used in intercultural communication in order to maintain social cohesion is apology. Apology is an expressive speech act in which speakers admit their responsibility for something, apologize for their actions, and try to restore interpersonal relations (Trosborg, 1987). According to Brown & Levinson (1987), apologizing is a type of face threatening act because speakers admit being responsible for something while trying to repair the hearer's positive face at the same time. Earlier research has already shown considerable cultural differences in the strategies employed by speakers when apologizing. Some cultures value expressing explicit regret and admitting fault, while other cultures favor using indirect apologies in order not to show personal responsibility or restore interpersonal harmony (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Ogiermann, 2009).

Another key perspective in politeness studies is the discourse analysis approach, which goes beyond single sentences and analyzes conversations, stories, and longer discourses (Schiffrin, 1994). Discourse analysis looks into the ways that speakers manage their talk in order to be coherent, take turns in the conversation, and achieve certain communicative objectives within a certain context (Schiffrin, 1987). Cross-cultural studies of politeness benefit from the insight that discourse analysis offers about request and apology constructions and interpretation across various cultural settings. Discourse analysis uncovers the role of discourse markers, politeness formulas, organization of conversation, and contextual elements that help create successful interactions (Wierzbicka, 2003). Moreover, according to Gumperz (1982) and Goffman (1967), discourse analysis also captures broader social identities and cultural norms.

Brown and Levinson's (1978 & 1987) Face Theory is utilized as the central theoretical framework in the current study in order to explore politeness strategies used in English and Pashto.

This framework is a good one to look into how speakers from various cultures deal with their face needs when performing acts of request and apology. Positive politeness strategies involve building up inter-personal intimacy through expressions of appreciation and similarity while negative politeness strategies involve reducing imposition through indirectness, hedging and use of polite speech.

However, there are still very few comparative studies conducted between English and Pashto despite much academic work on cross-cultural pragmatics. Existing works have mostly concentrated on languages such as English, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, and Arabic, while comparatively little work has been done in regard to the Pashto language. Besides, a number of studies have separately explored the speech acts of requests and apologies without considering the two in one comparative analysis.

The current study attempts to fill this void by studying the use of request and apology strategies used by native speakers of English and Pashto in their culture. The study will analyze the similarities and differences in the performance of these speech acts and will identify the role of culture values in shaping the politeness behavior in interpersonal communication. By drawing on the concepts of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, Speech Act Theory, and Politeness Theory put forward by Brown and Levinson, this study will contribute to the existing literature in the field of intercultural pragmatics. The results of this study can be useful both theoretically and practically.

1.1 Research Objectives

Objectives of the current research are listed below:

1. To examine how the same techniques of making requests differ in the case of English- and Pashto-speaking communities.
2. To analyze the various types of techniques that can be used by the speakers of the two languages while making an apology.
3. To understand how the cultures, differ in their techniques of politeness.

1.2 Research Questions

These research questions will guide the investigation of the proposed research study.

1. How are there similarities and differences in making requests in the Pashto-speaking and English-speaking communities?
2. What are the different approaches to making apologies in English-speaking and Pashto-speaking communities?
3. How are there cultural differences in the expressions of politeness in requests and apologies between the two language speakers?

2. Literature Review

The importance of politeness in pragmatic studies has been well acknowledged for quite some time now owing to the fact that politeness is used by the speaker to accomplish his/her objectives while at the same time maintaining his/her relationship with others. Individuals are engaged in negotiating their social relations on the basis of the language they use, which is why politeness has become one of the most widely researched fields in cross-cultural pragmatics.

Speech act theory offers the underlying theoretical framework that explains the function of language in performing social actions. According to Austin (1962), an utterance not only conveys a message but can also serve as an action such as requesting, apologizing, promising, and thanking. The contribution of Searle (1969) to the theory was to categorize speech acts into types such as directives, expressive, representative acts, commissives, and declaratives. Requests are considered directives since they seek to manipulate the actions of the addressee while apologies are classified under expressive since the speaker expresses feelings of blame and restores harmony in the social setting.

One of the most important approaches to studying politeness is the approach offered by Brown and Levinson in their Politeness Theory (1978, 1987). The approach states that each person has two sides of his/her face, namely, positive face that concerns the need for appreciation and approval, and negative face that concerns the desire for freedom from imposition. As a rule, requests are threatening negative face of the hearer, while apologies are threatening positive face of the speaker. In order to reduce the level of threat, the speaker uses different politeness strategies such as bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies (Brown &

Levinson, 1987). However, researchers have pointed out that culture plays a very important role in the choice and implementation of politeness strategies.

Based on the theories of speech acts and politeness, Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989) formulated the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), which is one of the most significant models for the analysis of requests in different languages. This model categorizes requests according to their directness as direct requests, conventional indirect requests, and non-conventional indirect requests. Likewise, Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984) formulated a well-recognized model for analyzing apologies, which identifies types of apologizing such as expressions of regret, acceptance of responsibility, explanations, offer of repair, and promise of forbearance.

In earlier studies, it has been shown that politeness is universal but culturally-specific as well. As per Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), even though requests are present in every language, the cultures vary largely in the level of directness and indirectness that they prefer. The conventional indirect requests are the norm for English speakers as they pose minimal imposition and preserve personal independence at the same time. The politeness strategies like 'please', 'could you' and 'would you mind' are regularly used in order to make requests less imposing and maintain the negative face of the addressee.

It is also true that the research on apology styles has shown many differences across different cultures. It has been found by Cohen and Olshtain (1981) that apologies normally involve a number of elements including expressions of remorse or regret, explanation, taking of responsibility, repairing of damage, and assurance not to repeat the same mistake in future. But the significance of these elements varies across cultures. Trosborg (1987) has pointed out that an apology serves mainly the purpose of restoring harmony in interpersonal relationship but the language used is determined by social conventions and norms of that culture.

Social linguistics also gives great attention to the role of social variables in polite behavior. According to Labov (1972) and Eckert (2000), language changes systematically depending on

variables like age, gender, education, and social class. In her turn, Ochs (1990) underlines the significance of power relations and hierarchy for formulation of requests and apologies. The theory of Spencer-Oatey (2008) also adds to this concept stating that intercultural communication requires knowledge about interactional norms that are appropriate for each culture rather than mere grammatical proficiency. Finally, House (2013) insists that pragmatic competence is crucial for effective communication.

There have also been substantial contributions from discourse analysis in studying the topic of politeness in intercultural communication. While traditional approaches study only separate sentences, discourse analysis considers how meaning is made in interactions, which include conversational, narrative, and institutional discourse (Schiffrin, 1987, 1994). Gumperz (1982) claims that contextual interpretations are crucial in intercultural communication because people tend to interpret meanings based on cultural assumptions. Social interactions are organized in such a way as to save face and preserve relationships, according to Goffman (1967). Moreover, Wierzbicka (2003) proves that there are differences in discourse patterns between different cultures, which means that discourse analysis is an important tool in studying requests and apologies in various languages.

Though there have been major developments in the field of intercultural pragmatics, there is not enough comparative study done between English and Pashto language. Previous studies conducted on English have mainly included comparison of English with other languages like Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, and Hebrew, while Pashto language has not gained much academic interest. In addition to that, most studies conducted have covered only one type of speech act at once, request strategies, and apology strategies, but not both together.

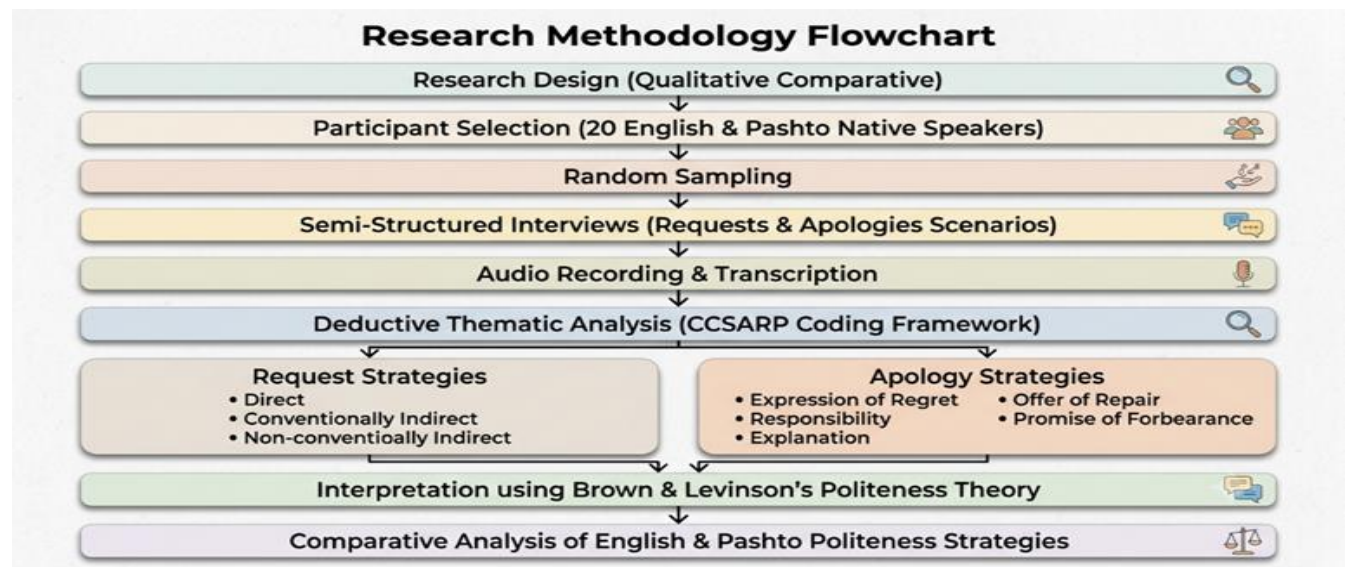
This research is designed to fill this gap through a comparative analysis of English and Pashto speech acts of requesting and apologizing based on Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson and the use of the CCSARP approach. The results obtained through this study will provide empirical data regarding the field of intercultural pragmatics, which has been growing rapidly in recent years. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to theory building in politeness while offering practical applications for teaching languages, translation, and intercultural communication.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1978, 1987), which explains how speakers employ linguistic strategies to manage face-threatening acts during interpersonal communication. According to the theory, individuals possess positive face, representing the desire to be appreciated and accepted, and negative face, representing the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. Since requests threaten the hearer's negative face and apologies threaten the speaker's positive face, speakers employ various politeness strategies to minimize interpersonal conflict and maintain harmonious relationships.

For this systematic analysis of these speech acts, the research also uses the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), which was designed by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper in 1989. CCSARP categorizes request strategies based on the extent of directness used while pinpointing some important elements of apology strategies, which include expression of regret, explanation, taking responsibility, making reparations, and offering forbearance. These two frameworks can be combined to provide a broad foundation for the comparative analysis of request and apology strategies in both languages.

3. Research Methodology



3.1 Research Design

A qualitative comparative research methodology was used for the examination of politeness strategies in English and Pashto, especially focusing on request and apology speech acts. Qualitative research is deemed suitable because it provides an opportunity for in-depth study of the linguistic choices made by the subjects of the research. The research was based on intercultural pragmatics while its results were interpreted through the prism of Brown & Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) and Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) proposed by Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984, 1989).

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The participants were 20 native speakers of English and Pashto of varying age ranges, gender, and social backgrounds. The participants were randomly sampled in order to give all equal chances of being included in the study. The data collection process was continued until the researchers gathered enough data without any new theme coming up.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection was done by using semi-structured interviews, whereby the participants could answer freely and at the same time there would be consistency in all the interviews conducted. The interview schedule had two parts, each dealing with requests and apologies respectively. Five scenarios in each part were developed based on

the past researches on speech acts and politeness.

3.4 Data Analysis

Deductive latent thematic analysis was utilized in analyzing the interview data. Coding of the interview transcripts was based on the CCSARP model (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). This made possible the systematic coding of the different request and apology strategies employed. The responses to request were coded under Direct Requests, Conventionally Indirect Requests, and Non-Conventionally Indirect Requests, while the responses to apology were coded under Expression of Regret, Acceptance of Responsibility, Explanation, Offer of Repair, and Promise of Forbearance. The identified themes were then analyzed using the Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson (1987).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were maintained through the process. Participation was on a voluntary basis, informed consent was sought from all participants before the process of data collection, and privacy and anonymity were guaranteed during data analysis. All participants were assured that the information provided would be used only for academic purposes and that they could withdraw from the study at any point in time.

4. Results and findings

4.1 Request Strategies

The analysis of data collected from the interview revealed that there are three main types of requests

made by both English and Pashto speakers; they include Direct Requests, Conventionally Indirect Requests, and Non-Conventionally Indirect Requests, which are congruent with the CCSARP approach (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum

Direct Requests

Direct requests were common in both languages; however, direct requests were more common in Pashto speakers. Direct requests with polite markers like 'please' and modals were used by English speaking participants. For example, one participant said, "Can I have a day off, please?" While the request was direct, it still showed that please minimized the amount of imposition and the speaker was concerned about his/her hearer's negative face in line with the Politeness Theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987).

Likewise, Pashto speakers used direct requests with respect. Some examples are:

- "سر، پليز ماله چوتي راکړئ زمونږ کړه واده دی"
- "مهرباني وکړئ ماله چتي راکړئ زما دا کار دی"
- "دا څيز اخلم خو بهای لږ ريت راسره وکړی"

Though these requests may look grammatically straightforward, politeness terms like "مهرباني" (please) and polite terms of address serve as politeness markers that make the request softer. It is evident that politeness in Pashto language is realized by means of cultural expressions and not only by grammatical indirectness.

Conventionally Indirect Requests

- The conventional indirect strategy was found to be the most common approach among both English and Pashto speakers. English speakers normally used modals and softeners like could you, would you mind, and excuse me to avoid imposing on others.
- For instance:
- "I just wanted to say that I don't want to impose myself upon you, but I am a little uncomfortable with my current seat. Could we switch seats please?"
- These softeners lessen the threat to face implied in the request as they allow the recipient to have some choices of whether to accept or reject the request.

- Likewise, Pashto speakers normally used contextual explanations before putting forward their request. These examples include:

- "پلار مي بودا دی، هغوي هسپتال ته بوخم، ټول ورونه می " بهر دي، ماله چوتي راکړئ"
- "ما ته د ټولو لږه مسئله ده، نو تاسو خفه کړئ مه، خو دي " سيټ ته راشئ"

In contrast to the English group, Pashto speakers made longer explanations before issuing requests. This was done to avoid any imposition and is consistent with cultural values such as empathy and respect for others.

Non-conventionally Indirect Requests

Nonconventional indirect requests occurred rarely within both linguistic groups. Instead of making direct requests, the participants used subtle suggestions based on their mutual understanding of context.

English illustration:

"I have been thinking about next Friday; there is this family gathering that is very important for me...."

Examples from Pashto included:

- "زما ستاسو سره دا کتاب دی، یو پارټ می کتلی او بل می " نه دی، ما ویل چي ویي غورم"
- "هلکه، پلاس به درکړه نه یی؟"
- "زه دکاندار ته ووايم چي که لس گتي نو پنځه وگته"

These utterances allowed the hearer to infer the intended request without explicitly imposing upon them, thereby minimizing face-threatening effects.

Comparative Findings on Request Strategies

This comparison showed that Conventionally Indirect Requests formed the most popular technique for the speakers of both languages. However, speakers of English tended to use modal verbs and language mitigation, while speakers of Pashto used contextual information and respectful language expressions. More Direct Requests were found among Pashto speakers; however, they were softened with the help of honorific language, for example, "مهرباني وکړئ." Non-conventionally Indirect Requests were rare for both languages and used mostly where there was common background knowledge.

4.2 Apology Strategies

Five apology strategies emerged from the interview data: Expression of Regret, Acceptance of Responsibility, Explanation, Offer of Repair, and Promise of Forbearance.

Expression of Regret

Regret was the most common form of apology used by both groups.

Common English apologies included statements like the following:

"I am really sorry for forgetting your birthday."

"Please accept my sincere apologies."

The Pashto apologies included similar statements such as:

- "معافي غواړم."
- "معافي غواړو که تاسو خفه شوي یی"
- "خفه کېږه مه"

These expressions conveyed genuine remorse while attempting to restore interpersonal harmony.

Acceptance of Responsibility

The English speakers often took the responsibility for their mistakes and apologized.

Examples included:

"I realized my mistake now."

"I'm really sorry. It was my fault."

The Pashto speakers did accept the responsibility too, although not in complicated forms.

Examples include:

- "زه په خطايي کښي ووم"
- "ستاسو خبره بله وه او ما تري غلط مطلب اغستي وو"

Explanation of the Cause

Explanations were also provided in both language groups.

The English-speaking participants justified their actions on the basis of the unforeseen.

Such as:

"Something unexpected came up, and I won't be able to make it."

Similarly, the Pashto-speaking participants also

gave their explanations for their actions.

Such as:

- "زما اراده وه چي درځم، خو په دغه ورځ زموږ کره "بیماري راغلي وه او زه هسپتال ته تللی ووم"
- "زه هغه وخت پوهه نه شوم"

These explanations reduced the perceived severity of the offence while maintaining politeness

Offer of Repair

English participants often provided concrete proposals for fixing the breach of manners.

Examples include:

"Please let me know how I can make it right."

The Pashto participants also showed their readiness to mend matters.

Examples included:

- "زه به درته بل راوړم"
- "بل وخت به لاړ شو"

Promise of Forbearance

The use of this technique was the lowest for both groups.

English speakers sometimes used a promise that the same thing will never happen again.

For instance:

"It won't happen again."

The Pashto group seldom used any clear promise of forbearance, implying that relationship restoration was done through regret and explanation.

4.3 Comparative Findings

From the comparative study, it becomes clear that although the types of strategies used by English speakers and Pashto speakers were similar, the way these strategies were expressed varied due to cultural differences.

English speakers showed preference for Conventionally Indirect Request and often combined several types of apologies such as expressions of regret, expressions of responsibility, explanations, offer of repair, and promise of forbearance.

Conversely, Pashto users made use of culturally rooted ways of expressing respect and

contextualizing their responses. While direct requests were common, they were made using honorific phrases such as "مهرباني وکړئ". Apologies in Pashto were based on restoration of harmony in the relationship as evidenced by phrases like "خفه کيږه مه", "معافي غواړم", among others.

The results provide evidence for the theory of Politeness put forward by Brown & Levinson in 1987, showing that both language communities are trying to save their face while making requests and apologizing. However, the implementation of politeness is culture-specific. The members of English community use mostly indirectness and explicit mitigation techniques, while the Pashto community uses more context explanations, honorifics, and cultural rules of respect. The results also demonstrate that the CCSARP model can be used in the study of speech act realization in different cultures.

6. Conclusion

This research paper focused on politeness across cultures by analyzing request and apology strategies of English and Pashto speakers by using the model proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) in their Politeness Theory, as well as the CCSARP framework developed by Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984) and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). The results showed that the speakers of the two languages used the same types of strategies but

realized them differently depending on culture and communication. Of the various types of requests, the Conventional Indirect Request was found to be the most commonly used type by speakers of both languages. The use of indirect forms, modals, and politeness formulas was typical for the English language speakers to decrease the imposition and to save the negative face of the addressee. Respect and explanation were characteristic of the Pashto speakers' requests, which can be attributed to their culture of respect and social solidarity. In addition, an investigation into the use of different forms of apologizing revealed that the speakers of English and Pashto utilized the use of expressions of regret, expressions of acceptance of responsibility, explanations, offers to make repairs, and expressions of forbearance. English speakers, however, used more than one form of apology while Pashto speakers relied mostly on expressions of regret and explanations. In conclusion, this research has provided evidence for Politeness Theory proposed by Brown & Levinson as it has shown that politeness is affected not only by language forms but also by culture and the type of social relations between interlocutors. This research can contribute to cross-cultural pragmatics in that it offers comparative analysis of English and Pashto politeness strategies and shows the need for development of pragmatic skills for successful intercultural communication.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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