

Request Strategies in Contemporary Chinese Teledramas—A Corpus-based Study^{*}

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Abstract—This study was designed to explore the issue of request strategies in the Chinese setting by establishing a corpus of video clips of contemporary Chinese teledramas on the basis of an overview of previous studies on Chinese request strategies. In the present study, we chose 3970 short sequences of video clips from 35 Chinese teledramas which vividly describe the Chinese people's life in the contemporary times. Taking the two variables of power and distance as reference points, nine situations were designed in this study. Elaborate request strategies were expected to be consecutively elicited in the nine situations of the 35 contemporary Chinese teledrama serials from the perspectives of social power and social distance in the section. It offered a new research method and idea for the future speech acts research.

Index Terms—request strategies, corpus, contemporary Chinese, teledramas

I. INTRODUCTION

A speech act is an utterance that serves a function in communication. We perform speech acts when we offer a request, apology, greeting, complaint, invitation, compliment, or refusal. Austin (2002, p.137) puts request, a kind of act for asking somebody to do something, into the category of executives which show the exercising of power, right, or influence. Lyons (1977, p.745) subsumes “commands” and “requests” under the general term “mands” which are a subclass of “directives”. He notes that the crucial difference between a “request” and a “command” is that the former leaves to the hearer the option of refusing to comply, whereas the latter does not. Searle (2001, p.21) puts request together with command and order under directives whose illocutionary point is to get the hearer to do something. Leech (1983, p.219) places “command” and “request” into the same category of “directives”, however, he does note that one of the crucial differences between the two is that a “command” has the feature “unconditional”, viz., S assumes that H will comply, whereas a “request” has the feature “conditional”, meaning S assumes that the “directive” will only take effect if H agrees. Searle & Vanderveken (1985, p.199) also suggest “A request ... allows for the possibility of refusal.” This study was designed to explore the issue of request strategies in the Chinese setting by establishing a corpus of video clips of contemporary Chinese teledramas on the basis of an overview of previous studies on Chinese request strategies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Requests impose upon the hearer to a larger or smaller extent (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p.57). The desired goal may not be reached, and the hearer may be embarrassed, or the interpersonal relationship may be damaged, if they are not made appropriately. Different strategies are employed in different situations to achieve goals: to make the request accepted and done. Here we will go further to explore the choice of requests from the perspective of semantic functions: directness and indirectness.

Requests may embody a kind of interpersonal relationship in discourse, so the corresponding studies from the perspective of directness degree seem more convincing and reasonable. A request can be more or less direct (Searle, 1976, p.1-24). By directness, we mean the degree to which the speaker's illocutionary intent is apparent from the locution. It is related to, but by no means coextensive with, politeness (Blum-Kulka, 1987, p.131-146). A request strategy is the obligatory choice of the level of directness by which the request is realized. Three general degrees can be distinguished to represent a universally valid scale of directness, where directness is defined as a measure of illocutionary transparency according to Blum-Kulka & House (as cited in Blum-Kulka & Kasper 1989, p.123-154). The more direct a given request strategy type is, the shorter the inferential path to the requestive interpretation. Such a request can then be said to be more illocutionarily transparent. These three levels are direct, conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect (ibid, p.133). With the direct requests, the illocutionary force is indicated in the utterance by grammatical, lexical or semantic means; conventionally indirect requests express the illocution via fixed linguistic conventions established in the speech community; and non-conventionally indirect requests require the hearer to compute the illocution from the interaction of the locution with its contexts.

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We would like to give a brief introduction to Chinese scholars, who made studies on requests, such as Huang (1996), Zhang Shaojie & Wang Xiaotong (1997), Gao Hong (1999), Song Mei & Lee-Wong (2000), Liao Chao-chih (1997), Ding Feng (2002) and Lee (2004).

Huang (1996) analysed request speech acts between native speakers of Taiwanese Mandarin and American English, in relation to the universality of politeness described in Brown and Levinson (1987, p.36). The study employed the data collection method of DCT. She found that direct request strategies were preferred more by Taiwanese Mandarin speakers than by American English speakers. Her findings show that the claim of universality of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.89) is not completely warranted, as the value it places on private face is incompatible with the Chinese emphasis on public face as the high value in everyday interactions (Gu, 1990, p.237-257).

Based on the questionnaire design of Kasper & Dahl (1991, p.215-247), Zhang Shaojie & Wang Xiaotong (1997) conducted an investigation of requests of the Chinese in sixteen different situations concerning all aspects of social interaction, by using five parameters such as social power, social distance, age, sex and ease of action, and they came to the conclusion that (a) there exists the same sequence of request speech acts in the Chinese language as that in others; (b) social factors, such as social power, social distance, age, sex and ease of action, do affect the choice of request strategies of the speaker; (c) the conventionally indirect strategy is the most widely employed strategy and the most polite form of requests in Chinese; and (d) the use of alerters and supportive moves in requests is characteristic of Chinese culture.

Gao Hong (1999, p.75) studied the features of request strategies in Chinese in terms of the strategy types classified in Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper's CCSARP (1989, p.147). Unlike the previous studies, hers is not based on a DCT. She focuses on identifying universal categories of conventionally indirect requests in terms of the linguistic features of Chinese. Gao states that compared with English, Chinese have more performative verbs, indicating explicit request intents, such as 请, 求, 请求, 命令, 让, and 叫. In addition, Gao (1999, p.75) claimed that imperatives are the most effective and appropriate way to make a request in Chinese, a strategy considered the least efficient in English requests. Furthermore, she argues that while hedged performatives in English are used to mitigate the impositive force, this is not necessarily the case in Chinese where a hedged performative may indicate doubt. For instance, in “我想让你给我把那个拿回来”, the speaker wants to take a look at that one but is unsure about the hearer's reaction. Obligation statements can also be perceived as belonging to the category of suggestory formulae in hearer-oriented requests, as in the sentence “你应该马上离开这里”. Query preparatory is the most explicit request strategy in English, but in Chinese an interrogative type like “你为什么...?” may convey a complaint.

Song Mei & Lee-Wong (as cited in Hess-Luttich, & Richard Watts, 2000, p.128) conducted their studies of the requests of Chinese people by employing the DCT questionnaire from Blum-Kulka & House (as cited in Blum-Kulka & Kasper 1989, p.123-154) and interviews, three groups of their subjects are Melbourne group, Singapore group and the group from the People's Republic of China. They found that the use of direct bald on-record strategy is the preferred choice in most face-to-face interactions. This preference is in keeping with Chinese speakers' emphasis on clarity, explicitness and upfront sincerity in daily face-to-face requestives; most of the requests are issued from the perspective of the speaker, that is, speaker-dominated; and the rights and obligations of interlocutors are found to be valid and influential contextual factors in describing and explaining politeness.

Liao Chao-chih (1997, p.251) also employed the DCT questionnaire to make an investigation of directives in American English, Mandarin and Taiwanese English. In her studies, the findings are: (a) people from the two ethnic backgrounds do not employ the same strategies for the same item of requests; (b) for the obligatory request in the work domain, American bosses prefer threatening more than their Chinese counterparts; (c) to their roommates, Chinese females tend to use the conventionally indirect request more often than males; (d) as for the right-type request, Chinese women utter reasons for the request more frequently than Chinese men and Americans; (e) in asking a prospective customer to shop in a store, Chinese prefer the mood derivable while Americans like to use the conventionally indirect request “Can I help you. . .?”; (f) in asking a roommate to go to the night market with them, more Americans prefer using “Do you want to...?” than the other three forms of conventionally indirect request, mood derivable or pre-request; (g) in uttering altruistic requests, Chinese like to use fixed sayings or proverbs to show that they are wise, learned or sincere; (h) Chinese are more verbose than their American counterparts in requesting, and more Chinese women than men offer reasons for the above three types of requests; (i) more Americans than Chinese choose to be verbose when uttering a refusal, and finally (j) Chinese people often repeatedly use the same strategy and words, for example, for the Chinese invitation, one has to repeat for several times until it is accepted.

Lee (2004, p.58-72) investigated request strategies used by Chinese learners of English (CLE) in emails written to their teachers. In analyzing the data, she employed the coding system developed in CCSARP. Lee found that CLE tend to manipulate direct request strategies and requestive hints in requests of their teachers. The study reveals that there is a strong cultural focus on asymmetrical and hierarchical relationships and respect by student towards teacher. Requests were realized through the maxim of generosity claimed in Gu (1990, p.237-257) and linguistic modifications including lexical and syntactic modifications.

Of all the previous studies on the speech act of request, one important focus was on strategic preferences in making requests in a certain setting. A number of researchers have devised classification systems for request strategies. Most research has been conducted in languages under the influence of western culture. Moreover, written questionnaires such as DCTs were used almost exclusively in the previous studies. The lack of validity has also been pointed out by

researchers. The functional deficiency is that the data was not oral but written. Therefore, the findings from DCT studies should be examined and elaborated by comparing results from data elicited by different methods.

The research in the fields of requests needs near-authentic oral data in order to support or verify the results of previous studies. Conversational analysis should be encouraged since requests are realized through interactions in a conversation. The context in the conversation has to be considered to a great extent because it is the most important variable affecting requests. Speech acts cannot stand alone but are achieved in the sequential flow of conversation. In other words, speech acts should not be dealt with as an isolated segment from conversation but as a whole text. Thus the importance of analyzing speech acts and politeness models in contexts should be emphasized. Politeness should also be assessed not as a small segment but as speech act sequences or part of a whole discourse. The study of conversation as a whole text will also provide foreign language teachers and learners with the best sources for pragmatics in the target language.

Most studies are concerned with surface structure of requests, either to study requests in a particular language or to compare two languages. Researchers mainly aim to form semantic formulas for requests, to identify request strategies, and to find out how frequent different strategies are used, without exploring into the nature of requests, the underlying social and moral values, and the framework of the conversation pairs of request and refusal.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

In the present research, we produced a new method, a data-collecting method of building a corpus of video clips of Chinese teledramas. We chose 3970 short sequences of video clips from 35 Chinese teledramas which vividly describe the Chinese people's life in the contemporary times, and most of them were once broadcast on China Central Television (CCTV), after reading the Chinese teledrama books and watching the Chinese teledrama videos for at least three times. In terms of the politeness theory, we will take these three factors, power, social distance and size of imposition relative to the addressee, as the major variables of our research. The variable of power has three levels: +power(+P, the refusee has a higher power status than the refuser), =power(=P, the interlocutors have parallel status) and -power(-P, the refusee has a lower power status than the refuser). There are various types of determinants of power, such as physical strength, age, gender, and institutionalized roles (Brown and Gilman, 1960). In this study, the relative ranking of each interlocutor, such as inferior, superior or equal, are considered a variable of power. The variable of social distance also has three levels: +distance(+D, the interlocutors do not know each other), =distance(=D, the interlocutors know each other as acquaintances) and -distance(-D, the interlocutors know each other well). Finally, the variable of the size of imposition has two levels: +rank(+R, a high rank or degree of imposition is involved in the request setting) and -rank(-R, the opposite of +R).

On the basis of the two variables of power and distance, this study focuses on +R because requests have a high degree of imposition, compared with invitations, offers, and suggestions, especially in the request refusal settings. Variables of high rank or degree of imposition and other factors are not taken as major reference points, because they are too complicated to measure in people's everyday life in the society and in the teledramas. Taking the two variables of power and distance as reference points, we designed nine situations: Situation 1: +P and +D; Situation 2: +P and =D; Situation 3: +P and -D; Situation 4: =P and +D; Situation 5: =P and =D; Situation 6: =P and -D; Situation 7: -P and +D; Situation 8: -P and =D; Situation 9: -P and -D. We compare the impact of different combinations of social variables on the ways in which request strategies were used by the Chinese speakers in the teledramas. Elaborate request strategies were expected to be elicited in the nine situations in the teledramas in the study.

IV. REQUEST STRATEGIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY CHINESE TELEDRAMAS

Gao Hong (1999) studies the features of request strategies in Chinese in terms of the strategy types classified in Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper's CCSARP (1989). Within the types of directness, the nine directness levels of request strategies are distinguished (Mood derivable; Performative; Hedged performatives; Obligation statements; Want statements; Suggestory formulae; Query preparatory; Strong hints and Mild hints). They are mutually exclusive, i.e. a Head Act can only be realized through one specific request strategy. The most distinctive feature of the linguistic realization of requests in Chinese is the application of basic action verbs that indicate the desired action directly. And imperatives are the most proper and efficient way to make a request.

A. *Request Strategies Used in the Nine Situations of Contemporary Chinese*

Taking the two variables of power and distance as reference points, nine situations were designed in this study: Situation 1: +P and +D; Situation 2: +P and =D; Situation 3: +P and -D; Situation 4: =P and +D; Situation 5: =P and =D; Situation 6: =P and -D; Situation 7: -P and +D; Situation 8: -P and =D; Situation 9: -P and -D. We compared the impact of different combinations of social variables on the ways in which request strategies were used by the Chinese speakers. Elaborate request strategies were expected to be consecutively elicited in the nine situations of the 35 contemporary Chinese teledrama serials from the perspectives of social power and social distance in the section.

1. Situation 1: +P and +D

This is a situation where the addressee (that is, hearer or refuser) has the higher power position and the interlocutors do not know each other: +P and +D. For example, you are interviewed for a promotion by your manager. You do not know her/him, because s/he has been on leave for a long time and you have worked for the company for only about half a year. During the interview, the interviewer is not satisfied with your documentation, and asks you to provide more information together with an additional reference letter from one of your previous managers. The interviewer wants to make a decision tomorrow because he is leaving to attend a conference the day after tomorrow, so s/he asks you to submit the additional information by tomorrow. However, you feel that there is not enough time and would like to extend the due date. Now you ask him to give you more time. Or a freshman asks a university professor in the other college, whom s/he doesn't know, to take part in an activity.

Comparatively, such a situation doesn't happen often in the daily life. We collected only 57 video clips of this situation from 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas, which is only about 1.44% of the total corpora.

TABLE 1
THE CORPUS OF REQUEST STRATEGIES USED IN SITUATION 1

Request strategies		Number	Percentage
Direct strategies	Mood derivable	10	17.54%
	Performatives	0	0
	Hedged performatives	1	1.75%
	Obligation statements	1	1.75%
	Want statements	16	28.07%
Conventionally indirect strategies	Suggestory formulae	1	1.75%
	Query preparatory	25	43.86%
Non-conventionally indirect strategies	Strong hints	1	1.75%
	Mild hints	2	3.51%
Total		57	99.98%

The above table shows the types of request strategies and the frequencies with which they are used by Chinese speakers in the thirty five teledrama serials. Chinese speakers display a strong tendency to select conventionally indirect strategies. The Chinese speakers are prone to use the query preparatory as the most appropriate way to present requests with an occurrence of 43.86%. For example, “我就是替她们求个情。孩子不懂事，您大人有大量，抬抬手放了算了。” The next preferred form of head act for Chinese speakers was the want statement using words such as “需要”，“想”，“希望” and “但愿” with an occurrence of 28.07%. For example, 王主任：麻烦你了，希望你们尽快过来。 And the mood derivable using “对不起” and “麻烦你” has an occurrence of 17.54%. For example, 钟杨：大娘，能不能给我们一点吃的？

2. Situation 2: +P and =D

This is a situation where the addressee has the higher power position than the addresser and the interlocutors know each other as acquaintances. For example, you are talking with a head of your department in the company, who has only been with the company for a few months, so you do not know each other very well at this stage. You ask her/him for leave because you have something urgent to do. Or a freshman asks a university professor in the other college, whom s/he knows as an acquaintance, to take part in an activity.

We collected only 76 video clips of this situation from 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas, which is only about 1.91% of the total corpora.

TABLE 2
THE CORPUS OF REQUEST STRATEGIES IN SITUATION 2

Request strategies		Number	Percentage
Direct strategies	Mood derivable	19	25%
	Performatives	1	1.32%
	Hedged performatives	2	2.63%
	Obligation statements	0	0
	Want statements	3	3.95%
Conventionally indirect strategies	Suggestory formulae	1	1.32%
	Query preparatory	46	60.53%
Non-conventionally indirect strategies	Strong hints	3	3.95%
	Mild hints	1	1.32%
Total		76	100.02%

The above table shows that the query preparatory of the conventionally indirect strategy is 60.53% of the corpus. For example, 肖童：郁教授，这个既然不行那就麻烦你帮忙再找一个吧？ Or 许涤新：我是许涤新！周副主席，我们准备发表的文章遭到他们的扣压，您看怎么办呢？ The next preferred strategy is the mood derivable (25%), as in

sentences such as 雷雷：麻烦您找一下叶青儿，成吗？ And 向南：阿姨您真甬客气，我叠件儿衣服垫一下就行了，别麻烦了阿姨。 The mood derivable is the most direct request strategy in terms of head acts. For example, 潘小伟：不好意思，麻烦你帮忙把这东西存一下。

3. Situation 3: +P and -D

S3 is a situation where the hearer has the higher power status than the requester and the interlocutors know each other very well: +P and -D. For example, the leader of your unit is talking with you at work, who has only been with the company for quite a few years and you know each other very well at this stage. You want to change jobs at the same company, because you think that you can not cope with the responsibilities that your present position entails. However, if you change jobs, it would put her/him in a difficult situation, because several clerks are on leave and nobody is available to take over your current duties. Or you ask one of your professors whom you know her/him very well for a couple of years to give you a higher mark in an examination.

We collected only 22 video clips of this situation from 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas, which is only about 0.53% of the total corpora. This is the second smallest corpus in the total corpora.

The following table shows that the query preparatory is overwhelmingly used in the corpus (59.09%). For example, 陈寺福：哎！行。大哥，有什么好处没有？ and 海藻：老板，你下午能不能把钥匙送过来？ The use of want statement, a direct head act strategy, is also present in the corpus (18.18%). For example, 木鑫：爸，你和妈能不能上哪儿去旅游一趟，给我一个月的时间，我把你们这个家装修一下？ Among those with the closest relationship such as family members, performatives are used (9.09%). For example, 华子：妈，你出去吧，我们有话说，这些事儿我们自己解决，您就甬管了！ and 亮亮：您别去，王明叔叔，得从二楼那家进去修，他家老没人在。电闸又特高，好多人摔下来过。

TABLE 3
THE CORPUS OF REQUEST STRATEGIES IN SITUATION 3

Request strategies		Number	Percentage
Direct strategies	Mood derivable	2	9.09%
	Performatives	2	9.09%
	Hedged performatives	1	4.55%
	Obligation statements	0	0
	Want statements	4	18.18%
Conventionally indirect strategies	Suggestory formulae	0	0
	Query preparatory	13	59.09%
Non-conventionally indirect strategies	Strong hints	0	0
	Mild hints	0	0
Total		22	100.00%

4. Situation 4: =P and +D

This is a situation where the interlocutors have parallel status and the interlocutors do not know each other: =P and +D. For example, the addressee holds a similar rank to you. You do not know each other, because you have just joined the company. You come to the photocopier with many documents, and need them for a meeting which starts soon. However, s/he is photocopying a lot of documents for a meeting. Now, you ask the addressee whether or not you can interrupt and do your photocopying first.

Such a situation happens often in the daily life. We collected 257 video clips of this situation from 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas. This corpus is the third biggest in the total corpora, which tells us that this situation is very popular in our daily life and it can reflect the real life of the Chinese people very well.

TABLE 4
THE CORPUS OF REQUEST STRATEGIES IN SITUATION 4

Request strategies		Number	Percentage
Direct strategies	Mood derivable	30	11.67%
	Performatives	12	4.67%
	Hedged performatives	4	1.56%
	Obligation statements	5	1.95%
	Want statements	6	2.34%
Conventionally indirect strategies	Suggestory formulae	41	15.95%
	Query preparatory	151	58.76%
Non-conventionally indirect strategies	Strong hints	6	2.34%
	Mild hints	2	0.78%
Total		257	100.02%

The above table shows that the query preparatory of the conventionally indirect strategy is 58.76% of the corpus, which is the most favored tactic in this situation. For example, 潘大伟：黄小姐，你为什么不喝？ and 雷母：叶青

儿勾引我儿子，你为什么不管？

Suggestory formulae are the second strategy in the Chinese teledrama serials (15.95%). For example, 年轻人：一百，怎么样？ Obviously, conventionally indirect strategies are an overwhelming majority employed in the Chinese teledramas. The mood derivable is the third most widely used request strategy in the corpus (11.67%). For example, 潘小伟：不好意思，麻烦你帮忙把这东西存一下。

5. Situation 5: =P and =D

This is a situation where the interlocutors have parallel status and the interlocutors know each other as acquaintances: =P and =D. For example, you have something urgent to use money, but you do not have any cash on you. Then you meet with one of your colleagues whom you barely know. You ask her/him to lend you 100 dollars. The relationship between most schoolmates in the same school or university, that between most outgroup colleagues in a big company and that between general business partners belong to this situation.

We collected 732 video clips of this situation from 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas, which is 18% of the total corpora. This corpus is the second biggest in the total corpora, which tells us that this situation is very popular in our daily life and it can reflect the real life of the Chinese people very well.

TABLE 5
THE CORPUS OF REQUEST STRATEGIES IN SITUATION 5

Request strategies		Number	Percentage
Direct strategies	Mood derivable	254	34.70%
	Performatives	161	22%
	Hedged performatives	89	12.16%
	Obligation statements	113	15.44%
	Want statements	30	4.10%
Conventionally indirect strategies	Suggestory formulae	27	3.69%
	Query preparatory	31	3.24%
Non-conventionally indirect strategies	Strong hints	17	2.32%
	Mild hints	10	1.37%
Total		732	100.02%

The above table reveals an overwhelming majority of the mood derivable of direct strategies (34.70%) which are used by Chinese speakers in the thirty five teledrama serials. For example, 乔乔：方言，你为什么不去当兵呢？ And 张大民：你现在是美国人，你心里最清楚，那儿美吗？是人呆的地方吗？ The next preferred form of head act for Chinese speakers was performatives with an occurrence of 22%. For example, 露露：一会儿我男朋友来了，麻烦你告儿他一声，你是冲我的美色才愿意付账的啊！ and 冯裤子：同志们安静一点儿！安静一点儿！ And obligation statements has an occurrence of 15.44%. For example, 史今：你必须提前交给他。

There is an almost absence of conventionally indirect strategies and non-conventionally indirect strategies in this corpus.

6. Situation 6: =P and -D

This is a situation where the interlocutors have parallel status and the interlocutors know each other well. The following case is a typical example in today's China. The addressee is your colleague of a similar rank and s/he has just got a promotion. Now you ask her/him to treat you to a meal.

We collected 2695 video clips of this situation from 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas, which is 68% of the total corpora. This situation takes overwhelmingly the majority of all the adjacency pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas, whose corpus is the biggest in the total corpora. In other words, this situation is the most popular in our daily life, which reflects the real life of the Chinese people most in the contemporary China.

TABLE 6
THE CORPUS OF REQUEST STRATEGIES IN SITUATION 6

Request strategies		Number	Percentage
Direct strategies	Mood derivable	754	27.98%
	Performatives	208	7.72%
	Hedged performatives	504	18.70%
	Obligation statements	132	4.90%
	Want statements	127	4.71%
Conventionally indirect strategies	Suggestory formulae	350	12.99%
	Query preparatory	431	15.99%
Non-conventionally indirect strategies	Strong hints	136	5.05%
	Mild hints	53	1.97%
Total		2695	100.01%

An overwhelming majority of the mood derivable of direct strategies (27.98%) are used by Chinese speakers in the

thirty five teledrama serials as revealed in the above table. For example, 鲜儿: 别一口一个嫂子的, 还没过门呢。 and 传杰: 二哥, 柜上的东西你不能昧了, 交柜吧。 The next preferred form of head act for Chinese speakers was hedged performatives with an occurrence of 18.70%. For example, 小贝: 你再好好想想? Query preparatory has an occurrence of 15.99%. For example, 周茜: 你为什么不说话?! 为什么不解释? And suggestory formulae has an occurrence of 12.99%. For example, 韩丁: 你的意思呢? 你肯定不想和他们一起住吧, 那咱们结婚怎么样?

7. Situation 7: -P and +D

This is a situation where the refuser has a lower power status and the interlocutors do not know each other: -P and +D. For example, you are a manager in a company, and you want to ask a new clerk to work over time to finish a report. Such a situation doesn't happen often in the daily life. We collected only 18 suitable video clips of request refusal conversation pairs of this situation from 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas.

TABLE 7
THE CORPUS OF REQUEST STRATEGIES IN SITUATION 7

Request strategies		Number	Percentage
Direct strategies	Mood derivable	4	22.22%
	Performatives	1	5.56%
	Hedged performatives	3	16.67%
	Obligation statements	1	5.56%
	Want statements	2	11.11%
Conventionally indirect strategies	Suggestory formulae	1	5.56%
	Query preparatory	6	33.33%
Non-conventionally indirect strategies	Strong hints	0	0
	Mild hints	0	0
Total		18	100.01%

The above table reveals an overwhelming majority of the Query preparatory (33.33%) of direct strategies which are used by Chinese speakers in the thirty five teledrama serials. For example, 宋思明: 海藻? 有什么事吗?

The next preferred form of head act for Chinese speakers was Mood derivable with an occurrence of 22.22%. For example, 宋思明: 海藻, 来, 打一杆。 The strategy of hedged performative has an occurrence of 16.67%. For example, 修小眉: 我想你就不要来了。

8. Situation 8: -P and =D

This is a situation where the addressee (that is, hearer or refuser) has the lower power position and the interlocutors know each other as acquaintances: +P and +D. For example, you are a manager in one company, and you ask one of your clerks to work overtime, who has only been with the company for a few months, so you do not know each other very well at this stage. Or a professor asks a freshman to rewrite his paper.

Comparatively, such a situation doesn't happen often in the daily life. We collected 91 video clips of this situation from 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas, which is only about 2.29% of the total corpora.

TABLE 8
THE CORPUS OF REQUEST STRATEGIES IN SITUATION 8

Request strategies		Number	Percentage
Direct strategies	Mood derivable	13	13.29%
	Performatives	15	16.48%
	Hedged performatives	11	12.09%
	Obligation statements	5	5.56%
	Want statements	18	19.78%
Conventionally indirect strategies	Suggestory formulae	6	6.91%
	Query preparatory	21	23.08%
Non-conventionally indirect strategies	Strong hints	2	2.20%
	Mild hints	0	0
Total		91	100.39%

The above table shows that there is a high level of frequency in the use of the query preparatory (23.08%) of direct strategies which are used by Chinese speakers in the thirty five teledrama serials. For example, 校长: 程岭, 这究竟是怎么回事, 能不能叫家长来商议一下? 学校设有奖学金, 你成绩上乘, 不难申请。 and 宋思明: 出什么事情了?

The want statements of the conventionally indirect strategies with an occurrence of 19.78%. For example, 鄢永年: 我想你就不要来了。 And the next most used of head act for Chinese speakers is performatives of the direct strategies with an occurrence of 16.48%. For example, 郁文涣: 正好, 有件事你帮个忙, 你来的正好我正着急呢。

9. Situation 9: -P and -D

This is a situation where the refuser has the lower power position and the interlocutors know each other well. For example, you are a manager in one company, and you ask one of your clerks to work overtime, who has been with the company for several years, so you know each other very well at this stage. Or this situation refers to the relationship between parents and children, superiors and intimate subordinates and so on. Comparatively, such a situation doesn't happen often in the request refusal conversation pairs of this situation in the contemporary Chinese teledramas. We collected only 23 video clips of this situation from 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas.

TABLE 9
THE CORPUS OF REQUEST STRATEGIES IN SITUATION 9

Request strategies	Number	Percentage
Direct strategies	Mood derivable	10
	Performatives	1
	Hedged performatives	1
	Obligation statements	2
	Want statements	1
Conventionally indirect strategies	Suggestory formulae	3
	Query preparatory	5
Non-conventionally indirect strategies	Strong hints	0
	Mild hints	0
Total	23	100.01%

The above table shows that the mood derivable is overwhelmingly used in the corpus (43.48%). For example, 郭小鹏: 我想我说得够清楚了吧? The next preferred form of head act for Chinese speakers is the query preparatory with an occurrence of 21.74%. For example, 郭小鹏: 你为什么不问我来这儿干什么? The use of suggestory formulae is also present in the corpus (13.04%). For example, 钟匡民: 钟槐, 正因为路途艰难, 我才叫你们千万别来找我。这样吧, 你先回你娘那儿去, 有些话我们以后再说好吗?

B. Request Strategies from the Perspective of Social Variables

1. The +P Factor

This section examines the patterns shown for the combinations of the +P Factor (the addressee has a high power status) with three different familiarity levels (+D in S1, =D in S2 and -D in S3).

As shown in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3, the query preparatory is employed as the most ideal request strategy in all the three situations (43.86%, 60.53% and 59%). The next request strategy is the want statement or the mood derivable in the three situations, the want statement is the second most head act in Situation 1 and 3 (28.07% and 18%) and the mood derivable the second most head act in Situation 2 (25%). The third most widely used request strategy is the mood derivable or the want statement in the three situations: the mood derivable is the third most head act in Situation 1 and 3 (17.54% and 9%) and the want statement in Situation 2 (3.95%).

From 155 video clips of the +P Factor from 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas, when making requests directed to superiors, people tend to prefer conventionally indirect strategies of head acts at all three familiarity levels with [=D] topping the list.

2. The =P Factor

This section examines the patterns shown for the combinations of the =P Factor (the addressee has an equal power status) with three different familiarity levels (+D in S4, =D in S5 and -D in S6). Among 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas, 3684 video clips of the +P Factor were collected when requests are made directed to equals, which is 92.80% of the total corpora. This factor takes overwhelmingly the majority of all the request refusal adjacency pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas, which is the biggest in the total corpora. In other words, such situations are the most popular in our daily life, which reflects the real life of the Chinese people the most authentically in the contemporary China.

As shown in Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6, both situations ([=D] and [-D]) employ the mood derivable as the most preferred request strategy in requests towards addressees who has equal power unless they are unfamiliar, although it occurs in [=P, =D] more than in [=P, -D] (34.7% versus 27.98%). The situation of [+D] uses the query preparatory as the most preferred request strategy (58.76%) when requests are made of unfamiliar equals. However the three situations differ in their second and third preference, where the suggestory formulae and mood derivable are the second and third preference in [+D], the performative and obligation statement in [=D], and the hedged performative and query preparatory in [-D]. More conventionally indirect strategies are employed in [+D] and more direct strategies in [=D] and [-D] because of different degree of familiarity.

In general, there is a strong tendency to employ direct request strategies by Chinese speakers in both situations when addressing close equals. And all the types of request strategies are collected in the three situations and is comparatively evenly distributed in [-D].

3. The -P Factor

This section examines the patterns shown for the combinations of the -P Factor (the addressee has a low power status) with three different familiarity levels ([+D] in S7, [=D] in S8 and [-D] in S9). Among 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas, only 132 video clips of the -P Factor were collected when requests are made directed to inferiors, which is 3.32% of the total corpora.

Table 7, Table 8 and Table 9 show that the most widely used request strategies are the query preparatory, mood derivable, want statement, performatives and hedged performatives, and non-conventionally indirect strategies including strong hints and mild hints are seldom found in the -P Factor when addressing inferiors. Table 7 reveals that the query preparatory is the most common request strategy collected in the contemporary Chinese teledramas when requests are made to unfamiliar inferiors (33.33%), followed by mood derivable-imperatives (22.22%) and hedged performatives (16.67%). A high use of the query preparatory is collected in Table 8 (23.08%) and Table 9 (21.74%) ([=D] in S8 and [-D] in S9). Table 8 shows that there is a greater variety of strategies and the strategies are used comparatively evenly distributed in [=D]. The mood derivable is overwhelmingly widely used in the corpus of Situation 9 shown in Table 9. The pattern emerging indicates that direct request strategies towards juniors are used as the most standard method at all three familiarity levels with [+D] topping the list, although sometimes superiors disguised as polite and considerate speakers by using conventionally indirect strategies at the very beginning.

4. The +D Factor

This section examines the patterns shown for the combinations of +D (the interlocutors do not know each other) with three different degrees of power (+P in S1, =P in S4 and -P in S7).

The results shown in Table 1, Table 4 and Table 7 reveal that the most widely used types of head acts are the query preparatory, the want statement and the mood derivable, and Chinese speakers' favorite formula of head acts is the query preparatory across all three situations +P, =P and -P, from 332 video clips of the +D Factor from 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas, when making requests directed to strangers. When there is no familiarity between the interlocutors (+D), then regardless of the addressees' power rank, Chinese speakers tend to utilize the query preparatory (+P 43.86%, -P 58.76% and =P 33.33%) with [=P] topping the list. The next preferred formulae are the adoption of the want statement when the addressees' power position is higher; the use of the mood derivable-imperatives (the most direct head acts) when the addressees' power position is lower. It is very obvious that the Chinese are more indirect in dealing with an unfamiliar acquaintance than with an unfamiliar superior. All in all, there is a great deal of variety in the choice of head acts in [+P, +D] and [=P, +D]. And no non-conventionally indirect strategies, strong hints and mild hints, are collected in [-P, +D] in the contemporary Chinese teledramas.

5. The =D Factor

This section examines the patterns shown for the combinations of =D (the interlocutors are acquaintances) with three levels of power status (+P in S2, =P in S5 and -P in S8).

As displayed in Table 2, Table 5 and Table 8, there is a strong tendency to the query preparatory (60.53% in +P and 23.08% in -P) when requests are not made of acquaintances, and the mood derivable-imperatives (the most direct head acts) is the most widely used type (34.70%) in =P. The next preferred is the mood derivable (25%) in +P, the performative (22%) in =P and the want statement (19.78%) in -P. In the realization of requests towards juniors, there is a greater variety of request strategies in =P and -P than in +P. There is also comparability between =P and -P in the manipulation of direct head acts (88.4% in =P and 68.2% in -P) making requests of addressees in an identical power position. On the contrary, indirect strategies are the most ideal head acts when addressing superiors.

6. The -D Factor

This section examines the patterns shown for the combinations of -D (the interlocutors know each other very well) with three levels of power status (+P in S3, =P in S6 and -P in S9). 2740 video clips of the -D Factor were collected from 3970 minimal pairs in the 35 contemporary Chinese teledramas. Among the three situations, S6 (=P) is the most representative which has a corpus of 2695 video clips (68% of the total corpora) with an occurrence of 98.36% in the corpus of the -D Factor.

As indicated in Table 3, Table 6 and Table 9, the most widely used types of head acts of the -D Factor are the query preparatory and the mood derivable. The most ideal request strategy in the contemporary Chinese teledramas is the query preparatory (59.09%) in +P, followed by the want statements (18.18%), when making requests directed to superiors. There is no correlation between this and =P and -P, which are a balance of direct strategies (the mood derivable (27.98% in =P and 43.48% in -P)). It is very obvious that the Chinese are more indirect in dealing with an equal or a junior than with a superior in -D. And there is a greatest variety in the choice of head acts between equals in [-D, =P], and no non-conventionally indirect strategies, strong hints and mild hints, are collected in [-D, +P] and [-D, -P] in the contemporary Chinese teledramas.

V. CONCLUSION

This study on the linguistic behaviour of making requests in the contemporary Chinese teledramas is one of the first attempts to add a new dimension to the study of request speech acts by moving beyond the patterns of foreign languages. This study explores the intricate relation between request strategies and social factors (such as power and distance). The findings raise questions about the influence of methodology on data, and the applicability of so-called universals to oriental languages.

For the convenience of comparison and contrast, we have all these data included in the following table without considering any influencing factors in the end.

TABLE 10
THE OVERALL DISTRIBUTION OF THE REQUEST STRATEGIES CORPORA

Request strategies		Number	Percentage
Direct strategies	Mood derivable	1096	27.61%
	Performatives	401	10.10%
	Hedged performatives	616	15.52%
	Obligation statements	259	6.52%
	Want statements	207	5.21%
Conventionally indirect strategies	Suggestory formulae	430	10.83%
	Query preparatory	729	18.36%
Non-conventionally indirect strategies	Strong hints	165	4.16%
	Mild hints	68	1.71%
Total		3971	100.02%

The above table shows that the most widely used types of request strategies (head acts) in the contemporary Chinese teledramas are the mood derivable, query preparatory, hedged performatives, suggestory formulae and performatives.

Mood derivable is the most used in the corpora, although the query preparatory is employed as the most ideal request strategy regardless of power status or familiarity in all the situations. The next most used request strategy is the query preparatory and then the hedged performatives. The Chinese people used more direct head acts in the corpus of the video clips of the contemporary Chinese teledramas. The extraordinarily greater use of indirect head acts in the Chinese teledramas suggests that the Chinese paid more attention to facework when observed by others.

On average, far more direct request strategies were collected in the contemporary Chinese teledramas than the previous research (Hong, 1996, p.127-138; Zhang, 1995, p.23-68). This indicates that Chinese people have a tendency towards more naturalness and straightforwardness in the real life, and the Chinese do not pay more attention to facework as expected from the previous studies (Hong, 1996, p.127-138; Zhang, 1995, p.23-68).

Social variables such as social power (power status) and social distance (familiarity) are very important influencing factors in choosing request strategies. Indirect request strategies were utilized most when dealing with familiar or unfamiliar equals. The highest number of direct request strategies occurred between equal acquaintances. In other words, Chinese could be more indirect with someone of equal position who is a close or distant colleague, and more direct with someone who has an equal position and is an acquaintance. As all these actions seem to occur around equals, it may be concluded that if Chinese speakers are of an equal position they can do whatever they are most appropriate, and be either most direct or most indirect. Hints, non-conventionally indirect request strategies, are seldom used. Strong hints are more frequently used than mild hints, for the mild hints may not efficiently convey the interlocutor's true speech intention.

The findings in the contemporary Chinese teledramas clearly show that a strong tendency was to employ request strategies based more on social distance than social power. Chinese manipulated much more sophisticated and longer initiating, negotiation and closing sessions. And greater efforts were made to realize a request act by giving sufficient reasons and explanations. All these, especially the strong insensitivity to social power and great emphasis on social distance, reflect the characteristics of the Chinese culture, such as the significance of human relationships, an aversion to bluntness, and the value placed on formality. The Chinese people pay much more attention to *guanxi* (relationships or connections) in their social life and building personal connections is pivotal. It is the right *guanxi* that makes all the difference in ensuring that request will be successful. By getting the right *guanxi*, the interlocutor minimizes the risks, frustrations, and disappointments when making request in the Chinese society. Thus, the variable of social distance plays a much greater role in the consideration of request strategies in the Chinese setting.

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