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СОЦИОЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ ПРОСЬБЫ

В статье рассматривается просьба, как речевой акт, способы выражения просьбы и их зависимость от социолингвистических факторов (статусно-ролевые характеристики участников коммуникации, их гендерная принадлежность и дистанция). Просьба представлена как речевой акт, обладающий высоким потенциалом негативного воздействия на собеседников, поэтому косвенность выражения является неотъемлемой характеристикой данного речевого акта. Автор предлагает развернутую классификацию прямых и косвенных конвенциональных и не конвенциональных просьб, созданную на основе статистической обработки современных аутентичных источников британского и американского вариантов английского языка (художественная литература и телевизионные сериалы). Наиболее распространенными в современном английском языке, как британском, так и

американском являются косвенные конвенциональные просьбы, среди которых следует отметить выражения долженствования и предположения, запросы о способности собеседника выполнить просьбу, запросы о наличии у него возможности или желания что-либо сделать, выражения пожеланий говорящего и апелляции к знанию/памяти. На конкретных примерах анализируется зависимость выбора говорящим той или иной формы просьбы от его статусно-ролевых (вышестоящий, нижестоящий, равный) и гендерных характеристик, также учитывается дистанция между собеседниками. Особое внимание уделяется процессу хеджирования, который представлен в статье как компенсационная коммуникативная стратегия, характерная для выражения речевого акта просьбы. Автор рассматривает разнообразные хеджирующие средства, используемые в просьбах говорящими, обладающими разными статусно-ролевыми характеристиками в ситуациях равного и неравного общения в двух вариантах английского языка (британском и американском). Учитывается также гендерная принадлежность участников коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: речевой акт, просьба, способы выражения просьбы, социолингвистические факторы, статус, роль, дистанция, гендер, хеджирование, хедж.

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SOME SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF REQUESTS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The article deals with the speech act of request, ways of expressing requests in the English language (British and American) and the sociolinguistic factors that determine speakers' preferences in the choice of request formulas. Requests

are viewed as highly frequent speech acts characterized by a high degree of the ranking of imposition that is why indirectness is an indispensable feature of this speech act. A taxonomy of direct and indirect requests (conventional and non-conventional) is drawn up by the author based on thorough analysis of modern authentic sources (fiction and TV series). The most widespread in colloquial English (British and American) are conventional indirect requests among which the following are noteworthy: obligation and necessity utterances, suggestion formulas, ability/possibility utterances, appeals to willingness, want utterances and references to memory and awareness. Frequencies of different request formulas are compared for superior, subordinate and equal speakers, males and females. The distance between the communicants is also considered. Considerable attention is given in the article to hedging which is perceived as a compensatory communicative strategy aimed at attenuating the negative impact to the interlocutors' faces. The use of hedging devices by superior, subordinate and equal speakers (males and females) in different communicative situations is illustrated with ample examples.

Key words: speech act, request, request formulas, sociolinguistic factors, status, role, distance, gender, hedging, hedge.

Introduction

Requests are highly frequent speech acts characterized by a high degree of the Ranking of imposition (Rx) (Brown and Levinson, 2014: 77)¹ In linguistic literature request formulas are roughly classified into two groups: direct and indirect requests (Goffman,

¹ According to Brown and Levinson (2014), Rx is a culturally and situationally defined factor characterizing speech acts by the degree to which they are considered to interfere with an agent's wants of self-determination and of approval.

1967; Grice, 1975; Blum-Kulka, 1987; Brown and Levinson, 2014; Leech, 2014, etc.). **Direct requests** usually take the form of either imperatives: “**Lock** your remote,” she said (Congo). **Don’t tell** your mother you’ve been gambling. (HP4) or performatives²: **I suggest** you start working with people who want your help (Scrubs4). Nurse Espinosa, **I specifically requested** that you transfer Mrs. Merchant to the Morning Side Nursing Home (Scrubs). Direct requests in the form of imperatives can be intensified by means of the intensifying *do*: *And Potter – do try and win, won’t you?* (HP3) or by means of the personal pronoun *you* that focuses attention on the person being addressed: **You stay out of your aunt’s way while she’s cleaning.** (HP2). However, in most situations, especially those which do not require urgent action, an opposite process occurs: the impact of direct requests is mitigated by the extensive use of hedging devices (Lakoff, 1973, 1977; Fraser, 2010). Hedges should be regarded as face-redressing strategies (Brown and Levinson, 2014) which reduce the possible threat that a speech act can bring about. According to Brown and Levinson (2014), hedges are predominantly used as negative politeness³ strategies in face-saving. Among the most common hedging devices found in hedged imperatives are: invariant tags⁴ and the politeness marker *please*: *Okay, please,*

² Performatives are utterances that don’t describe actions but incite ones. The following performative verbs are likely to be found in requests: *suggest, request, invite, advise, recommend, tell, appeal, propose, ask, reckon, protest* etc.

³ According to Brown and Levinson (2014), “*face* is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction. In general, people cooperate (and assume each other’s cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face” (p. 3). *Negative face* is the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom from imposition.

⁴ Invariant tags, unlike canonical ones, don’t take the form of the body, their form is fixed.

draw a circle (TFIOS). And *Potter – do try and win, won't you?* (HP3). *Bring as many of these books as you can, okay?* (HP 4). Hedged performatives are characterized by shift of tenses and modal verbs as the most common hedging devices: *I must ask you, Harry, whether there is anything you'd like to tell me* (HP2). *I really wanted to ask you how are you getting on with your golden egg?* (HP 4). *I was just ringing to see what you wanted for Christmas* (BJD). As is seen from the examples above intensifiers (*really, just*) are typical of hedged performatives. **Indirect requests** form two classes: conventional and non-conventional. Given the conventionalized character of the speech act of request in the first place, it shouldn't come as a surprise that amongst the possible ways of requesting **conventional indirect requests** rank first.

The most common types of conventionally indirect requests observed in literature are:

1) Obligation and necessity utterances built with the help of the modal verbs *must, should, (you might) have to, ought to, shouldn't you* in the meaning of obligation and the modal verb *need to* in the meaning of necessity. The Ranking of imposition (Rx) of such requests is high because they give the hearer little choice as to whether fulfill the request or not: *I'm afraid that, for your own safety, you will have to spend the night here* (HP3). *You might have to write that down for me* (HP3). In the latter example the modal verb *might* in the meaning of supposition implying uncertainty functions as a hedge mitigating the potential negative impact of the obligation utterance.

2) Suggestion formulas⁵ starting with the conventional formulas *how about..., what about..., why don't you..., why doing..., why not do..., let's do, you'd better...* etc.: ***Why don't you***

⁵ According to Fraser (1974), suggestions are speech acts in which the speaker indicates their desire for the hearer to consider the merits of the state of things expressed by the proposition.

help your dad with the wood? (Lost). Charlie, how about you and I go for a walk? (Lost).

3) Ability/Possibility utterances built with the help of the modal verbs *can, could, may* and their equivalents *be able to, be possible, be capable of* etc. ask the interlocutor about the possibility of performing the action: **Can** you call back? (*Friends*). **Could** you leave it here on the desk for me? (*HP3*). Ability/Possibility utterances with *could* sound politer because the impact of the request is redressed with the help of shift of tenses in the hedging function.

4) References to memory and awareness starting with *do you remember..., do you know..., have I asked you..., have you told me..., etc.* either draw the listener's attention to some previously mentioned facts or appeal to their knowledge of the situation: We're looking for the North Tower. You don't **know** the way, do you? (*HP 2*). *You wouldn't happen to know where Rosehill Cottage is? (the Holiday).*

5) Appeal to willingness is the type of request asking the listener about their will or intention to fulfill the action. These forms are usually built with the help of the modal verbs *will* or *would* in the meaning of willingness and the modal constructions *would you mind, would you like, do you mind*. **Will** you write my recommendation? (*Scrubs3*). **Would** you please put all your books back in your bags? (*HP3*). **Would** you like something to drink? (*The Holiday*).

6) Want utterances⁶ fall into two groups: the speaker either imposes on the hearer their will (*I want..., I want you to...*): **I want you to go in there and tell Mr. James that there's absolutely no reason for him to be up here (Scrubs)**. **I wanted to talk to you, Professor (HP4)** or asks the hearer about their willingness to perform the action (*you might want to, do you want to...*):

⁶Given their semantics, want utterances of the latter type could be referred to the appeal to willingness group, however their distinctive feature is the presence of the verb *want* in their structure.

(1) **Wanna** help me grab the rest of those bags? (Lost).

(2) Hey, you **wanna** go grab a cup of coffee? (Scrubs).

Want utterances of the latter type are highly colloquial and are predominantly found in situations where the Power (P) and Distance (D) variables make such usage appropriate. Both utterances display other features of the colloquial register: ellipsis in sentence 1, the interjection *hey* in sentence 2, the colloquial *wanna*, the use of the verb *grab* in both sentences. **Non-conventional indirect requests** are represented by hints which contain partial reference or no reference at all to the object of the request and whose meaning is interpretable only by context. Since the possible forms of non-conventional indirect requests are characterized by great diversity, the process of deriving the speaker's intent requires more inferencing activity from the hearer, for example: *I'm applying for a fellowship, and I could really use a letter of recommendation* (Scrubs).

Materials and methods

Request formulas for the analysis have been obtained from contemporary fiction and TV series sources: Harry Potter (1998-2000); The Holiday (2006); Scrubs (TV series) (2001-2010); Friends (TV series) (1994-2004); Doctor House (TV series) (2004-2012); Lost (TV series) (2004-2010); John Green's The Fault in Our Stars (2012); John Green's Looking for Alaska (2012) and Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones's Diary (1996). The collected materials were subjected to thorough structural, semantic, statistical and comparative analysis.

Results and discussion

The comparative statistical analysis of different types of requests used by British and American male and female speakers with respect to their social status yielded the following results: in the speech of **British males in the superior position** imperatives: *Take the dog up to my office, tell him I will be with him shortly, then come back here* (HP4) and hedged imperatives dominate. Among the most frequent hedges were *kindly* and *please*: *Professor McGonagall, please go to Mr. Filch at once and tell*

him to search every painting in the castle for the Fat Lady (HP3). Kindly escort Harry back up to the castle, Hagrid (HP4). Less frequent are want utterances I want the prefects to stand guard over the entrances to the hall (HP3) and hints I don't want to be rude or anything, but this isn't a great time for me to have a house-elf in my bedroom (HP2). **Inferior British males** tend to use hedged ability/possibility utterances Couldn't you do something about it, Dumbledore? (HP1). Among the most frequent hedging devices are shift of tenses and negation (observed in the example above). The range of request formulas used by **equal British males** is vast. Here we observe ability/possibility utterances (can/could), hints Do you need driving back to London? (BJD), appeal to willingness utterances Will you come to Prague next weekend? (BJD), suggestion formulas, why don't you being the most common of them: Why don't you book somewhere for next weekend? (BJD) and want utterances: But I do not want you questioning him until he is ready to answer, and certainly not this evening (HP4).

The two most common types of requests used by **American males in the superior position** are ability/possibility utterances as in the examples: Carla, can you check room air pulse ox on Mrs. Shipp? (Scrubs). Listen, today if you bother me, could⁷ you do it without being around me? (Scrubs) and obligation utterances: But as to these Americans, you must tell them to leave at once (FOS). The point is, you've gotta stop wasting everybody's time and grow up (Scrubs). Other less frequent, though notable types are want utterances: I don't want you hanging around him anymore (Lost). Lisa, I want you to start him on diuretics, OK?⁸ (Scrubs); hedged imperatives: Look, just cut

⁷ In the case of *could* we also observe hedging in the form of the shift of tenses.

⁸ In this *want* utterance the invariant tag *ok* performs the hedging function.

Most *want* utterances take the form of the complex object.

the damn thing off, will ya? (Scrubs). *Oh, for God's sakes, Newbie, take a look around, would you please?* (Scrubs); appeal to willingness: *Would you like to share a memory of Augustus with the group?* (FOS). *And for God's sake, will somebody wake up Gloria?* (Scrubs) and suggestion formulas: *Why don't you help your dad with the wood?* (Lost). Look, I have an even dandier idea: *Why don't you crazy kids do something on your own?*⁹ (Scrubs)

Hedged ability/possibility utterances prevail considerably over other types of requests in the speech of **inferior American males**: *Could I hitch a ride?* (FOS). *Dr. Kelso, could you help me out?* (Scrubs). The hedging function is predominantly performed by the shift of tenses, although in many examples more than one hedging devices are used by inferior speakers to mitigate the relatively high imposition of the request addressed to a superior interlocutor as in: *I was wondering if you could write a eulogy for Hazel* (FOS). Other requests are considerably less frequent. Among them two types deserve attention: appeal to willingness utterances: *Dr. Reid, would you sign this for me, please?* (Scrubs). *Will you write my recommendation?* (Scrubs). *Sir, would you mind giving me the duodenojejunosomy instead of the Todd?* (Scrubs) and hedged want statements as in: *Sir, I wanted to talk to you about that hernia seminar this weekend?* (Scrubs).

In the speech of **equal American males** ability/possibility utterances prevail: *Can you meet us at my house in, say, twenty minutes?* (FOS). Hedging in the form of the shift of tenses can also be observed as in *Could you take a look at my ears?* although such cases are far less frequent in comparison with requests used by inferiors. It is the speaker's decision whether to use hedging devices or not. This, presumably, depends on the distance

⁹ Suggestion utterances are observed in child-adult discourse in families where parents are perceived as superiors. However, the distance between the speakers in this case is close, which should affect the form of the request.

between the interlocutors, their relationships, attitudes or any other pragmatic factors which in many situations are impossible to trace. Some requests used by equals are heftily hedged: *I was hoping that maybe you could get someone to cover for me out at the prison tonight* (Scrubs). Note should be made about the ability *can't* used in the negative. This type of request usually expresses irritation and/or disapproval: *Can't you give out the aspirin yourself?* (Dr. House). The less common types are: *want* utterances: *Wanna help me grab the rest of those bags?* (Lost). *I want you to stop seeing her* (Scrubs); obligation utterances¹⁰: *You should have him checked out, he might have diabetes.* (Scrubs). *Shouldn't you call the fire department or something?!* (Scrubs); appeal to willingness: *Will you be joining us for dinner?* (Scrubs). *Would you go ahead and close your eyes for a second?* (Scrubs); and hints as in: *I don't need you right now* (Lost).

British females occupying the superior position use imperatives: *Pass the frying pan* (HP1) including hedged imperatives: *Longbottom, kindly do not reveal that you can't even perform a simple Switching Spell in front of anyone from Durmstrang!* (HP4). Equally frequent are obligation utterances where a wide range of modal verbs expressing the meaning of obligation can be observed: *As you're all in my House, you should hand Hogsmeade permission forms to me before Halloween* (HP 3). *You're to go in here with the other champions* (HP4). Less frequent are appeal to willingness utterances: *Oh, and dear, after you've broken your first cup, would you be so kind as to select one of the blue patterned ones?* (HP3). *Potter! Weasley! Will you pay attention?* (HP4). Other types of requests are rare in the speech of superior women. Unlike men British women avoid *want* utterances in their speech. Typical of the speech of **subordinate**

¹⁰ Equal speakers tend to use the modal verb *should* in the meaning of obligation to build requests, whereas in the speech of superiors *must* is also possible.

female speakers are hedged ability/possibility utterances: *Couldn't you do something about it, Dumbledore?* (HP1) *I was wondering if you could tell us anything about the Chamber of Secrets.* (HP2). Hedging should be regarded as an indispensable feature of the speech of inferior speakers, both males and females. Hints are also frequent in the speech of females occupying the inferior position: *I'm wondering if your house is available this Christmas* (The Holiday). **Equal British females** use a variety of request formulas with comparable frequencies: ability/possibility utterances: *Can I offer you a lift home?* (The Holiday), including hedged ability/possibility utterances: *Could you set it for seven o'clock tomorrow morning, BBC 1?* (BJD). *We thought it would be super if you and Daniel could come* (BJD); appeal to willingness utterances: *Would you mind coming back tomorrow?* (The Holiday); hedged imperatives: *Pass me one of those mini-pizzas, will you?* (BJD) *Do take care, won't you Harry?* (HP 4). It is noteworthy that the number of hedging devices observed in the speech of equal British females is by far the higher than in the data obtained for men. Obligation utterances are less frequent: *Mark, you must take Bridget's telephone number before you go* (BJD). Mention should be made about the frequent occurrence of *you might want to* formula in women's speech, for example: *Harry, you're secretary, so you might want to write down everything* (HP4).

One fourth of the requests observed in the speech of **Superior American female speakers** are ability/possibility utterances: *Okay, can you arrange these to tell a story?* (Dr House). *Could you drop an NG tube on the patient in 234 and then call the attending?* (Scrubs). The frequency data for imperatives, including hedged imperatives are comparable: *You bring your father home Jack* (Lost). *Please, let me watch America's Next Top Model* (FOS). *Please* is among the most frequent hedging devices. Less common are hints: *Did you think that maybe I'm the doctor?* (Scrubs). **Inferior American female speakers** use hedged ability/possibility utterances: *I wonder if you could give*

me your opinion on a patient? (Scrubs). I was wondering if it were possible to have surgery again? (Scrubs) and hedged appeal to willingness utterances: I wonder, though, if you would mind answering a couple questions I have about what happens after the end of the novel (FOS). As is seen from the examples, the list of forms available to speakers occupying the inferior position is rather limited. Like equal American men, **equal American females** have a great choice of formulas to express requests. Ability/possibility utterances, including hedged utterances: Could you move my car out of the sun? (Scrubs). I was just wondering if I could get your advice on something (Scrubs). I know this may be asking too much, but could you please try and keep it together until we can get home and talk about it? prevail over other types, although this difference is not considerable. Only slightly less frequent are want utterances: I just want you to open up, you know, emotionally, spiritually (Scrubs); appeal to willingness utterances: Would you keep an eye on Tyler, here, while we take care of his dad? (Scrubs); suggestion formulas: Hey Turk, why don't you play the next game with Marco? (Scrubs) and hints: Do you always have to bring him here? (Friends). I'm trying to figure out why you didn't tell me about them (The Holiday). You never told me what you really think of Turk (Scrubs). You might want to utterances are as common in the speech of equal American females as in the speech of British females, for example: If you can find them, you might want to fasten your seat belts (LfA). And Carla, you may wanna borrow some of my spray-on hair (Scrubs).

Conclusion

Requests are highly conventionalized speech acts that display a high degree of indirectness. While choosing request formulas appropriate for the situation communicants rely largely on their perceptions of the sociolinguistic factors: the roles they assign to each other, their gender characteristics and the distance. Due to the considerable ranking of imposition and the negative impact requests might have to the communicants' faces correct hedging

behavior as a compensatory strategy is invaluable.

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**ПЕРСУАЗИВНОСТЬ, МАНИПУЛЯЦИЯ И
ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКОЕ ПРИНУЖДЕНИЕ В БИЗНЕС-
КОММУНИКАЦИИ**

В статье анализируются коммуникативные приемы, которые используются в современной англоязычной бизнес-