

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The current study aims at revealing the influence of English language proficiencies on pragmatic realization and strategies of making requests across high and low SEFL proficiency learners. This chapter highlights interlanguage pragmatics including pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence (section 2.2). Conceptual framework is presented in section 2.3. Next, it presents the effect of language proficiency on pragmatic performance (Section 2.4). This chapter also addresses the works of previous studies on pragma-linguistic, Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP), and sociopragmatic studies from Arab and Saudi context (Section 2.5 and 2.6). Section 2.7 introduces a brief about Saudi Arabia education system. This chapter ends with a concluding remark (Section 2.8).

2.2 Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP)

When addressing pragmatic with the field of second language studies, it relates to Interlanguage Pragmatic (ILP) as defined by Blum-Kulka and Kasper “the study of nonnative speakers’ uses and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language L2” (1993, p. 3). Regarding ILP, Kasper and Blum-Kulka, (1993) determined five areas 1) pragmatic transfer, 2) performing of linguistic action, 3) communicative effect, 4) pragmatic comprehension, and 5) improvement of pragmatic comprehension. Kasper (1988) classified pragmatic transfer as the pragmatic competence of culture and

language utilized by second language learners to comprehend, learn, and produce pragmatic knowledge of L2.

L2 learners should achieve effective and suitable social interaction. Subsequently, to do so, they should recognize the linguistic structure, the function of this structure and the social constraints that determine these structures in certain languages and culture. This type of L2 competency is attributed as pragmatic competence (Kasper, 1999). Pragmatic competence of learners depends on the knowledge of pragmalinguistic actions and the ability to react with appropriate utterance. Furthermore, it is agreed by researchers that insufficient pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics can result in pragmatic failure. Altasan (2016) mentioned that pragmatic failures occur when students misinterpret what is said in the target language or use inappropriate expressions that conflict with the cultural norms in the target language.

Accordingly, such pragmatic failures can further be classified into sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistic failure, which occurs when EFL /ESL learners employ inappropriate forms and structure in the target language. Sociopragmatic failure generally occurs if the person does not pay attention to social norms, values, age, gender, and cultural differences in their speech. For example, when students ask their instructor; *"I need a recommendation letter"* employing a high degree of direct speech instead of such phrase *"could you please"*. In this instance, the failure is the result of the student's unconscious of the power variable. In contrast, pragmalinguistic failure refers to weakness in using structure improperly and an example is that most of LA's use of request tended to employ direct as indicated in Chapter 4.

To sum up, pragmatic failure is considered as a serious and significant problem because it may sometimes be misinterpreted as racial discrimination, rudeness, and arrogance (Blum-Kulka, et al. 1989). During the last three decades, many studies have

been adopted in the field of speech acts and interlanguage pragmatic such compliments (Rose, 2000), apologies (Trosborg, 2011), complaints (Ellwood, 2008), implicature (Taguchi and Yamaguchi, 2019) and request act (Hussein & Albakri, 2019)

Request act is a field of pragmatics which has been tackled from different languages and cultures. Blum-Kulka (1991, p.257) assumed that "The motivational, intentional source of a request is the requestive goal, which speakers strive to achieve with maximum effectiveness and politeness". These aims could be altered from the most coercive (e.g., requests for performing an action) to the least coercive (e.g., requests for goods and information). for instance, "Give me a hand", this utterance is considered as a high degree of politeness and a useful strategy to get the hearer to perform a request. Although it might not be determined as the highest politeness strategy in context.

Regarding request, Cowley (2009) argued that the biggest challenge for second language learners' face is the appropriateness of sociolinguistic transfer rules despite there being some principles that look to be less cultural-language specific. In short, ILP focuses mainly on the role of pragmatic competence and how to achieve communicative competence. Pragmatic competence, as part of communicative competence, indicates the ability of the speaker to understand and perform the illocutionary force in the lens of social norms. That means the primary goal of pragmatic competence is centering on the perception and production of speech act. Hence, one of the main interests of this study is pragmatic realization of making requests across high and low SEFL learners. To sum up, speakers of L2 should be pragmatically competent by understanding sociopragmatics (social norms) and pragmalinguistics (linguistic sources) which are addressed in the following sections.

2.2.1 Pragmalinguistic Knowledge

As mentioned, pragmatic competence has two aspects which are core parts of the current study: Sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence (Kasper and Rose, 2002). Pragmalinguistics might be referred to linguistic knowledge of pragmatics as “the range of resources from which speakers of language have to choose when using that language” (Barron, 2003, p. 8), these resources are used to achieve the communicative act including pragmatic strategies such as using level of directness and internal and external modifications. Pragmalinguistic competence reveals the proper linguistic structure and language function to transfer a specific illocutionary force.

2.2.2 Sociopragmatic Knowledge

Sociopragmatic knowledge is defined as “sociological interface of pragmatics (Leech, 1983, p. 100) which investigates how pragmatic performance depends on social variables such as power and distance in speech. Hence, sociopragmatic knowledge is linked with understanding and realizing social distance and power (Brown and Levinson, 1987). As the aspects of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics are crucial to understand language in social use. In the current study, pragmalinguistic level scrutinizes the differences between HAs and LAs in using level of directness and modifications in performing request act. On the other hand, sociopragmatic level demonstrates the groups’ awareness in altering their speech based on social variable.

Due to the lack of studies on SEFL’s English proficiency levels and strategies in making requests, such reasons have prompted the researcher to bridge the gap on the lack of information about this issue, this study entails the pragmatic competence in general and it amplifies in speech act as branch of pragmatic competence. The following section addresses speech act of request and past studies in this field.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The current study seeks to investigate linguistic variability concerning the relationship between SEFL's English proficiency levels and strategies of making requests. To achieve the aim of the current study, it is based on Brown and Levinson politeness theory (1987) and Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) as a conceptual framework to identify request strategies employed by Saudi EFL learners at two different levels of English language proficiency use (linguistic variability). More specifically, it aims to investigate the level of directness, internal and external modifications among learners from different language proficiency. However, Brown and Levinson (1987) examined the theory of politeness and proposed that politeness may be achieved if we show and acknowledge the notion of face. Face is a universal phenomenon among cultures defined as a public self-image which requires the speaker to respect feelings and expectations of others and to take into consideration how to prevent face threatening acts.

Brown and Levinson (1987) claimed that some types of acts are by default Face Threaten Act (FTA); the researcher categorized these acts as follows:

1. Threatening the speaker's positive face (compliment, accepting or apologizing).
2. Threatening the speaker's negative face (accepting offers or thanks).
3. Threatening the audience's negative face (advising, requesting, ordering, or treating).
4. Threatening the audience's positive face (disagreeing, complaining, or criticizing).

Generally, most previous studies utilized Brown and Levinson's framework in ILP research as a tool to distinguish politeness strategies between native and non-native

speakers (Bella, 2011, Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Byon, 2004). Therefore, this study scrutinizes the influence of language proficiency in using level of directness when learners request as a type of speech act in the target language.

Despite of the importance of politeness theories, it suffers from problems and shortcomings that influence the efficiency in analysis of the communicative communication. For example, universalism, adopted by Brown and Levinson's theory, is not well defined. Besides, the Face concept includes problems in defining the notion of face. The main criticism of the theory of face -saving is that this model is product-oriented rather than process-oriented because this model centers on the speaker's politeness ignoring the listeners' preconception. Hence, face-saving focuses more on the speaker (Burke and Kraut, 2008). However, Eelen (2001, p. 128) simply states that "to be polite is always 'to act appropriately' ... depending on the hearer's expectation". Moreover, one of the most shortcomings of this model is that there is no evident correlation between indirectness and politeness. Leech (1983) states that indirect speech acts are deemed as politeness. In contrast, in Saudi context, direct offer and invitation is considered more polite (Ghazzoul, 2019). Even in English language, some linguistic expressions are used as polite as "please", but this expression is also used impolitely when it is employed in ironic intonation (LoCastro, 2013).

Request act may alter in weight, considering as big or small, which needs the use of different requestive strategies. With regards to Brown and Levinson (1987), requests threaten Hearer's negative face as they impinge on Hearer's right of privacy. In order to investigate the request act, there is a need to realize the elements made of requestive sequences. CCSARP found that there are three focal elements of requestive sequences as follows: supportive moves (external modification), head act, perspective, and internal modification.

These classifications, according to Al-Momani (2009) and Al-Ageel, (2016, p. 156) are the head acts which include several degrees of politeness as follows: 1) Mild hint (e.g., *You are busy now' aren't you*), 2) query preparatory (e.g., *Would you please move this chair*), 3) mood derivable (e.g., *Clean your room alone*), 4) hedge performatives (e.g., *I would like to ask you to postpone the date of the exam*), 5) want statement (e.g., *I really ask you to come on time*), 6) obligation statement (e.g. *You will have to remove this garbage*), 7) suggestory formulae (e.g. *How about fixing the damaged chair?*), 8) performative (e.g. *I am informing you to leave*) and finally, 9) strong hint (e.g. *The bathroom is dirty*). The current study seeks to use a level of indirectness, including three options, namely conventionally indirect, direct, and non-conventionally indirect among SEFL learners (See chapter 3 section 3.6.3).

2.3.1 Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory is the focal element in language communication adopted by Austin (1962) in his posthumous collections *How to Do Things with Words*; his work has a massive impact on philosophy, linguistics, and especially on pragmatic studies. Subsequently, this work was developed by Austin's student Searle (1969, 1975 and 1976), who became a pioneer in pragmatic theories. Language is a combination of sound and meaning, and in generative thinking, a language is a group of sentences having a specific meaning (Searl, 1975). Critically acclaimed, these definitions do not focus on language as an activity that performs speech act described as the essential or least part of linguistic communication. As Searl (1969) mentioned, communication does not concern only words and symbols, but rather the performing words, symbols, and sentences in performative speech acts.

Speech acts are considered as a challenge for second language-acquisition students (Austin, 1962) in areas such as requesting, warning, compliment, thanking and apologizing. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) attributed speech acts as "one of the most coercive aspects in the study of language use." The researcher believes that pragmatic competence is difficult for non-native speakers to achieve due to the cultural differences between the two languages.

Cohen (2004, p. 3) indicated that "language learners can have all of the lexical items and the grammatical forms and still fail at conveying their message because they lack necessary pragmatic or functional information to communicate their intent". He clarified speech acts as a constant interest for second and foreign language learners because they face difficulties continually in exploiting speech acts like apologizing, requests, complaints, thanking, and refusals. All of which indicates that speech acts have different interpretations for non-native speakers i.e., they do not grasp explicitly the intended meaning of the speaker due to the cultural differences and pragmatic competence. Furthermore, speech acts are used in second and foreign language teaching because it determines the learner's production and perception of other languages.

Speech act theory, as adopted by Austin (1962), supposes that the least part of human interaction is not only terminology or linguistic expression, but it is part of acts such as request, apology, refusal, and thanking. In this case, any utterance includes meanings and actions, and these actions are classified into three acts as follows: Locutionary act: how to produce meaningful utterance, Illocution act: an act which needs to be achieved, such as answering and promising and Perlocutionary act: the impact of the expression of the thought and feeling. Austin (1962) supposed that if there is a relationship between the type of utterance and illocution act, it will be a direct

speech act. Moreover, if there is no correlation between the kind of utterance and illocution, it will be seen as an indirect speech act.

Consider the following example:

- i. I ask you to give me water
- ii. Give me water
- iii. Could you please give me water?

While example (i) is making request explicit performative, example (ii) reflects making the request via an imperative direct speech act. In contrast, example (iii) shows how a request is made via an interrogative speech act. Because of this, although they have the same meaning but different ways to express, not having such awareness may be problematic to L2 learners. They may be interpreted as rude and arrogant if they use terms inappropriately.

2.3.2 Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP)

To analyze the request act across a range of cultures and languages, many scholars have attempted to improve the coding scheme. Accordingly, the most updated and profound technique to examine request is Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) that was first introduced by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) in their study to investigate sociocultural norms of request and apology exploited in different language as coding schemes to analyze speech act in their communities. In 1989, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) published their CCSARP pattern, which has since treated as a prominent tool for analyzing requests used by many researchers across languages and cultures as they gathered data from native speakers of English (Australian English, American English, and British English) and from learners of English as EFL/ESL

(Russian, Danish, and German) via Discourse Completion Test (DCT), involving eight requesting situations.

With respect to request strategies, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) stated that request is realized in three essential universal classifications: (1) direct strategies, (2) conventionally indirect strategies, and (3) non-conventionally indirect strategies. As indicated earlier, CCSARP taxonomy of Blum-Kulka (1989) is adopted in order to answer the first research question ‘‘what strategies do Saudi EFL learners at different levels of English language proficiency employ in making request act pertaining to level of directness / indirectness, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect, external and internal modifications between HAs and LAs?

To attain this aim, the study investigates the level of directness and the proficiency levels between the participants. As for the level of directness, the request contexts were distributed to 98 SEFL students in 12 different situations, namely, directness, conventionally indirect, and internal and external modification. The components of CCSARP used in the current study are introduced in section 3.6.3).

Additionally, House and Kasper (1987) examined the speech act of apologizing and request among cultures and languages using CCSARP to study the native speakers of Canadian, Argentinian, Hebrew, Danish, Germany English, and non-native speakers of English. To collect data, a DCT was designed with 16 situations of apology and request to cover the essential variables of social power and social distance. The data were analyzed based on internal and external modifications and directness levels. They observed that British speakers inclined to preparatory strategy (e.g., ‘‘*Could you*’’). However, Danish and German selected variety levels from the highest level of directness (e.g., mood derivable) to least direct (e.g., strong hints). Additionally, German speakers were also found to employ a more direct level compared to Danish

because of the effect of social norms in German language. The following chart simplifies the conceptual framework utilized in the current research.

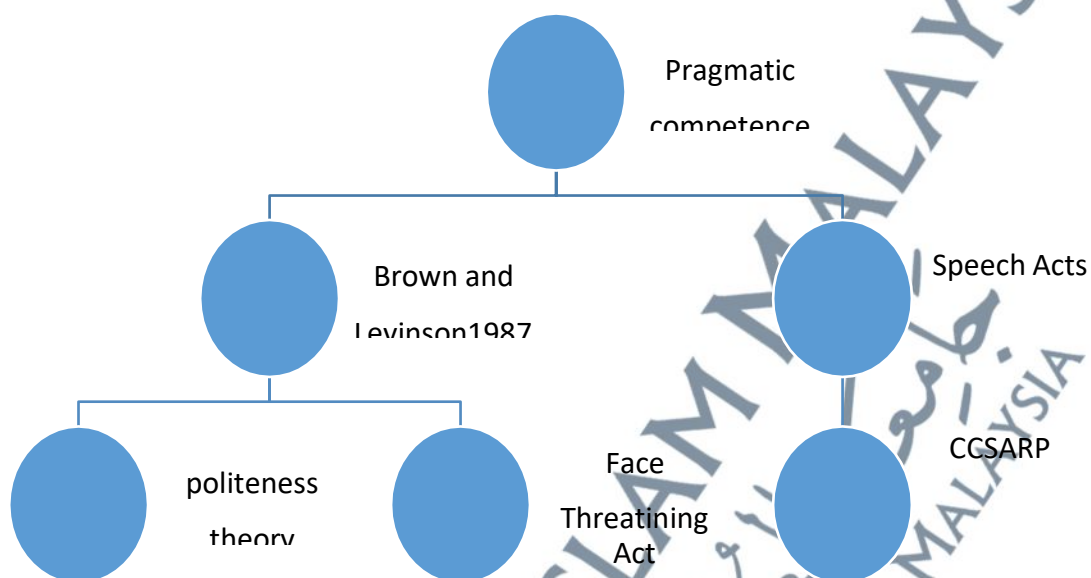


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework in the Current Study

2.3.2.1 Past Studies – Making Requests Using CCSARP

Requestive behaviors can be achieved effectively by depending on whether the speaker focuses on the role of the speaker (*“may I do it?”*), the role of the hearer (*“would you do it?”*) or the role of both (*“could we clean it now?”*) or neither (*“it should be fixed”*). However, the head act is considered as a mandatory part of performing a request, speakers may vary in adding internal modification and supportive moves to mitigate the compelling nature of a request and to change the request to be more productive. The supportive move may be added either before or after the head act, and it has different strategies such as “grounders” (e.g., *I did not take the exam yesterday*), availability (e.g., *are you free at 10:00?”*) and pre-commit (e.g., *“can you help me?”*) (Qari, 2017).

Regarding the speech act of request, Sfont (2008:168) defined requests act as “are performed by the speaker to engage the hearer in some future course of actions that coincide with a speaker's goal”. Searle (1976) categorized request act as “directive “which is used when the requester (speaker) reports to requestee (audience) that the speaker needs the requestee to execute an act (see Trosborg, 2011). Moreover, Blum-Kulka (1991) explained the request act as a “pre-even” influence on requestee actions as opposed to “post-even” such as complaints and apologies.

Daskalovska et al. (2016) scrutinized request act used by intermediate EFL/ESL learners. Data were collected by DCT and role play instruments adopting CCSARP to analyze data. It was observed that the most frequently used types of strategies are conventional indirect (query preparatory) in both informal and formal situations. This study is in line with the current research as both used CCSARP, but the current study investigated the influence of language proficiency taking two groups as high and low achievers.

Haddad (2017) conducted a study to investigate the use of request strategies by upper-secondary learners of English in Sweden. Data were gathered from 30 students by (DCT) based on social distance, power, and status. Data were analyzed according to the levels of directness adopted by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). The findings presented that the L2 students preferred the conventional indirect strategies when requesting from a person of equal status, superior status and from a stranger. It is noted that the social variables have less influence on using request strategies by Swedish upper-secondary learners. This study did not exploit groups at different language proficiency that help to understand the factor of pragmatic competence such as language proficiency. So, this study expands Haddad (2017)’s study to include groups at different language proficiency.

To investigate the Sociopragmatic competence between (64) Moroccan Arabic learners and (41) American English speakers in using level of directness in request act, Mohamed, (2019) used DCT to gather data and analyzed them in the light of CCSARP to show the influence of social variables in making request act. It was observed that a significant difference between two groups in inclining to directness levels in using request act such as mood derivable. Regarding sociopragmatic variables, social power distance, and degree of imposition have a strong impact on using the level of request directness between two groups. This study is consistent in dealing with sociopragmatic knowledge, but the current research hopes to expand this study to cover the factor of language proficiency among SEFL learners at pragamalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspect to draw a full picture of the influence of language proficiency in pragmatic competence.

It is clearly obvious that CCSARP used in speech act studies is considerable of importance for different speech acts in general, and request act in specific. In order to analyze the speech act of request among SEFL's English proficiency levels and strategies of making requests and the differences in pragmatic realization of making requests across high and low SEFL proficiency learners, CCSARP is a commonly employed framework in determining universal strategies in the realization of speech acts of request in cross-cultural pragmatics, request Strategies lead to the development of CCSARP by enhancing language data scope. That is why the current study employs CCSARP to investigate the performance of SEFL in using request act at different language proficiencies.

Al-Gahtani and Alkahtani (2012) carried out a study on the speech act of requests among Saudi high- and low-level learners of Australian English. The participants were divided into three groups as follows: 1) 8 native speakers of Australia from 19-40 years

old, 2) 8 high-level Saudi learners from 27-30 years old, and 3) 8 Saudi low-level learners from 25-39 years old. The participants of the study were requested to take part in three different role plays that vary according to the relative power relationship between the informant and the conductor. The findings revealed no difference between high-level learners and low-level learners regarding pre- and post-head act strategies, and request strategies; thereby indicating that proficiency level does not have a significant impact on L2 learners' choice of pre- and post-head act strategies and request strategies. Considering the social variable (power) influence, it was found that power affected both groups of learners, along with the native speaking group, in terms of pre- and post-head act strategies.

Nevertheless, power did not influence the SLL group, whereas it did influence the high-level group, along with the native speaking group, in terms of request strategies. Accordingly, there is no apparent correlation between the social variable (power) and L2 learners' use of pre- and post-head act strategies, while power positively correlates with L2 learners' proficiency level regarding their use of request strategies. This study fails to clearly define the differences between both levels. Possibly, the method was not adequate to draw a distinction between them. It is advisable if the author used another method such as DCT to achieve the desirable outcomes. Moreover, the study focused only on pre and post head act neglecting other request strategies with inadequate number of participants. The current study hopes to cover the whole request strategies including directness, external and internal modifiers.

Qari (2017) carried out a study on the use of politeness strategies, namely: requests and apologies among Saudi and British students. To do so, discourse completion test questionnaires were distributed among students. The study adopted Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and used the Cross-Cultural Speech Act

Research Pattern (CCSARP) request and apology coding systems. The findings revealed that both males and females Saudis generally preferred to use direct strategies in their request, while EFL and British groups were systematically more indirect. The study recommended instructors and policy makers to include in their classrooms and curriculum makers to include the indirect forms that the British used in this study and were not part of the original CCSARP speech-act classification.

Qari (2017)'s study did not clarify the differences between the participants because the employed method for eliciting data was insufficient and it just showed the differences between groups in using speech act disregarding the factors that influence the development of pragmatic competence. Thus, the researcher advocates the use of observations and interviews for obtaining more accurate information. Moreover, this research focuses on the cultural difference in employing speech neglecting the individual difference and this gap focusing on individual responses is examined in the current study by investigating the influence of language proficiency among students at different language proficiency.

Alsulayyi (2017) stated that Saudi learners have a lack of pragmatic competence, and they must increase the exposure to real – life activities. One of the effective strategies to improve their pragmatic ability is realizing the norms, values, and culture of the target language. Recommendations of previous studies suggested two ways to improve this competence, which are Saudi themselves and material in classrooms that enable students to take the chance to benefit from the instructions delivered by their instructors on using language effectively and appropriately. Moreover, Qari (2019) also added that English books in the EFL contexts, used in schools and universities emphasize grammar and vocabulary without bearing into consideration the significance of contextual and social settings in their speech. For instance, textbooks in Saudi Arabia

are extremely biased to the favor of “national” or “transnational” purposes (Faruk 2014). As a result, the gaps between Saudi English Language Education Policies (SELEP) and the textbooks still exist.

Bataineh (2014) also contended that EFL learners should not focus only on the discourse and structure of the target language (TL) but also on the pragmatic and social rules of the TL that enhance students to use language effectively. Saudi learners use English as a foreign language in limited domain that means using English is deficient and restricted only in classroom activities, which leads to insufficient input of linguistic information. Similarly, Almulla (2018) carried out a study concerning education in Saudi Arabia. The study indicated that the educational process in Saudi Arabia confronts significant challenges not only pertaining to teachers’ awareness, school resources, but also school curricula, particularly the use of English language textbooks. For instance, most of the textbook’s materials are found to originally be constructed within the grammar, lexical competence structure with little focus on practicing language in situations as role-play activities (Marzban & Davaji, 2015).

2.3.3 Politeness Strategies

The acquisition and learning of politeness strategies as a part of learning L2 pragmatics might be complicated for language learners (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Brown & Levinson, 1987). A factor that can complicate the choice of speech act strategy is the influence of the interlocutor’s social, cultural, and personal aspects, which Kılıçkaya (2010) suggests that this influence can shape the eventual linguistic output by second language learners. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate it in language learning and teaching within the social variable (power and status). Brown and Levinson (1987) claimed politeness as the main tool to mitigate and smooth the imposition in FTAs by

separating between polite and impolite speech. They suggested some techniques to prevent such threatening positive faces such as paying attention, joking, and asking for clarifications. To prevent a negative face, they assumed speaker should acknowledge the hearer's freedom of actions. To fully understand politeness aspect, we should understand the definition of culture as what is considered as polite in a society, it may be considered impolite in another community.

Culture is transferable through its components (traditional ideas and values). Hamblin (1978, p. 6), defined culture as "a set of beliefs, objects and events acquired by individuals as members of society". Hofstede (1978, p. 25) described it "as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another". Similarly, Matsumoto (2009, p. 16) defines culture as a set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but unique to each individual, communicated from generation to generation." Hofstede (1980) developed a six-dimensional cultural model that has been widely used in literature as providing a valuable insight into understanding different aspects of culture.

Power and distance are two of these dimensions (Minkov & Hofstede 2012). While the cultural framework is not without criticism (see McSweeney, 2002), it does provide valuable insight into some cultural differences in many countries. The social power and distance aspects "express the degree to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect unequal power distribution." This reflects how a society handles social inequalities. The social status of interlocutors has been highlighted as a significant contextual component that must be included in request and politeness research (Levinson, 1987 and Bataineh, 2014). Thus, Brown and Levinson (1987) advocated that social status might be considered as a major contextual element in socio-linguistic studies.

Social distance and social power can be used to describe social rank (Bataineh, 2014). Importantly, people's perceptions of social characteristics (such as social status and power) vary between cultures. Both social power and social distance are conveyed differently from one culture to another, and thus, the culture is considered a specific context. The "relationship between two interlocutors" is defined primarily by social distance and social power (Ogiermann, 2009, p. 233). Social distance and social power are both context-external characteristics. According to Locker and Buzard (1990), the role of social power in communication entails interlocutors understanding each other's social position, which influences what is considered appropriate speech acts.

The degree of closeness between the interlocutors is fundamentally measured by social distance, which is related to how well the interlocutors know one another (Al-Khaza'leh, 2018). In speech act research, social power (SP) is frequently portrayed as an unequal variable indicating the extent to which a speaker can force his or her will on the listener.

It basically expresses the level of influence that the listener has on the speaker; for instance, a teacher has comparatively greater influence over a student, a parent has more influence over a kid, and a manager has more influence over the subordinate. Three types of social power between the interlocutors are typically perceived in speech act research to capture this environmental element which are used in the current DCT in this study. The first type (Equal SP) describes circumstances in which both parties are equally powerful; the other two types (Low SP and High SP) allude to situations in which one party is more powerful than the other.

It's critical to acknowledge that determining the differences between interlocutors in speech actions involves some degree of subjective opinion. It may be difficult to discriminate between different social power types (Ogiermann, 2009). The

same holds true for social distance. The social variable of social distance describes the level of familiarity between the interlocutors. To put it another way, the degree of intimacy between the parties (Al-Khaza'leh, 2018). Thus, social distance essentially represents how familiar the interlocutors are with one another.

According to Alasqah, (2021), social distance is a symmetrical variable that shows the level of familiarity and frequency of interaction between two interlocutors. According to Waldvogel (2007), the interlocutors' level of familiarity and frequency of interactions might be either personal or professional. The various levels of familiarity are typically depicted on three levels: strangers (high SD), acquaintances (mid SD), and friends (low SD) in order to capture the influence of social distance on request strategies and the three classifications are therefore relevant for practical application in researching speech acts.

The differences as they are employed in the literature, are intended to aid in operationalizing the analysis of speech acts in order to comprehend the context in which speech actions are utilized (Waldvogel, 2007). For example, Holmes & Stubbe (2003) contend that when it comes to politeness techniques, negative politeness is used more frequently in relationships with a great deal of social distance and positive politeness is used more frequently between friends.

Negative politeness demonstrates distance and power disparities in this way. However, Culpeper, (2011), underlined that social distance and social power do not necessarily go hand in hand. Numerous studies on speech actions, including those that concentrate on the Arabic language and Saudi Arabia particularly (Al-Sobh, 2013; Alsulayyi, 2016; Qari, 2019), have looked at the two contextual elements. For instance, a study by Alsulayyi (2016) indicated that Saudis apologize more frequently when the

interlocutors are far away (or there is a significant social distance), as well as when there is a high level of social authority.

It's significant to note that Alsulayyi (2016, p. 79) makes the argument that "the adoption of upgraders in such cases is attributed to cultural reasons as the Arab culture necessitates the use of such intensifiers as a sign of showing respect to the interlocutors." Additionally, Alsulayyi (2016) discovered that Saudis used lengthier apology techniques, such as the combined upgrader strategy, when the social distance between the interlocutors was low. According to Qari (2019), it is in the best interest of the apologizer with low social standing to make an effort to preserve a cordial, polite relationship with the aggrieved party in circumstances of high social power.

Binasfour (2014) stated that Saudi learners of English employed more speech act strategies when the higher the social power of the offended. In other words, a combination of request strategies was used when the social power between the interlocutors was high. In this respect, the social status of interlocutors has an influence on speech acts.

The concept of "Face," as described by Goffman (1967), is the public self-image which was adopted later by Brown and Levinson (1987), which has become the essential work in the field of social communication. The notion of the face has been classified into two classifications, negative face and positive face. These classifications, as Brown and Levinson (1987) mentioned, based on two-dimension values or social relations of social distance (D) and power (P) as Brown and Levinson (1987, p.77) defined power as "The degree to which H can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of S's plans and self-evaluation". The classification of social variable is adopted in the current study to reveal the pragmatic realization among HA and LA in performing request act which will be discussed in the answering the

second question of the present study which aims at investigating the pragmatic realization of making requests across high and low SEFL proficiency learners (situational variability).

Because of the value of the concept of ‘‘Face’’ in communication, interaction and social, many researchers have examined this notion from different perspectives. The first scholar who adopted the theory of face was Goffman (1967), and then it was conducted by researchers in linguistic behavior and social communication (Chen, 2001). Pertaining to politeness theory and request acts, politeness is the essential element in daily human communication (Al-Marrani and Sazalie, 2010). Despite the universality of politeness strategies among cultures as suggested by Brown and Levinson, 1987, they vary in using politeness strategies, so each culture has its technique in performing politeness, including defense, respect, and face-saving. To underestimate the notion of politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987) suggested five scales from the most magnificent loss face to lowest loss face as follows (from lowest polite to highest polite).

1. Use the FTA on bald record, without redressive action (e.g., “*Give me your calculator*”)
2. Use the FTA on record by employing *positive politeness strategies* with redressive action (e.g., “*Doctor, you are the best doctor, can you please write a recommendation letter?*”)
3. Use the FTA on record by employing *negative politeness strategies* with redressive action, (e.g., *Sorry to bother you, can I share my ideas with you?*)
4. Use the FTA off record by using some hints as asking for something indirectly (e.g. *I forget mine*”).

5. Don't use the FTA is when the speaker refrains from performing the FTA for any reason.

Brown and Levinson (1987) designed a formula based on three factors: Power (P), Ranking I and Distance (D) which may help the speaker to calculate the weightiness of the FTA to select which strategy to employ: $W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$. When the speaker has a higher level of social, cultural, or hierarchy than the addressee, losing face is not probable to happen. Therefore, a direct request may be performed. If the speaker is low power status, the indirect request will be used. Therefore, using force is more probable to happen. Consider the following examples to illustrate the difference between indirect and direct utterances:

- A lecturer asks students to “*submit the assignment tomorrow morning on time*”.
(Direct, bald-on record)

A student asks his lecturer to make an excuse, “*I am asking if it is possible not to attend tomorrow's class*” (indirect, negative politeness). To fully grasp Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Grice's (1975) influential work on the cooperative principle (CP) and its conversational maxims should be considered. The cooperative principle is defined as the way in which people seek to make the conversation run smoothly among people. In this respect, Grice (1975) suggests the cooperative principles entail making the conversational contribution essential, as the phase that occurs by the accepted goal or the direction of the talk exchange in which speakers are engaged. It encompasses different categories. One of which, Maxim of quantity as one of the cooperative principles that is primarily interested in presenting the needed information without making the contribution more informative than it required. As such,

the contribution of each individual to conversation should be just as informative as it requires. It should not be more informative or less informative.

To clarify the concept of politeness, there is a need to shed light on the theory of “Conversational Maxims”. Grice (1989) coined a set of fundamentals that enhance language to be more effective in communication. These fundamentals were entitled “Cooperative Principle” (CP) and are distributed into maxims of conversation as follow:

1. Quality Maxim: be informative.
2. Manner: be perspicuous.
3. Quantity: be informative.
4. Relation: be relevant.

Grice claimed that flouting one or more of these maxims lead to conversational implicatures, Fraser, 1990 described it as “non-explicit messages intended by the speaker to be inferred by the hearer”. For example, when someone asks a person about the weather “its nice today” although it is stormy and windy. This response violates relevant maxims that leads to implicature that the hearer is not care of speaker. Regarding request act, for example a student asks his professor to write a recommendation letter. He says “*I am Ali I am from Kharj I studied science and my father promise me to help me to register for master degree..... can you please write a recommendation letter?*” (S7, HA# 22). In this example the students violate the maxims of quantity by giving extra information that leads to implicature that the student sympathizes with his professor to write a good recommendation.

2.4 Proficiency Effect on Pragmatic Competence

According to previous studies (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Alshraah, & Daradkeh, 2021, Niezgoda & Roever, 2001; Shardakova, 2005; Takahashi & Beebe, 1993), there is no concord about the extent of the language proficiency effect on using pragmatic competence. Hassal (2012) in the study that investigated the development of pragmatic competence by Australian study-abroad participants claimed that the linguistic competence is not the only factor for pragmatic competence, but it is vital for pragmatic recognition. The data were collected by means of interactive role play. The second element that might be taken into attention when examining the element of developing pragmatic competence and acquisition is the influence of language proficiency. Hence, the current study expands on Hassal's (2012) study by focusing on other factors that is impact of language proficiency on pragmatic performance.

Furthermore, many studies argue that residing in the target community is necessary to develop pragmatic competence, whether it is for a short or long stay. Churchill (2001) stated that learners use less direct request who stay only one month in the target community. The reason behind that might be attributed to their short accommodation period in the foreign country leading to their less use of request. Schauer (2006) recorded that German ESL performs proper pragmatic recognition when they stay for nine months in England. It is indicated that the more stay and more exposure to the target language and culture as well may lead to better second language acquisition (Hassal, 2012 & Bella, 2011).

The benefit of more interaction using the target language and longer stay in the target community is an indispensable opportunity for learners to be more socialized and to engage with a different real-life situation. Hence, this exposure might be an evident influence on the learner's pragmatic competence and relief learner's background of

social values of the target language and culture (Bella, 2011). Another factor that plays a role in pragmatic competence development by investigating the influence of language proficiency on pragmatic competence in making and realizing request acts as the main aim of the current study.

Several studies regarding the influence of language proficiency on the pragmatic adequacy revealed that the High Achievers (HA) of language competence show increasing in performing the pragmatic competence compared to Low Achievers (LA) (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2011; Xiao, 2015, Geyer, 2007; Pinto, 2005; Wannaruk, 2008). Wannaruk (2008) administered DCT to collect data from 40 Thai and 40 native speakers of English learners to show the role of language proficiency on using speech acts (request, thanking and refusal) depending on the student placement test, and the students were classified into advanced, intermediate, and lower learners.

The research sought to examine the role of language proficiency in using negative pragmatic transfer. It revealed that LA learners skewed more to use negative pragmatic transfer. However, HAs have the ability to show positive pragmatic transfer in their speech and less negative pragmatic transfer. According to Wannaruk (2008), increasing language proficiency has a significant impact on using speech appropriately. So this study is designed to show also the influence on Arab learners in using speech act of request at different language difference as providing solid insight into the pragmatic competence by Arab learners who are Saudi EFL learners in the current research.

To investigate the effect of language proficiency on using the request act, Cook and Liddicoat (2002) conducted a study by using Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT) disseminated to 100 EFL students. Participants were classified into low and high achievers depending on their results on TOEFL and 50 native speakers of English. The study was conducted to investigate the ability of EFL

students to realize request strategies such as direct, conventional, and nonconventional indirect. This study concludes two findings: 1) native speakers realize request act more than high and low achievers 2) HAs have shown more comprehension to request acts in three types compared to LAs. Hence, there was an evident influence of language proficiency in realizing request acts. The researcher argues that using other methods along with DCT will outline the differences in using the speech act of request clearly and taking into consideration the social variables in using speech acts. However, using only MDCT to gather authentic data might be insufficient, so employing an authentic tool may lead to more precise findings as discourse completion task.

Garcia (2004) studies the ability of second language learners in determining nonconventional indirect requests, offers and suggestions acts. Nineteen native speakers and 56 HA and LA second language learners engaged in this study, which revealed that native speakers and HA scored more points in identifying the suitable utterances in certain request act situations compared to LA. Moreover, the findings also conform to Cook and Liddicoat study, which claimed that HAs are approaching native speakers in realizing the appropriate speech acts. However, Garcia (2004)'s study focused only on the nonconventional indirect requests neglecting other strategies such as direct, internal, and external modification so the current study covers the three request strategies.

Jalilifar (2014) compared Iranian and Australian learners in the realization of the request act. Data was elicited from 96 MA and BA Iranian learners and 10 native speakers of English. DCT was designed to cover social power and distance, including 50 multiple situations. The results showed that EFL learners moved from direct strategy to indirect strategy because of their pragmatic development, and it was observed that advanced learners performed more indirect request acts. In contrast, native speakers of

English described prefer using conventional indirect strategy. All of which reveals that pragmatic competence plays a considerable role in the choice of request strategies.

Regarding social variables, results revealed that EFL students showed a closer realization to native speakers. In contrast with native speakers, EFL learners did not show proper social communication because of their lack of knowledge of the socio-pragmatic background. The current study agreed with Byon (2004), which concluded that higher proficient learners of English develop their performance of politeness strategy in the request speech act.

The researcher inferred that low proficient students did not have sufficient competence of socio-pragmatic in performing the request. Although Jalilifar's (2014) study was important to entail the influence of language proficiency of Iranian, it had a limitation in its methodology. The researcher used only one tool to collect data which is considered insufficient for collecting data regarding pragmatic realization.

Dalmau and Gotor, (2007) attempted to explore the impact of language proficiency in the production of apology act. 78 Catalan students divided into high and intermediate levels according to their results on the placement test and 26 native speakers of English. This study stated that HA performed several apology strategies and a range of lexical intensifiers. However, LAs encounter difficulties in using a pragma-linguistic structure accurately due to their insufficient linguistic knowledge of the target language. Possibly, the reason behind the differences between them is attributed to their mode of thinking that affects their choice of apology strategies. Most previous studies focused on apology acts that require more studies should center on request as considered as part of everyday speech.

Tabatabaei and Farnia (2015) focused on the relationship between language proficiency and pragmatic comprehension of the refusal speech act among Iranian EFL

learners. For this objective, the participants were divided into two groups, namely: high achievers HAs and low achievers LAs according to their proficiency score by giving them a proficiency test so-called as Oxford Placement Test (OPT). After that, a multiple-choice discourse completion task (MDCT) was distributed to both groups to elicit their pragmatic knowledge. Surprisingly, the findings of the study revealed that both groups. Another interesting finding, there is no correlation between learners' language proficiency and pragmatic knowledge. However, this study fails to consider the use of other instruments for achieving the desirable goals, such as Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT) that depends on conversation practice in various situations and at different social status levels as assessing pragmatic performance speed becomes difficult when using MDCT outcome measures. The current research hopes to add more insight into pragmatic research by using DCT and SRQ to investigate the use of request strategies across two groups of proficiency.

Allami and Naeimi, (2011) examined the performance of Iranians in using the refusal act. Thirty students participated in the study classified into upper-intermediate, intermediate, and lower intermediate based on their results in TOEFL. DCT was administered with 12 situations to Iranian and American learners, including social variables (low and high status). The study stated that HA participants show less awareness of social status in refusal situations compared to LA Iranian learners who recognize more the influence of social status. On the other hand, low and intermediate learners tried to transfer from first cultural norms less than upper intermediate who display more pragmatic failure in performing the request act. This study has failed to address the reasons that prompted the participants to fail in using refusal act. Possibly, the employed instrument was insufficient to yield adequate data from the participants.

This section focuses on the consequences of language proficiency on the improvement of pragmatic competence along with other factors. Taguchi (2006) used a role play instrument administered to 59 Japanese learners, and 20 native speakers of English aimed to detect the effect of language proficiency on performing a request act depending on social factors (low and high power). Participants were classified as high and low achievers depending on their scores of TOEFL. The role play included four situations, and the learners' responses were assessed based on appropriateness scale by experienced teachers, which numbered 1-6 in terms of appropriateness in using speech act. This study revealed that LAs gained lower appropriateness scores than HAs, but in situations where power is high, the difference between groups is not significant. Whereas the power is low, both groups use direct utterances. Regarding the performance of request utterances, both groups tended to use fewer mitigation utterances, and increase the usage of hinting expressions.

Moreover, the deviation from native speakers was evidently high for high achiever groups. To sum up, the influence of language proficiency in using the request act is also mediated by social variables. The researcher suggests the importance of using observation to have the chance to observe the participants' attitudes in using request strategy. Using only role play methods in collecting data has some shortcomings which may influence the results that the current research employs two methods DCT and SRQ which may provide authentic results.

Focusing on the learners' production of request act, Félix-Brasdefer (2007) investigated the Spanish students in using direct, conventional, and unconventional indirect. Forty-five learners participated in this study distributed into advanced, intermediate, and beginners according to their course levels. Participants were asked to reply to seven request situations in a role-play scenario. Results show that beginners use

more direct expressions in request utterances contrasted to intermediate and advanced students. In the same vein, HAs employ more convenient indirect requests. Regarding the third type of request strategy, which is unconventional indirect, there was no evident variation in using this type between the three groups. For instance, advance learners used this type with 7%, intermediate 6%, and beginners with 4%. This study concludes that the impact of language proficiency is also affected by pragma-linguistic competence, such as the level of directness. Referring to Félix-Brasdefer (2007), and Taguchi (2006) studies, the limitation of these studies included using few inadequate situations and one tool for each study.

Previous studies reveal a positive impact of language proficiency on performing a speech act from different corners. For example, regarding the negative pragmatic transfer HA performs less negative transfer from their first language compared to LA (Wannaruk, 2008). Furthermore, HAs manifest better in realizing and identifying the appropriate speech acts such as to request in certain situations (Garcia, 2004).

To continue, HAs have the capability to produce a range of strategies in recognizing a speech act by using different pragma-linguistic forms such as contrastive markers, downgrade, and intensifier (Pinto, 2005), and Despite language proficiency has positive leverage on pragmatic competence for HA, this mastery in a language is not guaranteed to be like-native in the production and realization speech acts. The researcher admits the differences between HAs and LAs regarding their use of request strategy. In line with the studies investigating the influence of language proficiency of Saudi learners on pragmatic realization, the current study used TPT to classify groups the students into 2 main groups namely the High achievers – i.e., students who achieved ≥ 44 out of 70 and Low achievers (LA) students who achieved ≤ 43 out of 70.

2.5 Request Acts Studies on Arab Learners of English

Arab EFL students face difficulties and challenges when they are admitted to the university, college, or institution in which the language of instruction is English and/or some of their instructors are native speakers of English. In the Arab context and close to the current study, Ahmad and Maros (2017) conducted a study to examine the use of linguistic devices like hedge and politeness among Arabs from different nationalities when they contact their professors regarding their academic consultations. The aim was to explore the impact of gender on performing these devices. Data were collected by pragmatic questionnaires and one-one interaction (student-professor). Eight Arab EFL postgraduate students studying in Malaysia aged 22-25 years old took part in this research.

The findings revealed a significant appearance of using hedges in their speech, although they have a lack of knowledge of the pragmatic function of these devices. Interestingly, participants manifest awareness of using hedge pragmatically in order to achieve their purpose, which is to satisfy their professors and prevent any hindrances that obstruct their success. However, it is important to note that choosing participants from different countries influences the result and focusing only on the impact on gender neglecting other factors is considered a critical limitation of the study. Therefore, the present study hopes to cover the factor of language proficiency on pragmatic realization in using request act.

Regarding employing written request act via emails by Emirates EFL, Deveci and Hmida (2017) investigated the difference of pragmatic competence between native speakers of English and Arab students in the Emirate in writing emails. To achieve this purpose, data were collected by asking students in response to DCT via email to their professors. Regarding the employment of strategy choice, external and internal

modifier, and discourse strategies, results revealed that there were few significant differences between native speakers of English and nonnative speakers of English in performing these strategies. The limitation arises in the above studies (Ahmad and Maros, 2017 and Deveci and Hmida, 2017) from two angles; few numbers of participants and the participants from different nationalities that may influence the results. This way of gathering participants has been highly criticized by many researchers (e.g., Al-Issa, 2005).

Pertaining to speech acts of request in the Iraqi context, Hussein et al. (2019) adopted a pragmatic study to explore the importance of teaching and developing student's pragmatic competence in using speech act in general and request act in particular situations. Data was collected by audio recorder and observation sheet. The researcher found out that EFL students fail to use pragmatic competence to interact or assimilate request situations. Arab students, as well as Iraqi students, encounter difficulties and challenges in making requests because of the lack of pragmatic competence, and the responsibility is on curriculum makers and teachers which are one of many strategies that may develop and improve student's pragmatic competence and performance.

Moreover, Iraqi learners employ speech acts affected by their first language competence, which might have led to pragmatic failure (Ahmah & Maros, 2017). This study is restricted only to primary stages, it will be more significant if secondary and tertiary stages are included. Because the previous studies stress the school's students, the current research will bridge the gap to investigate the university students.

Al-Khaza'leh, (2018) conducted a study on the pragmatic and sociopragmatic difference in politeness strategies between British and Jordanian cultures. The samples comprised 40 Jordanian non-native speakers of English and 40 Jordanians second-

language speakers compared to 40 British native speakers of English, and all participants were male and their ages from 27 to 40. Data were gathered analyzed through three instruments 1) Discourse Completion Test (DCT) 2) Scale Response Questionnaire (SRQ) and 3) interviews. It is clearly obvious that triangulation methods are beneficial in achieving the desired goals of the research objectives.

Al-Khaza'leh, (2018)'s study aimed to examine if the negative pragmatic transfer is observed from the first language to the second language by Jordanian second-language learners. As a result of the examination, it was observed that the negative pragmatic transfer in producing apology is clear in two fields: the choice of apology strategies and the frequency of performing apology. This study showed similarities and differences among Jordanian and British culture and that Jordanian speech is affected more by social variables (power, force, and distance). Pragmatically, the analysis revealed that British people are more inclined to use indirect strategy of apology, whereas Jordanian people are more inclined to use direct apology. In terms of politeness strategy, he disagreed with Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness. As he claimed, the Jordanian prioritizes the use of positive politeness, but the British tend to use negative politeness. The pedagogical recommendation from Al-Khaza'leh's study is that EFL instructors and course designers should focus on pragmatic knowledge, which encourages students to develop their pragmatic competence and reduce pragmatic failure and miscommunication. Al-Khaza'leh, (2018)'s study fails to shed light on the factors of producing speech act such as apology. It addresses only differences and similarities in producing apology among Jordanian and British learners. The current study is different in terms of the influence of language proficiency on linguistic and social variability.

In respect of Arab EFL learners, Umar (2004) administrated a DCT to conduct a comparative study on request by 20 native speakers of English and 20 Arab EFL students. Participants were from different cultural backgrounds - Saudi, Bahraini, Sudanese, and Egyptian. DCT was coined with nine situations that addressed social power (low, equal, or high) and social distance (stranger or familiar). This unique study was carried out to answer two inquiries as follows 1) how do Arab EFL students perform requests; are there any differences in using request strategies between native speakers and Arab learners? 2) To what extent do Arab learners utilize pragmatic transfer in using speech act of request?

Umar (2004) concluded that Arab students prefer direct strategies compared to their native speakers' counterpart; a preference is obvious when calling a person of lower status. For instance, they use this utterance "*Stop driving like this*" (taxi request situation), whereas native speakers employ a different request in the same situation "*Would you mind driving more carefully*". Arab learners tend to use a high level of directness, as he claimed, because of pragmatic transfer from the Arabic language, which permits using an extreme level of directness with lower status people and close friends.

Additionally, he stated that native speakers of English perform a requested act skillfully, politely and tactfully, and that Arab students use fewer internal modifications compared to native speakers. The researcher recommended instructing students explicitly and implicitly to comprehend the influence of social power and social distance in using request, since Arab students deviated in requested behaviors from native speakers, and to refine these students with pragmatic competence. Regardless of the importance of this study concerning EFL learners' pragmatic behaviors, the study did not address two main aspects of the request act - perspective and supportive moves.

Therefore, this study is inadequate and there is a need for further studies to tackle these two aspects.

In another study, Atamna (2016) attempted to investigate politeness, direct and indirect strategies in the use of request act employed by Algerian students in academic emails. The study was conducted to investigate the common strategies in which proficient students of English exploit request act with regard to social variables and politeness strategies. It mainly examined the correlation between linguistic proficiency and cultural norms of learners and the level of request behaviors. Data were collected within two years, including 80 emails, which were categorized into students' objectives. The researcher found that there was a significant connection between simplicity and explicit request behaviors and proficiency level of students and the effect of their culture on the politeness conception.

According to the CCSARP framework, it was found that the strategy most often employed by learners was the direct strategy with 55.5 %, followed by conventional indirect strategy 40.8%, and the least used strategy was non-conventional strategy 4%. Intrinsically, the reason behind using direct strategy in request act was the learner's dependence on their pragmatic-linguistic competence and socio-pragmatic knowledge. Moreover, the learner's request act was found to be influenced by their cultural norms and pragmatic knowledge and, as he argued, that there is a significant correlation between request behavior of learners and their level of English proficiency. This study is useful in terms of defining the differences between the students who belong to the same culture, but it is preferable if such study concentrated on the spontaneous written request. As such, the information will be more precise and accurate.

For the purpose of examining the Jordanian EFL learners' request realization in terms of pragma-linguistic knowledge (performance) and socio-pragmatic knowledge

(perception) compared to native speakers from America, Al-Momani, (2009) gathered data by distributing 1) Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and 2) Scale – Response Questionnaire (SRQ) to 132 participants classified in three groups 1) 44 native speakers of Arabic 2) 44 native speakers of English and 3) 44 EFL learners. The results indicated that Jordanian EFL learners' speech was influenced strongly by their first language despite their development in using American English.

From the pragma-linguistic angle, Jordanian learners are described as more direct users in making requests than native speakers. Furthermore, the researcher found that Jordanian learners employ negative pragmatic transfer in their selection of perspective and their performance of conventions of forms and means in the domain of conventional indirectness. It was observed that Jordanian EFL learners overused supportive moves when compared to American participants and underused internal modifications such as hedges, and consultative devices. Additionally, the author found that the negative pragmatic transfer of Jordanian participants was evident in their perception of the factor in the right of the speaker to make a request. It is obvious that the use of the speech act of request from Arabic into English might not sound natural for English native speakers because Arab speakers convey the meaning by using their utterances from their first language which is considered as negative transfer. All of which reveals the impact of cultural background in the use of speech act. The study did not take into consideration the variations in students' language level which may influence the results. So, this study may fill the gap by focusing on the influence of language proficiency in pragmatic realization and production.

To investigate the internal and external mitigation devices employed by Australian native speakers of English and Iraqi native speakers of Arabic, Aldhulaee, (2011) exploited the role-play method to collect data, including eight different situations

for both groups. It aimed mainly to discover how speakers of both groups use the structured request speech act in everyday situations and the influence of cultural and linguistic elements and their performance of request mitigation. The results revealed that Australian native speakers inclined to use internal mitigation more frequently than Iraqi learners, whereas external mitigation devices prevailed in both groups.

This prevalence in using external mitigation was interpreted as a politeness strategy. It also showed that the diversity between two groups in their realization of requestive behaviors was due to cultural and linguistic variation between Iraqi and Australian. The researcher suggests that such study is helpful in terms of examining the speech act of request between native and non-native speakers of English. However, employing only one tool such as role play is insufficient to gather authentic data. It would be helpful if the author pointed out the factors on improving pragmatic competence.

From different angles of requestive examination, Rahman et al. (2015) analyzed the use of discoursal, lexical/phrasal, and syntactic request mitigators among Omani learner as advanced and beginners. In order to achieve the goal of this research, the researcher administered a DCT to 30 native speakers, 50 students in level 1 of proficiency and 50 students in level 4 using Fisher's test. This study revealed significant results as follows: 1) although there was a sufficient gap between level 1 and level 4 in studying English, neither of them has the adequate pragmatic competence to perform request mitigators in comparison to native speakers 2) It indicated that employing request mitigators was seen as a linguistic and cultural knowledge. That is, native speakers resort to applying indirectness by using discoursal/phrasal and discoursal mitigators. At the same time, Omani students tried to transfer polite requests directly from their mother tongue. Regarding social variables (power, social distance, and

imposition), it seemed that native speakers were influenced profoundly by these factors when performing the request. In contrast, Omani learners prefer some syntactic mitigates such as modals, regardless of the social variables.

This section concerns mainly on Arab speakers using request act such: as Sudanese (Umar, 2004), Jordanian (Zayed, 2014), Iraqi (Sattar et al, 2009), Yemeni (Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010) Omani (Rahman et al., 2015) and Algerian (Atamna, 2016). In terms of categories, some research categorized interlanguage, cross-cultural differences, politeness, mitigation, and directness. Since the current study focuses on Saudi learners of English to try to fill the gap in literature, the next review will address some studies related to Saudi EFL learners and request act.

2.6 Request Acts Studies on Saudi Learners of English

Pragmatics, as the most important field in learning and acquiring targeted language, is also defined as Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP). Furthermore, ILP concerns the ability of ESL\ EFL learners to understand and to produce speech acts (Kasper, 1992). Despite several research deals with the relationship between ILP and language education in general, the insufficient studies of ILP among Saudi EFL to scrutinize their pragmatic knowledge are still limited. Interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) is the underlying concern of the current study, which has become one of the seminal aspects for linguists when it is adopted in language education (Garcia, 2004; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981).

Competence consensus among linguists that the main part of communicative competence is pragmatic adequacy that educators and learners of foreign language learners should pay specific attention to speech act as part of pragmatic competence. To do so, the study will reveal the learners' pragmatic competence among them, specifically the use of request strategies.

Crystal (1997) indicated that pragmatics is regarded as the study of language from users' perspectives, particularly concerning the choices they make, the obstacles they confront in employing language in social interaction and the impacts of their employment of language on other people during the act of communication. As a matter of fact, pragmatic competence is achieved when the second language learner integrates form, context, force, and meaning. In addition, the necessity to know what to say, how to say, with the level of formality, politeness and directness are essential in this position.

Al-Ageel (2016) conducted a noteworthy investigation on sociolinguistic, linguistic perspective and socio-pragmatic of request act in contemporary Arabic among Saudi women in different contexts to collect a range of varying contexts to gather several practices of requestive behaviors. The researcher divided this study into four main branches - one primary and three sub-branches. The main branch of her study examined politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and shed light on the request speech act realization (Kasper, 1989). It mainly focused on the gender and religion and the influence of social variables of social distance, gender, and level of imposition on request speech act performed by Saudi females. The subjects of this study were female, aged between 20-39 (first generation) and 40-60 (second generation).

For effectiveness and reliability purposes, she used the role-play method to collect data, and gathered data analyzed by T-test and ANOVA. This study found some valuable results, for example, 1) females of both groups prefer using direct strategy in making requests 2) from the sociopragmatic lens, it was concluded that there was a significant effect of the social variables, degree of imposition, power and social status on making requests, 3) it is assumed that there was a firm connection between the level of imposition and performing of negative politeness. 4) Socially, participants prefer

internal and internal modifications, as mitigated requestive strategies, which are employed to strengthen solidarity and display intimacy.

Regardless of the importance of role play in engaging participants to apply content in a relevant, real-world context in which the participants can transcend and think beyond the confines of the classroom setting. It is preferable to use other instruments, such as DCT and SRQ along with this instrument in order to achieve the desired goals. I suggest that the employed techniques were useful in clarifying the tendency of Saudi learners in using request strategy. It helps in obtaining beneficial information that reflects their inclination to use particular request strategies. Consequently, it will serve the purpose of the present study that tackles the differences in pragmatic realization of making requests across high and low SEFL by male.

For the purpose of examining the concept of politeness and (in) directness in request realization among American English and Saudi Arabic, Tawalbeh, and Al-Oqaily (2012) administered a DCT with 12 situations to 30 American and Saudi undergraduate students. These situations were classified according to their degree of directness: non-conventional indirect (N-CI), Imposition (I), and Conventionally Indirect (CI). Interestingly, this research found significant results as follows: American English native speakers inclined to employ direct strategy only in one situation, that is, when they deal with close relatives and friends (-Distance).

Regarding Saudi learners, conventional indirectness was employed by inferiors when they were addressing their boss or superiors. In +Distance and -Power correlations, both speakers preferred independent politeness to decrease the threat and prevent losing face. Both native speakers and Saudi EFL learners resorted to indirect requests to address their superiors' negative face where the hearer was in a higher position than the speaker. Whether the speakers were socially close or distant and

whether the rate of force was low or high, both groups opted not to request directly from their superiors.

It was indicated that there was a negative relationship between social variables and indirectness in + Distance and - power correlations. Pertaining the direct request, it was observed that Saudi learners resorted to directness in situations with their close friends and intimates, and this prevailed with the boss or superior addressing inferiors. It is important to note that these results conflict with Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) claim that the use of indirect strategies among speakers reveals the extent of politeness among them. Tawalbeh, and Al-Oqaily, (2012)'s focused only on direct request so the current research expand to focus on three request strategies (direct, external, and internal modifications) to draw full picture of using request strategies among two groups at different language proficiency.

The study's assumption was consistent with previous studies, e.g., Economidou-Kogetsidis (2013), Al-Marrani and Sazalie (2010), Wierzbicka, (2003), which showed that in different cultures, directness should not be tackled as impolite, but should be considered as a way of showing affiliations, closeness, camaraderie, and connectedness. The employed methodology in this study is useful in revealing the commonly used strategies of request among native and non-native speakers. This study is a comparative study between native and non-native speakers of English, so the current research sheds light on the individual differences according to the language proficiency in making request acts.

Altasan (2016) investigated a contrastive analysis of using requests between two Saudi learners of English from different academic levels; one a 27-year-old male intermediate learner of English and the other a 24-year-old female advanced learner of English. To this end, DCT was used. The data were analyzed in the light of external

modification (supportive moves) and internal modification (phrasal and lexical downgrade).

Regardless of the high performance of the advanced learner in terms of using lexical items and grammar competence compared to the intermediate learner, it was found that both learners (advanced and intermediate) underused external and internal modifications in contrast with the native speaker. The finding revealed that intermediate learners employ 4.5 % of internal modification, whereas 5.4% was used by advanced learners. Native speakers used 6.5% of internal modification. It is preferable to use other methods along with DCT and SRQ to validate the responses of the participants. Owing to the reason that using several methods will achieve the optimal results.

Rouissi (2014), moreover, showed that SEFLs have different pragmatic failures, thus, the author suggests applying more communicative approaches as elements of EFL instruction for the purpose of overcoming such pragmatic failures. For instance, using direct request with a hearer in high status may be considered as impolite that cause misunderstanding such as “*write recommendation letter for me*” (S7, LA#32).

Most importantly, the existing English Language teaching (ELT) is not considered enough for EFL students to achieve pragmatic knowledge. In this respect, Elyas and Picard (2010) critically investigated education history in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its effect on modern teaching practices. The study criticized the education in Saudi Arabia by employing critical reflexivity and their social local knowledge as a method of questioning practice, related texts, and research of the field.

As stated by Ageel (2016) and Qari (2017), instructors of English language in universities, colleges and schools revealed that Saudi learners find obstacles in producing request act appropriately in the target language. It was noticed, as researchers

claimed, Saudi students switched to their first language in using speech act and they tended to direct utterances as direct expressions might be easier and simple, for example, asking a calculator “*give me your calculator*” (S11, LA#11) instead of “*could you give me your calculator? I promise I will return it back as soon as I finish using it?*”

(S11, HA#43). (See Appendix 11). Likewise, Qari’s (2017) conducted a study on politeness research and teaching English as a second language by examining the speech act of requests and apologies as generated by Saudi Arabic native speakers, Saudi English as a foreign language (EFL) learner, and British native speakers. Her study is consistent with the current study in terms of tackling the speech act among Saudi EFL learners, but it differs from the current study in terms of tackling other aspects of speech act, namely, request as well as in encompassing two groups from different cultures. The findings of her study pointed out that Saudi EFL learners inclined to use direct speech act. Unlike British Native speakers who tend to use indirect speech act. This imbalance between two dimensions of language will lead learners to study and pay more attention to linguistic knowledge. The producing of inappropriate utterances because of insufficient knowledge of pragmatic competence (Qari, 2017).

The discussion of the Saudi context based on previous studies seems to be more focused on examining the similarities and differences between Saudi context with British (Qari, 2017), and Saudi with American (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). Some studies comprise request, apology, and politeness (Alsulayyi, 2017; Qari, 2019). Some of this literature addressed one or two strategies of the request such as internal or external modifiers (Altasan, 2016), the directness of indirectness (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). Pre-post head Act techniques (Al-Gahtani & Alkahtani, 2012). Some studies neglected the other strategies in making requests such internal and external modifications.

Therefore, there is a need to focus on the request acts and examine it profoundly from different angles. Furthermore, few studies have been conducted on the effect of language proficiency in a student's pragmatic realization. As a result, the current study reveals the level of language proficiency on making a request. Hence, this study hopes to fill this gap in the literature in order to shed light on this issue that is tackled from a different perspective including pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. However, this study attempts to employ two instruments, which are DCT, and SRQ to investigate request act among learners from different language proficiency.

2.7 Saudi Arabia Education System

Formal education consisted of two educational stages, primary and secondary since the foundation of the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia in 1923. The education developed in Saudi Arabia to encompass three educational stages school, college, and university. Several studies (Elyas & Al Grigri, 2014; Al-Seghayer, 2014) indicated that English was first introduced, throughout the period 1928-1942, into the primary education, students were taught English once a week. Some scholars (Elyas & Al Grigri, 2014; Al-Salloum, 1991) pointed out that English in the intermediate level was introduced during 1942-1980 with three classes weekly, followed by secondary level with five classes weekly (1980-2003).

Since 2003 until today English education in Saudi Arabia encompasses primary stages, intermediate stage, and the secondary stage. Since the initial introduction of EFL in schools, educational policies and plans have been adjusted various times responding to several factors. The status and function of English has extended significantly in the education system, responding to the rapid growth and development of the Saudi economy.

Despite of the tremendous efforts of the Ministry of Education, students still have weakness in using English in their speech. Generally speaking, students learn English in order to pass exams, and thus the verbal and written communication levels of the majority of secondary school graduates who studied English for about nine years still face difficulty in using English in undergraduate stage. According to several studies (Al- Zahrani, 2008; Al-Seghayer, 2005, 2011, 2014; Shah et al., 2013; Elyas & AlGrigri, 2014), the majority of them are unable to engage in basic conversation and very weak in English.

As a result, one of the interests of English education programs going forward needs to be enhancing learners' pragmatic competence. Throughout the last decade, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches have been executed by the Ministry of Education in state schools to overcome these deficiencies and enable Saudi EFL students to engage purposefully in learning English. There is no doubt that a range of language functions have been improved in the syllabi, with the addition of contexts that learners might encounter. However, students still struggle to engage in basic communication, particularly with NSEs, who continue to abound in the industrial, economic, and military cities of Saudi Arabia.

On the other hand, Al-Ghamdi and Al-Saddat (2002) indicated that Higher education institutions have sought to play a leading role in enhancing English education in the country. The higher education sector established the Scholarship Preparation School, in Mecca in 1936. Most importantly, it was the first high school to teach EFL in the country, to prepare Saudis striving to continue their studies abroad after continuing their formal education.

First English department was established in 1957 (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014; Al-Haq & Smadi, 1996) at King Saud University founded, and EFL departments were

instantly added to Saudi higher education foundations. The whole Saudi universities (approximately 35 registered universities) teach English as a subject in EFL departments, teaching EFL courses in several departments, and adopt English as a means of instruction for Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Science, disciplines, and Technology. English departments at Saudi universities deliver four-year first degrees in EFL, entailing students to take intensive English language instruction along with other courses in linguistics, literature, and translation.

In other academic disciplines, the majority of the students take five to ten semester courses in English during the duration of their studies. EFL departments are, in most cases, also responsible for teaching EFL courses to the other departments and faculties. Nevertheless, most of Saudi EFL departments rarely teach pragmatics, which is one area that this study entails higher education providers would benefit from them.

In general, Al-Seghayer (2014) pointed out that higher education foundations have sought to assist in providing Saudi students with acceptable communicative competence in English and to compensate for the weakness of English instruction in formal education for the poor proficiency levels. Nevertheless, a number of primary difficulties continue to confront the teaching and learning of English in Saudi Arabia, such as the lack of daily relevance of English to people's lives and needs, the components of the curriculum itself, the use of poor teaching methods, and the lack of qualified and committed teachers.

According to Rouissi (2016) one of the main shortcomings, manifested recently, is that Saudi learners of English do not have enough knowledge to define the suitable utterances in different situations. They have revealed a relative weakness to use English in an effective manner in context resulting in cross-cultural miscommunication, so-called pragmatic failure. For the purpose of overcoming the above-mentioned shortfalls

in local education, and to help implement economic policies and enhance English instruction in the country, the Saudi government has founded ESL scholarship programs as discussed later.

Similarly, Almulla (2018) carried out a study concerning education in Saudi Arabia. The study indicates that the educational process in Saudi Arabia confronts significant challenges concerning teacher awareness, school resources, school curricula and student discipline. Also, teacher's abilities to influence school curricula and resources might be limited since these factors are typically influenced by other academic stakeholders like the Saudi government. His study demonstrated the nature of education in Saudi Arabia by reviewing related literature.

To clarify, governmental institutions in Saudi Arabia still have significant administrative control over all fields of the national education system and this has sometimes negatively impacted the quality as well as the enhancement of educational practices at different levels. In fact, this is one of the primary causes behind the lack of self-criticism in Saudi society. Assuming 'why-questions' is still considered as a form of rebellion and generally regarded as culturally unsuitable, negative, and prone to pose difficulties among people. It should be mentioned that the current study resembles Almulla (2018) study in terms of addressing the issue of education in Saudi Arabia, while it differs from the current study in terms of addressing such issue from teachers' perspectives. However, the current study is concerned in revealing the influence of English Language Proficiencies on pragmatic realization and strategies of making requests across Saudi Arabia's EFL learners regarding high achievers and low achievers.

Various educational and non-educational governmental institutions in Saudi Arabia have designed their own scholarship programs to enhance the English levels of

Saudis, and to ensure they are adequately qualified. Institutions offering scholarships contain Saudi universities, the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, the Ministry of Civil Service, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Defense and the Saudi National Guard, and the Ministry of the Interior (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014; Al-Ghamdi & Al-Saddat, 2002; Al-Abed Al-Haq & Smadi, 1996).

Another important scholarship program is The King's Scholarship Program (KSP), which is run by the Ministry of Education and targets students interested in studying abroad. The King's School Programs is considered one of the largest scholarship programs in the Middle East; it was founded in 2006. It sends a huge number of Saudi males and females to study abroad each year for studying English speaking countries. It seeks to produce graduates who will become instrumental in the success and sustainability of Saudi universities and to benefit the public and private sectors.

The program is also designed to bring to fruition the latest economic policies to enable Saudis who have finished their studies abroad to apply for jobs and positions within the governmental and non-governmental sectors, promoting their social and economic prospects, and helping them communicate with expatriates, who constitute around 30% of the population. It is a sample of such a group of young Saudis studying English in the United Kingdom that constitute the ESL group studied for this research.

It is very important to admit that the Saudi community as any society follows the technology which forces them to recognize and grasp English in everyday life not only in academic issues but also in business, hospital, hotels, conferences and more. Despite the importance of the Arabic language as the formal and official language in this community, which is the language of the Holy Quran and it is connected with Saudi's identity, the Ministry of education presents English in primary, intermediate, and secondary stages when pupils are at the age of 11 years old; fourth grade (Aljohani,

2016). Therefore, understanding this issue and adopting some measurements to improve the students' pragmatic skills at the undergraduate level may lead to more professional communication with native speakers and evade any inconvenience and misunderstanding in the future.

Khankar (2001), Fareh (2010) and Elyas and Al Grigri (2014) conducted studies on SEFL learners and their obstacles in using English, it is noticed students leave secondary stages with minimum ability to make successful conversation in English. Khanakar (2001) stated the most problematic issue in secondary stages are due to some reasons such as, the curriculum puts the focus on the vocabulary and grammar competence with little focus on cultural aspects of the target language used outside classrooms, regarding contents, the content does not help students to improve student's self-learning.

Finally, few interesting topics are inserted in the curriculum with scant modern teaching aids employed in classrooms. Hence, it is crucial that teachers and curriculum makers should provide language activities in such a way that students can relate these to their everyday situations. For example, Schneider (2005) supposes creating community problems, issues and matters into the classroom because "it provides an opportunity to make learning more engaging and relevant because students have the opportunity to understand new material in terms of their own lives and realities" (p. 298).

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of theories related to speech acts and pragmatic, Interlanguage pragmatics, politeness, sociopragmatics, and pragmalinguistics. Additionally, In the context of Arab and Saudi learners, comparative

studies of the linguistic forms of request realization between the EFL Arab and Saudi speakers to that of the native speakers of English were addressed (Alaoui, 2011; Al-Ali and Alawneh, 2010; Al-Marrani and Sazalie, 2010). Furthermore, studies on the influence of language proficiency in production and realizing request acts were also highlighted (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Niezgodna & Roever, 2001; Shardakova, 2005; Takahashi & Beebe, 1993).

The current study might be significant in terms of pinpointing the aspect of proficiency and how that affects the performance in making request speech act. In other words, it specifically investigates the impact of the level of language proficiency and the influence of social variables on making requests in academic contexts. To this end, this study adopted Discourse Completion Task (DCT), and Scale Response Questionnaire (SRQ) because they are reliable and authentic since they are used widely in the field of speech act, and they were utilized to achieve the research questions as mentioned in the following chapter.