A SOCIOPRAGMATIC STUDY OF CAREGIVERS’ REQUEST SPEECH ACT REALISATION PATTERNS IN ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FOSTER CHILDREN

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Abstract

Previous studies indicate that foster caregivers often disregard foster children’s academic progress as they have difficulty in understanding the education system (Zetlin, Weinberg, and Shea, 2006; Watson & Kabler, 1997). This phenomenon may affect the academic performance of the foster children as studies have shown that they lack knowledgeable and reliable academic support in the foster home (Watson & Kabler, 1997). As such, the motivation for this study is to examine the caregivers’ realisation patterns of speech act of requests in addressing the academic needs of foster children so that they would be able to provide educational inspiration to these children. The narratives elicited from the semi-structured interview data are analysed based on Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989) Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Patterns (CCSARP) and Takahashi’s (1996) Preparatory Expression Model. The caregivers are found to employ indirect expression, direct and overlapping linguistic expressions when making requests. The frequent use of indirect expression serves to provide strong hints, suggestions, and mitigate the caregivers’ requests, which is clearly seen by the use of contrastive markers, conjunctions, and hedges. Further, direct expression entails wants statements, imperatives, and obligation statements to reinforce the caregivers’ request, which is evident when they employ intensifiers, idioms, and modal verbs. In voicing their concern about the academic needs of the foster children, caregivers make requests for the need of tutors, consistent and continuous financial support, and frequent motivational programmes.

KEYWORDS: LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS, REQUEST SPEECH ACT, FOSTER CAREGIVERS, MALAYSIA

Introduction

Foster children mostly lack knowledgeable and reliable academic support in the foster home (Watson & Kabler, 1997). Most foster caregivers lack knowledge in terms of the foster children’s academic strengths and weaknesses and are unable to provide educational inspiration to these children (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2004, p. 422). According to Zetlin, Weinberg, and Shea (2006), children welfare agencies often disregard foster children’s academic matters as they have difficulty in understanding the educational system; similarly, teachers also appear to encounter the same problem in comprehending the children welfare system. They further assert that social workers disregard the foster children’s academic progress due to large caseloads and high yearly turnover rate (ibid., p. 170).

In Malaysia, students who have excellent academic achievement have been given best possible educational curriculum to enhance their potential, in hoping to make the country a fully industrialised nation by the year 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2006).

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On the other hand, those who do not excel for example, foster children have not received the academic attention that they need (Dykstra & Kucita, 1997). As such, it is imperative that this study aims to investigate foster caregivers’ concern and their realisation patterns of speech act of requests in addressing the academic needs of foster children.

Related Literature on Speech Acts of Request

Austin (1962) defines speech acts as “actions performed when an utterance is produced” and classifies them into locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. He asserts that interlocutors mostly use a performative verb in an utterance to make the illocutionary force explicit. Based on Austin’s work, Searle (1969) proposes five macro-classes of speech acts, namely, declarative, representatives, directives, expressives, and commissives.

The act of requesting is classified under directive acts as it directs hearer to perform tasks (Cutting, 2002, p. 17). Fukuya et al. (1998) and Fukuya and Clark (2001) were among the researchers that conducted studies on requests, specifically in terms of comparing learners’ ability in making requests. Similarly, Takahashi (2001), and Dastjerdi and Rezvani (2010) explore the effects of teaching EFL learners in making requests. Nevertheless, those studies emphasise more on the context of language learning and teaching.

The Use of Modal Verbs in Making Requests

Modal verbs consist of various types, such as ‘can (possibility)’, ‘may (permission)’, ‘must (obligation)’, and ‘have to (necessity)’ (Leech, 1983, p. 87), and they are linked with different meanings. For instance, when a speaker stresses obligation or necessity with the modal verb ‘need to’, it is also to some extent related to the modal verb ‘must’ and ‘ought to’ or ‘should’ (Leech, 1983, p. 101). Besides, one of the functions of using modal verbs is to mitigate or reinforce an utterance. To illustrate, speaker can use the modal verb ‘should’ to soften a directive illocutionary force and give advice or moral obligation (Boicu, 2007, p. 10).

Malaysian speakers often opt to employ the past tense of modal verbs when making requests, as it appears to be more polite (Tongue, 1979; Suraiya Mohd Ali, 2002). However, Boicu (2007) reveals an opposing finding when his study on Ashley Mote’s political speech shows that modal verbs are adopted with the aim to aggravate the illocutionary forces and threaten other’s face.

Mitigation Devices

Speakers mitigate when making request to avoid being rejected (Abdolrezapour & Eslami-Rasekh, 2012). When speakers try to mitigate the face-threatening act, it involves using mitigation devices (Abdolrezapour & Eslami-Rasekh, 2012) such as external and internal modifiers (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

Blum-Kulka (1985) states that internal modifier occurs within the request itself (e.g. Could you possibly close the door?) and to satisfy one’s positive face. The external modifier, on the other hand, is largely used to make request directly and acts as an optional clause (e.g. I missed the bus, could you give me a ride?). At the same time, it also satisfies one’s negative face as speakers can be persuasive in getting hearers to do something for them.
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Intensifiers

Besides mitigation devices, intensifiers are also found in requests. To illustrate this, the utterance ‘I would really appreciated it’ in Beltran’s (2014, p. 92) example shows that the intensifier ‘really’ is embedded in the request.

Previous studies show that intensifiers have often been the focus of studies on speech act (Ghanbaran et al., 2014; Dastjerdi & Nasri, 2013). According to Quirk et al. (1985), there are two categories of intensifiers, namely, amplifiers and downtoners. Amplifiers can act as maximisers (e.g. absolutely) or boosters (e.g. very); while downtoners act as approximators (e.g. nearly), compromisers (e.g. quite), diminishers (e.g. slightly), or minimisers (e.g. hardly) (Quirk et al., 1985). Both Lakoff (1975) and Olsson (2000) claim that intensifiers serve to boost the language.

Several studies on intensifiers are related with Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989) Cross-Cultural Speech Acts Realisation Pattern (CCSARP) framework. Afghari (2007), in his study on the transformation on the use of intensifiers in Persian and English language, adds two intensifiers (i.e. hope for forgiveness and swearing) to the Cross-Cultural Speech Acts Realisation Pattern’s (CCSARP) list of intensifiers. Similarly, Moghaddam (2012) found that Persian and English speakers express their condolences based on Blum-Kulka and Olshain (1984) categories of intensifiers: double intensifiers (e.g. I am very sorry), multiple intensifiers (e.g. I am so very sorry), implicit intensifiers (e.g. It broke my heart), explicit intensifiers (e.g. I am so sorry), and adjectival intensifiers (e.g. I extend my sincere sympathy). Since previous studies have shown that CCSARP framework by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) is suitable to code and analyse linguistic expressions, this framework will be used to analyse the data in this study.

Methodology

The theoretical framework employed in this study is Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989) Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Patterns (CCSARP) and Takahashi’s (1996) Preparatory Expression Model. Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989) CCSARP have been commonly used in coding the different directness levels of linguistic expressions, especially in the speech act of request. This framework consists of three levels of expressions in making request, namely, direct, conventional-indirect, and non-conventional indirect (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). A direct request can be identified through the lexical, grammatical, or semantical choice in the utterance (e.g., "Please get me a glass of water."). Conventional indirect request can be identified when speaker uses fixed linguistic conventions to mitigate the illocutionary force of the request (e.g., "Could you get me a glass of water?"). Lastly, a request is categorised under non-conventional indirect request when the utterance contains partial reference of the requested act (e.g., "Do you have a glass of water?") (Taguchi, 2006, p. 514).

The following are the types of expressions classified under each level of linguistic expressions:

(a) Direct Requests
   - Imperatives
   - Performatives
   - Implicit Performatives
   - Obligations
   - Want Statements
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(b) Conventional Indirect Requests
- Preparatory
- Suggestions
- Permissions (Takahashi, 1996)
- Mitigated Preparatory (Takahashi, 1996)
- Mitigated Wants (Takahashi, 1996)

(c) Non-Conventional Indirect Requests
- Strong hint
- Mild hint

This study also adds three preparatory expressions proposed by Takahashi (1996), which include preparatory questions, permissions questions, mitigated-preparatory, and mitigated-wants, in order to provide a more in-depth analysis.

Sample of the Study
A total of five foster caregivers from two selected urban foster homes located in the Klang Valley area in Malaysia were interviewed. Snowball sampling method is used when the caregivers from the first foster home recommended their acquaintances of the second foster home. These foster caregivers, whose age ranges from 31 to 66, comprised of three Malays, a Chinese and an Indian (see Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of Foster Caregivers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Caregiver</th>
<th>Years of Working Experience in the Home</th>
<th>Ethnic</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>G1</td>
<td>6 Years</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G2</td>
<td>2 Year</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>G3</td>
<td>18 Years</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G4</td>
<td>12 Years</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G5</td>
<td>5 Years</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only two of the caregivers (G3 and G4) have more than 10 years of experience working in the foster care system.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures
Prior to the data collection, verbal consent from the foster caregivers was obtained and a brief introduction about the aims of the research was provided. They were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity of the given responses.

The semi-structured interview questions, adapted from the Center for Social Services Research project (CSSR) by Choice et al.’s (2001, p. 41), was used for the five interview sessions. The 125 minutes of recorded data were transcribed based on an adapted version of Jefferson Transcription Conventions (1984) and any utterances in Malay language were translated to English. The data were qualitatively...
analysed using content analysis in which occurrences of speech act of requests in addressing the academic needs of the foster children were coded according to the theoretical framework presented earlier.

Data Analysis and Findings

The findings reveal that the caregivers employ both direct and indirect linguistic expressions when making requests. Overlapping linguistic expressions were also found in their requests (see Table 2).

Table 2: Levels of Linguistic Expressions in the Foster Caregivers’ Requests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Linguistic Expressions</th>
<th>Frequency of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Direct Expression [Want Statements] + Indirect Expressions [Non-Conventional Expressions (Strong Hint)]</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Indirect Expression [Conventional Indirect (Suggestions)] + Indirect Expressions [Non-Conventional Expressions (Strong Hint)]</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Direct Expression [Imperatives]</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Direct Expression [Want Statements]</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Indirect Expression [Mitigated Wants]</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Indirect Expression [Strong Hint]</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis begins with direct expression [want statements] + indirect expression [non-conventional expressions (strong hint)] since this strategy is the most prominent among the caregivers’ requests.

*Direct Expression [Want Statements] + Indirect Expressions [Non-Conventional Expressions (Strong Hint)]*

Excerpt 1

[1] G2: I would send them all for home schooling / but the money is the issue over here / okay / why / like I said er
[2] majority of them have already lost out / and erm / private schools / their standard is higher / okay / so even the ones that are doing well / I don’t see why they shouldn’t be in a private school setting / okay / it’s good for them /
[3] okay / so that’s the first thing I would do / or I would try to get in more tutors / currently we are very stretch /
[4] there are still a few more kids who don’t have tutors /
[5] a few subjects were not covered /

G2, in Excerpt 1, claims that home school will benefit the foster children in improving their academic performance. She repetitively employs the modal verb ‘would’ in lines 1 and 7, which can be labelled as a want statement as the caregiver expresses her wish in a direct manner. Additionally, the utterance
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‘I don’t see why they shouldn’t be in a private school setting’ in lines 5 and 6 can be taken as G2’s positive view in supporting her claim about placing the foster children in a private school.

Nevertheless, G2 states the barrier of carrying out the task when she employs the contrastive marker ‘but’ in line 1 to signal a contrary proposition associated with her wish. Although the noun ‘stretch’ (line 8) literally refers to the act of extending something without tearing it apart, in this context of use, it refers to the lack of funds in employing more tutors for the foster children. The intensifier ‘very’ (line 8) adds reinforcement to the noun ‘stretch’, which emphasises the constraint. G2 further justifies the consequence of the financial issue as an additional reason in the utterance ‘there are still a few more kids who don’t have tutors’ in line 9, which can be considered as a strong hint to indicate the need of financial aid.

Excerpt 2

[1] G3: We have to read to them / that’s why I said I need somebody to come / you cannot take all / oh ramai sangat ni / there’s a lot / there’s a lot /

[2] bila you tengok ada ramai yang er tuition kita pun I hire / when you see there’s a lot the tuition I even hire / when you see there’s a lot I even hire tutors (for them) / I paid them four of them sini / jangan anggap the four can here / don’t assume here / don’t assume

[3] semua / tak boleh / as I’ve told you earlier all / cannot /

[4] teach all of them / cannot /

[5] budak-budak need attention / one-to-one / three children these children

[6] yang paling banyaklah / the most /

[7] the most /

In Excerpt 2, G3 requests for volunteers to tutor the foster children. She employs the modal verb ‘need’ in the utterance ‘I need somebody to come’ (lines 1 and 2) to emphasise her request in aspiring for volunteers to help the foster children, which can be taken as a want statement. G5 once again adopts the modal verb ‘need’ (line 6) to strongly hint the crucial move to provide attention to the foster children.

Excerpt 3

[1] G4: Kem motivasi sekarang lebih kepada keseronokan pergi Motivation camp now is more towards fun and

The current motivation camp is more towards fun and

[2] mencari benda / macam tak berapa jiwa / and then kalau searching for things / like not really soulful / if searching for things / like not really effective / if

[3] motivasi tu / pergi tengok kat luar / the motivation / go see the outside / for motivation / go and see the outside (world) /

[4] orang lebih susah / patut bersyukur /
G4, in Excerpt 3, claims that motivational camps these days aim at entertaining the children instead of enhancing their motivation in learning. The utterance *saya nak mereka rasa macam tu* (I want them to feel that way) in lines 6 and 7 can be taken as a want statement as G4 employs the modal verb *nak* (want) to express her wish to enhance the foster children’s interest in learning.

However, the contrastive marker *tapi* (but) in line 13 signals a contrasting remark from G4’s earlier suggestion in organising a motivational programme for the foster children. The utterance *kami tak mampulah* (we cannot afford) in line 14 is a strong hint, which refers to the help needed financially for executing the motivational camp for these children. The need for financial support is further strengthened by the use of the particle –lah.
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Indirect Expression [Conventional Indirect (Suggestions)] + Indirect Expressions [Non-Conventional Expressions (Strong Hint)]

Excerpt 4

[1] G1: First / change all the staff first / that’s the first thing / okay /
[2] get very good staff / of course to get that / I would have to
[3] maybe pay a little bit better in terms of getting good staff /
[4] okay / er then maybe have staff that will specifically really
[5] really look into their education / not just doing the
[6] housework / maybe a staff that is solely looking / right now
[7] I’ve actually got a staff that’s starting to do that / looking
[8] into of the educational aspect children / yeah / third one is
[9] er / what would I change ah / what would I change /
[10] children / yeah / er I don’t know I can’t
[11] think of any third one / two main ones lah / get somebody to
[12] be very involve / yeah / maybe also to get the children to
[13] know more educational / and things like that lah / get them
[14] to er have more educational / we’ve tried online education
[15] programme but again it falls back to not enough people to
[16] supervise them / because some of them / they go online /
[17] they can’t even read / you know / can’t even understand / so
[18] I still need the monitoring / yes / I still need the supervisors /
[19] again it falls back to the staff /

G1, in Excerpt 4, is highly concerned about the foster children and uses the intensifier ‘really’ (line 4) to emphasise the need to monitor their academic performance. The use of multiple lexical choices, such as the adverb ‘specifically’ (line 4), ‘solely’ (line 5) and the phrase ‘very involve’ (line 10), highlights the necessity to appoint a staff member who takes charge to fully monitor the foster children’s academic performance and more importantly, he or she is not involved in other tasks. The repetitive use of the hedge ‘maybe’ (lines 3, 4, 6, and 12), however, mitigates the force of his suggestions.

In lines 15 and 16, the utterance ‘not enough people to supervise them’ can be taken as a contrasting remark from G1’s suggestion due to the lack of staff members. Additionally, he repetitively uses the modal verb ‘need’ in line 18 as a strong hint to reinforce his direct request for the provision of more caregivers to manage the foster children.

Excerpt 5

[1] G4: I’ve told you the background is different / so the persepsi
perception
[2] dia nak accept this one is also different / unless we focus in one or
he wants
[3] two children / we focus in their education / we focus in their
[4] kasih sayang / but as I’ve told you / I got thirty illiterate for the past
affection
love
[5] two years / you cannot overcome everybody / tak boleh / as long as
cannot

In lines 1 and 2, G4 mentions the difference in perception and uses the modal verb ‘accept’ (line 2) to suggest that accepting the current situation is crucial. In lines 3 and 4, he focuses on the educational aspect and acknowledges the past experience of thirty illiterate children. The phrase ‘as long as’ (line 5) is used to imply a condition for overcoming the problem, reinforcing his suggestion for adequate caregivers.
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[6] they know how to read and write / for me / dah pandai baca
/ already smart in reading
/ even if he is good in reading
[7] tak buat karangan / tak pandai yang ni /
not doing essay / this is not smart /
but he doesn’t know how to write an essay / he’s still not good /

In Excerpt 5, G4 also claims that foster children need to be monitored in terms of their academic pursuits. In line 2, the conjunction ‘unless’ serves to suggest an alternative for the lack of attention given to these foster children. The use of contrastive marker ‘but’ (line 4) indicates a contrasting remark from G4’s earlier suggestion, which hinted strongly on the need of academic support to help overcome illiteracy amongst children in foster home.

Direct Expression [Imperatives] + Direct Expression [Obligation Statements] + Indirect Expression [Strong Hint]

Excerpt 6

[1] G5: Number one cut down on this Islamic classes first / ah
[2] that’s one / number two / we cannot do the classroom stuffs /
[3] not with the children / because they’re all / they’ve different
[4] diverse background / you know / or what they’ve went
[5] through in their lives / so you’ve got to do a lot of like what
[6] I’m doing / erm the most two / but of course I understand
[7] where do we get the people to do that / to teach / and having
[8] that compassion / patience / the last one is the learning
[9] environment / they must understand / we cannot teach the
maths where you have this classroom in open areas like this
[10] one group / that one group / er because of my
experience as general manager / teaching is not like
[11] something to be done / or something to occupied a certain
number of hours / no / you must have okay / how about the
comprehension? / evaluation / was I effective in teaching
the kids? / did they get what I want them to get? / all these
[12] so far now are not questions / it’s just that on and on and on /
[13] okay / I hope they’re okay / results as you can see not okay /
[14] you can see the pattern you know when it comes to the seni /
art
[15] they are very good / when come to ugam / they are
religious subject
[16] very good / or not so good / it’s like er not even fifty fifty /
[17] it’s like forty sixty / some score sixty something / some score
forty something / or Arabian some tend to get well / sixty and
[18] some no / so it’s still not / but the the non er let’s say the
non-crucial area / they’re I would say sixty percent are strong /
but that’s not the important areas that will make them pass
[19] or fail / so er / yeah but even Islam taught us / you need to do
something for the duniawi and the akhirat / so now we’re
worldly hereafter
[20] not balance / er okay / they’re good in this / but er but also you
can see forty sixty regions / some scored forty percent / some
less than forty / some scored sixty percent / but that is not
[21] enough to make them go to university or college of Islam / not
In Excerpt 6, G5 stresses that there is a need to improve the foster children’s performance in core subjects. The speech act of directive can be seen in line 1 when G5 uses the phrase ‘cut down’ to urge the teachers to reduce their emphasis on religious subject. Instead, the modal verb ‘must’ (lines 9 and 14) is used to reinforce his obligation statements in highlighting the crucial move of understanding the way to teach children in foster care. In lines 34 and 35, the utterance ‘something got to be done here’ may be considered as a strong hint to indicate G5’s indirect request for the school teachers to focus on improving the foster children’s performance in core subjects.

Direct Expression [Imperatives]

G5, in Excerpt 7, gives an imperative expression with the utterance ‘focus on the Maths and Science lah for heaven’s sake’ (lines 4 and 5) to emphasise the importance in helping the foster children with their core subjects.

Excerpt 7

[1] G5: Right now is more of Waqafat / another Islam religious
[2] subject / co-cu / that’s all / and I notice they / to be honest
[3] they sembahyang solat sembahyang solat / here got so much pray
have prayer
[4] teaching of Islam already isn’t it / focus on the Maths and
[5] Science lah for heaven’s sake you know / they don’t /

Further, the particle -lah and the idiom ‘for heaven’s sake’ in line 5 boost the illocutionary force of the need to focus on the core subjects. It also signals G5’s frustration on the lack of attention that children in foster care receive on their core subjects resulting in their poor academic performance.

Direct Expression [Want Statements]

Excerpt 8

[1] G3: I really want a committed people / genuine and sincere
[2] to come / that is the only way / educate them / focus in
[3] their study / if you’re good in Maths / let’s say you’re
good in Maths / you cannot get all the ninety fifty children /
[4] maybe you can study with standard four five six / groom
[5] them / really give them the education / make them happy to
[6] do the Mathematics / or even like Bahasa Malay language / focus / okay /
[7] I want everybody in standard two or standard three / just
[8] focus / then train them / they will train the others / that is
[9] what is proven / it’s proven /
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In Excerpt 8, G3 uses the intensifier ‘really’ in uttering her want statement and further strengthen the illocutionary force of the modal verb ‘want’ (line 1) in hoping to get committed volunteers to help tutor and guide the foster children. The multiple adjectives used such as ‘committed’, ‘genuine’, and ‘sincere’ (line 1) share the same sentiment on asserting her wish on getting volunteers who are devoted to the cause. G3 further intensifies her assertions and uses the verb ‘focus’ (lines 7 and 9) in grooming the children so that they, in turn, would be empowered to help other children as well.

Indirect Expression [Mitigated Wants]
Excerpt 9

[1] G4:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Utterance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>erm / saya kalau ni / kalau kita ada kemampuanlah / / me if / if we have the ability / / if it is me / if we have the ability /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>kalau boleh / ada kelas tuition / kalau kita ada kelas tuition \ if can \ have tuition class / if we have a tuition class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>kalau boleh / ada kelas tuition / kalau kita ada kelas tuition \ if can \ have tuition class / if we have a tuition class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>yang khas untuk mereka / macam satu guru tuition tu / specifically for them / like a tutor / specifically for them / like a tutor /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>yang khas untuk mereka / macam satu guru tuition tu / specifically for them / like a tutor / specifically for them / like a tutor /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>kalau boleh / ada kelas tuition / kalau kita ada kelas tuition \ if can \ have tuition class / if we have a tuition class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>kalau boleh / ada kelas tuition / kalau kita ada kelas tuition \ if can \ have tuition class / if we have a tuition class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>kalau boleh / ada kelas tuition / kalau kita ada kelas tuition \ if can \ have tuition class / if we have a tuition class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>yang khas untuk mereka / macam satu guru tuition tu / specifically for them / like a tutor / specifically for them / like a tutor /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>yang khas untuk mereka / macam satu guru tuition tu / specifically for them / like a tutor / specifically for them / like a tutor /</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In lines 1 and 2, G4 repetitively employs the conjunction kalau (if) to express her wish on providing a tuition class specifically for the foster children, which can be labelled as mitigated-wants expression when her request is embedded in the clause structures (kalau kita ada kelas tuition yang khas untuk mereka (if we have a tuition class specifically for them)). G4 further justifies the importance of her claim to reinforce her request with the utterance supaya mereka lebih fokus dalam subjek akademik (so that they are more focus on the academic subjects) in lines 4 and 5.

Indirect Expression [Strong Hint]
Excerpt 10

[1] G3: er usually for yang ini / subject yang dia itu / Maths kut / this / that he maybe this issue / that he (is weak in) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Utterance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>maybe Maths / that’s why I tekan dengan Maths / BM / press with / Malay language / emphasise on / Malay language /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>dia ada ni sekarang ah yang rasa ada masalah sikit he has now the one with the little problems he has now the one with the little problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>in terms of apa tu ni lah apa tu macam kalau BI BM / what is that like if English Malay Language / like if the English and Malay Languages /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>it’s because they are from er dia bukan from standard one they are not they are not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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[6] good excellent / bila dia masuk darjah lima darjah enam / / when they enter standard five standard six / / when they enter standard five or standard six /

[7] you know / they have to start dengan karangan / so with essays / with writing essays /

[8] itu yang kita er actually we need some er focus in studylah / that is what we that is what we

[9] they are weak in English Maths BM / Malay language / Malay language /

In Excerpt 10, G3 believes the foster children need help with the subjects they are weak in. The verb tekan in line 2, in this context of use, refers to the act of emphasis, which indicates her effort in helping the foster children with their studies. G3 can be seen employing the modal verb ‘need’ (line 8) to put forth her view on the crucial move of improving the foster children’s core subjects such as Mathematics, English language, and Malay language, which could also be a strong hint to request for volunteers to help the foster children.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Based on a small sample size, the realization patterns of caregivers’ requests speech act differs. The findings show that the caregivers prefer to use more indirect than direct expression. As reflected in Table 3, strong hint is the most prominent in the caregivers’ requests.

Table 3: The Categories and Sub-Categories of Linguistic Expressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Linguistic Expressions</th>
<th>Frequency of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Indirect Expression (n=10)</td>
<td>Non-Conventional Indirect (n=7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conventional Indirect (n=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Direct Expressions (n=7)</td>
<td>Want Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The caregivers tend to express the positive view of their wish and employ the contrastive marker ‘but’ to hint the constraints that deterred them from carrying out the tasks they want. They sometimes make suggestions and mitigate their wants to avoid being too explicit; thus resort to giving partial reference which has to be inferred based on the context to accomplish the tasks.

Analysis of the data also reveal that direct expressions are used when want statement is highly adopted by caregivers in making requests. Modal verbs such as ‘would’, ‘need’, and ‘want’ are frequently employed by them to state their wishes. Nevertheless, the data reveal that there are overlapping expressions when the caregivers use indirect expressions such as strong hint to mitigate their direct expressions (want statements) in conveying their intentions to seek help.
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Table 4: The Types of Linguistics Features Use in the Foster Caregivers’ Requests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Linguistics Features</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Modal Verbs (need; would; should; must)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Contrastive Markers (but; tapi (but))</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Intensifiers (really; very)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Conjunctions (kalau (if); unless)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Hedge (maybe)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Idiom (for heaven’s sake)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Table 4, the use of modal verbs is the most prominent feature used in speech act of request (n=4); this is followed by the use of contrastive markers (n=2), intensifiers (n=2), conjunctions (n=2), hedge (n=1), and idiom (n=1). Modal verbs such as ‘need’, ‘would’, ‘should’, and ‘must’ are common in their requests. Consistent with Tongue (1979) and Suraiya Mohd Ali (2002), the foster caregivers tend to use modal verbs in making polite requests to address the academic needs of children in foster care.

The caregivers also use intensifiers such as ‘really’ and ‘very’ to strengthen the illocutionary force of their utterances on wanting committed volunteers to help the foster children in their weak subjects, which is in line with Quirk et al.’s (1985) categories of intensifier that act as a maximiser or booster. This finding further supports Lakoff (1975) and Olsson’s (2000) claim that intensifiers serve as a boosting device. However, the difference that lies between making requests in Malay and English is the use of particle –lah (see Excerpt 3 and 7), which serves to intensify the need for financial support and the need to focus on improving the foster children’s academic performance in core subjects. This is also seen as a diplomatic way to express frustration on wanting so much to help the foster children.

Besides, the caregivers provide alternatives in aspiring to eradicate the problems by using conjunctions kalau (if) and ‘unless’ to state their wish. One foster caregiver uses the idiom ‘for heaven’s sake’ to emphasise the need to provide more attention on the foster children’s performance in core subjects. In addition, the contrastive marker tapi (but) is employed when the caregivers complain about their inability to accomplish the tasks, such as the lack of funds to provide motivational programme for these children.

The study shows that the foster caregivers rely heavily on hinting expressions to minimise offence or lessen the face-threatening act when making request. They appear to politely voice their concerns by making requests to get devoted volunteers to help foster children with their core subjects, to obtain financial support and to organise motivational programme. It is, therefore, important to recognise the issues caregivers are laden with through their direct and indirect requests in order to provide support on the academic needs of foster children.

References


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