

## The Speech Act Of Arabic Request In WhatsApp Messages In Workplace

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### Abstract

This study explored the strategies of the speech acts of request and the supportive moves employed in WhatsApp messages in the workplace by instructors with their superiors. The speech act of request has been investigated broadly in Arabic in face-to-face communication. However, few of these studies explored the use of requests in online communication and the workplace. This topic is important to study because it is sensitive and can lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication and threaten relationships in the workplace. Therefore, a total number of 82 WhatsApp messages were collected from 30 males and 52 females of Arabic native speakers at a university in Saudi Arabia. The messages were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively to explore strategies, supportive moves, and gender differences regarding acting at the request of their superiors. The results found that the instructors in the workplace employed direct and indirect strategies of request. However, indirect strategies were the most frequent, especially when using strong hints. Different supportive moves were also used, but the greeting was the most frequent way to show solidarity with superiors. The instructors used grounders more than IFID and imposition minimizers to mitigate supportive moves. The influence of gender was found in the indirect strategies primarily used by females than males, alongside the supportive moves. The latter was used more frequently than the request strategies to mitigate the request, reflecting instructors' awareness of pragmatic competence when making requests. That was used to avoid misunderstanding, maintain relationships, and accomplish communicative goals with superiors in the workplace.

**Keywords:** Arabic; Gender; Requests; Speech Act; Supportive Moves; WhatsApp; Workplace

### INTRODUCTION

Within the scope of speech acts, requests play a crucial role in achieving effective interaction. For example, in an official and professional setting, they assist in facilitating task completion while establishing position and rank hierarchy and establishing responsibilities between different parties in the communication. They reflect the immediate needs of the speaker. In addition, the complex interplay of other factors like politeness strategies, organizational norms, and interpersonal relationships in the workplace come to take part in shaping the required interaction. Yin and Kuo (2013) point out that these requests usually come with a level of indirectness in platforms like WhatsApp, unlike professional emails for example, where more direct requests are expected (Leopold, 2015) in order to maintain politeness and avoid conflict. However, it is important to balance direct and indirect communication strategies to achieve clarity and

understanding in professional interactions. In other words, the subtleties of formulating requests can significantly influence the efficiency and harmony of workplace interactions.

As a theoretical background for speech acts, they can be defined as the actions performed by speakers through their utterances. These acts play an important role in communication, as it is through which speakers tell a message, convey their intentions, and achieve specific goals in their communication. In other words, this theory examines how the interpretation of meaning beyond the literal meaning of words that can differ based on the communication context. Austin (1962) categorized speech acts into three categories. First, locutionary Acts, which merely refers to only producing sounds and words in a language. This category involves the physical act of speaking which includes pronunciation, grammar, and meaning of words. The second category is illocutionary Acts, which refers to the actions intended behind speaking which includes asking questions, giving commands, making a request, etc. The last one is perlocutionary acts which refers to the effects of the speech act on the listener. It refers to the consequences of the speech acts on the listener.

Searle (1969) presented his expansion of Austin's Speech Acts theory. In fact, he added a distinction between the different types of illocutionary acts and introduced the assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations concepts. These basically explain that speech is not about only conveying information, but about performing various actions, like asking, promising, expressing feelings, etc. In addition to this expansion, Searle (1969) had also introduced felicity conditions which are necessary for a speech act to be considered valid or appropriate. According to Geurts (2019), speech acts help both sides of the interaction coordinate their actions so a smoother and meaningful interaction in communication. In other words, by performing requesting, apologizing, promising, etc., interlocutors not only achieve their goals of the communication but also maintain societal norms. Roulet (1984) highlighted the function of pragmatic connectives in tying together discourse constituents, underlining the significance of speech acts. Also, Sbisà (2002) emphasized the dynamic character of speech acts in forming the communicative context by reorienting speech act theory towards a context-changing perspective.

Among other concepts, the speech act of request plays a crucial role in the field of pragmatics. Using the speech act of request, the speaker attempts to elicit a specific action or response from the listener. In his/her pursuit for the action response, the speaker directly or indirectly asks for their request. Research into directness and indirectness in the speech act of request shows cross-cultural variations. According to Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012) for example, American English speakers tend to favor conventional indirectness, while, on the other hand, Saudi Arabic speakers vary their strategies based on social variables like social status, power dynamics, gender, relationship between speaker and listener and some other factors. The status of a person making the request and the one being addressed influences the level of directness. A younger to an elder or a subordinate to a superior means more indirect requests. A female requesting a male is expected to be more indirect especially in formal contexts which reflects modesty and avoiding being perceived as overly assertive (Tatton, 2008; Yazdanfar & Bonyadi, 2016).

Communication in the workplace, among office mates or between employees and their senior staff members has evolved through drastic shifts from the traditional face-to-face interaction to more electronically mediated forms, i.e. email, to, finally, arrive at a more digital format, i.e. messaging apps like messenger, WeChat, WhatsApp, etc. While

emails bring communication that is asynchronous in nature, it continues to keep some levels or formality. With the advent of WhatsApp and similar apps, communication has become more informal and the lines between professional and personal interactions blurred which, in a way, presents challenges in tone, clarity, boundaries, etc. between interlocutors.

According to Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez (2018), communication in digital platforms can be as authentic and spontaneous as the natural face-to-face offline one. An advantage to the digital one is the ability of communicators to plan, edit, and organize before sending, i.e. conveying the message (Locher, 2010). This enhances clarity and politeness and leads to less issues that might occur in natural communication. Yet, a downside to the communication on digital platforms is the absence of established guidelines in regards to writing messages on platforms like WhatsApp. Thus communicators may face uncertainty regarding appropriate language and politeness forms. While addressing Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model and strategies to manage politeness, Yus (2011) pointed out that these strategies are essential for online interactions, where there is a lack of non-verbal cues like tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language are limited compared to face-to-face interaction.

Previous studies on WhatsApp have addressed social, educational, interpersonal, and other similar aspects of WhatsApp. On the other hand, the research focused on WhatsApp messages' pragmatic characteristics remains limited. This has been pointed out by studies like that of Baron (2010), Al-Rahmi et al. (2015), and Yus (2017) or even more recent ones like that of Mwanda (2022) and Manji et al. (2021). Baron (2010) pointed out that more focus needs to be geared towards pragmatic nuances that are relatively unexplored. Similarly, Yus (2007), highlights that attention should be paid to how meaning is conveyed through nonverbal tools like emojis, stickers, and gifs for instance. For this, studies like that of Bimo (2021) found out that the use of stickers by millennials, as a means of self-expression, helped in the transition from in-person to virtual communication. Al-Rahmi et al (2015) and Manji et al. (2021) believe that pragmatic elements like turn-taking, politeness, indirectness, conversational implicature, etc. should receive more attention from those interested in the field.

As a very commonly used application, WhatsApp has added some features to the language used in communication. For example, it allows for sharing verbal language elements from both written and spoken styles (Bieswanger, 2013; Dynel, 2016; Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018). Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez (2018) pointed out that messages in WhatsApp are written as if spoken. In other words, the language usage closely resembles spoken discourse. The transfer of orally oriented discourse to the written form adds some sort of a hybrid characteristic to the language used in WhatsApp. This is usually coincided with the use of emoticons or emojis, which replaces physical actions and emotions in the communication (Derks et al., 2008; Rezabeck and Cochenouor, 1994). These features and their ability to compensate for real face to face communication were pointed at by Blanco Rodríguez (2002) as the "ability of adaptability and colonization of human communicative competence in any medium" (p.79).

For the speech act of request in online communication, most of studies on speech act of request discussed the topic in a university context in online communication. For example, Aseeri (2021) found that in communication via e-mail between male and female students with the lecturers, female students make up for the absence of direct face-to-face

access to their male lecturers using different emailing behaviors. For instance, they tend to write more justifications in their requests. Generally, there was a clear difference in relational communication, for example, small talk and compliments. Aseeri (2021) pointed out that the language used shows variation in the way communication is laid out. For example, when using Arabic, students' mother tongue, they use lengthier sentences with more detailed justification that reflected the ease of use of the language.

For instance, Deveci and Abbas (2023) extended the analysis to identify the strategies of speech act of request and supportive moves in email writing between Emirati students and professors in Arabic, using a discourse completion task. The results found that students used most frequently direct strategies with spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary mistakes and grammatical errors, alongside with informal language use in some instances. Most of the students relied on supportive moves, such as thanking expression, grounder, and small talk as external modifiers with the strategies of request.

Also, Munkova et al. (2013) studied the impact of language used on the speech act of request in written forms between students and teacher. They compared requests written in the participants' mother tongue, such as Slovak and the foreign language they speak that is English. They found out that requests made in the native language tend to be less direct than those in the foreign language. Based on the study, these differences are rooted in the culture and linguistic norms associated with each of the two languages. It is a common politeness strategy in Slovak to avoid imposing on the requestee by using compliments and pre-sequences that soften the impact of the request. On the other hand, when using English, interlocutors preferred more direct requests which are expected to add more clarity and efficiency to the communication. In brief, language difference impact on request here is due to the distinct cultural norms and politeness strategies that influence how requested are created in each language.

Several studies of pragmatics addressed cross-generation variation in various aspects of speech acts (Bella & Ogiermann, 2019; Fukushima, 2011; He, 2012; Hong, 1996; Roels & Enghels, 2020; Zhang & Wang, 1997). Hong (1996) and Zhang and Wang (1997) are in line with the cross-generation variation and pointed out that gender, along with social status and social gap play as important factors when producing requests. Research shows that gender has a crucial effect on the production of requests. This is, perhaps, because each of the two genders employs distinct strategies that are guided by socialization and cultural norms within the society. For example, females tend to use more mitigated and deferential request forms as they usually prioritize politeness and indirectness. On the other hand, as men are socialized to assert dominance and independence, they become more direct and assertive as a result. Sikder (2021) found out that female participants made about 62% requests in comparison to 37.5% requests by males among Bangladeshi students within online classrooms. Not only higher, also female requests according to the study were characterized with more politeness than that of males'.

However, it is important to point out that a few studies found out that there are no statistically significant differences between males and females in directness when making requests. For example, Hobbs (2003) analyzed data from voice mail messages in a legal setting. She found out that both male and female participants show roughly equal politeness markers in their requests. García (1993) found out that although there were some differences in the degree of politeness where females making requests are more than males, these differences were not statistically significantly gender-based differences in

politeness strategies. Đenana and Osmankadić (2019) investigated gender differences in politeness strategies among Bosnian native speakers, who came from various socio-economic backgrounds. Requests in the study were directed towards various hypothetical situations and involved different types of interlocutors including people in a higher and lower position or social power as well as peers. The study findings indicate that both male and female participants used the same politeness strategy, specifically negative politeness in most situations.

For the speech act of request on social media, many studies have investigated the use of speech act of request on social media such as WhatsApp and WeChat. For instance, Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez (2018) addressed the fact that WhatsApp messaging holds no specific linguistic rules in regards to what politeness strategies are to use in what situations. The researchers analyzed 82 WhatsApp messages sent by 60 Spanish teachers in two different groups. They examined how politeness is expressed through the form of address used, opening and closing of a conversation, and the level of directness used. The researchers found out that indirect strategies were used (more than 80%) and a lot of modification to the language used was implemented. Examples of the indirect strategies include using polite greetings and expression of gratitude when making requests. In addition, solidarity-building greetings were more preferred than formal or deferential types of address. Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez's (2018) also emphasizes the use of syntactic modification and the presence of opening and closing sequences in WhatsApp interactions among Mexican Spanish speakers. While the study does not specifically focus on workplace communication between employees and their supervisors, it does provide insights into the use of politeness strategies and linguistic forms in WhatsApp discourse among the participants, i.e. Mexican Spanish speakers.

Also, Liu et al., (2021) investigated how age difference plays a role in the use of request strategies by younger and older Chinese. Their study was on social media in general with a focus on the Chinese version of WhatsApp that is WeChat. They specifically studied how the social status of the interlocutor (higher or lower) affects the request strategies and what modifications to use. The study found out that both age groups showed a preference for using the direct request strategy. Yet, social status (higher or lower) has had a clear effect on the external and internal modification of requests within each age group. For example, the older group used more direct requests and fewer conventionally indirect requests in comparison to the younger one particularly when addressing higher-status interlocutors. However, the authors indicated that some observed differences in request strategies between the two age groups could be ascribed to influence of the societal changes in China which in a way also got affected by the Western culture especially on the younger generation.

In addition, Alharbi and Aldaghri (2024) investigated the number of words and the type modification devices used by Saudi female postgraduate student in face to face communication and WhatsApp text-based interactions, using a discourse completion task. The results found that the participants used more words in WhatsApp than face to face communication. Also, the participants produced external modifiers more than internal ones. It was found that the grounders were used more frequently as an external modifier whereas interrogatives and politeness markers were used more frequently as internal modifiers. The researchers infer that modification devices are obligatory, not optional in Saudi culture.

For the speech act of request in workplace, requests, as a speech act, play a role that cannot be ignored in everyday workplace communication. Their importance comes from the fact that they help maintain effective interactions and ensure smooth organizational operations. Various studies have addressed the topic and explored how different cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds influence the way requests are made in professional settings like workplace. Previous Studies found that interlocutors used a nuanced approach to managing power dynamics and impositioned levels in making requests in workplace (Moussa Farrag, 2022; Idris & Ismail, 2023; Joo, 2024; Rue et al. 2007; Sindy, 2014)

For example, Idris and Ismail's (2023) focused on Malay speakers of English and found that employees in the workplace used internal modifications in requests when communicating with others of equal power. On the other hand, they used more external modifications in high-imposition contexts. Joo (2024) found that participants used a mix of socio-pragmatic norms from both German and English. Being bilingual could explain how the participants showed more direct when using German. Generally, the participants used hints predominantly with those in higher positions which reflects strategic adaptation to interlocutors differences. Similar results were found by Rue et.al (2007) where Koreans tend to use indirect request strategies more frequently with those higher in power. These lessened as the power rank of the addressees decreased.

In addition, Sindy (2014) investigated whether the structure of the language and the gender of the customers making requests influence the way the request was made. The study revealed that while both tended to use direct, imperative request strategies, females tended to lean to more indirect and polite approaches than males. This finding asserts the idea that gender plays a significant role in shaping communication, particularly in making requests. Other studies in line with this assertion (Al-Abbas, 2023; Habibi, 2017; Leopold, 2015; Macaulay, 2001; Mobaraki & Jahromi, 2019).

Moreover, Liu et al., (2021) implied that request strategies can vary in the context of workplace based on the social status of the interlocutors involved. They pointed out three strategies in their study, direct requests (e.g., imperative or want statements), Conventionally indirect requests (e.g., query preparatory), or non-conventionally indirect (e.g., by giving hints for example). Generally, the study showed that although requests depend a lot on the social status of requester and requestee, older groups in workplace used more direct requests (with a ratio of 3 to 1 (75.86% and 22.41%) than younger ones 1:1 (55.17% and 44.83%). When using direct requests, external and internal modifications were used to mitigate the force of the request. An example of the external ones is adjuncts like address term (e.g., director ...) and the internal ones is lexical downgraders (e.g., please) and syntactic ones (e.g., if it is ok...). The researchers believe that such modifications help maintain politeness and manage hierarchical dynamics in workplace communication.

Furthermore, Moussa Farrag (2022) investigated the positive and negative strategies and the influence of the faculty's years of experience on the speech act of request by female faculty members in western region in Saudi Arabia. The researcher used a discourse completion test in collecting the data. The researcher found that social power which was defined based on having more years of experience influenced the strategies of request. The results found that the older generation employed more extended sentences more than younger colleagues in request to reduce the sense of their social power and to save their colleagues' face. Also, it was found that the older generation

employed strategies of politeness. Finally, it was found that conditional phrases were used to reduce face-threatening acts as in "if it is not going to bother you". The researcher interprets the more use for indirect politeness strategies as a way to convey respect.

The previous literature suggests that employing politeness strategies, like indirect requests, can play a significant role in maintaining positive relationships and friendly, yet professional, work environment. On the part of employees, understanding the nuances of politeness in such online communication platforms helps employees conduct interactions with their bosses in a respectful and professional manner. In light of all of that pointed out above, the researchers of this current study believe that the gap in understanding the use of request in Arabic in workplace in WhatsApp message needs to be filled by this study. The medium of WhatsApp messaging is a widely used platform for workplace communication. WhatsApp's text-based, asynchronous nature offers a unique venue for examining how written speech acts are constructed and interpreted in a professional context. What makes WhatsApp unique is that it is devoid of non-verbal cues.

Based on the studies in literature review, using speech act of Arabic request in workplace has not been investigated yet based on using naturalistic data, especially in WhatsApp. The previous contributions on Arabic request on WhatsApp was conducted by using a discourse completion task, not naturalistic data from WhatsApp or they were on students or only one gender. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap about the use of speech act of request in online communication in the context of workplace. In particular, it aims to explore the types of request strategies in terms of directness and indirectness and the supportive moves that accompany the speech act of request, and gender differences. The following questions will be answered what are the types of direct strategies used by instructors in WhatsApp in Workplace? What are the types of indirect strategies used by instructors in WhatsApp in Workplace? What are the supportive moves used by instructors in WhatsApp in Workplace? What are the similarities and differences between male and female instructors in the use of request strategies and supportive moves in WhatsApp in Workplace? The researchers, also, hope that findings of this research will also bring about valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of professional communication in the digital age.

## METHOD

To conduct this study, the researchers collected WhatsApp messages that include requests in Arabic from instructors to their superiors. The messages were sent and received by the same gender of instructors and superiors. Data collection took place within both male and female departments in a public university in the middle of Saudi Arabia. Data was collected from 82 instructors (52 females and 30 males) from three distinct departments: The English, the Sciences, and the Computer skills and Self-Development Departments. It means that 82 WhatsApp messages include requests were collected, with a total number of 1462 words and an average of 17.82 words. The participants were master's and PhD holders who came from various Arab countries in the Middle East. In the academic setting of the workplace at the departments, a lot of daily workplace interaction take place via WhatsApp. As for requests, they are typically made for daily workplace-related matters such as for leaves, requesting changes in schedule times, and other departmental matters.

Prior to collecting the data, IRB procedure was conducted and approval was obtained from our university. Data was collected from only those who agreed to share

their WhatsApp request messages to their superiors. The researchers ensured that confidentiality and ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to. Superiors were asked to share only the WhatsApp messages including requests and not including the names of the instructors who sent the request messages in an Excel file. Although implied above, it is important to point out that data was collected from superiors and not from the instructors. This method was employed to maintain the authenticity of the data and ensure that the messages were not altered or manipulated.

### Data analysis

To analyse the strategies of speech act of request, Blum-Kulka's et al. (1989) model of the types of request strategies was adapted in this study to explore how instructors make a request when they interact with their superiors on WhatsApp messages in workplace. The researchers added two new categories to accommodate the Arabic online request on WhatsApp to the current model: questions and nominal requisites. Also, the supportive moves were identified such as greeting, grounder, Alerter/attention (e.g. address terms), IFID (e.g. excuse), imposition minimizer, small talk, closing, softeners, thanking, which were used as mitigators. The researchers conducted several rounds to code the strategies of request and the mitigating supportive moves. Regarding discrepancies, they were resolved through discussion between the researchers. For coding the data and extracting the frequency, the Microsoft Excel was used. Pseudonym was used where is needed instead of using the real names for the superiors in the request for privacy. The Arabic examples from WhatsApp messages were used without changing in the spelling mistakes in the section of results. Also, the transliteration and translation were provided for the Arabic examples. The following table provides a detailed discussion of the levels of directness, including direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect strategies.

**Table 1. The Level Of Directness For Request Strategies (Blum-Kulka et al.,1989)**

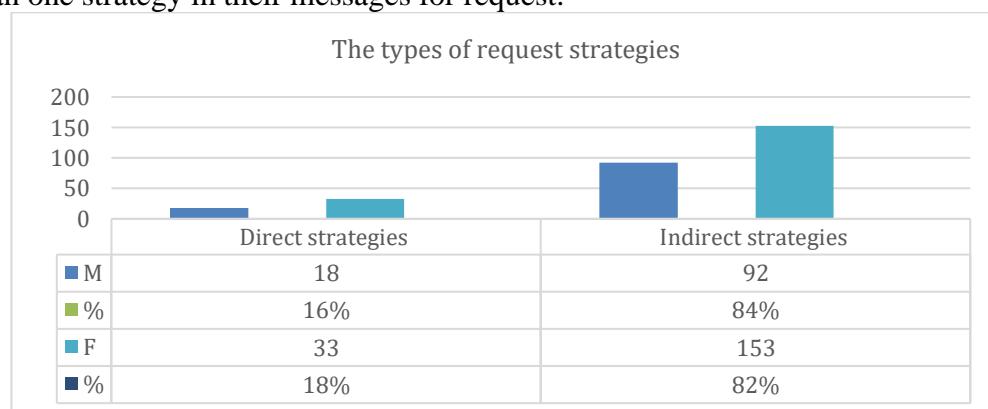
Strategy	Definition	Example
<b>Direct strategies</b>		
Mood derivable	The request is indicated by the grammatical mood of the verb	Help me with my computer.
Performative	The request is explicitly named.	I am asking you to move this chair.
Hedged performative	The request is modified by hedging.	I would like to ask you to give me more time to submit my assignment.
Obligation statement	The hearer's obligation to carry out the task is explicitly stated.	You will have to come on Monday.
Want statement	Indicates the speaker's desire that the hearer perform the task.	I really wish you'd postpone the exam.
<b>Conventional indirect strategies</b>		
Suggestory formula	The speaker makes a suggestion for the hearer to perform the task.	How about typing this letter?
Query preparatory	The speaker inquires about the possibility of carrying out the request by the hearer.	Can you open the window?
<b>Non-conventional indirect strategies</b>		
Strong hints	Explicit reference to an object necessary for completing the task is made.	You left the door open.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section illustrates the construction of speech act of Arabic request in WhatsApp in workplace in four subsections. The first one shows the types of strategies in terms of directness and indirectness. The second one illustrates the different types of direct strategies. The third one illustrates the different types of indirect strategies. The fourth one shows the supportive moves that were used with the speech act of request. Gender differences were compared in each subsection.

### The Types Of Request Strategies

According to Figure 1, the instructors used both direct and indirect strategies when they request something from their superiors. However, employing *indirect strategies* (245 times: 83%) were used more than *the direct strategies* (51 times: 17%) (see Figure 1). Also, the total number of strategies, 296 strategies, means that the instructors utilized more than one strategy in their messages for request.

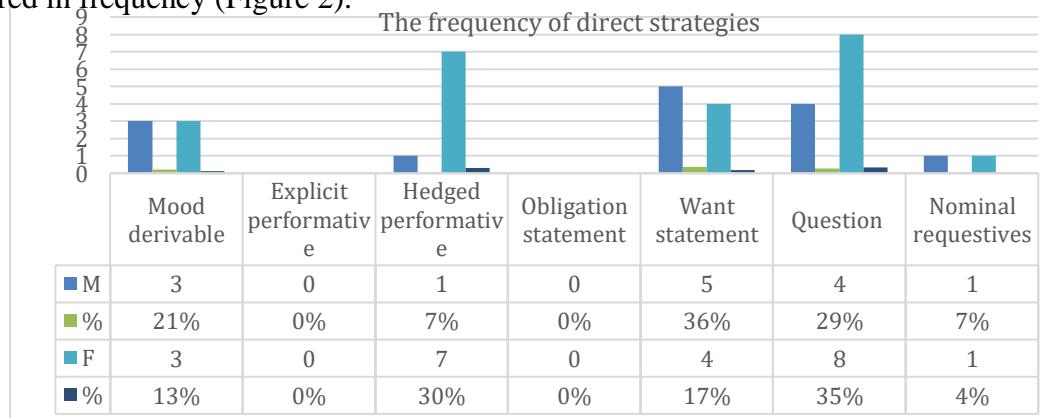


**Figure 1. The Frequency Of The Types Of Request Strategies In Whatsapp In Workplace**

Regarding gender differences, the female instructors used more *indirect strategies* (153 times: 82%) than the male instructors (92 times: 84%). Also, the female instructors used more *direct strategies* (33 times: 18%) than the male instructors (18 times: 16%). Although both genders employed *the indirect strategies* more than *the direct strategies*, the female instructors used more strategies than the males in each type.

### The Types Of Direct Strategies

The instructors used five different types of strategies. Those strategies also differed in frequency (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. The Frequency Of Direct Strategies In Whatsapp In Workplace**

For instance, using *question* as a direct request strategy was the most frequent one that was used 12 times (32%) by the instructors (see Examples 1-2). The examples show yes/no question and WH question that needs to provide information.

**Table 2. WH Question That Needs To Provide Information and The Types Of Indirect Strategies**

Question		Mood derivable	
Example 1	هل عند حضرتك اي updates	Example 10	ارسل لي ايميل
	“Sir, do you have any updates?”		“send me an email”.
Example 2	ايش اللي حصل؟	Example 11	كلبي الشركة
	“What happened?”		“call the company”.
Want Statement		Example 12	شوف لي احدى الاخوات تغطي لي القاعة
Example 3	باليت لو ترسل لي...		“find one of our colleagues to cover my class”.
	“I wish you send me ...”.	Nominal requestives	
Example 4	أبي...	Example 13	في طالبتين عندي
	“I want ...”.		“there are two students. Any advice”.
Example 5	فأرجو ...	Example 14	للتذكير
	“so I hope ...”.		“for reminder”
Example 6	أحتاج...		
	“I need...”.		

However, using question was used most frequent by female instructors (8 times: 35%) than the males (4 times: 29%), which is less than the half of the strategies that were used by the females. *Want statement* was the second most frequent strategy (9 times: 24%) (see Examples 3-6)’

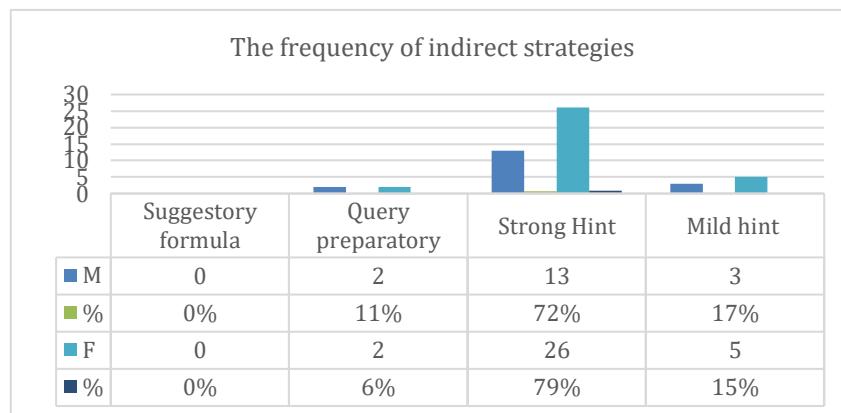
*Want statement* was used by male instructors more than the females; however, it shows a slight difference between males and females in frequency. It was used 5 times (36%) by males, but it was used only 4 times (17%). *Hedged performative* was the third most frequent one (see Examples 7-9).

*Hedged performative* was used 8 times (22%), and it was used more frequently by the female instructors (7 times: 30%) than the males, who used it only 1 time (7%). *Mood derivable* was the fourth most frequent strategy (6 times: 16%), followed by *nominal requestives* (2 times: 5%) (see Examples 10-14). *Mood derivable* was used with softeners that are discussed later.

Interestingly, both of the strategies were used equally by males and females, that are 3 times and 1 time, respectively. Also, two types of the direct strategies were not used by anyone of the instructors, such as *explicit performative* and *obligation statement*. The reason is the nature of relationship between the instructors and the superiors in terms of power and social distance.

### The Types Of Indirect Strategies

The instructors used *the conventional indirect*, which include suggestory formula and query preparatory, and *non-conventional indirect* strategies, which include strong and mild hint. However, they differed in frequency as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. The Frequency Of Indirect Strategies In Whatsapp In Workplace**

According to Figure 3, using the *non-conventional indirect* strategies (47 times) were used more than the *conventional indirect* ones (4 times). For the non-conventional indirect strategies, using *strong hint* (39 times: 76%) was used more than *mild hint* (8 times: 16%) (see Examples 15-16).

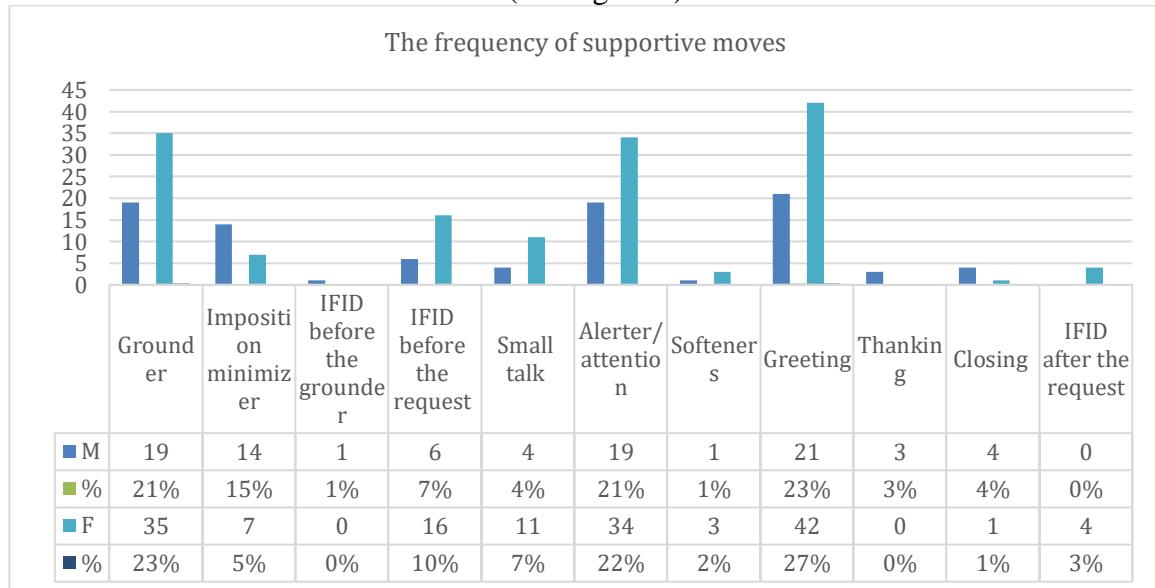
**Table 3. The Types Of Indirect Strategies**

Strong Hint		Query preparatory	
Example 15	بخصوص الصيفي لاني ما اتذكر انك سجلت اسعي في الكشف	Example 17	ممكن أوصل المستشفى نصف ساعة وجاي؟
	“Regarding summer course, I don’t remember that you have added my name in the list”.		“can I go to hospital and come back in half an hour”
Mild hint		Example 18	أستاذة (اسم رئيسة القسم) فيه طالبة عندها سؤال ممكن تجين؟
Example 16	أنا وزميلي تعطلت بينا السيارة في الطريق، وحاليا منترين أحد يساعدنا		“professor (name of chairwoman of department), there is a student who has an inquiry. Can you come?”
	“My colleague and I had a car break down on the road. Now we are waiting for someone to help us”.		

Also, the female instructors used *the strong hint* (26 times: 79%) more than the males (13 times: 72%). In addition, the female instructors used *mild hint* (5 times: 15%) more than the males with a slight difference (3 times: 17%). For the conventional indirect strategies, *query preparatory* was used 4 times (8%) (see Examples 17-18). However, *suggestory formula* was not used in the data. Interestingly, *query preparatory* was used equally by the male and female instructors, that is 2 times for each gender.

### The Types Of Supportive Moves

The instructors used supportive moves with the direct and indirect strategies. Those moves were different in frequency across all the different types of moves and across the male and female instructors (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4. The Frequency Of Supportive Moves In Whatsapp In Workplace**

According to Figure 4, 11 types of supportive moves were used in the speech act of request with a total number 245 moves. It means that the instructors employed more than one move in each request, similar to strategies of request in terms of employing more than one strategy in the request. Using *greeting* was the most frequent move that was used 63 times (26%) (see Examples 19-21).

**Table 4.**

Greeting	Small talk		
Example 19	السلام عليكم	Example 30	كيف حالك دكتورنا
	“peace be upon you”		“Our professor, how are you?”.
Example 20	صباح الخير	Closing	بارك الله فيك
	“Good morning”	Example 31	“May Allah bless you”
Example 21	مساء الخير		جزاك الله خيرا 
	“Good evening”	Example 32	
Grounder			“May Allah reward you  ”.
Example 22	عندی سخونۃ وصداع صعب والله ما أقدر أدائم بکره	Example 33	خالص الشکر والتقدير
	“I have a fever and a headache. Indeed, it is difficult to come to work tomorrow”.		“Sincere thanks and appreciation”
Alerter/		Softeners	

attention			
Example 23	دكتور	Example 34	لا هنت
	“professor”		“May Allah not humiliate you”
Example 24	يابروف	Example 35	ولأ عليك أمر
	“Professor”		“unforcefully”
Example 25	أستاذة (اسم رئيسة القسم) Professor (name of chairwoman)	Example 36	بالله “by Allah”
Example 26	يا جميلة	<b>IFID after the request</b>	
	“You beautiful” (a compliment to address the chairwoman between the female instructors)	Example 37	اليوم بغيض لأنني تعبانية ويعتذر جدا غصبا عَنِي
Example 27	أمولة (اسم مصغر ومستعار لاسم أمل)		“I will be absent today because I am tired. I apologize indeed. It is against my will ”
	Ammulah (it is a pseudonym for diminutive to address the chairwoman between the female instructors).	<b>Thanking</b>	
<b>IFID before the request</b>		Example 38	اشكرك كل الشكر
Example 28	السلام عليكم ورحمة الله, انا باستاذن اليوم لأنني مريضة (الضغط مرتفع) ما عندي مراقبة ولا احتياطي		“I thank you indeed”
	“Peace and Allah's mercy and blessings be upon you, I excuse because I am sick, and my blood pressure is high today. I have neither invigilation nor substitution”.	Example 39	اكون شاكر لك
<b>Imposition minimizer</b>			“I will be thankful to you”.
Example 29	(اسم محاضرة) رح تغطي لي المحاضرة الأولى	<b>IFID before the grounder</b>	
	“(name of instructor) will cover the first lecture for me”.	Example 40	يا بروف باستاذن يوم غدا ان شاء الله نسبة لظروف اسرية
			“Professor, I excuse for not be able to come tomorrow”

		because of family issues, Allah willing".
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*Grounder*, which means mentioning a reason for the request, was used 54 times (22%), followed by *alerter/attention* that was used 53 times (22%). The example number 22 shows an instance for *grounder* whereas the example number 23 to 27 show instances for *alerter/attention*.

*IFID before the request* was used 22 (9%), followed by *imposition minimizer* that was used 21 times (9%). The example number 28 shows an instance for *IFID before the request* whereas the example number 29 show an instance for *imposition minimizer*.

*Small talk* was employed 15 times (6%), followed by *closing* that was used 5 times (2%). The example number 30 shows the question that was used in the small talk whereas the numbers of examples from 30 to 33 show expressions used in *closing*.

*Softeners* and *IFID after the request* were used equally (4 times: 2%). The examples from 34 to 36 display expressions used as softeners but example 36 shows an instance for the *IFID* that was used after request.

Finally, *Thanking* was used 3 times (1%), followed by *IFID before the groundner* that was used only 1 time, less than 1%. The numbers of examples from 38 to 39 show expressions of thanking and example 40 shows an instance used as an *IFID* before the *groundner*.

Regarding gender differences, it was found that all the supportive moves were used more frequently by female instructors than the males, except *imposition* and *closing*. *Imposition* was used 14 times (15%) by the males than 7 times (5%) by females. Also, *closing* was used 4 times (4%) by males than 1 time (1%) by females. Using *thanking* and *IFID before the groundner* were used only by the male instructors, 3 times and 1 times, respectively. Finally, using the *IFID* after the request was used only by the female instructors that was used 4 times (3%).

This study aimed to identify the types of strategies employed in the speech act of request and the supportive moves that accompany the request in the WhatsApp messages in workplace. The examined request was given by instructors to their superiors. The request was given and received among the same sex of instructors and superiors.

The results found that the instructors used indirect strategies more than direct strategies and with different types of supportive moves to make request polite and to increase the possibility of their requests to be accepted, as mitigating moves. This reflects the high pragmatic competence with instructors in workplace. Preferring indirect strategies in Arabic is similar to English and Korean, but not German, Malay speakers of English, and Malay in Malaysian environment of workplace, where direct strategies are preferred in workplace (Idris and Ismail, 2023; Joo, 2024; Rue, et al., 2007). The latter is interpreted in the light of providing a clear and concise statement of their needs or desires, without hedged or unclear statement. The current results are not consistent with Leopold's (2015) findings of English native speakers' emails in terms of using more direct strategies with superiors, mitigated by lexico-syntactic devices. This difference can be interpreted as a result of the nature of medium. Email is considered a formal medium whereas WhatsApp is considered an informal and social medium of communication. In the current study, it was found that females used strategies of request and supportive moves more than the males.

Regarding the direct strategies, using direct question was the most frequent one, followed by want statement and hedged performative. The direct question was suggested by Qari (2017) as a strategy of request that was used by Saudi Hijazi in Arabic. The mood derivable was used, but it was preceded or followed by religious and cultural softeners, reflecting employing sociopragmatic norms in workplace. Obligation statement was not used which is expected because the request was directed to their superiors, not vice versa.

Regarding the indirect strategies, although they were used more than the direct strategies, there was a preference for using the non-conventional indirect strategies, especially using strong hint. This result is supported by Joo (2024) regarding the prevalence of using hints with superiors in German and English in workplace. It suggests that pragmatic competence concerning the workplace (Joo, 2024). The prevalence of use of indirect strategies in general and the use of strong in particular are considered as polite strategies that were supported by supportive moves. Also, it shows consideration and respect to the superiors than focusing on the needs of requestor in interaction.

Regarding the supportive moves, different types of external modifications were used in the speech act of request. This result is similar to what is used by Malay speakers of English and Malay, where external modifications in requests are used mostly with a higher degree of imposition in some contexts (Idris and Ismail, 2023). Greeting and alerter/attention by using address terms were used mostly where the first to show solidarity and the latter to show respect and indicate formality with the superiors. The frequency of using greeting means that it was given more importance than closing. It was observed that males tended to use the title with or without the first name of superior to maintain the distance and formality. In contrast, the females tended to use the first name with or without the title more than using the titles, which may aim to reduce the degree of formality and distance. Interestingly, it was found some females used diminutives and compliments to address the superior with employing emojis, such as heart and rose emojis to show solidarity with their superior. Grounder was dominant wither to give reasons or explain the situation before or after acting the request, followed by imposition minimizer and IFID (e.g. excuse me) either before the grounder or before/after request as mitigating supportive moves. Using more indirect strategies with supportive moves with superiors can establish norms of communication that help not only to accomplish communicative goals, but also to maintain social relationships in workplace (Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to identify the strategies of speech act of request, supportive moves, and gender differences in WhatsApp messages in workplace. The results found that the indirect strategies were used more than direct strategies with employing different types of mitigating supportive moves. For direct strategies, the use of question was the most frequent one, followed by want statement, hedged performative, and mode derivable that was accompanied with softeners. For indirect strategies, the non-conventional strategies, such as strong hint and mild hint, respectively, were used more than the conventional strategies. For supportive moves, greeting was the most frequent one, followed by grounder, alerter/attention, IFID, and imposition minimizer as mitigators to increase the chances to have their requests accepted. The females employed more strategies, not only the indirect strategies but also direct ones, and supportive moves than males.

The results can increase the awareness of employers about how to make a request and understand the sociopragmatic norms of communication in Arabic in workplace. In addition, this helps the field of Arabic for specific purposes in terms of curriculum designers and trainers in workplace to educate future employers about effective strategies of request in online communication in workplace. The number of messages is limited and they were used between the same sex, not opposite sex. Therefore, future studies should enlarge the number of messages and extend the analysis to the opposite sex to explore new results about the strategies and supportive moves. Also, this study analyzed only the request that was addressed to the superiors which show the power of them. Therefore, the request between colleagues who are equal in social distance should be explored.

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