Culture-specific concepts of politeness: 
Indirectness and politeness in English, 
Hebrew, and Korean requests

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Abstract

Pragmatic clarity and politeness have been the two major factors in pragmatic competence rules since Grice (1975). Clarity and politeness have been claimed as complementary elements (Lakoff 1973) and politeness as the motivation for indirectness in requests (Searle 1975, 1979; Gordon and Lakoff 1975; Lakoff 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1989, 1990; Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987). However, highly indirect strategies, e.g., hints, may also be perceived as lacking in politeness because of a lack of concern for pragmatic clarity (Blum-Kulka 1987). In order to compare indirectness and politeness scales in Korean, Hebrew, and English and to re-examine the link between indirectness and politeness cross-culturally, this study uses the theoretical and methodological framework of Blum-Kulka (1987) and Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989). The study results show that neither non-conventional indirectness nor some strategies of conventional indirectness imply politeness in Korean and imply, in agreement with Yu (2002), that politeness is differently perceived cross-culturally. In particular, the results of the study show that the conventional indirect strategies such as Strong Hints, Mild Hints, and Suggestory Formulae in the nine request categories are not significantly correlated with politeness in Korean and that Performatives (Austin 1962) and Want Statements are perceived as direct but polite strategies in Korean. These results support that the degree and the concepts of politeness in Korean, Hebrew, and English are significantly different.

1. Introduction

In intercultural pragmatics, the study of politeness phenomena in relation to certain forms of language usage can be an important key to understanding a number of sociolinguistic problems and misunderstandings arising from differences in culture, as well as between individuals in interpersonal communication.
While universal politeness theorists (Lakoff 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1989, 1990; Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987; Fraser 1990) believe that politeness is a socio-cultural-linguistic universal, empirical research on culture-specific politeness (Blum-Kulka 1987; Ide et al. 1992; Marti 2006; Yu 2002) shows that the conception of politeness and the degree of politeness are not the same among different cultures and thus the different perceptions on politeness may lead to misunderstandings and conflicts in intercultural interactions. The principal aim of the present study is to challenge the widely accepted notion that politeness is a socio-cultural-linguistic universal, focusing on indirectness and politeness in English, Hebrew and Korean requests.

In their universal politeness model, Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) assume that all rational “model persons” have “face” as outward self image, which is taken from Goffman (1967). Insofar as politeness is a form of social behavior, their introduction of “face,” defined as “public self-image,” is plausibly useful in human interaction. The goals of face-saving motivations correspond roughly to Lakoff’s (1973, 1979) politeness rules “Don’t impose,” “give options,” and “maintain camaraderie.” The politeness rules consisting of non-imposition, optionality, or friendliness are based on the emphasis on individual autonomous face, not on membership in a group or society. Marquez Reiter (2000: 23) states that in Asian, African, Latin American, and many southern European cultures, the self is seen as part of a social relationship and one’s behavior is determined by what one perceives to be the thoughts and actions of others in relationship. As Matsumoto (1988) and Wierzbicka (1990, 1991) point out, in Japanese (and in Korean) culture, “face” is based on the notion of membership in a group or society, not of an independent individual. Furthermore, face is a constantly negotiated process within interaction, not fixed conceptualization (Geyer 2008; Bousfield 2008).

In addition, if discernment and volition^1 are two complementary aspects of linguistic politeness as Hill et al. (1986) hypothesize, discernment is the major aspect of linguistic politeness prevalent in the East, while volition is the major aspect of linguistic politeness prevalent in the West. Blum-Kulka (1992: 259–260) states that “Israeli public life is emically perceived as low in discernment and high in (im)polite volition and that among Israelis, politeness indexes a ‘show of consideration.’” Ide et al. (1992: 290) propose that wakimae ‘discernment’ is the key concept of linguistic politeness in Japanese, and lack of wakimae leads to impoliteness. Their empirical study shows that the English concept of polite is oriented more to volition, and the concept of teineina ‘polite’ is oriented more to discernment in Japanese. Yu’s (2002) empirical study based on Ide et al. (1992) shows that the concept of gongsonhada^2 ‘polite’ is oriented to both volition and discernment in Korean. The empirical studies emphasize the culture-specific concepts of politeness.
The notions of politeness and indirectness are also important in the negotiation of face during the realization of requests (Félix-Brasdefer 2005) because requests are pre-event acts that impose on the hearer to do something, and thus might require mitigated or indirect expressions to be polite. According to Brown & Levinson’s definition of face-threatening acts, imposition is an intrinsically face-threatening act and politeness is the main motivation for indirectness in requests (Searle 1975; Leech 1983). However, clarity and politeness are not complementary, and formality does not necessarily correlate with politeness. In Greek, deference does not always mean giving options, and camaraderie does not always show sympathy either (Sifianou 1992). According to Sifianou (1992: 121), the conceptions of a “request” differ in Greek and English: The English use pragmatic indirectness to give options to addressees, whereas the Greeks use pragmatic indirectness to express rapport with the addressee.

Blum-Kulka (1987) suggests that politeness is linked with conventional indirectness, but not necessarily with non-conventional indirectness in Hebrew. As in Blum-Kulka (1987), non-conventional indirectness is not linked with politeness in Turkish (Marti 2006) and Mexican Spanish (Félix-Brasdefer 2005) requests. Félix-Brasdefer (2005) also presents that directness is more preferred in a “solidarity” politeness system that displays closeness (–distance and –power) in Mexican Spanish. Thus, as Marti (2006) claims, there seems to be no linear relation between indirectness and politeness and these two concepts need to be viewed separately.

In order to examine the link between indirectness and politeness in Korean and re-examine the relationship between the two concepts cross-culturally, the present study followed Blum-Kulka’s (1987) approach in data collection and analysis, using the cross-cultural speech-act realization patterns (CCSARP) methodology (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989). The four major study aims are as follows: (1) to examine the link between indirectness and politeness in Korean by measuring the degrees of indirectness and politeness for the nine request categories, (2) to compare Korean (in)directness scales with the Hebrew and English ones, (3) to compare Korean politeness scales with the Hebrew and English ones, and (4) to re-examine whether the notions of indirectness and politeness are the same or different in the three languages by correlation analysis and by the rank ordering of the speech-act types.

The present study shows that not only non-conventional indirect strategies, i.e., hints, but also some strategies of conventional indirectness, such as Suggestory Formulae, cannot be universally polite. Performatives and Want Statements are perceived as direct but polite in Korean, since some lexemes and formulaic expressions function as polite markers in requests.

This paper is organized as follows: In Section 2, previous research on politeness is briefly described. In Section 3, the study methodology, design and
procedure are described. In Section 4, the statistical results of the study are presented. In Section 5, a relationship between indirectness and politeness is discussed, based on their scales. Finally, brief concluding remarks follow in Section 6.

2. Previous research

2.1. Universal politeness and culture-specific politeness

The enactment of politeness can be viewed in two different ways: (1) The proposed rules of politeness are universal, and (2) politeness should be studied from a culture-specific perspective.

In the universal politeness theories (Lakoff 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1989, 1990; Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987; Fraser 1990), clarity and politeness are complementary elements and that indirectness in requests is motivated by politeness (Searl 1975). The main thrust of these studies is that diverse politeness phenomena are driven by underlying universal factors, such as non-imposition, optionality, and friendliness. For example, they claim that the motivation to use interrogative forms rather than imperatives for requests is politeness. However, these studies cannot answer several crucial questions relevant to politeness in other cultures, e.g., Korean, where the features of non-imposition, optionality and friendliness do not correlate with politeness in the way that is seen in English.

The literature review of cross-cultural perspectives on politeness can be summarized in four main points. First, the perspective of the universal politeness theories is Anglo-centric, not universal, and so are the concepts behind the technical terms linguists use (Wierzbicka 1985a, 1985b, 1990, 1991). Second, non-conventional indirectness in requests, e.g., hints, does not necessarily imply politeness (Blum-Kluka 1987; Félix-Brasdefer 2005; Marti 2006). Unambiguous directives or impositions can constitute polite behavior in Turkish (Marti 2006), Japanese (Mastumoto 1988), and Korean (Yu 2004). Third, the use of politeness is not merely a voluntary action to be employed strategically (Hill et al. 1986). Linguistic politeness is grammatically required in some cultures, such as Japanese (Ide et al. 1992) and in Korean (Yu 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004). Fourth, speakers from different cultures can use different conventions to accomplish the same conversational goals. Overall, the literature shows that not only the concept of politeness, but also the strategies indicating politeness, can differ from culture to culture. Accordingly, the supposedly universal politeness rules can be shown to be non-universal when we review them cross-culturally.

In addition, the terminologies in politeness theories are not unified. In the universal politeness theories, deference may be paraphrased as “give options” or as “non-imposition.” Lakoff paraphrases the term “deference” as “give op-
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Brown and Levinson see it as “the speaker’s recognition of the addressee’s right to non-imposition” (1987: 183). This is essentially what Lakoff means by the term “distance” (1979: 64–65). However, in Korean and in Japanese, the concept of “deference” is realized in interpersonal relations based on social rank, status, or age difference rather than by the notion “give options” or “non-imposition.” Non-imposition based on individual right is an Anglo-centric concept (Wierzbicka 1991), and imposition can be connected with politeness in some cultures such as Japanese and Korean. In these cultures, imposition to ask to receive or to do the favor of doing X is a polite act (Mastumoto 1988; Yu 2003b, 2004). For example, the basic means of making a request in Korean is to use a form of the verb juda, ‘give,’ which has a connotation of the addressee’s benefaction and thus a good or desirable behavior. In requests, speakers use formulaic expressions that contain impositions but are commonly perceived as polite.

“Give deference” is one of the negative politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson. This strategy, according to Brown and Levinson, aims to minimize the imposition on the addressee’s action. In English, it is important to acknowledge the addressee’s autonomy or allow the other person options, and thus indirectness in requests is motivated by politeness. In Japanese and in Korean, however, it is important to acknowledge the interrelationship of both participants and to acknowledge each participant’s interdependence on the others in their group. As a member of a group, the relative positions or social ranks between interlocutors should be considered, and interdependence, rather than the preservation of an individual’s proper territory, is the most important principle commonly required in these cultures.

As Watts et al. (1992) and Watts (2003) point out, many linguists deal with the concept of first-order politeness (i.e., the common-sense notion of politeness perceived and talked about by members of socio-cultural groups) using second-order concepts (i.e., a term within a theory of social behavior and language usage) in their models of language usage, which induces problems. Watts et al. explain that the pursuit of universals will necessarily relate to second-order concepts, whereas the investigation of politeness in individual cultural frameworks will almost inevitably relate to first-order concepts.

2.2. Indirectness in requests

In indirect requests, there are three types of meaning: (1) non-conventional indirectness in which requestive force is not indicated by the literal meaning but is inferred, as in hints, (2) conventional indirectness (Searle 1969, 1979), and (3) literal meaning. As for conventional indirectness, Searle (1969, 1979) proposes a set of conditions that are necessary for the successful and felicitous performance of the directive illocutionary act, which can conventionally be
used as indirect requests. Gordon and Lakoff (1975) also postulate strategies of conventional indirectness: “one can convey a request by (a) asserting a speaker-based sincerity condition or (b) questing a hearer-based sincerity condition” (1975: 86). They claim that asserting the speaker’s wish or questioning the hearer’s ability or the hearer’s willingness can convey a request.

Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) assume that on theoretical grounds there are three major patterns of (in)directness, which might be manifested universally by requesting strategies: (1) the most direct or transparent pattern in which requestive force is syntactically marked by “modes” as in imperatives, or explicitly indicated by an “illocutionary force indicating device” as in Explicit Performatives (Austin 1962) and Hedged Performatives (Fraser 1975), (2) conventionally indirect request patterns in a given language, and (3) the least direct pattern in which requestive force has to be inferred as in hints. They subdivide these three patterns into nine request strategy types, which together form a scale of indirectness: Mood Derivable (Do X), Performatives (I am asking you to do X), Hedged Performatives (I would like to ask you to do X), Obligation Statements (You have to do X), Want Statements (I want you to do X), Suggestory Formulae (How about doing X?), Query Preparatory (Can you do X?), Strong Hints, and Mild Hints.

In this typology, the request patterns of Mood Derivable and explicit Performatives are considered the most direct and transparent. Hints are considered the most indirect request patterns. The middle group is distinguished by conventions of forms and meaning (Blum-Kulka 1987: 134). Hedged Performatives can be characterized by convention of forms, i.e., by the choice of wording of the speech act. Obligation Statements, Want Statements, and Suggestory Formulae can be characterized by convention of meaning, i.e., by choice of a semantic device that counts as a potential request by social convention in a given language. Query Preparatory can be characterized both by conventions of forms and meaning because this form is habitually used for making the request, and the actual choice of a linguistic element is “Can you do X?,” not “Are you able to do X?”

Blum-Kulka (1987) conducted a study utilizing the nine-point (in)directness and politeness scales to examine the notions of indirectness and politeness in Hebrew and English requests. The present study has a similar focus and uses the same theoretical and methodological framework to compare Korean with Hebrew and English.

3. **Methodology**

This study is patterned on two previous investigations: “Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns” (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984), and “Indirectness and politeness in requests:
Same or different?” (Blum-Kulka 1987). The CCSARP was set up to investigate cross-cultural and intralingual variation in requests and apologies, which are “face-threatening acts” in Brown and Levinson’s term, and thus call for “redressive action” (Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987).

As Marti (2006) points out, the limitation of CCSARP and Blum-Kulka’s methodology is that controlled data cannot represent what people actually say in natural interaction but what they report they would say in the discourse completion test (hereafter DCT), and thus it might not include some interactional characteristics of politeness, e.g., what is unsaid. The respondents might write what they consider appropriate in a written role play, which might be different from an oral form, because DCT is designed to evaluate the written forms only, i.e., ‘what is said.’ In studies on cross-cultural politeness, however, we need an objective research tool, i.e., a theoretical and methodological framework to collect comparable cross-cultural data in the same way, along with intuition of native speakers. In order to compare concepts of politeness cross culturally, this study employed the same instruments as Blum-Kulka (1987, 1989) carried out in Hebrew and English.

The instruments used in this study are DCT, which was originally developed by Blum-Kulka (1982), and nine request strategies, which were designed by CCSARP. Nine request realizations of controlled data in Korean were used to measure scales of indirectness and politeness. The DCT in Korean and the controlled data elicitation procedure are described in Section 3.2.

3.1. Participants

The study participants were 176 native Korean-speaking university students sorted into three groups. In the first stage, the data for the DCT were collected from 95 students, who all completed the DCT. In the second stage, data for indirectness and politeness scales were obtained from 40 and 41 subjects, respectively, who were asked to rate each request expression on a nine-point scale for indirectness or politeness. The 40 subjects rated nine types of requests in the five situations on the indirectness scales. All completed the scales presented in the test. The 41 subjects of the other group rated the same data on the politeness scales. After the responses from four students who did not complete all the scales presented in the test were deleted, the data from the remaining 37 subjects were used in the study analysis. All participants were attending Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, Korea, and were not majoring in linguistics so that their answers would not be affected by previous linguistic knowledge.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Discourse completion tests (DCT). In the earlier stage of the study, actual utterances encoding a request were obtained by a DCT, following the
framework of the CCSARP project. The DCT consists of incomplete discourse sequences relative to five different situations: (1) a student asks his roommate to clean up the mess in the kitchen, (2) a student asks another student to lend him or her some lecture notes, (3) a student asks a neighbor for a ride home, (4) a policeman asks a driver to move his or her car, (5) a professor asks a student to present his or her paper a week earlier than scheduled.

In the Korean version of the DCT, all discourses except situation 1 are expressed with polite suffix markers. In situation 1, the informal non-deferential level of Korean was used because the interlocutors were roommates and their relationship was expected to be close. In situation 2, the informal deferential level of Korean was used because the interlocutors were not close friends and normally Korean university students tend to use the informal deferential level when they are not friends. In situation 3, the student initiated the dialogue with the informal deferential level and the neighbor replied with the formal deferential level, since both the informal and formal deferential levels can be used in the one discourse. In situation 4, the formal deferential level was used because this was a formal situation. In situation 5, the professor used the informal deferential suffix, and the student used the formal deferential suffix, according to Korean classroom convention. (For Korean honorific system and politeness, refer to Yu 2003a, 2003b.)

From the actual utterance obtained by the DCT, 45 controlled data for the nine request types in the five situations ($9 \times 5 = 45$) were taken. The typology of the nine request patterns is the same as in the previous works. The controlled data elicitation procedure is described in the following section.

3.2.2. Controlled data elicitation procedure. The unit of analysis for the speech act aimed at for the data, which is provided by the DCT, is the utterance(s) given by the informant in completing the test item. The 45 controlled data for the nine request types in the five situations ($9 \times 5 = 45$) were selected from the actual utterances obtained by the DCT, in addition to a few appropriate responses composed by the researcher in cases where the test did not have suitable data for a given strategy type, as in Blum-Kulka (1987).

In the case of requests, the “discourse-filler” (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989: 17) elicited from the DCT is analyzed into three segments: address terms, head acts, and adjuncts to head acts. The head act is the nucleus part of the speech act for a request. It might serve to realize the request independently. The adjunct is the part used to strengthen or support the head act, e.g., indicating the reasons for the request or excuses, etc. For example, in “Min-Gih, if you have time, clean up the kitchen,” Min-Gih is an address term; the if-clause is an adjunct to the head act; clean up the kitchen is the head act for the request. Of the three segments, only the head acts were selected as the data for the following survey. In addition, internal and external modifications
were cut out from the actual utterances in order to ensure that the judgments of indirectness and politeness relate only to request categories and to avoid the other effects of softening or urging the act by the modifications. Internal modifications are hedges, intensifiers, or expletives, etc., within the head acts. External modifications are not localized within the head act, but support or aggravate the speech act within its immediate context. Adjuncts to the head act are external modifications. For example, in “If you have time, please clean up the kitchen,” the *if-clause* is an adjunct to the head and an external modification; *please* is an internal modification; and *clean up the kitchen* is the head act.

When the controlled data were extracted, the sentence-final suffixes of the data in a given situation were united in one speech level of Korean. The data in situation 1 were informal non-deferential. The data in situations 2, 3, and 5 were informal deferential. The data in situation 4 were formal deferential. The honorific marker *si* was used for all the data in situations 2, 3, and 4, according to the contexts. The example of the nine request categories used in the study are listed in Table 1.

In order to fit the Korean data into the nine categories, language-specific conventions were followed. For example, conventional indirect speech acts in Korean are indicated by an auxiliary verb *ju* ‘give’ or by a hedge word *jom* ‘a little bit,’4 not by *gess* indicating the hearer’s willingness or *su* meaning the hearer’s ability alone. The auxiliary verb *ju* after a main verb means ‘give (do) me the favor of doing X.’ Thus, the sentence patterns including ‘main verb with *julsu*’ or ‘main verb with *jugess*’ are conventional indirect speech acts in Korean (Yu 2004, 2008), and they were chosen as the Query Preparatory category in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Korean request pattern</th>
<th>Corresponding English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MD  Bueok cheongso hae.</td>
<td>Clean up the kitchen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P   Bueok cheongso but’ak hae.</td>
<td>I ask you to clean up the kitchen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HP  Bueok cheongso but’akhaedo doilkka?</td>
<td>Would it be okay to ask you to clean up the kitchen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OS  Bueok cheongso haeyaman doi.</td>
<td>You have to clean up the kitchen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WS  Bueok cheongso haejumyeon johgeseo.</td>
<td>If you do (give) me the favor of cleaning up the kitchen, I would like it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF  Bueok cheongso haneunje eottae?</td>
<td>How about cleaning up the kitchen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QP  Bueok cheongso hae jul su isseo?</td>
<td>Can you do (give) me a favor of cleaning up the kitchen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SH  Uri bueoki dwaegi uri gat’damyeon ne chemyeonedo munjega issji anheulkka?</td>
<td>If our kitchen looks like a pigsty, isn’t there a problem losing your face, too?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH  Eumsik mandeul ttae kkaekkeus. han goseseo yori hal su issge hae jugessni?</td>
<td>Will you do (give) me a favor so that I can cook in a clean place when I cook?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the next stage, the 45 controlled data were measured on the nine-point scales that represent degrees of politeness and indirectness by the other two groups. The test sheets prepared for indirectness were the same type as those for politeness. The test sheets consisted of three pages containing five items for five situations. One item consisted of three parts: (1) description of the situation, (2) indirectness (or politeness) scale, (3) nine request realizations of controlled data in random order.

However, it should be noted that in the study the scales obtained represent the perceptions of indirectness and politeness within a given context only, and that the judgment was confined to one dimension of request strategy type only. Other probable effects on the judgment of indirectness and politeness, which could come from internal and external modifications, were disregarded, as in the previous works (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Blum-Kulka 1987; Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989).

3.3. Statistical results

For statistical analysis, firstly, the category means of the strategy types were calculated by weighted averages for each of the scales in order to obtain their rank ordering. The category means of the request strategies in Korean, Hebrew, and English on the scales of indirectness and the politeness scales are compared in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

In Table 2, the entire category means of all strategies except Mood Derivable are higher in Korean than in Hebrew and English, indicating that the Korean formulaic expressions are perceived more indirectly than the Hebrew and the English ones. For example, the literal translation of the Korean HP (Would it be okay to ask you to do X?) is more indirectly perceived by the Koreans than the English HP (I would like to ask you to do X) by the English speakers. Similarly, the linguistic form of Korean QP (Can you do me a favor of doing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>CM</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>CM</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>CM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (most indirect)</td>
<td>MH</td>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>MH</td>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>MH</td>
<td>8.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>SH</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>SH</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>SH</td>
<td>7.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>SF</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>QP</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>HP</td>
<td>6.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>QP</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>HP</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>QP</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>HP</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>SF</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>SF</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>WS</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>OS</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>WS</td>
<td>4.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>OS</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>WS</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>OS</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (most direct)</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source of Hebrew and English data: Blum-Kulka 1987: 137)
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X?) is more indirectly perceived than English form (Can you do X?). However, the Korean SF has the same linguistic form as in English (How about doing X?) but its category mean in Korean (4.79) is higher than in English (2.8). In Korean SF, the deferential speech levels used in the controlled data might influence the respondents’ judgments about indirectness. Although the category means in Korean are higher than in English and Hebrew, the rank orders for the scales in the three languages are similar. Hints are the most indirect and Mood Derivable is the least indirect. However, Hedged Performatives and Want Statements are differently perceived in the three languages. These results will be discussed in Section 4.1.

Table 3 shows that in Korean, Hedged Performatives are the most polite, and Obligation Statements are the least polite; in Hebrew and in English, Query Preparatory is the most polite, and Mood Derivable is the least polite in the politeness scales. However, Performatives, Hedged Performatives, Want Statements, and hints are ranked differently in all three languages. The rank orders in these three politeness scales are not similar. This result will be discussed in Section 4.2.

Using the category means in the three languages, the Kendall Tau B correlation coefficients analysis was used to search for correlations between indirectness and politeness, and to check the cross-cultural validity of the indirectness and politeness scales.

The results of the statistical analysis are as follows: (1) In Korean, indirectness and politeness do not significantly correlate (R = 0.38889, P = 0.1444), (2) In Hebrew, indirectness and politeness correlate to some extent (R = 0.61111, P = 0.0218*), (3) In English, indirectness and politeness correlate very significantly (R = 0.76064, P = 0.0046**), (4) The perceptions of politeness in Korean and Hebrew correlate to some extent (R = 0.66667, P = 0.0123*), (5) The perceptions of politeness in Korean and English do not significantly correlate with each other (R = 0.44444, P = 0.0953), (6) Indirectness scales in Korean and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Korean CM</th>
<th>Hebrew CM</th>
<th>English CM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (most polite)</td>
<td>HP 8.20</td>
<td>QP 7.08</td>
<td>QP 7.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>QP 6.72</td>
<td>HP 6.34</td>
<td>MH 5.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>P 6.35</td>
<td>P 6.06</td>
<td>SH 5.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>WS 5.83</td>
<td>MH 4.47</td>
<td>HP 5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>MH 5.27</td>
<td>SH 4.38</td>
<td>SF 4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>SH 4.11</td>
<td>SF 4.18</td>
<td>P 4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>SF 3.95</td>
<td>OS 3.36</td>
<td>WS 3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>MD 2.49</td>
<td>WS 3.20</td>
<td>MD 2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (least polite)</td>
<td>OS 2.17</td>
<td>MD 2.30</td>
<td>MD 2.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source of English and Hebrew data: Blum-Kulka 1987: 137)
Indirectness scales in Korean and English correlate very significantly \((R = 0.88889, \ P = 0.0008^{***})\), and (7) Indirectness scales in Korean and English correlate very significantly \((R = 0.81698, \ P = 0.0024^{**})\).

Blum-Kulka (1987) assumes that in Hebrew, indirectness does not necessarily imply politeness, but our statistical results show that indirectness and politeness in Hebrew correlate with each other to some extent as in English. In English, indirectness and politeness strongly correlate with each other. Even in the case where the significance level is under 1% \((P = 0.01)\), they significantly correlate in English but not in Hebrew. In Korean, however, indirectness does not correlate with politeness.

In addition, these results show that the perceptions of politeness in Korean and Hebrew correlate and thus that Korean and Hebrew students perceive politeness in similar ways to some degree. However, perceptions of politeness in Korean and English do not correlate, and thus Korean and English students perceive politeness in different ways. The statistical results from (1) to (5) above show that the concept of politeness differs cross-culturally, and the results from (6) and (7) show that the concept of indirectness is perceived in the same way in the three languages.

In order to confirm these results, the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test was employed. The result also shows that the obtained rank ordering of the politeness scale does not significantly correlate with the rank ordering of the indirectness scale at a 5% significance level \((Z = -0.4146, \ P = 0.6784)\). The Sign Test also shows that the rank ordering of politeness does not correlate with that of directness in Korean (2-tailed \(P = 0.5078\)).

Overall, these statistical results support the following three conclusions: (1) indirectness does not correlate with politeness in Korean but may imply politeness in Hebrew and English, (2) politeness is differently perceived cross-culturally, and (3) the indirectness scales have cross-cultural validity.

4. Discussion

4.1. Indirectness scale

In earlier studies (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984: 201), indirectness is theoretically divided into three levels: (1) the most indirect group realized by indirect strategies, such as hints, (2) a group realized by conventionalized indirect devices or by semantic devices, such as Query Preparatory, Suggestory Formulae, Want Statements, and Obligation Statements, and (3) the most direct group realized by Mood or other references that name the act as a request, such as Imperatives, Performatives (Austin 1962), and Hedged Performatives.

The empirical scales in English, Hebrew, and Korean, however, show that Want and Obligation Statements are rated as more direct than Hedged Perfor-
Culture-specific concepts of politeness

In our discussion, we employ the empirical indirectness scales illustrated in Table 4: The indirect group A includes Mild and Strong Hints; the conventional indirect group B includes Suggestory Formulae, Query Preparatory, and Hedged Performatives; the direct group C includes Want Statement, Obligation Statement, Performatives, and Mood Derivable.

The indirectness of group A and the high directness of Mood Derivable and Obligation Statements in group C can be explained semantically. The inferential process of hints is much longer than that of imperatives and Obligation Statements. Asking somebody to do X by hints is the most indirect request strategy. Forcing somebody to do X by imperatives is the most direct in request strategies. Grammatically, Mood Derivable is the form of the verb expressing commands. Imperatives require that we have to do X with immediate attention urgently. Obligation Statements have the same meaning as the imperatives semantically, although they are not commands: (I request it) so you have to do it.

In Table 4, the different ranks of Want Statements in the three languages may be due to linguistic factors, as Blum-Kulka (1987: 138) suggests. The length of the inferential process of Want Statements in English, Hebrew and Korean may be different. Consider the following habitual linguistic forms of Want Statement in the three languages:

English: I would like you to do X
Hebrew: I want you to do X
Korean: If you do X, I would like it.
    (lit., If you give me the favor of doing X, I would like it.)

The use of irrealis in English (CM = 2.5) and Korean (CM = 4.56) seems to obscure the requestive illocutionary intent and can cause a higher perception of
indirectness, leading to higher category mean values than in Hebrew (CM = 1.6). Also, in Korean, *ju* ‘give’ and deferential speech levels used in the controlled data might influence the judgments on indirectness and lead to higher category mean than in English and Hebrew. In rank orders, however, Want Statements are the third most direct in Korean, the second most direct in Hebrew, and the fourth most direct in English.

Although the rank orders of group B in English and in Korean appeared to be reversed, English and Korean speakers may not necessarily have perceived them in the opposite way. The differences in category means of the three strategy types in English and Korean show that the Korean strategies are perceived as more indirect by Korean speakers than the corresponding English examples by English speakers. For example, Hedged Performatives in Korean are the third most indirect with a category mean of 6.76, whereas they are the fifth most indirect with a category mean of 2.60 in English. This is probably because the linguistic form of Hedged Performatives was a question form in Korean, but a declarative form in English, as shown in Table 5.

The category means and the ranks of Suggestory Formulae, Performatives, and Want Statements in the three languages are shown in Table 6. In Korean, their category means are very close; in English, the category means of Want Statements and Performatives are the same, although Blum-Kulka (1987) gave their orders as 6 and 7. This result indicates that the range of students’ responses about the strategies varied when they judged the indirectness scales.

As shown so far, although there are language specific differences in the conventions of linguistic forms and meanings, indirectness can be divided into three groups: (1) the non-conventional indirect group including Strong and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>CM</th>
<th>Linguistic form</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>HP</td>
<td>6.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>QP</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>SF</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>SF</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>QP</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>HP</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>CM</th>
<th>Linguistic form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>SF</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>QP</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>HP</td>
<td>2.60</td>
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<table>
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<th>Rank</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>CM</th>
<th>Linguistic form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew</td>
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<td>SF</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>QP</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>HP</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mild Hints, (2) the conventional indirect group including Hedged Performatives, Query Preparatory, and Suggestory Formulae, and (3) the most direct group including Mood Derivable, Obligation Statements, Performatives, and Want Statements. The indirectness scales have cross-cultural validity in the three languages.

4.2. Politeness scale

As also shown by the statistical results of the correlation analysis, the ratings of the politeness scale reveal cross-cultural variations. Even the end-points of the scales are not the same in the three languages. The Korean and English politeness scales are very different, with Hebrew occupying an intermediate position between the two. See Table 3 in Section 3.3.

In comparison to the English scales, the peculiar characteristics of the Korean scales are: (1) Hedged Performatives (CM = 8.20) are rated the most polite, even more polite than Query Preparatory (CM = 6.72), (2) Performatives (CM = 6.35) are the third most polite strategy although they are ranked the third most direct on the (in)directness scale, (3) Want Statements (CM = 5.83) are more polite strategies than Mild Hints (CM = 5.27) and Strong Hints (CM = 4.11), (4) Hints do not correlate with politeness, and (5) Obligation Statements (CM = 2.17) are the least polite, even less polite than Mood Derivable (CM = 2.49).

In both Korean and Hebrew, Hedged Performatives and Performatives rank high, which may be due to language-specific conventions of form and meaning, as Blum-Kulka suggests. The Hebrew Performative verb levakesh ‘to ask’ and the adverb bevakasha ‘please’ are derived from the same root. The use of levakesh marks the pattern for politeness (Blum-Kulka, Danet, and Gerson 1985). A similar explanation is possible in Korean. There are two different verbs meaning ‘request’: yocheonghada and boot’akhada. The former is used only in formal written contexts where speaker-hearer interrelation is not considered, while the latter is used in contexts where interrelation and interdependence are considered. In the study, the latter was selected because the requestive illocutionary force of the former is too strong to use in normal conversation. The latter connotes ‘request a favor,’ and hence the use of the Performative verb boot’akhada itself marks politeness.

Also, in Hedged Performatives, –haedodoilkka ‘would it be okay’ is a syntactic structure to ask permission to the hearer and in Query Preparatory, –julsuissseo ‘can you give me’ asks a possibility of doing favor to the hearer. Since interrogative forms were selected for both categories in the study, the result shows that the Performative verb but’akhada ‘to entrust and ask’ is conventionally perceived as more polite than the Query Preparatory verb hae juda ‘to
give the favor of doing X,’ and that Hedged Performatives are politer strategies than Query Preparatory in Korean. Although both verbs involve the imposition of asking a favor, they have conventionalized polite social meanings in Korean. Thus, the politeness of Hedged Performatives should be explained by the lexeme but’akhada and the syntactic structure of asking permission.9

Another interesting ranking variation is found with Want Statements. Korean, Hebrew, and English speakers rank them as the fourth (CM = 5.83), eighth (CM = 3.20), and seventh (CM = 3.54) most polite respectively. The linguistic form used in this study is literally, ‘If you give me the favor of doing X, I would like it’ and the convention of a modal and the socialized meaning of the auxiliary verb ju ‘give’ seem to cause a higher rank on the politeness scales because the speaker’s wish to be given a favor is a polite act in Korean. On indirectness scales (in Table 4 in Section 4.1), however, they are included in the direct group C: the third, second, and fourth most direct in Korean, Hebrew and English, respectively. Thus, Korean speakers perceive them as direct but polite strategies, while Hebrew and English speakers perceive them as direct and impolite strategies.

Hints also differ in rank-order. Mild and Strong Hints are ranked as the second and third most polite in English, as the fourth and fifth in Hebrew, and as the fifth and sixth in Korean, respectively, although they are the most indirect strategies in all three languages. English speakers perceive hints as indirect and polite strategies; however, Korean speakers perceive them as indirect and impolite (or at least non-polite) strategies for request.10

The rank-order of Suggestory Formulae differs cross-culturally too. They are ranked as the fifth with a mean of 4.25 in English, as the sixth with a mean of 4.18 in Hebrew, and as the seventh with a mean of 3.95 in Korean although the Korean SF employed the deferential speech levels in all the situations except situation 1. The Korean form of Suggestory Formulae is the close translation equivalent of ‘How about doing X,’ so linguistic factors (e.g., syntactic form) are not involved. Thus, the result indicates that English and Korean speakers perceive the degree of politeness of Suggestory Formulae differently.

As discussed so far, the rank orders of the nine request categories on the politeness scale are culture-specific. Even the end-points in the three languages are not the same. The perceptions and the degrees of politeness differ cross-culturally.

4.3. Indirectness and politeness

As mentioned in Section 4.1, indirectness is divided into three groups: non-conventional indirect, conventional indirect, and direct. When the strategies are divided into two levels, the indirect and direct groups are distinguishable,
with the non-conventional and conventional indirect groups being merged into the indirect group, as indicated by the dashed line in Figure 1.

In English (Figure 1), Query Preparatory is a politer strategy than hints. The five strategies in the indirect group are the five most polite, while the four in the direct group are the four least polite strategies. This result is predicted by the correlation between English indirectness and politeness scales as in the statistical results ($R = 0.76064$, $P = 0.0046^{**}$). Statistical figures and Figure 1 show that indirectness and politeness in English significantly correlate with each other.

In Hebrew (Figure 2), Query Preparatory is the most polite strategy, followed by Hedged Performatives and Performatives. All three are politer strategies than hints. Interestingly, Performatives, a member of the direct group, are ranked higher, rising from sixth place in the indirectness scale to third place in the politeness scale, and thus mixed in with the indirect group. The correlation between indirectness and politeness scales in Hebrew ($R = 0.61111$, $P = 0.0218^*$) indicates a less significant correlation than in English.

In Korean (Figure 3), Hedged Performatives, Query Preparatory, Performatives, and Want Statements are rated as more polite strategies than the indirect strategies Strong and Mild Hints. Two members of the direct group—Performatives and Want Statements—occur in the third and fourth most polite positions. They are ranked as the sixth and seventh on the indirectness scale respectively. In other words, they are perceived as direct but polite strategies. In addition, Suggestory Formulae, a member of the indirect group, are the seventh most polite (i.e., the third least polite) with a mean of 3.95 on the politeness scale. They are perceived as an indirect but impolite strategy in Korean. Figure 3 and the correlation between indirectness and politeness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirectness scale</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Politeness scale</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(most indirect)</td>
<td>MH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>QP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SH</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>MH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SF</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>SH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>QP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>HP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>SF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(least indirect)</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>MD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. *Indirectness and politeness scales in English.*
scales (R = 0.38889, P = 0.1444) show that indirectness does not relate to politeness in Korean.

Marti (2006: 1848) also compares directness levels of Turkish speakers with the results of Blum-Kulka and House’s (1989: 125) study. He presents the politeness means of Turkish requests obtained from situation 1 (cleaning up the kitchen) and two other situations\(^{11}\) in DCT, and claims that there is no linear relationship between indirectness and politeness. In his data (2006: 1850–1852), Hedged Performatives were not employed because they were not found in the Turkish data, and the eight request strategies were listed on the nine-point scale. This can be illustrated in Figure 4.

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### Figure 2. Indirectness and politeness scales in Hebrew.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirectness scale</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Politeness scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(most indirect)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(most polite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>QP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SH</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>HP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QP</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>MH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>SH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>SF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OS</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>OS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WS</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>WS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(least indirect)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>MD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Figure 3. Indirectness and politeness scales in Korean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirectness scale</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Politeness scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(most indirect)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(most polite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>HP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SH</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>QP</td>
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<tr>
<td>HP</td>
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<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>WS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>SH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WS</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>SF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OS</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(least indirect)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>OS (least polite)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{11}\) In DCT, Hedged Performatives were not employed because they were not found in the Turkish data.
In Marti’s data (2006: 1852), explicit Performatives are perceived as the most polite and the mean (6.37) is slightly higher than the mean of Query Preparatory (6.35); Strong and Mild Hints are scattered; Strong Hints and Want Statement are not politer than Obligation Statements; Mood Derivables are rated the most impolite strategies.

According to Marti (2006: 1848), “impositives” are more frequently employed in all four situations in Turkish than in Hebrew, Canadian French, Argentinean Spanish, Australian English, and German: 67.1% of Turkish monolingual speakers employed “impositives” when they ask their friends to clean up the kitchen (situation 1), 43.4% when a teacher asks a student to give a presentation one week earlier (situation 5), 20.7% when a student asks another student for course notes (situation 2), and 20.3% when they ask a neighbor (not very familiar) for a lift (situation 3). The conventional indirect strategies are used by 79.7% in situation 3 and 78% in situation 2. Hints are not commonly used: 1.2% in situation 1, 1.2% in situation 2, 0% in situation 3, and 11.3% in situation 5.

As shown so far, the concepts and the degrees of politeness are perceived differently cross-culturally. However, it should be noted again that the present study is limited to the same five situations as were examined in Blum-Kulka (1987) and Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989). Politeness phenomena are judged in relation to social context and situation. In a given social context, indirect request forms can be perceived as more polite than direct request forms or vice versa. In particular, in Korean culture it is quite difficult to judge politeness by linguistic forms only without taking into consideration interrelationships and situations.

In addition, unlike English, Korean politeness is primarily expressed by grammatical system of honorifics and use of stylistic politeness strategies is secondary and optional (Yu 2003b). For example, deferential imperative forms

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Figure 4. *Indirectness and politeness scales in Turkish.*
are much politer than non-deferential forms, which employ stylistic politeness strategies. In other words, imperatives with honorific forms and deferential suffixes are much more polite than interrogatives or hedged expressions without honorifics and deferential suffixes. See the examples below:

1. **Seonsaeng-nim, chaek jom billyeo-ju-si-psio.**
   Teacher-HT book a little bit lend-give-HM-Imperative [P]
   ‘Teacher, please do me the favor of lending the book.’

2. **Seonsaeng-nim, chaek jom billyeo-ju-si-l-laeyo?**
   Teacher-HT book a little bit lend-give-HM-CP-Interrogative [Y]
   ‘Teacher, would you like to do me the favor of lending the book?’

3. **??Seonsaeng-nim, chaek jom billyeo-ju-l-laey?**
   Teacher-HT book a little bit lend-give-CP-Interrogative [E]
   ‘Teacher, will you do me the favor of lending the book?’

4. **??Seonsaeng-nim, chaek jom billyeo-ju-l-su-isseo?**
   Teacher-HT book a little bit lend-give-CP-can-Interrogative [E]
   ‘Teacher, can you do me the favor of lending the book?’

When a student asks to borrow a book from his or her teacher, a formal deferential imperative form -jusipsio in (1) sounds more polite and more appropriate than an informal deferential interrogative form -jusillaeyo in (2). The non-deferential speech level [E], as presented in examples (3) and (4), is never used by a student to a teacher although the requests include conventional indirect strategies. However, the four examples can be used by a teacher to a student: The deferential speech levels sound politer than the non-deferential speech levels, and the latter sounds informal and can indicate closeness between the teacher and the student.

5. **Conclusion**

The results of the present study indicate that neither non-conventional indirectness such as hints nor some conventional indirect strategies can be universal or polite and support the idea that the degrees and the perceptions of politeness can be culture-specific. Although previous proposals on politeness rules claim that the motivation for indirectness in request strategies is politeness, and although pragmatic clarity is proposed as a complementary element to politeness in pragmatic competence rules, highly indirect strategies do not necessarily imply politeness cross-culturally because lack of concern for pragmatic clarity may cause a lack of politeness, as assumed by Blum-Kulka. Furthermore, the request strategies perceived as direct but polite have peculiar cultural and so-
cialized meanings as request markers. In that case, the grammaticalization process might provide a clue as to why the lexeme or the formulaic expression can carry the function of marking the speaker’s politeness in the speech acts.

In particular, the present study shows that not only hints, but also one conventional indirect strategy, Suggestory Formulae, are not significantly correlated with politeness and that some direct strategies, such as Performatives and Want Statements, are perceived as polite strategies by Koreans. Hedged Performatives can be politer strategies than Query Preparatory in Korean. Even explicit Performatives can be politer than Query Preparatory in Turkish (Marti 2006). Furthermore, Want Statements, which are direct and impolite in English, Hebrew, and Turkish requests, are perceived as a polite strategy by Korean speakers. In other words, explicitness for requests can be a politer strategy than implicitness in Korean (Yu 2004).

However, it is important to remember that politeness is an interactional phenomenon that includes what is unsaid and that cannot be separated from social contexts and situations. Although this paper has shown that indirectness is not linked with politeness in Korean, our discussion is limited to the situations dealt with in this paper. In other situations and contexts, however, hints may be used to learn about the addressee’s situation and intention to do X before a request and in that case, to be polite, hints may be used to request something.

Furthermore, in Korean, grammatically consistent use of jondaemal, ‘deferential language,’ is the main and primary feature for politeness, which is obligatory, whereas use of stylistic politeness strategies is secondary and optional (Yu 2003b). Use of honorifics and deferential speech levels is much more necessary for politeness than the realization of negative or positive face-saving strategies. Thus, this paper supports a cross-cultural assumption that different languages with different language world-views should be analyzed using different systems of speech acts.

However, this does not mean that politeness phenomena differ completely among different cultures. It is premature to conclude that politeness phenomena are necessarily different and incommensurate in every culture because the present study has focused only on the same five situations that were examined by Blum-Kulka to argue against the universal rules of politeness and for the purpose of cross-cultural comparability. Some features of politeness are found as common elements among cultures such as overlapping circles. For example, there are common elements overlapping between cultures A and B; otherwise, some politeness features may overlap between two cultures as in A and B, and B and C, but not between A and C. Although some features of politeness in culture B are connected with the other cultures A and C like a bridge (for example, as in English, Hebrew, and Korean), we conclude that the concepts and the degrees of politeness in the three cultures differ and that they should therefore be explained in terms of a culture-specific system of politeness.
In intercultural studies, systematic and comparative empirical research is valuable to reduce problems from miscommunication in diverse cultural contexts. When we understand politeness as smooth interpersonal relations in human interaction, the study of politeness from culture-specific perspectives can contribute to reducing cultural misunderstanding and misinterpretation in intercultural encounters and increasing appropriate and effective communicative understanding by non-native speakers in a second language teaching and learning context. When we discover sociocultural and extralinguistic knowledge and language worldviews, we can prevent the inaccurate negative stereotyping (i.e., the attribution of characteristics to groups) that results from sociocultural differences and the misinterpretation of other’s intent. Therefore, the researcher believes that further research on culture-specific speech acts will improve understanding among different cultural groups and help people to achieve their communicative goals effectively.

Notes

1. According to Hill et al. (1986), discernment is a matter of obligatory linguistic choice; volition is a matter of an intentional, strategic linguistic choice.
2. The phonemic and phonetic values of Korean alphabetic letters in this paper are represented by the system developed by the National Institute of the Korean Language. For convenience of analysis, they are based on Korean spellings, regardless of the assimilated or dissimilated pronunciations in words.
3. Instead of using the terms such as conventional and non-conventional indirectness, Sifianou (1992) uses “structural” and “pragmatic” indirectness because she thinks that “pragmatic indirectness can also be a conventionalized means for requesting” (114).
4. The hedge word jom literally means ‘a little bit,’ but functions as a polite marker ‘please.’
5. The statistical analysis was conducted in consultation and with the help of the Statistical Consulting Center at Korea University in Seoul in order to obtain reliability and validity for statistical methods in the study.
6. For calculation of category means of the strategy types, individual responses for the same strategies and the same ranks were added. The accumulated responses of the categories on the indirectness and politeness scales were calculated. Using the data of the accumulated responses on the nine-point scales, the means of the categories were calculated by the weighted average. The higher means of the categories represent more indirect or more polite strategies.
7. In this analysis, an R value higher than 0.5 and a P value less than 0.05, means that the two factors significantly correlate with each other at a significance level of 5%. The more asterisks show the smaller probability of standard error, e.g., *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001, and ****p < 0.0001.
8. Z value should be between +0.025 and −0.025, and significance level P should be smaller than 0.05, if they correlate with each other.
9. One anonymous reviewer of this paper commented that HP has a construction with the state-of-affairs external to the speaker (do-i-) and concessive conditionality (-do), whereas QP has a construction with the existence of means (-su) in the addressee, and the addressee’s bene-
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faction (ju), so that HP is perceived as more indirect and thus more polite than QP in that HP and QP originated from “addressee-external” and “addressee-internal” lexemes respectively. However, -su means the hearer’s ability, not the existence of means, and jul-su-iss (‘give-can-be’) is a conventional request marker and –su (‘can’) or jom (‘a bit’) might reduce imposition in Korean requests.

10. The anonymous reviewer also commented that the mentions of “a pigsty” in MH and “cooking in a clean place” in SH might influence the result that hints are not perceived as polite strategies in Korean. However, the result is drawn from all five situations, rather than only from this situation and the statistical result (R = 0.38889, P = 0.1444) shows that indirectness and politeness do not significantly correlate in Korean.

11. A host asks a guest to leave because of dinner invitation; a student asks a secretary for a piece of paper.

12. In the examples, the symbol *?? means a pragmatically wrong sentence and the abbreviations used in the glosses mean: HT = honorific title, HM = honorific marker, CP = connective particle, [P] = formal deferential speech level, [Y] = informal deferential speech level, [E] = informal non-deferential speech level.

References


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