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## Request Speech Act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin

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### Abstract

Request is used quite often in Malaysian Chinese people's daily life. Most previous researchers focused on request speech act in mainland Chinese language. However, very little attention is paid to the request speech act in Malaysian Chinese. This study aims to investigate the request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. Role play method was employed to elicit data needed for this study. 25 Malaysian Chinese participants and 1 Malaysian Chinese interlocutor were recruited to role play 12 scenarios. The collected data underwent analysis using a revised framework for coding. The results unveiled that the most commonly utilized strategy was conventionally indirect strategy, followed by direct strategy. The least frequently used one was non-conventionally indirect strategy. More external modifiers were used than internal modifiers. Variables of social distance, and ranking of imposition had impacts on request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. Social power did not influence the use of 'query preparatory' and 'want statements' strategy. This study can be of great value with regard to theory and practice. Theoretically, it revises and validates the CCSARP theoretical framework with Malaysian Chinese Mandarin data. Practically, it can improve communication skills in Malaysian Chinese people's everyday interactions and help them maintain positive relationships.

**Keywords:** Malaysian Chinese Mandarin, request speech act, social distance, social power, ranking of imposition

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## 1. Introduction

As an essential part of the cultural heritage of Malaysia, Malaysian Chinese is spoken by a large portion of Malaysia's population, mainly among the Malaysian Chinese community. Since there are many dialects that are spoken by Malaysian Chinese people, such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, and Hakka (Ong & Ben-Said, 2022), this study only focuses on Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. It is one of the four official languages of Malaysia, alongside Malay, English, and Tamil (Lim et al., 2015). While Mandarin holds the status of being an official language in Malaysia, the term "Malaysian Chinese Mandarin" may not be commonly used to describe the Mandarin spoken by Malaysian Chinese. In this study, Malaysian Chinese Mandarin is defined as Mandarin Chinese that is spoken by the Malaysian Chinese community.

Request is a fundamental part of human communication that cannot be separated from daily activities. It is regarded as the speech act that has garnered the most extensive research, both in terms of the volume of literature and the multitude of languages investigated (Chen et al., 2013). Brown & Levinson (1987) categorized the act of making a request in speech as a form of an act that threatens one's social image, also known as a face-threatening act (FTA). Studies on request usually divide request speech act into head act (core) request and request modification (Hendriks, 2008). Barron (2016) held that the realization of request required comprehending pertinent speech acts and strategies for making modifications. According to Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, the realization of requests is influenced by social factors such as social distance, social power, and the degree of imposition. Yazdanfar & Bonyadi (2016) claimed that speakers should know how to use language appropriately based on different contextual factors so that they can have communicative competency.

Although the request speech act has attracted many researchers' attention (Arabmofrad & Mehdiabadi, 2022; Malmir & Taji, 2021; Ren, 2019; Ren & Fukushima, 2020; Shakki et al., 2023), little is known about how request is realized in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. This research seeks to address this gap by examining how requests are realized in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. Specifically, this study aims to address the categories of request head act strategy and request modification used in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin and the impacts of social factors on request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. What makes

this study different is that it investigated the request speech act of the Malaysian Chinese community which is rarely explored by previous researchers.

Wang (2011) also pointed out that there was a pressing need to conduct a study on the request behavior of Chinese speakers in the foreign language environment. This study is motivated by the need to explore the request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin and the dynamic interplay of languages, cultures, and request behavior within this community. Investigating the request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin can meet this inquiry. Such research can offer valuable insights into language use, and sociolinguistic dynamics, with potential benefits for both academia and society at large. In addition, the present study can not only enhance our comprehension of request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin but also bolster the communication proficiencies of Malaysian Chinese individuals in their day-to-day interactions, both in personal and professional contexts.

This study was guided by the following three research questions:

- 1) What request head act strategies are employed in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin?
- 2) What request modifications are used in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin?
- 3) How do three social variables of social distance, social power, and ranking of imposition influence the request head act strategies used in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin?

## 2. Literature Review

Pragmatics, including second language pragmatics (e.g., Shakki, 2022; Shakki et al., 2020), is an important field of linguistics. To understand how speech acts are performed through language, some researchers have investigated various speech acts, such as apologies (e.g., Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020; Shakki et al., 2021, 2023), refusals (e.g., Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020; Malmir & Taji, 2021), compliments (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2023), and requests (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2020; Derakhshan & Shakki, 2021; Malmir & Taji, 2021), that are related to second language pragmatics. Since the request speech act in Chinese is the main focus of the current study, we concentrated on reviewing it in detail.

As concluded in Pang et al.'s (2023) study, most previous studies on request

speech act were conducted on English and European languages, such as French and Greek. Ninomiya & Shadayeva (2020) also pointed out that previous researchers used European languages as the data base. Although studies on request speech act in Chinese lag behind those in English and European languages (Pang et al., 2023), some researchers have shifted their attention to studying request in Chinese in recent years.

As to request head act strategies in Chinese, Han (2013) found that conventionally indirect strategies were employed most frequently. With regard to request modifications, Yujie (2021) revealed that female participants utilized more internal and external modifiers than their male counterparts in terms of request modification. However, Ren & Fukushima (2022) found that Chinese participants expressed disapproval of direct requests with minimal modifications, but were amenable to requests with several modifications, as well as indirect requests with multiple modifications.

In terms of influencing factors, the selection of request strategies was influenced by a range of factors, including social power, social distance, imposition level, age, and gender in Chinese (Zhang & Wang, 1997). Cai (2023) found that gender and social power are not factors that influence the participants' use of openers, head acts and external modifiers in Chinese. The participants' utilization of external modifications was significantly influenced by social distance.

Through literature review, it can be found that more and more studies have also been conducted in recent years. However, studies on request in Chinese are still very limited and their opinions are rather divided: some studies found that direct strategy is preferred in Chinese (Lee-Wong, 1994a), while some studies held that indirect strategy is more popular in Chinese data (Ren, 2019). Certain researchers argued that the selection of a direct or conventionally indirect strategy was contingent upon the context (Su & Ren, 2017): direct request strategies were preferred when native speakers of Chinese communicate with someone with equal social power and small social distance (Chen et al., 2013). In addition, Ren & Fukushima (2020) found that Chinese speakers tended to employ more lexical/phrasal modifiers in order to be more polite when requesting. Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond the head act request in Chinese and investigate the full interactions (Su & Ren, 2017).

Moreover, it can also be found that how different regional varieties of Chinese vary in terms of request speech act is rarely explored. Although there are some studies on request in mainland Chinese mandarin (Ren & Fukushima, 2020), Hong Kong Chinese (Yeung, 2000), Taiwan Chinese (Ren, 2018), and Cantonese (Lee, 2005), as far as researchers are aware, there has been no study carried out to investigate how requests are realized in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin.

Codina-Espurz (2022) contended that the selection of request strategy was influenced by social factors such as social distance, social power, and the ranking of imposition. However, Codina-Espurz (2022) only examined these variables in English. Since social distance, social power, and ranking of imposition are culturally characterized (Chen & Wang, 2021), it is unknown whether these three social variables can influence the request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

Twenty-five Malaysian Chinese participants (10 male and 15 female; age range: 21-24; mean age: 21.96; *SD*:1.06) were recruited randomly on a voluntary basis. All the participants are local students who were born in Malaysia. And 1 Malaysian Chinese student (male, age:25) from UPM was recruited as an interlocutor. To avoid the influences of other varieties of Chinese Mandarin, the recruited participants have never been to mainland China, Hong Kong China, or Taiwan China. All participants signed the informed consent form before participating in the study. Since this study focuses on investigating the request speech act in Mandarin Chinese, all the participants are able to speak Malaysian Chinese Mandarin.

#### 3.2. Instrument

Role play was adopted for this study. The reason why role play was chosen lies in that role-play can elicit data from scenarios in which variables can be controlled (Félix-Brasdefer, 2007; Márquez Reiter, 2002). Moreover, there are two types of role-play: closed role-play and open role-play (Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Ninomiya &

Shadayeva, 2020). Open Role-play has the advantage of eliciting interactive (Han, 2013) and natural data (Hosseinpour et al., 2021).

Since open role-play instruments can help investigate request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin, open role-play with 12 scenarios was adopted in this study so as to collect more interactive and natural data with more conversational features (see Appendix). The 12 scenarios employed in this study were adapted from Ying & Hong (2020) and Zhang (1995), incorporated three social variables with systemic variations.

We systematically vary 12 scenarios using different combinations of variables to prompt participants' responses in the form of request speech acts. These systemic variations ensure a comprehensive analysis of how three social variables influence the request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. These twelve scenarios were validated by two experts in pragmatics and proofread by a native Chinese speaker in mainland China.

### 3.3. Data Collection Procedures

The Malaysian Chinese interlocutor role-played with each participant one by one in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. The Malaysian Chinese interlocutor was asked not to distribute the written Chinese version of scenarios in advance and can only present them during the role-play sessions with the participants. The interlocutor was instructed to tell the participants to respond as naturally as possible in each role-play. To enhance the genuineness of the gathered data, both interlocutor and participants were told to role-play in the way that was incongruent with the role that they assumed in each scenario.

Each role play was conducted in a quiet play individually and was audio-recorded. It took each participant about 10 minutes to finish the role-play with the interlocutor. All the role plays were then transcribed in a later stage through a Chinese software named as FeiShuMiaoJi. The transcripts were examined by the researcher manually twice.

### 3.4. Revised Data Analysis Framework

The fundamental theoretical framework employed was the Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP), which was formulated by Blum-

Kulka & Olshtain (1984), as well as later expanded upon by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). Using the gathered information, an adapted iteration of CCSARP was formulated, taking into account prior scholarly works as a point of reference (Ren, 2019; Zhang, 1995) so as to be fit to analyze the collected data of this study. And the definitions of each strategy are also adopted from theirs.

It should be pointed out that modifications made to the CCSARP coding framework were based on data collected from Malaysian Chinese participants. In this revised coding scheme, a new category - 'Inquiry for information' was classified into conventionally indirect strategy. Categories, mild hints and strong hints, were collapsed into one code - 'hints'. 'Doing common activity', 'encouragement' and 'seeking empathy', found in the corpus data, were categorized into external modifications. Request head act strategies, internal modifications and external modifications were presented in the following sections. Examples in Tables 1-3 come from the collected data in this study.

### 3.4.1. Request Head Act Strategy

A head act can realize a request speech act independently (Han, 2012). It was classified into three distinct categories: direct strategy, conventionally indirect strategy, and non-conventionally indirect strategy. Each request strategy category is further divided into sub-strategies. Based on the collected data, a new category 'Inquiry for information' was categorized as Conventionally indirect category. The request head act strategy classification is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

#### *Request Head Act Strategy Classification in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin*

Sub-Strategies	Examples
<b>Direct</b>	
Explicit performance	请你把车挪开 [Please move the car]; 你借我一下 [Can you lend it to me for a moment?]
Hedged performance	可能需要麻烦你帮我拿一下包裹 [I might need to trouble you to help me with the package]
Imperatives	借我一支笔 [lend your pen to me]; 借我的电脑 [lend your computer to me]
Obligation statement	你的车要往前走一点点呐 [Your car needs to move forward a little bit]
Want statement	我想要重新申请一张 [I want to apply for a new one]

Sub-Strategies	Examples
<b>Conventionally indirect</b>	
Inquiry for information	请问我该怎么处理? [Could you please advise me on how to handle it?]
Suggestory formula	要不借你的给我用一下? [How about lending yours to me for a while?]
Query preparatory	请问你可以帮我办一个新的卡吗? [Excuse me, can you help me apply for a new card?]
<b>Non-conventionally indirect</b>	
Hints	我今天不能交啦 [I can't hand it in today]

### 3.4.2. Request Modification

When people request something, they utilize various modifiers to lessen or intensify the request. These modifiers are often used to reduce the imposition, thus softening the request (Barron, 2016). According to Barron (2016), there are two types of modifiers: internal modifiers and external modifiers.

(1) Internal modification. Internal modification constitutes a component of the request head act, capable of either reducing or enhancing the illocutionary impact of request speech act (Han, 2012). There are two kinds of internal modifiers, namely syntactic modifiers and lexical/phrasal modifiers (Blum-Kulka, 1985). The internal modifications are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

#### *Internal Modifications Classification in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin*

Internal modifiers	Examples
<b>Syntactic downgraders</b>	
Conditional	如果学生证不见了 [If my student ID is lost]
Interrogative	你可以帮我办一张吗? [Can you help me apply for a new one?]
<b>Lexical/phrasal downgraders</b>	
Appealer	可以吗? [Is it Okay?]
Downtoner	啦 [Ah] ; 呀 [oh] ; 哎 [hey]
Hedges	可能 [Maybe]
Politeness marker	请 [Please] ; 麻烦 [trouble]
Subjectivizer	我想 [I want] ; 我希望 [I hope]
Understaters	呢 [a little] ; 一下 [a little bit]

(2) External modification. As its name implies, external modification refers to the external part of the head act and its primary function is to indirectly lessen or intensify the illocutionary force of the request (Halupka-Rešetar, 2014). According to Yazdanfar & Bonyadi (2016), external modifiers are adjuncts to the



head act and can take place within the immediate context of a speech act.

Based on collected data, three new categories which are ‘doing common activity’, ‘encouragement’ and ‘seeking empathy’ were found and classified into external modifiers. The external modifiers of this study are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*External Modifications Classification in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin*

External modifiers	Examples
<b>Mitigating supportive moves</b>	
Apology	真得不好意思 [I'm really sorry]
Disarmer	我知道你跟我讲过不能分享课件 [I know you told me not to share the lecture materials]
Doing common activity	我们一起读书 [Let's study together]
Encouragement	我相信你可以的啦 [I believe you can do it]
Getting a pre-commitment	我可以找你帮我一个小小的忙吗? [Can I ask you for a small favor?]
Grounder	因为我现在我的爸爸妈妈生病啊 [Because my parents are sick now]
Imposition minimizer	延期很短的一段时间就好了 [Just a short extension will do]
Preparator	请问你现在得空吗? [Are you available now?]
Promise	我一定会做完的 [I will definitely finish it]
Promise of reward	下次我请你吃饭 [Next time, I'll treat you to a meal]
Seeking empathy	我真的很用心的听 [I really listened attentively]
Sweetener	你是非常棒的一个人选 [You are a great choice]
<b>Aggravating supportive moves</b>	
Moralizing statement	你们的打游戏有什么很重要的 [What is so important about your gaming?]
Repetition of head act	我可以跟你借一下你的笔记吗? 我可以借一下你的笔记吗? [Can I borrow your notes for a moment? Can I borrow your notes?]
Reprimand	不要在这边阻碍人家 [Don't obstruct others here]
<b>Adjuncts</b>	
Alerter	你好 [Hello]、王老师 [Mr. Wang]、胡教授 [Professor Hu.]
Confirmation	这样子 [Like this]
Thanking	谢谢 [Thank you]

### 3.5. Data Coding and Analysis

The coding was conducted through ATLAS.ti 23. The researcher himself and the other trained students who majored in linguistics were the coders. The researcher himself coded all the collected data and the other recruited coder coded 1/8 of the collected data. This recruited coder was trained by the researcher for about 1 month. Two coders coded data independently. Inter-rater reliability was assessed with a Kappa test,

revealing a strong level of agreement ranging from .74 to .80. If any disagreements arise, two coders would discuss until an agreement on coding can be reached.

Each conversation was coded in terms of request head act strategy, internal modification, or external modification with reference to the revised coding framework. The request head act strategy was coded into direct strategy, conventionally indirect strategy, non-conventionally indirect strategy, and the corresponding sub-strategies (see Table 1). The internal modification was coded with reference to internal modifiers categories (see Table 2). With regard to external modification, the external modifiers were coded with reference to the external modification framework (see Table 3).

Moreover, the frequency and percentage of collected data can also be provided through ATLAS.ti 23 so as to find out how to request head act strategy and request modification were used in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. The analysis of data was carried out utilizing SPSS version 22. The Chi-square test was employed to investigate the independence between participants' choice of request head act strategy and a specific variable while controlling for the other two variables.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Request Head Act Strategy

According to the revised coding framework in this study, the frequency and percentage of request head act strategies, are illustrated in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
*Request Head Act Strategies in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin*

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Direct</b>	124	33.07%
Explicit performance	20	5.33%
Hedged performance	5	1.33%
Imperatives	12	3.20%
Obligation statement	1	0.27%
Want statement	86	22.93%
<b>Conventionally indirect</b>	242	64.53%
Inquiry for information	48	12.80%
Suggestory formula	1	0.27%
Query preparatory	193	51.47%
<b>Non-conventionally indirect</b>	9	2.40%
hints	9	2.40%
<b>Total</b>	375	100%

As is presented in Table 4, in terms of request head act strategy, three categories of request were identified in the database. Conventionally indirect strategy (64.53%) was preferred in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin, followed by direct strategy (33.07%). Non-conventionally indirect strategy had the lowest incidence in the database (2.40%).

A more in-depth analysis of the distinct sub-strategies within the three categories indicates that in terms of direct strategy, Malaysian Chinese Mandarin speakers preferred using ‘want statements’ (22.93%), ‘explicit performance’ (5.33%) and ‘imperatives’ (3.20%) that are the three most frequently used head act strategies. With regard to conventionally indirect strategy, ‘query preparatory’ (51.47%), ‘inquiry for information’ (12.80%) and ‘suggestory formula’ (0.27%) were identified in the database. Most of the participants employed the expression ‘*kebukeyi*’ (may I) to realize the ‘query preparatory strategy’. ‘Hints’ strategy (2.40%) under the non-conventionally indirect category was seldom used.

## 4.2. Request Modification

Following the revised coding framework in this study, the internal and external modifiers are identified and presented in the following two sections respectively.

### 4.2.1. Internal Modification

Table 5 shows the internal modifications that were employed in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin.

**Table 5**  
*Internal Modifications in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin*

Internal modifiers	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Syntactic modifiers</b>	241	40.44%
Conditional clause	11	7.38%
Interrogative	230	38.59%
<b>Lexical/phrasal modifiers</b>	355	59.56%
Appealer (tags)	44	7.38%
Downtoner	14	2.35%
Hedges	3	0.50%
Politeness marker	99	16.61%
Subjectivizer	68	11.41%
Understaters	127	21.31%
Total	596	100%

As is indicated in Table 5, 596 internal modifiers were used by Malaysian Chinese participants. Among them, lexical modifiers ( $f = 355$ ;  $p = 59.56\%$ ) were used much more than syntactic modifiers ( $f = 241$ ;  $p = 40.44\%$ ).

With regard to the individual internal modifiers, for syntactic modifiers, the most frequently used syntactic modifier was ‘interrogative’ ( $f = 230$ ;  $p = 38.59\%$ ) in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin, followed by ‘conditional clause’ ( $f = 11$ ;  $p = 7.38\%$ ). As to lexical modifiers, Malaysian Chinese participants employed a variety of them. Among them, the ‘politeness marker’ ( $f = 99$ ;  $p = 16.61\%$ ) was employed most frequently in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. ‘Understaters’ ( $f = 127$ ;  $p = 21.31\%$ ) were also used very frequently, followed by ‘subjectiviser’ ( $f = 68$ ;  $p = 11.41\%$ ), ‘appealer’ ( $f = 44$ ;  $p = 7.38\%$ ), ‘downtoner’ ( $f = 14$ ;  $p = 2.35\%$ ) and ‘hedges’ ( $f = 3$ ;  $p = 0.50\%$ ).

#### 4.2.2. External Modification

Table 6 showcases the external modifications utilized by Malaysian Chinese participants.

**Table 6**

*External Modifications in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin*

External modifiers	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Mitigating</b>	391	41.07%
Apology	12	1.26%
Disarmer	18	1.89%
Doing common activity	1	0.10%
Encouragement	3	0.32%
Getting a pre-commitment	1	0.10%
Grounder	250	26.26%
Imposition minimizer	39	4.10%
Preparator	45	4.73%
Promise	3	0.32%
Promise of reward	8	0.84%
Seeking empathy	5	0.52%
Sweetener	10	1.05%
<b>Aggravating</b>	36	3.78%
Moralizing statement	1	0.10%
Repetition of head act	26	2.73%
Reprimand	4	0.42%
<b>Adjuncts</b>	525	55.15%
Alerter	515	54.09%
Confirmation	7	0.74%
Thanking	4	0.32%
<b>Total</b>	<b>952</b>	<b>100%</b>

As is shown in Table 6, Malaysian Chinese participants used mitigating, aggravating, and adjunct external modifiers. ‘Adjuncts’ ( $f = 525$ ;  $p = 55.15\%$ ) were employed most frequently by the participants. More ‘mitigating modifiers’ ( $f = 391$ ;  $p = 41.07\%$ ) were employed than ‘aggravating ones’ ( $f = 36$ ;  $p = 3.78\%$ ).

A closer look of the specific external modifiers shows that, for adjuncts, ‘alterer’ was employed most frequently ( $f = 515$ ;  $p = 54.09\%$ ), followed by ‘confirmation’ ( $f = 7$ ;  $p = 0.74\%$ ) and ‘thanking’ ( $f = 4$ ;  $p = 0.32\%$ ); for mitigating modifiers, ‘grounder’ ( $f = 250$ ;  $p = 26.26\%$ ) stands out as the most frequently used external modifier by Malaysian Chinese participants. By doing this, participants provide justifications to support his/her request so that requestee can be cooperative. ‘Preparator’ ( $f = 45$ ;  $p = 4.73\%$ ) and ‘imposition minimizer’ ( $f = 39$ ;  $p = 4.10\%$ ) were also used very often, followed by ‘disarmer’ ( $f = 18$ ;  $p = 1.89\%$ ), ‘apology’ ( $f = 12$ ;  $p = 1.26\%$ ), ‘sweetener’ ( $f = 10$ ;  $p = 1.05\%$ ), ‘promise of reward’ ( $f = 8$ ;  $p = 0.84\%$ ), ‘seeking empathy’ ( $f = 5$ ;  $p = 0.52\%$ ), ‘promise’ and ‘seeking empathy’ ( $f = 3$ ;  $p = 0.32\%$ ), ‘getting pre-commitment’ ( $f = 1$ ;  $p = 0.10\%$ ) and ‘doing common activity’ ( $f = 1$ ;  $p = 0.10\%$ ).

#### 4.3. Impacts of Three Social Variable

The data in Table 7 show that Malaysian Chinese Mandarin speakers employed various request head act strategies in different situations, with variations based on three social variables.

**Table 7**  
*Request Head act Strategy in Scenarios with Variations of Three Social Variables*

Scenarios	1 Apply for student ID [D+, P-, R-]		2 Ask for direction [D+, P=, R-]		3 Move a car away [D+, P+, R-]	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
Explicit performance	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	6	23.08%
Hedged performance	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Imperatives	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Obligation statement	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	3.85%
Want statement	7	21.21%	6	20.69%	2	7.69%
Inquiry for	23	69.70%	19	69.52%	1	3.85%

Scenarios	1 Apply for student ID [D+, P-, R-]		2 Ask for direction [D+, P=, R-]		3 Move a car away [D+, P+, R-]	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
information						
Suggestory	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Query preparatory	2	6.06%	4	13.79%	11	42.31%
Hint	1	3.03%	0	0.00%	5	19.23%
Scenarios	4 Copy slides [D-, P-, R+]		5 Get parcel [D-, P=, R+]		6 Borrow laptop [D-, P+, R+]	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
Explicit performance	0	0.00%	1	4.00%	3	10%
Hedged performance	0	0.00%	1	4.00%	2	6.67%
Imperatives	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	3.33%
Obligation statement	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Want statement	5	19.23%	1	4.00%	3	10%
Inquiry for information	1	3.85%	1	4.00%	0	0.00%
Suggestory	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Query preparatory	20	76.92%	21	84%	21	70%
Hint	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Scenarios	7 Complain about noise [D+, P-, R+]		8 Take a ride [D+, P=, R+]		9 Assign a difficult task [D+, P+, R+]	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
Explicit performance	4	8.51%	1	2.70%	4	10.00%
Hedged performance	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	2.50%
Imperatives	1	2.13%	0	0.00%	1	2.50%
Obligation statement	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Want statement	24	51.06%	14	37.84%	16	40.00%
Inquiry for information	1	2.13%	0	0.00%	1	2.50%
Suggestory	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Query preparatory	16	34.04%	22	59.46%	17	42.50%
Hint	1	2.13%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Scenarios	10 Postpone deadline [D-, P-, R-]		11 Borrow lecture notes [D-, P=, R-]		12 Borrow a pen [D-, P+, R-]	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
Explicit performance	0	0.00%	1	3.33%	0	0.00%
Hedged	1	3.85%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%

Scenarios	1 Apply for student ID [D+, P-, R-]		2 Ask for direction [D+, P=, R-]		3 Move a car away [D+, P+, R-]	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
performance						
Imperatives	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	9	34.62%
Obligation statement	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Want statement	2	7.69%	6	20.00%	0	0.00%
Inquiry for information	0	0.00%	1	3.33%	0	0.00%
Suggestory	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	3.85%
Query preparatory	21	80.77%	22	73.33%	16	61.54%
Hint	2	7.69%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%

In order to analyze the impacts of D variable, scenario 11 and 2 in which P and R variables are controlled, and D variable changed from [D-] to [D+] are examined. As indicated in Table 7, the frequency of ‘inquiry for information’ ( $f = 1$ ), ‘query preparatory’ ( $f = 22$ ), and ‘want statements’ ( $f = 6$ ) used in scenario 11 is different from ‘inquiry for information’ ( $f = 19$ ), ‘query preparatory’ ( $f = 4$ ), and ‘want statements’ ( $f = 6$ ) used in scenario 2. Chi-square test showed that Malaysian Chinese participants’ use of these three request strategies was statistically dependent of changes in variables D in scenarios 11 and 2,  $\chi^2(2, N = 58) = 28.662, p = .000$ . Varying D from [D-] to [D+] has impacts on the use of request head act strategies.

To assess the effects of the P variable, we examined scenario 7, 8 and 9, where the D and R variables are regulated while the P variable is altered from [P-], [P=] to [P+]. The ‘query preparatory’ ( $f = 16$ ), and ‘want statements’ ( $f = 24$ ) in scenario 7 were used differently from that in scenario 8 (query preparatory,  $f = 22$ ; want statements,  $f = 14$ ) and scenario 3 (query preparatory,  $f = 17$ ; want statements,  $f = 16$ ). The Chi-square test results indicated that the use of two request strategies by Malaysian Chinese participants was statistically independent of changes in variables P in scenarios 7, 8, and 9,  $\chi^2(2, N = 109) = 3.399, p = .183$ . Varying P variable has no impacts on the use of ‘query preparatory’ and ‘want statements’ in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin.

To examine the effects of variable R, we analyzed scenarios 1 and 7 by controlling variables D and P while varying R from [R-] to [R+]. ‘Want statement’

( $f = 7$ ), ‘inquiry for information’ ( $f = 23$ ) and ‘query preparatory’ ( $f = 2$ ) in scenario 1 were used differently from that in scenario 7, namely ‘want statement’ ( $f = 24$ ), ‘inquiry for information’ ( $f = 1$ ) and ‘query preparatory’ ( $f = 16$ ). The outcomes of the Chi-square test unveiled a noteworthy difference in the relationship between varying R variable (R- and R+) and above mentioned three request strategies,  $\chi^2(1, N = 42) = 30.644, p = .000$ . Varying R variable from [R-] to [R+] influences the use of request strategies.

## 5. Discussion

This study investigated the request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. Request head act strategy, request modifications and impacts of variables on request speech act will be discussed in the following sections.

### 5.1. Request Head Act Strategy

The first research question attempted to investigate the request head strategy in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. The finding indicates that conventionally indirect strategy was used most frequently, which mirrors findings of Li & Jiang (2019) and Chen et al. (2013) that indirect requests were preferred in Chinese but is contrary with previous findings (Gao, 1999; Lee, 2005; Lee-Wong, 1994b, 1994a). The frequent use of conventionally indirect strategy may be due to their insufficient linguistic expressions as they do not speak Mandarin Chinese all the time in their daily life. Because the indirect request strategy has the ability to decrease the imposition of the request, it can help alleviate the possible damage to the recipient’s negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This could also explain why conventionally indirect strategy was preferred by Malaysian Chinese participants.

With regard to direct strategy, using this strategy frequently might be considered an appropriate approach to making requests among speakers of Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. This stems from the fact that in Chinese culture, directness doesn’t necessarily imply impoliteness (Chen & Wang, 2021) and being direct implies sincerity and solidarity in Chinese culture (Lee-Wong, 1994a). In addition, direct requests paired with modifications can exhibit politeness equivalent to, or surpassing, that of indirect request (Ren & Fukushima,



2020). The frequent use of the direct strategy in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin can also be attributed to Chinese collectivistic culture, where imperative statements are considered polite and appropriate.

As to non-conventionally indirect strategy, the least use of it is in line with Ren and Fukushima's (2020) findings. The reason why this category was used least frequently may be due to the Malaysian Chinese participants' lack of confidence in speaking Mandarin Chinese. They may be concerned that using a non-conventionally indirect strategy to convey their request might lead to misunderstandings because it requires more inference on the part of the requestee.

## 5.2. Request Modification

This section pertains to the study's second research question. A wide range of request modifications were also employed in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. The results of request modification will be discussed in the following two sections.

### 5.2.1. Internal Modification

A large proportion of lexical modifiers were used in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin, which is contrary with Zhang's (1995) study in which 60.3% and 90.3% of the Mandarin Chinese participants refrained from using any lexical downgraders and upgraders. Moreover, the frequent use of 'interrogative', 'downtoner/understater', and 'politeness marker' in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin mirrors Su & Ren's (2017) study in which 'interrogative', 'understater', and 'politeness marker' were the first three frequently employed internal modifiers in mainland Chinese mandarin. This can be explained by the fact that using internal modifications frequently in Chinese can weaken the direct request's illocutionary force, thereby enhancing the politeness of the request (Lee-Wong, 1994a).

### 5.2.2. External Modification

Many external modifiers were employed by Malaysian Chinese participants so as to lessen the coercive impact of the request, such as 'apologies', 'thanking' and so on. This finding resonates with the findings of previous studies on request in Chinese (Ren & Fukushima, 2020, 2022). The reason why more external

modifiers were employed in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin can be explained by the fact that external modifiers can make request more polite and effective (Han, 2012). And Malaysian Chinese Mandarin speakers tend to show politeness when requesting.

It is worth noting that ‘grounder’ and ‘alerter’ were employed by Malaysian Chinese speakers quite frequently. The ‘grounder’ was used at a similar rate with finding of Zhang (1995). The frequency of ‘alerter’ used in this study was similar with that used in Ren's (2018) study. The frequent use of ‘alerter’ can be explained by the Chinese Confucian culture, which emphasizes social hierarchy (Chen & Chung, 1994).

### 5.3. Impacts of Three Social Variable

The third research question is addressed in this part. The findings show that request head act strategies of ‘inquiry for information’, ‘query preparatory’, and ‘want statements’ in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin are contextually determined by social distance and ranking of imposition. This finding aligns with the finding of Lee (2005), Li & Jiang (2019) and Chen et al. (2013) that social distance and ranking of imposition can influence the request speech act in Chinese, but contrasts with Yeung (1997) and Su & Ren's (2017) finding that there was little evidence of impacts of situational variations on how Chinese mandarin speakers realized their requests. The impact of factors, such as social distance and the ranking of imposition on request speech act in Malaysian Chinese culture can be attributed to the strong influence of traditional Chinese values, which emphasize social hierarchy.

This study finds that social power has no impacts on ‘query preparatory’ and ‘want statements’ strategy. The finding echoes Cai's (2023) finding that social power did not influence the use of certain request strategies. And it is contrary with Ying & Hong's (2020) study where power held a significant position in influencing the request speech act in Chinese. The reason why social power does not exert so much influence on ‘query preparatory’ and ‘want statements’ strategy can be clarified by the fact that Malaysian Chinese people are influenced by demographic concept that emphasizes the equality.

## 6. Conclusion

This study examined how head act request strategies, and request modifications are realized in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. It also investigated the impacts of three social variables on request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. The results indicated that various request head act strategies were employed in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. These request head strategies were used in conjunction with different proportions of syntactic and lexical modifiers to make the request more polite. Based on the results of this research, it is possible to infer that Malaysian Chinese participants are aware of the social situation with different social variables when making requests.

This study expands the scope of literature on the request speech act in Chinese and makes contribution to the request in Mandarin Chinese. It is of great significance in terms of theory and practice. Theoretically, this study developed a modified version of CCSARP framework that is suitable for analyzing the request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. This modification makes it suitable or applicable for analyzing request speech act specifically in the context of Malaysian Chinese Mandarin, thus improving an existing analytical tool to better fit the needs of this specific research context. Practically, the findings of this study carry significant implications that can provide a strong rationale for the inclusion of pragmatics as an integral component in the curriculum of Mandarin Chinese teaching.

This study is not without limitations. Firstly, it is important to note that the sample size is insufficient, thereby restricting the extent to which the conclusions of this study can be applied to a broader context. While the findings offer valuable insights into the specific population under examination, further research with a larger and more diverse sample is recommended to enhance the generalizability of these results. This expansion in sample size would enable a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena and potentially uncover nuances and variations that may not be apparent within the currently limited sample. Secondly, the participants are mainly students, which would influence the generalizability of this study. While the student demographic offers valuable insights into language usage within an educational context, it does raise concerns about the generalizability of our findings to a broader population. This limitation suggests the need for future research to encompass a more diverse range of participants,

such as non-student adults or individuals from various linguistic backgrounds, to further enhance the overall generalizability and relevance of the study's findings. Thirdly, this study does not investigate the influence of gender which might also be a factor that would influence the request speech act in Malaysian Chinese Mandarin. By not considering the gender factor, the study may miss out on valuable insights into how male and female speakers within the Malaysian Chinese community might differ in their request strategies. Future research endeavors could explore this aspect to provide a more comprehensive understanding of request speech acts in this linguistic and cultural context.

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## Appendix

*Request Head act Strategy in Scenarios with Variations of Three Social Variables*

NO.	Scenarios	Variables		
		D	P	R
1	<b>Apply for new student ID</b> You are a student. You've discovered that your student identity card is missing. Despite thoroughly searching in various places, you've been unable to locate it. You're now planning to visit the Students Affairs Office in order to obtain a replacement. What would you say to the officer in Students Affairs Office?	D+	P-	R-
2	<b>Ask for direction</b> You are a traveller. You travel to another city to visit a famous tourist attraction. Upon your arrival in this city, you struggled to locate the tourist attraction. As you stood there, a person approached you, prompting you to consider asking them for directions. What would you say to this person walking towards you?	D+	P=	R-
3	<b>Move a car away</b> You are a police officer. A passenger parked his car on the sidewalk in front of a building where an accident just happened. You are on duty and approach him to ask him to move his car away. What would you say to him so that Hu Wei can move his car away?	D+	P+	R-
4	<b>Copy slides</b> You like the course of intercultural communication taught by Professor Hu Wei. You've communicated with him a lot with regard to some questions of intercultural communication. He made it very clear on the day one that he expects all the students to take notes in the class and that he does not like sharing slides with students. Since you do not understand some parts of his teaching, you intend to duplicate the PowerPoint slides for the purpose of review. What would you say to him?	D-	P-	R+
5	<b>Get parcel</b> You are a staff of a company. The courier contacted you, requesting that you retrieve your package prior to 17:00. Regrettably, you were unavailable and unable to return in time. Thus, you intend to contact your colleague and close friend, Yang Lei, to urgently retrieve it on your behalf. He is attending a meeting. What would you say to him?	D-	P=	R+
6	<b>Borrow laptop</b> You are an aunt/uncle. While you were working on your laptop, it suddenly crashed. But you need to submit your work tomorrow. Your nephew/niece is playing an online computer game at your house. You want to borrow your nephew/niece's laptop to get work done. You know he/she doesn't want to interrupt the game right now to lend you his/her computer. What would you say to him/her?	D-	P+	R+
7	<b>Complain about noise</b> You are a resident of a community. Your neighbor plays loud music almost every night and sometimes makes phone call late at night, which seriously affects your sleep. You talked to him/her a few times, but he/she didn't make any changes. So you complain to the newly appointed director of the neighborhood committee and want the neighbor to move out. You know your neighbor won't move out. What would you say to the director of the neighborhood committee?	D+	P-	R+

NO.	Scenarios	Variables		
		D	P	R
8	<b>Take a ride</b> You are a friend. Your best friend is visiting China/Malaysia. You want to take him/her to a tourist attraction. But your e-wallet doesn't work, and you don't have cash with you to call a taxi. You see a driver pulling up not far from you. You want to take his car to this tourist attraction. You know drivers don't like taking strangers. What would you say to this driver?	D+	P=	R+
9	<b>Assign a difficult task</b> You are head of a department. You have just been promoted to lead a new department, and you have no communication with the employees of that department before. Your superiors have now assigned a difficult task to your department. Since you are the head of the department, you need to assign this difficult task to one of employees in your department. You know no one wants to take on this task. What would you say to your staff?	D+	P+	R+
10	<b>Postpone deadline</b> You are a student. You need to submit the Chinese intensive reading assignment assigned by lecturer Wang Minggao, but you cannot submit it on time. You want to postpone the deadline, and lecturer Wang is in no hurry to grade the assignment. Lecturer Wang is also your thesis advisor, and you have asked him some questions before. You want to talk to him about this issue. What would you say to him?	D-	P-	R-
11	<b>Borrow lecture notes</b> You are a student. Yesterday you had a high fever, so you were absent from class. However, this is a Professional Course of utmost significance, and you wouldn't want to overlook it. Today, you intend to borrow your peer's lecture notes to thoroughly revisit the material covered in this class. This classmate is your good friend. What would you say to your classmate?	D-	P=	R-
12	<b>Borrow a pen</b> You are an older sister/brother. You and your sister/brother are studying together. While jotting down notes, you realize you're without a pen. Thus, you intend to borrow one from your younger sibling. What would you say to your younger sister/brother?	D-	P+	R-

**Note:** 1) In the actual data collection, three variables in this table are not presented to the participants.

- D: Distance
- Requester and requestee are familiar with each other
  - + Requester and requestee are unfamiliar with each other
- P: Power
- Requester has lower social status than requestee
  - = Requester and requestee have equal status
  - + Requester has higher status than requestee
- R: Ranking of imposition
- Situations are with a low degree of imposition
  - + Situations are with a high degree of imposition

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