



## Requesting with an appropriate degree: The request speech act competence of BIPA learners

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**Received:** January 10, 2026

**Revised:** April 13, 2026

**Accepted:** April 15, 2026

### KEYWORDS

BIPA Learners  
Directive-Request  
Speech Acts  
Pragmatic  
Competence  
Second Language  
Acquisition

### ABSTRACT

BIPA learners not only need to understand the structure of the Indonesian language they are learning, but also its functional aspects in accordance with the situation and context of use. This study aims to analyze the request speech act competence of BIPA learners from the perspective of second language pragmatic acquisition. Based on a sociopragmatic perspective, utilizing the variables of Distance, Power, and Rank of Imposition proposed by Brown & Levinson, eight speech situations were constructed as instruments for data collection. Through a written discourse completion test, 17 upper-intermediate BIPA learners from Taiwan participated as respondents in this study. The data analysis employed the framework of request speech act realization as summarized by Schauer. The findings indicate that the BIPA learners have developed their pragmatic competence in producing request speech acts, although they still face difficulties in adjusting levels of politeness and situational context. Based on the realization of speech acts in terms of core and peripheral elements, the utterances produced tend to be overly long and excessively polite. This tendency is influenced by instructional emphasis on formal language, as well as differences in the pronominal system between Indonesian and Mandarin as their first language. The challenges identified are related to developing pragmatic competence, the influence of first-language cultural norms, and limited experience with real-life contexts. Thus, these upper-intermediate BIPA learners are at a transitional stage and are not yet fully flexible in adapting to contextual demands. The implications of this study highlight the importance of context-based BIPA instruction and the need for more explicit integration of pragmatic aspects in second language learning.

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## Introduction

Traditionally, learning a language has meant learning its structure, so most learners spend their time and effort acquiring linguistic rules while neglecting the social and cultural aspects of language learning (Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2017; Niu et al., 2018; Sun & Zhang, 2021; Morve et al., 2023). In fact, grammatically correct language that is socially and culturally inappropriate can lead to various problems, including misunderstandings (Nabila & Daulay, 2023; Yu, 2025). Such failures may occur when a learner lacks sufficient pragmatic competence (Thomas in Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2017; Mokoro, 2024) or when communicative interference occurs (Jia in Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2017).

Having pragmatic competence in a foreign language and culture is not easy. Second language learners often face challenges in understanding and adapting to the target language's cultural norms (Nuridin, 2018; Santoso, 2019; Pamungkas & Wulandari, 2020). For example, what is perceived as politeness in a particular culture is intrinsically tied to the values and beliefs of that speech community, which are associated with norms that must be followed for a member of the community to be considered polite (Taguchi, 2015; Linguarum, 2025).

In addition to being governed by social rules and conventions, everyday communication is also constrained by various types of speech acts (Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014). Among the five types of speech acts which are representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations; directives are the most frequently studied (see Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014; Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2017). Directive speech acts are those intended to get the hearer to do something as expressed by the speaker. Verbs commonly used in this category include "to request," "to command," "to beg," "to pray," "to invite," "to permit," and "to advise" (Searle, 1969).

Within directive speech acts, requests constitute a type that, according to Alzeebaree & Yavuz (2017), is the most frequently studied. Requests are commonly used in everyday communication; however, they impose a burden on the hearer. As a result, such utterances have the potential to cause discomfort for the interlocutor (Pütz & Neff-Aertselaer, 2008). A single request utterance can function as multiple illocutionary acts, and without a request, it would be difficult for learners to function effectively. Therefore, effective strategies are needed to express requests and maintain harmonious relationships between individuals and groups (Khatimah et al., 2024; Oktavianti et al., 2021).

For BIPA learners, the ability to make requests that are not only linguistically correct but also socially appropriate and acceptable is essential. Therefore, BIPA learners need to understand the social and pragmatic norms for expressing requests in Indonesian. Below are three examples of BIPA learners' utterances in a context where they are taking a walk in a park with a close friend and ask the friend to take a photo. Based on Brown and Levinson's three variables—Power (P), Distance (D), and Rank (R)—this context is characterized as -D/-P/-R. In such a context, the most natural utterances are casual and personal.

- (1) I want to take a photo here. (0.8.11)
- (2) Please take a photo for me here. (0.8.3)
- (3) Josya! Could you take a photo for me? (0.8.6)

From the examples above, by using a non-conventionally indirect (hint) strategy that reflects closeness with the interlocutor, utterance (1) is the most natural. Meanwhile, in example (2), although it already uses the politeness marker "tolong" ("please"), the utterance is still inappropriate due to a grammatical error. In Indonesian, direct imperative speech acts do not require the formal *meN-* prefix on the verb. This indicates the presence of interlanguage, where the speaker adds the *meN-* affix to a base verb. On the other hand, the conventionally indirect strategy used in example (3) can be considered overpoliteness when addressed to a close friend. Moreover, the use of the address term "Anda" is less appropriate, as it implies a high level of formality. In second language acquisition, this shows that the learners' interlanguage is still at a stage that is not yet fully sensitive to context (sociopragmatics). This limitation in sociopragmatic competence is not caused by a lack of understanding of vocabulary or structure, but rather by the ability to recognize that different situations require different language varieties and degrees of personal nuance.

Various studies on the acquisition or competence of request speech acts in relation to interlanguage pragmatics have been widely examined across different languages. Most researchers use discourse completion tasks (DCTs), for instance Blum-kulka & Olshtain (1984), Iragui (1996), Woodfield (Pütz & Neff-Aertselaer, 2008), Eslami & Noora (Pütz & Neff-Aertselaer, 2008), or Alzeebaree & Yavuz (2017); Kurniawati et al. (2021) as their basic methodology; although others gather their data from informal interviews and questionnaire surveys, for instance Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1998) and Dippold (Pütz & Neff-Aertselaer, 2008). The seminal work of Blum-kulka & Olshtain (1984) remains a key reference through their study *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*. From a pragmatic perspective, Taguchi (2011) investigated the development of pragmatic competence, including the use of request speech acts, while (Zhu, 2012) examines and compares request strategies in request emails. Woodfield (Pütz & Neff-Aertselaer, 2008) and presents differences between ESL learners and native English speakers in expressing requests. At a relatively advanced level, ESL learners may operate with a limited range of linguistic strategies in formulating appropriate speech acts and may benefit from awareness-raising tasks aimed at developing their pragmatic competence. Furthermore, sociocultural transfer has been shown to significantly influence Japanese learners' planning processes for developing appropriate politeness strategies. Similarly, Otcu & Deniz Zeyrek (Pütz & Neff-Aertselaer, 2008), who studied the use of modality in request utterances, found that learners with lower proficiency levels relied solely on formulaic utterances they had previously been

exposed to, while learners with higher proficiency levels were more likely to exhibit pragmatic transfer, given the linguistic resources available for such transfer.

So far, there have been relatively few studies that specifically examine directive speech acts in Indonesian as a second language, particularly from the perspective of language acquisition. Existing studies tend to remain at a surface level, focusing primarily on pragmatic studies only or on BIPA teaching only. The study discusses the strategies and politeness modifications of the speech act of requesting by Japanese students in the BIPA program (Kartika, 2017). Meanwhile, Firmansyah et al. (2022), who investigated the perceptions of beginner-level BIPA learners regarding teachers' speech acts, found that in online learning, the most frequently used speech acts by teachers are assertive illocutionary acts, because teachers spend more time delivering material than assigning tasks. Research on directive speech acts has also been linked to politeness (Masitoh, 2021) or impoliteness (Rahmawati et al., 2021). Furthermore, based on a study of teaching materials, Mayrita et al. (2023) found that there are 5 types of illocutionary speech acts, namely assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative, which are very important because these teaching materials determine and guide BIPA learners in learning Indonesian.

One of the goals of learning Indonesian as a second language is to enable learners to communicate with Indonesian-speaking communities or use Indonesian as a means of intercultural communication. Therefore, learning Indonesian Language (BIPA) cannot be separated from learning Indonesian culture (Periera, 2018; Rofiuddin et al., 2019; Wirawan & Nakti, 2023; Prameswari et al. 2023; Haliq et al., 2025; Lubis et al., 2025; Turistiati et al., 2025). Even more, Zuchdi & Nurhadi (2019) and Rahmawati et al. (2024) argue that learning to understand and use Indonesian will be more effective if the language is studied together with its culture (see Ekasiswanto et al., 2024; Inderasari et al., 2024).

Given the lack of studies that specifically examine the competence of directive request speech acts among BIPA learners, particularly from a second language acquisition perspective, it is important to conduct research on the acquisition of directive request speech acts by BIPA learners. The focus is on shared tendencies in learners' sociopragmatic behavior in expressing requests appropriately according to context. By employing Brown & Levinson's theory and the framework of speech act realization as summarized by Schauer, this study aims to analyze the acquisition of socially sensitive realizations of directive request speech acts among BIPA learners.

## Method

Given the long duration of longitudinal language acquisition research, this study adopts a cross-sectional design. Therefore, the variables are collected at a single point in time from the entire sample population or an available subset (Dadjowidjojo, 2008). In addition, since this research is situated within pragmatics, specifically speech acts, and among the three most commonly used data collection methods—(1) Discourse Completion Test, (2) role-play, and (3) natural conversation data—the instrument used is the Discourse Completion Test (hereafter DCT) (see Blum-Kulka et al., 1984). The reasons for its use include its ease of data collection and its ability to observe individuals from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds responding to the same situation, while controlling for variables. Although there is no version of the DCT that allows the investigation of interactional dynamics, negotiation, and complex realization of speech acts, these versions do allow the examination of model or prototypical responses. Furthermore, to identify what participants consider an appropriate response in each situation, the WDCT is the best choice, as no other instrument enables such controlled data collection while producing comparable data. As stated by Rose & Kasper (2002), when the aim of research is to provide information about speakers' pragmalinguistic knowledge of the strategies and linguistic forms through which communicative acts can be implemented, as well as their sociopragmatic knowledge of contextual factors that enable certain strategic and linguistic choices, the DCT is an appropriate method.

The WDCT instrument in this study was first subjected to a pilot project involving 12 BIPA learners. By testing the instrument on this sample, items or questions were identified and subsequently refined to ensure validity and reliability. In addition, supplementary data collection through direct observation and interviews was also conducted. Interviews were used to confirm responses or to inquire about the background behind participants' answers. Meanwhile, observations were conducted both through elicited classroom situations and naturalistic observation.

The instrument consists of three sections: a consent form, respondent demographic information, and the main WDCT questions. The first section is the consent form, which provides information about the study and confirms the participant's willingness to participate. The second section contains respondent data, including demographic background such as gender, age, languages spoken, length of Indonesian language study, information on participants' mobility to Indonesia, and possible familial or friendship relations with Indonesians. The third section contains the main WDCT instrument. The entire instrument is presented in

Indonesian. However, during the completion, a research assistant (a native Mandarin speaker) provided oral explanations to respondents in Mandarin.

The core instrument consists of eight situations designed to elicit request speech acts. Each WDCT scenario is first briefly described (an average of 22.125 words per situation), followed by a prompt directed to the respondent (e.g., "What would you say..."). The request situations are divided into eight groups based on three variables: Power (P), Distance (D), and Rank (R), following Brown & Levinson's framework. Power relations depend on whether the interlocutor possesses certain social characteristics such as social status and age: if so, the relationship is considered equal (-P); otherwise, it is unequal (+P). Distance is operationalized in terms of familiarity between interlocutors: if they know each other, the distance is low (-D); if they are strangers, it is high (+D). Meanwhile, Rank (R) is determined by the degree of urgency of the situation (time or circumstances): urgent situations are (+R), while non-urgent situations are (-R).

The situations used in this study represent all combinations of these variables, with respondents positioned in equal or lower power relations than their interlocutors, coded as (1) +D/+P/+R, (2) +D/+P/-R, (3) +D/-P/+R, (4) +D/-P/-R, (5) -D/+P/+R, (6) -D/+P/-R, (7) -D/-P/+R, and (8) -D/-P/-R. Given that the target respondents are university students, situations reflecting different configurations of power, distance, and urgency were selected to ensure realism and relevance for this group. Furthermore, following Klimczak-Pawlak (2014), the -D/+P condition in certain student contexts is interpreted as Med D/+P when the interlocutor is a lecturer.

Based on this, the scenarios presented involve students in eight situations: (1) asking an unknown elderly woman not to block the way when getting off a bus; (2) requesting a seminar speaker's presentation file; (3) borrowing a pen from an unfamiliar fellow student during orientation; (4) asking a shop assistant for help retrieving a hard-to-reach item; (5) asking a lecturer for clarification shortly before an exam; (6) asking one's father/mother to cook a special meal; (7) asking a dormitory friend to bring food delivery because of stomach pain and urgency to go to the bathroom; and (8) asking a close friend to take a photo while walking together in a park.

The unit of analysis in this study is the realization of speech acts. It is based on Blum-kulka & Olshtain (1984), who state that request speech act realization consists of a core element that may be accompanied by peripheral elements, also called supportive moves or external modifiers, which may precede or follow the core act. According to (Blum-kulka & Olshtain, 1984), the core elements of speech acts include Direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect strategies. The adjuncts to the head act in this study follow Schauer (2009) synthesis of classifications by Blum-kulka & Olshtain (1984) and Trosborg (1995), comprising (1) Alerter (address terms), (2) Preparator (getting a precommitment), (3) Grounder, (4) Disarmer, (5) Imposition or cost minimizer, (6) Sweetener, (7) Promise of reward, (8) Small talk, (9) Appreciator, and (10) Considerator.

The participants selected for this study were 17 BIPA learners from Taiwan who had studied Indonesian in their fifth semester. Thus, the participants were at an upper-intermediate level. This selection was based on the homogeneity of background and their willingness to participate in the study.

## Results and Discussion

Social distance relates to the degree of closeness between interlocutors, which has implications for whether speech is produced in a more formal and impersonal manner or in a relaxed and personal one (Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014). Meanwhile, power is associated with differences in social status that imply the relative level of authority between interlocutors. These differences in social status result in speech that is either more formal and respectful or, conversely, more casual and direct. The level of imposition, on the other hand, relates to the urgency of the situation, whether based on time constraints or circumstances. In other words, the greater the values of +D/+P/+R, the "heavier" the speech act and the higher the level of politeness strategy required.

### Realization of Speech Acts

Utterances are manifested through actions that take shape in various types of speech acts. Based on the research data, the realizations of the speech acts produced by the learners may consist solely of the head act or of a head act accompanied by one or more peripheral element(s), either preceding or following the head act (see Blum-kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Trosborg, 1995; Reiter, 2000; Schauer, 2009). Drawing on the components summarized by Schauer (2009), Tabel 1 presents data illustrating the realization of these constituent elements in the request speech acts produced by the respondents.

Table 1. Realization of Speech Acts

No	Situation	Constituent Elements	Examples of the Data
A.	+D/+P/+R	1) Head act	1) Permisi. (1.7)
		2) Head act + Grounder	<i>Excuse me.</i> (1.7)
		3) Alerter + Head act + Grounder	2) Permisi. Saya mau turun. (1.1) <i>Excuse me. I want to get off.</i> (1.1)
		4) Alerter + Grounder + Head act + Appreciator	3) Permisi, Bu. Bolehkah Bu pindah sebentar, saya mau turun. (1.3) <i>Excuse me, ma'am. Could you move over for a moment, I'd like to get off.</i> (1.3)
B.	+D/+P/-R	4) Alerter + Head act + Grounder	4) Permisi, Bu. Saya mau turun di sini. Bolehkah minta tempat untuk turun ya? Terima kasih, Bu. (1.12) <i>Excuse me, ma'am. I want to get off here. May I have a place to get off? Thank you, ma'am.</i> (1.12)
		5) Alerter + Head act + Grounder	5) Bang, bisakah saya ambil ppt Anda. Karena saya sangat tertarik dengan ppt Anda. (2.4) <i>Bro, can I have your PPT? I'm very interested in it.</i> (2.4)
		6) Alerter + Grounder + Head act	6) Pak, saya sangat tertarik dengan presentasi Bapak, boleh saya minta file tayangan itu? (2.5) <i>Sir, I'm very interested in your presentation. May I request the presentation file?</i> (2.5)
		7) Alerter + Preparator + Grounder + Head act + Appreciator	7) Selamat pagi, Bapak. Saya mahasiswa dari NCCU. Saya sangat tertarik dengan presentasi yang Bapak tadi membagikan, jadi saya ingin minta file tayangannya tadi untuk belajar. Terima kasih, Pak. (2.9) <i>Good morning, Sir. I am a student from NCCU. I am very interested in the presentation you shared earlier, so I would like to request the presentation file for study purposes. Thank you, Sir.</i> (2.9)
		8) Alerter + Head act	8) Permisi, boleh saya meminjam pulpen Anda? (3.11) <i>Excuse me, may I borrow your pen?</i> (3.11)
		9) Head act + Imposition minimizer	9) Bisakah berikan sepuah pena kepada saya? Saya akan kembalikan sebentar. (3.17) <i>Could you give me a pen? I'll return it in a moment.</i> (3.17)
		10) Alerter + Grounder + Head act	10) Permisi Mas. Saya lupa membawa pulpen. Bisakah saya meminjam sepulpen? (3.5) <i>Excuse me bro. I forgot to bring a pen. Can I borrow a pen?</i> (3.5)
C.	+D/-P/+R	11) Grounder + Alerter + Head act	11) Saya lupa membawa pena hari ini. Maaf, boleh meminjam pena kepada saya? (3.13) <i>I forgot to bring a pen today. Sorry, may I borrow a pen?</i> (3.13)
		12) Alerter + Head act + Grounder + Disarmer	12) Permisi, kak. Bolehkah meminjam pulpen atau pena kamu kepada saya? Karena saya harus mengisi formulir tapi lupa bawa pulpen saya. Minta tolong ya! (3.9) <i>Excuse me, sis/bro. May I borrow your pen? I have to fill out a form but forgot to bring mine. Please!</i> (3.9)
		13) Alerter + Head act	13) Mas/Mbak, boleh bantu saya ambil barang itu? (4.5) <i>Bro/Sis, may you help me get that item?</i> (4.5)
		14) Alerter + Preparator + Head act	14) Permisi, Saya mau lihat barang itu, bolehkan Anda bantu saya? (4.3) <i>Excuse me, I want to see that item, may you help me?</i> (4.3)
D.	+D/-P/-R	15) Alerter + Head act + Grounder	15) Maaf Bisakah membantu saya? Saya mau cek barang itu. (4.17) <i>Sorry. Can you help me? I want to check that item.</i> (4.17)
		16) Alerter + Head act + Disarmer + Grounder	16) Permisi, kak. Bolehkah kakak mengambil barang di atas rak itu kepada saya? Minta tolong ya, karena saya terlalu pendek. (4.9) <i>Excuse me, sis/bro. May you help me get that item on the shelf? Please help me, because I'm too short.</i> (4.9)
		17) Alerter + Preparator + Grounder + Head act + Appreciator	17) Permisi Pak/Mbak, Saya ingin mengambil barangnya tapi itu di tempat terlalu tinggi. Bisakah Pak/Mbak membantu saya? Terima kasih banyak. (4.15) <i>Excuse me, sir/madam. I want to get that item, but it's too high up. Can you help me? Thank you very much.</i> (4.15)
		18) Alerter + Head act	18) Dosen bisakan Anda menjelaskan teknis ini dengan kami (5.4) <i>Lecturer, could you explain this technical matter to us?</i> (5.4)
		19) Alerter + Head act + Grounder	19) Permisi Bu/Pak __ bolehkah Anda menjelaskan ini sebentar? Saya masih sedikit bingung tentang ini. (5.16)
E.	-D/+P/+R	18) Alerter + Head act	18) Dosen bisakan Anda menjelaskan teknis ini dengan kami (5.4) <i>Lecturer, could you explain this technical matter to us?</i> (5.4)
		19) Alerter + Head act + Grounder	19) Permisi Bu/Pak __ bolehkah Anda menjelaskan ini sebentar? Saya masih sedikit bingung tentang ini. (5.16)

		20)	Alerter + Grounder + Head act		20)	<i>Excuse me, Ma'am/Sir ____, could you explain this for a moment? I'm still a little confused about this. (5.16)</i> Maaf bu, kami masih bingung tentang teknis presentasinya. Bisakah Ibu menjelaskannya sekali lagi? (5.14) <i>Sorry ma'am, we are still confused about the technical aspects of the presentation. Could you explain it once again? (5.14)</i>
F.	-D/+P/-R	21)	Grounder + Head act	+	21)	Lapar sekali. Saya mau makan. (6.14) <i>I'm very hungry. I want to eat. (6.14)</i>
		22)	Alerter + Grounder + Head act		22)	Bu, aku lapar, bisa masak nggak? (6.1) <i>Mom, I'm hungry. Can you cook for me? (6.1)</i>
		23)	Alerter + Head act + Grounder		23)	Ibu masak kan makanan, saya mau makan (6.4) <i>Mom, cook me some food. I want to eat. (6.4)</i>
		24)	Alerter + Grounder + Disarmer + Head act		24)	Ayah/Ibu, aku lapar sekali, boleh memasak aku makanan? Tolonglah. (6.5) <i>Dad/Mom, I'm very hungry. Could you cook me some food? Please. (6.5)</i>
		25)	Alerter + Grounder + Imposition + Head act		25)	Ibu, sudah lama saya belum makan masakan yang dibuat oleh ibu. Saya kangen banget! Minta ibu memasak masakan untuk saya. (6.9) <i>Mom, it's been a long time since I've eaten your cooking. I really miss it! I'm asking you to cook for me. (6.9)</i>
G.	-D/-P/+R	26)	Alerter + Head act		26)	Dosen bisakan Anda menjelaskan teknis ini dengan kami <i>Lecturer could you explain this technical matter to us</i>
		27)	Alerter + Head act + Grounder		27)	Joko, bisakahmu mengambil Uber untuk saya? Saya masih di kamar mandi. <i>Joko, can you get me my Uber order? I'm still in the bathroom.</i>
		28)	Alerter + Head act + Promise of reward		28)	Hadi (teman asrama), boleh bantu saya ambil Uber Eat? Nanti aku berbagi makanan denganmu. (7.5) <i>Hadi (dorm friend), may you help me pick up Uber Eats? I'll share the food with you later. (7.5)</i>
		29)	Grounder + Head act		29)	Makananku sudah datang tapi aku masih di kamar mandi, boleh bantuku mengambilkan makanannya? (7.14) <i>My food has arrived but I'm still in the bathroom, may you help me pick it up? (7.14)</i>
		30)	Alerter + Head act + Grounder + Imposition + Disarmer		30)	Kak, bolehkah ambil makanan yang uber Eat antar itu kepada saya? Makanan itu sudah datang, tapi perut saya masih sakit sekarang. Mau minta tolong kakak. (7.9) <i>Bro/Sis, may you help me pick up the Uber Eats order for me? The food has arrived, but I have a stomachache right now. I'd like to ask for your help. (7.9)</i>
H.	-D/-P/-R	31)	Head act		31)	Ayo berfoto di sini. (8.5) <i>Let's take a photo here. (8.5)</i>
		32)	Alerter + Head act		32)	Joko, bisakahmu berfoto saya di sini. (8.8) <i>Joko, could you take a photo of me here? (8.8)</i>
		33)	Preparator + Head act + Promise of reward		33)	Tempat ini indah sekali! Bolehkah Anda menfoto saya? Saya juga bisa menfoto Anda! (8.10) <i>This place is so beautiful! May you take a photo of me? I can also take one for you! (8.10)</i>
		34)	Preparator + Promise of reward + Head act		34)	Ayo berfoto! Aku akan memfotomu dulu, nanti bisakah kamu memfotoku? (8.16) <i>Let's take a photo! I'll take yours first, then could you take mine? (8.16)</i>

Theoretically, the higher the values of D, P, and R, the more indirect the head act tends to be, and the more peripheral elements are included. Conversely, if the values of D, P, and R are low, the utterance tends to be more direct, and peripheral elements can be reduced or omitted.

In situation (A), with values of +D/+P/+R, the utterance requires an impersonal form, respectful language, and brevity. Based on the data in the table, utterances (1)–(4) generally follow the +D and +P contexts. However, utterances (3) and (4) are not entirely consistent with the +R context. There are some peripheral elements that are unnecessary, namely the imposition in example (3) and the alerter and grounder in example (4). In this context, the speaker should ideally choose the fastest and most direct form so that the communicative goal is achieved immediately. “Time” is the main factor that necessitates a condensed utterance. The physical situation (the bus stopping, people moving to get off) already provides strong cues that the speaker intends to pass through. Thus, the presence of peripheral elements becomes

redundant, as the request can be understood without additional explanation. These two utterances indicate that the respondents have not fully grasped the urgency of the context. Using long and excessively polite utterances in urgent situations shows that the speaker only understands that requests must be polite, without understanding that politeness is relative to the context.

Next, in context (H), with -D/-P/-R, the utterance should be more direct, include minimal peripheral elements, and use an informal style. However, examples (33) and (34) still show indirect forms, formal style, and relatively long utterances. This indicates overpoliteness or overmitigation that is not suitable for the context. This can be related to the internalized rule that requests should always be polite and long, as well as the tendency to avoid the risk of sounding impolite. As a result, all contexts are treated the same because the learners have not yet understood that politeness is relative to D, P, and R.

The data also show that learners have not consistently been able to use informal Indonesian when they have close social distance and power relations with their interlocutors, as in situations (D, F, H). This mismatch is evident in the use of the pronouns “Anda” and “saya” in informal contexts. This can be related to the BIPA (Indonesian as a Foreign Language) learning process. Since BIPA learning generally starts with formal Indonesian, followed by gradual introduction to informal Indonesian, learners at the upper-intermediate level are still unable to spontaneously apply the distinction between “Anda” and “kamu” or “saya” and “aku” contextually. There is a tendency to use the formal register as a default safe strategy because it is taught in class as the “correct” and socially safe choice. This is a “playing safe” strategy. Moreover, Mandarin does not have a pronominal system that consistently marks social relations like Indonesian does. Consequently, learners tend to simplify the system (for example, always using “saya-Anda” or “aku-kamu”) or transfer first-language norms that are not fully compatible with Indonesian. This language transfer is evident, for instance, in data that use the address term “dosen” to refer to a lecturer (example 27). In language acquisition, this is called a pragmalinguistic failure, meaning the learner has chosen the wrong linguistic form. In B2-level interlanguage, this indicates that learners are still not fully sensitive to sociopragmatic aspects, although their grammatical knowledge is adequate. This limitation in sociopragmatic competence is caused by the ability to understand vocabulary and structures, but not yet being able to recognize that a relaxed situation should automatically activate an informal register. Thus, the inability to apply this principle is not due to linguistic deficiencies, but rather to still-developing pragmatic competence, cultural transfer, and a lack of experience with real-life contexts.

The analysis of speech act realization into its constituent elements, namely core and peripheral elements, is as follows.

### Core Elements of Speech Acts: Categories and Strategies

Based on the classification summarized by Trosborg (1995), which is grounded in the work of earlier scholars such as Austin (1962), Searle (1969), and as well as Blum-kulka & Olshtain (1984), the request speech act strategies found in the data of this study can be classified as in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Categories and Strategies of Core Elements in Request Speech Acts

No	Category	Strategy	Example of Data
1.	directive	Imperatif	1) Bantu aku berfoto di sini! (8.14) <i>Help me take a photo here! (8.14)</i>
			2) ambillah untukku! (7.1) <i>take it for me! (7.1)</i>
			3) Kak, minta tolong untuk memfoto saya ya. (8.9) <i>Bro, could you please help me take a photo of me? (8.9)</i>
			4) Tolong membawa itu untukku! (7.17) <i>Please carry that for me! (7.17)</i>
		Performatif	5) saya minta tolong mas/mbak untuk mengambil itu. (4.17) <i>I would like to ask bro/sis to help me take it. (4.17)</i>
			6) Saya minta izin untuk menjelaskan lagi tentang teknis presentasi yang dari kelas Anda itu. (5.9) <i>I would like to ask permission to further explain the technical aspects of your class presentation. (5.9)</i>
2.	Indirect	Hints	7) Permisi (1.7) <i>Excuse me. (1.7)</i>
			8) saya mau turun. (1.8) <i>I want to get off. (1.8)</i>
			9) Saya mau makan. (6.14) <i>I want to eat. (6.14)</i>
			10) saya mau melihat barang di rak atas. (4.3) <i>I want to see the item on the upper shelf. (4.3)</i>

3.	Conventional indirect (Hearer based)	Ability	11) Bisakah Anda mengambil untuk saya? (4.7) <i>Could you take it for me? (4.7)</i>
		Permission	12) Bisakah Ibu menjelaskannya sekali lagi? (5.14) <i>Could you please explain it once again, Ma'am? (5.14)</i>
			13) boleh saya meminta file tayangan ini? (2.11) <i>may I request the presentation file? (2.11)</i>
			14) Bolehkah saya meminjam pena Anda? (3.12) <i>May I borrow your pen? (3.12)</i>

Based on the core speech acts in the table, learners use three types of speech acts to express requests: direct speech acts, indirect speech acts, and conventionally indirect speech acts. The data above show that although learners employ direct imperative and performative forms as in examples (1)–(7), they already make use of internal modifiers such as *tolong* ('please/help') and *izin* ('permission'). According to Blumkulka & Olshtain (1984) and Schauer (2009), such lexical down graders serve as markers of awareness of politeness strategies used to soften utterances.

Meanwhile, the use of declarative sentences as in examples (7)–(10) falls under indirect speech acts. These indirect speech acts are classified as hints. By conveying information in the form of declarative statements, respondents provide cues to the interlocutor without using a direct strategy, with the intention that the interlocutor will infer the implied request from the information given.

The use of interrogative sentences in request speech acts, as seen in examples (11)–(14), belongs to conventionally indirect speech acts. Through this interrogative mode, respondents express requests using ability and permission strategies that are oriented toward the hearer. In other words, by adopting the hearer's perspective, respondents demonstrate an understanding of the need for empathy by considering the interlocutor's viewpoint. Inherently, this type of speech act is not overly direct (i.e., not imperative), but also not overly complex. Within Brown & Levinson's (Brown & Levinson, 1987) framework, it functions as a negative politeness strategy (non-imposing) while remaining efficient. Its structure is also simple (modal + verb) and does not require complex constructions. Thus, learners prefer it due to its low pragmatic risk (it does not sound rude, nor overly elaborate). This form becomes high-frequency input, making it easily stored as a pattern in interlanguage. In addition, it is explicitly taught in the classroom as a polite and "correct" form of requesting. As a result, learners tend to generalize it across various contexts.

A number of studies in interlanguage pragmatics show a developmental tendency in request strategies from more direct forms toward more indirect ones. Learners at early stages tend to use direct strategies, then develop toward conventionally indirect strategies such as ability and permission, while non-conventionally indirect strategies such as hints tend to appear at later stages (Rose & Kasper, 2002; Trosborg, 1995). The data in this study validate previous findings in interlanguage pragmatics, namely that intermediate-advanced BIPA learners have already moved beyond overly direct forms but are not yet fully contextually flexible (Rose & Kasper, 2002). Therefore, ability and permission strategies function as a transitional stage (Otcu & Deniz Zeyrek in Pütz & Neff-Aertselaer, 2008; Woodfield in Pütz & Neff-Aertselaer, 2008).

### Supporting Elements of Request Speech Acts

In addition to the core utterance, the components of directive request speech acts are also preceded or followed by peripheral elements. Based on the available data, Tabel 3 are the types of peripheral elements in request speech acts produced by BIPA learners.

**Table 3.** Supporting Elements of Request Speech Acts

No	Supporting Element	Type	Example
1.	Alerter	Greeting	(1) Halo 'Hello'
			(2) Pagi 'Morning'
			(3) Selamat siang, Pak. <i>Good afternoon, Sir.</i>
		Salutations	(4) Mas/Mbak/Pak/Bu/Ayah/Ibu/Kak/Bang 'Bro/Sis/Sir/Mam/Father/Mother/Sis/Bro'
			(5) Rudi, Joko, Hadi 'Rudi, Joko, Hadi'
		Exclamation	(6) Oh ya. 'Oh, yes.'
			(7) Eh/ey

			<i>Hey/eh</i>
			(8) Aduh.... 'Oh no... / Ouch...'
		Politeness	(9) Maaf 'Sorry'
			(10) Permisi 'Excuse me'
2.	Preparator	Explanation	(11) saya mau barang itu (4.13) I want that item (4.13)
			(12) Tempat ini indah sekali! (8.10) This place is very beautiful! (8.10)
3.	Grounders	Reason	(13) saya lupa bawa pena (3.1) I forgot to bring a pen (3.1)
			(14) saya tak bisa ambil itu (4.2) I cannot take it (4.2)
			(15) kami tidak tahu hal-hal tentang teknis presentasinya (5.6) We do not know anything about the presentation technicalities (5.6)
4.	Disarmer	Persuasion	(16) Saya kangen banget! (6.9) I really miss you! (6.9)
			(17) Mau minta tolong kakak. (7.9) I want to ask for help, bro/sis. (7.9)
5.	Imposition	Burden statement	(18) Saya mau makan ayam goreng (6.13) I want to eat fried chicken (6.13)
			(19) tapi perut saya masih sakit sekarang (7.9) but my stomach still hurts right now (7.9)
6.	Appreciator	Thanking	(20) Terima kasih. (6.10) Thank you. (6.10)
			(21) Terima kasih, Bu (1.9) Thank you, Ma'am (1.9)
7.	Promise of reward	Reward	(22) Nanti aku berbagi makanan denganmu. (7.5) Later I will share food with you. (7.5)
			(23) Kalau kamu mau aku bisa berikan sedikit! (7.17) If you want, I can give you some! (7.17)
			(24) Aku akan memfotomu dulu (8.12) I will take your photo first (8.12)

From the table above, learners use various peripheral elements, namely alerters, preparators, grounders, disarmers, imposition markers, appreciators, and promises of reward. The use of alerters aims to attract the interlocutor's attention; preparators provide preliminary explanations before the head act; grounders offer reasons for making the request; imposition markers are used to strengthen the persuasive force of the request; appreciation forms express empathy toward the interlocutor; promises of reward make the request more appealing to the interlocutor; and disarmers are used to "soften" the request or reduce the risk of it sounding too commanding.

In the use of alerters in examples (1)–(10), learners employ greetings, address terms, interjections, and politeness markers. The address terms used as alerters are also varied. Learners who are already able to use alerters demonstrate development in their pragmalinguistic competence. However, not all alerters conform to sociocultural norms in Indonesian. For instance, the use of "Bang" in situation (B), addressed to an older, unfamiliar person in an academic setting, is problematic. Although "Bang" (an informal, familiar, regional form of address) is structurally correct and can be considered polite in certain contexts, it is not appropriate in this situation. A more appropriate form would be "Bapak" or another neutral formal address term. This indicates the learners' difficulty in mapping contextual variables (formal setting, high power distance) to appropriate address forms. While they know "how to be polite," they do not yet fully know "how to be culturally appropriate in politeness." This reflects a typical feature of interlanguage, where rules have not yet been fully and finely differentiated.

Rose & Kasper (2002) argue that early stages of pragmatic development focus primarily on the head act (e.g., imperatives or simple forms), while later stages involve the increasing use of peripheral elements (modifiers). The findings of various peripheral elements (alerters, preparators, grounders, imposition markers, appreciation, etc.) in this study indicate that learners have reached a stage of pragmatic expansion, in which they enrich their utterances with multiple supportive strategies. The presence of promises of reward and disarmers as peripheral elements suggests that BIPA learners have mastered more advanced pragmatic strategies to minimize the imposition of requests and increase compliance from interlocutors. This indicates a relatively strong development of their pragmalinguistic competence.

Overall, learners show significant development in pragmatic competence, as indicated by their ability to use various peripheral elements in realizing request speech acts. This reflects growing pragmalinguistic competence, particularly in mapping linguistic forms to pragmatic functions. However, the use of these elements is not always fully sensitive to social context, so in some cases it may still lead to overpoliteness or culturally inappropriate expressions.

## Conclusion

The functional aspect of language is essential in second language acquisition, as learners are required not only to understand linguistic structures but also to use language appropriately according to situational contexts. This study finds that upper-intermediate BIPA learners have demonstrated progress in pragmatic competence, particularly in employing strategies and linguistic forms to express requests with an appropriate degree of force; however, they still encounter difficulties in adjusting levels of politeness and situational demands, as reflected in overly long and excessively polite utterances even in urgent contexts, stemming from a simplified assumption that requests must always be expressed politely. Learners' preference for certain request strategies is further influenced by instructional practices that emphasize formal language as a "safe" option, leading to overreliance on formal registers and limited flexibility in spontaneous adjustments, such as selecting appropriate pronouns based on social context; this issue is compounded by differences between learners' first language and Indonesian pronominal systems, particularly the absence of complex social distinctions, resulting in inappropriate language transfer. These challenges indicate that the difficulties are not merely linguistic but are closely related to the ongoing development of pragmatic competence, the influence of first-language cultural norms, and limited exposure to real-life communication contexts, with intermediate learners occupying a transitional stage where their directives are neither overly direct nor fully contextually appropriate. This study is also limited by its methodology, suggesting that future research could benefit from incorporating scheduled observations, in-depth interviews, or a cross-sectional approach across multiple BIPA proficiency levels, as well as expanding participants' cultural backgrounds to enrich interlanguage pragmatics research. The findings carry important implications for both BIPA teaching and second language pragmatics research, emphasizing that instruction should not only focus on grammatically correct forms but also on contextually appropriate usage through real-life practice, role-play simulations, and feedback addressing pragmatic aspects, while also reinforcing the position of pragmatics as a core component of language learning rather than a supplementary one.

## Declarations

- Author contribution** : Wira Kurniawati was responsible for overseeing the entire research project. She also led the writing of the manuscript and collaborated closely with the second author. Silvia Rehulina Ginting contributed to data collection, transcription, and analysis. She also revised the manuscript. Both authors approved the final version of the manuscript.
- Funding statement** : This research did not receive any funding.
- Conflict of interest** : Both authors declare that they have no competing interests.
- Ethics Approval** : Information on Ethics Approval and informed consent statements are required for all articles published in BAHASTRA since 2026.
- Additional information** : No additional information is available for this paper.

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