Communication in the Workplace: Request Mitigations in Instant Messaging (IM) among Native Malay Speakers

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ABSTRACT

In workplace communication, being polite and clear is essential. However, achieving both simultaneously can be challenging, particularly when dealing with face-threatening acts like making requests. Requests can infringe on someone's freedom of action, potentially leading to face threats, necessitating facework strategies for restoration. One effective strategy is using external modifications or supportive moves to mitigate requests. Unfortunately, studies on requests among native Malay speakers have mainly focused on request cores, neglecting the investigation of request supportive moves. To address this gap, our qualitative study aims to explore request supportive moves used by native Malay speakers in instant messaging (IM) group communication. We analysed the data using strategy types of supportive moves by Fukushima (1996), supplemented with additional categories from Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and Konakahara (2011). Our findings revealed a preference for deferential supportive moves, with grounders being the most favoured type for mitigating requests. Our research highlights that communicatively competent native Malay speakers often use reasons as supportive moves to mitigate requests, regardless of the requests' directness levels. Hence, it is advisable to mitigate requests with supportive moves generally or with grounders specifically when producing effective requests in the work environment. This approach allows native Malay speakers to present their requests clearly, politely and without imposing on others which in return helps to build quality relationships and keeps them productive.

Keywords: Instant messaging (IM); native Malay speakers; Speech Act of request; supportive move; workplace communication

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INTRODUCTION

In social interactions, effective communication is essential for successfully delivering messages. Communicative competence encompasses two fundamental rules; (1) making oneself clear; and (2) being polite (Leech, 1983). However, achieving communicative competence can be challenging as being straightforward may lead to offense, while being overly polite can result in ambiguity. This inherent conflict between consideration and message clarity often complicates communication principles. For example, consider the imperative utterance, "I want to have the report on my table by 5 pm," which is undeniably direct. The directness will be perceived as rude if both the speaker and the hearer hold the same level of position such as the executive level or managerial level. Unless the request is uttered from a manager to his or her subordinate, then, it will be considered as an order or instruction and will not be deemed as offensive. Nevertheless, if someone says, "If it does not trouble you, would it be okay if you get me the report by around 5 pm or so?" the message will become vague and the recipient might interpret it as optional rather than an urgent request. The conflict between consideration and clarity becomes particularly crucial in organizational contexts where performance goals and productivity are emphasized. Balancing both aspects of communication can impact organizational progress.

Context plays a crucial role in workplace communication as different variables may result in different approaches. For instance, communication that occurs in hospitals might neglect the use of supportive moves during urgency, but in universities, supportive moves are needed to communicate efficiently between students and lecturers. Taking the latter example, Malaysians are observed to employ supportive moves frequently in contexts where power dynamics are involved, particularly in unequal role relations such as student-lecturer relationships (Sattar & Farnia, 2014). A university lecturer is portrayed as having lawful authority over students, who do not possess any legitimate power. Song (2012) claims that Asian society prioritizes education which leads to high regards for university lecturers, therefore, requests are carried out softer through mitigated supportive moves. Supportive moves allow harmonious exchanges between the weaker and the stronger as the weaker anticipates greater cooperation and understanding from the stronger (Aldhulaee, 2011).

Furthermore, written text in daily workplace conversations adds complexity to this conflict as it is different from spoken text. It lacks non-verbal cues which are vital in politeness contextualization and short text messages constructed fall in between spoken language and written language. This article focuses on examining the types of strategies used by native Malay speakers in instant messaging (IM) when mitigating requests in workplace interactions. The analysis was carried out using the analytical framework by Fukushima (1996) which was adapted from Blum-Kulka et al. (1989).

REQUEST STRUCTURES

Requests have become the focus of discussion among researchers beginning with Austin's (1962) work on speech act theory and the subsequent work by Searle (1969). Requests are inherently face-threatening acts as they infringe upon hearers' freedom of actions and freedom from imposition. When speakers make requests, they risk losing face which necessitates the use of facework strategies to restore and repair their face. These facework strategies may be constructed by adopting positive or negative politeness strategies to minimize the imposition involved (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Additionally, speakers may employ supportive moves to modify requests' impacts, allowing their forces to be mitigated on hearers (Blum-Kulka, 1989). This study's

investigation was based on the theoretical perspectives of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and the succeeding Speech Act Theory work by Searle (1969). Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory is considered one of the most productive, effective, and definitive works on linguistic politeness (Haugh, 2013), demonstrating its continued relevance in today's society (Thuruvan & Yunus, 2017). Many recent studies continue to apply the theory (e.g., AlMujaibel & Gomaa, 2022; Wijayanti et al., 2019).

Requests uttered by interlocutors may be displayed in two segments. Sifianou (1992) calls them as Head Acts and supportive moves. A Head Act makes a request and represents the core of a request, whilst a supportive move softens or intensifies the force of a request. A request's realization relies on its core except for off-record requests which use peripheral elements as requests (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Analyse the following request structures:

(1) "This living room is filthy."
(2) "<u>This living room is filthy</u>. Would you and Mary be able to clean it up?"

(Adapted from Weizman, 1989)

In Example (1), the utterance is considered as an off-record request and acts as a Head Act. Nevertheless, in Example (2), it serves as a supportive move for the new request core, "Would you and Mary be able to clean it up?" Consider another example of a request structure:

(3) "Can you describe this subject immediately to me? <u>I will treat you to lunch, later</u>."

(Adapted from Mohd Noor, 2016)

In Example (3), the underlined supportive move represents a promise of a reward, assuring the hearer that a reward will be given once the requested act is accomplished.

A request can be modified internally through elements within the same Head Act or externally via an adjunct to the request Head Act. For instance, the request, "Can I change the shirt colour, sir?" is added with an interpersonal meaning through the word "*sir*" which shows a courteous greeting (Hassall, 2001) and acts as an internal modifier that softens the request's impositive force. Conversely, the request, "I have to go back to my village. Can I sit for the test in advance?" displays an external modifier example. The utterance, "I have to go back to my village" acts as a supportive move to the request core, "Can I sit for the test in advance?" which enables the request's force to be mitigated (Sattar & Farnia, 2014). Put differently, verbal means can be classified under internal or external modifications, allowing requests to be modified (Faerch & Kasper, 1989), but the directness level of a request will not be affected by these two modifications. However, in this study, no attempt was made to contrast internal with external modifications as the focus was solely on external modifications, leading to the concept of "supportive moves" being more appropriate to represent external modifications to request Head Acts. In essence, supportive moves or external modifications are interchange-able. Request Head Acts are accompanied by supportive moves which are used to mitigate or aggravate requests' strengths through solidarity or deference. Some examples of supportive moves include; (1) grounders; (2) preparators; (3) disarmers; (4) pre-commitments; (5) promises of rewards; (6) availability checks; and (7) imposition minimizers.

Prior request studies on native Malay speakers focus primarily on request cores by investigating various types of request Head Acts categorized as direct, conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect. Notably, a majority of participants in previous studies preferred indirectness when making requests (Saimon, 2021; Thuruvan & Yunus, 2017; Yassin & Razak, 2018), in contrast to directness observed in a few other studies (Ahmad et al., 2020; Maros & Abdul Rahim, 2013; Mohd Noor, 2016). Only four studies have included supportive moves in their analyses (Ahmad et al., 2020; Idris & Ismail, 2023; Mohd Noor, 2016; Sattar & Farnia, 2014) with grounders being the most preferred supportive move type to mitigate requests. More information about the aforementioned studies on request supportive moves is illustrated in the Table 1.

TABLE 1. Research aspects in previous request supportive move studies

Aspect	Studies			
	Ahmad et al. (2020)	**Idris & Ismail (2023)**	**Mohd Noor (2016)**	**Sattar & Farnia (2014)**
Participants	University students in Malaysia	Working adults in Malaysia	University students and working adults in Japan	University students in Malaysia
Gender	Non-specific	Non-specific	Male	Male and female
Age	18 - 39	Non-specific	20 - 34	21 – 26
Setting	Discourse completion test (DCT)	Discourse completion test (DCT)	Instant messaging (IM)	Discourse completion test (DCT)

As Table 1 displays, participants involved were university students (Ahmad et al., 2020; Mohd Noor, 2016; Sattar & Farnia, 2014) and working adults (Idris & Ismail, 2023; Mohd Noor, 2016) who were male (Mohd Noor, 2016), male and female (Sattar & Farnia, 2014) and non-gender specific (Ahmad et al., 2020; Idris & Ismail, 2023). Generally, they were in between 18 and 39 years old (Ahmad et al., 2020; Mohd Noor, 2016; Sattar & Farnia, 2014) and obtained their tertiary education locally (Ahmad et al., 2020; Sattar & Farnia, 2014) and abroad (Mohd Noor, 2016). Mostly, request data were derived from DCT (Ahmad et al., 2020; Idris & Ismail, 2023; Sattar & Farnia, 2014), as opposed to IM (Mohd Noor, 2016). These four studies highlight a research limitation in understanding how supportive moves are used to mitigate requests in utterances concerning another type of group; female, middle-aged employed native Malay speakers.

Therefore, the present study aims to address the question of how supportive moves are used by exploring the specific mitigation strategies employed by female, middle-aged native Malay speakers when constructing requests within instant messaging (IM) workplace group communication. Identifying request supportive move types conducted by these speakers and examining how they achieve politeness and clarity in their requests are crucial, knowing that requests are face-threatening in nature. In addition, the most preferable strategy to mitigate requests can be identified as well, allowing comparisons to be made with other previous findings such as by Idris and Ismail (2023), Ahmad et al. (2020) and Sattar and Farnia (2014). Thus, the current knowledge about supportive move strategies in requests carried out by adult Malay speakers may be revised.

SUPPORTIVE MOVE STRATEGIES

Supportive moves are exterior elements attached to request Head Acts which enable impacts on hearers to be altered via mitigations or aggravations of request forces (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). The exterior elements affect requests' contexts, allowing requests to be mitigated or aggravated without affecting their directness levels. In other words, illocutionary forces can be modified indirectly through supportive moves (Faerch & Kasper, 1984), and these supportive moves may be adopted to precede, follow or to be in between Head Acts. As recommended by Fukushima (1996), strategy types of supportive moves are identified as getting pre-commitments, preparators, grounders, availability checks, disarmers, imposition minimizers and promises of rewards, and they are adapted from Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) supportive move strategy types. The summary of previously mentioned supportive move strategy types is described in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Supportive move strategy types by Fukushima (1996) adapted from Blum-Kulka et al. (1989)

Mitigating Supportive Moves		
Strategy Types	**Descriptions**	**Examples**
Preparator	Hearers are prepared for requests through announcements.	"I would like to inform you about this one important thing…"
Getting a pre-commitment	It checks on possible refusals.	"Would you be willing to do me a favour? I need you to go to the staff room and take some books for me."
Grounder	Justifications or reasons are provided for one's request.	"Mary, I did not attend yesterday's class. Can I use your handout?"
Disarmer	It removes possible rejections when requests are made.	"It is apparent that you do not like going to the church, but can you spare some of your precious time this Sunday?"
A promise of a reward	Hearers are offered assurances which are conducted once requests are finished.	"Could you tell me more about this topic? I'll buy you lunch afterwards."
Imposition minimizer	Hearers are allowed to revise "costs" involved prior to making requested acts.	"Could you give me a lift, but only if you are going to my direction."
Availability check	It determines if prerequisites are necessary before making requests.	"Will you be here for the convocation?"

Supportive moves attached to request Head Acts can be categorized according to the strategy types suggested by Fukushima (1996). Nevertheless, these strategy types can be added-on from other resources too in order to support the lack of tactics Fukushima (1996) proposes such as including the sweeteners by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) or Konakahara's (2011) expanders and speech act types. According to Mohd Noor (2016), supportive move strategy types listed by Fukushima (1996) are inadequate to categorize supportive moves employed by native Malay speakers. Therefore, Mohd Noor (2016) includes several additional types recommended by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and Konakahara (2011) in order to classify successfully the supportive move strategies found in his data (refer to Table 3).

TABLE 3. Supportive move strategy types by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and Konakahara (2011)

Mitigating Supportive Moves		
Strategy Types	Descriptions	Examples
Sweetener	An overstated acknowledgment is expressed which relates to the hearer's ability.	"You wrote excellent answers for these questions. May I copy them?"
Expander	It is a repetition of the same request or synonymous expression.	"I left my purse at home. Could you lend me 1000 yen now? I will give the money back to you once we arrive at the bank, so could you?"
Speech Act (a) Apology	It is conducted for the posed request and/or for the imposition occurred due to the request.	"I am terribly sorry for the inconvenience, but is it okay for you to wait a bit longer?"
(b) Thanks	Regards in advance are shown for hearers' willingness to perform requests.	"Could you spell your surname? Thank you for your co-operations."

Leech's (1983) politeness principles are seen to have shared a few similar moves with Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory and supportive move strategy types by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984); and Fukushima (1996) adapted from Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), through politeness principle maxims known as Tact Maxim and Approbation Maxim. In Tact Maxim, the expressions of opinions which imply cost to others are minimized, but any expressions of opinions that emphasize the benefits are maximized. When speakers try to minimize cost implications to other interlocutors, the speakers are said to have tried to minimize the imposition, and this fits Brown and Levinson's negative politeness theory, comparable to Fukushima (1996) adapted from Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) imposition minimizer as illustrated in, "Could I interrupt you for a while?"

In Approbation Maxim, dispraises are minimized or approvals of others are maximized. When the need to praise arises, speakers are encouraged to express approvals, but when the need decreases or is impossible, they are advised to give minimal responses or to remain silent. Expressing approvals resembles Brown and Levinson's positive politeness strategy which is characterized by one's desire to be liked, similarly to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's Sweetener which is a type of supportive move that acknowledges the ability of an interlocutor as exemplified in the utterance, "I heard you sang at the karaoke last night. You must have sounded amazing." Table 4 summarizes Leech's politeness principle maxims and their comparableness.

TABLE 4. Leech's (1983) politeness principle maxim comparableness

Leech (1983)	Brown & Levinson (1987)	Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984)	Fukushima (1996) adapted from Blum-Kulka et al. (1989)	Example
Tact Maxim	Negative Politeness	-	Imposition Minimizer	"Could I interrupt you for a while?"
Approbation Maxim	Positive Politeness	Sweetener	-	"I heard you sang at the karaoke last night. You must have sounded amazing."

METHODOLOGY

The present study uses an approach called Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) which examines online practice through language and it is purely qualitative in nature. CMDA employs content analysis as its main methodology with a focus on language and attempts to standardize computer-mediated communication related practices (Herring, 2004). CMDA allows the inclusion of context or communication aspects pertaining to computer-mediated communication (CMC). For instance, the lag in conversation in CMC might be due to technical problems, but it might also occur due to the physical speed of typing which leads to over-talking or non-sequential turn-taking. Therefore, in CMDA, online communication features are given the opportunities to be included in the analysis (Fitzpatrick & Donnelly, 2010).

The online communication feature involved in this study is the adjacency pairs of requests and request responses. In instant messaging (IM), request and request response pair features are different from that of face-to-face request and request response pairs. The use of CMDA allows us to describe regular customs occurring in IM through pattern analyses. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this paper, only the analysis of request supportive moves is highlighted and reported.

THE PARTICIPANTS

A group of eight native Malay speakers of Kelantanese descent from Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia were involved. These speakers were female, aged between 40 and 59 years old, and collectively in a group of instant messaging (IM) work-related communication. They worked closely in the same institution, taught English language and shared a strong bond due to common interests and gender. Earlier studies on requests (Ahmad et al., 2020; Maros & Abdul Rahim, 2013; Mohd Noor, 2016; Thuruvan & Yunus, 2017; Yassin & Razak, 2018) emphasized more on young adults of native Malay speakers with an age interval between 13 and 39 years old, leaving a gap for studies on middle-aged adults aged 40 through 59 years old. Different age groups are perceived to exhibit different vocabulary and language uses. Ikram and Affaf (2019) states that, older speakers adopt more formal and standard language apart from appropriateness in language allowing longer and complete sentences to be structured.

The group made by these speakers served as a platform for discussing matters related to English language teaching and learning through instant messaging (IM). The use of IM messages allowed for efficient communication despite the geographical dispersion of its members. Whenever there was a need to organize a program or event related to English language, this group was utilized to discuss and delegate responsibilities pertaining to activities, venues, students and documentation. The membership for this group was exclusive and by invitation only. We had no control over its creation, member selection or interaction content. This indicates that the data collected occurred naturally, instead of researcher-generated. According to Potter (1996, as cited in Lester et al., 2017), naturally occurring data are a type of data that would have occurred regardless of the role the researcher holds. Even if the researcher had not been able to record it, the data would naturally occur. Prior to commencing the study, permission was obtained from the English Language Panel Head and this approval was communicated to all members of the group.

SAMPLING

Three types of data sampling techniques were implemented; (1) time; (2) group; and (3) convenience and the details are provided in Table 5.

TABLE 5. Data sampling techniques

Technique	Reason	Advantage
Time	Data were collected until they reached a saturation point which was in about two months' time. A total of 1723 IM transmission units were collected with 99 requests identified in the data.	Rich in context
Group	Data were collected from a group of native Malay speakers of Kelantanese descent which comprised eight female members aged between 40 and 59 years old.	Enable to focus on a group based on its gender and age interval
Convenience	Data were available to hand and easily accessed by the researcher.	Convenience

DATA COLLECTION

This study adopted instant messaging (IM) data from an IM app called *Telegram* which followed these general characteristics; (1) data taken were group communication; and (2) data consisted of transmission units (or utterances) performed by native Malay speakers. They were drawn during COVID-19 pandemic whereby online interactions had become the major means of communication in the workplace.

Before the commencement of this study, a suitable online community that matched the general characteristics was searched. An online community that consisted of eight female speakers of native Malays who were bilinguals was identified, and the extraction of their chat texts was then carried out. In order to extract, firstly, the IM app had to be logged in to. After logging in, the chat history was exported by selecting some criteria that we wanted. For instance, the duration of compilation chats was prearranged to be taken from July 2021 to September 2021, yielding 1723 IM transmission units and had attained saturation. Although the duration was only two months, however during the pandemic, IM had become the major communication platform in the workplace. Therefore, it managed to generate 1723 instant messages which were sufficient for qualitative analyses of this study.

Apart from that, we also had arranged to not include any photos, videos or files attached in the extraction as we preferred to focus on the language used by participants solely. Later, all selected criteria together with the chat history were sent to an email chosen by us. In order to download and view the emailed chat history, we needed to log in to the email, and once downloaded, the chat texts were ready to be analysed. Hence, IM group chats of the *Telegram* app performed by eight female speakers of native Malays for the duration of two months were chosen and analysed.

DATA ANALYSIS

Requests were identified based on Fukushima's (1996) request conditions, namely; (1) material want requests; and (2) non-material want requests. Material want requests are requests for goods such as in the expression, "Could I use your pen?" In contrast, non-material want requests occur when other things besides goods are requested, such as in the utterance, "Could you speak a little bit louder?" Upon identifying requests, analyses of request segments were carried out by looking at how supportive moves were manifested in the requests. During these analyses, supportive move strategy types by Fukushima (1996) adapted from Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) were referred to as the major framework. For instance, in the request, "Sorry, after this I will re-enter the online

examination," the word "sorry" acts as a supportive move which falls under the apology type. Thereafter, a simple frequency count was tabulated to document the regularity of supportive moves exhibited in the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Generally, supportive moves were seen to have mitigated non-material want requests more as compared to material want requests, and the strategy types displayed for material want requests were lesser than non-material want requests. To describe further, consider the following sub-section.

REQUEST SUPPORTIVE MOVE STRATEGIES

Strategy types of supportive moves for material and non-material want requests were singled out and Table 6 provides their summary:

TABLE 6. Strategy types of supportive moves for material and non-material want requests

Strategy Type	Material Want Request	Non-material Want Request	Total
Grounder	4 (6.3%)	42 (65.6%)	46 (71.9%)
Availability Check	3 (4.7%)	7 (10.9%)	10 (15.6%)
Imposition Minimizer	-	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)
Thank	-	2 (3.1%)	2 (3.1%)
Expander	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.1%)
Sweetener	-	3 (4.7%)	3 (4.7%)
Total	8 (12.5%)	56 (87.5%)	64 (100.0%)

Sixty four supportive moves were identified with non-material want requests were seen to have employed supportive moves more in contrast to material want requests (87.5% vs. 12.5%). This indicates that non-material want requests such as asking for help were carried out with mitigations contrary to material want requests like asking for food containers. Due to the geographical restriction during the pandemic, it was almost impossible for material want requests to be made and non-material want requests were seen to have been exhibited abundantly in work-related group interactions.

Grounders were selected as the most favoured supportive move to mitigate material and non-material want requests, and deferential supportive moves were much more preferred, contrary to solidarious supportive moves. Examples of deferential supportive moves adopted were; (1) grounders; (2) availability checks; (3) apologies; (4) imposition minimizers; (5) thanks; and (6) expanders, and only one type of solidarious supportive move was discovered which was the sweeteners. As claimed by Garcia (1993), deferential supportive moves state wishes to not impose, whereas solidarious supportive moves express common grounds between speakers and hearers. More discussions about deferential and solidarious supportive moves are shown in the examples as follows:

THE USE OF GROUNDERS

Material and non-material want requests were preferred to be mitigated mostly by grounders. Utterances that imply grounders attempt to justify ones' requests (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) which may be uttered before or after requests. The excerpt that follows is structured in a Head Act and a supportive move, and illustrates how the speaker wanted to log out of the online meeting because her daughter needed to use her mobile phone to snap examination answers.

Request:
371	E:	*kak* li and vi
372		I *keluar jap* meeting
		[Head Act]
373		<u>izzah needs my handfon to snap her answers</u>
		[Supportive Move]

Translation:
371	E:	Sis Li and Vi
372		I (will) log out of the (online) meeting for a while
373		<u>Izzah needs my handphone to snap her answers</u>

The underlined transmission unit which follows a non-material want request Head Act implies a supportive move strategy and represents a grounder as it explains the reason why the request was made by the speaker which can be seen in the utterance, "Izzah needs my handphone to snap her answers." The grounder had mitigated the strength of the main request, "Sis Li and Vi, I (will) log out of the (online) meeting for a while," which was uttered directly in a goal statement. On first glance, the goal statement seemed like an informative statement, but upon closer investigation, it functioned as a request because the interlocutor who responded to the request made a response by assuring no indebtedness via the utterance, "It's okay, Za."

This request was made by E in code-switching as code-switching allows communication to be effective (Celario, 2022; Mabule, 2015). E's use of the direct request strategy aligns with the notion that members in close-knit groups, such as this one, typically display solidarity in group language due to their low social distance. Interestingly, E further strengthened the request by providing a reason for making it, demonstrating an external modification. The addition of a supportive move to mitigate the request indicates E's consideration and desire to not impose on other interlocutors, as proposed by Garcia (1993).

THE USE OF AVAILABILITY CHECKS

This supportive move (SM) type ranked as the second most preferred SM right after grounders. "Availability Checks" were particularly favoured when making non-material want requests over material wants. They refer to utterances whereby speakers inspect the needs of prerequisites before requests can be extended (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984).

The following excerpt exhibits a material want request structured in two supportive moves and a Head Act. The preceding supporting move before the Head Act is considered as an availability check because the speaker inquired whether the hearer had an answer scheme or not.

Request:

792	E:	nurul aini *weyh*	
		[Address Term]	
793		*skema* form 1 *nga* you *kan*	
		[Supportive Move]	
794		I *nak deh..*	anytime *jer*
		[Head Act]	[Supportive Move]

Translation:

792	E:	Hey, Nurul Aini!
793		(The examination) scheme (for) Form One (is) with you, right?
794		I want (it), yeah. Anytime (whenever that suits your time).

As illustrated in the example, the utterance, "Hey, Nurul Aini! (The examination) scheme (for) Form One (is) with you, right?" indicates an availability check by the speaker with the hearer for a material want (the answer scheme for Form One). If the answer scheme was with the hearer, the speaker would like to have it which can be seen in the utterance, "I want (it), yeah." The utterance acted as the main request and can be categorized as a direct Want statement. The speaker mitigated the request with another supportive move, "Anytime (whenever that suits your time)," in order to minimize the imposition on the hearer.

E, one of the youngest members in the group, employed the stated supportive moves in her interaction. Her use of a direct request aligns with the observation that group members often display solidarity in their language due to small social distance among themselves (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990). Nevertheless, E took steps to mitigate the direct request by incorporating two types of supportive moves: "availability check" and "imposition minimizer" and both types are examples of deference politeness strategies. This suggests that E was conscious of not imposing on the interlocutor while making the request, as suggested by Garcia (1993).

THE USE OF IMPOSITION MINIMIZERS

Imposition minimizers were not as popular as grounders or availability checks, but they were selected as one of the external modifications by participants. Imposition minimizers refer to utterances that allow "cost" reviews to hearers who will be making the requests (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). The following excerpt exemplifies a non-material want request structured in a supportive move and a Head Act. The supportive move was uttered before the request Head Act and indicates an imposition minimizer because the speaker allowed hearers to consider complying to the request as it was just a suggestion from her.

Request:

865	E:	Just a suggestion	why not *kawan2* just take one slot with our students and
		[Supportive Move]	[Head Act]
866		ask them to take part in the competition by jpn.. as above	
		[Head Act (continued)]	

Translation:

865	E:	Just a suggestion, why (do) not all of you take one slot with our students and
866		ask them to take part in the competition by JPN as above.

The imposition minimizer represented by the phrase "Just a suggestion" shows that the speaker considered the "cost" hearers had to bear with in order to comply with the request. If the hearers had considered to accept the suggestion, they would have carried out the request which was by taking a slot out of their online classes, and using it to ask students to join the competition organized by the State Education Department of Kelantan (JPN). This can be seen from the utterance, "Why (do) not all of you take one slot with our students and ask them to take part in the competition by JPN as above?" which was uttered in negative politeness, conventionally indirect and took after Leech's (1983) politeness principle of Tact Maxim that supported the act of minimizing cost implications on others through the expressions of opinions.

E, one of the youngest members in the group utilized conventional indirectness which contrasts with the commonly held belief that interlocutors who are together as a group use solidarity while speaking (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990). Instead, E believed that showing respect could be achieved through the use of an indirect strategy as a way to compensate for the face-threatening act involved. In addition, she incorporated a deferential supportive move to ensure that her interlocutors would not feel imposed upon (Garcia, 1993).

THE USE OF APOLOGIES

Supportive moves categorized as apologies were one of the least preferred strategies selected by participants and they were mainly used to mitigate requests for non-material wants. According to Konakahara (2011), speakers offer apologies for requests made by them or for any imposition resulted from the stated requests. The excerpt that follows displays a non-material want request structured in a supportive move and a Head Act. The supportive move which precedes the request Head Act shows that an apology was carried out by the speaker before she conducted the request. She expressed her sorry to the hearer and requested to re-enter the online examination later.

> *Request:*
> 374   E: <u>sorry</u>...   *lepas ni* I *masuk balik*
>   [Supportive Move]   [Head Act]
>
> *Translation:*
> 374   E: <u>Sorry</u>… After this, I (will) enter back (the online examination).

As demonstrated, the word "sorry" indicates that the speaker apologized to hearers before stating her desired goal which was to re-join the online examination later. The request strategy, "After this, I (will) enter back (the online examination)," was direct and presented as a goal statement. As advocated by Hassall (2003), goal statements happen when desired goals are named by speakers. It was responded by an interlocutor through the utterance, "It's okay, Za. *Tak dop gapo doh*. *Cuma tunggu kalau-kalau ada* problem," which can be translated to English as, "It's okay, Za. (There's) nothing (important to do) already. (I) just wait if there is (a) problem (that might occur)."

This request was made by E, one of the youngest members in the group. It aligns with the belief that people in close-knit groups maintain low social distance, leading to solidarity in their language. The direct approach was chosen to avoid potential misunderstandings. Nevertheless, the speaker added an apology to soften the request, indicating a reluctance to impose on others. Consequently, a deferential supportive move was selected and included as an adjunct to the request Head Act.

THE USE OF THANKS

Participants expressed appreciations and gratitude as external modifications to their requests. Thanks are uttered explicitly beforehand as expressions of appreciation for one's willingness to perform requests (Konakahara, 2011). The next excerpt shows a non-material want request structured in a Head Act and a supportive move. Other participants in the group were thanked by the speaker earlier for their readiness to perform the request through a supportive move which followed the request Head Act.

> *Request:*
> 1501   N: *nnti mintak tlg* yr stds *esok utk melawat* my lower 6 stds *pnya* website
>   [Head Act]
> 1502   and watch some of their video podcasts *ye* tq
>   [Head Act (continued)]   [Supportive Move]
>
> *Translation:*
> 1501   N: Later, (you) ask help (from) your students tomorrow to visit my Lower Six students'
>   websites.
> 1502   and watch some of their video podcasts yeah, <u>thank you</u>.

As the extract illustrates, the request was made by N in code-switching allowing communication to be most effective (Celario, 2022; Saringat & Ismail, 2024). The abbreviation "tq" which is a common abbreviation for "thank you" indicates that participants were thanked by the speaker beforehand due to their readiness to ask students to visit websites and watch video podcasts created by the speaker's Form Six students. The phrase "thank you" itself is an expression of gratitude and shows that the speaker did not want to impose on other interlocutors. Put differently, the speaker was being deferential through her supportive move.

The request Head Act can be classified as direct because an appropriate illocutionary verb was employed to distinctly identify its illocutionary intent which can be seen from the word "*minta*" or "ask" in English. The request was carried out by N who was one of the youngest members in the group, complementing the claim that people in groups are in low social distance and their language exhibits camaraderie (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990). The request's directness avoided the speaker from being misunderstood and by adding a deferential supportive move to it, it mitigated the request and showed that the speaker did not want to impose on others (Garcia, 1993).

THE USE OF EXPANDERS

Expanders through tag questions were employed by participants to mitigate requests. Utterances that restate similar requests or other synonymous expressions are known as expanders (Konakahara, 2011). The following excerpt illustrates a non-material want request structured in a Head Act and a supportive move mitigated by a tag question. The tag question was employed in order to get a confirmation from the hearer whether it was alright for the speaker to join the online exam a bit late, nearly when students were about to send their examination scripts.

Request:
29   N: I maybe *masuk lewat dkt dkt bdk nak hantar skrip* <u>ok ko</u>
                [Head Act]   [Supportive Move]

Translation:
29   N: I maybe (will) join (the online exam) late (probably when) students are
                about to send (their examination) scripts, <u>is it okay (with you)</u>?

The request Head Act was conveyed directly in a declarative goal statement. The intended outcome was mentioned explicitly by the speaker which was to join the online exam, but possibly at a later time than expected. The specific Head Act: "I maybe *masuk lewat dekat dekat budak nak hantar skrip* okay *ko?*," is equivalent to, "I maybe (will) join (the online exam) late (probably when) students are about to send (their examination) scripts, is it okay (with you)?" in English. The phrase "Okay *ko*?" used in a code-switching phrase of English and Malay Kelantanese serves as a tag question. It not only completes the sentence but also seeks confirmation from the hearer about the acceptability of the speaker joining the online examination slightly after. Put differently, the tag question can be interpreted as, "Is it okay (with you to let me join the online exam late)?" This expression serves as a repetition of the same request, seeking reassurance from the hearer.

The request was made by N, one of the youngest members in the group. Given that N belonged to the same group as other members, they held a low social distance relationship, and typically, group language exhibits camaraderie (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990). By addressing this request directly, N aimed to avoid potential misunderstandings (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and employed a deferential Supportive Move to mitigate the request indicating a desire to not impose on others (Garcia, 1993).

THE USE OF SWEETENERS

Sweeteners were the only type of solidarious supportive move (SM) adopted by participants and the third most preferred SM used to mitigate requests. Utterances conducted by using exaggerated acknowledgments of hearers' capacities to make requests are perceived as sweeteners (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). The following excerpt displays a non-material want request structured in a supportive move and a Head Act. The SM which precedes the request Head Act shows an overstated acknowledgment to food containers offered to be sold by one of the hearers in the group.

Request:
106   N: <u>cute*nyo*</u>
                [Supportive Move]
107   *aloh tokleh tggu gaji ko*
                [Head Act]

Translation:
106   N: <u>(That food container is) so cute!</u>
107   Oh, can't (you) wait (for) the pay (day)?

As evident from the extract, the phrase, "(That food container is) so cute," used before the request Head Act can be identified as a sweetener. The speaker employed this sweetener to express her exaggerated admiration for the food containers being sold by the hearer. By emphasizing their cuteness and mentioning her desire to buy them but waiting until payday, the speaker aimed to establish common ground with the hearer. This act resembles Leech's (1983) politeness principle

of Approbation Maxim which encourages a speaker to maximize approvals of others. The non-conventional indirect request, "Oh, can't (you) wait (for) the pay (day)?" was made by N, one of the youngest members in the group. Despite the belief that people in groups typically exhibit camaraderie and maintain low social distance, this example contradicts that notion. The speaker opted for a non-conventional indirect request strategy to avoid direct imposition or a face-threatening act while leaving the interpretation of the request to the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Additionally, a supportive move that shows solidarity with the hearer emphasizing the shared perspective was used by the speaker to mitigate the request.

In summary, supportive moves act as exterior elements for request Head Acts to mitigate request forces. They were employed through a few strategies such as by using grounders, availability checks, imposition minimizers, apologies, thanks, expanders and sweeteners. When material and non-material want requests were mitigated, grounders emerged as the most desirable type of supportive move indicating the preference to give reasons or to offer explanations as external modifications to request Head Acts. This finding correlates with previous studies (Ahmad et al., 2020; Idris & Ismail, 2023; Mohd Noor, 2016; Sattar & Farnia, 2014) which claim that grounders are the most preferred supportive move to mitigate requests among native Malay speakers. It is also in line with Hassall (2001) who claims that grounders are the most preferred external modification exhibited in many languages. As suggested by Aldhulaee (2011), grounders may act as attempts to obtain cooperation and construct rapport with less face-threatening acts to hearers' face.

CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted the strategies of request supportive moves conducted by native Malay speakers in instant messaging (IM) group communication. The data analysis adopted the strategy types of supportive moves proposed by Fukushima (1996) with some additional classifications suggested by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and Konakahara (2011). While material and non-material want requests were being conducted, mitigations occurred externally, and mostly through deferential supportive moves indicating participants' wishes to not impose. Deferential supportive moves adopted by participants were grounders, availability checks, imposition minimizers, apologies, thanks and expanders. Only one type of solidarious supportive move; the sweetener was adopted to mitigate requests.

Grounders emerged as the most favoured supportive move used to soften requests which aligns with the findings from previous studies (Ahmad et al., 2020; Idris & Ismail, 2023; Mohd Noor, 2016; Sattar & Farnia, 2014). The small distinction discovered was female participants in this study preferred to mitigate requests of both types (material and non-material wants) with grounders, unlike male participants in Mohd Noor (2016) whose preferences were more that of grounders to mitigate non-material want requests, and expanders to mitigate material want requests. Grounders are found in various languages and considered a primary type of supportive move (Hassall, 2001). Moreover, they can serve as face-saving strategies to seek cooperation and build rapport (Aldhulaee, 2011). Hence, this study further substantiates the evidence of grounders' popularity as the preferred choice for request mitigations among native Malay speakers and explores alternative mitigation strategies as well.

In the context of native Malay speakers, providing reasons as supportive moves to mitigate requests is common practice. This approach aims not only to reduce imposition but also to demonstrate politeness and clarity, thereby fostering communicative competence in instant messaging (IM) work-related group communication. Such value is inherent in Malay communication styles, regardless of requests' directness levels. As advocated by Goddard (2000), native Malay speakers are mindful of their verbal interactions, making efforts to avoid hurting others' feelings. Additionally, this cultural emphasis on sensitivity to others' emotions reinforces the notion that native Malay speakers prioritize maintaining harmonious and respectful communication within their social interactions. By employing reasons as supportive moves, they demonstrate conscientious approaches to request mitigations, enhancing their overall communication effectiveness in IM group settings. This study can be expanded by administering internal modification analyses to request Head Acts. Direct requests without any external modifications are considered polite, only if internal modifications occur within request Head Acts. Therefore, the analyses of internal modifications may determine politeness occurrences in requests too, apart from external modifications.

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