

## Alerters in Malay and English Speech Act of Request: A Contrastive Pragmatics Analysis

MARLYNA MAROS

*Sustainability of Language Sciences Research Center  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
marlyna@ukm.edu.my*

NURUL SYAFAWANI HALIM

*Universiti Teknologi Mara, Seremban, Malaysia*

### ABSTRACT

*This study focuses on the speech act of requests, specifically on the alerters. An ‘alerter’ refers to the discourse feature used in initiating a conversation or the getting attention of the hearer. Request as a speech act is much investigated for its Head Acts and Supportive Moves, however, alerter as one of its initial discourse features has not been much looked into. In the context of contrastive pragmatics study on the Malay language in Malaysia, the study of alerters in request has yet to be explored. Hence, the aim of this study is as follows: 1 - to classify the Malay categories of alerters by Malaysian Malay speakers, and 2 – to compare them with alerters in the English language. The participants consist of 400 native speakers’ of Malays from a central city and a rural area, aged between 12 to 56 years old, and varied in social backgrounds. The data was collected via Discourse Completion Task within a span of 3 months, and also coded and analysed using the framework of Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) by Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984). The findings revealed 10 categories of alerters by Malay speakers. The findings also indicated similarities and differences in the categories of Malay alerters and English alerters which could be the result of intercultural fusion in the sociopragmatics of doing requests within English, and the languages in Malaysia with the Malay language.*

*Keywords: Alerters; English Requests; Malay Requests; Sociopragmatics competence; contrastive pragmatics*

### INTRODUCTION

ALERTER is one of the major sociopragmatic aspects at the stage of initiating a conversation. The term refers to the language used in initiating a conversation or the way of choosing the form of calls following the rules and the norms which are based on several social variables including age, social status, social distance and context of the utterance (Savic 2014, Blum-Kulka et al. 1989).

Whilst there are many kinds of speech acts such as apologies, complaints, and advices, this paper focuses on the speech act of request, specifically, on the alerters used by the person doing the act of request. Unlike many other researches on requests that chose to analyse its Head Act and Supportive Move, this research chose to focus on the Alerters, i.e, the first segment of the act. The reason for the study is to venture into a linguistic feature that is less studied yet makes a difference to the quality of interaction, in this case, a request. To make a request, the locution of request must be an act done by the speaker, which pragmatically means that the speaker requested for the effects of that particular action. The expected effect or perlocution, is that the hearer wants to do the action and the way a request is accomplished is by getting the hearer to do the action.

Moreover, a speaker needs to be aware not only for the attempt of the request itself, but also of the culturally appropriate ways of alerting the request. Requests need to be carefully expressed in order to attain the compliance of the hearer and the gratification of the speaker’s desire. For the request to be a successful attempt, the speaker and hearer must be able to comprehend each other, such as by taking turns in adjacent pairs of doing requests

competently, using an appropriate or catchy attention-getter, i.e., alerters, and communicating in a mutually intelligible mode of communication. Awad Mohamed S Youssef (2012, p. 147) stated that:

“...When making a request, the speaker expresses a desire that the hearer does an action. The hearer is, therefore, asked to do something, which is mainly for the benefit of the speaker. Requests can be face-threatening acts, which call for considerable expertise on the part of the learner.”

According to Wei (2005, p. 56), language has two different characters. The first character means communication and the second one depicts a carrier of culture. Language without culture is absurd, just as absurd as human culture without language. Brown (1994, p. 165) discussed about the relation between language and culture as follows: “A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture”. The advent of technology and social media enhances the dynamics of language-culture relationship, creating a fusion of languages and cultures as communication occur.

Language communication in Malaysia at all times can be classified into the formal and the informal varieties; with usage of the former being in the official or formal domain while the latter being in the unofficial or informal domain (Asmah Haji Omar 1987). Successful communication in both varieties depend on the users’ sociopragmatic competence namely, understanding, strategizing and utilizing contextually appropriate forms and function in the interaction. Knowing how to start the conversation effectively with the apt choice of alerters for example would make a difference to the sense and quality of a request. On that same note, the speakers might transfer their sociopragmatic skills of using alerters in their language (L1) into another language (L2 or Target Language/TL) if alerters are used differently in the L2/TL.

In order to become a competent L1 or L2 speaker, linguistic competence must be accompanied by the sociopragmatic competence of the particular language itself. It is insufficient for learners who are learning a second language to be competent only at the linguistic aspect because learning a language involves learning the sociopragmatic norms and culture that contribute to the meaning of the language itself (Kramsch 2003, Senft et al. 2009). Hence, the purpose of study is to focus on the discussion on the alerters used in the Malay language, and compare them to the categories in the English language, the two being the official language and a second language for many Malaysians respectively, and relate the findings to the cultures, especially the Malay culture.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### SPEECH ACT

The Speech Act Theory was founded in 1962 by John Austin, a British philosopher. The tenet of the theory lies on explaining the meaning of words in language usage. By coining the term ‘speech act’, Austin (1962) proposed that in saying something, one is doing something. He pointed out that communication is a series of communicative acts or speech acts that are used systematically to accomplish particular communicative purposes. Throughout the years, researches adopting this theory as their foundation of investigating communicative events have further developed the categorization of actions initially proposed by the founder. Request and the linguistic elements encompassed in its categorization is just one of the many speech acts studied to understand language use.

## REQUEST SPEECH ACT

One of the major studies on Request was by Blum-Kulka et al. (1984) and (1989). Subsequent studies include those by Jaafar et al. (2009), Trosborg (1995), Rose (1999), and Yuan (2011), to list a few out of the various quoted studies. The speech act is commonly defined as a pre-event act by a speaker toward some prospective action to be done by the hearer. In the studies of linguistic politeness, request is viewed as a face-threatening act because it causes the speaker to encroach on the hearer's individual space. Much research was carried out to investigate the patterns of strategies adopted in doing this act and relate its discussion to cross-cultural communication. The major project by Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984) studied the speech act in the scope of the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) has found three categories within request which are the Alerter, the Head act and the Supportive move. The Head Act functions as the core of the speech act.

### THE ALERTER

An alerter is an element, which often precedes the requests and whose function is to alert the hearer's attention to the ensuing speech act. Since alerters serve as attention-getters, they are equal in function to all verbal means used for this purpose (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989, p. 277). Hence, for its pre-request structural position and for its meaning in context, the act has a dual function that is, to be the opening move of the request sequence, and to orient the hearer's attention. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) in their studies of 8 cultures namely, Danish, Hebrew, British English, American English, German, Canadian, French, and Australian English, have discovered and categorized the alerters into the following categorization (Table 1). The categorization was used as the coding framework for this study.

TABLE I. Alerters categories by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989)

Category	Example
Title/Role	Professor, waiter,
Surname	Johnson
First Name	Nick, Judith
Nickname	Judy
Endearment term	Honey
Offensive Term	Stupid cow
Pronoun	You
Attention getter	Hey, excuse me, listen

An example of an alerter is underlined in the following request and it falls within the first name category: "Danny, can you remind me later to bring the book for you on Monday? Otherwise it may slip out of my mind" (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989, p. 203).

### THE HEAD ACT

"The head act is that part of the sequence which might serve to realize the act independently of other elements; namely it is the minimal unit which can realize a request: the core of the request sequence". In other words, it is the core of the request or the request proper as in the non-linguistic term. For example, in the following request, the head act is the one underlined: "Danny, can you remind me later to bring the book for you on Monday? Otherwise it may slip out of my mind" (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989, p. 203)

SUPPORTIVE MOVE(S) (BEFORE OR AFTER HEAD ACT):

“In using specific types of supportive moves, a speaker intends to mitigate or aggravate his request. Supportive moves are external to the head act occurring either before or after a head act”. The underlined statement in this request is an example of the supportive move: "Danny, can you remind me later to bring the book for you on Monday? Otherwise it may slip out of my mind". In many cases, the analysis of head acts and supportive moves relate the requests to whether it is a direct or indirect speech act. The studies are much discussed in the literature of linguistic politeness.

#### STUDIES ON SPEECH ACTS

Jaafar et al. (2009) described the sociopragmatic features of Malay request based on 264 multiracial Malaysian students. The study used Discourse Completion Tasks DCT as a tool for data collection and Byon's (2002) semantic formula of request supportive move (RSM) as the framework to analyse the data. Based on the categories of RSM, this study elaborated the patterns of Malaysian requests, the effect of social variables on the realization patterns of the requests, and the strategies of request among 3 Malaysian ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian). The findings show that Malaysian students applied all the RSM in their speech and the requests made are presented by several politeness markers in Malay; such as *tolong* (please), *boleh* (can/may/could), *mintaka* (ask), *mahu* (want). The most interesting part is, this study found that most of the features involved features of direct requests. Some of the selection of the direct request strategies are; imperative, i.e. *Tolong pinjamkan buku saudara...* (please lend me your book...), explicit performative, i.e. *Saya mintak menu lain* (I ask for another menu), hedged performative; i.e. *Boleh tak minta penangguhan...?* (Can (I) ask for extension...?); and want statement. i.e. *Saya mahu meminjam buku ini* (I want to borrow this book). The findings helped to contribute in developing the pragmatic competence of request among Malaysian students in a formal domain.

Hasuria Che Omar et al. (2009) show that the respondents of their studies were aware of and were able to use the appropriate kinds of alerters in their greeting patterns. The study involved 20 female and 10 male students from three ethnic groups to recognize the differences between cultures in the use of alerters and closings. The results revealed the use of 'assalamualaikum' and 'apa khabar' to greet Malay hearer; 'ni hao ma' to their Chinese addressee and 'vanakkam' to their Indian recipient. It shows that in general, the respondents accommodate to greetings according to the norm among the ethnic groups of their counterparts in interaction which demonstrated them to be highly sociopragmatically competent and culturally accommodating towards each other as people of the same country, Malaysia.

In a cross-cultural context of speakers from different countries, a study by Umar (2004) shows the differences in the request strategies between Arab learners of English and the native speakers of English. The study involved 20 Arab students from English Department in four Arab universities and 20 British students in three British universities and used a Discourse-Completion-Test to generate the speech act data. The findings revealed the same strategies used by the two groups for requests that involved social equals or hearers with a higher social status. For requests that were addressed to hearers in lower position, the Arabic students tended to use more direct request strategies compared to the British students. The native speakers of English employed more semantic and syntactic modifiers compared to their Arabic counterparts and for this reason their requests sounded more polite and considerate. This might be due to the culture of the Arabic students where direct utterances may be the more polite option in certain context, but the level of politeness may be seen differently in different culture. Similar results of cultural differences were also noted in the

study of requests in academic circles by Jordanian speakers of English by Al-Natour et al. (2015), and refusal strategies by Al-Shboul et al. (2012).

A study of request will not be complete without citing the biggest and most significantly comprehensive analysis of the speech act, which is the CCSARP by Blum-Kulka et al. (1984, 1989). CCSARP refers to the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project. It was a mega project investigating cross-cultural and inter-lingual variations in the speech acts of requests and apologies across 8 language speakers, namely, Danish, Hebrew, British English, American English, German, Canadian, French, and Australian English. The project was often quoted for its method, the written Discourse Completion Test or DCT situational questionnaire. The data was collected throughout the respective countries in both the English language and the mother tongues, and later analysed by native researchers in their respective countries within a shared analytical framework. The findings contributed to the field of pragmatics and language teaching extensively. The findings specifically related to this study are the 9 categories of alerters in requests done in English language as in Table 1. The categories will be compared to the findings from the Malay data in this study.

#### RULES OF SPEAKING IN MALAY

Traditionally, the Malays signify indirectness in speaking to help others save face and to help preserve good relationships among the interlocutors and society as a whole. When they experience any uncomfortable circumstances, they will try to regulate their anger and avoid saying anything or even avoid dealing with those situations face to face (Jan & Wun 2016, Maros & Rahim 2013, Mustafa 2002, p. 103-104, Asma Abdullah 1996, p. 30, Jamaliah Ali 1995, p. 34). Malays are expected to communicate decent manners and be subtle to those with whom they interact with on a more formal basis. Not conforming to these cultural rules may be considered as unrefined for it is seen as one's culturally incompetence in selecting the content and form of conversation, nonverbal cues, and the forms of greetings (Asmah Hj. Omar 1996, Asmah Abdullah 1996, Teo Kok Seong 1996).

#### LANGUAGE TRANSFER AND SOCIOPRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

First language (L1) is termed by different names such as native language, primary language, and mother tongue. It is assumed to be the one, which is learned during early childhood, before the age of about 3 years old. According to Houmanfar, Hayes, and Herbst (2005), the first and second languages are interconnected, and the history of the first language is a contributing factor to the acquisition of the second language (L2).

However, Selinker (1972) suggests that we might also expect more learning difficulties and thus more likelihood of performance interference at those points in L2 acquisition which are more distant from L1, as the learner would find it difficult to learn and understand a completely new and different language. So, contrastive analysis was used as an attempt to identify areas of convergence and divergence between the L1 and the L2 in order to predict elements of the L2 which would be easier or harder for the learner to learn.

The notion of sociopragmatic competence was raised out of the concept of communicative competence in language acquisition. Leech (1983, p. 10) describes sociopragmatics as “the sociological interface of pragmatics” involving speakers’ and hearers’ views built on relevant social and cultural values. Meanwhile, Harlow (1990) defines sociopragmatic competence as the ability to modify speech strategies properly according to dissimilar social variables such as the degree of imposition, social dominance and distance between participants of conversation, and participants’ rights and obligations in communication.

Inability to use the language appropriately would be considered as a sociopragmatic failure, and speakers are assumed as having trouble of adjusting to the social conditions placed on language use. There are three different contributing factors that lead to sociopragmatic failure, namely linguistic, sociocultural and sociopsychological factors. These factors can be influenced by aspects of the speaker's first language (L1) and target language (TL) and also by his or her proficiency or awareness of the culture of the target language.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine how Malay speakers use alerters in their request speech act. It seeks to fulfil the following objectives:

- 1 - To classify the Malay categories of alerters by Malaysians speakers, and
- 2 - To compare (1) with the existing categories of alerters in the English language.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research utilizes both quantitative and qualitative measures in its design and analysis. The quantitative part was related to the instrument used which required quantitative coding as well as frequency analysis. The qualitative part was based on the content of the responses obtained from the qualitative face-to-face impromptu interviews, immediately after the responses to the instrument were given. The interviews were open-ended questions to elicit the views and opinions of their written responses to support the quantitative analysis.

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

This study utilized the Discourse Completion Task (DCT), which is considered scientifically effective for speech acts study in a large scale and exploratory purpose. The DCT in this research consisted of fourteen open-ended questions based on ordinary several social situations that elicited the participants to do alerting moves for a request. The questionnaire incorporated varying degrees of social context in order to get the most out of the situations. For example, where the situation needed the participant to ask a waiter for a different menu, he/she had to imagine an answer towards 6 different age groups – his/her parents' age, his/her age, younger than him/her, his/her sister's age, his/her brother's age, his/her younger siblings' age. The objective of the data collection was to optimize the responses of alerters from the Malay speakers from both gender, various age groups, and from both urban and rural areas.

The questionnaire was also designed to involve both formal and informal situations. The following diagram illustrates a clearer picture showing two situations that may be a significant factor influencing the utterances made by them.

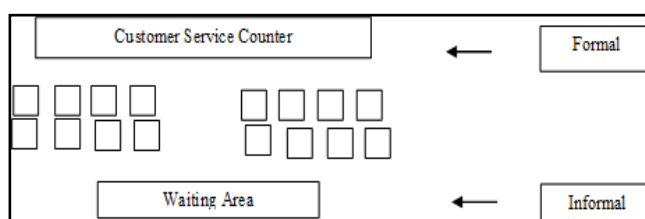


FIGURE 1. Formal and informal situation

The targeted areas for formal situation were the post office, immigration office, registry office, KWSP office, banks, and the telecommunications office. In those premises, the more formal situation was expected to occur in front of the customer counter, while the informal situation was at the waiting area, enabling customers to interact with each other using less formal language. Therefore, several questions have been formulated to describe the two situations in order to obtain the types of alerters, which may vary according to particular situations. The informal situation involved more public places such as shopping mall, grocery store, recreational park and neighbourhoods.

The first 20 questionnaires were pilot tested resulting in a few amendments before the final instrument was used in the data collection.

## RESPONDENTS AND DATA COLLECTION

The participants were made up of 200 Malay residents in one of the major central cities and 200 from one non-remote rural area in Malaysia. They were selected via purposive random sampling from various age groups and gender. The reason for these selections of areas, age groups and gender was to capture as many and varied types of alerters in Malay among the Malay speakers. This would create substantial data and valid categories of alerters in Malay language that the study aimed to achieve. Each of the responses was coded according to the Gender and the participants' participation turns. For example, P024 refers to a female participant who was the 24<sup>th</sup> respondent, and L036 was a male respondent on the 36<sup>th</sup> list of respondent.

## FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The project coding scheme was based on frames of primary features in the realization of request and apologies, proposed by Blum-Kulka Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). In order to analyse the alerters of requests elicited from the questionnaires, the researchers have adapted the coding categories based on the frameworks employed by the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). These coding categories are equivalent to each other in some cases. These outlines were used as the guidelines or the framework in analysing the data collected. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) formulated 9 categories of alerters, i.e., title/role, surname, first name, nickname, endearment term, offensive term, pronoun and attention getter (please refer to Table 1).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to relate the findings to awareness of the existence of alerters as part of the speech act of request in Malay and English language. There were ten categories of alerters in Malay found in this study which are Family Name/Surname, First Name, Nickname, Endearment Term, Pronoun/Address Term, Greetings, Oral sound, Apologizing, Attention getter/Exclamation, and Non-Verbal. To elaborate the categories, the paper will not focus on the quantitative aspect of the data, instead the categories are elaborated by providing examples and clarifications on each specified category.

FAMILY NAME/SURNAME

TAN

Family name or surname is very synonymous among the Chinese population in Malaysia. In this research, some respondents used the imagined-hearer's family name possibly due to the multiracial nature of Malaysia, as the respondent's neighbour might be a Chinese. Tan is a common Chinese surname in Malaysia.

TABLE 2. Example of family name category

Situation 13	Example
You would like to borrow a portable staircase from your neighbour. How would you begin your request to the person at the service counter?	" <i>Tan, boleh pinjam tangga sekejap?</i> " (Tan, can borrow your staircase for shortwhile?) (P024)

FIRST NAME

AMINAH, ABU

In interactions that involve social equals or people who are very familiar with each other, it is common to start a conversation by addressing the hearers with their first name. In this study, some respondents said that it is even friendlier to use the hearer's first name when requesting for assistance. In fact in Malaysia, alerting somebody on a first name basis often occurs regardless of geography. In the following example, the neighbours may not be socially close, but the way the request was done befitted the norm of speaking among Malay neighbours.

TABLE 3. Example of first name category

Situation 13	Example
You would like to borrow a portable staircase from your neighbour. How would you begin your request to the person at the service counter?	" <i>Fiqah, umah ko ade tangga tak? Aku nak pinjam leh?</i> " (Fiqah, does your house have a staircase? Can I borrow? ( P035)

NICKNAME

BOB

Nicknames are also commonly used among the Malays to obscure others about the true identity of a person. In the following example, Bob, which stands for 'Badan Orang Besar' (Big Bodied Person) is a nickname for the imagined-shopkeeper. The respondent may have just encountered a 'Bob' prior to participating in this research.

TABLE 4. Example of nickname category

Situation 7	Example
You would like to buy some sugar at a local store near your place. How would you begin your conversation with the shopkeeper?	" <i>Bob, mintak gula sekilo?</i> " (Bob, can I have 1kg of sugar?) (P039)

ENDEARMENT TERM

SAYANG

Using the endearment terms such as "honey", "love", and "sayang" is a communicative strategy that almost immediately creates warmth and enhances camaraderie between interlocutors. In the example below, the word 'dear' is used by a speaker to someone of her sister's age in an informal situation in the official domain, i.e., the waiting area of a post



office. It is considered as a term of endearment as the respondent stated that he imagined it was a girl he knows well at a post office of his hometown. It may be considered as sexual harassment if they are strangers.

TABLE 5. Example of endearment term category

Situation 2	Example
You would like to send an express mail but don't know the procedure. How would you begin your request to the person at the service counter?	" <i>Sayang, bagaimana nak hantar pos laju?</i> " (Dear, how to send this express mail?) (L036)

#### PRONOUN/ADDRESS TERMS

*TUAN, PUAN, CIK, ENCIK, ABANG, KAKAK, ADIK, SAUDARA, SAUDARI, MAKCIK, PAK CIK, AWAK, WAK, TAMBI, MACHA, ANNEY, AYA, NYONYA, TAUKE, AMOI, BRO, MAKWE*

The Malays use pronouns in place of address terms and vice versa (Jalaludin et al. 2005). The use of "*Tuan*", "*Puan*", "*Cik*" shows that the speaker knows how to adapt with the situation such as the formal or the informal one based on the given situation in the DCT questionnaire. The use of "*Abang*", "*Kakak*", "*Adik*", "*Pak Cik*", "*Mak Cik*" were meant to show respect to the hearer based on their age group. "*Wak*" is a pronoun that means 'uncle' in the Javanese language that is used widely among the Malays to address a middle aged man, while "*Aya*" from Tamil language carries the same connotation as *Wak*. "*Nyonya*" and "*Tauke*" are mostly used to address Chinese shopkeepers.

Additionally, the address term "*bro*", which is a short form of "brother" is used by the youngsters to address males of any age in certain social circles. "*Amoi*" as well as "Sis" can be the equivalent address terms of "*Kakak*", "*Adik*", in certain circles. The following examples illustrate the use of address terms as alerters.

TABLE 6. Example of pronoun category

Situation 11	Example
You would like to buy some sugar at a local store near your place. How would you begin your conversation with the shopkeeper?	" <i>Tauke, saya mau beli gula boleh?</i> " ( <i>Tauke</i> , can I buy sugar?) (P024)

#### GREETINGS

*ASSALAMUALAIKUM, SALAM 1 MALAYSIA, SELAMAT PAGI, SELAMAT PETANG, HELLO, HAI, APA KHABAR, GOOD DAY, GOOD MORNING*

It has become a norm to Malaysians to say "Assalamualaikum" as a greeting. It began as a loan word from Arabic language but has become part of greeting patterns especially among the Muslims. More formal greetings include "Selamat Pagi", literally meaning Good Morning, and "Good Morning" or "Good Day". These are usually used at the service counters or offices to show formality and respect, but are also used as a common greeting form socially.

The example below is given by the respondent in seeking for help from the staff at the government and private department counter. The speaker began to request for related information by greeting the personnel at the counter with the purpose of showing respect and rapport.

TABLE 7. Example of greetings category

Situation 5	Example
You would like to register for a handset line but you don't know the procedure. How would you begin your request to the person at the service counter?	" <i>Selamat pagi, boleh bagi tahu tak macam mana nak register untuk line henfon.</i> " (Good morning, could you tell me how to register for a phone line?" (L149)

## SOUND

### NOISY SOUND (NUDGE SOUND)

However, some Malaysians are still unaware of the language courtesy in conversations. The data was given by a small portion of the sample from a teenage-age group. This used to be uncommon and was considered as inappropriate and rude however, individual anecdotes have shown complaints of this emerging communicative tendency among the younger Malaysians.

TABLE 8. Example of sound category

Situation 7	Example
You were given a wrong menu that you ordered and would like to get the right one. How would you begin your request to the waiter?	Produced certain soft palatized clicked sound to alert the waiter. (L016)

## APOLOGIZING

### MAAFKAN SAYA

The Malays have a great tendency to start their conversation by apologizing. According to Yusof et al. (2011), an apology can follow the request verb in formal situations and can appear as the initiator element of discretion or (*alerter*) that precedes the actual request. This linguistic behaviour could be the result of cultured upbringing (Asmah Haji Omar 1995) and the conscientiousness on personal spaces of the others.

TABLE 9. Example of apologizing category

Situation 5	Example
You would like to register for a handset line but you don't know the procedure. How would you begin your request to the person at the service counter?	" <i>Maafkan saya, boleh saya bertanya?</i> " (I'm sorry, can I ask?) (P221)

## ATTENTION GETTER / EXCLAMATION

### TUMPANG TANYA, SEBENTAR YA, ERRR.., WEI, OI, DEII, WEH, HMM.., EMM.., EH..

Respondents who used these kind of alerters mentioned uncertainties of the appropriate way to start a request. They tried to alert their hearer by producing minimal sounds such as "emm.." or "hmm.." or taking the safe way with "*tumpang tanya*", the equivalent to 'excuse me'. However, the respondents further stated that the one-syllable utterance such as "wei", "oii", "deii" and so on were used with their close friends. This mostly happened among the younger respondents. None of the interviewed respondents used the minimal or the one-syllable utterance in formal situation.

The following exemplify the discussion:

TABLE 10. Example of attention getter category

Situation 1	Example
You would like to send an express mail but don't know the procedure. How would you begin your request to the person at the service counter?	" <i>hmm..nak tanya boleh? Bagaimana cara hendak menghantar pos laju?</i> " (hmm..would like to ask? How to send an express mail?) (L036)

### NON-VERBAL

#### SMILES, WAVING HANDS

For this particular category, the respondents who were interviewed confessed that they were not sure of the most appropriate way to start the request. Hence, they chose to use a non-verbal strategy instead. This frequently happened in the situations where food served to the respondent not as he/she ordered.

TABLE 11. Example of non-verbal alerters category

Situation 7	Example
You were given a wrong menu that you ordered and would like to get the right one. How would you begin your request to the waiter?	Waved at the waiter and at the same time signalled him/her that it was not the menu the respondent has ordered. (P039)

### A COMPARISON BETWEEN MALAY AND ENGLISH CATEGORIES OF ALERTERS

The data revealed ten categories of alerters used by the Malay speakers. The following discussion describes the similarities and differences of the categories found in this study with the categories from the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) by Blum-Kulka & Olshain (1984). The results show some differences in categories of alerters in Malay and in English.

TABLE 12. A comparison between the Malay and English categories of alerters

Categories of Alerters	Malay	English
<b>**Title/Role</b>		<i>Professor, Waiter, Teacher, Dr.</i>
<b>Family Name/ Surname</b>	Tan	Johnson
<b>First Name</b>	Aminah, Abu	Judith
<b>Nickname</b>	Bob	Judy
<b>Endearment Term</b>	Sayang	Honey
<b>Pronoun/Address term</b>	Tuan, Puan, Cik, Abang, Kakak, Adik, Saudara, Makcik, Pak cik, Awak, Wak, Tambi, Aya, Nyonya, Tauke, Amoi, Bro, Makwe	You
<b>Greetings</b>	Assalamualaikum, Salam 1 Malaysia, Selamat Pagi, Hello, Hai, Apa khabar?	Hello
<b>*Sound (nudge)</b>	<i>Produce sound to alert waiter</i>	
<b>*Apologizing</b>	<i>Maafkan saya,</i>	
<b>Attention Getter / Exclamation</b>	Tumpang Tanya, Sebentar ya, Errr..., Wei!, Oi!, Deii!	Excuse me, hey!
<b>*Non-verbal</b>	Smiling, Nodding, Waving hands	
<b>**Offensive Term</b>		<i>Stupid cow</i>

\*\* Appear in English \*Appear in Malay

In Malay, there was no offensive term and title/role being used preceding the Head Act of a request. The use of title/role is usually dependent on the situation that they are in. In the DCT questionnaire, there was a situation at the restaurant in regards with calling the

waiter for mistaken food order. But, none of the respondents addressed the role of ‘waiter’ to start their request conversation. The researchers attribute this to the different kind of restaurants of the cultures involved. The respondents of this study may have imagined the local restaurant instead of the exclusive one. Typically, the Malay people thought that ‘waiter’ was only to be used at hotels and other exclusive places. Linguistically, the word “waiter” as an address term has no equivalent in the Malay language. A “waiter” when translated to Malay is “*pelayan*”, which is an occupation.

Malay speakers prefer openers with neutrals, an alteration from the forms utilized in some situations (Austin 1962). Besides that, the offensive terms were avoided by the Malay community in their request conversation as they are still aware of the need for politeness or greet courteously, therefore, they do not ever start their conversation with such rude words. This issue corresponds to what Maros (2006) has said, namely “Malays are expected to communicate good manners, breeding and sensitivity to those with whom they interact on a more formal basis.”

The two categories that are not in the English data are the categories of oral sound made, and apologizing. The oral sound may be attributed to the speakers lack of sociopragmatic knowledge of their own culture, and the apology category could be due to the cultural upbringing or awareness of the speakers to use this linguistic softener before the Head Act.

#### PRAGMATIC TRANSFER FROM L1 TO L2

The pragmatic aspects of the language are frequently overlooked since the traditional language teaching methodologies accentuate to the learner solely the grammatical features of the language. Pragmatic competence in language teaching is an essential component in the language learning process. The approach used contrastive analysis method to identify areas of convergence and divergence between the L1 and the L2 in order to predict whether the elements under investigation would facilitate or impede L2 acquisition.

It is vital that language learners are taught or introduced to pragmatic and sociopragmatic rules of languages other than their L1 because this will enrich their linguistic and cultural repertoire. The move would enhance the speakers’ ability in becoming a more socially and sociopragmatically apt communicator. If done on a massive level, i.e. school level, it would build a society rich in pragmatic skills and cultural knowledge.

However, the environment where the speakers are in may affect the effectiveness of such exposure or teaching. There is a chance that speakers will prefer and will transfer their own social and cultural rules to other languages. Numerous studies show that although learners may have learned the target language rules and the target language linguistic form, they are not able to comprehend the social and cultural rules which constrain the target language use. In their communication with native speakers of the target language, learners are likely to transmit their native social and cultural norms or customs into the target language, producing unsuitable linguistic behaviours that can lead to pragmatic failure.

The results of this study that show the similarities and differences of the alerters categories in the two languages can help design the teaching of speech functions in Malay and English language. With consistent language practices in and out-of-classroom activities, the language learners would be able to “do things with words” (Austin 1962) competently.

#### CONCLUSION

This particular study can be used as a reference for further studies by researchers who are interested in investigating other elements related to contrastive pragmatics and the speech act

of request. Since several factors have been identified to have an influence on the process of L1 pragmatic transfer, more empirical investigations are needed to determine the conditions under which L1 pragmatic transfer occurs.

The four hundred Malay respondents have given a rather broad number of categories of alerters to requests in the Malay language. A comparative analysis has shown some similarities and differences between the categories of alerters in the Malay and English languages. Further studies could include studies of alerters in request or other speech acts from varieties of Malay, for example Indonesian Malay and Brunei Malay. This would enrich the intercultural understanding between the varieties of Malay as learners' L1 and English as learners' L2.

This study could also benefit the education sector in designing curriculum for language teaching and learning, specifically with English as the second language. Additionally, the study could function as a reminder to the teaching culture, that it is important to raise awareness among the language learners and to constantly reminding them of appreciating and developing their own sociopragmatic competence while attaining competence in other languages and cultures. Teachers and program developers are suggested to take the learners' sociocultural background into consideration when selecting materials and employ suitable pedagogical approaches for particular contexts of teaching.

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