

POLITE REQUESTS IN NON-NATIVE VARIETIES OF ENGLISH: THE CASE OF GHANAIAN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Although several studies have been carried out on the theory of politeness, the definition of this notion varies among linguists and according to languages and cultures: what is polite and socially appropriate in one context or culture may be considered impolite or excessively polite in another. Further, rules of politeness may be transferred from a first language to a second language by learners who maintain hybridized usage due to these transfers. In this article we demonstrate the maintenance of some of these transfers in politeness strategies in Ghanaian English. This variety is influenced by the cultural norms of politeness of some Ghanaian languages whose speakers fuse native speaker conventions with English politeness conventions. We discuss herein some hybridized forms that result from cultural transfers from one Ghanaian language, Akan.

Key words: Politeness; Ghanaian English; requests; hybridization; pragmatics; non-native varieties of English

RÉSUMÉ

Bien que de nombreux ouvrages traitent la théorie de la politesse (e.g., Brown et Levinson 1978, 1987; Leech 1983; Lakoff 1973, 1977), la définition de ce terme diffère parmi des linguistes et encore à travers les langues et les cultures: ce que l'on considère comme étant poli et correct dans un contexte ou dans une culture ne l'est pas ou peut être vu comme étant excessivement poli dans un autre contexte ou une autre culture. Les règles de la politesse peuvent être transferts d'une langue par des locuteurs en apprentissage d'une autre langue, locuteurs qui maintiennent un usage hybride à cause de ces transferts. La présente étude montre le maintien de quelques transferts des normes de la politesse par des locuteurs de l'anglais du Ghana et fait état de formes hybrides qui relèvent de la langue ghanaienne d'Akan.

Mots-clés: Politesse; anglais ghanaien; demandes; hybridisation linguistique; pragmatique; variétés d'anglais non-natives

1. ENGLISH IN GHANA

Ghana, which is located on the west coast of Africa, has a population of about 19 million (Ghana Statistical Services 2002). Like many African countries, Ghana is a linguistically heterogeneous country. There are about 40 to 80 indigenous languages which are spoken in the country but the exact number is much in discussion due to differing distinctions in the classification of “dialects” and “languages” (Agbedor 1996; Bodomo 1996; Dolphyne and Kropp-Dakubu 1988). Gordon and Grimes (2005) put the number of languages spoken in Ghana at 83, to include English and two sign languages. Much of the discussion centers on the difficulty in assessing which should count as languages and which should count as dialects. All these 40–80 languages belong to the Niger-Kordofanian language family and specifically to the Gur and Kwa sub-families. It is estimated that about 24% of the total population of Ghana speak Gur languages, 75% speak Kwa languages, and 1% speak Mande languages (Huber 2008:70).

Interestingly, no indigenous language serves as a national language. Akan, Ewe, and Ga are described as major languages. Although these three languages belong to the Kwa family, they are not mutually intelligible. Only Akan approaches the status of a national language, used by about 49.1 % of the population as a first language and spoken by many as a second or third language as well (Ansah 2008).¹ The Bureau of Ghana Languages officially uses nine languages for purposes of information and public education, i.e., Akan, Ewe, Dangme, Ga, Nzema, Dagaare, Gonja, Kasem, and Dagbani. Apart from these indigenous languages, a few non-indigenous languages are used widely in Ghana, e.g., Hausa and English.

English has a special place in the daily lives of Ghanaians. Ghana's contact with the English language dates back to the 1550s, when British traders first arrived on the Coast of Guinea (Sackey 1997:126). Before the arrival of the British, other European nationals (the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the Danish) had already established contact with Ghana and had acquired forts and castles in an attempt to establish trade posts in this area, then known as the Gold Coast. However, by 1872, these other European nationals had given up their possessions to the British (Sackey 1997:126), giving the British traders full control over the area. In order to facilitate their trading activities with the locals, the British traders trained some of the locals to serve as interpreters. During this period, there were schools established in the forts and castles where some local people were given formal training for various purposes. Apart from the trading activities, the colonial administration and missionary activities further consolidated the use of English in the Gold Coast. Due to the multilingual nature of the colony, the colonial masters found it convenient to use the English language for purposes of administration and education.

Today, English is commonly acknowledged as the official language of Ghana though the current Constitution (1992) does not explicitly name it as such. Al-

¹“Even though there is no official legislature on Akan as a national language, in practice, it is” (Ansah 2008:3).

though English is spoken by less than 40% of the entire population, it is a language which is associated with authority and prestige. English is used predominantly in public functions such as government, politics, media, business, commerce, and religion. It is the language of education from the upper primary level to the tertiary level. It is the language of judiciary proceedings and all official government business is conducted in English. It is also the language of parliamentary proceedings and so people who do not speak or understand English cannot represent their constituencies in parliament. English is also the language of the national media. Currently, almost all the major newspapers operating in Ghana are published in English. In addition, no television station broadcasts solely in an indigenous language. English is also used in many informal contexts. For many children of school age, English is the school language, the language they speak when they play with their friends at school or sometimes at home. It is becoming the home language or the first language of a few children growing up in urban centres. It is also the language of adults who do not share the same first language. Thus, English enjoys a very close contact with the indigenous languages that are used in Ghana.

The close contact between English and the indigenous languages has created the need for new ideas and new modes of thoughts to be expressed in ways that are not available in the native varieties of English. This close contact between English and the indigenous languages has also led to a situation where new speech habits and local customs and traditions are conveyed through the English language. This has led to the development of a distinct variety of English which can be characterized on the phonological, lexical, syntactic and pragmatic level as "Ghanaian". A few scholars have studied the lexical, phonological, and syntactic features that characterize the English language used in Ghana (Dako 2001; Huber and Dako 2004; Anderson 2006; Koranteng 2006). Very few studies, however, have been undertaken to describe the pragmatic features of Ghanaian English. This article contributes to this discussion by examining how the concept of politeness that exists in Ghanaian languages has been transferred into the English language that is used in Ghana.

In this article, we contend that when Ghanaians speak English as a second language, they transfer certain politeness strategies from their various first languages. Since these politeness rules are usually not grammatical rules, they do not violate the syntax of the English language. However, they give the English which is spoken in Ghana some pragmatic features that distinguish it from other varieties of English. We argue further that these pragmatic transfers lend weight to the identification of Ghanaian English as a distinct variety of English.

2. THEORETICAL NORMS OF POLITENESS

Politeness is an aspect of linguistic pragmatics that has been studied extensively. It has been described as a powerful constraint on linguistic expression. While the concept of politeness has been construed as universal, its manifestation, whether linguistic or non-linguistic, tends to vary from culture to culture and from language

to language. As a result, different scholars from a variety of cultures and linguistic communities have expressed diverse views about politeness. Fraser (1990) groups the main theories about the linguistic expression of politeness into four categories:

- (i) social norm views
- (ii) conversational maxim views
- (iii) face-saving views
- (iv) conversational contract views

The *social norm view*, proposed by Hill, Ide, Ikuta, Kawasaki, and Ogino (1986), equates politeness with good manners. Therefore, speaking politely implies showing good manners. The second view, the *conversational maxim view*, is reflected in the politeness theories of Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983) according to which speakers show politeness when they conform to certain maxims when they speak. In the third view, the *face-saving view*, presented by Brown and Levinson (1987), all speech acts are potential sources of threat to a speaker or hearer's face. Politeness is, therefore, used as a strategy to reduce this threat to face. Fraser advances the last view, the *conversational contract view*. For him, politeness is "a state that one expects to exist in every conversation; participants note not that someone is being polite . . . but rather, that the speaker is violating the conversation contract" (Fraser 1990:233).

Some of the preceding theories of politeness have their roots in Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975). For Grice, every conversation is a co-operative activity between the participants involved in the conversation and these participants expect each other to observe a general principle, the Cooperative Principle. It expects that speakers would:

Make their conversational contribution such as required, at the stage which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which they are engaged. (Grice 1975:45)

The Conversational Principle is expressed by means of four maxims and nine sub-maxims. The four maxims are: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. Horn (1984) has suggested that Grice's four maxims and its sub-maxims can all be reduced to three maxims: Quality, Quantity, and Relevance. Sperber and Wilson (1986) have gone a step further than Horn, reducing all the four maxims Grice proposes to one super-maxim of Relevance.

In the Politeness Theory propounded by Lakoff (1973), one major source of violation of Grice's conversational maxims is politeness. She observes that speakers violate Grice's maxims more often than they observe them for politeness reasons. She maintains that human communication is rule-governed and that just as there are grammatical rules governing our linguistic structure, there are rules relating to the pragmatic aspects of language use. She proposes two rules of pragmatic competence:

- (i) The Clarity rule: Be clear.
- (ii) The Politeness rule: Be polite.

Lakoff points out that these two rules are potentially in conflict and that the observation of either of these rules is determined by the ultimate goal of the conversation. When the objective of the participants in a conversation is only to communicate, then the clarity rule is observed but when the participants want to maintain a friendly relationship with one another, then the politeness rule is observed. Lakoff sees Grice's Conversational Maxims as rules of clarity.

Lakoff therefore views politeness as compliance to rules which enables people to engage in conversations without any friction. She proposes the following three sub-rules to the Politeness Rule:

- (i) Formality: Don't impose (distance).
- (ii) Hesitancy: Give options (deference).
- (iii) Equality: Be friendly (camaraderie).

Each of these three rules applies under different conditions and the selection of one or the other depends on the social relationship that holds between the speaker and the hearer. Lakoff claims that although these three rules are universal, different cultures may order them differently. One major criticism of Lakoff's model is that it does not theorize the relationship between politeness and context.

Leech (1983) proposes another model of politeness which is also based on Grice's theory of Conversational Implicature (1975) and on Austin (1962) and Searle's Speech Act theories (1969, 1975, 1979). The model, which he explains as an attempt to maintain friendly relations and cooperation among interlocutors, is known as the Politeness Principle (PP). Generally, Leech views politeness as a fixed set of six maxims and these maxims are analogous to Grice's maxims. Each maxim has a negative version and a positive version, as cost-benefit, dispraise-praise, disagreement-agreement and antipathy-sympathy. According to Leech, politeness increases if the cost/dispraise increases for the speaker and the benefit/dispraise increases for the addressee. Leech points out that the Cooperative Principle (CP) and the Politeness Principles (PP) are the same and they actually are complementary to each other. He strongly believes that without the PP, the CP will make incorrect predictions.

Leech goes on to add that the Politeness Principles are universal but their use depends on cultural, social, and linguistic factors. Leech's model of politeness has been criticized on the grounds that it does not take into account the social distance between the speaker and the hearer. Fraser (1990:227) also notes that "this proposal is difficult to evaluate, since there is no way of knowing which maxims are to be applied, what scales are available, how they are to be formulated, what their dimensions are, when and to what degree they are relevant and so forth". Turner (1996) also criticizes Leech's politeness principles for not having "theoretical proposals" about the relationship between linguistic form and linguistic functions.

Brown and Levinson's (hereafter B&L) politeness theory provides a thorough treatment of the concept of politeness. Their theory assumes a model person (MP) who is endowed with two basic properties: *rationality* and *face*. Rationality refers to "a mode of reasoning from ends to a means that will achieve those ends" (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The other property, a key notion in B&L's politeness model, is the concept of "face". Drawing on Goffman (1967:61), they explain "face" as the self-image of a person. This self-image, which is "emotionally invested, can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (1987:61). Thus, B&L assume that all adult members of a society have two kinds of face: negative and positive face and they try to maintain these two faces in the course of interaction. Whereas positive face seeks appreciation and approval from others (the desire to be liked and respected), negative face seeks autonomy (the desire to be free from constraint and imposition). A person's positive face is threatened when we make that person know directly or indirectly that we do not approve of them or of their behaviour. Negative face is threatened when we order people to do things or when we ask people to give up freedoms that they would normally hold. In every society, there are certain kinds of action that can threaten a person's positive or negative face. Such acts that can threaten interlocutors' face can be made more polite by performing them with one of B&L's super politeness strategies.

These strategies they proposed could be summarized into the following broad categories:

- (i) Bald-on-record — a direct way of saying things
- (ii) Positive politeness — an expression of solidarity
- (iii) Negative politeness — an expression of restraint
- (iv) Off-record politeness — the avoidance of unequivocal impositions

Figure 1 shows these strategies that speakers could employ to do face threatening acts (FTA).

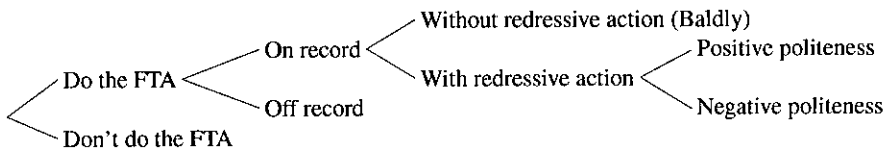


FIGURE 1

Possible strategies for performing FTAs
(Source: Brown and Levinson 1987:60)

The model in Figure 1 suggests that there is a series of ways by which a speaker could satisfy his/her face needs and those of his/her hearer. In the first place, the speaker has the option to either do the FTA or "opt out" by not doing the FTA. If

the threat to face is so great, speakers could choose to opt out by not making the utterance at all. If the speakers decide to do the FTA, they could either choose to “go on record” or “off record”. When the speakers go off record, they use metaphors, hints, tautologies or rhetorical questions so that the meaning of their acts is not transparent. This way, they cannot be held accountable for the face-threatening act they have committed. Off-record acts depend on implicature and in this way, they violate some of the Gricean maxims. Thus, with off-record politeness, a face-threatening act is performed in such a way that multiple interpretations can be given to the act. A hint is a typical example of an off-record politeness strategy.

When speakers go “on record”, it means that they have committed themselves to the FTA, but they still have a choice. They can either mitigate the force of this utterance by the use of positive or negative politeness strategies or decide to do the FTA “baldly” without any redressive act. Speakers can also convey positive politeness by emphasizing closeness or intimacy with the hearer. In B&L’s model, the power of the speaker or the hearer, the social distance between the speaker and the hearer as well as the level of imposition of the FTAs are three important factors that determine the choice of a strategy type. B&L’s theory predicts that as social distance increases, politeness also increases. In the same way, as differences in status or power between speaker and hearer increase, politeness also increases. Thus, the more powerful the hearer is in relation to the speaker, the more polite the speaker would be expected to be. And the higher the level of imposition of any request made by a speaker is, the more polite the form is that the speaker would be required to use in the phrasing of the request.

One major strength of this theory of politeness is that, unlike the rule-based approach adopted by Lakoff and Leech, B&L’s theory explains politeness by resorting to basic human notions such as rationality and face wants. In spite of its strengths, recent studies on politeness theories show that not all aspects of the theory propounded by B&L are applicable across cultures. The most criticized aspect of their theory is their claim that positive face and negative face operate in most languages and cultures and that the desire to protect negative face and defend positive face are important functions of politeness in all languages and cultures. Matsumoto (1988), Ide (1989), Gu (1990), Nwoye (1992), and Mao (1994) have all pointed out that B&L’s theory is not applicable to many Asian and African cultures and we strongly agree with this view. Matsumoto (1988) questions the universality of B&L’s theory of politeness. Citing examples to illustrate the discrepancy between the universality of face and the Japanese notion of face, Matsumoto observes that the theory of politeness as proposed by B&L makes wrong assumptions and predictions for the concept of politeness in Japanese culture.

Matsumoto argues that what governs politeness in Japanese culture is not the “face wants” as described by B&L but, rather, the acknowledgment of interdependence in Japanese society. On the basis of this observation, she suggests that a universal theory of politeness must take into account the cultural variability in the constituents of face. Wierzbicka (1985) also criticizes the claim for universality of

B&L's theory. Citing examples from Polish, Wierzbicka points out that the imperative form, which could be considered rude in English, is actually a mild directive in Polish. In another study, Ide (1989) provides empirical evidence to confirm that the notion of face as expressed by B&L is not an issue of primary concern in cultures where members set out to conform to norms of expected behaviour. Gu (1990), in a similar fashion, argues that B&L's model is not suitable for Chinese because of the difference in how the Chinese perceive negative face. Thus, a potential negative FTA in B&L's context will not constitute a negative FTA in Chinese. It is important to note here that Matsumoto and Gu's studies deal with Asian societies which emphasize collectivism rather than individualism. This may probably be the source of discrepancy in the concept of face between the two cultures. Other researchers like Janney and Arndt (1993) have also criticized B&L's theory for its bias toward British and North American social psychology. Thus, the universality of B&L's notion of face has been strongly criticized by non-Western researchers.

In addition to the question of the universality of politeness strategies, B&L's ranking of politeness strategies has been challenged. Some scholars have argued that the desire for approval and the desire for autonomy are two distinct ideas and as such the corresponding notions of positive and negative politeness are not rightly ordered. In place of this, it has been suggested that approval vs. desire for autonomy and positive vs. negative politeness must be considered as two independent concepts. Apart from these, scholars evaluating the match between B&L's rankings and perception of politeness have remarked that off-record strategies are not always perceived as more polite than negative politeness strategies by all cultures (Holtgraves and Yang 1990). These researchers have also noted that the level of politeness of any politeness strategy can vary depending on the context in which it is used and the intentions of the speaker who uses them. Another major weakness of this theory which B&L themselves recognize, is the nature of the data they used for their study. They mix intuitive, naturally occurring, and elicited data collected from different sources. According to them, their work "was an unholy amalgam of naturally occurring, elicited and intuitive data" (Brown and Levinson 1987:11).

Current research on politeness issues have also criticized the model of politeness proposed by B&L. Some of the current studies distinguish two broad approaches to politeness: the "traditional" view and the "post-modern" or "discursive" view (Watts 2003; Watts, Ide, and Ehlich 2005; Terkourafi 2005; Haugh 2007). Watts (2003), for instance, departs from the dominant research paradigm established by B&L (1987) and introduces a conceptual distinction between politeness, a concept that signifies a range of disputed notions of polite and impolite behaviour, and impoliteness, a term used to represent universal claims about politeness as a particular form of social interaction that can be found in any socio-cultural group, independent of time and place. He advocates a paradigm shift in linguistic politeness studies and calls on theorists to abandon the "traditional" view by B&L, in favour of a "post modern" or discursive one that gives greater attention to the role of interactional data, and the participant's own perceptions of the politeness

phenomena (Watts 2003:9). Watts insists that “the concept of politeness expresses what he calls first-order interpretive struggles over the discursive domains of lay conceptions of politeness and impoliteness” (p. 11).

Watts explicitly claims that he does not aim to present yet another theory of politeness, but rather his intention is to review the literature on linguistic politeness as a technical term in order to help rectify many of the false pathways that have been created over the years in an attempt to define linguistic politeness. Using naturally occurring data that were gathered from different discourse activities, Watts focuses on the term “face” and criticizes it for giving rise to the equation of Politeness Theory with Face Theory. He further states that the concept of politeness has not been properly understood, and so, he criticizes some of the widely used models of linguistic politeness suggested by Lakoff (1975), Leech (1983), and B&L (1987).

He goes on to argue that “for a more satisfactory model of linguistic politeness that is grounded in a theory of social interaction, there is the need to return to Goffman’s notion of ‘face’ rather than placing emphasis solely on the dual notion of ‘positive and negative politeness which forms the basis of Brown and Levinson’s model” (Watts 2003:25). In effect, Watts stresses the need for a replacement of all other models with the Relevance Theoretical Approach to Social Interaction suggested by Eelen (2001), by virtue of its ability to offer a more subtle and flexible method of deriving inferencing processes that are needed by participants in social interactions. Eelen (2001:110) demands that “when a speaker and hearer are psychologically on a par, their interactional practices must also be interpreted using the same criteria that are socially appropriate and acceptable as polite.”

Other scholars, such as Haugh (2007), also express concerns over whether earlier works by B&L and other scholars and researchers can truly remain free from their own theoretical pre-occupations or categories that may taint the analysis of corpus collected from interactions in their various studies. Haugh by raising these concerns relies distinctly on sociological conceptions of interactions and emphasizing the interpretive quality and role of power relations in form and contexts of polite communicative behaviour. He continues to make a radical rejection of “politeness”; as a concept that had been lifted out of the realm of lay conceptions by earlier discussions from Watts et al. (1992:3). Haugh’s goal is to contribute to a theory of politeness that locates possible realizations of polite or impolite behaviour and then offer ways of assessing how interlocutors can evaluate communicative behaviours from everyday speech situations.

3. CULTURAL NORMS UNDERLYING THE PRAGMATICS OF POLITENESS IN GHANA

Like the Japanese situation, in Ghanaian culture the acknowledgment of interdependence is very important. This idea is reflected in some Ghanaian proverbs and sayings: “One tree does not make a forest”. Ghanaian culture values co-operation over competition and so group achievements are valued over individual achieve-

ments. As a result, Ghanaians value “we” before “I” and group-defined social norms and duties before personal opinion. As a result, Ghanaians tend to value interdependence, commitment to family, ethnic groups, etc. more than independence or individual freedom or choice. Thus, the rules that govern politeness in Ghanaian culture vary from those that govern politeness in the cultures in which Leech, Lakoff, and B&L operate.

Clearly, differing cultural values will have differing pragmatic outcomes, especially in the negotiation of politeness. For instance, the imperative form is not considered rude in Akan provided that it occurs with the Akan word *mi pa wu kyèw* for ‘please’. In fact, among the Akwapim-speaking people of Ghana, it is even possible to precede an explicit insult with the word “please” to make it more polite. There is a joke about the excessive politeness on the part of Akwapim speakers when they say “Please, you are stupid.” or “Please, you are a fool.” Hence our prediction is that traditional politeness theory, best represented by B&L, can be only partially applicable to Ghanaian culture. Another important shortcoming of traditional politeness theory has to do with the factors that influence the choice of a strategy type. B&L argue that the power of the speaker or the hearer, the social distance between the speaker and the hearer and the level of imposition are three factors that determine the choice of strategy type. However, in some societies, such as Ghana, gender and age are more important factors than those that have been proposed.

Despite the various criticisms discussed here, B&L’s politeness theory provides a thorough examination of the subject and serves as a useful point of departure for any meaningful study of politeness theory. Therefore, in this study, we use a framework proposed by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989a) which adheres to B&L’s theory to explain the motivations behind the linguistic choices that are made by our informants. In fact, the Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper framework represents an approach that can be seen as an elaboration of B&L’s theory.

4. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE

The data for this present study were obtained from three sources:

- (i) observation of natural speech
- (ii) discourse completion tests
- (iii) insights provided by the author, a native speaker of Akan

We adopted these sources for the data collection because we did not expect one single data source to provide us with all the necessary insights into the politeness strategies that are employed by speakers of English in Ghana. Naturally occurring requests were collected from five different spontaneous speech situations (Table 1). The data collection followed the ethnographic method, deriving from anthropology. The informants in the naturally occurring data consisted of 500 adult speakers of English selected randomly from different social situations. The data were collected with the help of five assistants. One assistant was assigned to each of the situations

TABLE 1
Spontaneous speech situations

Situation	Location
1.	a bank
2.	a lecturer's office
3.	a restaurant
4.	a service provider's office
5.	on the phone

TABLE 2
Role constellations in the DCTs

Situation	Social Status	Age
1. bank	S > H	S > H
2. lecturer's office	S < H	S < H
3. restaurant	S > H	S = H
4. office	S > H	S > H
5. on the phone	S < H	S < H

Key: S = Speaker; H = Hearer

and each assistant was asked to note down 100 requests, which he/she heard in the situation he/she had been assigned without selection or censorship. They were to note, as accurately as possible, the exact words used by speakers in the request situations, together with relevant contextual details.

The second method used to collect data was the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) questionnaire (Appendix). The real life situations in the natural data were designed into a discourse completion test. The test consisted of 5 situations, which presented respondents with a detailed description of each of the contexts in the natural data situation, specifying the social distance between the participants and their status relative to each other. Social status was established in terms of whether the interlocutors were equal in status, or if the speaker had more or less power than the hearer. The age and gender of the interlocutors were also considered. The interaction of these factors was constructed in the scenarios. Table 2 presents how each item on the questionnaire varied by these variables.

In the bank situation, the assumption was that the bank official had a higher social status than the respondent and was also older than the respondent. In the lecturer's office situation, the lecturer also had a higher status than the student. In the restaurant situation, the patron had more power than the waiter because the former was paying for his/her service.

The informants for the questionnaire data consisted of 100 Ghanaian undergraduate students in various departments at the University of Ghana. Their ages

ranged from 17 to 43 years, with a mean of 25 years. The informants signed consent forms on which they agreed to participate in the study. Tables 3 and 4 present a profile of the informants in the written test.

TABLE 3

Age distribution for written questionnaire informants

Age range	17-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	Total
Number of respondents	15	45	34	6	100

TABLE 4

Gender distribution for written questionnaire informants

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	60	60.0	60.0	60.0
Female	40	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	100.0

As shown in Table 4, the respondents for the written questionnaire were made up of 60 male students and 40 female students. The Discourse Completion Test questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part I elicited data on background information on the informants' native language, area of study, earlier training in and exposure to the English language, and use of English. Part II outlined the five formal and informal discourse situations in which informants were asked to make requests (see Appendix for Part II).

The written test questions were given to each informant for them to grasp the meaning of the items. Each informant was given the following:

- (i) background information of the test
- (ii) procedure of the test
- (iii) sample test items

The informants were required to fill out their personal information just before the test was begun. The test lasted about fifteen minutes, including administration time. When the test was over, all 100 answer sheets were collected.

The data gathered were coded and analysed by using the coding scheme and analytical framework designed by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989b) for CC-SARP (Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project). The coding scheme adopted for CCSARP was based on frames of primary features that were expected to be found in requests. For that project, a request was identified as all the utterance(s) involved in the completion of the dialogue in the DCT and we made the same assumption in this study. A sample response is presented in (1).

(1) *Sample situation and response:*

a. Situation 1:

YOU ARE AT A BANK

You want to pay some money into your account, but there is no pay-in/deposit slip on the counter. You wish to ask the elderly male bank official behind the counter for a pay-in slip. You say:

b. Analysis:

The response to this situation may include the following discourse sequence:

Excuse me, sir, there is no pay-in slip on the counter. Do you think

1

2

3

I could get one? I want to deposit some money into my account.

4

5

Following Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989b) a response such as this, in (1), was parsed into the components outlined in (2).

(2) Response	Category
'Excuse me, Sir'	Alerter
'There is no pay-in slip on the counter.'	Pre-posed supportive move
'Do you think'	Downgrader (optional)
'I could get one?'	Head act
'I want to deposit some money into my account.'	Upgrader (optional)
—	Post-posed supportive moves (optional)

Following the framework developed for CCSARP, we classified the request strategy types, according to a nine-point scale. The nine strategy types, with examples from responses to the sample in (1), are as presented in (3).

- (3) a. *Mood Derivable*: Utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force: "Open the window, please."
- b. *Explicit Performatives*: Utterances in which the illocutionary force is explicitly named: "I am asking you to open the window."
- c. *Hedged Performatives*: Utterances in which the naming of the illocutionary force is modified by hedging expressions: "I would like to ask you to open the window."
- d. *Obligation Statements*: Utterances, which state the obligation of the hearer to carry out the act: "You'll have to open the window."
- e. *Want Statements*: Utterances, which state the speaker's desire that the hearer carries out the act: "I want you to open the window (please)."
- f. *Suggestory formulae*: Utterances that contain a suggestion to do x: "How about opening the window?"
- g. *Query Statements*: Utterances containing reference to preparatory conditions as conventionalised in any language: "Can you/could you/would you mind opening the window?"

- h. *Strong Hints*: Utterances containing partial reference to object or element needed for the implementation of the act: "Why is the window closed?"
- i. *Mild Hints*: Utterances that make no reference to the request proper but are interpretable as requests by context: "It's very hot in here."

5. DISCUSSION

An analysis of the oral data showed that speakers of English in Ghana do not frequently use modals such as "can", "could", "may", and "might" when they make polite requests. Instead, they use more "want"-statements and imperative forms that may be perceived as impolite forms in native varieties of English. These forms are, however, used with lexical politeness markers such as "please" or "kindly". From the oral data that was collected in the natural situation, fewer than 47% of the respondents used the modal or query preparatory forms for Situation 1. Interestingly, the questionnaire data showed the use of more modals than did the oral data for this particular situation. This probably happened because the informants regarded the written form as a more formal medium and as such used forms that are taught as polite forms in native English. The oral data seems to us to be closer to typical Ghanaian English than the questionnaire data. Figure 2 shows a comparison of the oral data and the questionnaire data for Situation 1. The most frequent type of request used in the oral data is the want statement. Generally, there are fewer query preparatory forms than mood derivable forms in the oral data. Since mood derivable/imperative forms are not regarded as impolite forms in Akan, our impression here is that Ghanaian speakers transfer their first language pragmatic linguistic forms into the English language.

Although the difference between the frequency of occurrence of modals and want statements in the natural data was not significant for this situation, Situation 2 showed a vast difference between the frequencies of modals and other request forms. In this second situation, modals occur in 67% of the questionnaire data but for the natural data, they occur in only 1% of the data. The figure below shows this difference in the distribution of modals and other request forms in Situation 2. From our introspection as speakers of English in Ghana, the responses in the natural data appear to be more prevalent in English in Ghana.

Situation 3 presented a different picture. The context of the situation presumed that the addressee was under an obligation to provide the service or item which the speaker requested. The questionnaire data showed a high frequency of query preparatory forms (58%) while the natural data showed a high frequency of mood derivable forms (55%). We expected the mood derivable forms to be used more frequently than they were used here since we assumed that the level of imposition in this request was lower. The waiter is paid to serve meals and so the patron's request for the menu should not be a high imposition request. The results, however, suggest that this factor was not very important to the informants in the questionnaire data since they selected modal forms that are marked for politeness.

In the questionnaire data for this situation, the informants generally avoided

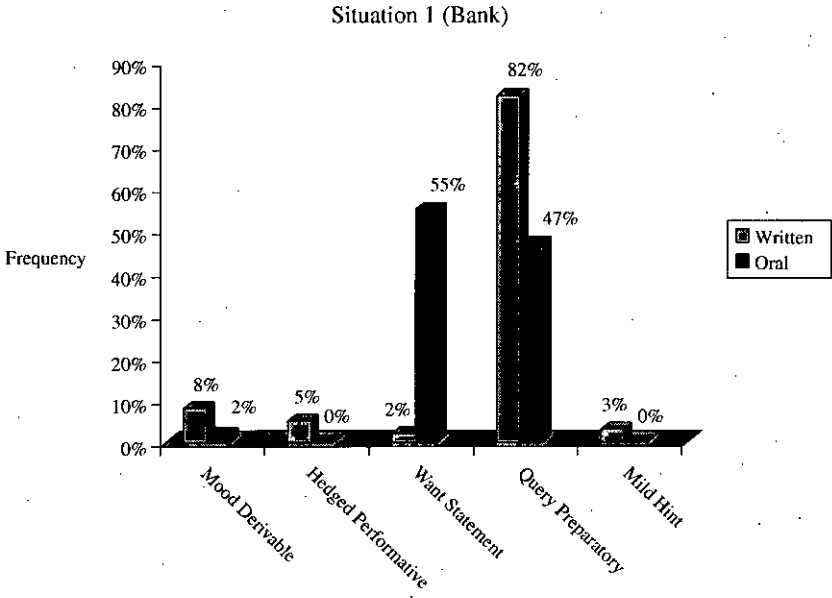


FIGURE 2

Frequency of request strategy types
(Situation 1: written vs. oral data)

mood derivable forms such as “Give me the menu” or “I want the menu”, which are direct requests, in preference for indirect forms such as “Can you give me the menu, please”. We believe that this happened because the informants have been taught that the modal forms are more polite in English, thus, when they completed the discourse completion tests which they perceived to be formal documents, they adhered to the politeness rules of native varieties of English; conversely, when they spoke naturally, they consider the imperative forms and the want statements to be appropriate polite forms. Thus, in the natural data, they preferred to use forms such as “One plate of rice and a bottle of beer” or “Give me rice and stew”. These are the forms that are prevalent in spoken English in Ghana.

In Situation 4, the modals occurred in 56% of the questionnaire data and in 29% of the natural data. The explicit performative, which is considered to be a less polite form in English, occurred in more than 30% of the natural data while it occurred in just about 5% of the questionnaire data. The results here showed a marked disagreement between the natural data and the questionnaire data in the use of modals. This difference in the forms preferred by informants can be attributed to methodological factors. In the written responses, informants preferred to use the modal forms because they knew that this form marked politeness and they were aware that they were operating in a formal domain because they were writing. In the natural data, informants did not use the modal form because that was not the

Situation 2 (Lecturer's office)

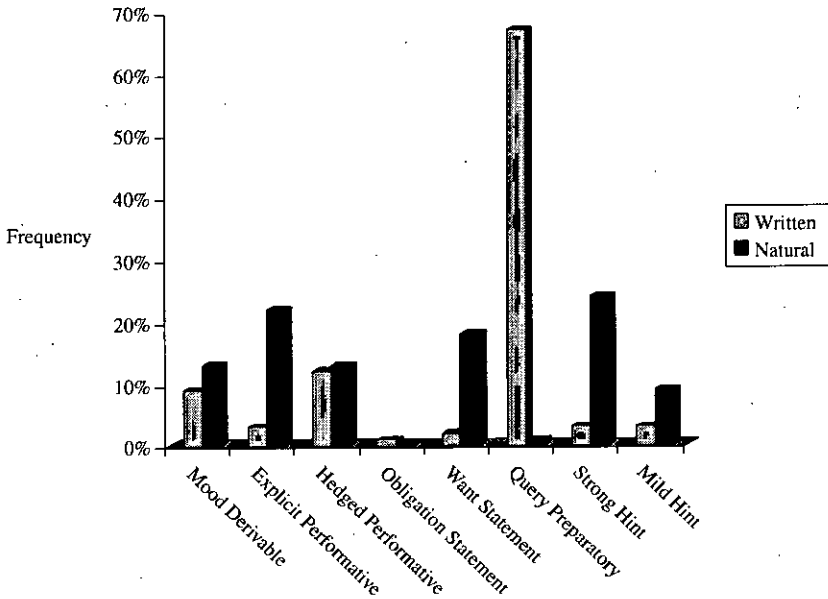


FIGURE 3

Frequency of request strategy types
(Situation 2: written vs. oral data)

form that naturally came to them and they were not aware that what they were saying were being recorded. Figure 5 shows the frequency of each form in the oral and written data.

Closely related to this infrequent use of modals is the frequent use of lexical politeness markers. Two lexical markers were frequently used in the data to indicate politeness. These two lexical politeness markers are “please” and “kindly”. A closer look at the responses elicited show that they were mostly imperatives, which carried the lexical politeness markers “kindly” and “please”. These lexical politeness markers downgraded the force of the imperatives. The examples in (4) show how these forms were used in the data.

- (4) a. Kindly give me a pay-in slip *please*.
- b. *Please kindly* give me a pay-in slip.
- c. *Please* sir, kindly give me a pay-in form *please*.
- d. *Please* sir kindly sign my forms for me.
- e. *Please kindly* sign my faculty forms for me.
- f. *Please kindly* give me fufu.
- g. *Please kindly* serve me with some rice.

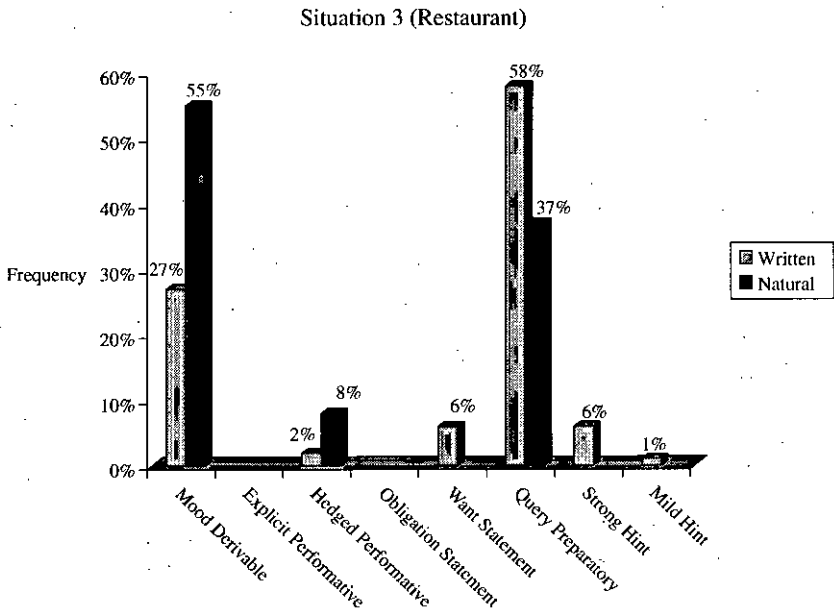


FIGURE 4

Frequency of request strategy types
(Situation 3: written vs. oral data)

- h. *Kindly* let us have two plates of banku with okro soup, no meat please.

Modals were occasionally used with both “kindly” and “please” (5).

- (5) a. *Please* could you kindly give me a pay-in slip?
 b. *Please* sir, could you kindly give me a pay-in slip?

The forms “please” and “kindly” make the request forms more polite than the forms without the lexical politeness markers. From the data, we observed that the choice of “please” is tied to request strategy types such as imperatives. A few modal types had these politeness markers but the frequency of occurrence of these forms was higher with the imperatives than with the modal forms. The frequent use of the lexical politeness markers “please” and “kindly” have their source in the conventions of requesting in Ghanaian languages. In many Ghanaian languages, it is common practice for younger people or subordinates to use the word “please” in speech to indicate respect or politeness. In fact, in Ghana “please” occurs with speech acts or linguistic forms in which they may not occur in native varieties of English. Thus, it is possible to find such forms as “please, good evening” or “please, thank you”, “please, wait for me”, “please, you are invited” or “please, I will be with you in a minute”, “please, no”, “please, yes”, which are atypical utterances among native speakers of English.

Situation 4 (Friend's office)

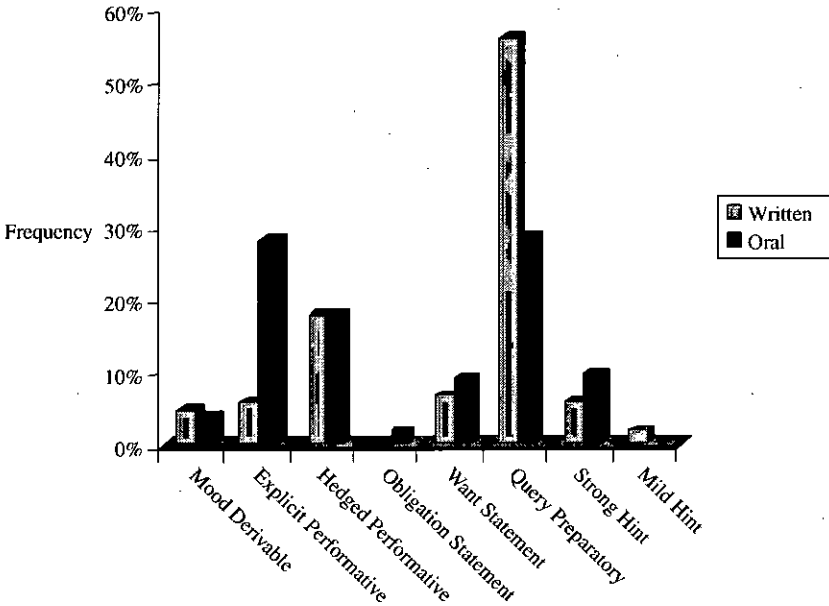


FIGURE 5

Frequency of request strategy types
(Situation 4: written vs. oral data)

In Ghanaian English, when the addressee is older than the speaker, the use of a politeness marker is required. Usually younger people are not expected to send adults to do a task or even to ask them to perform certain tasks but if this has to happen, indicators of politeness show that they are making the request in a polite manner and “please” is the most common politeness marker. However, Ghanaian children are taught from infancy to use the word “please” whenever they speak to adults: when they greet adults, when they ask adults questions, or when they request adults to perform certain tasks for them. If they fail to do so, they are perceived to be impolite and not well brought up. Among the Akwapims of the Eastern Region of Ghana, the use of “please” is even more extensive, so that it is possible to find forms like “please, you are stupid” or “please, you are a fool”. Even in classroom situations when pupils or students want to pose questions to their teachers, they are expected to precede the questions with the word “please”. So it is not uncommon to find questions such as “Sir, please, what do you say is the capital city of Canada?”. It is also not uncommon to hear questions such as “Please, how much does this cost?”. This calque therefore is excessively used in Ghanaian English as a marker of respect.

It was interesting to compare the use of “please” by male and female respon-

dents, as it has been suggested that women tend to be more polite than men (Lakoff 1975). In the written data, we noticed that in all five situations, female respondents used "please" more frequently than the male respondents did (Table 5).

TABLE 5
Male/Female use of "please"

Situation	Usage (%)	
	Female	Male
1.	80	73
2.	83	78
3.	59	49
4.	61	58
5.	80	69

Although the difference is not significant in Situations 1 (7%), 2 (5%), and 4 (3%), the difference in situations 3 (10%) and 5 (11%) are not negligible. When we look at the natural data, we notice that the distribution of "please" is not regular in all the situations and informants use "please" more in the questionnaire data than in the oral data. Taken together, the difference between the male and female informants is statistically significant. In Situations 1 through 5, it is the female informants who use "please" more frequently. Thus, the claim that female speakers are more polite than male speakers is supported by our findings.

As predicted by B&L (1989), there are certain variables that call for the use of 'please' and the other politeness markers that are found here. Some of the variables that affect the choice of "please" and other politeness indicators are the age of the requester, the right of the requester to make the request, the degree of difficulty involved in making the request, and the degree of obligation placed on the requestee to comply with the request. Generally, the younger the requester is, the more likely it is for the requester to use 'please' and the greater the level of imposition or face-threat, the more likely it is for the requester to use 'please' or other politeness markers. This finding therefore lends support to B&L's theory of politeness. If the level of imposition or face threat goes higher, politeness goes higher in the direction of the requestee and vice versa. This also lends support to the politeness theory propounded by Leech.

Another strategy employed by speakers to indicate politeness is the use of alerters. Alerters are primarily used to call the hearers' attention to the speech act. There are several types of alerters: endearment terms, titles, pronouns, attention getters, nicknames, etc. In this study the informants frequently used two types of alerters to indicate their levels of politeness, address terms and attention getters. According to B&L (1987) the use of address terms such as titles and endearment terms show negative politeness. In Ghanaian culture, it is not polite for speakers to refer to or address people who are older than they are or people who are of a higher

status without using address forms. Thus, we find the use of politeness markers such as “sir” or “madam”, “sister”, and “aunty” occurring frequently with requests. Although these words exist in native varieties of English, they occur more frequently in English in Ghana than in native varieties of English. Again, for words like “sister” and “aunty”, native speakers of English reserve them for people with whom they share blood ties but in Ghanaian culture any adult female is an “aunty” whether the speaker is related to the person or not and any younger female who is close to the age of the speaker is addressed as “sister”. In fact, this is a very important discourse feature of Ghanaian English. These forms of address are used to indicate respect/politeness by users of English in Ghana. This discourse pattern is obviously a transfer from Ghanaian languages. The address terms “sir” and “madam”, which are also in native varieties of English, are more frequently used in Ghanaian English than in the native varieties and they have acquired a wider range of usage and connotations in Ghanaian English. It is therefore common to have the forms in (6) used in the English spoken in Ghana.

- (6) a. Sir/Madam, (please) I want to ask a question.
 b. Sir/Madam, (please) I have a question. (Or) Please sir, I have a question.

Speakers who use these forms virtually transfer syntactic structures from their first languages into the second language because in the first language, these are the polite forms for framing questions. To a native speaker of English, this mode of asking questions might sound odd and probably condescending or even subservient but to the speaker of English in Ghana, it is most appropriate.

Thus, the data revealed the use of titles such as “sir”, “madam”, “young man”, “waiter”, and “Boss”. These address forms were used more frequently in the written data than in the oral data. In Situation 1, for instance, while the titles “Sir”/“Madam” were used in 21% of the written data, they did not occur even in one instance in the oral data. In Situation 2, these titles occur in 65% of the written data and in 49% of the oral data. The address forms which occurred frequently in Situation 3 were “Waiter”, “Sister”, “Charlie”, and “Madam”. In the written data these address forms occurred in 20% of the data while in the oral data they occurred in 17% of the requests. The results for Situation 4 differ from the first three situations. In Situation 4 address forms were used in 6% of the written data and in 21% of the oral data. What factor(s) increased the frequency of occurrence of address forms in the oral data? It could be that the level of imposition to the addressee is higher but the benefit is lower. The benefit to the requester, however, is higher and so the requesters sought to mitigate the high level imposition by using address forms. In the last situation address forms are used in 17% of the written data and 4% of the oral data.

The other type of alerter that was used was the attention getter. The attention getters that were used here were “excuse me”, “hello”, “hi” and greetings such as “good morning”, “good afternoon” and “good evening”. The use of attention getters such as greetings and “excuse me” constitute an important means of showing polite-

ness in English in Ghana. By using these attention getters, the informants showed regard and respect for the hearer. The greetings also indicated or acknowledged the addressees. Once again, in Ghanaian culture, greetings are strong indications that the speakers are interested in addressees. Thus, the use of greetings is a polite way of expressing recognition of the hearer's status, power or age. Ghanaian children are taught from childhood to greet every adult they come across at any time of the day. Thus, depending on the time of the day and the occasion, young persons greet adults to show them respect. The use of greetings such as "excuse me", "hello", "hi" and such forms as "good morning", "good afternoon", or "good evening" show that the speakers have regard for the hearers. Usually younger persons and subordinates initiate these greetings. When the younger person does not greet the adult or superior, that person is seen as an impolite or disrespectful person. This habit of greeting to show politeness and respect has been transferred into Ghanaian English and this is seen in the data that are examined for this study. Example (7) lists examples that respondents/speakers use to show that they have regard for their hearers.

- (7) a. Excuse me, I would like a deposit slip.
 b. Good morning, Madam. I wanted to ask you to sign my form for me.
 c. Excuse me, sir. I wanted to ask you to sign my form for me.
 d. Excuse me, sir. Could you sign my form for me?
 e. Good afternoon, sir. Can I please give you my faculty form for endorsement?
 f. Good morning, sir. Can I bring my faculty form to be signed?
 g. Excuse me, sir. Can I please have my form signed?

There are many situations which call for greetings in Ghanaian culture and Ghanaian languages for which native English has no equivalent. For such situations, Ghanaian speakers of English transfer the politeness strategies that are used in their indigenous languages. For example, there are specific greetings that are used when a person meets an addressee while she or he is eating. Native English does not have an equivalent form and so in order to show politeness, speakers of English in Ghana transfer this form of greeting into English and this results in Ghanaian English expressions such as "you have met me well", "You know how to walk", and "you are invited". The pragmatic imports of these expressions are not known to non-speakers of Ghanaian languages but these are all polite expressions that are used when a person meets another while that person is eating. Failure to use any of these expressions will be counted as impoliteness. There are other expressions, like "sorry", which have different meanings in native English but they have additional meanings in Ghanaian English and so if a person says "sorry" in Ghanaian English it could convey polite sympathy. There are other expressions, like "thank you for yesterday", which are used to express gratitude for a favour or a gift that was done or given before the day in question. This is another example of such transfers.

Another important means by which our informants made their requests more polite was by the use of indirection. By using these indirect request forms, the infor-

ments distanced themselves from the request situation. Examples of such indirect forms that occurred in the data are given in (8).

- (8) a. I was asked to come here from the general office for my form to be signed.
 b. I was asked to bring my faculty form here for signing.
 c. I have been asked to bring this form here.
 d. Please, I was sent here to bring my registration form.
 e. I was asked to bring this form to you for signing.
 f. They say I should bring my form here to be signed.

These structures occurred frequently in the oral data in Situation 3. In this situation, the informants had gone to their academic adviser to sign their faculty forms. Instead of asking the academic adviser to sign their forms, the students preferred to say, “they say I should come to you to sign my form”. By saying this, they assumed a passive role in the requesting situation and shifted the actual request to a third person who was neither identified nor mentioned. In some instances, the third person plural pronoun was used. This pronoun did not, however, refer to any particular person. It functioned as an indefinite pronoun. In examples (8e) and (8f), the students did not even mention the signing of the forms but they expected the adviser to sign the forms for them. These forms occurred frequently here because the informants felt they were imposing on the adviser by asking her to sign their faculty forms. Closely related to these indirect forms is the use of honorific pronouns. The third person plural pronoun “they” can be used to mark politeness for a single superior or adult if the speaker does not want to mention the name of this adult or superior. For example, in expressions such as “they say I should call you”, “they are calling you”, and “they say I should bring this to you”, “they” could actually be used to mark respect for singular persons. So here, “they” could refer to a person’s father or mother or any other adult whose name the speaker does not want to mention.

It was also observed that some of the informants used temporal adverbial markers to indicate politeness. We suppose that this practice must also have been transferred from some Ghanaian languages. For example, native speakers of Twi find it normal when they hear someone say “Please, I wanted to tell you something”, which shows this possible transfer (9).

(9) *Twi*:

Mi pawɔkyew ŋka mi pɛ sɛ mi kã bibi kyere wɔ.
 I please TEMP.ADV I want that I tell something to you
 ‘Please, I wanted to tell you something.’

The Twi form is used for present tense constructions but it shows more deference for the hearer than the simple present tense. This is what has probably been translated into English by Twi speakers of English in Ghana. In the situation in which the informants produced the two request forms below, the informants walked into an office holding their faculty forms. Their intention was not to tell the lecturer

about a past request. They wanted her to sign their forms but they deliberately used these because they wanted to give her the option to sign or not to sign their faculty forms.

- (10) a. Madam, please. I wanted to ask you to sign my form.
 b. Madam, please. I wanted you to sign my faculty form.

By using these forms, the informants made their requests a lot more polite. Many educated people use this form to make high imposition requests. It was also found out from a few colleagues how they perceived those requests made with temporal adverbial markers and in all the situations they indicated that the temporal adverbial markers were more tentative and more polite than the present forms in requests.

Another important observations that we made was that there were few external and internal modifications. These external modifiers which serve as explanatory or supportive moves that occur either before or after the main request are not frequently used by speakers of English in Ghana. A few of them occurred in the data but they were not frequently used (11).

- (11) a. *I am sorry* but I want to make a deposit. Do you have any pay-in slip?
 b. Please I want my faculty form signed. *I brought it last week but it has not been signed yet.*
 c. *I am sorry to disturb you,* sir, could you sign my form for me this time.
 d. *I am sorry to bother you,* sir, but could you please sign my form for me.

The italicised expressions in (11) show that the speakers acknowledge that the requests impose on the hearers and so they use other supportive moves or grounders to explain or apologize for this imposition. Syntactic downgraders and softeners hardly occur. Thus, forms such as “do you mind if ...” and “I was wondering if you ...” rarely occur in Ghanaian English.

6. CONCLUSION

The objective of this article has been to show that politeness strategies that are used in Ghanaian languages are usually transferred into English by speakers of English in Ghana. The data used for this study were collected from naturally occurring requests, questionnaire data and native speaker introspection. The findings of the study showed that speakers of English in Ghana do not frequently use modals such as “can”, “could”, “may”, and “might” when they perform polite requests when they make oral requests. Instead, they use more ‘want statements’ and imperative forms that may be perceived as impolite forms in native varieties of English. However, these forms are used with lexical politeness markers such as “please” or “kindly”. The frequent use of the lexical politeness markers “please” and “kindly” have their source in the conventions of requesting in Ghanaian languages. In Ghanaian culture, younger people are taught to use the word “please” in speech to indicate respect or politeness. The use of these forms is so pervasive that it sometimes

possible to hear speakers with lower levels of proficiency in English producing forms such as “please, good evening”, “please, thank you”, “please, wait for me” or “please, I will be with you in a minute”. When speakers make written requests, they use modal forms more frequently. We think that this occurs because these users see the written forms as formal forms and so they adhere to formal rules of written English.

It was also observed that variables like the age of the requester, the right of the requester to make the request, the degree of difficulty involved in making the request, and the degree of obligation placed on the requestee to comply with the request are very important factors that influence the choice of a politeness strategy. In Ghanaian English, age and social status are also very important determinants of politeness. Another strategy that is employed by speakers to indicate politeness is the use of alerters. Although these alerters are used to call the hearer’s attention to the request, at the same time they indicate politeness because they acknowledge the speaker. Alerters that occurred in the data are endearment terms, titles, pronouns, attention getters, nicknames, etc. Greetings are also strong indicators of politeness in English in Ghana. There are greeting forms for different situations in Ghanaian English which are not present in native varieties of English. These forms of greetings are usually transferred into the variety of English that is spoken in Ghana. If the specialized greetings are not used, speakers are going to come off as being impolite.

In addition to the strategies that have been identified above, it was also observed that speakers used the third person singular pronoun “they” for singular persons when they want to show respect to superiors or older persons. It was also observed that some of the informants used temporal adverbial markers to indicate politeness. Finally, the study showed that syntactic downgraders and softeners such as “do you mind if . . .” and “I was wondering if you . . .” rarely occurs in Ghanaian English. We believe that these features that we have discussed are prevalent in English in Ghana because they are transferred from some Ghanaian languages into the English language spoken in Ghana and this gives the English language that is spoken in Ghana characteristics that mark it off as “Ghanaian English”.

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APPENDIX: DCT QUESTIONNAIRE (PART II)**YOU ARE AT A BANK**

You want to pay some money into your account, but there is no pay-in/deposit slip on the counter. You wish to ask the elderly male bank official behind the counter for a pay-in slip. You say:

YOU ARE IN YOUR LECTURER'S OFFICE

It is the beginning of the semester. Your faculty form has to be signed by your academic advisor who is also your lecturer. You go to her office and you wish to ask her to sign your form. You say:

YOU ARE IN A RESTAURANT

You want to buy a meal. You wish to ask the young male waiter for the meal you want. You say:

YOU ARE IN YOUR FRIEND'S OFFICE

You wish to see your friend at Barclays Bank of Ghana. You are at the reception and you wish to tell the receptionist you want to see your friend. (The receptionist is about your age.) You say:

ON THE PHONE

You wish to speak to your friend at the Bank of Ghana. You call the bank and you wish to tell the receptionist you wish to speak to your friend. You say: