

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF REQUESTS IN STUDENTS TO FACULTY EMAILS WRITTEN BY TUNISIANS

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes email requests of different degrees of imposition produced by Tunisian postgraduate students in elicited vs. Spontaneously written emails to their teacher. The natural email requests are composed of 371 e-requests found in 182 emails written by 81 Tunisian postgraduate students. The other dataset comprised 13 6requests elicited from a written discourse completion test (WDCT) elaborated by the same participants. Requests in the spontaneously produced emails and the elicited texts were analyzed according to the level of directness of request strategies. This study examines to what extent DCT requests performed by a group of Tunisian postgraduate students sent to their professor approximate their naturally occurring e-requests with respect to the degree of directness. The aim of the comparison of naturally occurring and DCT requests according to the degree of directness is to examine the validity of DCT data and to find out whether an approximation to naturally occurring requests produced by the participants may be considered. The two sets of data have fixed social parameters (low social distance between the interlocutors and social dominance of the addressee over the addresser). The classification adopted for coding the collected email requests is based on Blum-Kulka et al., (1989) and modified by Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) and Felix- Brasdefer (2012 a). A Chi square test is used to investigate the differences. Results of DCT and natural requests display approximately the same degree of directness. Results reveal that both of the naturally occurring requests and the DCT requests are direct. This reliance on directness is related to the great use of expectation statements and mood derivable in natural requests as opposed to direct questions and need statements in DCT requests. The non-significant differences emerged in the study show that DCT findings approximate those elicited naturally. The study seeks also to examine whether the ranking of the imposition of requests affects the choice of request strategies. The findings reveal that requests for information are not responsible for any difference between the two types of data but requests for action display some significant differences and are therefore responsible for this difference. As it is attested from the findings, it is argued that the WDCT requests could provide valid results if treated with caution.

KEYWORDS: *DCT E-Requests, Naturally Occurring E-Requests, Directness*