

## College EFL Teachers' Beliefs In Making Requests

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### ABSTRACT

**This study examined college EFL teachers' beliefs in their making requests in the classrooms. In this study, the methods for data-collection included a questionnaire, classroom observation, and an in-depth interview. A pre-observation questionnaire was administrated for collecting the information on teacher belief in the use of request types, and why and when teachers made these requests. Five EFL teachers and one of their respective English classes at university in Taiwan were invited to participate in the present study. Over a 4-week period, a total of 40 sessions of teaching, 50 minutes each, were observed, video-taped, and audio-taped. Afterwards, an interview was conducted. The data collected were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Findings showed that all teachers reported their uses of both direct and indirect requests. Also, all teachers made their requests for some specific reasons and at some specific point of time. It is suggested that teachers be aware of their uses of requests. Teachers' awareness of their uses of different types of requests may help promote teacher-student interaction.**

**Keywords:** teacher belief, requesting behavior, making a request, direct request, indirect request.

### INTRODUCTION

Requesting has been seen as a complex sociolinguistic and sociocultural phenomenon [1-3,5,20]. Research has also found that teachers make requests in the classrooms, revealing that teachers make two types of requests: direct requests and indirect requests [13-14,19]. However, since making requests in English may vary in different educational contexts, EFL teachers' beliefs in their making requests in terms of directness level needs to be further researched for theoretical and pedagogical purposes.

Teacher belief is a "proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held by teachers, is evaluative in that is accepted as true by the teacher, and is therefore imbued with emotional commitment" and teachers' beliefs usually refer to teachers' pedagogical beliefs [4]. It plays a central role in improving the quality in teaching and learning and in understanding classroom practices, including teachers' perceptions of teaching content and pedagogy [8]. Teacher beliefs make an influence on teachers' instructional choices and teaching practices [15].

Previous research has explored teachers' thoughts and beliefs in why and when they use questions in the classrooms [6][12]. These studies have focused on the investigations of teacher questioning. Teacher belief may affect teachers' complex requesting behaviors in the English classrooms. However, further research into college EFL teachers' beliefs in what types of requests in terms of

directness level they make and why and when they make different types of requests in the classroom has been paid little attention. Research questions were: 1) what are college EFL teachers' beliefs in their uses of requests in terms of directness level as? and 2) what are college EFL teachers' beliefs in why and when they make requests?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Requesting, one of the speech acts much researched in pragmatics, has been seen as a complex sociolinguistic and sociocultural phenomenon [1-3,5,9,11,16]. The speech act theory (SAT) states that "speakers do not merely use language to say things, but to do things and that utterances could be regarded as speech acts" [17-18]. Searle distinguishes two types of speech acts: the direct speech acts and the indirect speech acts [18].

Teachers make requests in the ESL/EFL classrooms [7]. Previous studies reveal that teachers make two types of requests: direct requests and indirect requests [11, 13-14]. Teachers make requests for pedagogical purposes [7][10][21]. Cazden states that in the classrooms, "the teacher is responsible for controlling all the talk that occurs while class is officially in session controlling not just negatively, as a traffic officer does to avoid collisions, but also positively, to enhance the purposes of education" [7].

Teacher belief is a "proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held by teachers, is evaluative in that is accepted as true by the teacher, and is therefore imbued with emotional commitment" and teachers' beliefs usually refer to teachers' pedagogical beliefs [4]. It plays a central role in improving the quality in teaching and learning and in understanding classroom practices, including teachers' perceptions of teaching content and pedagogy [8].

Previous research has explored teachers' thoughts and beliefs in why and when they use questions in the classrooms [6][12]. Çakmak's study finds that teachers ask questions to motivate students and to get their attention, to make students active, to evaluate the students and lesson, to provide feedback, to reinforce pupils' learning, to manage the classroom, to encourage students to think, and to identify students' existing knowledge about the subject [6]. Research shows that senior high school EFL teachers think that they ask questions to help students learn a language and stimulate their background knowledge, to help elicit responses from students and check their comprehension, to help teachers to evaluate students' second language learning, and to provide opportunities for answering [12]. Chen also reports that the teachers think they ask questions to help students follow and comprehend the contents [12]. In terms of teachers' beliefs in when they ask questions in the EFL classrooms, Chen also finds that teachers think they ask questions while teaching vocabulary, sentence patterns, and reading.

Some studies [8] have found that teacher belief is relevant to teachers' uses of question types in the classroom. Chang's study finds that teacher belief relates to EFL teachers' uses of question types and the purposes of questioning in the classrooms [8]. However, some research show that teacher belief is not relevant to teacher questions in the classrooms [8] [12]. These studies have also focused on the investigations of teacher questioning. So far, research into how teacher belief relates to college EFL teachers' uses of request types in the English classrooms have been paid little attention, too. Several studies have explored teachers' thoughts and beliefs in why and when they make

requests (e.g., teacher questions) in the classrooms. However, college EFL teachers' beliefs in the use of request types and in the performance of pragmatic functions in requests in the English classroom have been little explored.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### Participants

Five EFL teachers and one of their respective English classes at university in Taiwan were invited to participate in the present study. Over a 4-week period, a total of 40 sessions of teaching, 50 minutes each, were observed, video-taped, and audio-taped. The data collected were transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

### Instruments

In this study, the methods for data-collection included a questionnaire, classroom observation, and an interview. A pre-observation questionnaire was administered for collecting the information on teacher belief in the use of request types, and why and when teachers made these requests.

### Data Analyses

In this study, a framework of analysis was developed to analyze and explain college EFL teachers' and students' requesting behaviors in the English classrooms. The analysis consists of requests in terms of the levels of directness and potential factors that may influence teachers' and students' uses of request types. The categorization of requests at the directness level was based on previous taxonomies by Blum-Kulka, et al. and Trosborg [2] [19].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Teacher Belief in the Use of Request Types

This section presents teachers' beliefs in their requesting behaviors in the English classrooms. The data were gained from the pre-observation questionnaire answered by college EFL teachers. The teachers reported their beliefs in the use of request types in the classrooms. All teachers reported their uses of both direct and indirect requests. Table 4.1 shows teacher belief in what request types at the directness level used by teachers.

**Table 4.1 Teacher belief in what request types at the directness level**

	Direct Request (DR)	Indirect Request (IR)
<b>Teacher A</b>	Be quiet, please. I would like to ask some of you... I want you to... I hope you... Why do you think...?	Let's work together. How about working in pairs? Why don't you try to answer it?
<b>Teacher B</b>	Please turn to page 52. Please close the back door, thank you. Now, pair up with your partner.	Could you tell me...? Can you...?
<b>Teacher C</b>	Raise your hand. Listen carefully.	Can you tell me what you think?
<b>Teacher D</b>	Please do...	Can somebody help me?
<b>Teacher E</b>	What is the difference between A and B?	Would you read the next paragraph?

As illustrated in Table 4.1, most of the teachers thought they used direct requests by using the imperative sub-type, such as “Be quiet, please”, “Please turn to page 52”, and “Raise your hands”, and use indirect requests by using the query preparatory sub-type, such as “Could you...?”, “Can you...?”, and “Would you...?”. They did not report other types of requests such as the locution derivable sub-type, e.g., “What is the...?” (Teacher E), and the suggestory formula sub-type, e.g., “Let’s...” (Teacher A).

### Teacher Belief in Why and When of Making Requests

The reason and the timing of making a request are also important. These five teachers made their requests for some specific reasons and at some specific point of time. Table 4.2 below presents teacher belief in why and when college EFL teachers made request at the directness level.

**Table 4.2 Teacher Belief in Why and When Teachers Made Requests in terms of Directness Level**

Types	Why?	When?
<b>Direct requests</b>		
<b>Teacher A</b>	A direct request is a clearer request and students with lower proficiency are easy to understand a direct request; teacher-centered instruction for large class (easy to control)	Lecturing, ordering
<b>Teacher B</b>	Because I need to get the attention from the students and have them follow my requests so we can move on the course.	Lecturing. Ordering. Asking for help, giving advice.
<b>Teacher C</b>	To make requests clear	Lecturing, Ordering, Giving instructions
<b>Teacher D</b>	To have my students pay attention to the class.	Giving instructions
<b>Teacher E</b>	To make sure students understand the sentences	Most often giving orders.
<b>Indirect requests</b>		
<b>Teacher A</b>	“Because I don’t want the students to agree with all my opinions if they don’t agree”, “Respect students’ opinions”	“When I want to know students’ opinions about something” “When I want to give them opinions”
<b>Teacher B</b>	“It could encourage the conversation and interaction among students.”	“Sometimes I would ask my students to interview each other to practice English conversation”.
<b>Teacher C</b>	To create a more friendly atmosphere.	When I want to encourage students to give an answer.
<b>Teacher D</b>	People like to be respected by others. So, I believe if I use indirect request in the classroom, students will feel respected and be more cooperative.	When I need my students to do some tasks in class, or when I need their help, such as setting up the computer equipment, I would use indirect request.
<b>Teacher E</b>	More polite.	Ask students to perform some tasks.

As shown in Table 4.2, as for the reasons why the teachers made the direct requests, they explained that using the direct types helped students understand teachers' requests and they also thought that such requests might have students pay attention to the classroom activities. Specifically, one of the teachers (Teacher A) explained that the direct request type was easier for those students with lower proficiency level to understand and students were controlled more easily. Most of the teachers stated that they used direct requests in lecturing and giving orders. The direct requests were also used in asking for help, giving instructions, and giving advice. As for the reasons why using the indirect requests, most of the teachers thought that the purpose of using an indirect type was to make students feel respected. Other reasons given by the teachers for using the indirect requests were that the indirect requests could encourage interaction and cooperation and create warm atmosphere in the classrooms. They thought that they made indirect requests in different contexts in the classrooms, including sharing opinions, practicing English, performing a task, needing a help, and encouraging interaction and participation. Obviously, they were concerned about the classroom order, the students' feelings, the teaching effects, the interaction, and the atmosphere in the classrooms.

### CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate college English as a foreign teachers' beliefs in their uses of requests in the English classroom. College EFL teachers reported their different beliefs in their uses of requests in the English classrooms. It is suggested that teachers be aware of their uses of requests. Teachers' awareness of their uses of different types of requests may help promote teacher-student interaction.

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