**How do you ask things of your children? Request styles at school and in the home**

**Abstract**
The goal of this study was to examine the pattern of requests used by teachers and mothers, given that requests form a significant component of the language used with children. Naturally occurring kindergarten teachers’ lessons and mothers’ play sessions with their kindergarten aged children were taped and each request the adult made was identified and coded along different dimensions. Analyses showed that both teachers and mothers used frequent requests and that teachers used slightly more overall requests. Teachers also used significantly more hints, need or want statements, and non-designated requests than did mothers. Relevance to the transition from home to school, children’s ability to comprehend requests, and their developing theory of mind are all discussed and linked to ideas for future research.

**Introduction**

Language, and all of its components, is critically involved in all interactions. The linguistic form of the speech affects how actions are interpreted, thereby shaping the course of an event. Every aspect of life, from home to school, is guided by the communication that takes place in that context. Young children are first exposed to speech in the home and become familiar with their parents’ ways of speaking, one essential component of which is requests and how children are asked to do things. About five years later, they make the important transition from the home to school where they are suddenly exposed to new expectations and new patterns of speech. With the different expectations in the home and school, it is possible that the two sets of adults, parents and teachers, may talk with children differently and therefore may make requests differently. If this is the case, it is important to recognize these communication differences and how they may affect children entering school. Children who are exposed to new forms of requests in the classroom may have a harder time meeting expectations as they struggle to interpret what is being asked of them. This study examines the different uses of requests
in school and at home, specifically the requests styles used by teachers and mothers speaking to kindergarten children.

*Transition to School*

The first days of formal schooling mark an important milestone in the lives of children; they mark a change from the well-known and supportive family environment to the unfamiliar school setting (Wells, 1983). This transition is a difficult period in which changes occur in many areas of children’s lives. Their social networks are transformed from adult-centered to peer-centered and they must adjust to a new form of interaction (Feiring & Lewis, 1989). Ages four to seven are filled with changes in the “developmental agenda.” Responsibility and independence are expected in formal education, perhaps for the first time in the children’s lives (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Kindergarten introduces demands in a classroom environment filled with explicit goals for literacy, numeracy, and socialization (Haines et al., 1989). These formal goals are not found in the home or in preschool, so even though fifty percent of children have been to preschool, kindergarten is a novel experience for everyone (Flannagan & Baker-Ward, 1996).

In the preschool environment, there is an orientation toward social development. Teachers are warm and do not pressure children to follow formal routines or instruction (Love, Logue, Trudeau & Thayer, 1992). There are often smaller teacher-student ratios than in kindergarten and there is room for unstructured activities. In kindergarten however, there is a new emphasis on instruction with the purpose of raising children’s skill levels. Interactions become more intentional and cognitive skills are favored over
less academic activities. As a result, there is less time for guided unstructured activities and more time is spent teaching new skills. Teachers also encourage autonomy, so more time is spent in large groups in which children are forced to interact with each other (Seppanen et al., 1993).

Not only must children learn to relate to a new peer group, they must also accept a fall in social standing as they move into a classroom where peers surround them. In the family, there is an atmosphere of protection and children are measured and charted individually. In contrast, in the classroom, the atmosphere can be one of competition and children are compared daily to their peers, therefore there is a drop in social position as children join the masses. Children must construct a new identity and create an image of themselves as students while they are also discovering the routines of school and adjusting to teachers as their new authority figures (Entwisle, Alexander, Pallas & Cadigan, 1988).

Making the transition from home to school is always complex and challenging. However, there is evidence that certain children are more prepared for school than others. In the home or preschool environment, some children develop the basic language, reading, and math skills that prepare them for the school environment and they enter school a step ahead of their peers who have not had this opportunity (Votruba-Drzal, 2003).

But along with individual differences, there are group differences in how well the transition to school is made. Differences occur across class and race lines, with white and upper class children responding to the transition best. There are many theories as to why this is the case, a well-accepted one being that groups of different socioeconomic
status (SES) may socialize their children differently with respect to school (Hess, Shipman, Brophy & Bear 1968). Parents with a high SES may portray school as a place responsive to needs and effort while parents with a low SES may portray it as one where children must conform and respect authority (Entwisle, Alexander, Pallas & Cadigan, 1988).

Another possibility is that there is a relationship between family economics and cognitive stimulation in the home. Accordingly, children from a poorer background who have less exposure to cognitive stimuli are less prepared for school (Votruba-Drzal, 2003). Heath’s research extends this finding with the idea of a link between the presence of literary material in the home and ease of school transition. She does recognize, however, that it is difficult to state whether it is the presence of printed text in the home or the normative way in which middle class parents interact with and discipline their children that provides the benefits. If the latter were the case, it would show that schools are more in tune with the middle class’ philosophy of child rearing than with the lower class’. Expanding on this theme, Heath describes the cultural differences between families of different SES’s and shows that the ideology of the lower class may not fit well with that of the school. Skills valued by lower SES groups, such as elaborate acting and fictional story telling, are not the same skills that are valued in the classroom, therefore making the transition for certain groups of children much more complex. In school those children may be exposed for the first time to novel tasks such as identifying and labeling, which are common tasks in middle and upper class families (Heath, 1982).

The reality of the school atmosphere is that it is different for children of different SES’s and different ethnic backgrounds. Children as young as first graders are aware of
the different ways in which society views minorities (Entwisle & Baker, 1983) and there is a feeling that schools accommodate some groups over others (Entwisle, Alexander, Pallas & Cadigan, 1988). Additionally, social class differences between teachers and students affect the classroom atmosphere by affecting teachers’ expectations and judgment of children’s maturity. A study done by Alexander, Entwisle, and Thompson (1987) examined teachers’ perceptions of students as well as their students’ performance and suggested that the mismatch in social status between teachers and students was one of the most important factors in low achievement and negative perception of students. Not all students are starting school from the same position or with equal status and it is likely that success will be affected by this disparity.

Achievement in kindergarten is related to a student’s ability to successfully transition to school, an ability affected by linguistic background, race, and SES. There is a correlation between performance in the first years of school and future success. Individual differences in achievement are surprisingly stable after the first few years of school, so the initial transition has been identified as a ‘sensitive period.’ During this period, developing social and physical systems, along with other personal systems, are vulnerable to diverse influences. Minor adjustments in children’s developmental trajectory at this stage may have disproportionate effects on their school success (Rimm-Kaufman, & Pianta, 2000). Consequently then, the impact of exposure to a new way of speaking in the classroom coupled with a negative relationship with a teacher may be enduring.

Thus far, it has been shown that the transition from the home or preschool to kindergarten is loaded with new expectations. The ability to make this transition
successfully varies across groups and is essential for future success. In the transition, children learn that behavior that was previously accepted may now be a violation and that they must determine the difference. One key sphere in which expectations change is communication.

*Communication Differences between the Home and School*

Language plays a key role in children’s ability to transition to school. The differential in school success between children may be caused in part by their linguistic experience in the home. It is this experience that determines how well a child will respond to the linguistic expectations in the classroom. Wells (1983) proposes that the different aspects of the transition - the new goals and routines, larger atmosphere, and new skills children must use to succeed - are all made more difficult when a linguistic difference exists.

In the first few years of life, children gain significant linguistic knowledge. Theoretically, most children make the transition to school armed with all the linguistic information, other than vocabulary, that they need for formal education, regardless of whether they attended preschool (Wells, 1983). However, the language of the home is not always the language of the school and when there is a discrepancy in the structure or use of language, children are less prepared for the linguistic challenges of school. Teachers, then, are faced with the difficult task of speaking to a large number of children, who may all have different linguistic backgrounds even if they all speak English as their first language.
Considerable differences exist in the communication that occurs in the home and at school. In the home, children initiate about seventy percent of the conversations, interactions that are sporadic and reflect the children’s interest of the moment. Home conversations are also generally free from the informative or didactic nature of school interactions. Additionally, communication within the family is reciprocal and has shared meaning. With these significant features, the conversation has value for both participants. Questions are part of the dialogue, but they are frequently genuine, meaning that the speaker does not know the answer and has an authentic interest in asking the question (Wells, 1983).

Preschool reflects some of the same patterns, yet kindergarten is very different from both home and preschool. Therefore, children may need to significantly change their verbal behavior upon beginning formal education. Kindergarten teachers are less likely to encourage verbal participation in teacher-directed activities and are more likely to foster a restrictive communication environment than preschool teachers. Conversations follow the organization and format set by the teachers and when they veer off track, the teachers redirect and reject responses that do not follow their design (Menyuk, 1995).

In the classroom, a high proportion of teachers’ utterances are questions, and mostly questions to which the teacher knows the answer. There is frequently only one acceptable answer even when there are many possible ones. When teachers direct questions, there is very little reciprocity and they will sometimes even ask children who are least likely to know the answer. Some children have had experience with this language game, but others have not been exposed to this type of questioning. While they
will have to become used to it in the course of their education, the immediate expectation of compliance may be confusing. Children who are judged at the beginning of kindergarten by their ability to play a game they do not know may begin to believe early on that school is a foreign institution (Wells, 1983).

Disparities between kindergarten and preschool language are a result of different educational goals. The kindergarten teachers must focus on academics, instruction-following, and independent seatwork, even at the expense of verbal interaction, as they begin to prepare children for first grade. Children who do not attend preschool may have even more trouble with the communication adjustment than those who do, since those who do have had at least some exposure to group interaction in a school setting (Hadley, Wilcox & Rice, 1994).

Children who are overwhelmed by the new patterns of speech and the question game may feel uncomfortable and out of place; at the same time, the teachers are also judging them based on their lack of comprehension. The greater the difference in language between the home and the school, the more likely it is that children will become disoriented and will display behavior that can be assessed as a lack of ability or an unwillingness to learn. Once children are given a label, it becomes increasingly difficult to overcome the initial judgment and reach the levels of achievement of which they may be capable (Wells, 1983).

Different theories have been proposed to explain the reason behind the linguistic knowledge and success disparity between different groups of children. One feasible account is the communication process explanation discussed by Erickson (1987). He claims that high rates of school failure by minority and low SES students are partially due
to culturally learned verbal and nonverbal communication. Especially in the younger grades, when teachers and students may differ in their implicit expectations of speech and interactions, either may misinterpret behaviors. Expectations arise from experience outside of school in speech communities or networks (Gumperz, 1972).

Speech networks are created based on major social divisions and networks consist of groups of people who associate and share similar assumptions about communication, both in terms of the appropriate use of language and linguistic style. Different speech networks have distinctive cultural forms of talking and listening (Hymes, 1974). These cultural differences, when contrary to classroom practice, lead to miscommunication in the classroom. For example, children from a culture in which it is considered impolite to ask a direct question may think their teachers are angry with them if teachers routinely ask this type of question. Miscommunication also occurs in the other direction and teachers often respond by assuming something is wrong with the children. Rather than recognize that the problems arise from cultural differences, teachers often label the children with adjectives such as ‘slow’ or ‘rude’ (Erickson, 1987).

When children arrive at school for the first time then, many different factors are at play, including their group identity and prior language exposure. One of the significant challenges they face is in trying to understand what is being asked of them. Children must learn to navigate different types of requests as they learn to follow directions, and it is on requests that the focus now turns.
Request Usage

Much of the interaction between adults and children is in the form of adults making requests. Both parents and teachers use requests frequently in discussion and instruction and this usage has been documented through research on what type of requests parents and teachers use, when they use these requests, and the success of these requests.

Requests have been defined as speech acts “whereby a speaker conveys to a listener that he or she wishes the listener to perform a given activity” (Lefebvre-Pinard, Bouffard-Bouchard & Feider, 1982, p 134). There are two broad categories of requests, direct requests or imperatives in which the action is explicitly stated, such as “Use the pencil” and indirect requests in which the requests for action are made obliquely. Indirect requests have been further subdivided into five categories, embedded imperatives, question directives, need or want statements, hints, and suggestions. In embedded imperatives the action is explicitly stated but is qualified. For example “Can you use your pencil?” is a request in which the action ‘use your pencil’ is stated, but the word ‘can’ is used to soften the instruction. In question directives the action is implicitly stated in question form, for example “Do you have a pencil at your desk?” In this request, the action of using the pencil is implied when the request is made in context. In need or want statements the action is declared as an expression of desire, such as “I want you to write with your pencil”. In hints the action is implied, for example, “It’s not a good idea to write in pen” which insinuates that pencil would be better. Finally, in suggestions, joint action between the speaker and listener is recommended in a
declarative statement, such as “Let’s get our pencils out to write” (Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Garvey, 1975).

Much research on the use of request types has been done with the general population. However, such studies have often used groups such as college students and little attention has been focused on requests made to school age children. Research has shown that the usage of different request forms is motivated by different factors, such as desire to be understood and desire to be polite. From research on effective speakers, a paradox has emerged. In order to maximize the chance that a listener will understand a request, the speaker should use directives that are clear and emphatic. However, in order to maximize the chance that a listener will comply with the request, the speaker should use directives that are polite or indirect (Wilkinson & Calculator, 1982). In general, researchers have found that adult-to-adult speakers make over 90% of their requests in an indirect manner (Gibbs and Mueller, 1988). There is a clear motivation behind indirect requests. Adults see conversations as cooperative efforts, and therefore effective speakers use their knowledge of language forms, functions, and contexts in order to achieve their goals for the interaction. Using indirect requests allows for the most options, the most polite forms of speech, and the highest chance of compliance (Lazar, Warr-Leeper, Nicholson, and Johnson, 1989). These findings show the form that communication often takes in everyday life, patterns to which adults are accustomed. However, they only serve as a starting point since they discuss adults’ interactions with each other rather than with children.

1 Though this finding is an important one, it is unclear exactly what data support it. In the original articles cited, we were unable to find the data or specific conclusion.
Both direct and indirect requests of all forms are used with preschool children (Shatz, 1978a; Holzman, 1972), as noted in natural observations. The fact that both are used has lead researchers to examine when different request forms are used, in what proportion, who uses them, and what effect they may have.

Parents’ Use of Requests

No research has been done explicitly on parents’ use of requests; however, one group of researchers interested in complex language studied parents’ use of nonliteral language with their children. Nonliteral language is language consisting of categories such as metaphors, similes, irony, and indirect requests; so though requests were not the focus of the study, indirect requests were included. The experiment looked at interactions between parents and their preschool or kindergarten children in unstructured play interactions in a laboratory setting, with no distinction between fathers and mothers. Although the researchers do not provide the data on how many of the overall utterances were nonliteral language, they do show that 68% of nonliteral utterances were indirect requests, a large proportion. Additionally, they showed that of indirect requests, embedded imperatives were the most common, accounting for 29% of all nonliteral utterances. Need or want statements were the next most common at 26% followed by hints at 8% and then question directives accounting for only 5% of nonliteral utterances. These results show a large disparity between the frequencies of embedded imperatives and need or want statements as compared to hints and question directives. However, since the authors do not present the number of total utterances, it is impossible to know
how often children actually heard indirect requests in absolute terms (Sell, Kreuz & Coppernath, 1997).

This study also showed that different types of requests are used for different purposes. Along with nonliteral language, Sell, Kreuz, and Coppernath coded for imperatives. The imperatives were not part of the focus of the study though, so their frequency was not reported in the analysis. Nevertheless, the research showed that when direct requests were used, they were used 20% of the time to direct behavior and 80% of the time to engage the children or focus their attention. Indirect request forms were used only 5-9% of the time to direct behavior and the rest of the time were used to engage the children. There was also a negative correlation between use of direct and indirect requests, meaning that parents have individual styles in how they direct their children, implying that different children are exposed to different request forms more frequently, as well as showing that different request types are used in different contexts. Once again though, since the overall number of utterances is not reported, it is unclear how often both forms were used. There is little other research on parents’ use of requests with children.

**Teachers’ Use of Requests**

Much research has been done on the linguistic atmosphere in the classroom (Wilkinson, Milosky & Genishi, 1986). Often, conversations in the classroom consist of exchange, acquisition, and evaluation of information, a setting in which requests would clearly play an important role.
Teachers’ spoken language can be long and syntactically complex, and includes all forms of requests, even in the early grades. Researchers have found that two-thirds of teachers’ utterances are requests, clearly showing that requests are a significant component of speech in the classroom (Mehan, 1978; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975).\(^2\)

More specifically, Lazar, Warr-Leeper, Nicholson and Johnson (1989) studied the role of indirect requests in the classroom by observing naturally occurring classroom lessons. Similar to the research in the Sell study cited above, this experiment studied indirect requests in comparison to other multiple meaning expressions, a term which encompasses generally the same categories as nonliteral language. In kindergarten, 29% of teachers’ utterances are multiple meaning expressions and 23.8% of all utterances are indirect requests. Throughout elementary school, 27% of teachers’ utterances are indirect requests, approximately one in every four utterances, which is a large proportion (Lazar, et al., 1989).

These findings begin to illustrate the use of requests by mothers and teachers, and while there are some clear conclusions, there is also a lot of uncertainty. The study by Sell, Kreuz, and Coppernath (1997) on parent usage does not show the frequency of indirect requests in the context of speech as a whole. It also does not compare frequency of indirect requests to direct ones; it only says that parents are more likely to use one or the other, a finding which may be difficult to support in a more naturalistic context. Next, the study by Lazar et al. (1989) on teacher usage does not report the use of direct requests and also does not distinguish between types of indirect requests, an important distinction. No study has been done specifically on the use of different request types by

\(^2\)Again, while this result is significant, even in the original articles it is unclear who the sample consisted of as well as how the conclusions were drawn.
mothers or by teachers; data on this topic are all drawn from studies with a different focus. Systematically examining this usage and comparing it in the home and the classroom is therefore a novel undertaking and involves many different areas of research, including knowledge of the processes used by children as listeners.

Theory of Mind

Children must have a well-developed understanding of linguistic structure and meaning in order to understand requests. However, strong language skills are not enough by themselves. Linked to language development is theory of mind understanding, which children must have developed in order to understand the perspectives of others and to comprehend that different people will want and expect different things of them (Ruffman et al., 2003). Much research has been done on theory of mind and Premack and Woodruff offer a useful definition of this concept with the explanation

> an individual has a theory of mind if he imputes mental states to himself and others. A system of inferences of this kind is properly viewed as a theory because such states are not directly observable, and the system can be used to make predictions about the behaviors of others... Mental states [that can be inferred] are purpose or intention, as well as knowledge, belief, thinking, doubt, guessing, pretending, liking, and so forth (1978 p 515).

Theory of mind refers, then, to children’s awareness of themselves and others as conscious beings with a variety of thoughts, feelings, and desires. Only with this awareness is it possible for children to understand requests made of them. Specifically in comprehension of indirect requests, a theory of mind is critical, as children must infer and interpret the desires of the speaker and rely on different cues to decide what is expected of them; that is, what the speaker wants them to do.
Research on theory of mind has illustrated the idea that children begin life with a relatively egocentric viewpoint of others’ minds and it is only with age that they begin to develop the ability to see different points of view. Between the ages of three and five, significant advances are made in children’s performance on a variety of theory of mind tasks (Flavell, 2000). Studies have examined what children of different ages know about basic mental states ranging from percepts, knowledge, and thoughts, to feelings (Flavell, 2000). However, the majority of the work has focused on false belief and desire understanding (Cassidy, under review). Desire understanding is the realization that others have different desires and that desires are specific to the individual. This field is relevant to the comprehension of requests in that children must understand others’ desires in order to determine what others desire of them.

Most of the research on desire understanding has focused on children’s ability to understand what others want for themselves, for example to realize that a person who prefers cheese to candy will want cheese when given a choice. Past research has shown that young children are able to ascribe desires to others and to use this ability to predict others’ behaviors. Toddlers as young as eighteen months are able to infer the desires of others and to adjust their own behavior as a result of their inferences. For example, if toddlers have seen someone else try a food and smile, the toddlers then offer this person the food, even if they themselves do not like it, based on the knowledge that it is the preferred food of another (Repacholi & Gopnik, 1997). By age three and a half, children are able to infer desires and also to predict an agent’s behaviors based on those desires (e.g. Wellman & Woolley, 1990; Joseph & Tager-Flusberg, 1999; Bartsch, 1996; Flavell, Flavell, Green & Moses, 1990; Cassidy, 1998). Moreover, young children understand
that desire is a subjective experience, meaning that different people can have different feelings about the same object or event and that different people desire different things (e.g. Yuill, 1984; Hadwin & Perner, 1991; Cassidy 1998).

However, research on the understanding of the subjectivity of desire is not straightforward and studies have shown that in some circumstances, often more complex ones such as those involving wicked or conflicting desires, children may have difficulty with the tasks (Yuill, 1984). The results demonstrate that tasks are harder for preschool children when they have to infer desires in addition to predicting behavior (Moore et al., 1995). Cassidy et al. (under review) refined these results and showed that children, with a mean age of forty-six months can infer desires, can predict actions, and can predict actions based on inferred desires. As explained by Cassidy et al., difficulties arise when children are asked to predict action based on inferred desires that conflict with the children’s own desires.

Another recent finding is that children have trouble discriminating between desires and intentions. Intentions serve as the aim or objective that guides an action in order to fulfill a desire. Intentions are different from the desire itself and from the actual results, a distinction that can be difficult for three year olds. For example, an agent may intend to throw a ball to his friend, in order to fulfill his desire of playing a game, but he may actually hit his friend with the ball, an unintended result. All three elements are different but fit together, and it could be complex to differentiate between them (Feinfeld, Lee, Flavell, Green & Flavell, 1999).

Taken together, all these findings show that children do have a good understanding of desires by the time they reach kindergarten but that some aspects of
desire understanding are still developing through preschool, kindergarten, and the first few years of school. Additionally, areas that are more complicated for children include situations where they must make inferences about others’ desires, put aside their own desires, and predict behavior. It is conceivable that this combination of circumstances could naturally occur for children as they struggle to understand what others want them to do, either in a classroom or at home.

Research on desire understanding, however, has focused only on children’s comprehension of others’ own desires and how those people would act in response to these desires. To date, there has been no research undertaken with respect to children’s understanding of what others want them to do in terms of theory of mind, although it is a relevant issue.

*Request Comprehension*

Instead, researchers have looked at children’s comprehension of requests as a linguistic skill and many researchers have examined the effectiveness of requests in various settings. In order to respond appropriately to requests, children must employ different linguistic, social, and cognitive strategies based on the forms of the directives.

When a request is made, the listener must recognize two different intended effects. First is the intended illocutionary effect, and understanding this means that the listener understands what the speaker is trying to say in context. Second is the intended perlocutionary effect in which the listener understands what the speaker intends the listener to do (Searle, 1969, 1975). Often, direct requests have a clearer perlocutionary effect, and Searle (1975) therefore suggests that there is a more complex process involved
in understanding indirect requests as opposed to direct requests. In order to understand
the speaker’s intention in an indirect request, the listener must utilize both linguistic and
non-linguistic information, knowledge of the principles of conversation, and inferences
when necessary.

Direct requests do not call for inference, so understanding both the illocutionary
and perlocutionary intentions is much simpler than in indirect requests where the listener
must make inferences. Not all indirect requests require the same amount of effort of
inference however. Some indirect speech acts are routine and conventional, presumably
types such as embedded imperatives, need or want statements, and suggestions, so
understanding is guided by stable interpretation methods. Other request types are less
conventional and utilize a speech frame that is not routine and may have an intended
illocutionary effect that is not always directive. Question directives and hints fall into
this category. For these requests, the difficulty of making the inference is impacted by
the indirectness of the request (Ervin-Tripp, 1976).

Therefore, while dividing requests into indirect and direct categories is extremely
important, the picture is not so straightforward as to enable researchers to say that
children understand one type but not the other or that they understand both types, since
there is so much variation within indirect requests. Previous research has lent support to
the belief that young children can understand both direct and indirect requests at a young
age, however, this statement must be qualified to a great extent (Ledbetter & Dent, 1988).

Shatz has studied children’s comprehension of requests in different contexts and
has made an important distinction between information and action requests. Information
requests are questions such as “What color is the ball” while action requests are directives
such as “Hand me the ball.” Shatz (1978a & b) has shown that mothers commonly make action requests of their children rather than information requests and that children adapt to this style, producing action responses quite frequently. In Shatz’s first study (1978a), mothers played informally with their two year old children and observation showed that the children responded to imperatives and question directives with appropriate action roughly fifty percent of the time. Since it seems unreasonable to assume that two year old children are using high order processes to determine both the literal and then the intended meaning of question directives, Shatz proposed that children have an action heuristic in which they map their parents’ speech onto objects and determine which action would be a correct reply. It is also important to note that in this study the children were only responding around chance levels. So while they did not show a difference in comprehension of direct and indirect requests, the study suggests that though children learn to respond with action, they may not really understand the requests.

In Shatz’s (1978b) follow-up study, children aged 19 to 34 months were presented with all different forms of requests that could be interpreted as action directives, information requests, or desire expressions. An experimenter made the requests and each was stated neutrally so that either action or information was an appropriate response. The children produced action responses at least seventy-five percent of the time, a large proportion. This finding led Shatz and other researchers (Babelot & Marcos, 1991) to assert that children have a bias to respond to language with action. Action requests have therefore dominated the field of request comprehension as researchers have worked to see what forms of requests children comprehend.
Garvey (1975) studied older preschool children and found that children between the ages of 3.6 and 5.7 respond appropriately to direct action requests, but that the older children, those between the ages of 4.7- 5.7, follow indirect action requests more often than their younger counterparts. While interesting, these findings must be examined critically as the study observed children’s requests to each other and there may be different strategies involved in understanding peers than in understanding adults. Additionally, absolute rates of compliance to indirect requests were not reported, so it is unclear how good children are at comprehending these requests.

Subsequently, Carrell (1981) showed an increase in correct responses to both direct and indirect action requests between the ages of four and seven. Four classes of students, a nursery class, kindergarten, first grade and second grade were given a test. The students were told that they would hear a series of requests and would be asked to color circles with the appropriate color. The requests were both direct and indirect action requests and were grouped into pairs in which the same request would be made in a negative manner and a positive one. Overall, the total percent correct across the age range was 77.2 and split by ages, the nursery averaged 64.5%, kindergarten averaged 73.5%, first grade averaged 78.0%, and second grade averaged 92.0% indicating a clear increase with age, and also showing that in kindergarten students only understand about three quarters of the request types they may hear in the classroom. Also, performance was higher for all ages on direct requests than indirect; positive ones rather than negative ones; and declarative requests rather than interrogative forms. This last finding means that it would be more difficult for children, for example, to understand embedded imperatives, such as “Can you color it red?” than need or want statements, such as “I
want you to color it red”. Another interpretation of these findings however, is that they measure compliance; it can be difficult to differentiate between what children understand and what they are willing to do. Consequently, low levels of comprehension reported in studies must also be examined critically.

The studies discussed thus far have all focused on action requests and excluded information requests, making the findings less generalizable. Another concern is the fact that not every study used exactly the same categories or types of requests, making it difficult to compile the results.

Nevertheless, from the research so far, it seems that children ages three to seven improve in their ability to understand indirect action requests as they get older. Comprehension of these requests is not perfect at the beginning of school and continues to advance over time. However, children’s ability to understand indirect information requests has received less attention than action requests and findings on this topic are unclear (Shatz, 1978b).

Following this conclusion and addressing the lack of knowledge about comprehension of information requests, Ledbetter and Dent (1988) studied request understanding in three and five year olds of low and middle SES. They observed the subjects during structured play activities involving interactions between an experimenter and one child at a time. Working with the premise that imperatives, embedded imperatives, and hints are used to elicit similar behaviors in similar contexts, the researchers assumed that if children differed in their compliance, it would be as a result of differences in comprehension of these styles.
The experiment focused on these three types of requests, using both requests for action and information. Results showed that five year olds responded appropriately to more requests overall than three year olds. Out of ten requests, three year olds had a mean of 5.75 responses to action requests and 4.07 to information requests while five year olds had a mean of 7.22 responses to action requests and 6.37 to information requests. In addition to the age differential, these results also support the earlier finding that children respond better to action requests than to those for information.

Additionally, for action requests, both age groups responded to embedded imperatives best, then imperatives, and finally, hints. Of ten of each utterance type, three year olds responded to a mean of 8.0 embedded imperatives, 5.3 imperatives, and 3.8 hints while five year olds responded to a mean of 9.1 embedded imperatives, 7.0 imperatives, and 5.5 hints. For information requests, both age groups responded best to imperatives followed by embedded imperatives and finally hints. Again, of ten utterances of each type, three year olds responded to a mean of 5.5 imperatives, 4.2 embedded imperatives, and 2.9 hints while five year olds responded to a mean of 7.8 imperatives, 6.7 embedded imperatives, and 5.1 hints. Results were also affected by the ability of the children tested, with children labeled as ‘high ability’ performing better. This study led to the conclusion that responsiveness varies as a result of request structure, syntactic complexity, and age.

And while these conclusions show these differentials, they also show that understanding of indirect requests is not that strong, especially in the younger subjects. Even in the older subjects though, comprehension levels are low for effective functioning in a classroom setting. In this study, hints were the least effective, presumably because they do not provide the listener with explicit information about the agent or the action of the
request. While it was expected that imperatives would always be easier to understand, this was not supported in the results, showing either that the picture of children’s request understanding is very complex or that compliance could affect results and skew the reported rates of comprehension.

Crahay and Delhaxie (1991) then added one more major piece to the puzzle. When studying the ability to comprehend requests, it is also necessary to realize that children may have more trouble following requests in different contexts. Crahay and Delhaxie begin with the basic claim that for preschool teachers, the most effective requests are those that ask for simple behaviors. In their study, they observed preschool teachers working with small groups of four and five year olds doing different play activities and found support for this idea, showing that requests that call for complex cognitive processes are least likely to succeed. From their observations, they concluded also that forty percent of teachers’ requests are ineffective. Although this does not state that children cannot comprehend requests for complex processes, it does show that there are certain circumstances under which children are less likely to follow requests. For example, it seems that a request that does not interfere with the activity in progress is more likely to be accepted. Many contexts exist in which children are unlikely to listen to a request, and coupling these circumstances with requests that may not be understood creates a setting in which requests may not be fulfilled and adults may judge children based on noncompliance. Maximum use of requests that are easily understood by children coupled with use of requests that are most likely to succeed would be the ideal circumstances for children adjusting to the transition from home to school.
Rationale of Current Study and Hypotheses

A review of the research done on the transition from home to school, on adults’ production of requests, and on children’s comprehension of requests and development of theory of mind shows that the study of requests is a multifaceted field. There are many important applications, in terms of children’s achievement and language development, and while there has been a significant amount of research in certain areas of the field, there is plenty of room for further study. Discussion of the transition from home to school has shown that it is a complex time filled with a whirlwind of changes to which children must adapt, one noteworthy change being the one in linguistic environment. It is tremendously important that children know how to get things done in the classroom, a skill that is not taught explicitly but that relies on children’s developing desire understanding as well as their comprehension of requests (Wilkinson & Milosky, 1987). Children’s ability to succeed in school may depend partly on early adjustment to any differences in use of requests across contexts. Examining the requests used in the classroom and how they compare to the requests made at home is therefore a worthwhile endeavor.

Many differences exist between school and the home; there are different relationships, goals, functions of communication, and activities. As a result, it is logical to assume that request use may vary between the two contexts. The current study will compare request types used by teachers and mothers in interactions with kindergarten children. It will also compare frequency of the different request styles, how often requests are designated to a particular listener, and whether the request asks for action or information.
The first hypothesis is that teachers will use more requests overall than mothers. This prediction is based on the more didactic atmosphere of the classroom in comparison to the less goal-oriented atmosphere of the home. The next hypothesis is the broad hypothesis of the study: that there will be a difference in the request styles and frequency of styles used by teachers and mothers, as explained in the following paragraphs.

In the home, there is more familiarity and a less instructive, directive function of communication (Wells, 1983). Parents are more explicit in their desires and are not as concerned with politeness. Research has shown that parents teach their children politeness explicitly, but do not reciprocate in many instances, and it is considered appropriate for parents to use imperatives rather than the more polite indirect requests (Gleason, Perlmann & Greif, 1984). Teachers on the other hand have a less intimate relationship with the students and therefore are more likely to use polite, formal request forms, like indirect requests. Therefore, the specific hypothesis is that mothers will use more direct requests than teachers.

Little research has looked at the distribution of request types in the classroom. However, on a theoretical level, it seems likely that teachers would primarily use indirect requests that are polite, explicit, and conventional. Additionally, it has been documented that teachers frequently pose questions (Wells, 1983; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). This knowledge, combined with a theoretical understanding of the classroom goals and relationships permits a hypothesized order of frequency of request styles.

The hypothesis is that teachers will use embedded imperatives most frequently, followed by question directives. This fits with the premise that the classroom atmosphere is instructional since questions or interrogative forms of expression tend to dominate this
setting. Following in frequency is imperatives since they are direct and simple and may be useful to keep a class focused. Next, teachers would use suggestions since this form of request often uses the word ‘let’s’ and includes everyone, thereby fostering a sense of community in the classroom, a common school goal. Hints would follow suggestions as the fourth most common type because teachers realize that the request is implicit and therefore harder to understand (Ervin-Tripp, 1976). Lastly would be need or want statements since teachers generally try to coax students into behaving well or providing information without making it seem as though the students are performing only for the teacher; rather there are more general expectations associated with school.

For parents on the other hand, Sell, Kreuz, and Coppernath (1997) document the frequency of four of the five types of indirect requests. They showed that embedded imperatives are used most frequently, followed by need or want statements, then hints and finally question directives. It seems likely that the results of the current study will follow the same distribution. Sell, Kreuz, and Coppernath relied on informal observation that could have been affected by the laboratory setting, while the data from this study relies on naturalistic observation that could be affected in a similar way by the intrusion of a video camera in the classroom or the home.

The order proposed by Sell, Kreuz, and Coppernath, which is also hypothesized for this study based on a theoretical level, begins with embedded imperatives. These are simple, explicit, common and effective, so it seems likely they would be used most often. Next, parents frequently use need or want statements with their children to show their expectations. Hints follow since parents will often try to help their children succeed without giving them explicit instructions, but this occurs less frequently. Question
directives are used the least of these four which fits in with the idea that there is less of a place for didactic, formal, implicit language in the home. Suggestion use was not measured by Sell, Kreuz, and Coppernath, but will be in this study, and it is hypothesized that they will occur the least frequently. Mothers rarely make a request for joint action, since they are not trying to establish a group community. Overall, suggestions are less necessary and explicit requests are appropriate. In general then, mothers are most likely to use requests that are explicit and conventional.

The greater use of explicit, conventional requests, both imperatives and simple indirect requests reflects parents and teacher’s understanding that children of this age are still developing complex cognitive processes. Their comprehension of requests and their theory of mind are still in the developing stages. Adults should understand this, and though adults’ use of requests is primarily affected by their communication goals, it should also be affected by their knowledge of children’s developmental stage.

Next, there is a distinction between requests that are designated to a listener and those that are not. Parents are often interacting with one child at a time; consequently their requests are clearly directed at the child. Although not every request they make may be clearly asking the listener to respond, it is likely that the majority of the requests will designate the child. Teachers, in contrast, are often addressing the entire class and may therefore not designate a particular listener. For this reason, the next question the study examines is how frequently requests are made in the classroom in which there is no clear designation of a listener or group of listeners. It seems that requests in which a listener is not designated may be less effective since children may not even realize they are
expected to respond, even if they understand the linguistic meaning of what is being asked, making this an important distinction.

Further, as documented by Shatz (1978a, b), children display a bias toward an action-oriented interpretation of requests since they are used to hearing action requests from their parents. Therefore, it is relevant to compare the frequency of action requests with information requests made by teachers and mothers. It seems likely that teachers will make more requests for information since frequently the purpose of classroom instruction is to discuss and present facts and ideas, an arena in which children’s developing understanding of language and theory of mind are relevant. In the home, there are more actions that must be accomplished, such as dressing, bathing, and eating and also more play. Additionally, there is a less structured environment, so more straightforward, action based requests would play a larger role.

One last distinction that must be taken into account is the use of on-task and off-task requests. Different requests are made to accomplish different purposes, so it seems likely that requests for different purposes might be made using a different style. It is therefore interesting to examine the styles used when a request is relevant to the task at hand and when it is not. Sell, Kreuz, and Coppennath (1997) noted that direct and indirect requests were used at different rates to direct behavior or engage children. In their study, more direct than indirect requests were used to direct behavior, supporting the idea that the purpose of the request affects its style. It is hypothesized that teachers will use more off-task requests since the classroom is more goal-oriented than the home. Additionally, it is hypothesized that the majority of off-task requests will be imperatives since they are direct and would probably be the most effective at stopping misbehavior.
Summary of Hypotheses

In review, it is hypothesized that since there is more of an instructional dynamic in the classroom, teachers will use more requests overall than mothers. Next, it is hypothesized that teachers and mothers rates of request styles will differ. It is proposed that teachers’ use of requests will follow this distribution: the most frequent will be embedded imperatives, followed by question directives, imperatives, suggestions, hints, and lastly need or want statements. Mothers’ proposed use of requests will follow this distribution: imperatives, embedded imperatives, need or want statements, hints, question directives, and finally suggestions. Lastly, teachers will make more requests that are non-designated and ask for information than will mothers. They will also use more off-task requests than will mothers since there is more of a focus on goal directed activities in the classroom.

Methods

Participants

Audiotapes of naturally occurring classroom-reading lessons provided data on the teachers’ use of requests. There were twenty teachers, each of whom was taped as part of a national study on phonemic awareness. The teachers were in kindergarten classes in three high SES schools and three low SES schools. The teachers were all high SES, nine of whom taught at a low SES school and nine of whom taught at a high SES school; for the other two, the SES of the school was unknown at the time of writing.

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3 All information regarding SES was determined from the Hollingshead survey. Hollingshead, A. A. (1975). Four-factor index of social status. Unpublished manuscript, Yale University, New Haven, CT.
Written transcripts of mothers’ natural interactions with their kindergarten children were used to examine mothers’ use of requests. Each of the twenty mothers was speaking with a child in a one-on-one situation in the home. These observations were made for a longitudinal study on early predictors of reading achievement. The SES of the mothers followed a similar distribution to that of the classes, with nine low SES and eleven high SES families. All mothers were Caucasian.

Other descriptive information about the ages of children and adults as well as teachers’ ethnicity was unavailable to the researchers.

Procedure

Researchers familiarized themselves with the six different request types and examples. Once both researchers were comfortable identifying requests, data collection began. Researchers listened to the tapes or read the transcripts and identified all instances of requests. For each subject, a list of her requests was compiled and the total number or requests made by each subject was calculated. The requests in the majority of the transcripts or tapes were identified by one of the two researchers. However, both initially, and then periodically throughout the coding process, the researchers each identified and coded requests in the same tape in order to establish inter-rater reliability. After both coding twenty percent of the tapes, reliability rates were calculated, and there was a 79.88% agreement rate of request identification between raters.

Next, the number of speaking turns the subject took was also calculated. A speaking turn was defined as every time a speaker talked without interruption. When an
interruption was made or the speaker paused for more than three seconds, the speaker’s turn ended and a new one began when she began to speak again.

As requests were identified, they were coded into different categories following the distribution described in the coding section. The agreement rates across raters were as follows; for request designation, 96.50%, for task, 98.13%, for purpose, 99.25%, and for type of request, 94.50%. These reliability rates, averaged with request identification, resulted in an overall reliability rate of 93.65%.

**Coding Scheme**

Requests were coded based on a scheme used by Sell, Kreuz & Coppernath (1997) that was originally created from Ervin-Tripp’s (1976) identification of request forms. The scheme was adapted to include the category of suggestions as identified by Garvey (1975) and O’Brien and Bi (1995). Additionally, during the coding process two new categories were added. It was noted early in the data collection process that questions, which were asked frequently, could be thought of as requests for information. Although they were not part of the original coding scheme, they seemed to be an important part of the request picture and were therefore coded. A question was defined as an interrogative sentence or phrase in which a reply is expected, an example of which is “what do you think?” Also, as the requests were identified, a subgroup of requests that did not fit into the broad categories began to emerge. These did not meet the definition of any of the existing types, so a category was created for requests of unknown type. Unknown requests may include aspects of more than one type of request and may vary on different levels such as explicitness. An example of an unknown request is “Why don’t
you say your sentence out loud?” in which the action is stated overtly in an interrogative form. It is not a question however, since the action is expected rather than a reply to a question, and it does not seem to fit in any of the other categories. The following table presents the requests styles identified and provides examples of the different styles.

Table 1-Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Request Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>Action is expressed overtly</td>
<td><em>Put this away.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Interrogative sentence or phrase in which a reply is expected</td>
<td><em>What do you think?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded</td>
<td>Action is expressed overtly, but qualified and softened</td>
<td><em>You can put it away.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question Directive</td>
<td>Action is stated implicitly in question form</td>
<td><em>So where does the yellow one go then?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need/Want</td>
<td>Action is stated as an articulation of the speaker’s desires</td>
<td><em>I need you to think about the answer.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hint</td>
<td>Action is implied</td>
<td><em>I don’t see you talking to your partner.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td>Specification that the speaker will join the listener(s) in the action</td>
<td><em>Let’s put the castle away.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>A request that does not fit any one of the other seven category types.</td>
<td><em>Why don’t you say your sentence out loud?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Often times, more than one request was made in the same sentence. These were handled in the following manner. When a speaker said, “Wait, wait, wait,” three separate requests were identified since they are linguistically unrelated to each other. However, if
a speaker said, “I need you to sit down and listen” only one request was identified since it was assumed that the request structure used in the first part of the sentence carried over to the second. Additionally, when a speaker gave a prompt for information, such as saying “You win the kuh, kuh…” in order to aid the listener in responding with the word “contest,” the request was coded as a hint. Finally, the researchers decided to ignore requests made in a story that the speaker was reading or a song that the speaker was singing, because these requests did not reflect the teacher’s or mother’s own request style since it was not in fact the teacher or mother making the request.

After coding the requests by type, there were three other dimensions along which each request was categorized. First, requests were coded as designated or non-designated, as done by Wilkinson, Milosky and Genishi (1986). Designated requests are those that are addressed to a specific listener or listeners, either by use of the listener’s name, group identification, or other title, such as ‘you’ or ‘everyone’. Non-designated requests do not explicitly state who is being addressed. A third category was added during the coding process for requests of unknown designation. In these cases, researchers were uncertain if the speaker was specifying a listener. For example, if a speaker said, “Do you want to play?” when there was more than one listener, it was unknown if she had designated a listener in a nonverbal manner.

Next, requests were coded by their purpose, either asking for action or for information, as distinguished by Shatz (1978a, b). Requests for action are directives such as “Hand me the ball” or “I would like you to use your pencil” while requests for information are questions such as “What color is the ball?” or “Do you know who has a pencil?” Once again, a category was created during coding for requests with a purpose
that was unclear to the researcher. For example, “can you pick this up and tell me what it
is?” is coded as one request but asks for both action and information, so it was therefore
coded as having an unknown purpose.

Finally, requests were coded by their task relevance. They were categorized as
on-task, off-task, or unknown. Requests that were related to the topic of discussion or the
activity, such as “let’s read a story now” were considered on-task. Requests that were
unrelated, such as requests for discipline like “wait your turn” were considered off-task.
Unknown requests had unclear relevance to the activity or topic, for example, when a
teacher told the class to sit down, it was often unclear whether it was part of the activity
or a disciplinary request.

Results

Overview of speech patterns

Before statistical analyses were performed, descriptive statistics were collected to
display the rate of requests in teachers’ and mothers’ speech. Teachers’ lessons had a
mean of 112.75 speaking turns and an average of 122.05 requests, which leads to the
finding that 111.45% of teachers’ mean total turns contained requests. This suggests that
on average, teachers are making more than one request per speaking turn, a very
important finding to consider. Mothers had an average of 80.50 speaking turns in their
play sessions and made an average of 70.90 requests. On average, mothers made
requests in 91.47% of their total turns, 19.98% less frequently than did teachers. This
difference approaches significance, as will be discussed later. Descriptive statistics for
total requests and turns of teachers and mothers are presented in Table 2.
Table 2-Frequency and Mean Rates of Requests and Turns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th></th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean Rate</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests (per tape)</td>
<td>122.05 (70.33)</td>
<td>111.45</td>
<td>70.90 (28.37)</td>
<td>91.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turns (per tape)</td>
<td>112.75 (53.72)</td>
<td></td>
<td>80.50 (30.18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Preliminary Analysis of Request Types**

An exploratory repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run to examine the effects of the between subjects variables SES and sample type on the within subjects variable of request type. Data from two teachers was excluded due to unknown SES, resulting in the inclusion of 18 teachers and 20 mothers, with 20 subjects of high SES and 18 of low SES.

Results of the ANOVA showed that there was a significant main effect of request type and a significant main effect of sample type. There was not a significant main effect of SES, nor was there a significant interaction between SES and request type. The latter findings on SES mean that subjects of high SES did not differ from subjects of low SES in their use of different request styles. Following this finding, other preliminary analyses were conducted. All except one test, described later, showed that SES did not interact significantly with any of the dependent measures and that SES and sample type did not interact. As a result of this finding, new tests were run that collapsed across sample type and excluded SES. Without SES, the two subjects formerly excluded could then be included, thereby increasing statistical power.

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4 Percentages were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests by the mean total number of turns.
Analysis of Request Types

Following the exploratory analyses, a repeated measures ANOVA was run with sample type as the only independent variable and request type as the within subjects variable. For this test, and all others, post hoc corrections used the Bonferroni adjustment. The analysis showed a main effect of request type ($F(7, 28) = 102.04, p<.01$), meaning that different requests were used at significantly different rates. This main effect was qualified by an interaction that will be discussed below. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics of the eight different request frequencies.

Table 3-Means and Percentages of Request Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean Rate Percentage$^5$</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean Rate Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>45.25 (23.45)</td>
<td>42.91</td>
<td>33.80 (16.59)</td>
<td>42.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperatives</td>
<td>40.60 (36.60)</td>
<td>35.47</td>
<td>20.90 (11.73)</td>
<td>26.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded Imperatives</td>
<td>8.15 (5.47)</td>
<td>7.19</td>
<td>7.85 (7.65)</td>
<td>10.77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions</td>
<td>9.15 (9.42)</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>3.70 (3.15)</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hints</td>
<td>14.30 (8.43)</td>
<td>14.46</td>
<td>3.75 (3.68)</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need/Want Statements</td>
<td>3.85 (3.73)</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.25 (.91)</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question Directives</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.05 (.22)</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknowns</td>
<td>.75 (1.16)</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.60 (.68)</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^5$ Percentages were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests by the mean total number of turns.
The main effect of sample type approached significance, $p<.07$, and suggested that teachers used more requests overall than did mothers. There was a significant interaction between sample type and request type ($F(7, 32) = 2.28, p<.05$), showing that teachers’ and mothers’ distributions of request types were different.

Following the significant interaction, separate ANOVAs were run for teachers and mothers in order to examine each of their distributions of request styles. For each group, a hierarchy of request types was identified from the pairwise comparisons using a significance criterion of $p<.05$.

For teachers, questions and imperatives were not significantly different from each other, but were different from all other types. Hints and embedded imperatives were not significantly different from each other or from suggestions, but were different from all other groups. Suggestions were not different from hints, embedded imperatives, or need or want statements. Need or want statements were different from all groups other than suggestions. Question directives and unknown requests did not differ from each other but did differ from all other groups. This pattern can be more clearly understood from the hierarchy presented in Figure 1. The ‘greater than’ signs show where significant differences exist.

Figure 1- Teachers’ Request Type Frequency Hierarchy

| Questions, Imperatives | Hints, Embedded Imperatives | Suggestions | Need/want statements | Unknown Requests, Question Directives |

* Need want statements are not significantly different than suggestions, though they are significantly different from hints and embedded imperatives.
For mothers, questions and imperatives were not significantly different from each other, but were different from all other types. Embedded imperatives, hints and suggestions were not significantly different from each other, but were different from all other groups. Unknown requests, need or want statements, and question directives were not significantly different from each other but were different from all other groups. The hierarchy for mothers is presented in Figure 2. Again, the ‘greater than’ signs show where significant differences exist, \( p < .05 \).

Figure 2- Mothers’ Request Type Frequency Hierarchy

| Questions, Imperatives | Embedded Imperatives, Hints, Suggestions | Unknown Requests, Need/want statements, Question Directives |

Independent samples t-tests were also used to determine which request types significantly differed in rate between teachers and mothers. Since eight t-tests were run with no specific hypotheses in mind, the \( p \) value was reduced in order to decrease the chance of significant findings occurring by chance alone. The critical value of .05 was divided by eight, the number of tests being run, resulting in a significance criterion of \( < .006 \). Even with this stringent criterion, need or want statements and hints were found to differ significantly. Teachers used significantly more need or want statements \( (t(38) = -3.27, p < .006) \) and hints \( (t(38) = -3.64, p < .006) \) than did mothers. All other types of requests did not vary significantly between the two sample types.
**Analysis of Designation, Task Relevance, and Request Purpose**

Requests were coded along three dimensions other than type. Descriptive statistics for designation, task relevance, and request purpose are presented in Table 4, following which are the results for each of these three variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean Rate %^6</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean Rate %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Designation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designed</td>
<td>34.85 (26.14)</td>
<td>28.73</td>
<td></td>
<td>25.05 (14.13)</td>
<td>36.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Designated</td>
<td>87.60 (53.00)</td>
<td>77.66</td>
<td></td>
<td>46.65 (23.00)</td>
<td>56.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Task</td>
<td>103.8 (58.10)</td>
<td>87.11</td>
<td></td>
<td>68.80 (27.22)</td>
<td>97.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Task</td>
<td>17.90 (16.42)</td>
<td>14.70</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.10 (4.40)</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>66.85 (52.02)</td>
<td>50.76</td>
<td></td>
<td>36.15 (21.00)</td>
<td>49.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>55.15 (25.14)</td>
<td>53.15</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.65 (16.72)</td>
<td>44.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first variable analyzed was designation, whether a request was designated to a specific listener or was non-designated. A repeated measures ANOVA examined the effects of the between subjects variable sample type on the within subjects variable of designation. A significant main effect of designation was found ($F(1, 38) = 50.21, p<.01$) showing that the rate of designated requests ($M= 32.4\%$) was lower than the mean rate of non-designated requests ($M= 67.2\%$). There was no main effect of sample type. There

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^6 Percentages were calculated by dividing the means by the mean total number of requests.
was however a significant interaction between designation and sample type ($F(1, 39)=8.28, p<.01$) such that the difference between the rate of non-designated and designated requests was greater for teachers (48.93%) than for mothers (20.64%). A follow-up t-test was done to determine where the differences were, and results showed that teachers used more non-designated requests than mothers ($t(38)=-2.88, p<.01$). Means can be seen in Table 4.

The variable task relevance, whether requests were on-task or off-task, was examined next, also through a repeated measures ANOVA. This was the one preliminary test in which SES was found to play a significant role, thus this analysis was done with the between subjects variables of sample type and SES. The results showed a significant main effect of task relevance, ($F(1, 34) = 1379.83, p<.01$). On-task requests were made significantly more overall ($M = 92.2\%$) than were off-task requests ($M = 8.6\%$). There was also a significant main effect of sample type ($F(1,34) = 6.40, p<.05$) but this main effect was qualified by an interaction that will be discussed below. Additionally, there was a main effect of SES ($F(1,34) = 10.31, p<.01$), which was also qualified by an interaction that will be discussed below.

There was a significant interaction between task relevance and sample type ($F(1, 34) = 27.06, p<.01$), such that the difference between the rates of on and off-task requests was bigger for mothers (95.13%) than for teachers (72.41%). A follow-up t-test showed that mothers used more on-task requests than teachers, ($t(38)=4.69, p<.01$). Furthermore, the t-test showed that teachers used more off-task requests than mothers, ($t(38)=-4.58, p<.01$). Means for these findings can be seen in Table 4. There was no significant interaction between SES and task relevance. There was a significant interaction between
task relevance, sample type, and SES ($F(1, 34) = 4.39, p < .05$), showing that the relative rates of on and off-task requests were different across sample type and SES level. A post-hoc Bonferroni test showed that there were differences for both on and off-task requests. In terms of on-task requests, teachers of low SES students used significantly fewer of these requests ($M = 84.6\%$) than did mothers of both high SES ($M = 96.5\%$) and low SES ($M = 98.3\%$), but did not differ significantly from teachers of high SES students ($M = 89.4\%$). In terms of off-task requests, teachers of low SES students ($M = 20.6\%$) used significantly more off-task requests than teachers of high SES students ($M = 9.67\%$), high SES mothers ($M = 2.84\%$) and low SES mothers ($M = 1.42\%$).

The last dimension along which requests were coded, purpose, was also analyzed with a repeated measures ANOVA. No significant results were found, showing that there is no difference in the rate of information requests and action requests and that mothers and teachers do not use information and action requests at different rates.

Follow-Up Analyses

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the pattern of results, four follow-up tests were run. The data were reorganized into new categories, as explained below, to address these specific questions.

Task Relevance of Imperatives

The first follow-up was done to examine the use of on-task imperatives compared to off-task imperatives since one hypothesis of this research was that imperatives would be used frequently as off-task requests. To examine this pattern, requests were recoded
so that all the imperatives were divided by task relevance, leading to a total number of off-task imperatives and on-task imperatives. Imperatives of unknown task relevance were excluded. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 5.

Table 5-Means and Rates for Imperative Task Relevance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean Rate %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Task</td>
<td>28.55 (27.71)</td>
<td>25.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Task</td>
<td>11.80 (13.14)</td>
<td>9.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A repeated measures ANOVA with the independent variable sample type and the within subjects variables of on-task imperatives and off-task imperatives was used to examine this pattern. There were a significant main effect of imperative type ($F(1, 38)=67.65, p<.01$), showing that more on-task imperatives ($M=25.6\%$) were used than off-task ($M=5.41\%$), across all subjects. There was no main effect of sample type. There was also no interaction between sample type and imperative type meaning that mothers and teachers did not differ in their relative rates of on-task and off-task imperatives.

What was of interest in this analysis however was the rate of off-task requests that were imperatives. When the use of off-task requests was combined with off-task imperatives, the results showed that on average, teachers made 17.90 off-task requests, 11.80 of which were imperatives. Overall then, 65.92\% of the teachers’ off-task requests were

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7 Percentages were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests by the mean total number of turns.
imperatives. For mothers, 45.24% of off-task requests were imperatives since they only made on average 2.10 off-task requests, .95 of which were imperatives.

*Hint Purpose*

The second test was done to examine the use of hints for information compared to hints for action. This was of interest since during the coding of the data, researchers noted teachers’ wide use of information hints in the form of prompts and wanted to see if this usage was different in the classroom and the home. In order to examine this, hints were divided by purpose so that there was a total number of hints for action and hints for information. Hints for unknown purpose were excluded. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th></th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean Rate %</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean Rate %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hints</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>6.20 (4.05)</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>3.00 (3.43)</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>8.10 (7.57)</td>
<td>8.87</td>
<td>.75 (1.83)</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This analysis also used a repeated measures ANOVA, this time to examine sample type and the within subjects dependent variable of hint purpose, action or information. There was no main effect of hint purpose showing that information hints

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8 Percentages were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests by the mean total number of turns.
and action hints were not used at significantly different frequencies. There was, however, 
a significant main effect of sample type ($F(1,38) = 13.24, p<.01$) such that teachers used 
more action and information hints ($M = 7.23\%$) than mothers ($M = 2.50\%$). There was 
also a significant interaction between hint purpose and sample type ($F(1,38) = 5.69, 
p<.05$) such that teachers’ and mothers’ relative rates of action and information hints 
were different. A t-test showed that overall, teachers used more information hints than 
did mothers ($t(38)=-3.54, p<.01$); means can be seen above.

Request Style

The third test examined the use of direct requests compared to indirect requests. 
Many previous studies have made this distinction, so exploring the pattern of the data in 
this manner allowed for further comparison between the current findings and previous 
ones. Direct requests were defined here as both imperatives and questions while indirect 
requests were all other types. Unknown requests were excluded. Descriptive statistics 
are presented in Table 7.

Table 7-Means and Rates for Request Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Request Style</th>
<th>Teacher Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Teacher Mean Rate %</th>
<th>Mother Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mother Mean Rate %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>85.85 (56.10)</td>
<td>78.38</td>
<td>54.70 (22.97)</td>
<td>69.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>35.45 (19.26)</td>
<td>32.34</td>
<td>15.55 (10.92)</td>
<td>20.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 Percentages were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests by the mean total number of turns.
This ANOVA used the independent variable sample type and the within subjects dependent variables of direct and indirect requests. There was a significant main effect of request style ($F(1,38) = 150.95, p < .01$) showing that more direct requests were used ($M = 74.0\%$) than indirect requests ($M = 26.6\%$) across sample type. There was no main effect of sample type and no significant interaction, showing that mothers and teachers did not use different relative rates of direct and indirect requests.

Request Purpose Excluding Questions

Lastly, the fourth test compared the rate of action requests to information requests when questions were removed from the analyses. Questions were made mostly for information, thereby resulting in a different pattern of information and action requests than was expected, since questions were originally not part of the coding scheme. It was therefore relevant to remove them from the analyses and examine the new pattern. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 8.

Table 8-Means and Rates for Request Purpose Excluding Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Teacher Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Teacher Mean Rate %$^{10}$</th>
<th>Mother Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mother Mean Rate %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>65.45 (51.45)</td>
<td>56.94</td>
<td>35.45 (21.15)</td>
<td>45.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>11.35 (9.04)</td>
<td>11.61</td>
<td>1.55 (2.69)</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^{10}$ Percentages were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests by the mean total number of turns.
This analysis was done using a repeated measures ANOVA with sample type as the between subjects variable and the within subjects dependent variables action and information requests. There was a significant main effect of purpose ($F(1,38) = 46.79$, $p<.01$), with more action requests being made ($M = 51.3\%$) than information requests ($M = 7.14\%$). There was a significant main effect of sample type such that teachers made more action or information requests ($M = 34.3\%$) than mothers ($M = 24.2\%$). There was no interaction between sample type and purpose, in that teachers and mothers did not differ in their relative rates of action and information requests when questions were excluded.

Summary of Results

The main findings of this study are, primarily, that requests were made regularly in both teachers’ and mother’s speech, but are slightly more common in the classroom. Next, different request types were used at different rates overall by teachers and mothers and teachers used more hints and need or want statements than mothers. Designated requests were used more frequently than non-designated requests, especially by teachers. On-task requests were more common than off-task requests overall, although mothers used fewer off-task requests than teachers and low SES teachers used the most off-task requests. Request purpose was not significant. Follow-up analyses were then conducted. The first test showed that imperatives comprised around half of all off-task imperatives. Next, it was shown that teachers used more information hints than mothers. Both teachers and mothers used direct requests more often than indirect requests, and both made more requests for action once questions were removed from the analysis.
Discussion

General speech patterns

Requests are a regular, frequent occurrence in both school and the home, as shown in this study. Almost every turn that an adult takes when speaking to a child contains a request, therefore, it is essential to examine request usage. This study’s results show many differences and similarities between the home and school, which are valuable to explore.

The first finding was that teachers used slightly more requests overall than mothers, in line with the hypothesized relationship. In fact, teachers made, on average, requests more than once a turn. Mothers, while also making frequent requests, had fewer requests than turns. The natural end point of a turn is often a request or question, therefore the fact that teachers had turns with multiple requests while mothers had turns without requests is interesting and can be explained in a few ways. First, the types of activities that teachers and mothers were engaged in called for different speech patterns. In the classroom, teachers were leading language arts lessons, throughout which they were reading stories, asking questions, and practicing rhyming. The activities were very structured and goal-oriented. Teachers had a plan in mind and needed to cover the lesson they had prepared. There were a lot of directions given, often with multiple requests made in one turn. There was also a lot of back-and-forth in the activity, with teachers telling students what to do throughout the activity and asking questions to elicit information, maintain interest and engagement, and test understanding. Teachers often prompted students to obtain the right behavior or information and therefore used multiple prompts in one turn if the students did not respond immediately. In contrast to the
classroom in which goal-oriented activities dominated the taped lessons, mothers and children were engaged in free-play in the home. There was no goal or direction for the activity, and no time constraints in which to cover planned lessons. Children were allowed to speak spontaneously and for unlimited amounts of time, as is common in the home (Wells, 1983). Because of the form of the activity, mothers did not need to direct their children through requests as much; therefore, they used marginally fewer requests.

Additionally, teachers are the central figure in a classroom, and as such, they talk frequently and direct everyone around them. Mothers, while still authority figures, are not the central character in one-on-one play situations with their children. Consequently, while they still guide play and work to engage their child, the dynamic is different and requests play a smaller role.

Lastly, requests are often used to affect behavior. In the classroom, the activity at hand is focused and involves many students. Therefore, there is more of a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and more of a need to control misbehavior, which may result in an increased rate of requests. Moreover, since a teacher needs to quickly change misbehavior in order to return to her lesson, she may use multiple requests in one turn, or even in one quick sentence, such as “listen, listen, I need you to listen” which contains three requests. This use of multiple requests increases the rate of requests per turn used by teachers. In the home however, since there is no goal involved in most activities, mothers are more likely to allow a variety of behaviors when playing one-on-one with their children. The child may change the activity as desired and there are fewer expectations and rules guiding behavior. Mothers therefore may be able
to use fewer requests partly as a result of this dissimilarity, though it is important to keep in mind that the differences in frequency used by teachers and mothers are not great.

These differences in activities explain why teachers used slightly more requests overall than mothers, and also why teachers may have used more than one request per turn on average while mothers did not. While there have not been many studies focusing on the rate of requests in overall speech or in the home, some researchers have claimed that two thirds of teacher’s utterances are requests (Mehan, 1978; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). At first glance it seems that the current findings show a higher rate than this number, however, there is a methodological difference. The finding that two thirds of utterances are requests uses the linguistic unit of an utterance. While the methods in these studies were unclear, counting utterances is very different from counting turns, since an utterance is usually thought of as an idea unit while a turn is the time a person is speaking without interruption. A turn can be less than an utterance if there is an early interruption, equal to an utterance, or longer than an utterance. Many of the teachers’ turns were long and consisted of many utterances. This difference may indicate that the current findings are in accordance with past findings, although the number of turns in the current study would have to be converted into utterances for direct comparison.

**Request Types, SES, and Sample Type**

Following the general observations, analyses were run to see the patterns of use of request types, in relation to SES and sample type. The finding that SES was not a significant factor is particularly interesting, especially in light of research claiming that high rates of failure by minority and low SES students is due in part to culturally learned
communication differences (Gumperz, 1972; Erickson, 1987). While this previous research made no explicit claim about request styles, it seemed likely that requests, which are an important aspect of communication, would be included in these differences. There are a few possible explanations of this seemingly contradictory finding. First, the teachers in the sample are all high SES, only the schools varied on SES. Therefore, there may not have been a true distribution in the sample between high and low SES. It was the students, not the teachers, whose SES determined whether teachers were included with high or low SES subjects. It is still possible then that teachers from lower-class backgrounds, regardless of the school’s SES, may use requests differently.

Second, it is feasible that request styles are relatively constant across different SES groups. If this is the case, and requests do not vary by SES, then this could be one facet of the transition from home to school that is equal for all students. However, even if it is true that request usage is not different across SES groups, it could be different across ethnicities, a distinction not made in the current research.

Lastly, the activities were held constant across mothers of different SES levels and were also similar in all classrooms. The type of activity may have affected the requests used in this study more than the SES did. However, there was one analysis in which SES was significant, which will be discussed later.

On the other hand, request types did differ significantly in how often each was used. The original hypotheses for request order were split by sample type and did not include questions or unknown requests. For teachers, it was hypothesized that the most frequent requests would be embedded imperatives, followed by question directives, imperatives, suggestions, hints, and lastly need or want statements. The actual results
showed that the order was questions and imperatives; followed by hints, embedded imperatives, and suggestions; then need or want statements; and finally unknown requests and question directives. For mothers it was hypothesized that the most frequent requests would be imperatives, followed by embedded imperatives, need or want statements, hints, question directives, and finally suggestions. Since the hierarchies of requests established in the results were very similar, the results for both teachers and mothers will be discussed by request type, starting with the most common requests.

For both teachers and mothers, imperatives and questions were the most frequently used. Imperatives are the most direct way to request something, and with young children, it makes sense that they would occur the most. For mothers they were hypothesized to be the most frequent; mothers use them because they are simple and there is not much of a concern about politeness (Gleason, Perlmann & Greif, 1984). For teachers, they were slightly lower in the hypothesis, but their frequent use could be due to the fact that children understand imperatives well (Ledbetter & Dent, 1988). Since the children in this study were young and therefore were still developing language skills and request comprehension, teachers would have used simple requests. Teachers would also use these quick and explicit requests to keep the class on track, in line with the findings that there is a restrictive communication atmosphere and teachers redirect quickly when the conversation veers from the prescribed track (Menyuk, 1995).

Similarly, questions are the most direct way to ask for information and are well understood by children (Ledbetter & Dent, 1988). Although questions were not included in the original hypotheses, they would have appeared first for teachers, since research has shown questions occur frequently in the classroom (Wells, 1983). They also would have
been near the top for mothers in light of previous research, which has shown that mothers frequently use questions, especially when they are acting like teachers (Holzman, 1972).

The next most common request types in the classroom and the home are embedded imperatives, hints, and suggestions. Embedded imperatives were expected to occur frequently in both teachers’ and mothers’ speech since they are explicit yet also polite and well understood. Their actual frequency was therefore in accordance with hypotheses (Ledbetter & Dent, 1988).

Hints occurred more frequently than expected for teachers, but many hints were in the form of a prompt, which was not anticipated. Since prompts were a new interpretation of the category, it is understandable that the category would be more common than previously expected. These information prompts are discussed in more detail later. For mothers, hints were used approximately as frequently as expected.

Suggestions were used about as frequently as hypothesized for teachers, suggesting that there is a place for joint activity and community in the classroom. For mothers, suggestions were used more frequently than expected. This may have had to do with the taped activity, since it was one in which mothers and children were playing together. In this situation there may have been more of a place for mothers to suggest joint action than is typically the case in the home.

After these two levels of requests, there were differences in teachers’ and mothers’ frequencies of requests. Need or want statements were next for teachers, followed by unknown requests and question directives. For mothers however, these three categories, need or want statements, unknown requests, and question directives are all equal.
Need or want statements are the next most frequent. For teachers, these requests were used more frequently than expected, perhaps since the students are young and need or want statements are conventional and easily understood. It is also possible that teachers exert their authority and status in the classroom through this style more than anticipated. For mothers, need or want statements were used less than expected, although this may be partially a result of the activity types. Since the mother and child were playing, rather than engaging in chores or daily tasks, it would make sense that there would not be a need for this style to be used very often. Additionally, researchers decided to code statements beginning with “you need to” as embedded imperatives rather than need or want statements. This decision was based on the fact that this form of request is different from a need or want statement in which the speaker states what she wants the listener to do, and instead follows the form of an embedded imperative. It is not known how other researchers have handled these ambiguous requests, so as a result, it is possible that this distinction decreased the frequency of need or want statements.

Unknown requests were in the last level of requests for both teachers and mothers. This is as expected, because most requests do fit into a planned category. Had they been common, that would have shown a problem in the coding scheme.

Question directives were the least frequently used requests by teachers and mothers, which can be explained in a few ways. First, it is possible that since the action in a question directive is implied in a fairly obtuse manner, teachers and mothers do not rely on this type. This could be because it has a low rate of efficacy, or perhaps because teachers and mothers assume it is too complex and do not try to use it with young children who are still developing theory of mind. The second explanation is that the
definition of question directives was less clear to the researchers and this type of request was difficult to identify or code, so instances of this type of request may have been missed. A third explanation is proposed based on a theory presented by Ervin-Tripp (1976). She suggests that question directives are useful when a speaker thinks there is a chance the listener will not comply and the speaker is worried about the effects on his status if the listener refuses. Since question directives are implicit, less status is lost through noncompliance than if the speaker had used a stronger request style. In both the classroom and the home, teachers and mothers have no reason to worry about losing status since they are high above the children and need to induce compliance. For mothers, use of question directives was hypothesized to be infrequent in light of the results of the Sell, Kreuz, and Coppernath study (1997). They found that mothers used question directives as only 5% of their nonlitteral utterances. While the overall rate of nonliteral utterances is unknown, it is reasonable to assume that question directives form a very small percentage of all utterances, or all turns. Perhaps it is not surprising then that question directives were almost absent in this study. The hypothesized use of question directives by teachers was high, but was based on theory not on other findings and may have been misjudged. Overall then, the lack of question directives could be due to a combination of explanations.

Within these two hierarchies of request types, there were two types of requests that differed significantly between teachers and mothers. These were hints and need or want statements with teachers using each of these types more frequently than mothers. The first finding, that teachers used more hints was interesting because the hypothesis was that teachers would use hints infrequently. However, the definition of hints was
enlarged during the coding with the addition of information prompts. Therefore, the results led to the important question of whether or not teachers and mothers were using hints in a similar manner. For that reason, a follow-up analysis was done to examine the use of information hints and action hints. This analysis showed that information hints and action hints were being used at the same rate, but that almost all of the information hints occurred in the classroom, showing that the addition of prompts affected the rate of teachers’ hints, but did not really affect the rate of mothers’ hints. Had prompts not been added, it is likely either that teachers and mothers would not have differed in their rates of hints or that mothers would have made more hints. Before the addition of prompts, hints were implicit and unconventional, however, prompts are relatively explicit and therefore affect the characterization of the category as a whole. This suggests that though teachers were using more hints overall, their increased use may be of an explicit type rather than the typical implicit hints, thereby taking into account children’s developing understanding of requests and desires.

Next, the finding that teachers used more need or want statements is also of interest. It was hypothesized that teachers would not use these requests frequently based on the fact that there are general expectations at school and students are not working only for the teacher. However, though teachers were using them more than mothers, they were still not using them often. What is worth noting then is that mothers used need or want statements less frequently than expected, which again this may have to do with the types of activities that were observed. Since the mothers were playing with their children, they were not trying to direct activity or have their children perform chores.
Thus far then it is clear that the type of activities in which teachers and mothers were
engaged affected the pattern of results.

*Designation, task relevance, and request purpose*

Designation was the first additional dimension analyzed and results showed that
overall more non-designated requests were used than designated. Teachers especially
used more non-designated requests. Children, then, are hearing many more requests that
do not indicate a listener than those that do. In the home, this makes sense since mothers
do not assume the need to state their child as the listener since the two are playing one-
on-one. Designation may not be very important in the home, or in any one-on-one
situation, although this claim deserves future examination. Another possible approach to
designation is to claim that whenever there is a one-on-one situation, there is automatic
designation and therefore the rate of designated requests in the home was greatly
underestimated since requests were only counted as designated if they were explicit in
indicating a listener. If this alternative approach were used, the difference between the
use of designated requests in the home and school would have been even greater, with
many fewer designated requests at school. And in the classroom where designation is
less common, from either approach, designation is much more important since there is a
large group and students may not follow directions or respond to questions if they do not
clearly recognize that they are being addressed. Therefore the high rate of non-
designated requests in the classroom could be troublesome for some students. Future
studies could address the impact of non-designated requests on different students, since it
seems that some students, perhaps based on extraversion or cultural values, would be
more comfortable responding to non-designated requests than other students.

The next finding was that on-task requests were used more frequently than off-
task requests, which was true for both teachers and mothers. While this was expected in
the home since very little is off-task when there is no set topic or activity, it was a
positive finding in the classroom since it means that significantly more time is spent on-
task than correcting off-task behavior or discussing off-task topics. The amount of time
spent on-task is a significant issue in education; these findings are particularly relevant to
that field. Interestingly, the analysis of task relevance was the one analysis in which SES
played a significant role. There was no interaction between SES and task relevance, but
there was an interaction between task relevance, SES, and sample type, which showed
that teachers of low SES were using the most off-task requests and the fewest on-task
requests. This finding may reflect on the amount of off-task activity in a school of low
SES students and warrants further attention.

Along these same lines, future classroom research could also use the distinction
made by Sell, Kreuz, and Coppernath (1997). In their research, they distinguished
between requests that were used to direct behavior and those that were used to engage or
focus attention. This dichotomy is similar to the on-task or off-task distinction made in
the current study, but may be more useful in terms of truly understanding the role of
different request types. In their study, they found that parents’ imperatives were used
20% of the time to direct behavior and 80% of the time to engage the children or focus
their attention. Indirect request forms were used only 5-9% of the time to direct behavior
and the rest of the time were used to engage the children. In order to more clearly
understand the present study’s findings in light of the previous results, a follow-up analysis was done to examine the use of on-task imperatives and off-task imperatives. These results showed that for teachers, imperatives were used 9.76% of the time as off-task requests and for mothers, 1.05% of the time as off-task requests. These numbers are lower than those reported by Sell, Kreuz, and Coppernath. Nevertheless, 65.92% of the teachers’ and 45.24% of the mothers’ off-task requests were imperatives, clearly showing that imperatives play an important role in correcting or directing behavior, as hypothesized.

Finally, request purpose was examined with no significant differences found in use of requests for information and requests for action. Questions, however, were a large category of requests, and since they were added to the coding scheme after the study was begun, a follow-up analysis of request purpose was run excluding questions. This test showed that significantly more requests for action were made than requests for information. Research has shown that children have a tendency to respond to requests with action, so the great use of action requests by both mothers and kindergarten teachers is worth noting. Information requests were mostly comprised of questions, a very direct form of information request, showing that when teachers and mothers want to elicit information, they rely on a direct style. While questions are always a common way to ask for information, it is possible that teachers and mothers recognize that children have a bias toward action and consequently, when they want information, they use a simple, direct type of request.

One important point to consider, though, is that for these three dimensions, designation, task relevance and request purpose, there are very large standard deviations,
especially for teachers, although for mothers on some dimensions as well. These standard deviations mean that there is a lot of variation within the sample, and one must be critical of the strength of results. While generalizations are made from this study’s findings, the great variability makes the conclusions potentially less applicable.

Request Style

The last analysis examined the overall rates of direct and indirect requests. Since some previous studies (e.g. Carell, 1981; Garvey, 1975) have made this distinction rather than looking at the specific types of requests, it was relevant to convert the rates of requests found in this study into direct and indirect requests. Overall, more direct requests were used than indirect. Direct requests were defined as imperatives and questions, and since these two types of requests were the most frequent, it makes sense that together they would appear the most. Nevertheless, it is notable since indirect requests were composed of five types of requests compared to just two direct types. Another interesting use of these results is that they allow the current data to be compared to previous data. For example, Warr-Leeper et al. (1989) noted that 23.8% of all kindergarten teachers’ utterances were indirect requests. The current data showed that 35.24% of all kindergarten teachers’ turn contain indirect requests. Again, there is a methodological difference between turns and utterances. Many of the teachers’ turns were long and contained many utterances however, so it is possible that if the number of turns in the current findings were converted to utterances, these numbers would match well.
Overall though, both teachers and mothers are relying more on direct request styles than indirect, a finding that seems developmentally appropriate as well as practical. It is simplest to make direct requests, and although children do understand and comply with both direct and indirect, their ability to understand indirect requests is still developing. Understanding direct requests relies on the most basic understanding of language since the form of the request is explicit and does not require any inferences (Searle, 1975; Ervin-Tripp, 1976). This ability, when combined with theory of mind research gives rise to a more complete picture. Young children are in the process of developing theory of mind and desire understanding, meaning they are still learning to understand what others want, especially in cases when others’ desires conflict with something they themselves want (Yuill, 1984; Cassidy et al., under review). Making explicit requests thereby takes into account children’s still developing theory of mind and ability to comprehend and comply with more complex requests.

General Discussion and Directions for Future Research

Looking at the larger picture, then, it is clear that for children, requests are an integral part of the language they are hearing. And while they are hearing many requests at home, they are hearing slightly more requests in school. Nevertheless, there was little difference in the complexity of the requests used in the home or school, since the only types that differed in frequency were need or want statements and hints. Need or want statements are a conventional form of indirect requests, and though hints are unconventional, teachers used them more frequently in the form of information prompts, which are explicit. It is noteworthy that there is no increase in implicit request types used
by teachers. This pattern therefore suggests that a difference in request usage is not an integral part of the difficulty inherent in the transition from home to school; there are not many differences that children must adjust to in the realm of request styles.

However, children are hearing many non-designated requests from their teachers, which could affect their ability to make a strong transition into school and become a participating class member. This finding could be relevant to the implicit expectations that different groups have about language. If certain groups of students are not responding to requests not specifically designated to them, they may be labeled in an adverse way, which could have lasting effects (Gumperz, 1972; Erickson, 1987; Wells, 1983). Again, future research should examine effects of non-designated requests on different groups. Next, the majority of off-task requests children are hearing are at school, and reflect the transition they are in the process of undergoing from children in a family to students in a classroom in which rules and formal demands can be overwhelming (Haines et al., 1989; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Lastly, children are hearing equal rates of information and action requests, but the majority of information requests are in the form of questions while action requests are distributed across many styles. This finding could explain why past research on requests and comprehension has generally focused on action requests, since most information requests are direct questions. Although questions are definitely a form of request, it seems plausible that questions and other requests should be separated in further research.

The findings from this study take the significant step of establishing the base-line rates of requests used in school and the home. The current study demonstrates that requests are very frequent in teachers’ and mothers’ speech and therefore merit further
study. However, the rates discovered in this study only comprise the first part of the picture; further research is needed to make the description of request usage more comprehensive. Research needs to address comprehension of, and compliance to, different request types in the home and at school, especially since Carrell’s (1981) findings suggest that kindergarten students only understand about three quarters of requests when factors such as positive versus negative presentation and declarative versus interrogative presentation were taken into account. Thus, there is more to investigate than could have been accomplished in this initial study. Additionally, the role of theory of mind in the development of request comprehension deserves attention. It is known that children are making improvements in both theory of mind and request understanding between the ages of three and seven, accordingly kindergarten is the time when changes may be most apparent and influential (Flavell, 2000; Carrell, 1981). Thus, knowledge of what is understood at this age coupled with knowledge of the types of requests used with children of this age is essential.

Besides factors affecting comprehension, request usage should be examined in more depth. It should be analyzed across different types of activities, in school and in the home, particularly looking at everyday activities such as meals and chore times. It would also be interesting to look at requests used across different age groups, perhaps even from the beginning of the kindergarten year to the end, to see if the use of requests is aligned with children’s development. This current study should lead researchers in many different directions in order to eventually develop a more complete understanding of request usage.
References


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