Request Style: At Home and In School

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Abstract

Children’s understanding and fulfilling of requests is essential to succeeding in the home and school environment. The current study examines differences between teachers’ and mothers’ request styles to determine if children are exposed to different request styles in each respective environment. Forty naturalistic lessons and free-play sessions of teachers and mothers conversing with children were coded for requests along several dimensions, including request type. Analysis revealed contrasting teacher and mother request styles. Results suggest that requests occur frequently in teachers’ and mothers’ speech, with teachers using slightly more total requests. Further analysis reveals that teachers and mothers differ slightly in their request type frequency distributions, with teachers using more need/want statements and hints. The results are discussed in terms of their implications for children’s transition to school, Theory of Mind and request comprehension.
Effective communication between children and teachers is central to the children’s ability to learn and succeed in the educational environment (Milosky, Wilkinson, Chi-Pang, & Salmon, 1986). Past research has found divergence of communication styles in the home and school settings, possibly causing a lack of communication familiarity, comprehension and/or compliance in the school environment. The differences in communication style may further contribute to children’s difficulty transitioning into full-time schooling, causing repercussions of decreased school success. It is imperative that classroom communication be examined in contrast to home communication. With this research in hand, teachers, researchers, administrators and parents can help to create a classroom atmosphere based on linguistic differences among the children and the two different environments, thereby easing the transition from home to school (O’Toole, 2001).

Studying these linguistic differences requires looking at particular speech acts that occur frequently within both environments. Past research has noted that requests, linguistic constructions used to convey one’s desires, occur in both the home and educational settings. More importantly, using and understanding requests are essential to the productivity of both environments. In school, requests are used to maintain classroom management and student behavior; they are used to inquire about student knowledge and to engage participation. At home, requests are used for similar purposes: to control children’s behavior, inquire about their knowledge and engage them in participating in activities. Although these are just some of the purposes of requests in both settings, it is apparent that they are essential to communication and performance in each context.

Although requests have been identified in home and classroom communication, requests have been relatively understudied in research. By coding naturalistic recordings and transcripts of mother-child home play sessions and kindergarten reading lessons, this study seeks to explore differences in the request styles of mothers and teachers, and to further examine communication
differences in the home and school contexts. These differences may contribute to more arduous
transitions from home into the classroom setting.

Transition from Home to School

The transition from home life to full time school is categorized by a redefinition of social
roles, expectations and responsibilities, among other things (Entwisle, Alexander, Pallas, & Cadigan,
1988). Some people argue that preschool aids children in their transition from home to school, and
statistics reveal that over half of all children participate in preschool or day care and pre-kindergarten
theorize that kindergarten, the first step in full time schooling, is different from preschool in several
ways, creating a significant transition to school, even for those children with preschool experience.

One difference between kindergarten and preschool is the kindergarten teachers’ explicitness
in emphasizing social and academic goals and expectations. In their analysis of preschool and
kindergarten teachers’ expectations of their students, Hains, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz, and
Rosenkoetter (1989), assert that specific literacy, mathematic and social goals are more prescribed in
kindergarten than in the preschool setting1. After an extensive review of literature regarding the
transition to kindergarten, Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) contend that kindergarten’s new
academically and cognitively demanding curriculum found in Hains et al. (1989), and larger child-
teacher ratio, creates less friendly and welcoming student-teacher interactions than those found in
preschool and at home between children and parents. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) refer to the
new goal-orientation, classroom size, diversity, and interaction as the ecology of the kindergarten
classroom. Although the researchers claim that the ecology of the kindergarten classroom enhances
the children’s academic performance, they theorize that children’s ability to cope with early school
transitions plays an important role in facilitating their success in later levels of education.

1 Assertions were made upon analysis of researcher’s Skill Expectation Survey for Kindergarten Readiness
(SESKR) results.
The ecological differences within the classroom, as well as the change to full time schooling, marks a period of tremendous development in a child’s life. Children's cognitive abilities are expanding and they begin exhibiting more memory, reasoning, and recall strategies (Tudge, Odero, Hogan, & Etz, 2003). Children begin to physically mature, growing taller, while better understanding their own emotions, as well as others’. Just as children begin to understand their own identities in regard to their home life, they are thrown into a different environment surrounded by new people, responsibilities and expectations. Students must learn to socialize with peers and teachers, and cognitively strategize to succeed at completing new tasks and skills. Children must cope with the new expectations of their teachers and those of their parents, as well (Hadley, Wilcox & Rice, 1994). The difficulty of transitioning to school is dictated by the amount of change a child must endure. This difficulty exists on an individual level depending upon the child’s maturity and previous home experience (Abreu, 1995). However, much research has shown that the race, social background, and culture of a child influences the amount of transitional shock a child experiences (Abreu, 1995; Au & Mason, 1981; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1982; Entwisle et al., 1988; Erikson, 1987).

Much research has focused on apparent differences between races or minorities in the transition from home to full time schooling. In their literature review, Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1982) noted that research has found that although minority children have knowledge of their own traditions and values, they achieve at a lower level than children coming from the majority. Entwisle et al. (1988) further replicated this finding in their review of the process of schooling throughout first grade, in which they suggest that the shift into full-time schooling differs between races, regarding overall academic and cognitive growth. Entwisle et al. (1988) discovered that although African American and Caucasian children enter elementary school with equal competency levels, Caucasian children’s growth over the later years of schooling is dramatically greater than that of African American children. This is represented by lower report card grades and noted slower
cognitive development depicted through test scores, over the course of a school year. This difference was related to two factors: personal maturity and parental expectations. Teachers’ ratings of personal maturity suggested that Caucasian children had more maturity in their abilities to control their emotions and postpone gratification for school achievements, whereas African American children had less maturity, more restlessness and timidity, less control over their emotions, and a greater need for immediate gratification. The results of this study suggest that African American children have a more difficult transition to school than do Caucasian children, due to differences in maturity, which influences cognitive growth and academic performance throughout the children’s first year of full time schooling.

In their study on transition to school, Entwisle et al. (1988) failed to look at the home environment in relation to language usage and acquisition. Several education anthropologists propose that this is an important realm of focus because they insist that minority students and students of lower socioeconomic status (SES) are required to make a greater transition to school due to linguistic barriers (Jacob & Jordan, 1993 cited in Ogbu, 1997). These linguistic barriers stem from differences in language usage in home and in school, thus it is important to look at home practices that influence language knowledge. Research has shown that such home practices vary between families and parents from different backgrounds (Heath, 1982; Tudge et al., 2003).

Much of language knowledge is formed through literacy learning. Heath (1982) specifically focused on literacy practices in the home as compared to those found in school, suggesting that the more literacy at home, the better transition to school. In her ethnographical studies, Heath found that although working class families recognize the importance of helping their children to become literate, they take part in literacy practices that are not consistent with those of school, and therefore disadvantage their children (Heath, 1982). These conflicting literacy practices are contrary to those

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2 It must be noted that Entwisle et al. (1988) could not and did not account for bias in the teachers’ personal perceptions of the children’s maturity, as an influence on the noted results.
Heath found in middle class families with educated and professional parents. Heath (1983) observed that these families teach literacy to their children with methods similar to those used in school, helping to create an easier transition to school.

Similar to the findings that SES and parent educational background may cause discontinuity between home and school practices, thereby creating a more difficult transition to school, Au and Mason (1981) (cited in Erickson, 1987) found discontinuities between home and school practices due to cultural variation. The researchers found that conflicting community and public school literacy teaching strategies created a difficult transition to school for a group of Hawaiian first graders. Researchers found that students taught in a more culturally-comparable manner were more successful in literacy learning and more enthusiastic about learning and participating. The researchers explained this phenomenon as the reduction of culture shock through the integration of home culture and practices into the classroom, easing children’s transition to school.

Heath (1982; 1983) and Au and Mason (1981) found that similarity between home and school activities makes a difference in a child’s transition to school. Tudge et al. (2003) also recognized this relationship after observing home practices of three-year-old children and their families, and assessing the children’s academic competencies collected from teacher surveys. Overall, they found that middle class preschoolers experienced more school related activities at home than working class preschoolers, which is consistent with Heath’s findings. In conjunction with this finding, the researchers found that middle class preschoolers were more linguistically mature in their conversations and took part in more conversations than working or lower class preschoolers. Therefore, the research suggests that increased congruency of home and school practices contributes to linguistic maturity and thus an easier transition to school.

Tudge et al. (2003) suggest the important role of home and school practice congruency in helping to aid language acquisition and communication skills. However, the study fails to determine
specific aspects of home practice similar to school practice, and more importantly, the researchers
do not determine factors which may contribute more to language acquisition. Perhaps a determining
factor of communication and language acquisition is the similarity between home and school
language that takes place within respective home and school practices or activities. The current study
seeks to examine some possible linguistic differences within and across the home and school
settings, which may contribute to communication obstacles upon transitioning into full time
schooling.

Although Wells (1983) did not find language differences between different socio-economic
classes, nor did he look at different cultures, he noticed general differences between home and
school language across social categories and supports the idea of home language impacting the
success of school language. Wells proposes that goals made in conversations and activities and the
organization of patterns and routines, differ from home to school, causing different types of
language in each setting. Wells researched and analyzed conversations at home and school between
either teachers or mothers and their children, from a representative sample of socioeconomic
backgrounds. Overall, Wells found that at home, children initiate 70% of the conversations, which
are about topics by which they are inspired. Conversely, at school, the teacher is the most frequent
initiator of conversation, and aspects of the curriculum spark the conversations. Although it was
found that both teachers and mothers frequently use questions, teachers use more yes-no questions,
whereas mothers use more open-ended questions. Bellack, Hyman, Smith, and Kliebard (1966) have
similarly found that teachers frequently use questions that require brief student answers, unlike
open-ended questions asked at home which may require longer answers. These results suggest that
teacher talk significantly differs from mother talk with respect to the length of questions and
responses.

3 Although this data is significant, after reviewing the original cooperative research project, it is unclear how this data was
analyzed and collected.
Wells (1983) suggests that teachers should aim to integrate and compliment home talk to a greater extent. Gruenwald and Pollack (1984) acknowledge this by recommending that teachers use indirect or open-ended speech to increase the student’s response freedom and ability to choose their own actions when responding to questions or requests. The suggestions to integrate home language into school are made to increase student success. The students’ ability to use and understand classroom language dictates not only school success, but also the teachers’ opinions of students’ academic competency and capability to succeed (Tudge et al., 2003). In the previously mentioned Tudge et al. (2003) study, middle class preschoolers who initiated and took part in more conversations, were perceived by their teachers to be more academically competent. Thus, a teacher’s perception of a student’s academic competence may be influenced by the child’s actual ability to communicate.

This research leads to the conclusion that children must be able to understand classroom communication in order to succeed in school and to be perceived by his/her teachers as being able to succeed in school. Children must have enough understanding of language to: follow instructions given to them by their teachers; take part in conversations with teachers and peers; be able to ask questions; articulate their thoughts (Hadley et al., 1994). As mentioned earlier, it is imperative for children to understand teachers’ requests in the classroom for success to take place. Student familiarity with their teachers’ requests depends on the types of requests used by their mothers. A divergence in mother-teacher request style may decrease students’ familiarity with their teachers’ requests, further decreasing their ability to communicate and succeed in the classroom. This subsequently contributes to greater adjustment in transitioning from home to full-time schooling. Consequently, as researchers, it is important to understand and analyze what types of requests teachers use in school and how these requests differ from requests made at home by mothers.
Requests

The main methodology used to study language differences relies on the identification of definable, universal and recognizable “speech acts” (Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1982, p. 21). The current study relies on requests as the identified “speech acts,” which are very important in both the school and home realms. As mentioned earlier, requests are directed towards a listener to portray a speaker’s desire and intent for the listener to fulfill this desire by offering information or action. There are two main types of requests: direct and indirect. Direct requests, or imperatives, explicitly state the desired action (Put this away), whereas indirect requests implicitly state the desired action.

There are several types of indirect requests: embedded imperatives - an action is explicitly stated, but “qualified” (Sell, Kreuz & Coppenrath, 1997, p. 101) (You can put this away); question directives - implicitly mention the desired action in question format (So where does the yellow one go then?); need/want statements - stated in terms of the speaker’s desires (I need you to think about the answer); hints - request a desired action in a hidden manner (I don’t see you talking to your partner); suggestions – specify that the speaker will join the listener in the desired action (Let’s put the castle away); and questions – request a desired action explicitly in a questioning manner with questioning intonation which rises at the end (What do you think?) (Shatz, 1979). Most request research examines requests used in conversation by children. However, in our study, we will be focusing on mothers’ and teachers’ requests of children. In order to examine types of requests directed towards children, it is beneficial to first examine research on the general adult request styles.

4 Although embedded imperatives and question directives may both occur in question form, embedded imperatives are more explicit than question directives.
5 Although questions and question directives both occur in question form, questions are much more direct and explicit than question directives. Questions are also more explicit, more direct, and less polite than embedded imperatives.
6 Very little research on suggestion and question usage exists in literature. Out of several studies cited that focus on a wide range of requests, many do not include these types of requests. Minimal studies are available focusing on mothers’ and teachers’ usage of questions, none of which identify questions as a type of indirect request. Questions were added to the current study because of their prominent frequency among coded transcripts.
**Adult Request Style**

In their analysis of conversational interaction in psychotherapy, Labov and Fanshel (1977) have found that indirect requests are more desirable than direct requests, because when repeating the request (if necessary), one may soften or harden the request to receive the desired response. This preference for indirect requests is not surprising, given that Ervin-Tripp’s (1976a) analysis of several past empirical findings suggests that explicit language is perceived as unfriendly and distant. However, in Ervin-Tripp’s (1976a) study, results are derived from unpublished student term papers that do not account for several variables, such as SES and the reliability of these studies is not discussed. In a study by Gibbs and Mueller (1988), a sample of thirty-two undergraduates also demonstrated that indirect requests were most preferred when partaking in a conversation. Past studies have replicated this result, revealing that over 90% of requests are indirect (Gibbs & Mueller, 1988, p. 102). Overall, these studies suggest that adults most commonly use and prefer indirect requests rather than direct requests when speaking to adults, primarily because they are perceived as more polite.

Some research has identified certain situations in which specific directives are preferred. Ervin-Tripp (1977) has identified different social situations in which adults use specific types of directives, suggesting that context motivates request style choice. Ervin-Tripp states that need/want statements are often used in situations where the speaker wants to establish a hierarchical status relationship between him/herself and the listener, in that the speaker portrays a higher status than the listener. Similarly, imperatives, or direct requests, are frequently used when speaking to someone of equal or lower status. Ervin-Tripp further suggests that embedded imperatives are directed toward strangers or people of elevated status, because they want their requests to be more sincere and polite. Question directives are commonly used if the speaker notices a possibility that the

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7 Although this statistic is extremely relevant to this study, after viewing originally cited studies, it is unclear as to how this statistic was measured.
listener may not comply with the desired action of the request. Lastly, Ervin-Tripp reported that hints were often used when both speaker and listener shared an understanding of each other’s habits, desires and motivations, such as family members, co-workers and teachers.

Ervin-Tripp’s (1977) proposals suggest that language may be altered depending on the context and interpersonal situation. In her proposals, status was highlighted as a construct manipulated through request choices. Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan (1977) suggested that directives are used to create a speaker’s sense of dominance over the listener. Their study revealed that speakers used five times more imperatives when the listener was of lower rank, rather than higher rank (p. 207). Thus, it is possible that teachers or parents use a more direct request style when speaking to children.

In summary, research on adult requests has lead to ambiguous outcomes. Although some research contends that adults prefer indirect requests because they are more polite, other research has found that there are many situations in which direct requests are preferred over indirect requests, status being a primary example. Although status hierarchies are found in the home and at school, the importance of status may or may not contribute to request usage similarly in both settings. It is essential to distinguish and compare which types of requests are actually used by mothers and teachers in order to determine if there is a significant difference in request style in the home and at school, which may contribute to children’s mastery of their school transition.

Mother Request Style

Research has found that age and status influence request usage among mothers, suggesting that utterances between parents and children aid the formation and affirmation of status hierarchies (Pan, Perlmann & Snow, 2000). Gleason, Perlmann and Greif’s (1984) study looked at different parental strategies used to enforce politeness in their children’s speech. Results, obtained from audio-taped dinner conversations of 24 middle class families with children ranging from two to five
years old, revealed that while parents reinforced their children’s use of indirect requests, e.g., “May I please be excused?” they actually used more direct requests themselves, e.g., “Excuse me.” The researchers reason that this hypocritical use of requests emerges to highlight status differences. It is also worthy to note that this study proposes that parents may reinforce children’s use of indirect requests because in many cases they are viewed as more polite than direct requests (Gibbs & Mueller, 1988; Gleason et al., 1984).

Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan (1977) examined children’s utterances during role-play. The researchers found that children acting as parents used imperatives more often when speaking to a character of lower status (Mitchell-Kernan & Kernan, 1977). Although observations of children’s play do not present evidence from parents, it is worthwhile to acknowledge how children may perceive the types of parental requests as evidenced by this pretense. Children perceive their parents as using a more direct approach when making requests. This data suggests that perhaps parents alter their request style when speaking to their children.

The preceding studies have demonstrated that requests are used at home, explicating status hierarchies and imposing politeness. Several studies have focused specifically on the types of requests that mothers use with their children, finding that they typically use declaratives, questions and imperatives. Snow (1972) studied conversations between educated mothers or non-mothers and two different age groups of children. She found that the mother group simplified their language to be more direct, using declaratives and imperatives more often with two year-olds, and gradually changed their language to be more complex with 10 year-olds. Snow repeatedly noticed these results in her later literature review of mother’s speech, finding that although adult speakers prefer indirect requests, when the listener is at a premature level of language acquisition, the speaker will use a more direct approach (1977). However, Snow (1977) does not make clear whether direct requests are
preferred because children are at a lower level of language acquisition, or if the mother is exemplifying a status hierarchy.

In their analysis of non-literal language, Sell, Kreuz and Coppenrath (1997) found that among their use of non-literal language, indirect requests were used frequently among 17 parents of preschool children videotaped during free play sessions. Researchers coded for non-literal language, which consisted of: metaphor, similes, idioms, irony, hyperboles, understatements, rhetorical questions, and indirect requests (embedded imperatives, question directives, need/want statements, and hints). Although it is unclear how, the researchers did code for imperatives as well. Results suggest that indirect requests were used most often, occurring in 68% of all coded, non-literal language. Further results indicate that certain indirect requests were used depending on context and parent. Results revealed a negative correlation between embedded imperatives and direct requests, in that parents used more of one form of requesting and less of the other - direct or indirect (p. 107). However, results reveal that when imperatives were used, 20% were used to ensure request compliance and correct misbehavior (p.109).

Sell et al. (1997) found that embedded imperatives were the most frequently used indirect request, followed by need/want statements, hints, and then question directives, respectively. Of the coded requests, 80% were used to direct children’s attention to promote interaction in activities, whereas only 20% of embedded imperatives were used to promote completion of a task or action (p. 109). In summary, these results reveal that while indirect requests were the most frequently used non-literal language in this parent sample, different types of indirect requests were used more than others, and requests served various purposes.

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8 The descriptives of direct requests were not given because the results of the study were only focused on non-literal language. The absence of an absolute rate of direct requests prevents us from determining the absolute rate of difference between direct and indirect requests, which is the primary focus of our present paper. It also must be noted that this study provided no absolute rate of indirect requests. Results only suggest that indirect requests were the most frequent type of non-literal language used.
Although Sell et al. (1997) found that embedded imperatives were the most frequent indirect requests used, other researchers have suggested that question-type requests occur commonly. Shatz (1979) found that indirect question directives consisted of 44% of all “question” type utterances collected from 17 mothers involved in play sessions with their 18-24 month year old children (p. 1094). Shatz defined “question” type utterances as those posed in question form or with rising ending intonation, indicating a question. Thus, the frequency of question directives in comparison to other indirect request forms, or even direct request forms, were not compared. However, through observing 100 utterance speech samples of three mothers conversing with their children in natural settings, Holzman (1972) found that mothers use question directives frequently. She explained this as the mothers taking the role of the teacher, asking questions to display their children’s knowledge. Although these are two small, isolated studies, and the frequency of question directives in comparison with other indirect requests and direct requests were not addressed, the studies suggest that mothers use question directives.

As noted in the aforementioned Sell et al. (1997) and Holzman (1972) studies, situation or purpose-driven request usage may cause varying frequencies of specific types of requests, depending on the context or purpose of conversation. For instance, Holzman (1972) contends that question directives are used when the mother is acting as the teacher. Similarly, Bakker-Renes and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1974) (cited in Snow, 1977) also support the idea that different requests are used in different situations. They observed six different home situations: three care-taking situations and three unstructured, free play situations. They found that more complex speech (indirect requests) was used in free play situations (book reading and playing), than in care-taking situations (dressing and bathing). Snow, Arlman-Rupp, Hassing, Jobse, Joosten, and Vorster (1976) (cited in Snow, 1977) similarly found that more complex speech occurred during book-reading activities. Although the results of these parent samples cannot be generalized to the entire parent population, it is
worthwhile to note that in the home, parents use particular types of requests towards their children for specific purposes, and may use requests differently, depending on the activity. Furthermore, the occurrence of context driven requests may differ from household to household because of SES. For instance, as previously mentioned, studies have recognized more book reading in families of upper SES, thus parents of upper SES may have more of an opportunity to use indirect requests or complex speech. Thus, perhaps these children are exposed to and have increased comprehension of indirect requests (Heath, 1982; Heath, 1983).

SES may not be the only factor associated with parental differences in specific request usage. Researchers have also focused on different request usage biases among cultures. Ervin-Tripp (1982) proposes that the use of politeness in conversations between individuals of dissimilar status may differ depending on culture. According to Saenz, Iglesias, Huer, and Parette (1999), there is a cultural divergence of different expectancies for appropriate usage of direct and indirect requests. Tannen (1979), cited in Ervin-Tripp (1982) found that Greek-Americans rely on indirect allusions and hints when requesting. Clancy (cited in Ervin-Tripp, 1982) found that hints are taught to young children and used widely in Japanese culture.

Therefore, depending on the culture of the home atmosphere, different language is learned and used. If this language is dramatically different than classroom language, children will be less prepared for communicating in school and their transition may be more difficult (Menyuk, 1988). It is important for teachers to know about, and be aware of, different request styles used at home, in comparison to their own style, before making evaluations of children’s communication ability.

**Teacher Request Style**

In different situations, people select different linguistic tactics for conversation (Edwards & Westgate, 1994). It is legitimate to hypothesize that teachers would use different types of requests than parents. As previously mentioned, several researchers have recognized that school language is
inherently different from that in the home. Language differences may stem from routines and activities involved in the teaching process itself, such as managing the classroom and structuring lessons, both of which require the use of language and requests (Lazar, Warr-Leeper, Nicholson, & Johnson, 1989). Research suggests that requests occur consistently in the classroom, accounting for two-thirds of the teachers’ utterances to students (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975).9

Although research has not specifically focused on direct and indirect request frequencies in the classroom, one study examined the frequency of multiple meaning expressions (indirect requests, idioms, similes, metaphors, irony) of elementary school teachers (Lazar et al., 1989). In this study, kindergarten, elementary and middle school teachers’ utterances were audiotaped, revealing that there were multiple meaning expressions (complex speech) in 36% of all utterances recorded, with indirect requests occurring most frequently. Researchers found that indirect requests comprised of 27% of all coded utterances. Specifically, in kindergarten, indirect requests accounted for 23.8% of all utterances. These results suggest that indirect requests are one of the most frequently used types of speech directed towards students. Although, it must be noted that direct requests were not coded in this study; therefore it is unknown how direct requests factor into classroom speech.

Indirect style may not be appropriate or effective in all situations. Indirect requests are not as distinct as direct requests, which may inhibit understanding (Lazar et al., 1989). The teacher’s ability to make requests and receive adequate responses, as well as the student’s ability to understand and respond to these requests is essential to the success of the teaching and learning process (Wilkinson, Milosky & Genishi, 1986). If a child does not understand a request, communication and compliance cannot take place. Theory of Mind (ToM) is an underlying psychological mechanism contributing to understanding comprehension and compliance of requests and desires. ToM development enables people to understand how others think and feel, an essential ability required to comply with

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9 Although this is a significant statistic, it is unclear after reviewing the original study how this statistic was collected.
requests. ToM underlies the essence of request comprehension: understanding of what another wants of them and why.

Theory of Mind and Desire Understanding

Theory of Mind (ToM) refers to an individual’s ability to infer his/her own beliefs and desires, and the beliefs and desires of others. Researchers have focused on the age in which children require these “mentalistic understanding” abilities (Flavell, 2000, p. 18). With growth and maturation, children move from “desire psychology,” in which they are able to understand their own and others’ desires, to “desire-belief psychology,” where they are able to recognize the beliefs and desires of themselves and others (Flavell, 2000, p. 18).

By age three, most preschoolers have acquired some form of desire understanding, which allows them to infer someone’s wants and predict the behaviors of others based on those wants. Several studies found that by the end of preschool, children have acquired this ability (e.g., Bartsch, 1996, cited in Cassidy et al., under review). Specifically, these studies have focused on inferring the desires of others and predicting other's behaviors. Some of these studies have specifically examined children’s understanding of one’s desires and behaviors when they conflict with the desires of the children subjects. For example, a child subject is asked whether or not a puppet prefers to eat broccoli or ice cream, after it has been revealed to the subject that the puppet loves broccoli (whereas the subject dislikes broccoli and would prefer ice cream him/herself). Moore et al. (1995) and Nguyen and Frye (1999), cited in Cassidy et al. (under review), have found that three-year-old children can infer and predict behaviors of others, but have difficulty when these desires conflict with their own. Moore et al. (1995) have found that this ability is in place by age five.

Understanding others’ desires plays a large role in learning and communicating in home and at school. To communicate effectively, a child must be able to understand the desires of people with whom they encounter and interact. Many times, people’s desires are revealed through requests. In
terms of request comprehension, according to ToM research, most normally developing three-year-olds would be able to understand a speaker’s desires, which do not conflict with their own desires, when presented via a request. If in giving the request, the speaker desires the child to do something they do not like, the child would be less likely to understand it.

Some ToM research provides more straightforward implications of request comprehension involving direct and some types of indirect requests. Cassidy et al. (under review) had three-year-old children predict an agent’s actions based on the agent’s explicit or implicit desires, which either conflicted or were the same as the subject’s desires. Children were capable of inferring an agent’s desires and were able to predict the agent’s actions based on those desires, if the desires coincided with their own. The study also found that subjects were able to predict the agent’s actions from explicit agent desires, even if these desires conflicted with their own. This evidence may have some bearing on direct request comprehension. In a direct request, the speaker’s desires are explicit; the listener knows what the speaker desires and what action is expected of them. Therefore, it seems probable that three-year-old children should be able to comprehend an explicit direct request, even if the desires conflicts with their own.

The Cassidy et al. (under review) study provides evidence regarding ToM ability and indirect request comprehension. The study found that three-year-olds had more trouble suggesting appropriate agent actions if the agent’s desires were implicit, requiring inference, and if the desire conflicted with the subject’s. Some types of indirect requests, such as hints and question directives, require inference of the speaker’s desires. Therefore, according to this evidence, if a speaker’s desire must be inferred in a request, and those desires conflict with a three-year-old listener’s desires, it will be difficult for the listener to comprehend the request, suggesting that three-year-olds would have more trouble comprehending hints and question directives.
Although the research on three-year-olds suggests that not all children of this age group can infer desires and actions that conflict with their own, according to the ToM research, by age five, children would be expected to understand most requests, even those that are implicit and go against their liking (Moore et al., 1995). Thus, a kindergarten age child should be able to infer what the speaker of the request desires, even when the child does not prefer the desired action. It must be noted that these are inferences made from this cited ToM research. However, these inferences may suggest a possible direction for future ToM research: request comprehension by requiring children to infer or complete an act based on an agent’s desires.

Although we are theoretically relating ToM research to understanding requests, we must recognize that ToM research does not exactly replicate the type of reasoning required to fulfill a request. ToM research looks at children’s understanding of an agent’s desire to infer an agent’s behavior. Thus, research consists of asking child subjects to suggest what action the agent might make based on the child’s understanding of the agent’s desires. This may be inferred by the subject, or explicitly revealed to the subject, by the experimenter or agent. In other words, all of the reasoning involved in ToM research concerns the agent’s desires, rather than those of the child participant. Theory of Mind research does not look at children’s understanding of an agent’s desire for a child subject to do a specific behavior. Accordingly, solving ToM problems used in past research is different from the action of understanding a request because in a true request situation, a listener must understand the speaker’s desires. Also, the listener must complete an act to fulfill the listener’s implicit or explicit desires. Thus, the essential difference between ToM research and request comprehension is in the listener’s personal fulfillment of the act. Instead of predicting what the agent should do to act upon his/her desires, in a request situation, a listener must understand what he/she must do to fulfill the speaker’s desires.
Despite these differences, upon transitioning into kindergarten, fulfilling teachers’ requests and instructions is emphasized, making knowledge of normal ToM development imperative. Although factors such as culture, SES, home experience, parental education and income (Flavell, 2000; Pears & Moses, 2003) may affect individual development of ToM ability, children entering kindergarten should be able to infer, understand and predict others’ desires and behaviors, to communicate efficiently and succeed in school. Children must be able to comprehend teachers’ requests in order to follow instructions of classroom management and academic activities. Some studies outside of the ToM literature have looked at request comprehension.

Comprehension of Requests

The notion of direct versus indirect comprehension difficulty has been readily debated. Searle (1975) regards the process of understanding indirect requests as more complex than understanding imperatives, because the listener must infer and interpret the appropriate and intended action without much semantic information. However, other researchers have found that children, and even preschoolers, can understand imperative and indirect requests equally well (Elrod, 1983; Shatz, 1978a). This is contrary to ToM based inferences, regarding the probability of preschooler’s decreased understanding of question directives or hints, indirect requests in which the desires of the speaker must be inferred.

If children can understand direct and indirect requests equally, mothers, who researchers insist “simplify” their language by using direct requests to ease comprehension by younger, less-linguistically learned children, do so for an ill-formed reason (Snow 1972; Snow 1977). This may be an illusion or incorrect assumption that mothers innately have, or it may be a research fault in determining the reasons mothers may choose direct over indirect requests. This is an opening for future research. Meanwhile, overall, research has found that children can understand both types of directives (indirect and direct).
In a study by Shatz (1978a), children’s comprehension of their mothers’ requests was examined by coding videotaped play sessions. Results suggested that children as young as two years old can respond to all requests, whether they are indirect or direct. However, in terms of indirect requests, the study only focused on question directives, leaving children’s comprehension of several other types of indirect requests, such as hints, need/want statements, and embedded imperatives, ambiguous. It is assumed from this study that a correct response to a request implies comprehension of the desired action of the request. In this study, children responded correctly to all requests, implying perfect comprehension.

However, responding correctly to a request does not necessarily predict comprehension; perhaps nonverbal cues or elements in the setting contributed to the child’s response. Similarly, incorrect responses or no response does not necessarily imply lack of comprehension; there may have been confounding factors preventing the subject from complying or responding appropriately to requests. Comprehension only entails that the meaning and desire of the request is understood, while compliance means that the listener chooses to do the requested act. A listener can comprehend a request without complying with it. This confusion between request comprehension and request compliance is hard to overcome using naturalistic observation. Some experimental studies are more reliable when considering relationships between request responses and comprehension. Because the setting is more controlled, there may be fewer distractions, and children might be more likely to respond to experimenters accurately and truthfully.

Ledbetter and Dent (1988) tested three- and five-year-old children’s compliance and comprehension of different action and information requests presented to them by adult researchers, and found slightly different results than Shatz (1978a). The presented requests consisted of:
imperatives, embedded imperatives and hints.\textsuperscript{10} In the first experiment, results revealed a slight age “comprehension bias,” in that five year olds ($M = 68\%$) complied with all types of requests more often than three-year-olds ($M = 49\%$). Although the groups differed in their compliance, in response to requests for action, both groups complied with embedded imperatives most often (86\%), followed by imperatives (60\%), and then hints (45\%). In terms of information requests, groups complied most often with imperatives (67\%), followed by embedded imperatives (55\%) and then hints (40\%). Results also suggested a slight bias towards compliance or comprehension of action requests over information requests.\textsuperscript{11} This supports Shatz’s (1978b) theory that young children use an action-based heuristic when responding to requests, creating a comprehension or compliance bias towards action. She suggests that when children are young, they create associations between actions and objects or nonverbal language to satisfy requests. With age, these action associations, or “heuristics,” create an easier understanding of action requests.

Elrod (1983) clarified request comprehension research, experimentally testing 48 preschool and kindergarten children’s comprehension of indirect and direct requests, by asking them specific comprehension questions, regarding indirect and direct requests, used in parent-child scenarios. For each scenario, subjects were asked to answer questions about why the request was given, how they think the child in the story would respond, and what consequences would result from the response. Data revealed that children responded appropriately to questions, indicating comprehension of the requests in each story. Although there was an increase in the appropriateness of responses with increased age, there was no age interaction with specific types of requests.\textsuperscript{12} The study suggests that children understand both direct and indirect requests, and are better at

\textsuperscript{10} Results are reported in terms of average percentage of request compliance, out of 20 requests in each category of requests, given to subjects in each group.

\textsuperscript{11} Responses in the Ledbetter and Dent (1988) study suggest that subjects performed sporadically in terms of request compliance.

\textsuperscript{12} Appropriateness of responses was judged along several dimensions such as child understanding of request intention, consequence, literal meaning, and non-literal meaning. Scores of response appropriateness was further analyzed by age.
comprehending requests in kindergarten than in preschool. The methods of this study leave room for future research. The scenarios were presented in picture form, and thus may have provided non-verbal aids to comprehending the requests. Conversely, in a real life situation, request comprehension does not rely on pictures as non-verbal aids. Although these results are derived from an unrealistic experimental condition, this study gives clearer insight into comprehension of requests, whereas in other studies, it is unclear as to whether request comprehension, request compliance, or both are taking place.

Because request comprehension does not predict request compliance in all cases, the actual rate in which listeners comply with requests, or request effectiveness, is important to note. It is also important to observe the effectiveness of requests in different situations, looking at factors related to compliance and request effectiveness. Crahay and Delhaxhe (1991) exemplify the divergence between comprehension and compliance. In their study, only 58% of preschool teachers’ requests to their students were effective. Effectiveness was measured by student request compliance. Results, perhaps not surprisingly, showed that the more cognitively complex the request, the greater the chance of ineffectiveness. The researchers define a “cognitively complex” request as occurring in three different situations: a request to a child who has just received a negative or upsetting comment; a request that interferes with the child’s activity; a request for an action in which the child is not prepared for the desired action. These three situations represent ones, in which children may have comprehended the request, but did not comply with it.

Given past research, it can be hypothesized that these children did in fact understand the requests, but given particular classroom situations, chose not to comply with them, resulting in ineffective requests. In the future, it is important to look at not only what requests children can understand and by what ages they can understand them by, but also why children choose to comply
with certain requests. Insight into these issues will create a better teaching-learning atmosphere and better communication within the classroom.

Synopsis

Requests are essential types of communication, used in school and at home, to aid in implementing primary goals of both teachers and mothers, especially goals of managing, controlling, and generating behavior. Without creating comprehensible and effective requests, these goals are virtually unattainable. Although the application of ToM research indirectly supports linguistic research suggesting children can comprehend indirect and direct requests, other studies suggest a high degree of request ineffectiveness. Ambiguity derived from these conflicting results suggests there may still be request comprehension problems among children of kindergarten age and younger. Research must first find what specific request types are used in order to then refocus on comprehension of these specific requests.

The past findings of different home and school communication styles lead one to concur that request styles may be different between home and school. These possible differences in request style may be crucial to children’s transition to school. Conceivably, children would be familiar with requests made at home; however, if school request style is different, this may interfere with children’s ability to communicate effectively and to comply with the teacher’s requests in the classroom. This situation has been shown to influence children’s academic performance and future school success. Past research has shown that both mothers and teachers make requests of children; however, past research has not yet revealed the difference in their specific request styles.

Study Rationale

The present study examines this missing factor – revealing specific differences between parent and teacher request styles. Past research has indicated that classroom language is different from that in the home (Bellack et al., 1966; Gruenwald & Pollack, 1984; Wells, 1983). Thus, our
main hypothesis is that teachers and mothers will use different forms of requests, due to different emphasized goals, activities, and interpersonal relationships that exist in each setting. Numerous classroom lessons and home play sessions will be coded for types of requests made by teachers and mothers to their children, in order to examine the true distribution of request frequencies.

Explication of Hypotheses

Hypothesis I

Much past research has found an adult bias towards indirect requests (e.g., Ervin-Tripp, 1976a; Gibbs & Mueller, 1988). However, these studies failed to differentiate between teachers and mothers. Studies that have focused separately on teachers and mothers reveal that, again, indirect requests occur commonly; however, these studies did not compare indirect with direct request frequencies (Lazar et al., 1989; Sell et al., 1977). Despite this bias towards indirect requests, we hypothesize that mothers will use more direct requests than teachers because of the explication of status hierarchies and lack of emphasis on politeness due to close, familiar relationships with their children. Although teachers and mothers both maintain higher status in comparison to the children they communicate with, research has shown that mothers specifically chose to emphasize their status to attain respect, disregarding the need to be polite to their children (Gleason et al., 1984). Another reason why mothers may use more direct requests is because they may assume children will understand these requests with greater ease and more efficiency.

The researchers hypothesize that teachers will use more indirect requests. Past studies have indicated that indirect requests occur frequently in the classroom (Lazar et al., 1989). Teacher bias towards indirect requests may occur because teachers are less familiar with their students and want their requests to seem polite and friendly, which may increase request compliance and teacher approval (Ervin-Tripp, 1976a). Teachers may also use indirect requests more, because if the initial request is not satisfied, the request can be rephrased (Labov & Fanshel, 1977). Another reason why
teachers may rely more on indirect requests concerns the classroom context, which in this study will be reading lessons. Past research shows a bias towards more indirect complex speech during book reading activities (e.g., Snow et al., 1976). Mehan (1974) has also suggested that complex speech, or speech that must be interpreted, occurs frequently in the classroom. Although indirect speech or complex speech may be, more difficult for children to understand, teachers may desire to use these requests more often to help children acquire and develop greater ToM ability.

Hypothesis II

We have further hypothesized specific indirect request frequencies in the classroom. There is no research providing a frequency distribution of indirect requests used by teachers, as the current study is the first study to propose this investigation. We theorize that teachers will use embedded imperatives most frequently, followed by imperatives and then question directives. Wells (1983) found that questions which require short responses occur often in the classroom. Given this, it seems probable that embedded imperatives and question directives, both presented in question format, would occur often. More importantly, these requests are more explicit than other types of requests, but are more polite than direct requests. Thus, embedded imperatives and question directives imply status hierarchy and explicitness, while still being friendly and polite. This reasoning supports one of the primary goals in the kindergarten classroom: behavior management, which requires the teacher being politely assertive while controlling the classroom. Because classrooms must be controlled in order to have a productive class, the researchers hypothesize that imperatives will occur between embedded imperatives and question directives, primarily for authority establishment and behavioral management, which occur frequently in the classroom. Another important reason for common imperative usage in the classroom setting regards compliance. Past research has shown that children comply with embedded imperatives and imperatives more often than other types of requests (Ledbetter & Dent, 1988). These types of requests, and specifically
imperatives, may be used to request a student to do something in a manner that is quick, efficient, and easier to understand and follow. The classroom presents many situations in which the teacher must make requests in the most effective manner to ensure immediate student responses (e.g., fire drill, stopping a fight).

Next, we theorize that suggestions will be made in order to foster a sense of community in the classroom, by indicating joint goals to fulfill requests. Fostering a sense of community will further motivate students to take part as a group to complete a specified, explicit act. Following suggestions, we propose that hints will be the next frequently used requests, because they may be used as polite, gentle reminders to urge students to follow directions, provide responsibility for their actions and give them the opportunity to complete an action without thoroughly specifying what the student should be doing. The use of the hint in the classroom allows students to think for themselves and respond in ways they feel is appropriate. This approach is consistent with recent trends in education which emphasize student independence and opinion.

The researchers hypothesize that the least frequent indirect request form among teachers will be the need/want statement. Need/want statements may be used less than other requests because it gives the impression that the student is doing a request for the teacher, rather than for him/herself. This type of request may be more effective because a student would feel obligated to fulfill a request out of respect for the teacher’s authority. On the other hand, teachers may use this request less often than other types because they may want students to be intrinsically motivated to fulfill requests for themselves, rather than for the teacher. Need/want statements may also be used less often than other requests because they are the most direct and unfriendly of the requests; they may be used as a last resort when students do not fulfill other requests.
Hypothesis III

Although we theorize that mothers primarily use direct requests or imperatives, we believe they will also use indirect requests, to a lesser degree. We hypothesize that parents will use indirect requests similar to the frequency distribution found in Sell et al. (1977). This study provides reliable data, however, it is a distribution used among parents, rather than solely with mothers. Therefore, we have hypothesized the following indirect request distribution from most frequent to less frequent usage: imperatives, embedded imperatives, need/want statements, question directives, suggestions, and hints. We have slightly altered Sell et al.’s (1977) result distribution by theorizing that question directives will occur less than need/want statements, rather than at the lower end of the distribution. Much research has looked specifically at question directives and recognizes the wide use of questions in mother’s speech, especially when the mother assumes the role of teacher (Holzman, 1972; Shatz, 1979). Therefore, we hypothesize that these types of question directives will be readily used.

We hypothesize that embedded imperatives and need/want statements will occur most frequently due to their explicitness and status-inferences. Embedded imperatives, question directives and need/want statements will occur frequently because they are the least indirect and most assertive of the indirect requests. Following these requests, we hypothesize that suggestions will occur, because many times in home play sessions and in the context of the current study, parents take part in joint activities, in which they play and act together with their children; therefore their requests will specify the inclusion of the speaker in the desired act, along with the listener. Finally, hints will occur with the least frequency, although, Ervin Tripp (1977) has suggested that hints occur when there is a shared understanding between the speaker and listener, and specifically within families. We believe that because mothers are concerned with maintaining status roles, this least-direct type of indirect request will not be used as frequently as other indirect requests. Also, hints are
the most complex form of indirect speech. More often, mothers simplify their speech when conversing with their young children (Snow, 1972). Furthermore, although some studies have indicated that children understand most requests, this data is still ambiguous. Hints, as the most inexplicit form of requests in the study, may be the most difficult for a child to comprehend, or might take them the longest to understand. In a mother’s busy life, she has less time to be indirect about her desired actions and will therefore make explicit indirect requests more often.

_Hypothesis IV_

We also plan to examine designation of requests. A designated request is one in which it is clear exactly who the desired listener is. In an undesignated request, the particular listener is not explicit. We are looking at designation of requests because studies have shown they are often more effective. The designation of requests is important to examine in this study because the children in the study are partaking in activities which may decrease their attention toward teacher/mother speech. Also, they are in environments which may involve other children and adults in close proximity. Thus request designation may serve to successfully gain the child’s attention, impacting request comprehension, compliance and effectiveness. It is important to understand how frequently designated requests are used in the classroom setting (Wilkinson et al., 1986). In most cases, play sessions occur between only a mother and one child. Because request designation towards the child is implied, the researchers hypothesize that requests will be designated more often in the classroom than at home. We theorize that in the classroom, designation will occur often because the teacher must differentiate her desired listener from the rest of the class, unless the teacher is referring to the entire class, at which times suggestion-indirect requests will occur.

_Hypothesis V_

Task relevance will also be examined in the study, in that the rate of teachers and mothers on and off-task requests will be measured. Task relevance establishes whether the request at hand
relates to the current activity (on-task) or involves something not having to do with the current activity, such as misbehavior (off-task). Researchers hypothesize that teachers will use more off-task requests than mothers because they will be more concerned with keeping children on-task, as they are teaching a lesson in front of a video camera and a research assistant. Mothers are simply playing with their children. In education, staying on specified “tasks” and budgeting time for these “tasks” are emphasized constructs. Therefore, teachers would be more likely to attend to off-task behaviors. Mothers are generally involved in a situation where the task at hand changes freely and time is not as much of an issue. Thus, conversely, we hypothesize that mothers will use more on-task requests, as we theorize they will be mostly playing along with their children, leaving little room for misbehaviors and interruptions.

_Hypothesis VI_

Request purpose will also be examined in the current study. A request may either be given to retrieve information, or to attain an action from the listener. Researchers hypothesize that more information requests will occur in the classroom, whereas more action requests will occur in the home, primarily because of the respective goals and activities taking place within each setting. Because researchers have noticed that different types of activities occur in upper and lower SES homes (Heath, 1982; Heath, 1983), it must be recognized that the rates of action and information requests may also differ within socio-economically different homes and classrooms. For example, because more academically-focused activities have been found to occur more often in upper SES homes, upper SES mothers and teachers may utilize more information requests than those of lower SES. However, overall, behavior management and action promotion are main purposes for action requests. Because home play sessions may consist primarily of parents trying to promote action while playing, or trying to manage their child’s behavior, we hypothesize that mothers will use more action than information requests. Although behavioral management plays a large role in
Teacher and Mother Request Styles

In kindergarten, reading lessons will be analyzed. The main goal of reading or education in general, is to learn information; therefore, we hypothesize that teachers will most often make requests for information. This may be problematic, given that in past research, studies have shown that action requests are more effective and comprehensible (Ledbetter & Dent, 1988; Shatz 1978a,b).

Summary of Hypotheses

The following is a summary of the hypotheses of the current study, which has been previously explained, rationalized and supported using past research and theory in the aforementioned “Explication of Hypotheses.”

I. Mothers will use more direct requests than teachers; teachers will conversely use more indirect requests than mothers.

II. The teacher request type frequency will have the following distribution, from most frequent to less frequent: embedded imperatives, imperatives, question directives, suggestions, hints, and need/want statements.

III. The mother request type frequency will have the following distribution, from most frequent to less frequent: imperatives, embedded imperatives, need/want statements, question directives, suggestions, and hints.

IV. Teachers will designate more requests to a particular listener than mothers; mothers will conversely use more non-designated requests.

V. Teachers will use more off-task requests, whereas mothers will use more on-task requests.

VI. Teachers will use more requests for information, whereas mothers will use more requests for action.

Summary of the Current Study

Finding a possible difference in request style between the home and school will allow educators, administrators and parents to hone in on this difference and prepare children for this
change, thereby helping to create an easier transition into full time schooling. Although the results of this data will not infer comprehension or compliance, theories and results from past studies on compliance and comprehension, in combination with our results, will allow us to infer which types of requests styles are more effective. It will also provide leeway for other studies regarding ToM and request usage, regarding comprehension and compliance.

Methods

Participants

The data used in this study has been drawn from two nation-wide longitudinal studies. Audio-taped kindergarten reading lessons compiled as part of a national study researching phonemic awareness were reviewed, and teacher's requests to students were coded. Twenty audio-taped lessons were provided by six different schools. Fifty percent of these schools were considered high SES and the remaining 50% were considered low SES. In the current study, 45% of coded lessons were from classes from an upper SES school, whereas 45% were from a lower SES school, and 10% of lessons had an unidentifiable SES. Socioeconomic status of the schools was derived from the number of state subsidized meal tickets used in each school. Although the SES of the schools was distributed across high and low SES, it must be noted that all or most of the teachers in the study were considered high SES because of their profession.

Twenty mother-child free play transcripts were collected from a study of predictors of early reading achievement. Mothers’ conversations to their kindergarten-aged child during free play in the families’ homes were coded for mother requests. The participating families followed a similar distribution of SES as the schools, with 55 % from low and 45% from upper SES.

It must be noted that ethnicity is confounded in the current study because most of the teachers and all of the mothers in the study were Caucasian.
**Procedure**

Mothers’ and teachers’ request styles in mother-child interactions during free play sessions in the home and teacher-student interactions in kindergarten classrooms were coded and analyzed. Before official coding began, researchers familiarized themselves with the different request coding dimensions by coding one teacher and one mother transcript together. Once a comfort level was achieved and 90% interrater reliability was established, researchers officially began coding the data. The data was coded in a Microsoft Excel data sheet, found in Appendix A. First, researchers listened to, or read conversations between, teachers or mothers and children, and transcribed every request used by each subject. Oftentimes, this process was tedious, involving rewinding the audiotapes or skimming back over written transcripts, making sure that all of the requests were found and transcribed correctly.

After creating a comprehensive list of requests, the total number of requests was calculated and entered into the data sheet. Due to the fact that teacher audiotapes and mother transcripts occurred at varying lengths, teacher and mother speaking turns were calculated to provide an absolute rate of request usage, or the number of requests per turn. A speaking turn was defined as each time a speaker talks without interruption. A new turn was counted after the interruption of a child or after a pause of three seconds or longer. Determining the number of total turns required researchers to go back and listen to each tape or to reread the written transcripts multiple times to ensure accuracy. After creating the comprehensive list of requests and determining the number of total requests and total turns, the transcribed requests were coded along several dimensions to measure the absolute rates of these different types of requests within the home and school environments.

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13 Absolute rates of requests were calculated by dividing the raw number of requests in each coded category per subject by either the total turns or total requests per subject.
Even with the tedious coding procedure, requiring researchers to listen or read each of the transcripts repeatedly, notable interrater reliability was achieved. Throughout the entire coding process, researchers coded 20% of the same tapes or transcripts to ensure confirmed reliability. Interrater reliability was calculated to determine reliability across coded categories: collection of total requests (79.88%); request designation (96.50%); request task (98.13%); request purpose (99.25%); and request type (94.50%). The overall average interrater reliability for the current study was extremely high, at 93.65%. It is important to note that the process of gaining interrater reliability continued throughout the entire study, rather than just taking place only at the beginning of the study. Aside from the 20% of tapes and transcripts used to maintain reliability, the remaining 80% of the tapes and transcripts was coded separately.

Coding Scheme

This study adapted a coding scheme taken from Sell, Kreuz & Coppernath (1997) that was originally based on Ervin-Tripp’s (1976 b) identification of request forms. We additionally integrated the category of suggestions as identified by Garvey (1975) and O’Brien and Bi (1995), the category of questions derived from (Shatz, 1979), and an unknown category for requests which could not be placed in any other mentioned category. In all, requests were coded along four dimensions, request type, request designation, task relevance, and request purpose. Requests were not transcribed or coded if they were part of stories or songs that the teachers and mothers were reading or singing. The following table is an illustration of the request type coding scheme, defining and providing examples of the types requests to be coded.
Table 1 Request Type Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Request Type</th>
<th>Request Subtype</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>Action is expressed overtly</td>
<td><em>Put this away.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Specifies a desired action explicitly in a questioning manner with questioning intonation, rising at the end</td>
<td><em>What do you think?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>Embedded Imperative</td>
<td>Action is expressed overtly, but qualified and softened</td>
<td><em>You can put it away.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question Directive</td>
<td>Action is stated implicitly in question form</td>
<td><em>So where does the yellow one go?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<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></td>
<td>Hint</td>
<td>Action is implied</td>
<td><em>I don’t see you talking to your partner</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<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>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td>Does not fit into any one of the above stated categories; may include aspects of more than one types; may vary on different levels such as explicitness of implicitness</td>
<td><em>Why don’t you say your sentence outloud?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Request Designation

The current study used Wilkinson et al.’s (1986) categorization of request designation.

Request designation determines whether or not the request was literally designated toward a specific listener or listeners (designated: *Robert, go to the board*) or if it was given non-explicitly to the general audience (non-designated: *Go to the board*). Teacher requests were coded as designated if they included a student’s name or addressed the entire class as “everyone.” Mother requests were coded
as designated if they included their child’s name, if they used the word “you” (because there was only one other child present), or if they addressed a joint activity using “we.” If a request did not fit into either of these two categories, it was coded as unknown (Do you want to play? When there are multiple listeners). Many of the unknown coded requests were coded unknown because of the nature of the tapes or transcripts. Because researchers could not infer physical gestures or how many children the teacher/mother was talking to, some of the requests had an unclear designation.

**Task Relevance**

Researchers also coded for task relevance, which consisted of either on-, off-, or unknown task. On-task requests pertain to the current activity taking place in school or at home. For example, if children are reading a book in class, an on-task request might be, “Please turn to page five.” Off-task requests do not pertain to the current activity. For example, using the same scenario for on-task requests, an off-task request might be “Don’t pinch her hand.” An example of an unknown task request is when a teacher may have told the class to sit down, and it was unclear whether the student was sitting because of the activity, or because he/she was misbehaving while standing up. This particular categorization was coded in Wilkinson and Spinelli’s (1985) study of request usage in peer directed reading groups.

**Request Purpose**

The final coded category was request purpose. These requests were coded as action, information, or unknown (as not fitting into the other two categories). Past studies have shown that children comply or comprehend various types of requests, in different frequencies depending on whether the request is given for information or action (Ledbetter & Dent, 1988; Shatz, 1978a). An example of a request for action may be, “I would like you to use a question,” whereas an example of a request for information may be, “Do you know who has a pencil?” An example of an unknown request is
Ambiguous Requests

Researchers found that due to some ambiguous requests, it was necessary to create several rules or coding guidelines to follow when coding tapes and transcripts, to maintain reliability. The main ambiguous coding detail involved multiple requests in one sentence or turn. If a request contained two different requests separated by a conjunction, such as “and” it was coded as only one request (wait and listen). It was assumed by the conjunction indicated that the second part of the request carried the same request type structure as the first part of the request. However, if a request contained two different requests separated by a comma, it was coded as two separate requests (wait, wait). Guidelines for these types of requests were important because researcher’s ambiguity of when to code requests as one or multiple requests could have increased or decreased the total number of requests per transcript, affecting the request rates across all categories of requests. Lastly, another example of a coding ambiguity involves prompting. Several times teachers prompted students to say certain words or give certain answers. These prompts were coded as information hints (T: You with the ….cubbb S: contest).

Results

Overall Speech Pattern Descriptives

Researchers coded requests from twenty transcripts of teachers in the classroom and twenty transcripts of mothers in the home. On average, teachers had 112.75 speaking turns, in which they made an average of 122.05 requests. Thus, 111.45% of the teacher’s mean total turns consisted of requests, showing that on average there was more than one request per turn. Mothers had a mean of 80.50 speaking turns, in which they made an average of 70.9 requests, with 91.47% of their total turns consisting of requests. These descriptives suggest that teachers use requests 19.98% more
frequently than mothers. The significance of this difference will be subsequently discussed. Table 2 presents descriptives for total requests and total turns of teachers and mothers.

Table 2 Means and Percentages of Requests and Turns

<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>Requests (per tape)</td>
<td>122.05 (70.33)</td>
<td>111.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turns (per tape)</td>
<td>112.75 (53.72)</td>
<td>80.50 (30.18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Preliminary Analysis of Request Type: By Sample Type and SES**

The effects of the between subjects variables SES and sample type on the within variable of the percentage of use of the different request types were examined through a mixed model Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). A Bonferroni adjustment was used as a post-hoc correction for this mixed model ANOVA and all other ANOVA's used throughout this study. In this analysis, the 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 subjects of low SES.

There was no significant main effect of SES showing that high SES subjects did not differ significantly in their absolute rates of requests from subjects of low SES. There was no main effect of sample type, suggesting that teachers did not use more overall requests than mothers. However, there was a significant main effect for request type, such that different types of requests were used at significantly different frequencies ($F(7, 28) = 102.04, p < .01$). There was no interaction between sample type and SES, implying that teachers of high SES and mothers of low SES did not differ significantly in their request style, just as teachers of low SES and mothers of high SES did not.

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14 Mean scores for data tables are raw numbers.
15 Percentages were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests by the mean total number of turns.
Analysis of Request Type: By Sample Type

Given that the preliminary ANOVA revealed that SES was not a significant predictor, a second mixed model ANOVA was run with sample type as the between subjects variable and the percentage of use of the different types of request types as the within subjects variable. In this second ANOVA, the two cases previously excluded, due to having an unknown SES, were included, thereby increasing statistical power.

Results of the ANOVA, with sample type as the only between subjects variable displayed a marginal main effect of sample type ($F(7, 32) = 2.28, p < .07$). The main effect of sample type suggests that teachers used significantly more requests than mothers. There was also a main effect of request type ($F(7,28) = 102.04, p < .01$). These main effects were qualified by an interaction ($F(7,32) = 2.28, p < .05$). This interaction indicates that the distribution of rates of specific requests differed between teachers and mothers. Table 3 presents descriptives of the request rates.

<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>Questions</td>
<td>45.25 (23.45)</td>
<td>42.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperatives</td>
<td>40.60 (36.60)</td>
<td>35.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded Imperatives</td>
<td>8.15 (5.47)</td>
<td>7.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions</td>
<td>9.15 (9.42)</td>
<td>6.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hints</td>
<td>14.30 (8.43)</td>
<td>14.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need/Want Statements</td>
<td>3.85 (3.73)</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question Directives</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknowns</td>
<td>.75 (1.16)</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 Percentages were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests in each category by the mean total number of turns.
To test the main hypotheses of the current study, and examine the differences in the
distributions of the frequency of request types, two mixed model ANOVA’s were executed, with a
separate analysis for each sample type. Analysis shows that teachers and mothers have slightly
different request type frequency hierarchies, shown in Figures 1 and 2 ($p < .05$). From these figures,
it can be seen that within each sample type, requests occur at significantly different rates.

**Teachers’ Distribution of Request Type Frequencies**

Post-hoc tests with Bonferroni corrections indicated which request types were used
significantly more or less than other types, for each respective sample type ($p < .05$). Although
questions and imperatives did not significantly differ from each other, teachers used significantly
more of these requests than the remaining coded request types. Followed by the questions and
imperatives, teachers used hints, embedded imperatives and suggestions at the next highest rate.
Again, teachers’ rates of these three types of requests did not differ from one another. Need/want
statements did not occur significantly less than suggestions, yet they did occur less than hints and
embedded imperatives. Lastly, although they did not significantly differ with each other, unknown
question directives and unknown requests significantly differed from the rest of the sample, having
the lowest teacher rates of any of the other requests.

**Mothers’ Distribution of Request Type Frequencies**

Post-hoc analyses with Bonferroni corrections revealed a similar yet different distribution of
mothers’ request type usage. Although they did not significantly differ from each other, questions
and imperatives significantly differed from the remaining requests. More imperatives and questions
occurred than the other coded requests. Teachers used embedded imperatives, hints and suggestions
at the next highest frequency. Although these three types of requests did not differ from each other,
they were used significantly more frequently than unknown requests, need/want statements and
question directives. Unknown requests, need/want statements and question did not differ from each other and they occurred at a significantly lower rate than all other coded requests.

Figure 1 Teachers’ Request Type Frequency Hierarchy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In sum:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions, Imperatives &gt; Hints, Embedded Imperatives, Suggestions &gt; Need/want* statements &gt; Unknown Requests, Question Directives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 Mothers’ Request Type Frequency Hierarchy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In sum:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions, Imperatives &gt; Embedded Imperatives, Hints, Suggestions &gt; Unknown Requests, Need/want statements, Question Directives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Independent Samples t-tests, were conducted to determine which request types significantly differed in frequency between the sample types: teachers and mothers. A $p$-value of $< .006$ was used to test the significance of these results because eight t-tests were performed with no expectation of results. Even with this stringent criterion, need/want statements and hints were found to be significant, revealing that teachers used significantly more need/want statements ($t(38) = -3.27, p < .006$) and hints ($t(38) = -3.64, p < .006$), than mothers. All other types of requests did not vary significantly between the two sample types.

**Analysis of Request Designation, Task Relevance and Purpose**

In addition to request type, requests were coded on three other within subjects dimensions: request designation, task relevance, and request purpose. Three mixed model ANOVA’s were run to examine the effects of the between subjects variables SES and sample type on these dimensions.

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17 * Need want statements are not significantly different than suggestions, though they are significantly different from hints and embedded imperatives.
Table 4 presents mean and average rates of requests by dimension and sample type. In only one case, that of task relevance, was SES a significant independent variable. Thus, for the other two ANOVA’s, SES was removed as a between subjects variable and the ANOVA was rerun to increase statistical power.

Table 4 Mean and Request Frequencies of Designation, Task Relevance and Purpose

| Designation | Teacher | | Mother | |
|-------------|---------|--|---------|--|---------|
|              | Mean (SD) | Mean Rate % | Mean (SD) | Mean Rate % |
| Designated   | 34.85 (26.14) | 28.73 | 25.05 (14.13) | 36.10 |
| Non-designated | 87.60 (53.00) | 77.66 | 46.65 (23.00) | 56.74 |
| Task         |         |       |         |       |
| On Task      | 103.8 (58.10) | 87.11 | 68.80 (27.22) | 97.33 |
| Off-task     | 17.90 (16.42) | 14.70 | 2.10 (4.40) | 2.20 |
| Purpose      |         |       |         |       |
| Action       | 66.85 (52.02) | 50.76 | 36.15 (21.00) | 49.64 |
| Information  | 55.15 (25.14) | 53.15 | 34.65 (16.72) | 44.59 |

Request Designation

Request designation, whether or not a request is designated towards a specific listener, was examined because of the benefits of designated versus non-designated requests that past literature has demonstrated. A mixed model ANOVA was performed to measure the between subjects variable sample type and the within subjects variable of the percentages of use of designated or non-designated requests, in which the rate of designated and non-designated requests was compared.

There was a significant main effect of designation ($F(1, 38) = 50.21, p<.01$), in that there were different mean rates of non-designated ($M = 67\%$) and designated requests ($M = 32\%$) used across

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18 Percentages were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests in each category by the mean total number of requests.
the entire sample. There was no significant main effect of sample type. The data set also revealed a significant interaction between designation and sample type \((F(1, 39) = 8.28, p<.01)\), suggesting that the difference between the rate of teachers’ use of designated and non-designated requests was larger than that of the mothers’ rates of these types of requests. Teachers’ difference between designated and non-designated requests was 48.93%, as compared to the mothers’ difference which was 20.64%.

Due to the occurrence of an interaction between sample type and request designation, a t-test was also performed to determine any significance between teachers’ and mothers’ rates of non-designated and designated requests. Independent Samples t-test results suggested that teachers used more non-designated requests than mothers \((t(38) = -2.88, p < .01)\).

**Task Relevance**

Task relevance, whether or not a request was used for an on-task or off-task/misbehavior, was examined in the study because researchers hypothesized different rates of each of these requests occurring in the home and the school. A mixed model ANOVA was performed to analyze the difference in action and information request usage among mothers and teachers separated by SES. The ANOVA, with SES and sample type as the between subjects variables and the percentages of use of on- and off-task requests as the within subjects variable, resulted in three significant main effects and three significant interactions. The analysis shows a main effect of sample type \((F(1,34) = 6.30, p<.05)\). A main effect of SES was also found \((F(1,34) = 10.31, p<.01)\). The data also revealed a significant main effect of task relevance \((F(1, 34) = 1379.83, p<.01)\).

There was also a significant interaction between sample type and task relevance \((F(1, 34) = 27.06, p<.01)\), in that the difference between the rates of on- and off-task requests varied significantly between teachers and mothers. Teachers had a 72.41% difference in their rates of on- and off-task requests, while mothers had a 95.1% difference in their rates of these requests. An
Independent Samples t-test revealed that mothers (\(M = 97.33\%\)) used more on-task requests than teachers (\(M = 87.11\%\)) (\(t(38) = 4.69, p < .01\)). The t-test also suggested that teachers (\(M = 14.70\%\)) used more off-task requests than mothers (\(M = 2.20\%\)) (\(t(38) = -4.58, p < .01\)).

Although there was no significant interaction between SES and task relevance, there was a significant interaction between SES and sample type (\(F(1,34) = 8.11, p < .01\)). This interaction was qualified by a significant three-way interaction between task, sample type and SES (\(F(1, 34) = 4.39, p < .05\)), revealing a difference between the rates of on- and off- task requests by sample type and also by SES. A Bonferroni post-hoc analysis clarified this interaction. Results show that low SES teachers (\(M = 20.6\%\)) used significantly more off-task requests than high SES teachers (\(M = 9.67\%\)), high SES mothers (\(M = 2.84\%\)), and low SES mothers (\(M = 1.42\%\)). Post hoc analysis also reveals that teachers of low SES (\(M = 84.6\%\)) used the fewest amount of on-task requests, differing significantly from mothers of high SES (\(M = 96.5\%\)) and of low SES (\(M = 98.3\%\)), but did not differ significantly from teachers of high SES (\(M = 89.4\%\)).

**Request Purpose**

Request purpose, or whether or not a request desires an action or information from the listener, was examined in the study because of the knowledge that requests are used in different situations for different purposes. A mixed model ANOVA, with sample type as the between subjects variable and percentages of use of either action or information requests as the within subjects variable, revealed no significant main effects of request purpose or sample type, suggesting that there were no differences in the rates of action and information requests. The analysis also revealed no significant interaction between sample type and request purpose, indicating that there were no significant differences in the distribution of action and information requests between teachers and mothers.
Follow Up Analyses

Upon completion of primary analyses, researchers chose to further look at four issues in order to clarify the primary results and to attempt to explore additional rationale for the results in relation to the proposed hypotheses. Mixed model ANOVA’s were completed for each of the follow-up tests. Each follow-up test initially used sample type and SES as between subjects variables. None of the primary ANOVA’s had significant effects involving SES, so as previously done, SES was removed and ANOVA’s were repeated with only one between subjects variable: sample type.

Imperative Type: On-Task versus Off-Task

Researchers were interested in whether or not imperatives, the most direct and explicit of the other examined requests, occurred more frequently on- or off-task. So, researchers created two new variables: on-task imperatives and off-task imperatives. Raw scores and absolute rates of imperatives, which were only on- or off-task, were calculated. These descriptives are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5 Imperative Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th></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>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperatives</td>
<td>On Task</td>
<td>28.55 (27.71)</td>
<td>25.57</td>
<td>19.95 (11.31)</td>
<td>25.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Off-task</td>
<td>11.80 (13.14)</td>
<td>9.76</td>
<td>.95 (1.70)</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A mixed model ANOVA with the between subjects variable, sample type, and the within subjects variable of percentages of use of imperative type (on-task imperative, off-task imperative), revealed a significant main effect of imperative type ($F(1, 38) = 67.65, p<.01$), showing that overall, on-task imperatives ($M = 25.58\%$) were used more than off-task imperatives ($M = 5.41\%$). There

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19 Percentages were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests in each category by the mean total number of turns.
was no significant main effect of sample type, indicating that teachers and mothers did not differ significantly in their on- and off-task imperative rates. There was also no interaction between sample type and imperative type, in that teachers and mothers did not use significantly different rates of on- and off-task imperatives. This issue could be looked at another way. Calculation shows that on average, teachers made 17.9 off-task requests, of which 11.8 were imperatives, providing for an average of 65.92% of teacher’s off-task requests being imperatives. Mothers, on average, made 2.1 off-task requests, of which .95 were imperatives, providing for an average of 45.24% of mother’s off-task requests being imperatives.

**Hint Type: Action versus Information**

Upon completion of coding, researchers noted teachers’ large number of information requests, in the form of verbal prompting for some type of information answer. This follow-up test was generated from the interest in determining whether or not teachers and mothers use different rates of hints for action or information. Like the aforementioned follow-up, raw scores and absolute rates of hints, which were made for either action or information, were calculated. The raw means and mean rate percentages of these new variables can be found in Table 6.

**Table 6 Hint Type**

<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>

---

20 Percentages were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests in each category by the mean total number of turns.
Researchers performed a mixed model ANOVA with sample type as the between subjects variable and the percentages of use of action hints or information hints as the within subjects variable. There was no main effect of hint type, meaning that overall, the rate of action versus information hints did not vary across the sample. However, there was a main effect of sample type ($F(1,38) = 13.24, p<.01$). Results also showed a significant interaction between sample type and hint type ($F(1,38) = 5.69, p<.05$). This interaction suggests that the difference in rates of action and information hints is different for teachers than for mothers. Teachers had a 3.28% difference in their rates of action and information hints, while mothers had 2.39% difference. Given the interaction between sample type and hint type, an Independent Samples t-test was also performed to determine the nature of the differences between teachers’ and mothers’ use of action versus information hints. The t-test reveals that teachers ($M = 8.87\%$) used significantly more information hints than mothers ($M = 1.30\%$), who used more action hints ($t(38) = -3.54, p<.01$).

**Request Style: Direct versus Indirect**

Due to the late addition of questions to the study, a widely used form of direct requests (Ledbetter & Dent, 1988), researchers decided to further look at one of the main hypotheses of the study, whether or not direct or indirect requests as a whole would be used more or less by teachers and mothers. The addition of questions as a direct requests provides for the new categorization of direct requests as consisting of imperatives and questions. The remaining requests are considered indirect requests, as consistent with the original coding scheme. Descriptives for teachers’ and mothers’ rate of the newly coded direct requests and indirect requests can be found in Table 7.
Table 7 Request Style

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

Thus, a mixed model ANOVA once again looked at sample type as the between subjects variable and percentage of use of direct or indirect requests as the within subjects variable. The ANOVA illustrated a main effect of request style ($F(1,38) = 150.95, p<.01$), in that different rates of indirect and direct requests were used across the sample. Across the sample, more direct requests ($M = 74.0\%$) were used than indirect requests ($M = 26.6\%$). There was no main effect of sample type, meaning that teachers and mothers did not differ significantly in their rates of direct and indirect requests. Lastly, no interaction between sample type and request style was found, showing that the difference between rates of indirect and direct requests did not differ between teachers and mothers.

**Request Purpose: Action versus Information**

The current study revealed a high frequency of unanticipated questions, most of which being requests for information. Thus, researchers chose to look at whether or not there was a significant difference in the rate of action and information requests used between teachers and mothers, with questions and unknowns excluded because they were not considered when the original hypotheses were created. Researchers were curious as to whether or not mothers used more action requests than teachers, as originally hypothesized. Thus, questions and unknowns, which were coded as either given for action or information purposes, were removed, leaving only the original request types: imperatives, embedded imperatives, question directives, need/want statements, hints, and

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21 Percentages were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests in each category by the mean total number of turns.
suggestions. A mixed model ANOVA was conducted, with sample type as the between subjects variable and the percentage of use of action or information requests as the within subjects variable. Descriptives for this follow-up analysis are illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8 Request Purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</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>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>

Whereas the results of the aforementioned request purpose analysis with questions included showed no significant effects, results for this follow-up showed a significant main effect of purpose \((F(1,38) = 46.79, p<.01)\), revealing that overall, more action requests \((M = 51.30\%)\) were made than information requests \((M = 7.14\%)\), once questions and unknowns were removed. There was also a main effect of sample type \((F(1,38) = 4.90, p<.05)\), indicating that teachers \((M = 34.30\%)\) used more action and information requests (excluding questions and unknowns) than mothers \((M = 24.20\%)\). There was no interaction between sample type and purpose, in that the difference between the rate of action and information requests used did not differ between teachers and mothers.

Summary of Results

The current study’s results reveal several interesting findings regarding teacher and mother request style divergence. Overall, statistics suggest a trend of teachers’ rates of requests exceeding that of mothers. Across the sample, direct requests, consisting of imperatives and questions, occurred more frequently than the remaining coded indirect requests. Additionally, more non-designated and on-task requests were used across the sample. In terms of teacher and mother

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Footnote: Percentage were calculated by dividing the mean total number of requests in each category by the mean total number of turns.
request style divergence, teachers and mothers used specific types of requests more than others. Teachers used significantly more need/want statements and hints than mothers. Likewise, teachers also used more non-designated requests and off-task requests. The follow-up analyses provided several other results clarifying the current study’s hypotheses and researchers’ concerns. The main result of the follow-up analyses regarding teacher and mother request style divergence indicates that teachers use significantly more information hints than mothers. The study’s results indicate various other findings that are rationalized further in the Discussion.
Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore any possible divergence of request style between teachers and mothers in their interactions with kindergarten-aged children. Although there is no past research looking specifically at teacher versus mother request style, given past research on adults usage of requests, and the usage of requests by mothers and teachers separately, it seems likely that there would in fact be some sort of divergence in request style. The probable divergence in request style is likely to be caused by a difference in status representation, politeness, situational contexts, purpose of the interaction with the child, comfort level, and mutual understanding between speaker and listener.

The present investigation presents significant results suggesting that requests compose a large sector of teachers’ and mothers’ speech. These results support previous literatures findings of the great presence of requests in teachers’ and mothers’ conversations to children (Mehan, 1978; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Results of the current study extend past research, in that teachers were found to use slightly more requests in their speech than mothers. Analyses importantly reveal that teacher-mother request style divergence does exist in regards to particular types of requests. The current study also presents several results indicating that there may be some possible trends of overall adult request style when interacting with kindergarten-aged children. Some of these trends have been overlooked by previous literature.

Divergence of Teacher and Mother Rate of Requests

The specific nature of the rate of request usage (requests per turn) among teachers and mothers is important to discuss prior to examining analyses of specific request type usage. The current study’s sample yielded results revealing that overall, teachers had a greater average rate of requests than mothers, indicating a marginal trend that teachers use slightly more requests in their

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23 This result is marginally significant.
speech than mothers and also indicating that teachers use on average, more than one request per turn. These results may have to do with several differences in situational contexts between the home and the school (Bakker-Renes & Hoefnagel-Holhe, 1974) and speaker’s role and purpose in each respective environment.

Whereas, the general role of mothers in home free play sessions, such as those transcribed for the current study, is to act as a guide and playmate during play periods, the general function of school and classroom time is to exchange information. Teachers fulfill the function of the classroom by using requests to mediate conversations and to generate student behaviors, thereby enhancing the exchange of information and helping the learning process. Thus, it would seem likely that teachers would give requests more frequently than mothers, who may desire their children to initiate conversations and learning on their own, through exploration. In a classroom, activities are structured and time is limited. A teacher’s role is to cover all of the prescribed topics in a given amount of time, which may require the use of more requests in a shorter period of time, than would a mother’s role. To keep students on track in their activities, teachers may need to use more quick requests to get students’ attention and to cause them to respond and understand efficiently and more effectively. Thus, often times, teachers use quick repetition of many requests within only one part of one speaking turn (e.g., wait, wait, wait!). The actual type of activity may dictate the rate of requests. Academic activities, such as language arts and reading, present more opportunities for teacher feedback and mediation or questioning, rather than playing with toys at home, in which greater child exploration and child-initiated conversation may be desired (Wells, 1983). These explanations not only explain why teachers use more requests than mothers, but also rationalize why teachers may have more than one request per turn.
Divergence of Request Types

Examining the divergence of specific request types was a primary goal of this study. Analysis of request type between sample type and SES revealed no difference between high and low SES, and some differences between sample type. These results coincide with the lack of language differences between SES and home and school found by Wells (1983). The results also seem to suggest that SES linguistic barriers, thought to cause greater transition difficulties to school for lower SES, students did not include barriers regarding request differences (Jacob & Jordan, 1993). The main probable reason behind lack of SES significance is that, despite the even distribution of SES between homes and specifically between schools, virtually all of the teachers from the schools were from high socioeconomic backgrounds.

There was a significant main effect of request types, indicating that throughout the entire sample, specific types of requests were used at different frequencies. More importantly, and more relevantly in terms of the current study, an interaction was found between sample type and request type, revealing that teachers do use some types of requests at different rates than mothers. Further analysis of this interaction revealed two slightly different request type hierarchies of the significant distribution of request types for mothers and teachers.

Teachers Request Distribution

Questions and Imperatives

In the current study, teachers used imperatives and questions the most frequently. This finding is not surprising, as it partially supports the study’s second hypothesis, which predicts imperatives to occur at one of the highest frequencies of all of the request types. This does not support the study’s first hypothesis that teachers would use more indirect requests, in that imperatives and questions are the only direct requests coded in the study.
Teachers’ use of these direct requests can be rationalized by again looking at the classroom atmosphere and objectives. In a classroom, teachers have many children to attend to in a fast-paced, structured, time-oriented environment. Therefore, it seems practical for the teacher to use direct requests, such as imperatives and questions, because they are the most explicit and comprehensible ways to request an action or information. Teachers want to make the most of the time they have to get through a syllabus, while attending to behavior problems, emergency situations, and other issues in the classroom, which may arise. The frequent occurrence of questions within the classroom is very reasonable given that these requests are primarily used to obtain information, and obtaining information for the purpose of learning is one of the primary goals of school. Past research supports teachers’ frequent use of questions (Wells, 1983).

The fact that teachers used more direct requests than indirect requests, as contrary to the first hypothesis, contradicts past research and the current researcher’s rationalization that teachers would choose to be more polite in their requests, while exposing children to more implicit and open-ended requests. One rationale behind researchers believing that teachers would want to be more polite to their students is because they are more unfamiliar with their students, to the point where in some cases, students may be considered strangers. Past research indicated that indirect requests are used to be polite, such as when interacting with strangers (Ervin-Tripp, 1977). However, in the current study, this was not the case. Perhaps the teachers in this study had been teaching these students for an extended period of time, allowing them to feel more comfortable with their students. In the current study, it was unclear when during the school year the classes were taped. Future research should look at the difference of request style over the course of the school year to see if there is a change from indirect to more direct language. Moreover, teachers in this study may have been more concerned with using requests to obtain quick and correct actions,
keeping students on track in the prescribed activities. This seems probable given that these teachers knew researchers were observing them, to study a newly implemented academic program in schools.

*Hints, Embedded Imperatives and Suggestions*

Given that teachers used direct requests at the highest frequency, it is not surprising that teachers used hints, embedded imperatives and suggestions at the next highest frequency because they are the most explicit and direct of the indirect requests coded for in this study. Although this finding does not exactly support the original second hypothesis, there is valid rationale behind the pattern of results. These three types of indirect requests allow teachers to obtain actions or information from students in a polite, yet direct manner. Because oftentimes questions are used in the classroom to obtain information, teachers may choose to use embedded imperatives as a more polite, indirect way of asking a question, which may in turn increase compliance; this reasoning supports the second hypothesis. Being polite to a student by using indirect requests such as hints, embedded imperatives and suggestions, shows the student respect and promotes a sense of equality between the speaker and the listener (Ervin-Tripp, 1977). This feeling of respect may make a request seem more sincere and increase compliance. Likewise, if a teacher suggests that he/she will actually complete the action with the listener, this also seems sincere and is likely to increase compliance. It should be noted that as a whole, teachers’ and mothers’ generalizations can only be applied to kindergarten teachers and mothers interacting with kindergarten aged children. Most of the rationales behind why requests are used in specific cases deal with activities in the classroom and the children’s level of ToM. For instance, perhaps only teachers of younger children use suggestions. They may feel that the children’s immaturity makes them more likely to agree to a request if the older, higher-status speaker is partaking in the activity, especially if the request conflicts with the children’s desires. This concept plays true in other cases as well.
This also impacts the rationale behind teachers using hints at the second highest rate. Although hints are less direct types of requests and may be more difficult to comprehend, hints occurred frequently in the classroom. However, most hints teachers presented in the classroom were information prompts in which students gave quick answers (e.g., T: “This is a shhhheee…”, S: “shell!”). The rapidness of answers may have occurred because the teacher had a shared understanding with students of what the hint meant and what was expected of them. This would support past literature (Ervin Tripp, 1977). Although this prompting example fits the researchers’ definition of a hint, these information prompt scenarios are not found in past literature that discussed hints. If this is in fact a form of a hint, further research should look at the prevalence of this in the home versus school atmospheres, as well as children’s comprehension and understanding of what this type of hint entails.

_Need/want Statements, Unknown Requests, and Question Directives_

It must be noted that there was a slight ambiguity in the data, in that need/want statements did not differ significantly in rate from suggestions, but differed significantly from hints and embedded imperatives. Although the researchers have stated that need/want requests are the least friendly indirect requests, in predicting that teachers would use need/want statements at the least frequency, these requests occurred at the third lowest frequency. However, it should be noted that the least frequent type of request was that of question directives, in which there were virtually no examples by teachers. Thus, need/want statements were low in the teachers’ request type hierarchy. These requests may have been used as a last resort when other requests had not worked. The speaker might attempt to use this request to instill a sense of authority and increase compliance by almost coercing the listener to fulfill the request for the speaker. In the future, research should

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24 The occurrence of teacher’s information hints will be further discussed in the Follow-Up section.
25 This will be discussed further in the next section.
look further into whether need/want statements significantly follow other types of requests upon failure to complete previous requests.

Unknown statements occurred at an extremely low frequency as well, which is fortunate because a high number of unknown requests would signify some methodological error in the coding scheme. Question directives occurred at the lowest rate, with virtually no teachers using a question directive. This contradicts past research which notes frequent use of question directives in the classroom (Wells, 1983). Teachers may not have chosen question directives because of its extreme implicitness and their own assumption that children of kindergarten age would not understand this type of request. However, researchers also propose that this type of request may have been overlooked during coding due to the difficult and ambiguous definition of question directives used in the coding scheme. This type of request may have been coded as unknown instead of question directive, which would include the more frequent number of unknown requests. Future research might examine question directives further to determine if this result was a factor of methodological tribulations or if past research is in fact incorrect.

**Mother Request Distribution**

*Questions and Imperatives*

Similarly to teachers in the current study, mothers were found to use imperatives and questions most frequently of the remaining request types. This supports the study’s first hypothesis that mothers would use more direct requests than indirect requests. These results also support the third hypothesis in that mothers would use imperatives most frequently. The frequent use of questions is not surprising, given past research suggesting evidence that mothers use questions frequently (Holzman, 1972; Shatz, 1979). In a free-play context (observed in the current study) mothers used questions frequently to help the children learn about specific toys, and to ask the children how they could be involved in their play time. Researchers noticed mothers’ use of
questions to further children’s learning of the toys provided by researchers, which supports the past research that mothers specifically use questions when taking the role of the teacher (Holzman, 1972).

Mothers’ use of imperatives also seems reasonable because oftentimes, imperatives are used when the speaker is not concerned with request politeness and there is a status differential between the speaker and listener (Ervin-Tripp, 1977). Past literature suggests that parents are more concerned than teacher with reinforcing their higher status through the use of imperatives and direct requests (Gleason et al., 1984; Mitchell-Kernan & Kernan, 1977). If mothers do use direct requests to reinforce their higher status, children may be more apt to fulfill these requests effectively out of respect. Mothers may not only choose to use more direct requests to portray dominance over the listener, but also because direct requests are easier to understand and are more explicit. This rationale is supported by past literature, which has recognized mothers’ tendencies to simplify their language with their children (Snow, 1972). Most mothers have busy schedules in their daily lives, which may be aided by giving children requests, which may be understood the first time, due to the explicitness of the request, as well as the previously mentioned reinforcement of status hierarchies. In all, mothers may use more direct requests because they are more familiar with their children, and they might believe that children will understand and comply with their requests more often due to explicitness and representation of authority.

*Embedded Imperatives, Suggestions and Hints*

Again, similarly to teachers, mothers used embedded imperatives, hints and suggestions the second most frequently. Mothers’ use of embedded imperatives supports the researcher’s third hypothesis. The frequent use of embedded imperatives is practical, in that they are the most clear and direct indirect requests. They also provide a degree of politeness, which may help to increase compliance. In a mother’s busy schedule, a request that may increase compliance is a major benefit.
Mothers’ high frequency of hints and suggestions contradicts the researcher’s third hypothesis that suggestions and hints would occur toward the end of the request type hierarchy. Suggestions may have been used more for a similar reason that embedded imperatives have been used more – to increase compliance. It may be more likely to attain compliance from a listener if it is clear that the speaker will partake in the action along with the listener. In the initial literature review and study rationale, this explanation went unnoticed. The type of activity that mothers would be partaking in also went unnoticed and may have significantly contributed to the increased number of suggestions used by mothers. Mothers were playing with their children. Thus, the speakers were joining in activities with their listeners, creating an ideal opportunity to use suggestions.

Although it was not hypothesized that mothers would use hints frequently, because the researcher theorized mothers to be more concerned about comprehension and replication of status hierarchies, two main concepts were overlooked. First, the activity of free-play was not taken into consideration during the literature review and explication of the hypotheses. Perhaps the relaxed and unstructured free play activities provided more room for the most implicit request, thereby allowing the most time and thought to be given to comprehending and complying with the request. Perhaps during free play, mothers had more time to use requests which may or may not be difficult for the child to comprehend. However, teachers, whose time was limited, also used hints at the second highest frequency, which invalidates this argument. Perhaps hints were used not to make the child think more regarding complying with the request, but rather to help a child in answering a previous request. If hints were in fact used as follow up requests to questions, in which child comprehension or compliance failed, it would make sense that hints were used at the next highest frequency. This argument supports past literature that contends if there is no response or compliance with the original request, the request can be rephrased as hints, embedded imperatives or suggestions (Labov
& Fanshel, 1977). Future research should examine whether or not hints are used as a follow up request to a previous failed request.

*Need/want Statements, Question Directives and Unknowns*

Mothers used need/want statements, question directives and unknowns at the least frequency, which supports hypothesis three. Need/want statements may have been chosen for the same proposed reason of the previous three indirect requests: to recreate an original request which was not successful. As noted for teachers, mothers may have used need/want statements to instill a feeling of authority and to increase compliance by almost coercing the listener to fulfill the request. Question directives also occurred with the least frequency among the mothers’ request type hierarchy, despite past research which found question directives or questions with short answers occurring frequently in the home setting (Holzman, 1972; Shatz, 1979). The rationale for this finding on question directives and the results of unknowns follows the same rationale aforementioned in the teacher’s request style hierarchy.

*Divergence of Teacher and Mother Rate of Request Types*

Overall, the teachers and mothers had very similar request type hierarchies, which may or may not have occurred for different reasons having to do with various mentioned roles and goals in each respective setting. Upon further analysis of the significant interaction between request types and sample types, it is clear that some requests differ in rate between teachers and mothers. This is not surprising, given Ervin Tripp’s (1977) suggestion that language may be altered depending on the context. In the sample, there were only significant differences found between the rate of need/want statements and hints. Overall, teachers used more of these requests than mothers. This is contrary to the current study’s hypothesis, as it was theorized that teachers would use fewer need/want statements and hints. Among many possible rationales for these results, difference in activity (Hains
et al., 1989) and difference in need for status or authority development (Mitchell-Kernan & Kernan, 1977) may have played large roles.

Researchers observed that due to the difference in activities between the school and home atmosphere, which consisted of reading/language arts activities and playing, respectively, hints were used at different frequencies. Teachers used more hints, which were used to attain information from students regarding specific vocabulary words used in the activities. This was not seen to a great extent in the home. Perhaps teachers used more hints than mothers, because teachers were cognizant of their shared understanding of these particular requests with their students (Ervin Tripp, 1977). Teachers may have used need/want statements more frequently because there may have been a greater need to establish a status hierarchy in the classroom in order to increase respect and compliance with the teacher. More frequent use of need/want statements supports Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta’s (2000) findings that in school, teacher-student communicative interactions are less friendly and welcoming.

Request Designation

Request designation was examined in this study because of its important implications. Designating a request toward a specific listener has shown to be helpful in past research (Wilkinson et al., 1986). Giving a designated request helps to capture the listener’s attention toward the request. This is even more important in an atmosphere where there are several listeners or children and distractions, such as in a classroom. The current study’s results suggest that teachers and mothers use more non-designated requests than designated requests. These samples did not differ in their rate of designated versus non-designated requests. However, had the original coding scheme coded all one-on-one interactions as designated, all mother requests would have been coded as designated, completely changing the results of the study. If all mother requests were designated then children would frequently be exposed to designated requests, which may pose a problem upon transitioning
to school, an environment with many distractions and many other children who are given the non-designated requests. The disparity of request designation would be greater between the home and school environments.

However, given the original coding scheme, the overall reluctance of using designated requests in the current study may pose a problem because other research has stated the helpfulness of designation in request. These results are contrary to the current study’s hypothesis four, which theorized that teachers would use more designated requests because they would need to make sure a specified listener knew the request was directed toward him/her. Because the current study suggests that teachers use more non-designated requests, perhaps future research might focus on whether or not these designated requests are more frequently comprehended and followed, versus designated requests. Perhaps the teachers in this study did not have a high rate of compliance due to their frequent use of non-designated requests. Future research could help answer this question.

Task Relevance

Task relevance analyses provided many surprising findings. Not only was there a difference in overall rates of on- and off-task requests, but there were also differences in the number of off-task requests used by teachers and mothers, and differences between SES as well. In terms of pursuing hypothesis five, the prediction was slightly incorrect, in that teachers used more on- and off-task requests than mothers. Results show that teachers and mothers used more on-task requests, which might be a result of the way data was collected. The researchers mostly coded misbehaviors as off-task. Because an entire lesson and play session had more good behaviors than bad, this accounts for the great difference between on- and off-task requests. Also, the children and adult subjects in this sample may have been extremely focused and on-task because they were being videotaped by researchers. Additionally, parents and teachers may have paid more attention to positive behaviors rather than negative, off-task behaviors. Generally, these findings seem logical and practical.
The surprising finding is that teachers of low SES used the most number of off-task requests out of the entire sample and less on-task requests than mothers of high and low SES. This novel finding may relate to the type of student or to the behavioral management in schools of lower SES that differ from the other schools and homes in the sample. Perhaps students in these schools are more off-task in their activities; perhaps there are more students in the classrooms, allowing for more opportunities for one’s attention to be off-task; perhaps teachers in lower SES schools try to comment on off-task behaviors more often to control the classroom. Even more relevant to this study, as past research has shown, perhaps students of low SES have lesser linguistic skills, causing inferior teacher perceptions, and prompting teachers to focus on this negativity (Tudge et al., 2003). These are all possibilities which may be well researching in the future.

Purpose

Although researchers hypothesized a greater occurrence of information requests in the classroom and more action requests in the home, there were no significant differences in the rate of action versus information requests. This lack of significance may have been due to the great number of questions used, most of which were requests for information, in comparison to the rest of the types of requests used, most of which may have been requests for action. Had the researchers known that questions would be included in the original hypotheses, the hypotheses might have been modified. The results conflict with the researcher’s rationale that request usage depends on context and situational goals. For example, the researchers hypothesized that more information requests would be used by teachers, rather than mothers, because the primary goal of school is to learn information, whereas at home, playing involves mostly action. These results suggest that learning information and activity are equal in the home and at school. Future research determining the exact goals in home and at school may be necessary to clarify these results.
Another area of consideration regards request comprehension. Past research has indicated that young children are more likely to comprehend or comply with action requests than information requests (Ledbetter & Dent, 1988; Shatz, 1978a,b). This research may be important to bear in mind, because speakers may help to increase the effectiveness of their requests by choosing to use more requests for action when at all possible. If teachers and mothers are using the same rates of action and information requests, their young listeners may not be comprehending many of the information requests that they are making.

Follow-up Analyses

Upon completion of coding, researchers found several pertinent, yet unexpected types of requests to be of interest. These requests include the considerable number of direct questions to obtain information, information hints in the form of prompts, and imperatives observed to confront off-task behaviors. Follow-up analyses were done to clarify results and to try to examine why some of the researcher’s hypotheses were proven to be incorrect. Through these analyses, researchers sought to address the following questions of interest: Without questions, as intended in the original coding scheme, is there a difference in the sample’s request purposes? What is the difference in rate of direct requests, including questions, and indirect requests? Are imperatives used more for on- or off-task behaviors? Is there a difference in the rate of hints used for action versus information among the sample? Four concepts were examined in further detail to address researchers’ questions of interest: request purpose, excluding questions; request style, including questions as a direct request; on- versus off-task imperatives; and action versus information hints.

Request Purpose: Excluding Questions

After noticing the large amount of teachers’ questions to obtain information, the researchers examined request purpose without questions, because questions were not in the original coding scheme. Once questions were removed from the analysis, it appeared that more action requests were
used than information requests. Therefore, questions make up a large proportion of the information requests, whereas the other requests in the coding scheme are used to attain mostly action. However, upon analysis, there was still no difference between the rate of action and information requests amongst the sample. Thus, these results do not help to determine why action requests occur just as frequently as information requests in the classroom, contradicting the researchers’ hypothesis that more information requests would occur in this setting.

The goal of education in general is to learn information, so it makes sense that information requests are prominent. However, education has another goal, specifically in earlier years of schooling, to prescribe appropriate classroom behaviors, which would cause the need for action requests. In kindergarten, it may be the case that children learn as much information as they do behaviors, which would account for the results of this follow-up study. Teachers and mothers should also take into account that as mentioned for the earlier request purpose discussion, past research has found that action requests are more effective and easier for children to comprehend than information requests (Ledbetter & Dent, 1988; Shatz, 1978a,b).

Request Style

Another follow-up test was examined regarding the main hypothesis, also involving questions, because they were not included in the original coding scheme. This follow-up analysis helped to establish that researchers were partially correct in their hypotheses, in that across the sample more direct requests (including questions) were used than indirect requests. This contradicts past research, finding that indirect requests were more desirable to use amongst adults (Ervin Tripp, 1976a; Gibbs & Mueller, 1988; Labov & Fanshel, 1977). However, perhaps while indirect requests are more desirable with adult speakers and listeners, direct requests are more desirable with adult speakers and child listeners because of explication of status hierarchies, desire for increased comprehension and need for time efficiency.
Although past research has stated that more indirect speech occurs in the home, in play-centered, unstructured environments, researchers assumed that mothers would use more direct requests to explicate authority (Bakker-Renes & Hoefnagel-Holhe, 1974; Snow et al., 1976). Conversely, researchers incorrectly hypothesized that teachers would be more polite and use more indirect requests, concurring with past research indicating frequent indirect requests in the classroom (Mehan, 1974). It is possible that both teachers and mothers primarily wanted to establish authority over politeness. It is also probable, that both teachers and mothers wanted to give requests, which would be most efficient to get things done in a timely, structured manner.

Previous research that also supports these request style results, considers the assumptions of young children’s comprehension ability. Although comprehension research has shown kindergarten-aged children are able to comprehend all types of requests (Elrod, 1983; Shatz, 1978a), Snow (1972) found that mothers simplify their language in order to be more direct; this may be the case of the mothers and teachers in this sample. Mothers and teachers may carry the assumption that children will understand them more easily and comply with their requests if they are more explicit and clear. The unexpected rates of direct and indirect requests may also have to do with the type of sample, the particular activities in each setting, and the methods of collecting data. The particular sample and activities may have allowed for more direct requests due to the age of the children or to the personalities or intelligence of the children. In terms of methodological limitations contributing to this result, researchers may have simply recognized more direct requests due to their explicitness. Some indirect requests are so implicit that they go unnoticed. One example of this may have been the lack of question directives found in the study. This may be a problem inherent in indirect requests, which may reveal that they are not the best types of requests to use in a distractive situation with multiple younger children.
Imperative and Task

A third follow-up analysis was done to test hypotheses found in previous research, in which imperatives were used for off-task behavior, or behavioral management in correcting misbehavior (Sell et al., 1997). In the current study, researchers noticed particularly teachers’ use of multiple, rapid imperatives to attend to off-task behaviors (e.g., “shhhh, shhh, shhh” and “wait, wait”). This prompted the researchers’ interest in determining how often imperatives were used for off-task behaviors, as compared to when they are used for on-task behaviors, and whether or not these rates differed amongst the sample. The current study’s analysis showed that more imperatives were used for on-task behaviors than for off-task behaviors. However, this may have been due to the overall greater use of on-task requests than off-task requests. Future research can help to clarify exactly what types of requests are being used for on- and off-task situations.

Hints and Purpose

The final follow up analysis focused on hints because teachers used more information hints than anticipated. It was often found that teachers used many hints for prompts, something overlooked by past research. Originally, the researchers did not think that hints would be used as frequently as they were by teachers or mothers, because of their implicit nature and possible comprehension difficulty they present for their children. It was revealed that teachers used significantly more information hints than mothers. This increased use of prompting most likely contributed to the greater number of information hints made by teachers, which may have been due to the divergence of classroom activities, as compared to home activities. The classroom activities included prompting students to remember different vocabulary or readings words. This follows the important ideal in education to scaffold information for students. Teachers may recognize their students developing ToM and desire understanding, which enables them to understand indirect requests or implicit desires of others. Therefore, teachers may use more hints and prompts to
scaffold their ToM and indirect request comprehension abilities. Future research may seek to test comprehension of information hints, because the combination of having information for a request, and the request being an indirect hint, are two hurdles that past research has indicated towards younger listeners’ comprehension (Ledbetter & Dent, 1988).

Conclusion

The current study has produced several novel results, which, with the help of future research, may suggest findings of interest to the world of linguistics, psychology and education. Although the study sought to identify differences in the types of requests, made by parents and teachers, which may effect children’s transition to school, only some differences were found. These differences include greater number of need/want statements and hints used in the classroom setting rather than at home. Although these differences involve two types of requests, indirect and hints, being the most implicit of requests. The increased use of these types of requests upon transitioning to kindergarten may hinder a child’s comprehension of these requests in the long run. Most of the classroom hints are requests for information, which are more difficult for children to understand than action hints. This leads the way to comprehension research regarding whether or not children can effectively comprehend and comply with these types of requests that are novel to them.

The researchers were correct in their hypothesis that direct requests, including questions, occur more frequently in the school setting. Some researchers would say that this is better for children because indirect requests may be more difficult to understand (Lazar et al., 1989). This finding, in conjunction with the finding that questions make up most of the information requests, suggests that questions are one of the most frequently used requests in both the classroom and home settings. This finding is significant because very few studies focus on the rate of questions used in the environment and the children’s comprehension of these questions. Results also suggest that imperatives are used more for on-task requests, contrary to past research. This is an important
finding because past research proposed that imperatives are used to correct behavior, which did not occur this study. Perhaps a different type of request was used more frequently for off-task behavior. It would be interesting to see if any of the requests occurred as off-task requests most frequently.

Finally, probably one of the most interesting and important findings in this study is the dramatic difference in the rate of requests found in the home and school atmospheres. Although there were not tremendous differences in the rates of different request types used, children were exposed to many more requests at school than at home. Thus, if children have a difficult time understanding or following requests at home, they may suffer great difficulty upon entering kindergarten and succeeding in that environment (Miloksy et al., 1986; Wilkinson et al., 1986). It is clear from this study that more frequent parental practice of different types of requests could ensure proficiency of request comprehension prior to entering kindergarten, helping to reduce the anxiety in this different atmosphere. Without request comprehension, children will be unable to succeed in the academic atmosphere. Although ToM research and comprehension research suggest that children can comprehend different types of requests, being barraged and overwhelmed with the great number of requests in school might confuse a child, or undermine a child’s attention. This provides future research openings in the fields of ToM and comprehension. These two fields might test children’s ToM ability and request comprehension ability when exposed to a significantly larger number than to what they are accustomed. This would further clarify whether or not this factor increases a child’s likelihood of having a poor transition to school.

Although, ToM did not play a large role in the study, it can and should play a large role in future research having to do with this topic. One important aspect of requests which the researchers were not able to observe is request compliance, and whether or not the speaker’s desires conflicted with the listener’s desires. Future research should use the same methodologies as the current study, adding comprehension tests and a variable of conflicting listener desire. Although Moore et al.
(1995) and other ToM research mediates the suggestion that children should be able to understand requests that conflict with their own desires, research has yet to focus directly on using requests for ToM research. Nor have they looked at specific types of requests, especially those requests which differ significantly between an environment in which they are accustomed (home) and one which is novel (school).

ToM ability, comprehension, and compliance have no role if children are unaware that a particular request is being designated to them. The current study found that overall, more non-designated requests were used throughout the study than designated requests, meaning that in most requests, it was unclear to whom the specific request was being given. It must be noted that due to study limitations, it is unknown as to whether more requests were designated with non-verbal movements or motions, such as actually pointing to the listener. Nevertheless, designation may not be as important in the home atmosphere when the situations are mostly one-on-one, like the mother-child interactions used in this study, because the child knows that the mother can only be talking to him/her.

However, this result may be very important regarding the classroom atmosphere. Results showed that teachers used more non-designated requests than mothers. In the classroom, most times one teacher is responsible for teaching and maintaining a classroom of multiple children. Depending on the set-up of the classroom and the specific activities, groups of children may be spread out among the room completing separate activities, such as a classroom that uses different learning stations, where children independently go from learning station to learning station completing different activities. With children moving around completing different activities, there are many distractions and opportunities for children to get off-track and misbehave. There are also many different instructions, which need to be given by the teacher and followed by the students.

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26 Researchers could not see the subjects, and therefore could not determine or recognize non-verbal designation of requests.
Thus, the increased presence of non-designated requests may decrease children’s ability to determine if a specific request is designated to him/her or to any of the people in the vicinity. If a child does not understand that a particular request is designated toward him/her, then the request will be completely ineffective, causing the teacher to have to repeat the request, wasting time and energy and possibly endangering children, if the request involves a dangerous situation. In the future, research should further examine the benefits, if any, of using designated requests more frequently in the classroom.

Socioeconomic status is another area which is worth examining further. Although in most tests SES was not significant, the test in which SES was a factor may provide important implications for the field of education. The finding that more off-task requests occur in low SES schools than in any of the other examined settings, suggests that students in this atmosphere are exposed to more requests regarding negative behaviors. In many instances, people assume that low SES schools have more problem behaviors and less academically skilled students. Perhaps part of the problem is in the increased use of off-task requests in this atmosphere, as compared to these children’s homes and other upper SES atmospheres. The perceived increase in behavior problems might be part of a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that if teachers comment more frequently on off-task behaviors, via requests, more might occur. Their perceived lack of academics might also be part of a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that they are exposed to more off-task requests than requests having to do with the actual academic activity at hand. More research could be done in this area to clarify these hypotheses.

One noteworthy issue which this study was unable to examine is the cultural variation of request style. The current study was unable to account for the cultural backgrounds or origins of birth of the teachers, mothers and children in this sample. Past research has indicated a cultural divergence of what is considered “appropriate” usage of different types of requests (Saenz et al., 1999). For example, Clancy (cited in Ervin-Tripp, 1982) found that in Japanese culture, young
children are frequently exposed to hints. Using this example, in conjunction with the results of the current study, it would seem probable that kindergarten students from a Japanese background would be accustomed to teachers’ use of hints in the American classroom, perhaps even more than the American children examined in this study, whose mothers used less hints than their teachers. This is just one example of cultural differences in request usage. Cross-cultural studies of teachers’ and mothers’ request styles must be executed because they hold very important implications. More and more families are immigrating to the United States, bringing with them native customs, language, and children who will be thrust into the American school systems. Perhaps more than Americans, these children, with English as their second language, will be forced to make difficult transitions into school. Thus, it is very important to determine the request styles of their parents and how teachers can work with those request styles, incorporating them into the classroom, thereby helping these students to communicate and succeed.

Overall, although request usage might be overlooked in the classroom or in the home, there are significant differences between these two settings. Differences in request usage may cause slight differences such as the need to revert to understanding information requests rather than relying on action heuristics (Shatz, 1978b), but differences in requests might cause as large a problem as creating a stereotype of low SES schools. Future research in the field of requests can help to solve these problems and allow for easier transitions from the home to school environment. Most past research has looked at some differences in requests between the two environments, but seldom has research looked at what contributes to these differences, and even further, what repercussions children may suffer due to specific differences.
References


Appendix A Coding Sheet

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