

Pre-Request Sequences Strategy in Women Administrators’ Discourse: An Indicator of Successful Communication

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Abstract

A Pre-Request strategy helps to predict the acceptance of a request before it is articulated, thereby aiding in the avoidance of communication failure and the establishment of harmonious relationships. This study examined the frequency and usage of Pre-Request strategies in the discourse of Women administrators concerning effective communication. The data were collected from sixty female administrative staff members holding positions at BPS-16 and above at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. The closed-ended questionnaire was crafted using a five-point Likert scale. After administering the questionnaire, the data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 26) and descriptive statistics were used for each statement. The present study’s sample excluded female administrative staff below BPS-16. The findings regarding the use of Pre-Request strategies were positive and indicated a consistent pattern of conditional usage. The results showed that the majority of female administrative staff members use Pre-Request strategies in their everyday discourse. Hence, the importance of Pre-Request strategy usage for developing positive outcomes in building relationships and maintaining successful communication was validated in the present study. In light of these findings, recommendations are proposed at the end of the paper.

Keywords: Communication, Speech acts, Adjacency pairs, Turn taking, Pre-request, Discourse, Interactive Directives, Culture, Administrators

INTRODUCTION

Conversation is more than the articulation of words, it is the use of language in socio-interactive situations (Mey, 2001). Participants often try to determine the chances of acceptance of a request before the request is formally formulated using a pre-request strategy to generate positive relational dynamics and reduce the chances of communicative failure. Initial interest in conversational interactions arose from observations of a certain tendency during the exchanges among the research team, and then spread to other interlocutors. Motivated by this recurrent phenomenon, we (researchers of the present study) set out on a systematic study of the connection between pre-requests and successful communication in professional settings, recognizing the key role of effective communication for career advancement. Review of extant literature shows a dearth of empirical data regarding pre-request usage among females in the administrative post, thereby

providing the motivation for the current study. Accordingly, the following research questions are investigated:

1. What is the role of pre-request sequence strategy in achieving effective communication?
2. How often do women administrators use pre-requests in their everyday conversation?

Objectives of the Study

The aims and objectives of this investigation are to:

1. Investigate the role of the Pre-Request sequences strategy in fostering effective communication.
2. Determine the frequency of Pre-Requests usage by women administrators in their everyday discourse.

Significance of the Study

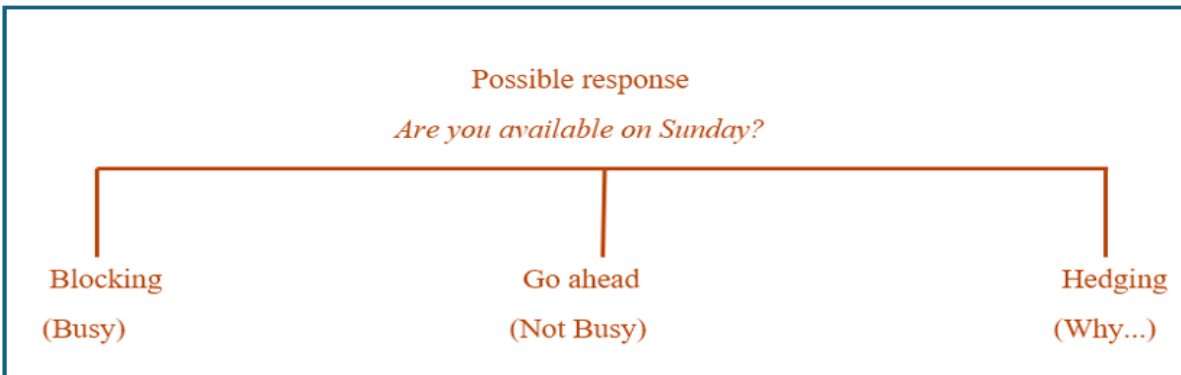
The relevance of pre-request dialogue in determining the success of communication is a new area of scholarly interest. This research aims to offer practical knowledge for ways to improve the strategic use of pre-requests in a professional context by individuals. The results will help to explain the role of pre-request patterns in strengthening interpersonal relationships and will shed light on the prevalence of the pre-request strategies in everyday communication. The potential benefits of the proposed model are deemed great in many different fields, from improving personal communicative competence to the development of academic and professional fields. For individuals, it can offer pathways to more effective speaking and listening by fostering an understanding of direct and indirect communication and conversational structures. In academic disciplines, such as linguistics, communication studies, education, psychology, sociology and anthropology, the model provides refined analytical perspectives on the use of language and social interaction. Applied fields such as artificial intelligence, natural language processing, law (especially forensic testimony analysis), business, and intercultural communications will benefit from advanced tools and capabilities for negotiation, comprehension and context-sensitive analysis. Ultimately, these insights will be useful to people who are involved in producing or studying language in different social situations.

Background of the Study

At its most basic level, communication is the total process of transferring information, ideas, emotions or intentions between two agents (Davis, 1967; Mathew, 2001). Communicative acts often take the form of greetings, introductions, and electronic correspondence and face to face interaction. Conversation is a unique subset in terms of interactivity, informality and turn-taking among several participants. Typical examples are people talking at the water cooler, friends arguing about a topic of presentation or family members exchanging remarks during a dinner. Each utterance often performs a specific illocutionary act, referring to the speaker's intended purpose or "doing" with language. These acts are categorized as assertive (statement of belief or fact, e.g. The meaning of the directives (command, e.g. "Close the door."), commissive (commitments, e.g., (I will help you.), expressive (affect displays, e.g. ("Thank you.'), and declaration (introductions of new states, e.g. "You're fired.") (Searle, 1969). A specialized directive illocutionary act is the request, the goal of which is to persuade the hearer to perform a desired action. Conversations are organized in sequences of related turns and the interrelation and communicative aims of the turns are investigated under the auspices of sequence organization (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Schegloff, 1991). The adjacency pair, i.e. a structure of two turns, one speaker's contribution immediately followed by another's, is one of the basic units of sequence organization, which

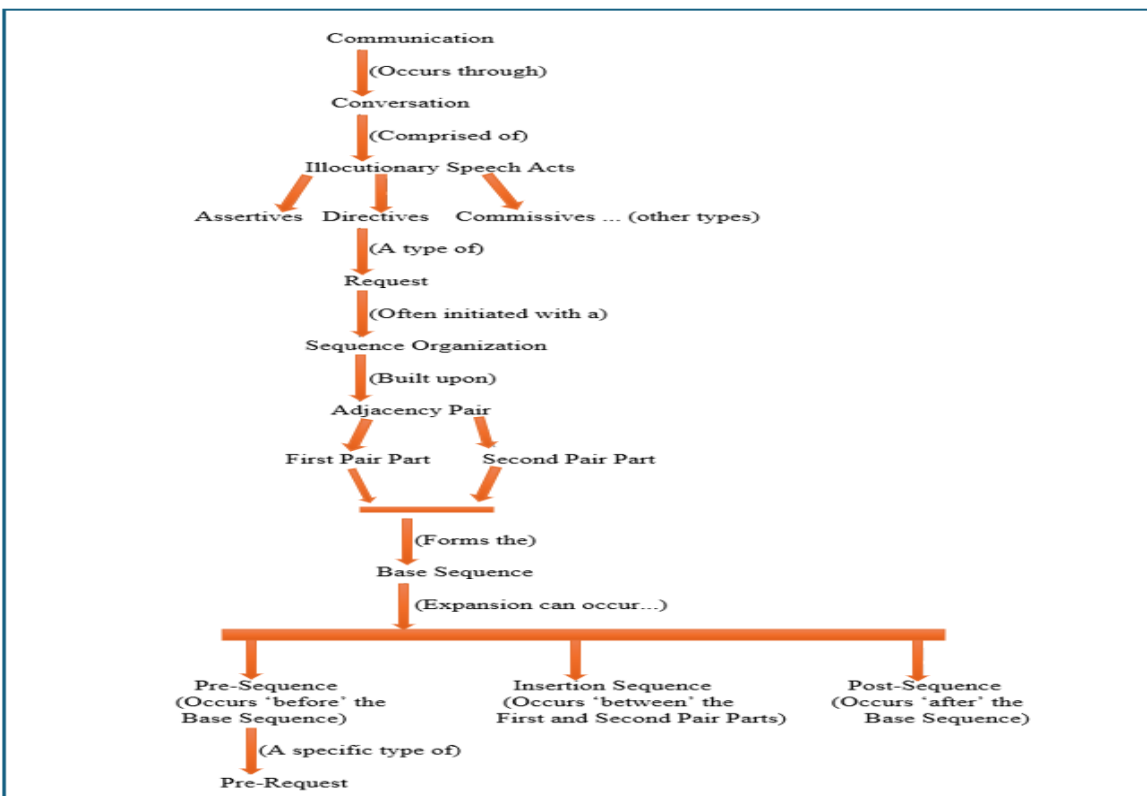
evokes expectations about the type of response (Richards & Schmidt, 1983). For example, the following pair consists of a question and an answer: What time is it? - It's afternoon. The adjacency pair is the basis on which more complex interactions are built; the base sequences may be supplemented by more turns before or after the base sequence (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). A turn preceding a base sequence forms a pre-sequence (Sacks, 1992), which prepares the ground of a conversation or checks for necessary conditions for its success (Schegloff, 1990) and has face-saving functions (Cutting, 2005).

Figure 1. Possible Responses of Pre-sequences (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 1995)



Pre- Sequences can elicit refusals, permissions or hedges, whilst insertions sequences provide clarification of the information preceding the second constituent. Post- sequences close the topic, evaluate outcomes, and/or initiate new topics (Schegloff & Sacks, 2007).

Figure 2. A Schematic Representation: From Communication to Pre-Request



The pre-request is one such specialized form of pre-sequence which is aimed at ascertaining the addressee's readiness to allow a subsequent request to be made. It probes availability, willingness or prerequisite conditions (Schegloff, 1995; 2007).

LITERATURE REVIEW

A systematic survey of current research on request strategies is necessary to contextualize the present research questions. The studies summarized below shed light on the complexity of pre-requests and their communicative functions in different varieties of languages and different cultural contexts. Bernsten (2002), using the Conversation Analysis, analyzed the use of pre-sequential interactions (invitations, requests, offers) in English as a second language (ESL) textbooks in order to give educators and authors CA-based insights into enhancing pedagogical quality. Indirectness is an area investigated in many research studies including Khalib and Tayeh (2014), whose work explored English requests among Malay university students. Data collected from discourse completion tests of forty Selangor higher education students found a tendency towards conventionally indirect strategies in interactions with instructors and peers which provided support for Brown and Levinson's face theory in that they propose politeness strategies to be a means to mitigate face threatening acts in Malayan cultural contexts.

Rossi (2015) examined interrogatives of the form *hai x* "do you have x" in informal Italian interactions, assessing the role of the interrogatives taking part in securing preconditions for successful requests. His analysis showed that the prosodic and syntactic features of pre-requests affect response types either inhibiting outcomes or making go-ahead responses easier, contributing to an enhanced understanding of request strategies and sequence organization.

Ruytenbeek (2019) in the context of relevance and politeness theory investigated indirect request contexts, and he reports that conventionalized indirect requests have a high relevance as a result of low cognitive costs in structural inference processes. Indirectness, not mainly to be polite, was argued to be used to avoid perceptions of rudeness in communicating, and thus, the most effective way to achieve communicative goals.

Revita et al. (2025) examined cultural nuances of pre-requests in Minangkabau language. The linguistic strategies in the form of authentic conversational contexts were analyzed in the study, and these strategies reflect the aspects of culture such as deference to social hierarchy, harmony, and indirectness. The authors suggest that these practices are based on culturally elaborate politeness conventions that are based on mutual respect and group cohesion. This work contributes to the field of pragmatics by providing information on the relationship between culture and language and speech acts, and also shows the importance of culture in cross-cultural communication, especially dealing with pre-request mechanism and Minangkabau speech convention "Kato nan Ampek."

The effect of Spanish and Chinese interactional styles on interlanguage pre-request sequences produced by Chinese speaking Spanish learners was examined by Wang (2025). Learners exhibited negative transfer and deviations from native Spanish usage in particular in terms of pre-requests about the availability and possession of recipients. They made more frequent use of Pre-Request asking for a favor, indicating diversity in their Pre-Request sequences and showing pragmatic transfer influenced by cultural differences, alongside verbosity in their organizational structure.

Despite the existing research on pre-requests, including those on textbooks, Malaysian students, cultural subtleties, specific linguistic forms, politeness and language learning (Bernsten, 2002; Khalib & Tayeh, 2014; Revita et al, 2025; Rossi, 2015; Ruytenbeek, 2019; Wang, 2025), there is still a paucity of research on the utilization of pre-requests by female administrators in professional contexts. The present study attempts to overcome this lacuna.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research distinguishes itself from prior studies by employing an innovative model rooted in Austin and Searle and Schegloff's work. This quantitative study involved sixty women working as administrative staff (above BPS-16) at The Islamia University of Bahawalpur. Participants were selected using a convenience sampling technique. A self-designed questionnaire served as the data collection instrument. To ensure the reliability, the questionnaire was piloted before its distribution to the selected sample. The questionnaire consisted of ten closed-ended items using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'Always', to 'Never'.

Reliability of the Questionnaire

To assess the reliability of the ten-item questionnaire, the questionnaire was administered to ten women administrators at IUB who were not included in the main study sample. The data collected from this pilot testing were analyzed using SPSS (Version 26). The resulting Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the ten questionnaire items was .893, indicating a high level of internal consistency and the strong reliability of the questionnaire.

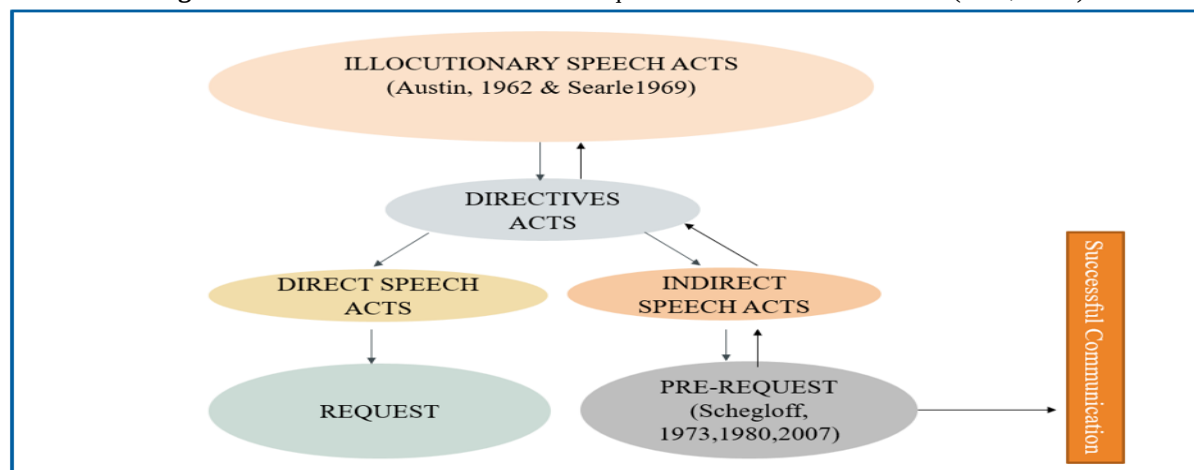
Table 1. Reliability of the Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.893	10

Theoretical Framework of the Research

The distinguishing feature of this study is the construction of the innovative model to synthesize Schegloff's interactional framework (1973, 2007) with Speech Act Theory expounded by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969).

Figure 3. The Interactive Model of Pre-Sequences and Indirect Directives (Zaib, 2025)



Illocutionary speech acts based on the theory of Austin and Searle form the basis of the Interactive Model of Pre-Sequences and Indirect Directives (IMPID). This model is the origin of all communicative interactions. It shows that in the extensive taxonomy of speech acts the model is concerned mainly with the force or the intended action of the speaker in their utterance. The diagrammatic downward arrow which emanates from the Illocutionary Acts ends with the Directive Acts, drawing attention to a particular subset of illocutionary acts whose main purpose is to elicit an action from the listener. The Directive Acts in turn split into two different modalities: Direct Speech Acts, which are explicit and unequivocal requests, and Indirect Speech Acts, that present requests in a different, and more oblique, manner. An arrow from Indirect Speech Acts leads to Pre-Request stage which implies indirect requests are characterized by opening turn intended to establish the context or to check the receptivity of the listener. Notably, there is no direct arrow connecting the Request component in Direct Speech Acts to the achievement of successful communication in the model. Rather efficacious communicative outcomes result from the interplay between the first Directive Speech Acts and the second Pre-Request Sequences. The model therefore shows that being able to navigate the Pre-Request Sequences efficiently is crucial for achieving a favorable communicative outcome.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The collected data were analyzed by using the Statistical Package version 26 to calculate frequencies and percentages with results presented in graphs and tables. The major findings of the study are summarized below.

Table 2.

Questionnaire Items	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
Relationship Building through Pre-Requests	5.0%	16.7%	60%	11.7%	6.7%
Face-Saving Function of Pre-Requests	5%	13.3%	38.3%	33.3%	10%
Relational Dependency of Pre-Request Use	3.3%	11.7%	58.3%	23.3%	3.3%
Pre-Requests and Communication Effectiveness	13.3%	21.7%	41.7%	23.3%	0%
Personal use of Pre-Requests	10%	20%	31.7%	30%	8.3%
Intentional use of Pre-Requests	6.7%	15%	31.7%	30%	16.7%
Pre-Requests and Anticipated Request Acceptance	3.3%	15%	35%	40%	6.7%
Preference for Directness over Pre-Requests (in Response)	11.7%	23.3%	35%	25%	5%
Perceived Necessity of Pre-Requests	1.7%	10%	43.3%	38.3%	6.7%
Observed Use of Pre-Requests by Others	0%	16.7%	58.3%	20%	5%

The analysis of the survey findings suggests that pre-requests are mainly understood and used as conditional and strategically deployed tool in the framework of professional correspondence, as opposed to universal and constant practices. Approximately 60% of the respondents reported that they use pre-requests "sometimes" for relationship building, and they are most commonly

perceived as mechanisms of protecting face (38.3% "sometimes," 33.3% "often," and 10% "always"). The use of pre-requests seems to be highly dependent on pre-existing relational dependency (58.3% "sometimes"), and is often used to maximize expected acceptance of a later request, and 40% of the respondents reported that they "often" use pre-requests for this purpose. Overall, respondents "sometimes" used pre - requests for personal reasons (31.7%), and considered them to be "sometimes" necessary (43.3%), noting that while pre - requests are generally seen as advantageous, their necessity and use vary for people and situations.

Table 3. Overall Findings on Pre-Requests

N	60
Mean	3.15
Median	3.00
Mode	3

Overall usage of Pre - Requests is reported in Table 2. The average number of questions the 60 respondents choose to answer is 3.15, and the median and mode are both 3, which implies that most of the respondents use Pre-Request at a medium frequency.

Figure 4. A Graphical Representation of Overall Results

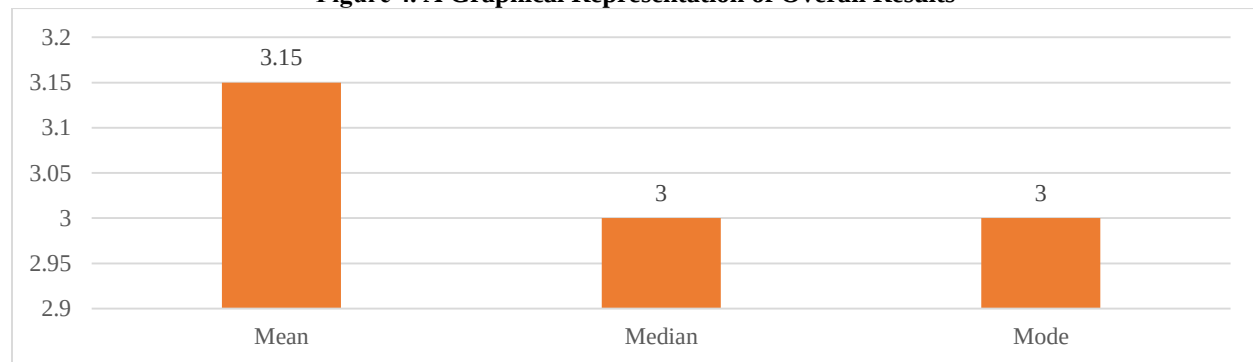


Figure 4 summarizes the statistical results in terms of the frequency of Pre-requests by the 60 participants. The mean is 3.15, the median is 3.00 and the mode is also 3. These results suggest that participants think that Pre-Requests would be an intermediary - frequency item, which is consistent with the "Sometimes" category of the Likert scale. The equality of the median and mode further implies intermittent usage among female administrators as opposed to rare or recurrent patterns.

DISCUSSION

The current study is a positive contribution to the literature in terms of providing critical insights into the role of Pre-requests among female administrators and their impact on successful communication. The empirical evidence suggests that Pre-Requests are simultaneously politeness strategies and persuasive mechanisms and they are thus effective in facilitating the initiation of requests and mitigating the risk of rejection. The data shows that most of the female administrators use Pre-Request in their verbal exchange. Whereas previous research dealt with pre-sequences in general, the present research directly links Pre-Requests to the communication processes of women in administrative positions. Findings from Bernsten (2002), Khalib and Tayeh (2014), Revita et al. (2025), Rossi (2015), Ruytenbeek (2019) and Wang (2025) confirm the prevalence of Pre-

Requests regardless of language and context. Consistent with past research, the present study proposes that Pre-Requests represent an important mechanism of countering face threatening acts and promoting politeness in social interactions. The results highlight a unique pattern among female administrators, a situation that previous academic studies have largely overlooked.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no previous research has examined the frequency of Pre-request usage among women administrators in a general or non-general context in Western or non-Western context. As a result, for the first time ever, this pioneering study charts new territory. It is predicated upon the Interactive Model of Pre-sequences and Indirect Directives (based on the work of Austin, Searle & Schegloff) but differs from those already existing which have usually replicated similar methodological designs. The finding of a large proportion of female administrators always using Pre requests is in very close agreement with the Interactive Model predictions. According to the model, indirect speech acts often precede pre-sequences; therefore, the results indicate that female administrators might use more of a non-direct communicative style as a natural intermediate step, using Pre-Requests. The causal arrow in this model from the Indirect Speech Acts to the Pre - Requests explains this observed tendency and highlights the efficacy of the pre-sequences in the preparation for an impending request. The use of such expressions as "Are you busy?" or "Did you see that email?" is a way of demonstrating that these administrators are relational workers: they find out the hearer's availability and prime the hearer for the forthcoming request, in accordance with the model's conceptualization of pre-sequences as instruments for successful communication.

In addition, the model describes the two-way nature of communication that involves pre-sequences. The responses to these Pre-Requests can be analyzed by this study to determine they influence how the women administrators then formulate their actual requests. For example, a reply of "no" to "are you busy?" can make the administrator more deferential in his or her request, or more cautious. Such outcomes would directly show the two-way relation of pre-sequences and indirect speech acts suggested in the model. Ultimately the model relates the effective use of pre-sequences to the sound communication. The results of the study suggest that such communicative strategy is widespread among female administrators. In other words, the results of this study in terms of frequency of occurrence of Pre-Requests in the discourse of female administrative staff is supportive of the Interactive Model of Pre-Sequences and Indirect Directives. They suggest that these staff members have a tendency to use the conversational techniques described in the model, and may prefer indirectness and use pre-sequences to facilitate effective interactions at work. The model provides a helpful framework for understanding the reasons and mechanisms for this observed communication pattern.

CONCLUSION

This research was meant to investigate the relationship between Pre-request usage and effective communication in the discourse of women administrators in Pakistan. The results show that most of the participants regularly use Pre-Requests as a regular feature when they want to be polite and maintain both the face of the requester and the requestee. Politeness therefore becomes not just an individual choice, but a professional necessity. Accordingly, the results support the role played by Pre-Requests in the development of harmonious, smooth relationships between co-workers and avoidance of communicative breakdowns. These outcomes may also become the basis for further enquiries.

Recommendations and Future Directions

Based on the findings of the study and framework of the Interactive Model of Pre-Sequences and Indirect Directives, there are a number of recommendations. Female administrative staff are to

develop a conscious awareness of the Pre-Request deployment taking into consideration the listener and additional factors, such as context and urgency, to ensure clarity and to reduce ambiguity. Flexibility in switching from direct to indirect communication and flexibility of style are both important as well. Training programs in administrative communication should incorporate the topics of indirect communication and pre-sequences in order to foster strong working relationships. Subsequent studies should address the use of Pre-request by gender, levels of hierarchy and the differential effectiveness of direct versus indirect requests, as well as the possible influence of culture on the Pre-request prevalence and perception. It is advisable to conduct parallel studies in other parts of Pakistan to increase the generality beyond the Bahawalpur context. The research could be extended to women professionals working at a variety of administrative and organizational levels in order to determine differential Pre-Request patterns. Future studies may use various data collection techniques, including direct observation, audio/video recordings, descriptive discourse analysis, and semi-structured interviews to try to gain a more comprehensive view of the results. Employing a mixed-methods approach of qualitative and quantitative methodologies may provide a richer insight into the Pre-Request utilization and functionality in a professional setting. Furthermore, future research should cover existing gaps by testing the factors that affect Pre-Request usage in different social contexts, languages and cultures. Lastly, investigating the specific strategies employed by women in leadership positions across different cultural settings would be particularly valuable.

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Author Contributions

FZ: Conceptualization, Designed Innovative Model, Data Analysis; SN: Literature Review, Proofreading

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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