



Research Article

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A Systematic Literature Review on Comparative Study of Request for the Past Ten Years (2012-2022)

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Abstract

This systematic literature review attempts to examine the current status, unsolved issues and future trend of the comparative study of request speech act for the past ten years (2012-2022). Based on the analysis of 186 studies, the findings are: 1) the status quo is that intralingual comparative studies of request are still very few and previous researches rely on DCT and CCSARP instruments too much; 2) unsolved issues include further investigation of intralingual comparative request, Asian languages, and the development of new or more advanced instrument; and 3) future trend is that more comparative studies of request need to be conducted on Asian languages, especially Mandarin and Malay from intralingual perspective and new or more advanced data collection and analysis instruments should be applied. This systematic literature review could help identify the research gap and unsolved problems in the current literature that calls for the further investigation of comparative request speech act.

Keywords: request, comparative study, compared languages, data collection instrument, data analysis instrument

1. Introduction

Request speech act is an inseparable activity in human beings' daily communication. People employ request speech act to fulfill their purposes or meet their needs. However, as Akmal et al. (2022) claims, performing a request is a tough job as there often exist unforeseen misunderstandings

between requester and requestee. It is necessary to investigate the request speech act so that better communication between people can be achieved.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), request speech act is type of face-threatening act (FTA). When requester asks requestee to do something, requester will inevitably impose the pressure on requestee. In this interconnected world, people who are from different countries or regions and different or similar cultures would behave differently when requesting. These cultural or linguistic differences may quite often cause communication breakdowns or misunderstanding between people. For this problematic nature of request speech act, comparative study of request speech act has attracted many researchers' attention and numerous studies have been conducted on this topic (Park et al., 2021; Elswiler, 2022; Halenko & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2022).

However, despite numerous studies on comparative study of request, it remains unknown what the status quo of comparative study of request is, what future trend for this topic is, and what issues need to be further addressed. This is the motivation for conducting a systematic review on comparative study of request. It aims to identify the status quo, unsolved issues and the future trend related to this topic.

This review can provide some insights for the future studies on request speech act and help them have a bird view of the development of comparative study of request speech act.

The structure of this article is organized as follows: first, systematic review method is introduced briefly; second, the methodology about this study is presented; third, we will present the results of comparative study of request in terms of three categories, namely cross-lingual, interlingual and intralingual type at the macro-level and the results of three themes in each category at the micro-level; finally, we will make conclusions and point out the status quo of current study, issues that remain to be solved and the future trend for this topic.

2. Systematic Literature Review Method and PRISMA

According to Kraus et al. (2020), a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) can be defined as "a review of an existing body of literature that follows a transparent and reproducible methodology in searching, assessing its quality and synthesizing it, with a high level of objectivity" (p. 1026). Literature review can lay the foundation for academic exploration. It can also help reader have an overview of a certain topic in a quick way. In addition, according to Xiao & Watson (2019), conducting literature review can help researchers have an in-depth and wide understanding of existing study of a topic and identify the gaps.

There are three stages that are involved in a systematic literature review: planning the review, conducting the review, and reporting the review (Keel, 2007). In planning stage, the need or motivation for a systematic review are identified, the questions that guide the review are proposed, and a review protocol is developed by researcher(s). In conducting stage, data identification, data abstraction and analysis, and data synthesis need to be done. In reporting review stage, a paper or report needs to be written for presentation and dissemination of the study.

Xiao & Watson (2019) summarized eight steps for conducting systematic literature review: (1) formulating the research problem; (2) developing and validating the review protocol; (3) searching the literature; (4) screening for inclusion; (5) assessing quality; (6) extracting data; (7) analyzing and synthesizing data; and (8) reporting the findings (p.102). Various researches have employed Xiao & Watson' (2019) eight steps to conduct systematic literature review on adaptation towards climate change (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2020), sustainable product attribute and consumer decision making (Bangsa & Schlegelmilch, 2020), and the definitions and challenges of rural tourism (Rosalina et al., 2021). We add one step to this process, which is to choose appropriate database. In this study, we will follow these nine steps to conduct a systematic review on comparative study of request. A modified version of conducting systematic review procedure is shown in the figure 1:

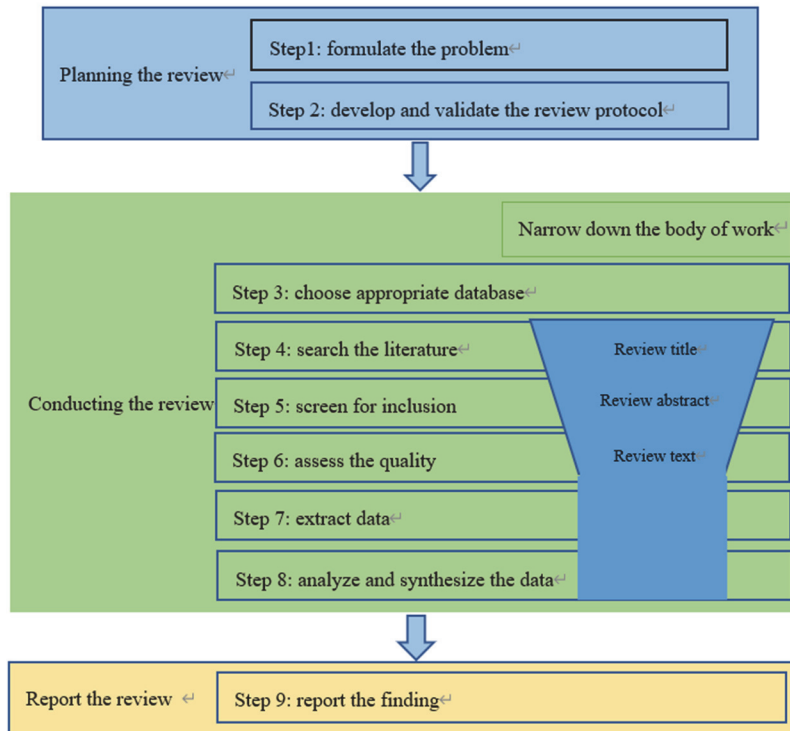


Figure 1: Process of systematic literature review
Source: Adapted from Xiao & Watson, 2019

Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) was originally proposed by Moher et al. (2009). It is like a road map that can best review previous studies and show how that literature review is conducted. PRISMA diagram includes four phases which are Identification, Screening, Eligibility and Inclusion (Moher et al., 2009). It is a standardized process for reporting systematic literature review (Wang et al., 2020). PRISMA has been used in various studies since its publication to facilitate reporting different types or aspects of literature review, such as abstract of literature review (Beller et al., 2013; Li et al., 2020), systematic reviews incorporating network meta-analysis (Hutton et al., 2015), or for waste animal fats as feedstock for biodiesel production (Andreo-Martínez et al., 2022). In this study, PRISMA diagram will be employed for reporting systematic review of comparative study of request.

3. Methodology

3.1 Step 1 Formulate questions

Three questions that this systematic literature review will address guide this study:

1. what is the status quo of comparative study of request regarding cross language, interlanguage and intra-language and three themes that appear in these studies?
2. what issues do the previous comparative studies of request rarely touch or remain unsolved?
3. what is the future trend for the development of comparative study of request?

3.2 Step 2 Develop review protocol

The protocol for this study includes the choosing appropriate database, searching literature, screening for the inclusion, assessing the quality, data extraction and data synthesis and analysis.

3.3 Step 3 Choose appropriate database

Scopus and Proquest are the databases that are used for collecting data in this study. Scopus is claimed to be “the largest single abstract and indexing (A&I) database in the world” (Boyle & Sherman, 2005, p.148). Although Web of Science (hereafter WoS) is also considered as an important database, Scopus has a larger journal coverage than WoS and most of journals indexed in WoS are also included in Scopus, especially Social Science and Arts and Humanities (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Most of relevant previous studies can be identified through reading title and abstract. Thus, So we choose Scopus over WoS and use Scopus as the main database to avoid the unnecessary duplication of searching.

Proquest provides access to tons of full-texts, abstracts, and indexes. It is “the largest single periodical resource available, bringing together complete databases across all major subject areas” (Leung et al., 2019, p.22). Another reason for choosing Proquest as the primary database lies in that it can provide more full-text articles than other databases, which is very helpful in Eligibility phase of PRISMA diagram.

Google Scholar is not as academic as the Scopus and Proquest are although it is very powerful and popular in searching literature. So WoS, and Google Scholar are used as the two supplementary databases.

3.4 Step 4 Search literature

In order to have a wider ranging examination and more up-to-date content, the studies that are covered in this review were published for past ten years from 2012 to 2022.

According to Ninomiya & Shadayeva (2020), almost all the comparative studies of request are about interlanguage study, cross cultural study and intralingual study. In order to have a thorough searching of the articles relevant to comparative study, nine sequential key words, namely “request, cross cultural”, “request, intercultural”, “request intracultural”, “request cross language”, “request, interlanguage”, “request, learners”, “request, EFL”, “request, variational pragmatics”, and “request, comparative” were typed in and the Boolean operator is OR. The basic search tool of Scopus and an advanced research tool of Proquest were used for searching.

In Scopus, we set the following limitations for searching: (1) the date range is from 25.10. 2012 to 25.10. 2022; (2) the abovementioned nine sequential key words are searched within article title, abstracts, and key words; (3) as this topic belongs to social science and arts and humanities area, so the search is limited to these two subject areas; (4) as to the document type, article, the search is limited to article, book chapter and book as they are more academic source; (5) with regard to source type, the search is limited to journal, book, and book series; (6) the language is limited to English. We got 749 articles in Scopus database in total.

In Proquest, the searching procedure is as follows: (1) the date range is from 25.10. 2012 to 25.10. 2022; (2) the abovementioned nine sequential key words were searched within title first, abstract second and all subjects and indexing at last; (3) The language is limited to English.

Within title search, we got 35 articles. Then within abstract search, we got 493 articles and within all subjects and indexing search, we got 21 articles. So we got 549 articles in total in Proquest database. After removing 57 duplicates, we got 492 articles in Proquest at last.

3.5 Step 5 Screen for inclusion

Inclusion criteria in this study are as follows: (1) the topic is about request speech act; (2) it is comparative study; (3) the published year is within 2012-2022

In order to further identify whether a study is relevant to comparative request or not, title and abstract were read first. If the relevance cannot be identified through them, then introduction and discussion part were read until it can be sure that this study belongs to comparative study of request. 183 papers in total are considered as the relevant literature and selected for data analysis.

The reporting of systematic review based on the modified PRISMA diagram can be shown in figure 2.

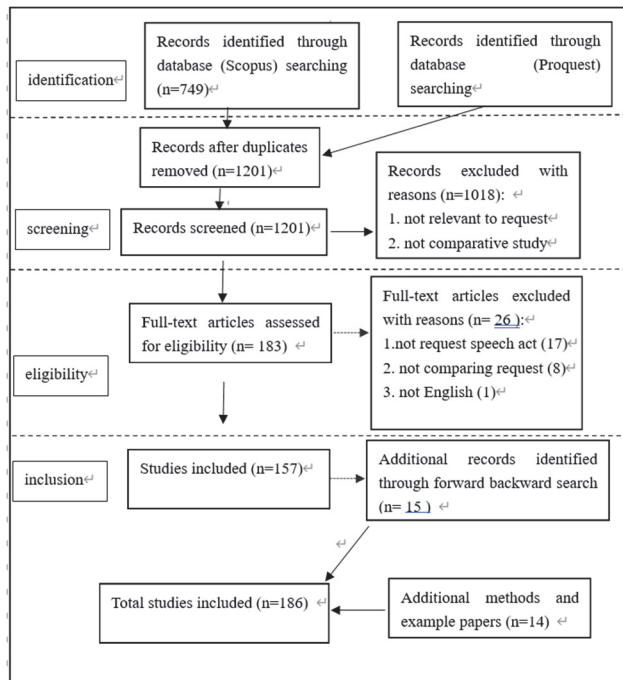


Figure 2: PRISMA diagram for reporting literature search and evaluation for inclusion

Source: Adapted from Xiao & Watson, 2019

3.6 Step 6 Assess the quality

In order to assess the quality of the collected data, books and papers that were published by reputable publishers are deemed as high-quality research. Reviews, report and presentations were excluded from our database. After reading full-text and examining the journals and publishers, 26 articles were excluded through this process. So 157 articles were included. 15 additional studies were identified through forward and backward search. 14 studies were added through additional methods and example papers. All together a total of 186 papers were included for data analysis of this study.

3.7 Step 7 Abstract data

Based on the collected data and also in order to further analyze the collected data, data abstraction was conducted based on Ninomiya & Shadayeva's (2020) definition for classifying comparative

linguistic studies. They are as follows: 1) if a study focuses on the similarities and differences of different languages' realization patterns of request speech act, it can be regarded as a cross lingual comparative study; 2) if a study focuses on the differences and similarities in realization patterns of a speech act between native speakers of one language and learners of that language, then it can be regarded as an interlingual comparative study; 3) if a study focuses on the realization patterns of request speech act within one speech community, it can be considered as intralingual comparative study.

The process of data abstraction is as follows: first, the data in the form of papers were categorized into three categories based on these three definitions. Then the previous studies that were broken down into three subtopics were presented, such as compared language, data collection instrument, data analysis instrument. The frequency of each category and distribution of three themes were identified.

4. Results

Based on the collected data, step 8 will be conducted in order to analyze and synthesize them on macro-level in section 4.1 section. Then we will analyze and synthesize them on micro-level in a more detail way in section 4.2. During this process, step 9 reporting the finding is also conducted. The results were calculated and tabulated through SPSS.

4.1 Results of three categories of comparative study of request

First, we will review these data from macro-level. Based on the collected data, they can be classified into three categories which are associated with comparative study of request, namely, cross lingual comparative studies, interlingual comparative studies and intralingual comparative studies.

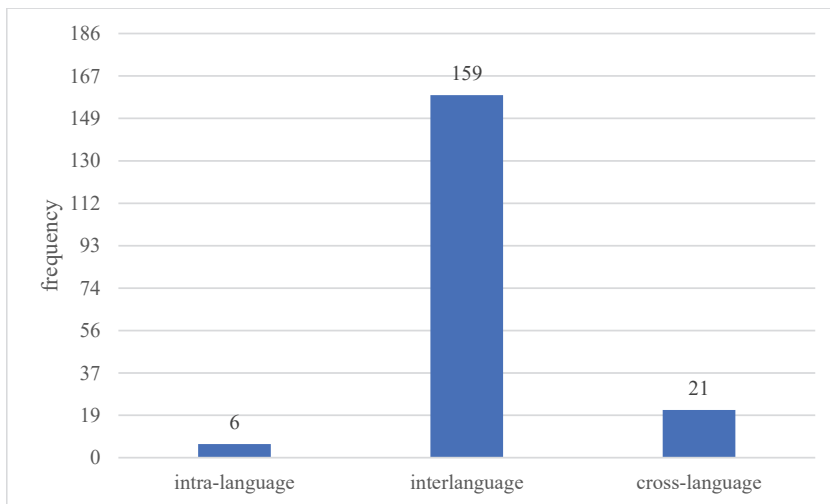


Figure 3: Frequency of three types of comparative study of request

As can be seen figure 3, among the total 186 researches related to comparative study of request, 159 are related to interlanguage study and there are 21 studies concerning cross-language study. While there are only 6 studies about the intra-linguistic studies.

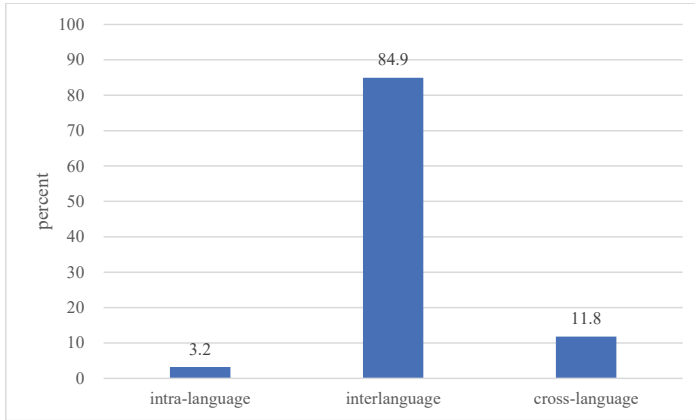


Figure 4: Distribution of three types of comparative study of request

Figure 4 shows the distribution of three categories of comparative study of request. As can be shown, interlanguage study is investigated most by the previous researches, accounting for 84.9%, followed by cross language study that occupies 11.8%. However, intra-language study is the least researched topic and only takes up 3.2%. The type that is studied most among three types of comparative study of request is interlanguage (Kang et al., 2021; Siddiqa & Whyte, 2021), while intra-language type (Schoppa, 2022) is studied least.

4.2 Results of three themes in three categories

After reviewing previous studies from the macro-level, now we will review them on the micro-level. To have a closer inspection of previous studies, three themes are included in above mentioned three categories of comparative study of request. They are compared language, data collection instrument and data analysis instrument. We will present the results about these three themes first.

4.2.1 Three themes in intra-language study

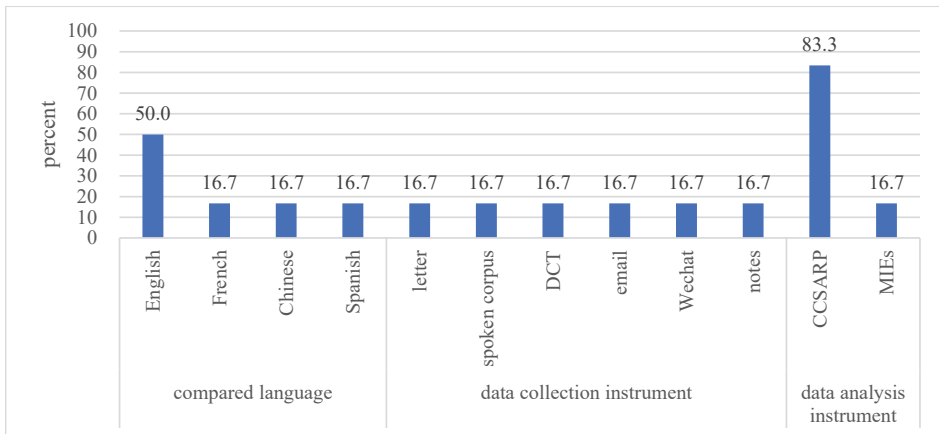


Figure 5: Overall distribution of three themes in intra-language

Figure 5 shows the distribution of compared language, data collection instrument and data analysis instrument in intra-linguistic request study.

(1) compared language

In terms of compared language, it involves four languages, namely English, French, Chinese and Spanish. As is shown in the figure 4, English language accounts for 50%. French, Chinese, and Spanish take up 16.7% respectively. English was studied most by the previous researchers (Elsweiler, 2022).

(2) data collection instrument

With respect to data collection instrument, there are six data collection instruments that are used for data collection. Each of them accounts for 16.7%. Since there are only few studies about intra-language, it is hard to tell which data collection tool is used most frequently and which one is used least frequently.

(3) data analysis instrument

As to data analysis instrument, two data analysis instruments are employed, namely CCSARP and MIEs. As is demonstrated in Figure 4, the difference between CCSARP and MIEs in the frequency of use is striking and CCSARP is employed much more frequently than MIEs. CCSARP accounts for 83.3 %, while MIEs only occupies 16.7%. CCSARP was the most frequently employed framework by the previous studies (Merrison et al., 2012).

4.2.2 Three themes in interlanguage

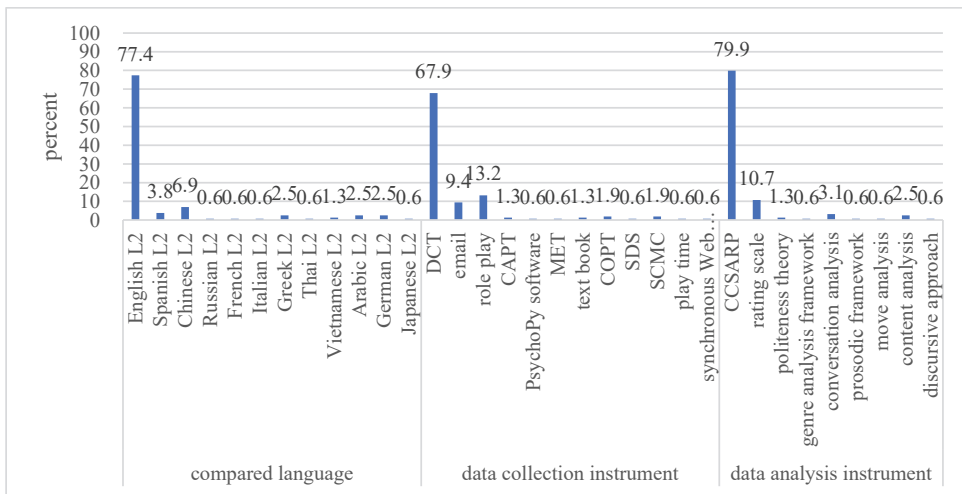


Figure 6: Overall distribution of three themes in interlanguage

Figure 6 shows the distribution of compared language, data collection instrument, and data analysis instrument in interlinguistic request study.

1. compared language

With regard to the compared language, thirteen languages are investigated and compared as the L2. Among them. English L2 is the most investigated one, accounting for 77.4%. Compared with English, other languages occupy the much smaller proportion. Chinese L2 (6.9%) is the second researched language, followed by Spanish L2 (3.8%), Greek L2 (2.5%), Arabic L2 (2.5%) and German L2 (2.5%), Vietnamese (1.3%). French, Russian, Italian, Thai and Japanese as L2 only take up 0.6% respectively. From the above results, we can see that most studies on interlanguage pragmatics focus on learning/teaching English (Akmal et al., n.d.;

Meng & Szczepek Reed, 2020) as a second/foreign language, while interlanguage characteristics of Asian languages (Wen, 2018) as a second/foreign language are under-examined.

2. data collection instrument

Regarding data collection instrument, twelve data collection instruments are employed in interlinguistic request study. As is shown in the Figure 2, DCT (67.9%) is the most preferred data collection instrument by previous researchers. Role play (13.2%) and email (9.4%) are the second and the third employed data collection instrument. Other data collection instruments are used much less, for instance CAPT (1.3%), PsychoPy software (0.6%), MET (0.6%), textbook (1.3%), COPT (1.9%), SCMC (1.9%), play time (0.6%) and synchronous Web conferences (0.6%). DCT was used most frequently (Qadha et al., 2021; Usó-Juan, 2021).

3. data analysis instrument

In terms of data analysis instrument, nine instruments are used in interlinguistic request study. Among them, CCSARP (79.9%) is the most used and outnumbers other data analysis instruments. Rating scale (10.7%) ranks second, followed by conversation analysis (3.1%) and content analysis (2.5%). Compared with them, other data analysis instruments account for a much smaller proportion, for example politeness theory (1.3%), genre analysis framework (0.6%), prosodic framework (0.6%), move analysis (0.6%), and discursive approach (0.6%). CCSARP was used most frequently (Ren, 2019; Timpe-Laughlin & Dombi, 2020).

4.2.3 Three themes in cross-language

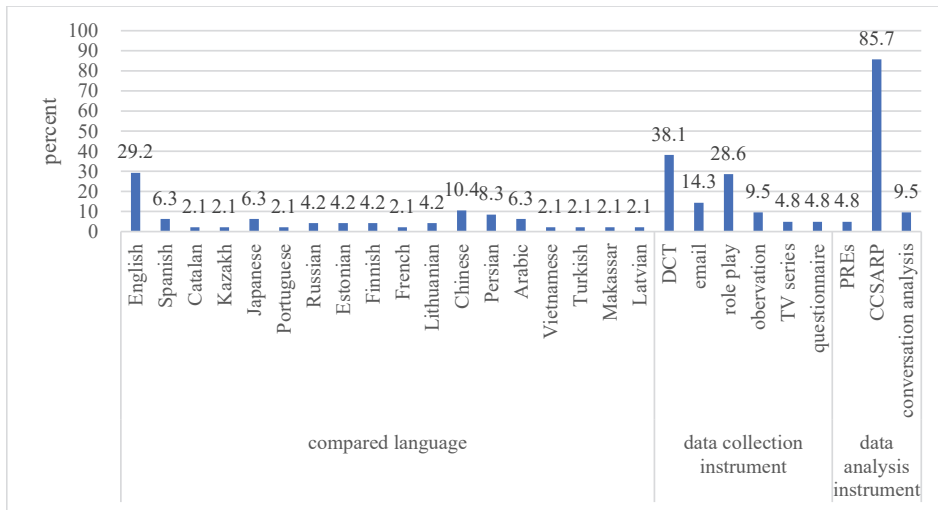


Figure 7: Overall distribution of three themes in cross-language

Figure 7 shows the distribution of compared language, data collection instrument, and data analysis instrument in cross linguistic comparative study of request.

1. compared language

As to the compared language, there are nineteen languages that are compared by the previous researchers. Among them, English (29.2%) is examined most frequently, followed by Chinese (10.4%), Persian (8.3%), Spanish (6.3%), Japanese (6.3%), and Arabic (6.3%). Other languages occupy a smaller proportion, namely Russian (4.2%), Estonian (4.2%), Finnish (4.2%), Lithuanian (4.2%), Catalan (2.1%), Kazakh (2.1%), Portuguese (2.1%), French (2.1%),

Vietnamese (2.1%), Turkish (2.1%), Makassar (2.1%), Latvian (2.1%). English is again the most compared language (McCarthy, 2018; Sulastri & Sulaiman, 2020).

2. data collection instrument

With regard to data collection instrument, six instruments are employed. As can be seen in the Figure 6, DCT (38.1%) accounts for the largest proportion. Role play (28.6%) occupies the second place, followed by email (14.3%) and observation (9.5%). Other instruments, such as TV series, and questionnaire take up 4.8% respectively. DCT was used most frequently (Pajusalu et al., 2017; Schalkoski-Dias & Godoy, 2018).

3. data analysis instrument

In terms of data analysis instrument, only three kinds of instruments are used by previous researchers, namely PREs, CCSARP, and Conversation Analysis. As can be seen in the Figure 6, CCSARP (85.7%) is used much more frequently than PREs (4.8%) and Conversation Analysis (9.5%). CCSARP was also employed most frequently (Ninomiya & Shadayeva, 2020; Ren & Fukushima, 2020).

5. Discussion

The results will be discussed based on the collected data of three categories of comparative study of request and three themes in them.

5.1 Discussion of three categories of comparative study of request

From the above analysis, it can be seen that compared with cross lingual and intralingual studies on request, interlingual studies are investigated much more. The reason why so many researchers conducted interlanguage studies lies in its educational feature since interlanguage is closely related to teaching and learning of L2. Education is such an important and common topic for people all over the world. Many studies involve comparing request in L2 with that in L1 or the learners' mother tongue (Vassilaki & Selimis, 2020; Ajabshir, 2021; Halenko & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2022).

The explanation for cross linguistic study is much less examined than interlingual study is that cross language needs to compare two languages that are usually spoken by people with different nationalities. It is more difficult to conduct this type of study as it takes time and money to go to another country for data collection. While interlinguistic study is relatively more convenient and less costly compared to cross-linguistic study.

The reason for why there is so little attention paid to the intralingual studies maybe is that not so many researchers realize the significance of conducting this kind of study or they hypothetically resume that there is little variation or difference in this kind of study.

5.2 Discussion of compared languages in comparative study of request

As is mentioned in the results, the majority of comparative studies of request have been conducted on English (Nugroho et al., 2021) or European languages, such as French (Annan, 2022), Greek (Savić et al., 2021), or Spanish (DiBartolomeo, 2021). English is the dominant language that is investigated most by the previous scholars. One explanation may lie in English's international language status. Since English plays such an important role in international communication, it is reasonable to know that English is also most widely researched language. As to the reason why European languages are more examined, it is maybe because the many linguistic researchers are from European countries and these researchers would choose their mother tongue as the first choice for their study. So Western European languages received much more attention than Asian languages. Another reason is that most of literature on Asian languages have been written in languages, other than English. For instance, a lot of comparative study of request in Chinese are written in Chinese.

5.3 Discussion of data collection instrument in comparative study of request

DCT data collection tool occupies a dominant position in comparative study of request. Previous researchers either use written DCT (Bagherkazemi & Harati-Asl, 2022), oral DCT (Šegedin Borovina, 2017), or multichoice DCT (Sofwan, 2017). DCT was originally developed by Blum-Kulka (1982) to examine the speech act realization patterns of the native speakers of Hebrew, English-speaking learners of Hebrew and Australian, British, American and Canadian native English speakers. Our study supports the claim that DCT has been the most frequently used instrument for collecting data since its appearance (Liu et al., 2021).

As can be seen, email is also used as a data collection instrument, but it is used only in studies when investigating the request in email. Multimedia Elicitation Task (MET) (Osuka, 2021) and Cartoon Oral Production Task (COPT) (Vassilaki & Selimis, 2020) are also used as the data collection tool. Similarly, compared with DCT instrument, these kinds of instrument are still employed much less.

5.4 Discussion of data analysis instrument in comparative study of request

CCSARP is the most frequently used data analysis instrument in comparative study of request. Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) was initially launched by Blum-Kulka et al. (1984). This project aims to examine two speech acts (request and apology) and tries to establish the realization patterns of them. Since the original motivation of developing CCSARP is to compare request speech act, it is very suitable to analyze the data of request speech act. This is one of reasons why so many researchers adopted this framework as the data analysis tool.

5.5 Discussion of the current status, unsolved issues and future trend

The current status of comparative study of request is that 1) as to type of comparative study of request, intralingual comparative study of request is still much underexamined; 2) in terms of compared language, most researches still compare English with the researchers' mother tongue. Some researchers have shifted their attention to middle-east languages, for instance Arabic and Asian languages, such as Malay, Indonesian, and Chinese; 3) with regard to data collection and data analysis instrument, previous studies still rely on DCT and CCSARP too much.

As to the unsolved issues, there are three. Firstly, too little attention is paid to the comparative study of request from intra-lingual perspective. Most comparative studies of request were conducted from interlingual perspective, followed by cross linguistic perspective. Secondly, some Asian languages, such as mandarin and Malay are not investigated enough. From the above analysis, we can see that comparative study of request on Asian languages are much fewer. If we have closer examination on Chinese, it can be found that intralingual comparative studies of request on Chinese are still very few. Although the compared Chinese language accounts for 7% in interlingual study and 9.8% in cross linguistic study, it is still much fewer compared with English and European languages. There is no comparative study of request about Malay from intralingual perspective. So Mandarin Chinese and Malay especially remain a paucity of evidence. Thirdly, more advanced data collection and analysis instruments, other than DCT and CCSARP are not developed. Although there are some researchers that employed a more discursive approach, for instance, Conversation Analysis (Sulastri & Sulaiman, 2020; Al-Gahtani, 2017) as the analytical tool to compare the sequential organization of request, other data analysis tools are employed much less.

Future trend can be discussed from the following the three aspects. The first is about intralingual and intra-cultural aspect. From the abovementioned analysis, it can be seen that intralingual regional varieties of request realization are much less investigated. So future studies should pay more attention to this sub-area of study. Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) argue that the studies of speech acts need to deviate from the western cultures. So future researchers should pay

more attention to studies in Asian cultures, especially the intracultural studies. Conducting comparative studies from intra-cultural perspective is a relatively new angle and worth trying. The second aspect involves in compared language. As mentioned above, most comparative studies of request dominantly focus on comparing English. So it is necessary to extend the examination to other Asian languages. So future studies could pay more attention to this respect. The third aspect is concerned about data collection and analysis instrument aspect. With regard to data collection instrument, future researchers can also employ or develops some new and more advanced data collection and analysis instruments, other than DCT and CCSARP. In addition, more studies can be conducted to see if CCSARP can be used for analyzing the intralingual and intracultural data and to test its applicability in this intralingual data.

6. Conclusion

This study conducts a relatively in-depth and thorough examination of comparative study of request over the last ten years (2012-2022) through systematic literature review method.

This study can offer a bird view for the researchers who just step into this area and let them know the current status and future trend of comparative study of request. For the researchers whose interest lies in comparative study of request, this study can help them understand the status quo, unsolved issues, and future trend of comparative request of study that need further investigation.

However, no study is perfect and this study is no exception. The limitations that need to addressed in this study are as follows. Firstly, since in Scopus coverage there are some biases against some languages and countries (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016), this will influence the comprehensiveness of literature review on this topic. Secondly, According to Mongeon & Paul-Hus (2016), both Social Sciences (SS) and Arts and Humanities (A&H) are underrepresented in Scopus. So the collected data might not reflect the full picture of comparative study of request as some relevant studies are not covered by Scopus. The third limitation is that we mainly employ Scopus and Proquest as the database. The findings could be more convincing if more databases are included for searching.

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