THE EFFECT OF IMPOSITION ON CHILDREN MAKING,

GRANTING AND REFUSING REQUESTS

by

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ABSTRACT

Through the use of social acts (e.g., excuses, justifications and pauses) adults preserve

relationships, 'smooth the waters' and signal the potential inconvenience of an upcoming

request. Claims have been made that adults use more social acts when making

requests of high versus low imposition. When granting requests, adults are generally

brief, whereas refusing often involves excuses, justifications, 'er's', 'um's' and apologies,

etc. which serve to soften the blow of the refusal. To explore whether children will

perform in this differential manner typical of adults, 114 children aged 5 – 13 years made

and responded to requests of varying imposition. Analysis of transcripts showed that

children used more total acts and more different acts when making high versus low

imposition requests and when refusing requests versus granting requests. Older children

used more acts and more different acts than younger children.

DEDICATION

To Henry, Will, and Jacob

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I thank the faculty and staff of Simon Fraser University for this opportunity to improve my ability to think.

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INTRODUCTION

Through social interaction children develop an understanding of the psychological world (Carpendale & Lewis, 2004; Turnbull & Carpendale, 1999). Making and responding to requests are among the earliest social acts performed by infants and young children (Bernicot & Marcos, 1993). The ability to make and respond to requests is essential for social interaction and normal social development. Close examination of the development of children's ability to make and respond to requests is therefore an important area of research.

Children's requests have been studied from a number of perspectives. Although requests are not in and of themselves polite, politeness is often the focus of studies in children's requests (Axia, 1991). Many politeness studies in developmental pragmatics have been inspired by the universal model of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978/1987). Part of their model describes factors involved in people's experience of the degree of imposition of a request, such that the imposition of a request is affected by the status of the participants, how well they know each other and the level of imposition that is culturally assigned to the particular act associated with the request.

An important aspect underlying the universal model of politeness is the notion of positive politeness versus negative politeness. Where requests are concerned, positive politeness means showing positive regard for the other and negative politeness means

showing one's intention not to impose on the other person (Turnbull, 2003). Consider the following example where M is asking for W to answer a ringing telephone:

M: Would you mind getting that for me please? My hands are wet.

In contrast to an unadorned version of this request, such as 'get that', M shows positive politeness by saying 'would you mind' and 'please'. In this way, M conveys that W. is important and held in positive esteem. Negative politeness is also illustrated in this example when M says 'my hands are wet'. That her hands are wet provides good reasons for her not answering the phone herself, which expediently conveys to W that M would not easily, and without good reason impede on the liberty of W. Negative politeness regarding requests means not only providing good reasons for the request and its accompanying imposition, but also ensuring that the act of making the request itself is expedient and does not impede on the other person's time. This might mean using timesaving pre-requests that project forthcoming requests and their potential imposition.

Several studies in developmental pragmatics (Ervin-Tripp, Guo, & Lampert, 1990; Ladegaard, 2004) examine politeness in children's requests in terms of the universal model of politeness, especially regarding cultural (Bernicot, 1991) and gender differences (Ervin-Tripp, 2001). Researchers taking this perspective (Ledbetter & Dent, 1988; Garton & Pratt, 1990) have also studied how children come to understand indirect requests such as 'I feel a draft in here' as opposed to direct requests 'Please close the window'. For example, children rated indirect requests as more polite than direct requests (Ervin-Tripp, 2001).

Developmental pragmatists consider structure in talk to be as important and sometimes even more important than content. How things are said matters along with what is said. This means that structures of talk such as repetitions, pauses, er's, um's, uh's, well's, gee's etc. that are often considered evidence of disfluency (Meyer, 1992; Oomen & Postma, 2001) are reinterpreted as hesitation markers or mitigating structures and are regarded as important structures of talk, therefore worthy of study. Pragmatists hold that pauses and er's and um's may serve various mitigating functions when the goals of social interactants threaten to impede their freedom or dignity. For example, pauses and er's and um's delay the threatening social act, thereby conveying reluctance on the part of a person to make a social act that might hurt the feelings of another person.

A particular view of talk known as the social pragmatic model (Turnbull, 2003) facilitates an examination of the structure and details of talk. From this social pragmatic perspective, participants in talk are co-creating and co-constructing their "images of themselves, the other, their relationship, and their culture; that is, participants in talk co-construct their personal, social and cultural worlds" (Turnbull, 2003, p. 17). This means that in addition to conveying information, people are accomplishing social acts that create relationships and realities through talk. In the method that follows from this approach, structure and details of talk are considered and examined along with social acts and many other aspects of talk. The social pragmatic model holds that participants are engaged in on-line, co-construction of meaning, and that meaning does not exist outside of the interaction. From this perspective, a study of children's understanding of indirect versus direct requests, for example, becomes problematic. The concept of indirect versus direct meaning assumes that children must first understand the direct or

literal meaning of the request and then infer the indirect meaning. The social pragmatic model rejects the assumptions of encoding and decoding literal meaning of talk and rather claims that meaning is co-constructed by participants through talk. The present study adopts the social pragmatic model to examine whether children of varying ages make, grant and refuse requests of varying imposition differentially.

According to Brown and Levinson (1978/1987), adults perform more social acts and use more mitigating structures when making requests of high versus low imposition. The term social acts refers to all acts that we do in talk to accomplish social interaction such as greeting, informing, questioning, confirming, making requests and refusing requests. Social acts in and of themselves are not necessarily polite. Those social acts oriented to politeness especially when making and refusing requests include thanking, saying please, making excuses and justifications. People also use mitigating structures such as pauses and er's and um's to convey politeness when making and refusing requests. The claim is that adults use more social acts, including mitigating structures, such as pauses and er's and um's, when making high imposition versus low imposition requests in order to preserve the relationship, acknowledge the familiarity or status of the other person and signal the potential inconvenience of an upcoming request (Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987). Ostensibly it is important that people in talk acknowledge the imposition in a request to show value and consideration for the other person's time, freedom and dignity.

Consider the following example in which A is making a request of B (Turnbull, 2003, p. 123). Pauses are shown in brackets by length such that (2.0) denotes a 2 second pause and (.) denotes a very brief pause, 1/10th of a second.

A: um (.) thanks for doing *this* (.) if you could just (1.4) also do the
following (.) um I actually (.) need this for one thirty so if it's
possible...

B: oh

A: unless you're um

B: oh no

A's request is softened with a show of gratitude for a prior act. A perhaps
attempts to minimize the imposition of the request with 'just' as if to say that there are no
other pending requests, although this does not appear to be the case as 'one' is needed
for 'one thirty'. A's utterances 'so if it's possible' and 'unless you're um' imply that the
granting of the request is not taken for granted and that B has the freedom and dignity to
refuse the request. The number of pauses and hesitations on the part of A, particularly
the long 1.4 second pause that B does not take as an opportunity to speak serve to
smooth the waters and soften the blow of the potentially imposing request.

In addition to the evidence regarding mitigating structures such as pauses, there
are claims that adults often use pre-sequences when making high imposition requests
(Brown & Levinson, 1978/87). A pre-sequence is the first part of a sequence in talk that
projects a forthcoming action, but does not itself perform that action. Sometimes these
pre-sequences can be clearly identified as pre-requests, in that they project that a
request is forthcoming, (for example, "Are you free tomorrow?"). Pre-sequences and
pre-requests can be used in the practice of positive politeness to show positive regard
by showing that the other person is important enough to receive warning that a request
is imminent. A pre-sequence or pre-request serves negative politeness by (a) delaying
the production of a request which thereby conveys reluctance on the part of the speaker,

(b) potentially conveying the extent of the imposition of the request, (c) providing an opportunity for the other to decline hearing a request or guess what the request might be, and grant it or refuse it without the actual request ever being uttered. Indeed, it is generally accepted that an adult asking for a loan from a friend of $100.00 will use more social acts such as pre-requests and justifications than if the loan were for $10.00 (Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987). Other acknowledgements of the other person and the degree of imposition of the request which tend to soften the blow of the impact of the degree of imposition of the request when adults make high imposition requests take the form of pauses, 'er's', 'um's' and 'well's'. For the most part, pre-requests, and 'er's' and 'um's' are noticeably absent from low imposition requests.

Consider the following example in which D makes a low imposition request of H:

D: Can I use your computer later?

H: Yeah. Yours sick?

D's request to use the computer is straightforward and does not contain pre-requests, pauses or mitigating structures, contrasting with the previous high imposition request.

When adults refuse requests, they rarely use a bald-faced 'no' (Turnbull & Saxton, 1997; Turnbull, 2001). Such a response to a request might be interpreted as rude, spiteful or perhaps even playful, depending on the relationship. Rather, adults often hedge, pause and use excuses when declining requests, producing a longer, more drawn out response, including pauses, excuses, 'er's', 'well's' and 'um's'. Consider the following example where R, a researcher, while requesting S, a student, to participate in a study is providing details regarding the time (example from Turnbull, 2003, p. 69):

The colons indicate a drawing out of the vowel sound.

R: ...takes place this Saturday from seven o'clock in the morning 'til about ten-thirty

S: (1.1) oh::I have a soccer tournament this weekend

R: oh I see

S: so sorry about that

S's refusal contains pauses, hesitation, an apology, and an excuse. In fact, even though R clearly interprets S's response as a refusal, S does not actually say 'no'. S's structures serve to soften the blow of the refusal, show awareness of the feelings of the other person and maintain the relationship.

In contrast, when adults grant requests their responses are typically short, sweet and to the point (Turnbull, 2001). Granting requests does not usually involve mitigating structures such as pauses,' er's' and 'um's'. This is shown in the following example in which a student (S) makes a request of a professor (P) (Turnbull, 2003 p 120).

S: Would it be okay to show your nursery clips in my tutorial?

P: Sure go ahead.

P's granting of the request is straightforward and devoid of mitigating structures. There are no pauses or 'er's' and 'um's'.

Structures such as 'er's', 'um's' and 'uh's' in children's talk are often judged to be evidence of disfluency (Ambrose & Yairi, 1999; Gordon, 1991; Brutten & Miller, 1988). Disfluency in fluent children's talk is thought to reflect developmental hesitations of a child learning to talk or not knowing what to say in a given situation. There are many cognitive and neural theories proposed to explain the phenomenon (Ambrose & Yairi,

1999). However, from the perspective of the social pragmatic approach taken in the present study, the details and structure of children's talk are important aspects of children's developing competencies in social interaction (Turnbull & Carpendale, 1999). Structures coded as disfluencies in otherwise fluent children (Ooman & Postma, 2001) may in fact be part of what children are learning as they learn to manage social situations, especially those situations involving the granting, refusing and making of requests. The present study examines whether children of varying ages will produce significantly more social acts and mitigating structures when making requests of high versus low imposition. Further, whether children grant requests in a short sweet and to the point manner and refuse requests using mitigating structures and more social acts is examined.

METHOD

Participants

One hundred and fourteen children (51 girls and 63 boys) ranging in age from 5 to 13 years (mean age 111.25 months) participated in the study. The mean age for girls was 112.25 months. The mean age for boys was 110.43 months. For the purposes of analysis the sample was divided into four age groups, with 21 children aged 5-6 (mean age 70 months), 37 children aged 7-8 (mean age 95 months), 24 children aged 9-10 (mean age 121 months), and 32 children aged 11-13 (mean age 148 months). The sample comprised children from the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada. The children were from middle-income families with the majority being Caucasian.

All children needed to either agree to the request, which was designed to elicit an acceptance and refuse the request, which was designed to elicit a refusal. There were nine children (5 girls and 4 boys) who were tested but not included in the study because they either refused the request which was designed to elicit an acceptance (2 girls aged 10 and 12) or agreed to the request, which was designed to elicit a refusal (1 girl aged 5, 2 girls aged 8, 1 boy aged 9 and 2 boys aged 10).

Role-play Method

A role-play method was used to collect the samples of the children's performance during the manipulation of the imposition of requests. It has been noted in the literature that role-playing experiments tend to elicit a greater proficiency in verbal persuasive strategies than naturalistic observation studies (Axia, 1996). Taking this into account, much effort was put into making the role-play experience as natural as possible (Turnbull, 2001). This method simulated social situations familiar to children in most parts of North America. Telephone role-play was selected as most suitable because children in middle-income families tend to be familiar with the telephone. A distinct advantage of telephone role-play in this study is that it provided the opportunity to introduce other children's voices without using children as confederates (the taped voices were provided by actors, a boy and a girl), and it created a sensible framework for the various taped voices being used as stimuli. Using taped voices as stimuli allowed for the rapid collection of several speech samples relating to different manipulations.

Apparatus

The data were collected with a prop telephone set up to provide familiar telephone sound effects (dial tone, number entry tones and ringing), and voices heard through the receiver, just as with a real-life telephone. The voices were those of actors making requests of varying imposition or answering the telephone when the children made requests of varying imposition. A tape player providing the voices and sound effects was connected to the prop telephone and controlled with a discrete foot pedal four feet away. A speaker connected to the telephone permitted all the telephone

sounds and taped voice conditions to be heard in the room as well as through the handset. A tape player recorded all the sounds in the room, capturing the sound effects, the taped voice conditions, the children's voices and the researcher's voice. This tape became the raw data and was transcribed for analysis.

Transcription Method

The transcription method used in this study is based on the Social Pragmatic Model (Turnbull, 2003; Turnbull, Atwood, & Gifford, 2001) and Conversation Analysis (Stenstrom, 1994). Structures, such as pauses of one half of a second or greater, er's, um's, uh's and words such as "well" were transcribed to become data for analysis. Along with pauses and hesitation markers such as "er" and "um", the transcripts were coded for social acts. Social acts such as apologizing, acknowledging, bribing, justifying, excusing, requesting, granting and refusing were all among the social acts the children performed in the study (see Appendix B).

Importantly, only those social acts directly pertaining to the performance of the making, granting or refusing of requests were included for analysis. This means that only acts that are required to accomplish the granting, refusal or request are included in the coding. Greetings, salutations and extended role-play were excluded from the data set. Older children tended to greet, use names and indulge in lengthy pretend conversations. These extraneous acts were omitted from the analysis. In this way, the difference in how the children of varying ages make, grant and refuse requests was examined, rather than their ability to role-play talking on the telephone.

Most of the social acts that the children performed were treated as continuous variables. There are three social acts that were treated as dichotomous variables

because they relate to the turn-initial position. The turn-initial position is the very beginning of a turn at talk. The first dichotomous variable was whether or not an unfilled pause was found at the beginning of the children's turn, known as a turn-initial pause (Turnbull, 2003). The length of the pauses between the utterances on the tape and the children's utterances were timed to the tenth of a second. Only those pauses of one-half or a second or greater were included as turn-initial pauses. The second dichotomous variable was hesitation markers such as 'er's' and 'um's, known as filled pauses and were also only included when they occurred in the turn-initial position. Filled and unfilled pauses were included only when they occurred in the turn-initial position because when they occur later in the turn at talk, they become difficult to interpret. Pauses that occur later in a turn may be invitations for the other person to speak and may not relate to mitigating the request or refusal. Therefore, any pauses, or 'er's' and 'um's' that were made further into the turn at talk were ignored. Also of interest in the turn-initial position is the third dichotomous variable, the utterance 'well'. 'Well' holds a special place in talk as it is sometimes used in the commission of refusals. However, the utterance 'well' when it does not occur in the turn-initial position becomes difficult to interpret and was therefore only included when in the turn-initial position.

Collection Method

Following a strict script (Appendix A) the researcher introduced the children to the notion of making and receiving pretend telephone calls. The conditions were presented in a fixed order. Before each condition she stated either (a) who is making the next incoming call and why, or (b) to whom the next outgoing call is going and why. Then she depressed the foot pedal, causing the tape with sound effects and an actor's

taped voice to play, thereby providing the various stimuli for the four different conditions. When the children made outgoing calls, they heard dial tones, push button tones, ringing and an actor's voice saying "Hi" or "Hello". When the children received incoming calls, they heard ringing, the sound of a handset being lifted and an actor's voice making either a low or a high imposition request.

Conditions

Four Warm-up Conditions

The main conditions manipulating imposition were preceded by four warm-up conditions to help the children become comfortable with the apparatus. The warm-up conditions provided the children with the experience of making and receiving pretend telephone calls. They were required to make, refuse and grant requests. After the warm-up conditions, the children were asked to make requests and respond to requests according to their wishes just as if it were real life.

Manipulation of Imposition

Imposition was manipulated over four conditions involving four pretend telephone calls. The children were asked to make two requests: (1) a low imposition request – ask your friend to the water park for the day; (2) a high imposition request - ask your friend to help you clean your messy room for the day; and respond to two requests: (3) a low imposition request designed to elicit a granting – bring your ball over so we can play some ball; and (4) a high imposition request designed to elicit a refusal – bring your

precious seashell collection over because my destructive younger brother wants to play with it (see Appendix A).

To assess the interrater reliability for coding the social acts Cohen's Kappa with a correction for chance was used with 40% of the data recoded by a second rater yielding the finding $K(56) = 0.92$.

RESULTS

Quantitative results are presented in two main sections. The first section analyzes how children made requests of varying imposition, followed by the second section examining how children granted and refused requests. Following the quantitative results is a qualitative section providing some key transcript examples with a brief qualitative analysis.

Quantitative Results

In order to carry out the analysis, two composite variables were created. Total Acts, the first composite variable, comprises all the social acts a participant did that directly pertained to the request, along with whether or not there was a filled pause or an unfilled pause. Social acts that did not directly pertain to the making, granting or refusing of the request such as greeting and extended role-play acts were omitted. All the social acts the children performed across all four conditions that directly pertain to the requests are presented in Table 1. Tables 2 and 3 show the acts the children performed by condition and age group. A second composite variable, Different Acts, consists of the number of different types of social acts a child performed per condition. For example, if a child made two excuses and one apology in a turn, this counted as three for Total Acts and two for Different Acts.

Table 1. **All Acts Performed by Children in All Four Conditions**

Act	Total	5-6 yrs (n= 21)	7-8 yrs (n= 37)	9-10 yrs (n=24)	11-13yrs (n=32)
Acknowledge	22	0	1	3	18
Apologize	12	0	1	4	7
Bribe	36	0	6	5	25
Demand	2	0	0	1	1
Endorse	53	1	8	14	30
Excuse	107	2	16	33	56
Filled Pause	134	11	36	39	48
Unfilled Pause	232	34	70	62	66
Justify	170	9	29	39	93
Offer/Suggest	82	1	17	24	40
Plead	30	1	0	7	22
Pre-sequence	60	0	4	19	37
Promise	2	0	1	1	0
Rep. Refusal	39	1	8	13	17
Request	72	1	10	23	38
Stall	19	2	2	7	8
Thank	55	10	18	10	17
Threaten	6	0	0	2	4
Turn Initial Well	16	0	0	5	11
Total Acts	1154	73	227	311	538

Table 2. **Total Acts Made by Children Making a Low Imposition Request**
(Asking a Friend to Go to a Water Park) and a High Imposition Request
(Asking a Friend to Help Clean a Messy Room)

Acts	Low Imposition Request					High Imposition Request				
	Total	5-6 yrs n=21	7-8 yrs n=37	9-10 yrs n=24	11-13 yrs n=32	Total	5-6 yrs n=21	7-8 yrs n=37	9-10 yrs n=24	11-13 yrs n=32
Acknowledge	5	0	1	1	3	4	0	0	1	3
Apology	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Bribe	0	0	0	0	0	34	0	6	5	23
Demand	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Endorse	3	0	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	2
Excuse	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	3	6	0
Filled Pauses	8	0	2	3	3	41	4	13	8	16
Unfilled Pauses	17	2	6	5	4	86	14	29	21	22
Justify	80	4	14	21	41	63	4	10	12	37
Offer/Suggest	17	0	5	2	10	6	0	1	3	2
Plead	6	1	0	0	5	22	0	1	6	15
Pre-sequence	19	0	2	6	11	40	0	2	14	24
Promise	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Repeated Request	22	0	2	6	14	14	0	4	4	6
Stall	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	2	1	2
Thank	1	0	0	0	1	9	0	2	4	3
Threat	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	1	3
Turn Initial Well	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Total Acts	179	7	33	45	94	345	23	74	86	162
Total Different Acts	11	3	8	8	10	18	4	12	13	16

Table 3. *Total Acts Performed by Children Across the Age Groups when Granting a Request of Low Imposition (Agreeing to Bring a Ball Over) Versus Refusing a Request of High Imposition (Refusing to Bring Fragile Seashells Over)*

Acts	Granting					Refusing				
	Total	5-6 yrs n=21	7-8 yrs n=37	9-10 yrs n=24	11-13 yrs n=32	Total	5-6 yrs n=21	7-8 yrs n=37	9-10 yrs n=24	11-13 yrs n=32
Acknowledge	5	0	0	0	5	9	0	3	0	6
Apology	1	0	0	0	1	12	0	1	4	7
Challenge	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Endorse	47	0	9	14	24	3	1	1	0	1
Excuse	0	0	0	0	0	110	2	16	33	59
Filled Pauses	16	2	7	4	3	61	9	14	17	21
Unfilled Pauses	16	3	2	6	5	96	15	30	23	28
Justify	0	0	0	0	0	10	1	3	0	6
Offer/Suggest	24	1	4	10	9	31	0	7	9	15
Plead	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Promise	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Repeated Refusal	0	0	0	0	0	22	3	5	6	8
Request	26	0	4	8	14	18	1	4	5	8
Stall	0	0	0	0	0	12	1	2	6	3
Thank	13	3	4	1	5	29	8	12	5	4
Threat	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Turn Initial Well	0	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	5	8
Total Acts	150	9	30	44	67	429	41	99	114	175
Total Different Acts	9	4	6	7	9	16	9	12	12	13

To be included in the study children were required to grant the request designed to elicit an acceptance, refuse the request designed to elicit a refusal and make two requests, one of low imposition and one of high imposition. Therefore, tallies for the granting, refusing and making of the request were not included in the analysis or the tables. However, sometimes children repeated the refusal. These repetitions are shown

in the tables as 'repeated refusal'. Also, sometimes children repeated requests or made other requests when they were either granting or refusing a request. These repetitions and additional requests are shown in the tables as 'requests'. Repetitions are included in the analysis because speakers may use them to strengthen or delay refusals.

In preliminary analyses using a MANOVA with levels of imposition (high versus low and making versus responding) as the within-subject factors and gender as a fixed between-subject factor, no significant main effects or interactions for both variables (Total Acts and Different Acts) were found for gender. Therefore, gender was not included as a factor in the following analyses.
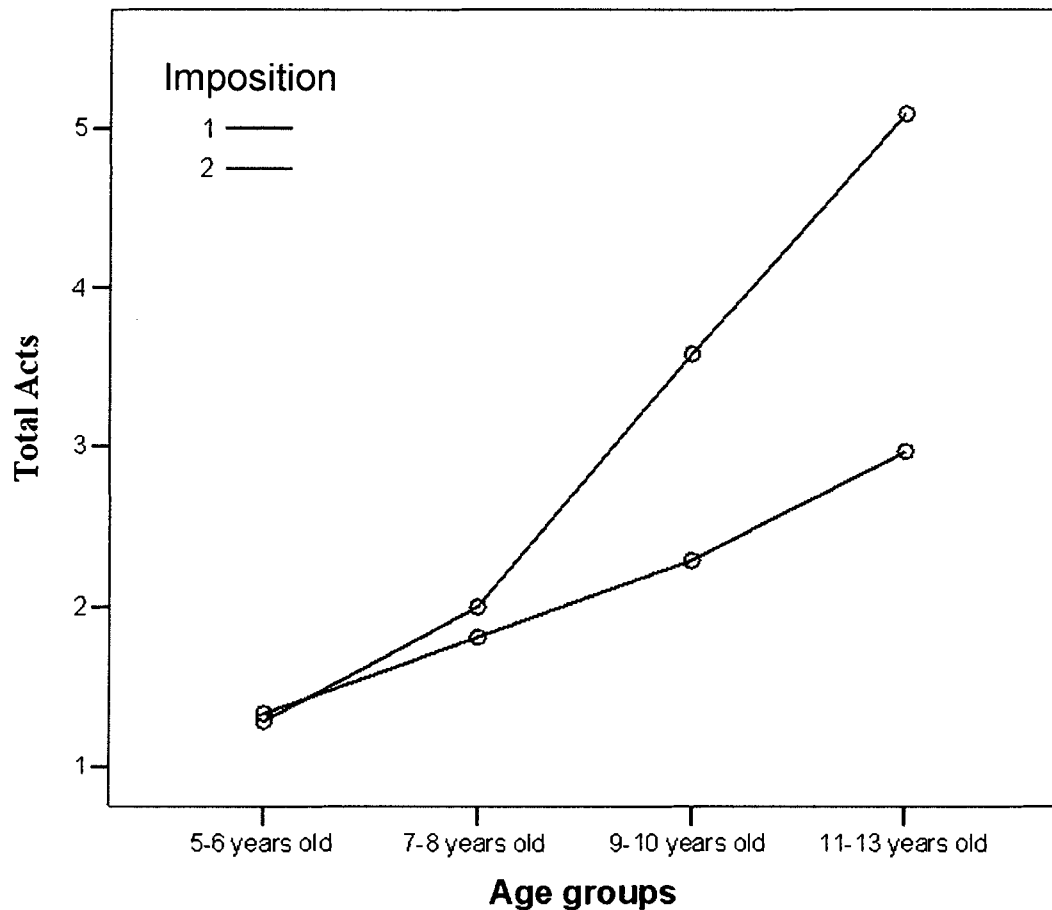
Making Requests of Varying Imposition

A 2 x 4 mixed between-within subjects ANOVA with levels of imposition (high and low) as the within-subject factor and age group as the between-subjects factor and Total Acts as the dependent variable revealed a main effect for condition, $F(1,110) = 21.793$, $p < .000$, $\alpha = .01$, with a 99% confidence interval and an effect size calculated using eta-squared of .165, such that children used significantly more acts when making the high imposition request ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 2.709$) than the low imposition request ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.731$). There was also a main effect for age, $F(3,110) = 232.658$, $p < .000$, $\alpha = .01$, with a 99% confidence interval and an effect size .679, such that children in the older age groups used significantly more acts overall. See Table 4 for the means and standard deviations. This main effect was qualified by an interaction $F(3,110) = 7.552$, $p < .000$, $\alpha = .01$, with a confidence interval of 99% and an effect size calculated using eta-squared of .171. Post-hoc analysis of the simple effects using a Bonferroni correction for

Type I error for 4 tests so that the criterion for significance was p = .0125 revealed that the differences between the means for the children in the 5- to 6-year-old group and the 7- to 8 year-old-group were not significant. However, the children in the other two age groups did show a significant difference for condition (t(27) = 2.782, p < .011, α = .01; t(31) = 4.559, p < .000, α = .01 respectively). That is, children in the 5 to 6 and the 7- to 8-year-old groups did not perform significantly more acts when making the high versus the low imposition request, whereas the children in the 9- to 10- and the 11- to 13-year-old age groups did (see Table 4 and Figure 1).

Table 4. *Means and Standard Deviations for Total Acts for Making a Low Imposition Request (Water Park) and a High Imposition Request (Clean Room)*

Age Group	Water Park		Clean Room		Total
	Mean	Std Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
5-6 yrs (n=22)	1.33	.577	1.29	1.231	1.310
7-8 yrs (n=40)	1.95	1.373	2.00	1.886	1.973
9-10 yrs (n=28)	2.21	2.265	3.58	2.842	3.396
11-13 yrs (n=32)	2.97	2.376	5.09	2.775	4.031
Total	2.15	1.731	3.07	2.709	2.546

Figure 1. *Total Acts for Making Low Imposition Request (1) Versus High Imposition Request (2)*
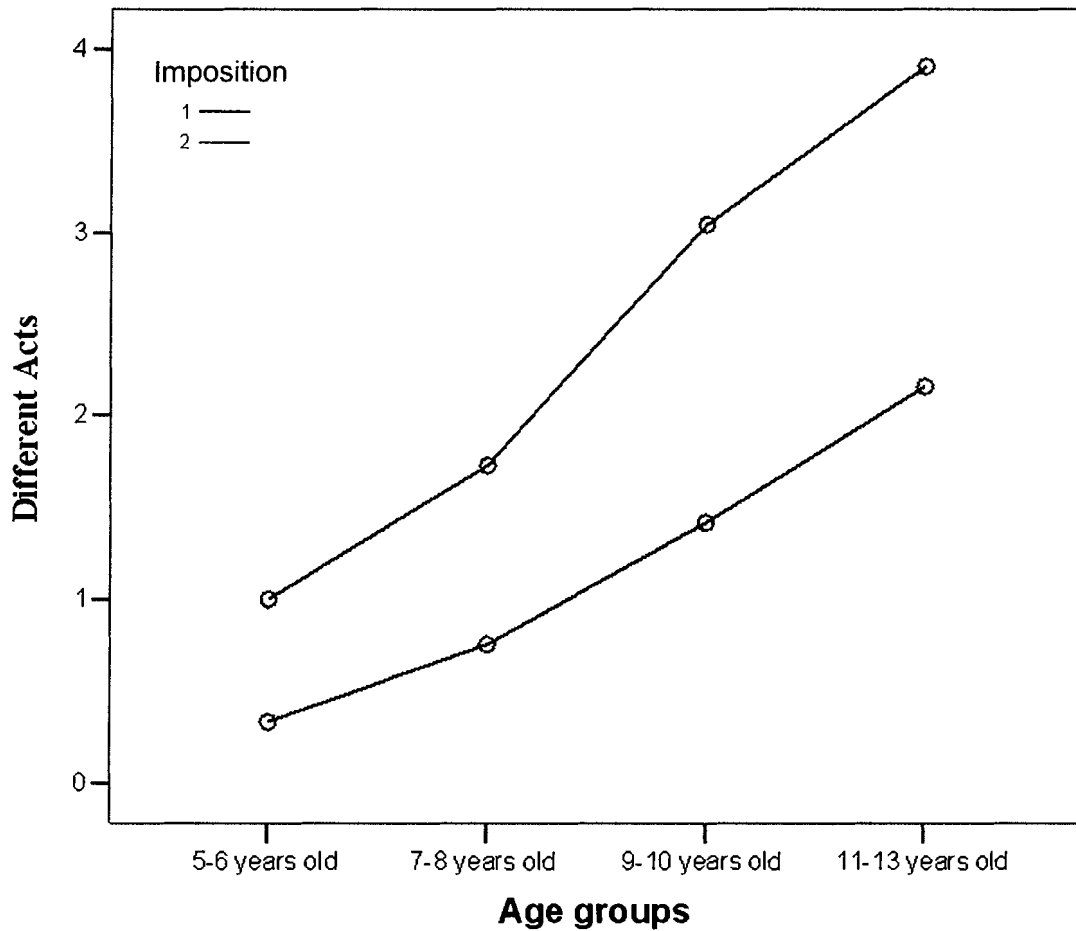

A similar 2 x 4 mixed between-within subjects ANOVA with level of imposition

(high and low) as the within-subject factor and age group as the between-subjects factor

and Different Acts as the dependent variable revealed a main effect for condition

$F(1,110) = 84.720$, $p < .000$, $\alpha = .01$, with a 99% confidence interval and an effect size

calculated using eta-squared of .435, such that children used significantly more different

acts when making the high imposition request compared to the low imposition request.

There was also a main effect for age $F(3,110) = 241.142$, $p < .000$, $\alpha = .01$, with a 99%

confidence interval and an effect size calculated using eta-squared of .687, such that older children used significantly more different acts overall than the younger children. There was also an interaction of age by condition $F(3,110) = 3.531$, $p < .017$, $\alpha = .01$, with a confidence interval of 99% and an effect size of .088. Follow-up simple effects tests testing for the effect of imposition at all levels of age revealed significant differences between the conditional means for each age group [5- to 6-year-olds $t(21) = 3.568$, $p < .002$, α .01; 7- to 8-year-olds $t(38) = 5.688$, $p < .000$, $\alpha = .01$; 9- to 10-year-olds $t(24) = 4.279$, $p < .000$, $\alpha = .01$; 11- to 13-year-olds $t(32) = 5.876$, $p < .000$, $\alpha = .01$; see Table 5 and Figure 2].

Table 5.   *Table of Means and Standard Deviations for Different Acts for Making a Low Imposition Request (Water Park) Versus Making a High Imposition Request (Clean Room)*

Age Group	Water Park		Clean Room		Total
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
5-6 yrs (n=22)	.33	.577	1.00	.638	.667
7-8 yrs (n=40)	.76	.983	1.73	1.262	1.243
9-10 yrs (n=28)	1.42	1.349	3.04	2.177	2.229
11-13 yrs (n=32)	2.16	1.505	3.91	1.802	3.031
Total	1.21	1.353	2.48	1.915	1.793

Figure 2. *Different Acts for Making Low (1) Versus High Imposition Request (2)*

Responding to Requests: Granting Versus Refusing

A 2 x 4 mixed between-within subjects ANOVA with granting versus refusing as

the within-subject factor and age group as the between-subjects factor and Total Acts as

the dependent variable revealed a main effect for condition $F(1,110) = 84.720$, $p < .000$,

$\alpha = .01$, with a confidence level of 99% and an effect size of .435 such that children used

significantly more acts when refusing a request ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 2.490$) than when

granting a request (M = 1.32, SD = 1.542). There was also a main effect for age

$F(3,110)$ = 241.142, p < .000, α = .01, with a confidence level of 99% and an effect size

calculated using eta-squared of .687, such that children in the older groups used

significantly more total acts than younger children (see Table 6). There was a significant

interaction $F(3,110)$ = 21.023, p < .000, α = .01, with a confidence level of 99% and an

effect size calculated using eta-squared of .364 (see Figure 3). Follow-up simple effects

t-tests for the effect of granting versus refusing at all levels of age revealed significant

differences in conditional means for all age groups [5- to 6-year-olds t(21) = 5.491, p <

.000, α = .01; 7- to 8-year-olds t(39) = 6.066; p < .000, α = .01; 9- to 10-year-olds t(27) =

4.001, p < .000, α = .01; 11- to 13-year-olds t(31)= 7.839; p <.000, α = .01; see Table 6

for the means and standard deviations].

Table 6. **Means and Standard Deviations for Total Acts Performed when Granting a Low Imposition Request (to Bring a Ball) and Refusing a High Imposition Request (to Borrow a Seashell Collection)**

Age Group	Ball		Seashell		Total
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
5-6 yrs (n=22)	.43	.811	2.24	1.091	1.333
7-8 yrs (n=40)	.81	.995	2.46	1.574	1.635
9-10 yrs (n=28)	1.83	2.180	4.96	2.255	3.396
11-13 yrs (n=32)	2.09	1.376	5.59	2.650	3.844
Total	1.32	1.542	3.82	2.490	2.552

Figure 3. *Total Acts for Granting (1) Versus Refusing a Request (2)*

The analysis for the variable Different Acts was conducted using a 2 x 4 ANOVA
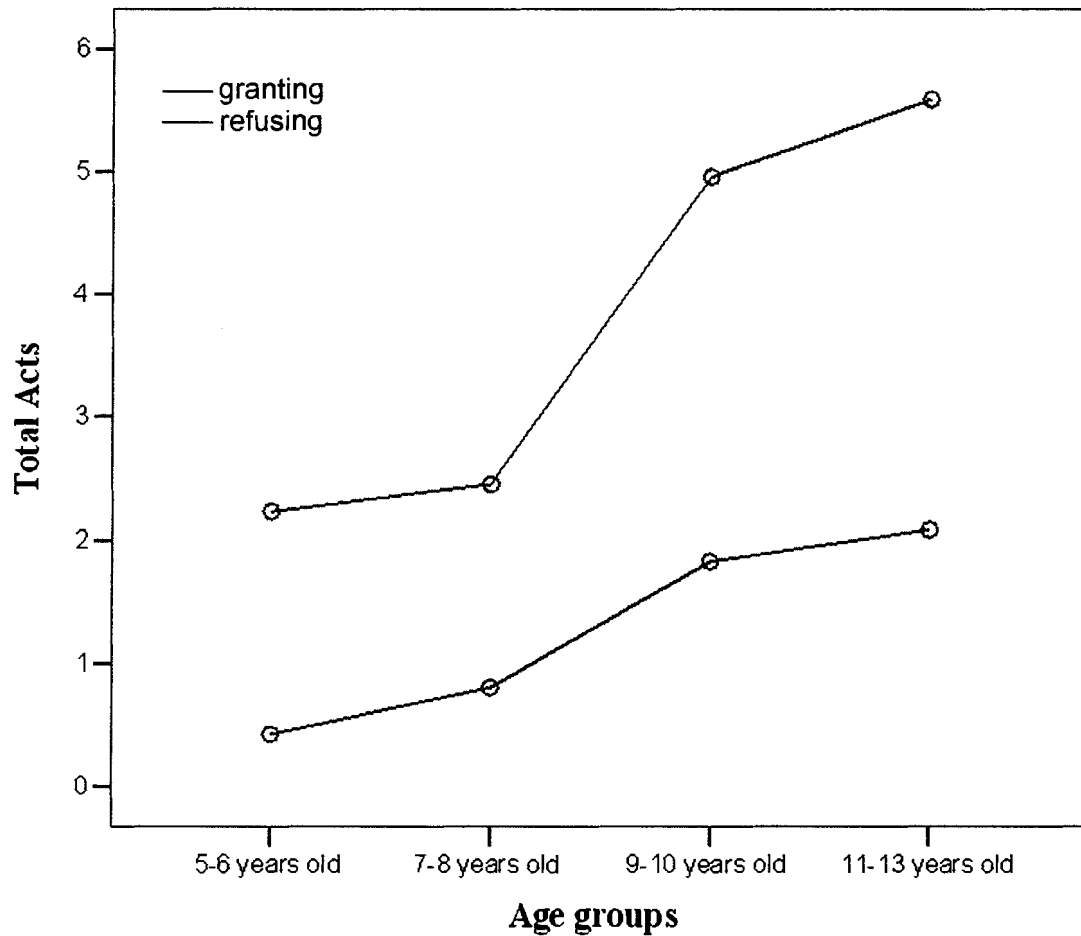
with granting versus refusing as the within-subject factor and age group as the between-

subjects factor and Different Acts as the dependent variable (see Table 7). This analysis

revealed a main effect for condition $F(1,110) = 197.253$, $p < .000$, $\alpha = .01$, with a

confidence level of 99% and an effect size of .642 such that children used significantly

more different acts refusing the request compared to granting the request. There was

also a main effect for age $F(3,110) = 432.601$, $p < . 000$, $\alpha = .01$, with a confidence

interval of 99% and an effect size of .797 such that older children used significantly more different acts overall. There was no significant interaction.

Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations for Different Acts Performed When Granting a Low Imposition Request (to Bring a Ball) and Refusing a High Imposition Request (to Borrow a Seashell Collection)

Age Group	Ball		Seashell		Total
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
5-6 yrs (n=22)	.38	.805	1.00	.638	.667
7-8 yrs (n=40)	.73	.962	1.73	1.262	1.243
9-10 yrs (n=28)	1.46	1.351	3.04	2.177	2.229
11-13 yrs (n=32)	1.94	1.343	3.91	1.802	3.031
Total	1.16	1.280	2.48	1.915	1.793

Qualitative Results

Granting a Low Imposition Request

A good friend calls: "Hi. Do you want to bring your ball over so we can play some ball?"

Most children in the study granted the request in a similar manner:

6-year-old child: 'Sure'

13-year-old child: 'Sure I'll be right over thanks'

For the most part, children of all ages granted the request in a short, sweet and to the point manner with few filled or unfilled pauses, no turn-initial 'well's' and no

repetition. The 13-year-old child explicitly endorsed the request by saying 'I'll be right over' and openly expressed thanks. This was common for children from 10 to 13 years who rarely made a one-word acceptance most commonly found in children 9 years and under.

Refusing a High Imposition Request

A good friend calls: "Hi. Do you want to bring your seashell collection over? My little brother Tommy wants to play with it."

5-year-old child:	'(1.0) no thaa:ank you'
12-year-old child:	'(1.8) u:u:m:m:m:m (1.0) I would like to bring them it's just it's Tommy (.) and I don't want my shells broken (.) I'm sorry he's gonna be sad (.) but it's just (.) these are really I'm preci-like my favourite shells (.) they're really special to me and I don't want any of them broken (.) okay?'

It is interesting that even children as young as 5, consistently showed filled and unfilled pauses when refusing a request. Also, even among the 21 youngest children aged 5 to 6 years, there was only one unadorned bald on record 'no' refusal, making this the only example of such a refusal in the entire study. The example provided by the 12-year-old child is typical of children aged 10 to 13 years in the sample. It begins with an unfilled pause followed by a filled pause, which could be said to convey reluctance to refuse the request. The child claims that he would like to bring them but due to vague circumstances beyond his control concerning Tommy he cannot. He does not come out and directly say that Tommy is destructive, but instead offers the excuse that he doesn't want his shells broken. This is followed by an apology and the provision of more good reasons to refuse the request.

Making the Low Imposition Request

Call your good friend and ask them to come to the water park for the day.

5-year-old child:	'Do you want to go to the water park?'

12-year-old child:	'You know that new water park that's opened yeah it's really cool (.) we:ell my mom's taking me (.) it's got a really big wave thing aa:n I was wondering if you could come?''

The request made by the 5-year-old is very brief and does not provide much information for the friend. The 12-year-old child provides several good reasons to accept the request. It was common for the older children in the study to provide several justifications when making the low imposition request.

Making the High Imposition Request

Call your good friend and ask them to come over to help you clean your room for the day:

5-year-old child:	'(1.0) Do you want to help me clean up my room?'

12-year-old child:	'(1.0) I was wondering if you could come over and maybe we could play a little (.) b ball (.) forty-one? (.) and cle:ean my ro:oo:om? (.) an' then we can have some ice cream and hang out a little (.) an' yeah my mom said I had to hehh well it's possible to get in (.) it's very hard but (.) so can you?'

In this example, the imposing request of cleaning the room is delayed by a more general request to come over. 'I was wondering' is considered to be polite (Ervin-Tripp, Guo, & Lampert, 1990). It is not that I am asking that you come over it is that I was wondering if you could. 'Maybe we could play a little' is a suggestion attempting to soften the blow of the contrasting ' and cle:ean my ro:oo:om'. The colons in the words

clean and room indicate a drawing out of the vowel sounds that may convey reluctance to a listener. The ice cream and the offer to hang out a little can be considered to be a bribe. Bribes to play and have ice cream after were very common among the older children. 'My mom said I had to' absolves the child making the request of responsibility, as if to say 'Of course if it was up to me I wouldn't be asking you this imposing thing, but my Mother says I have to clean my room and somehow this forces me to ask you to help'. Interestingly 'well, it's possible to get in (.) it's very hard' are placed in the turn at talk where one might find good reasons for accepting a request. For example, very few children said things like 'it won't take long' or 'it's not too messy'. Perhaps from the child's perspective emphasizing the messiness of the room is a way of saying if it were not really bad I wouldn't be asking you for help. In contrast to the water park example, the child used a greater variety of social acts to accomplish the making of the request.

DISCUSSION

In sum, even the younger children did respond differentially across the situations of making and responding to requests of varying imposition. This differential responding to these varying social situations was more pronounced for the older children in the study. Children in the 5- to 6-year-old and the 7- to 8-year-old groups did not use significantly more social acts but they did use a significantly greater variety of social acts when they were making the high versus the low imposition request. Older children used significantly more social acts and significantly more different acts when making the high versus the low imposition request compared to younger children. Further, all the children used more social acts and a greater variety of social acts when refusing a request compared to granting a request. And there was also an increase in the number and variety of social acts performed when responding to the two requests across the age range in this study.

Making Requests of High Versus Low Imposition

At first glance, these findings that children aged 9 to 13 used more social acts when making requests of high imposition versus low imposition and that all the children used a greater variety of social acts when making the high versus the low imposition request, appear to indicate that the children made social acts in response to imposition in the adult-like manner outlined by Brown and Levinson (1978/1987). However, it is

important to note that although the number of acts and the differential structure may be present in the children's performance, there is something qualitatively different about the nature of the children's performance that is not typical of adults. For example, pre-sequences such as pre-requests are common structures in adult talk (e.g., "I wonder if you can help me?" or "How clear is your afternoon?"). Among other reasons, adults use pre-requests to ascertain whether the other person is able or willing to fulfill the request, which can save embarrassment to both parties (Turnbull, Atwood, & Gifford, 2001). Using pre-sequences such as pre-requests relates to an overall ability to make inferences about directions an interaction may be taking. Adults look backward at previous social acts and forward to projected social acts to infer meaning in talk. So a pre-request such as "How clear is your afternoon?" signals an upcoming request yet leaves both parties free to maneuver if interpersonal difficulties arise.

In this study, the pre-sequences spoken by the children were not explicit enough to qualify as pre-requests as defined in the literature (Turnbull, Atwood & Gifford, 2001). By definition a pre-request needs to signal that a request is forthcoming. The pre-requests made by the children in this sample did signal that some type of act was forthcoming, but did not specify that the upcoming act was a request. Therefore, these acts, which occur in the turn at talk where a pre-request would appear have been coded as pre-sequences. As shown in Table 2, the children from age 5 to 8 used very few pre-sequences. Six-year-olds did not use any pre-sequences. Children from 9 to 13 used approximately twice as many pre-sequences when making the high versus the low imposition request. The pre-sequence structure seemed to be used quite smoothly by children when making the low imposition request as illustrated in the following example

provided by a 12-year-old boy, yet the pre-sequence itself does not provide the

necessary information that a request is forthcoming:

> You know that new water park down the street? It's like the one with the black hole. It's soooo cool! My mom says I can go after. Do you want to come with?

"You know that new water park down the street?" is a pre-sequence. It is setting

up that some act related to the water park is forthcoming in the interaction. A pre-

sequence such as this can help accomplish the making of the request by providing

information and directing the interaction. Perhaps as children learn to manage different

social situations they begin by using pre-sequences that occur in the correct place in the

interaction as a more specific pre-sequence such as a pre-request, yet these pre-

sequences are not as explicit as they may become in later life. Also of interest is that

when the older children made the low imposition request many children gave somewhat

elaborate descriptions of the imaginary water park, even after they made the request.

Perhaps this is part of being persuasive to gain compliance. Yet, when the older

children used a pre-sequence for the high-imposition request, the nature of the pre-

sequences does not seem to be related to persuasiveness to gain compliance. This is

illustrated in the following example provided by a 12-year-old boy:

> You know how my room is always a mess? Well, it's super messy right. There's dirt and dirty socks and dust and stuff. It's really, really bad. Can you come over to help me clean it up?

The pre-sequences in this example describe how messy and dirty the room is

which would seem to decrease the likelihood of compliance with the request. The

provision of good reasons to accept the water park request includes positive descriptions

of the state of the water park, which may serve to increase the likelihood of the

acceptance of the request. However, to use pre-sequences that provide elaborate descriptions of the state of a messy room to attempt to increase the likelihood of the acceptance of the request might appear to suggest a lack of guile. Perhaps the pre-sequences in the high imposition request help to justify the making of the request as if to say, "I would not ask you this except my room is so messy that I am forced to ask for your help." Further investigation is required to discover why children use pre-sequences.

One act commonly produced by older children when making the high imposition request that seems more clearly related to persuasion was bribery. The youngest children in the 5- to 6-year-old age group did not use bribery at all. A few children in the 7- to 8- and 9- to 10-year-old groups used bribes, but 23 out of 32 children in the 11- to 13-year-old group used bribes when making the high imposition request. Most of the children offered free play time or treats in exchange for labour. There is not much literature on bribery in children, but the bribery of children by their parents has been noted (Blum-Kulka, 1997).

Ervin-Tripp (1974) found that when children made requests of adults they used a request form but when making requests of peers, they used an imperative, demanding form. These findings were gathered from a review of several studies using a mix of role-play and naturalistic observation methods. In the present study, only two children used an imperative or demanding form when making requests. Perhaps the lack of imperative forms in the requests is due to the telephone aspect of the role-play or the role-play situation itself.

Granting Versus Refusing a Request

Children did grant requests in a short, sweet and to the point manner, as adults tend to do. Few children paused, hesitated, or used mitigating structures when granting the request. When the children in the study granted the request they used a total of 9 different types of social acts across all age groups whereas when they refused a request they used 16 different types of social acts. Excuses, justifications, pleadings, promises, stalls, threats and turn-initial 'well's' were performed by the children when refusing but not when granting a request. However, only the oldest children used the turn-initial 'well'. Of note is that older children, particularly those between the ages of 9 and 13 verbally endorsed the request while they granted it. This means they said things like "Sure. I'd love to. Be right over." Also some children between the ages of 9 and 13 added a request to their granting of the request. They said things like "Yeah. Can my brother come too? Okay. We'll be there." Younger children did not embellish their responses in this way.

Turnbull and Saxton (1997) found that adults often refused a request by making an excuse or a statement such as "I'm working on Saturday", without actually making an overt, explicit refusal. Of interest is the fact that none of the children in this sample used an indirect way of refusing a request. The refusals, although they did contain excuses, were without exception explicit refusals such as a "no". This finding suggests that perhaps the subtleties of refusing requests indirectly are developed later in life. In this role-play study where children were talking to an imaginary friend, children did not seem to rely on the inferential abilities of the addressee. Further investigation is required to

discover whether and to what degree children rely on the inferential abilities of the other person in social interaction.

The role-play and extraneous social acts that did not directly pertain to the accomplishment of the making, granting or refusing of the request presented in the conditions were not included in the data set. There are, however, interesting points to make regarding the talk that was excluded that may suggest future studies. Of interest is the fact that children starting at about age 8 began to use role-play in their making, granting and refusing of requests. Indeed, the children aged 11 to 12 showed extended role-play where they listened and responded to imaginary talk from the person on the other end of the line or sometimes even waited for the imaginary person on the other end of the line to ask a parent for permission to go to the water park. Children in the 5- to 6-year-old groups did not say good-bye or hello. Seven-year-olds did not say good-bye but began to say hello. Eight-year-old children began to say good-bye and by age 13 virtually all the children said hello and good-bye.

Limitations

When considering the results, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the method. After an examination of various pragmatic techniques (Turnbull, 2001; Hamo, Blum-Kulka, & Hacohen, 2004), a role-play method was chosen for this study. However, many studies involving children's talk have used naturalistic observation methods. The advantage of the naturalistic observation is that children can be observed as they participate in real life, talking freely as they might not do when engaging in role-play. In role-play children are talking as they imagine they might in that situation. Taking this into account, effort was made to increase the verisimilitude of the role-play experience.

A disadvantage of the role-play is that children in the 11- to 13-year-old age group may have used more social acts than they would in real life. They engaged in extended role-play. Taking this into account, any social acts that they performed that did not directly pertain to the accomplishment of the granting, refusal or request were not included in the analysis. Although the role-play method does entail certain disadvantages, the important advantage is that all the children were granting, refusing and making the same requests, which would be difficult to arrange in naturalistic observation, but which of course, facilitates meaningful comparisons. The telephone role-play method was piloted with children from aged 3 to 16. This method did not work well with the 3- and 4-year-olds who played with the telephone and directed a great deal of their talk at the researcher rather than to the imaginary friend on the telephone. In order to investigate sensitivity to imposition in this age group, another method would need to be used.

During the piloting of the telephone role-play method, several versions of requests manipulating imposition and attempting to elicit acceptances and refusals were piloted in an effort to create the conditions in the present study that were found to work well with both boys and girls from age 5 to 13. A condition that worked well with both boys and girls from age 5 to age 16 was not discovered. Children from aged 14 to 16 did not respond evenly to the nature of the conditions. Thirteen-year-olds found the nature of the requests in the present study reasonable in terms of things that occur naturally in their lives. However, many 14- to 16-year-olds objected to asking a friend over to help clean their room on the grounds that this was something that they would not do in real life. Children 13 and under found the request to be imposing, but still within the realm of likely occurrences in their real lives. Some of the 14-year-old girls said 'no'

to the low imposition ball request designed to elicit an acceptance, claiming that they did not play sports. Although the telephone role-play method would be suitable for this older age group, a new set of conditions would need to be created in order to investigate sensitivity to imposition when granting, refusing and making requests.

When considering the results for the making of the high versus low imposition requests, it is important to note that in order to ensure that the request would be as low in imposition as possible, it became an invitation, which is a type of request. In hindsight, perhaps another type of request that would be universally low in imposition but would not be classed as an invitation could have been used in this condition. The conditions were not counterbalanced. However, neither fatigue nor practice effects could explain the findings because across the four conditions there was an increase in number and variety of social acts used followed by a decrease and then another increase.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all the children in the sample showed many aspects of request granting, refusing and making that are very similar to the differential performance shown by adults. However, there are some interesting differences in the quality of the children's responses, suggesting that although the basic structure for these types of social interactions may be available to the children some of the subtleties and nuances have yet to be developed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A.   STRICT SCRIPT

This is what we are going to be doing. I want you to pretend that you are making some really short phone calls and getting some really short phone calls. I have a tape that has some voices saying short things to help you pretend. I am going to be taping what we say so I can listen to it later in case I forget something.

Warm-up Call # 1

First of all, we are going to do some practice calls. Pretend a call is coming in from a good friend of yours. Your friend is going to ask you to come over to do some homework. I want you to pretend that you don't want to do homework right now. Let your friend know this. Here comes the call.

(Start tape)

Warm-up Call # 2

Now I want you to pretend to make a call. Call up your good friend and ask them to come over to do one of your favourite things together.

Go ahead and make the call.

(Start tape)

Warm-up Call # 3

Pretend that a call is coming in from your teacher. Your teacher is going to ask you to bring $2.00 to a field trip tomorrow. I want you to pretend that you want to bring the money. Let your teacher know you will bring the money. Here comes the call.

(Start tape)

Warm-up Call # 4

Now I want you to pretend that you are going to call your teacher. I want you to pretend that for some reason you don't want to go on the field trip anymore. Maybe you are not feeling well, maybe you just don't want to go - that is up to you. Pretend that you are calling your teacher to ask for permission not to go on the field trip. Go ahead and make the call.

(Start tape)

Now I want you to pretend as hard as you can that this is real life. Pretend that you are really making the short phone calls that I am going to ask you to make and that you are really getting the short phone calls that I am going to tell you are coming. Okay? I want you to decide whether you want to do the things on the calls or not. That is up to you. Talk on the phone just like you would as if it were real life.

Incoming Calls

Now a call is coming in from your very good friend. Your good friend is going to ask you to bring your ball over to play some ball. Here comes the call.

(Start tape)

(1) Rings – "Hi! Do you want to bring your ball over? I want to play some ball."

Now pretend that you have a special seashell collection with beautiful seashells from all over the world. You love your seashell collection. Some of the seashells are very easy to break. It just so happens that your good friend has a little brother named

Tommy. Tommy is known as Tommy the Smasher because he smashes so many toys and things. Okay? Here comes the call.

(Start tape)

(2) Rings: "Hi! Do you want to bring your seashell collection over? I want to show it my little brother Tommy."

Outgoing Calls

Now I want you to pretend to make a few phone calls. Pretend that there is a really cool water park, with all the things you want a water park to have not far from here. You are going to call your good friend to come along for a day at the water park. Go ahead and make the call.

(Start tape)

(3) Dial tone, push button sounds of a call being made, rings – child's voice - "Hi!"

Now I want you to imagine that your room is really a mess. We are talking apple cores and stinky socks. Your room is so messy that you can't find the floor and can hardly open the door. Your Mom or Dad has told you that you have to clean up your room today or else! You know that it will take you all day to clean up your room. You are going to call your good friend and ask your friend to come over to your place and help you clean your room. Go ahead and make the call.

(Start tape)

(4) Dial tone, push button sounds of a call being made, rings – child's voice – "Hi!"

APPENDIX B.   DEFINITIONS OF ACTS USED BY CHILDREN IN THE STUDY

Several of these definitions are based on or informed by Turnbull & Atwood (2001) and Stenstrom (1994).

Acknowledge	signals receipt of information
Apologize	expresses regret
Bribe	offers a reward in exchange for compliance
Demand	insists the other perform an action
Endorse	expresses positive feelings toward the other's utterance
Excuse	provides good reasons for not doing an action
Justify	provides good reasons for doing an action
Offer/suggest	presents something for acceptance/rejection/ puts forward an idea or a plan
Plead	says please, begs or implores
Pre-sequence	sets up a following act without performing that act
Promise	a statement outlining a future action that will be done
Thank	expresses gratitude
Threaten	an utterance that outlines an upcoming negative action that will be imposed if the other refuses to comply with a request
Filled pause	er, um, uh - in the turn initial position when the person making the utterances is expected to be speaking
Unfilled pause	a pause of 1.0 seconds or greater that takes place at the turn initial position when the person pausing is expected to speak
Stall	delays an upcoming or expected action– where the person speaking says something like "mmmmm (1.0) let me seeeeee". For the purposes of this study only very exaggerated stalls were coded. Minor pauses and disfluencies that were not in the turn initial position were not counted.