CHILDREN'S PRODUCTION AND COMPREHENSION OF POLITENESS IN REQUESTS
Relationships to Behavioral Adjustment in Middle Childhood

ROBERT PEDLOW
Telstra Corporation
ROGER WALES
Latrobe University
ANN SANSON
Melbourne University

This study investigated the production and comprehension of requests by 10-year-old children with and without hostile-aggressive and anxious-fearful behavior problems. A representative sample of 100 children completed tasks involving the production and comprehension of politeness in requests. The results from the production task showed that when the children were explicitly asked to ask politely they primarily used "please" to indicate politeness, whereas face-saving politeness was marked by the use of question directives and hints. Children with hostile-aggressive and comorbid behavior problems were less likely than comparison group children to use question directives and hints in some social contexts, whereas children with anxious-fearful behavior problems were the same as the comparison group. The results of the comprehension task showed that children without behavior problems were more likely to judge nonpolite requests (which did not contain any politeness features) to be effective, compared with children with behavior problems.

This study investigated two major research questions concerning children's production and comprehension of politeness in requests. The first question of interest was to look at children's understanding of politeness in requests as a way of speaking or register compared with their understanding of the functional significance of different request forms, that is, how specific features of language work in specific

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situations (Robinson, 1974). This was studied by comparing children's understanding of what it means to ask politely with their understanding of the effects of the relationship between the linguistic form and social context of requests. The findings were used to compare two alternative conceptualizations of politeness, namely, the face-saving model proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) and the social normative concept of politeness described by Ferguson (1976). The second problem of interest was to explore the effects of hostile-aggressive and anxious-fearful behavioral adjustment problems on children's ability to produce and comprehend politeness in requests.

The study of children's production and comprehension of polite forms of language has received considerable attention in recent years (Snow, Perlman, Gleason, & Hooshyar, 1990; see also Baroni & Axia, 1989; Bates, 1983; Ervin-Tripp, 1976, 1977). The development of requesting is an area of politeness that has received significant attention, because any speech act that has clear interactive consequences may be seen as a request for a response of a certain kind (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 93). Thus, the handling of requests is a key aspect of conversational competence, particularly in a developmental context where the child speaker is frequently at a power disadvantage compared with the hearer. Furthermore, according to Labov and Fanshel (1977), we find that most of these requests are employed to accomplish other purposes, which strongly affect the social and emotional relations of the persons involved. Thus, requests have been identified as having a significant social interactional role.

A number of researchers have investigated children's use and understanding of politeness in requests. Studies by Blum-Kulka (1990) and Snow et al. (1990) of children's use of requests in family settings suggested that for children, a high level of directness is considered polite or at least not impolite when directed toward older, more powerful others within the family. Becker (1986) reported that 10-year-olds use a variety of features to distinguish nice versus bossy requests. The features that they made use of included grammatical form, use of the word *please*, and request for an object compared with other requests. Becker also found that children judged as bossy any direct requests from low-status others. Wilkinson, Wilkinson, Spinelli, and Chiang (1984) showed that a number of factors influence children's judgments regarding the appropriateness of different request strategies, including indirectness, use of *please*, requests for object versus action, and age of the intended hearer. Wilkinson et al. (1984) also asked the children to explain the reasons for their judgments. Factors that significantly influenced the explanations that children produced included age of the child, linguistic ability, form of the request, and use of *please*. Garton and Pratt (1990) found that 8- to 12-year-old children's ratings of the politeness, effectiveness, and likelihood of use of different request forms were highly correlated with effectiveness, except when the child

was addressing another child of the same age. They also found that children did not differentiate between hearers based on age; that is, their ratings did not vary with the age of the intended hearer. In a similar study, Bernicot (1991) found that 5-, 7-, and 10-year-old children's explanations for the appropriateness of requests were primarily related to the request form. She also reported that there was an age effect; that is, the number of explanation types and length of explanations increased with the age of the child.

Ervin-Tripp (1976) showed that one important element of the politeness of requests is their overall form. Following Garvey (1984), the request types that Ervin-Tripp identified can be ordered from least to most direct:

> hint (e.g., I'm very thirsty),
> question directive (e.g., Do you know how to do this sum?),
> permission directive (e.g., Could I have a glass of water?),
> embedded imperative (e.g., Could you get me a glass of water?),
> need/want statement (e.g., I need a drink), and
> imperative (e.g., Give me the ball).

Research by a number of other authors (e.g., James, 1978) has provided further support for this ordering. Another very basic strategy to indicate politeness in requests is the use of *please*. A number of studies (e.g., Gleason, Perlman, & Blank, 1984) have confirmed that children begin to use this strategy to indicate politeness around 2 to 3 years.

Most of the research on children's politeness has followed the broad approach to linguistic politeness outlined by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). Their face-saving model viewed linguistic politeness as a means for the strategic avoidance of conflict in social interactions. However, Watts, Ide, and Ehlich (1990) noted that this view of politeness does not match the everyday usage of politeness. Linguistic politeness, in common with many other theoretical constructs in psychology (e.g., intelligence), began as a lay concept that has been refined and elaborated into a theoretical construct (Ide, 1989). The everyday usage of politeness refers to a socially acceptable or normative way of speaking (Fraser, 1990). Watts et al. (1990) noted that researchers in politeness have barely addressed the distinction between what they refer to as first-order politeness (i.e., the everyday sense of the term) and second-order or theoretical models of politeness.

The difference between these two senses of politeness is of particular interest in the study of children's politeness because there is evidence that parents explicitly teach and are concerned about their children speaking politely. However, most of what parents teach explicitly seems to relate to the use of particular forms (e.g., saying *please* and *thank you*) (Becker & Smenner, 1986; see also Gleason et al., 1984). This finding suggests that much of children's exposure to direct

socialization in politeness may be to everyday politeness rather than politeness as a means of conflict avoidance in social interactions.

Watts et al. (1990) distinguished between first-order or everyday politeness and second-order or theoretical models of politeness. Fraser (1990) proposed a definition of first-order politeness as a social norm or socially acceptable way of speaking, stating that "there are standards of behavior in society and in any age by which the speaker is deemed to have spoken correctly or not" (p. 223). Fraser noted that, with the exception of some early work in linguistics (e.g., Mathews, 1943), everyday politeness has been largely ignored by researchers. For the current research, everyday politeness was defined in terms of children's understanding of what it means to ask in a usual, polite, or rude way. This is likely to be a familiar concept to children from parental socialization in politeness (Becker, 1990).

There has been in practice surprisingly little research directly investigating the association between social behavior and linguistic politeness (Tomasello, 1992). Robinson's work on mothers' answers to children's questions looked at the ways in which mothers socialized children in the use of different linguistic forms and variation with respect to social class (Robinson, 1972). The act of requesting has been identified as a key element of linguistic interactions (Labov & Fanshel, 1977) and one with important social interaction implications. Furthermore, the ability to use requests appropriately in social interactions represents an important sociolinguistic skill that children must acquire (Becker, 1986). Camras, Pristo, and Brown (1985) showed that the style of the requests children attributed to angry speakers was significantly less polite than that attributed to happy or neutral speakers. This suggests that children understand the relationship between request style and the affective relationship between participants, and provides some evidence of a direct linkage between request style and broader aspects of social interaction. This suggests that it may be of interest to explore the ways in which children with different levels of social adjustment vary their requests to mark the different aspects of linguistic politeness in their interactions.

Only two studies were located that directly investigated the production and comprehension of linguistic politeness by children with different levels of social adjustment. One study by Bates and Silvern (1977) looked at the relationship between IQ, social adjustment, and comprehension and production of polite speech in preschool children. For each child, they administered the Peabody IQ test, obtained teacher ratings of social adjustment, and tested production and comprehension of polite speech in a game situation. The game required children to "ask" a hand puppet politely (production) or to decide which of two hand puppets "asked" the most politely (comprehension). Bates and Silvern found that comprehension of politeness was significantly related to individual differences in social adjustment, but that production was

not. They concluded that, because production of polite forms was not related to their measure of social adjustment, the politeness indices and the teacher ratings of social adjustment reflected some common underlying difference in the children's social sensitivity.

Becker, Whitaker, and Gesten (1992) investigated requests and rerequests in normal and emotionally disturbed children. The test situation used in this research was set up in the school and involved the experimenter and a confederate whom the child was asked to make a request to. A key finding was that requests by the emotionally disturbed group did not differ from requests by the normal comparison group on either degree of directness or use of semantic softeners or aggravators. A couple of issues need to be noted regarding this study. First, the emotionally disturbed group comprised a heterogeneous group of children who are likely to have had a range of behavioral adjustment problems of varying severity. Second, the authors note that the situation used did not generate a wide range of variation in the requesting strategies produced. Overall, the experimenters commented that it would be premature to conclude that children's choice of an appropriate request is unrelated to their social competence. The current research addressed the methodological issues with this study by using groups of children with well-defined behavioral problems and presenting a range of request situations.

According to Brown and Levinson's model, politeness is a function of the linguistic form and the relationship between the speaker and hearer. Thus, in different contexts the same linguistic form will convey varying levels of politeness (e.g., an unnecessary level of indirectness between equals or intimates may convey sarcasm). For the current research, it is argued that politeness theory essentially predicts a specific interaction between social context dimensions and use of politeness (face-redressive strategies); that is, more face-redressive strategies should be used when making requests to others who are more powerful, distant, or both and when making requests that are more imposing. Furthermore, politeness theory makes a strong claim that this interaction should be invariant across all speakers. The current research explored the hypothesis that this interaction may vary between normally developing children and children with different types of social behavior problems.

The current research followed in significant respects from the approach used by Becker (1986) and by Wilkinson et al. (1984) in that it investigated children's ability to produce and evaluate requests differing in politeness. To address the research questions discussed, a selected group of 100 children from the Australian Temperament Project (ATP) respondent population (Prior, Sanson, & Oberklaid, 1989) was tested in their own homes. The children completed tasks assessing their ability to produce and evaluate politeness in requests.

The production task had two major objectives. The first was to examine the ways that children varied the styles of their requests in relation to the way of speaking (i.e., ordinary speech, polite speech, and rude speech) and the immediate social context (i.e., the power and distance relationship between the speaker and hearer and the degree of imposition of the request on the hearer). The second objective was to compare the production of these aspects of politeness by children with and without behavior problems.

The evaluation task explored judgments of the effectiveness of request strategies in different context conditions by comparison group children and children with behavior problems, and children's understanding of the social factors involved in using requests appropriately in social interaction. This study had two major objectives: first, to examine the effects of immediate social context and politeness features on children's judgments of the effectiveness of requests; and second, to examine differences between the evaluations of the effectiveness of different requesting strategies by children without behavior problems and children with behavior problems. This study also explored children's explanations for their judgments of the effectiveness of different strategies.

GENERAL METHOD

DESIGN

The children in this study were drawn from the ATP respondent population. The ATP is a large-scale longitudinal study of the temperament and behavioral development of a group of Victorian children (for details on sampling and measurement, see Sanson, Prior, & Oberklaid, 1985; for a summary of the project as a whole, see Prior et al., 1989). The children were between 10 and 11 years of age when they were interviewed for this study. The age of the children available for this research was a fixed condition prior to the design of the study, which represents an unavoidable limitation of using a preexisting sample. Children of this age without behavior problems would be expected to have mastered the majority of aspects of politeness. Four groups of children were selected from the ATP respondent population on the basis of parents', mainly mothers', ratings of the children on the hostile-aggressive and anxious-fearful subscales of the Rutter Childhood Behavior Questionnaire parent form (Rutter, Tizard, & Whitmore, 1970), at 6.5 and 8 years old.

RESPONDENTS AND PROCEDURE

The Child Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ) scores used for defining the groups in the study were based on population means for the ATP sample. Because the ATP is a broadly representative sample of Victorian children (Prior et al., 1989), it was considered that these values were reasonable estimates of the overall population values. Thus, groups of children selected on this basis would be expected to show elevated scores with respect to the overall population of Victorian children. Comparison group children scored at least half a standard deviation below the ATP population mean on both the hostile-aggressive and anxious-fearful subscales at 6.5 and 7 years old. Hostile-aggressive group children scored at least one standard deviation above the mean on the hostile-aggressive subscale and half a standard deviation below the mean on the anxious-fearful subscale, at both ages. Anxious-fearful group children scored at least one standard deviation above the mean on the anxious-fearful subscale and half a standard deviation below the mean on the hostile-aggressive subscale, at both ages. Comorbid group children scored at least one standard deviation above the mean on the hostile-aggressive and anxious-fearful subscales at both ages.

Eligible families (i.e., where the child met the behavioral selection criteria and was still resident in the state of Victoria) were contacted by mail and telephone follow-up and asked if they wished to take part in the study. For the comparison group, a random sample of families where the child met the selection criteria was contacted and asked if they were willing to take part. For the behavior problem groups, all of the families where the children met the criteria were contacted. All the children were tested by the experimenter in their own homes. The visits were scheduled for after school or on weekends. The task set was designed to fit within a single testing session lasting approximately 1 hour.

Table 1 shows the percentage participation rates; the final numbers of children in the four groups; their age, gender, socioeconomic status (SES); and parents' ethnic background and scores on the CBQ subscales at the time of interview. There was a significant difference in the gender distribution between groups with more boys in the hostile-aggressive and comorbid groups, $\chi^2(3) = 17.72$, $p < .01$. There were no other statistically significant differences between the four groups. There was a trend toward a lower participation rate for the pure hostile-aggressive group compared with the other groups, although this was not statistically significant.

Table 1
Background Characteristics of Comparison and Behavior Problem Groups

Variable	Comparison	Hostile-Aggressive	Anxious-Fearful	Comorbid
Participation rates (%)	81	66	77	83
Group (*n*)	24	24	23	24
Socioeconomic status (SES)[a]				
M	3.6	4.2	3.7	4.3
SD	1.2	1.4	1.1	1.2
Gender				
Male	10	20	11	18
Female	14	4	12	6
Ethnicity				
Both parents born in Australia	20	17	20	18
1 or 0 parents born in Australia	4	7	3	6
Child Behavior Questionnaire[b]				
Hostile-aggressive				
M	.09	.86	.43	.80
SD	.14	.37	.40	.49
Anxious-fearful				
M	.21	.45	.95	.99
SD	.24	.29	.39	.41

a. Composite score of parents' education and occupation. Scale ranges from 1 (*high SES*) to 8 (*low SES*).
b. Parent report measure at the time of interview.

PRODUCTION TASK STUDY: PRODUCTION OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN REQUESTS

A number of major studies (e.g., Becker, 1986; Wilkinson et al., 1984) have explored, following Brown and Levinson's model, children's ability to vary the politeness of their requests in response to (a) the power and distance relationship between the speaker and hearer and (b) the degree of imposition of the request on the hearer. The current study began from this point, exploring children's ability to vary their requests in response to the immediate social context. This study also extended the research agenda in two major areas, namely the everyday concept of politeness and the link between politeness and social behavioral adjustment. In summary, this study had three major aims:

1. To investigate politeness variation in children's requests in relation to the power and distance relationships between the speaker and the intended hearer and the degree of imposition of the request on the hearer.
2. To investigate politeness variation in children's requests in relation to the degree of conventional politeness.
3. To investigate differences between comparison group children and children with behavior problems and between groups of children with

different behavior problems in their use of politeness in the conditions listed in the first two aims.

From the previous research in children's politeness and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, a general hypothesis was developed about the relationship between social context and requesting strategies. The hypothesis was that more indirect, less obvious forms would be used in requests to more powerful and/or distant others and for requests that imposed more on the other.

Research concerning children with developmental behavior problems has shown that these children experience many difficulties in their ordinary day-to-day social interactions (e.g., Hymel, Rubin, Rowden, & LeMare, 1990). Furthermore, relatively little attention has been given to the linguistic detail of these children's social interactions and how this compares with children without behavior problems. Becker et al. (1992) found that requests by a group of emotionally disturbed children did not differ from requests by a normal comparison group on either degree of directness or use of semantic softeners or aggravators. Becker et al.'s study did not distinguish between types of emotional disturbance in the children studied. No research was located specifically on the politeness skills of children with internalizing or comorbid behavior problems. There is a range of research evidence that suggests that children with aggressive behavior problems may show differences in their ability to use and understand linguistic politeness.

For the current study, the children were presented with two different production tasks: producing appropriate requests in different social contexts and producing requests with varying levels of everyday politeness. Varying requesting strategies according to the characteristics of the intended hearer entails a set of knowledge and experience about social interactions with others. On the other hand, producing requests with differing levels of everyday politeness is a simpler task. Thus, it was hypothesized that the hostile-aggressive and comorbid groups would be less likely to vary their use of politeness strategies in requests in relation to the social context conditions compared with the comparison and anxious-fearful groups, and that the four groups would not differ in their production of everyday politeness.

For outcome measures, this study looked at the overall requesting strategy and the use of *please*. The approach adopted for categorization of requests is based on the approach presented by Ervin-Tripp (1976). This approach to the categorization of request forms has been adopted by a number of other researchers (e.g., Bernicot, 1991; James, 1978; Nippold, Leonard, & Anastopoulos, 1982). For the current study, a more explicit category was added before need/want statements, which are referred to as assertions. This was based on an initial visual review of the transcripts, which showed a small number of requests that all took

the form "I am using . . ." Request form and use of *please* were considered to be general indicators of politeness.

The analyses for this study focused on the distinction between Request Types 1 to 5 (i.e., assertions to permission directives) and Request Types 6 to 7 (i.e., question directives and hints). One problem for quantitative research in politeness is the absence of any strong theoretical basis for quantification. The approach adopted here, distinguishing between these two groups of requests, was based on a conceptual difference between these types of requests. The first group (assertions to permission directives) contains in the request form an explicitly stated request for a stated object. Question directives are by definition requests for information (e.g., "Do you know what time it is?"), which may in practice be a request for the correct time, whereas hints are not explicit requests of any kind (e.g., "It's getting cold in here," a request for the hearer to close the window) (Ervin-Tripp, 1976).

The hypotheses investigated in this study were as follows:

Hypothesis 1: All children's use of different types of requests would vary as a function of the power and distance relationship between speaker and hearer and the degree of imposition on the hearer, with less obvious requests used to more powerful or more distant others and for more imposing requests.

Hypothesis 2: The hostile-aggressive and comorbid groups would be less likely to vary the form of their requests in relation to the social context, compared with comparison group and anxious-fearful group children.

Hypothesis 3: The use of *please* would not vary in relation to social context.

Hypothesis 4: Request form would vary in relation to the normative politeness level of requests, with the more indirect/less obvious forms used most frequently in polite requests, less frequently in usual requests, and very infrequently in rude requests.

Hypothesis 5: The different groups would not vary in the ways that they modulated the form of their requests in relation to level of normative politeness.

Hypothesis 6: All children's use of *please* would vary in relation to the normative politeness level of requests, with *please* used most frequently in polite requests, less frequently in usual requests, and very infrequently in rude requests.

Hypothesis 7: Children with hostile-aggressive behavior problems were expected to be less verbally expressive than children without behavior problems.

METHOD

DESIGN

The overall design of this study consisted of the following factors: behavior group, power (age of the hearer: child = low, adult = high), distance (familiarity of the hearer: family member = high, other = low),

degree of imposition of the request (request for action = high, request for object = low), manner (usual/polite/rude). The children produced one request token within each cell of the design. Because there was one token per cell, it was not feasible to analyze the resulting data matrix completely in a single analysis. To address this problem, two separate analyses were conducted, aggregating over manner and power, distance, and rank, respectively. A potential risk of this analysis strategy was that it was not possible to rule out apparently valid effects in each of the separate analyses having been caused by small numbers of children producing all of the responses in some conditions. To rule out this possibility completely, two separate supplementary analyses were conducted. First, a series of preliminary analyses were carried out to determine whether there were any significant interactions between the manner dimension and the power, distance, and rank (degree of imposition) dimensions. No significant interactions were found between these dimensions.

PROCEDURE

The children were tested individually in their own homes. The set of tasks in the present study was given as part of the larger series of tasks, which took about 1 hour to complete. At the beginning of the production tasks, the children were read the following instructions:

> Now I am going to read you some descriptions of situations where you need to ask other people for things. Some of these situations may not have happened to you exactly but I'd like you to pretend. For each situation I would like you to tell me how you would usually ask. Then I'd like you to tell me a really polite way to ask. Then I'd like you to tell me a really rude way to ask.

During this part of the testing sessions, the children wore a clip-on lapel microphone. The experimenter then read the child each of the situations in random order, prompting when necessary:

> How would you usually ask?
> What would be a polite way of asking?
> What would be a rude way of asking?

MATERIALS

The set of tasks consisted of eight hypothetical situations where the child had to make a request to a specified other. The tasks were presented in random order that was held constant throughout. The complete set of tasks used is shown in the appendix. The intended hearer in each case was an actual person (the mother, a sibling chosen by the

child, the child's current teacher, or a classmate chosen by the child). The situations requiring requests to mother or sibling were set in the home, whereas the situations requiring requests to the teacher or classmate were set in the classroom. Although this confounds the issues of physical context and social distance, it was considered to have a higher face validity in terms of children's day-to-day experience. For each hearer the child made two requests, one for a specified object and the other asking the hearer to do something. Two examples are given below:

> You've got a new board game and you want [name of sibling] to play it with you. How would you ask [name of sibling] to play it with you?
> Mum's just come home with some shopping and you see that she's got some sweet biscuits and you think that you'd like to have one. How would you ask your mum for a biscuit?

REQUEST CODING

The tape-recorded sessions with each child were transcribed verbatim by the experimenter. Because the focus of the study was on the linguistic variation in the requests, no attempt was made to transcribe the prosodic characteristics of the requests, although these clearly convey some significant politeness information. The requests were coded into seven categories based primarily on those presented by Ervin-Tripp (1976). Because in practice the great majority of the responses (approximately 95%, including hesitations and mis-starts) produced by the children for each item consisted only of a single clearly identifiable request, relatively little systematic effort went into defining the parsing process. For hesitations and mis-starts, the final version was coded as the request. For the balance, the entire verbal sequence produced for that item was considered and coded as the request. Table 2 shows a complete description of the request coding categories used.

The requests were also coded for whether they included *please*. To address the question of interrater reliability, a random sample of 25% of the data was coded using the rules set out above by a second rater. The second rater was provided with the coding rules and the data, but was blind with respect to the experimental conditions and the research hypotheses.

The disagreements between raters when reviewed reflected either errors or inconsistent applications of the coding rules by one or other of the raters. The interrater reliability was computed using the kappa statistic ($\kappa = .83, p < .001$). This suggests that the coding scheme is reliably classifying a high percentage of the requests produced.

Table 2
Request Categories With Description and Examples (after Ervin-Tripp, 1976)

Request Category	Description
1 Assertions	These had the general form I am + using x (e.g., "I am using your game").
2 Need/want statements	Example of requests classified in this category are: "I wanna a pencil," "I need the answer to the problem," "Mum, I want a biscuit."
3 Imperatives	These generally include a verb, an object, and sometimes a beneficiary. Examples of requests included in this category are: "Gimmee the computer now, so that I can play it," "Tell me the sum right now; help me now."
4 Embedded imperatives	These are imperatives in which the agent and object are explicit. Examples of requests included in this category are: "Can you play this game with me?" "Could you come and play the board game with me?" "Could you please help me work this sum out?"
5 Permission directives	These are directives of the form Modal + Beneficiary + Have/verb + ? Examples of requests included in this category are: "Excuse me Mrs. [name], could I please have that pencil?" "Could we please have some of that to eat?"
6 Question directives	These request forms give listeners who do not wish to comply an alternative option of treating the request as an information question. Examples of requests included in this category are: "Would you like to play my new board game?" "Would I be able to have a red pencil?"
7 Hints	These include a wide range of forms that on the surface are not requests. Examples of responses included in this category are: "Mrs. [name], I don't really understand this work," "I don't know this sum."

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data from this study were analyzed via logit modeling, using the LOGLINEAR procedure in SPSS (Norusis, 1988). Using logit analysis, the objective is to find the best-fitting, most parsimonious model that describes the data. This is accomplished by finding the model with the minimum number of terms that gives a nonsignificant χ^2 goodness-of-fit index (GFI). To increase the cell *n*s to enable use of logit modeling, the seven request categories were collapsed into two types, based on their overall structural characteristics. The first type comprised categories one to five (see Table 2 for a description of the categories). Requests in categories one to five can readily be understood as requests without taking into account the context of the requests. The second type was made up of categories six and seven. Requests in these categories cannot be unambiguously interpreted as requests without

taking into account the context; for example, a hint such as "that's a really nice game" may function as a request in an appropriate social context and be easily understood as such by both participants.

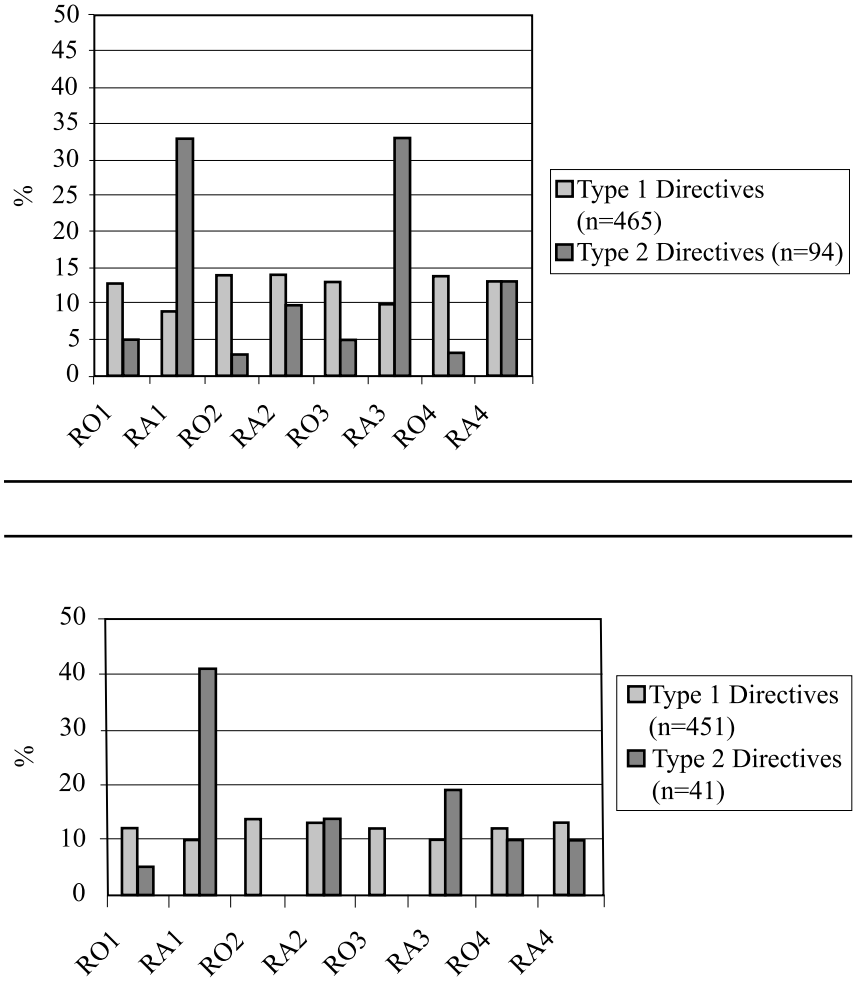
The model-fitting phase of the analysis involved finding the significant effects present in the data. The model-fitting method used was partial chi-square analysis. This technique involves comparing a set of related models, each containing all of the effects except for one. The χ^2 difference between the models is obtained, and if it is significant, this indicates that this term makes a significant contribution to the overall model χ^2. This is known to be a conservative technique and represents a relatively stringent modeling strategy (Kennedy, 1983).

To fully interpret the results of logit analysis, it is necessary to consider the logit model parameters and the terms in the model. The parameters indicate the size and direction of effects. An important distinction is that model parameters relate to the relative odds, not to raw cell frequencies. A significant parameter value indicates that the relative odds of Category 1/Category 2 of the dependent variable are significantly different for the two categories of the independent variable that are compared (DeMaris, 1991).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results presented in Figures 1a to 1d show the percentages of Type 1 responses (request categories one to five) compared with Type 2 responses (request categories six and seven) by the social context of the request and group. The percentages shown in each column of the figures are based on frequencies summed over respondents and manner of the request. The percentages shown have been calculated for response type within group; that is, the Type 1 responses sum to 100% and Type 2 responses sum to 100% across all the columns within each type. The maximum total *n*s for each group (i.e., Type 1 + Type 2 responses) is equal to the number of respondents times the number of responses. The differing *n*s reflect differences in the numbers of respondents in each group and a small amount (less than 2% of responses) of missing data where responses were inaudible on the tape. Preliminary screening showed that missing data were randomly distributed, and this issue was not analyzed further.

The data shown in Figures 1a to 1d were subjected to logit analysis to explore the following matters: (a) the interaction between request types used and the social context of the request (i.e., the power and distance relationship between the speaker and the intended hearer and the degree of imposition on the hearer) and (b) differences between groups on the interaction between social context and request types used. The most parsimonious model of the data in Figures 1a to 1d comprised the following terms: request type, Request Type × Group, Request Type × Distance, Request Type × Degree of Imposition on the

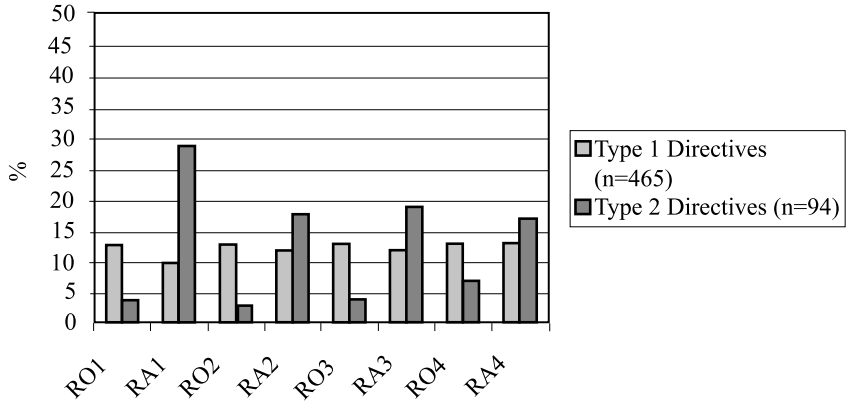


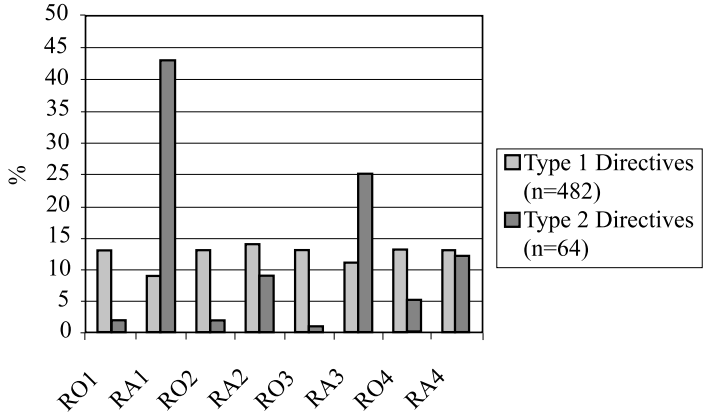
Figures 1a to 1d. **Comparison, Hostile-Aggressive, Anxious-Fearful, and Comorbid Group Children's Percentages of Requests by Type and Social Context.**

Note. Type 1 = assertions to permission directives, Type 2 = question directives and hints, RO = requests for object, RA = request for action, 1 = sibling, 2 = parent, 3 = teacher, and 4 = classmate.

Hearer, Request Type × Distance × Group, GFI $\chi^2(22) = 36.72$, $p = .27$. The nonsignificant p value for the GFI indicated that there was a good fit of the model to the data.

The model parameters[1] for Request Type × Group were –3.68 (hostile-aggressive group vs. comparison group), –2.22 (anxious-fearful vs. comparison group), and 1.16 (comorbid vs. comparison). The modeling





results indicated that the relative odds of using Type 2 compared with Type 1 requests were significantly less overall for children in the hostile-aggressive and anxious-fearful groups, compared with comparison children. The model parameters for Request Type × Distance (–5.58) and for Request Type × Degree of Imposition on the Hearer (10.54) indicated that the relative odds of children in all groups using Type 2 versus Type 1 requests were significantly less for requests to unfamiliar hearers compared with familiar hearers, and that the relative odds of children in all groups using Type 2 versus Type 1 requests were significantly greater for requests to others to do something, compared with requests for objects.

The model parameters for the three-way interaction term were Hostile-Aggressive/Comparison × Distance × Request Type (.80), Anxious-Fearful/Comparison × Distance × Request Type (0.32), and Comorbid/Comparison × Distance × Request Type (2.72). These results showed that the comorbid group showed significantly greater odds of using Type 2/Type 1 requests for requests to unfamiliar others compared with the comparison group. Thus, compared with the comparison group children, the comorbid group showed evidence of preferring a more deferent, less obvious style with unfamiliar others, whereas the hostile-aggressive and anxious-fearful groups did not.

In summary, the results of the analyses showed only very limited support for Hypothesis 1. Thus, there was no significant effect for the power relationship between the speaker and intended hearer on request type; there was a significant effect of social distance on request form in the reverse direction, that is, more indirect forms were used more frequently to more familiar others; and finally, there was a significant effect of degree of imposition of the request on the other. The results indicated partial support for the second hypothesis. Children in the comorbid group were significantly less likely to vary the form of their requests in relation to the distance between speaker and hearer, compared with the other groups.

Figure 2 shows the percentage use of *please* by social context and group. The percentages in each column are based on frequencies summed over respondent and manner of the request. The percentages sum to 100% within each group. The data shown in Figure 2 were subjected to logit analysis to explore the distribution of the use of *please* by the social context of the request and group. The best-fitting model of the data in Figure 2 comprised the following terms: please, Please × Distance, please by degree of imposition, and included manner of the request as covariate, GFI $\chi^2(26) = 16.28, p = .96$. The model parameters were Please × Distance (1.1) and Please × Type (–.8) with manner (–4.6). Because the covariate was the only term with a significant model parameter value (parameter value greater than 2.0), these results suggest that when covariance with manner of the request is controlled for, use of *please* does not vary significantly with social context. That is, the results showed that use of *please* covaried with whether the request was made in a usual, polite, or rude manner. There was no evidence that use of *please* varied with power or distance relationships between the speaker and hearer or with the degree of imposition of the request on the hearer or the child's group. Because use of *please* did not vary with the immediate social context of the requests, the results supported Hypothesis 3.

Figure 3 shows the percentages of Type 1 compared with Type 2 requests by group and manner of the request. The percentages shown in each column in Figure 3 are based on frequencies summed over respondent and social context condition. The results in Figure 3

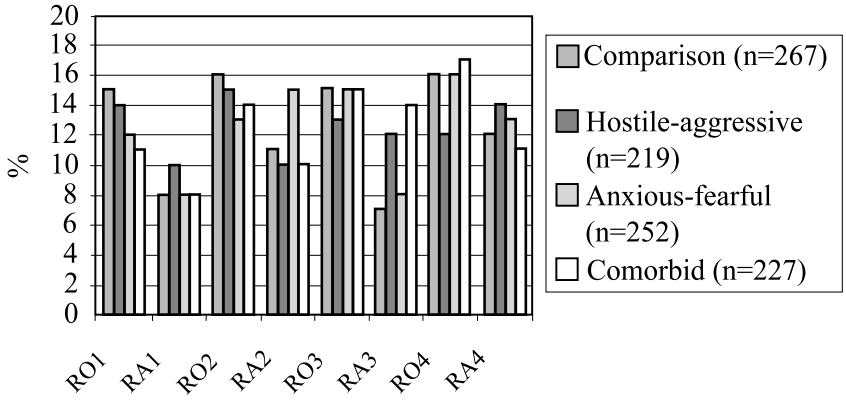


Figure 2. **Percentage Use of *Please* by Social Context and Group (collapsed over manner).**
Note. RO = requests for object, RA = request for action, 1 = sibling, 2 = parent, 3 = teacher, and 4 = classmate. Variation in group *n*s reflects the difference in respondent numbers between groups and a small amount of missing response data.

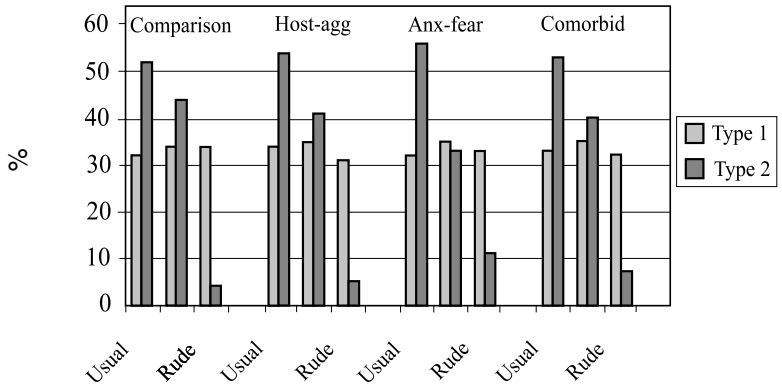


Figure 3. **Percentages of Requests by Overall Request Type, Group, and Manner (collapsed over social context conditions).**
Note. Type 1 = assertions to permission directives, Type 2 = question directives and hints, Host-agg = hostile-aggressive, and Anx-fear = anxious-fearful. Varying group *n*s reflect group *n*s and missing responses.

suggest that across all four groups, Type 2 requests were produced most frequently for the usual manner, less frequently for the polite manner, and very rarely for the rude manner. Overall, the comparison group children showed the most frequent use of Type 2 requests in all except the rude condition. These findings were confirmed by the

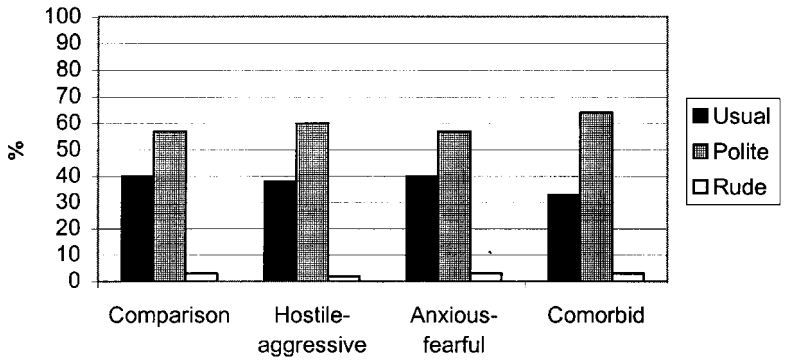


Figure 4. **Percentage Use of *Please* by Group and Manner (collapsed over social context conditions).**

results of logit analysis of these data. The best-fitting, most parsimonious model of the data in Figure 3 comprised the following terms: requests type, Request Type × Group, Request Type × Manner, GFI $\chi^2(6) = 4.09$, $p = .663$. The parameter values for Request Type × Group were –4.1, –2.4, and –1.6. These showed that hostile-aggressive and anxious-fearful groups were significantly less likely to use Type 2, compared with Type 1 requests. The parameter values for Request Type × Manner were –2.5 and –8.1. These results showed that Type 2 requests were significantly less likely to be used by all groups in the polite and rude conditions, compared with the usual condition. These results showed that Hypothesis 4 was not supported, that is, the more indirect, less obvious request forms were used less often in polite as compared with usual requests. This is a notable result in that it indicated that the less direct, more complex, and more potentially ambiguous request forms were not being used to signal explicit politeness or explicit rudeness. There was no significant interaction between manner and group, which indicated that Hypothesis 5 was not supported by the data.

Figure 4 shows the use of *please* in requests by manner of the request and group. There was a consistent pattern in these data, with *please* used most frequently in the polite condition, less often in the usual condition, and infrequently in the rude condition. Although there is some difference in the frequency overall of use of *please* by group, the variation by manner did not show any evidence of interaction with group. The best-fitting model of the data in Figure 4 comprised the following terms: please, Please × Manner, GFI $\chi^2(9) = 10.33$, $p = .324$. The parameter values for Please × Manner were 10.6 and –15.4, which showed that *please* was significantly more likely to be

used in the polite compared with usual manner requests and was significantly less likely to be used in the rude compared with usual manner. The results supported Hypothesis 6, suggesting that all groups of children used *please* to mark conventional or everyday politeness.

The research reported in this study explored several key questions in politeness in children's requests. First, this study explored politeness variation in requests to others of varying power and social distance and in requests that varied in the degree of imposition on the other. Second, this study explored the politeness variation in request due to manner of the request. Finally, the study compared the politeness skills of children without behavior problems and children with behavior problems to explore the contribution of social and behavioral factors to children's linguistic politeness skills.

The first major issue explored in this study was the use of different request types and use of *please* in response to the social context of requests by comparison group children and children with behavior problems. The results showed that the requesting strategies used varied with social distance of the hearer and degree of imposition on the hearer. There were no differences for requesting strategy by power of the hearer, which is not consistent with the predictions of politeness theory. This may reflect the fact that for mothers and teachers who were the high-power hearers in this research, there is a strong conventional or role-based expectation that they will assist children. The effect for requesting strategy by social distance of the hearer was in the opposite direction to that predicted by politeness theory; that is, the more indirect, less obvious forms such as question directives and hints were used more frequently for requests to familiar others. Thus, more indirect forms were not more likely to be used for requests to distant others as politeness theory would predict, but rather were more likely to be used for requests made to close others. One possible interpretation of this finding relates to the fact that the close others were the child's mother and a sibling. Between individuals with extended familiarity with one another's style of communicating, even a hint may in effect be a very clear direct communication. The use of *please* showed little or no variation with the social context of the request.

The second major issue explored in this study was the use of different request strategies in requests varying in manner by comparison group children and children with behavior problems. The results showed that use of *please* varied with manner of the request, with *please* being used very frequently in conventionally polite requests and very infrequently in rude requests. The results also showed that the interaction between use of *please* and manner of the request did not differ for comparison group children, compared with children with behavior problems. Saying *please* in requests seems to be associated for these children with their everyday understanding of asking politely. The results suggest that comparison group children and children with

behavior problems in this age group have mastered this conversational rule. The results also showed that the more indirect request strategies were used less frequently in conventionally polite requests. Overall, the strategy that the children used to convey conventional politeness could be described as more directly expressing the object of the request while indicating formal politeness through the use of *please*.

These findings show that for these 10- to 11-year-old children, variation in requesting style associated with conventional or everyday politeness differs from the variation in requesting style associated with social context. This finding suggests that theories of politeness, such as Brown and Levinson's model that explains politeness in terms of the immediate social context, may not fully describe the way politeness functions in children's everyday interactions. It is notable that the results show that the different groups of children appear to differ on their use of politeness strategies in relation to social context, but not in relation to manner of the request. Labov and Fanshel (1977) suggested that for the speaker, selection of a particular request strategy in a given situation involves some consideration of the hearer's role in the situation. By contrast, there is evidence that the use of *please* in requests is an indicator of everyday politeness (e.g., Gleason et al., 1984). The current findings offer some evidence that children employ these strategies differentially to indicate everyday and strategic politeness.

EVALUATION TASK STUDY: EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN REQUESTS

The first overall objective of this task was to explore the factors influencing children's evaluations of the effectiveness of different request strategies. As reviewed in the introduction, several major studies have explored children's judgments of the politeness of requests (Becker, 1986; Wilkinson et al., 1984). This research has shown that children use a number of the features of requests, such as indirectness and use of *please*, to judge whether a given request is polite. The results of this work have also shown that children take account of aspects of the context, such as the age of the intended hearer, in judging the politeness of different requests. The current study modified this research agenda to explore children's judgments of the effectiveness of politeness as a social strategy in request situations. Based on work by Ervin-Tripp, Strage, Lampert, and Bell (1987) and Bernicot (1991), a key question here was whether children primarily relied on the form or the social context of requests to judge the effectiveness of different strategies.

From the literature, two methods were suggested that children may employ to judge the expected effectiveness of different request strategies. It was hypothesized that the expected effectiveness of a request could be judged based on either the presence of politeness strategies in isolation or the relationship between the request form and the social context. The first rule would correspond to the conversational maxim of "be polite." Following this rule in a given context, children would judge a request containing politeness features as more likely to be effective than a request not containing politeness features. The second rule corresponds to Brown and Levinson's basic assumption: Respect the other's face. Following this rule, in a given context children would judge requests that provided enough face redress in the situation to minimize the threat to the other's face as more likely to be effective than requests that did not.

The second major objective of this research was to compare judgments of the effectiveness of different request strategies by children with and without behavior problems. The research by Rubin and Borwick (1984) suggested the possibility of an association between social adjustment and children's knowledge of the effectiveness of different social strategies. Broadly speaking, the findings suggested that better adjusted children are more sensitive to differences in social situations, compared with less well-adjusted children. It was hypothesized that this may result in children with behavior problems being less likely than children without behavior problems to take the social context into account when judging the effectiveness of different request strategies.

The potential association between children's behavioral adjustment and their judgments of the effectiveness of different request strategies was further explored by eliciting children's explanations for the effectiveness of different strategies. It was hypothesized that children with aggressive behavior problems would primarily explain the effectiveness of requesting strategies in terms of compliance or noncompliance with everyday politeness. By contrast, it was hypothesized that children without behavior problems and children with anxious-fearful behavior problems would explain the effectiveness of different strategies based on the extent to which they take account of the other person's perspective.

The specific hypotheses tested in this study were:

Hypothesis 8: Requests containing polite features would be more likely to be judged to be effective than requests without polite features.

Hypothesis 9: The presence, as compared with absence, of polite features in requests would result in a greater increase in the likelihood of children judging requests to be effective (a) when directed to more powerful versus less powerful others, (b) when directed to close versus distant others, and/or (c) for more versus less imposing requests.

Hypothesis 10: Children in the hostile-aggressive and comorbid groups would be more likely to judge the effectiveness of requests based solely on the form without taking into account the context, compared with children in the comparison and anxious-fearful groups.

Hypothesis 11: Children in the comparison and anxious-fearful groups would use more explanations for the effectiveness of requesting strategies that make reference to other person compared to children in the hostile-aggressive and comorbid groups.

Hypothesis 12: Conversely, children in the hostile-aggressive and comorbid groups would use more explanations that make reference to whether the request was conventionally polite or rude.

METHOD

MATERIALS

The materials comprised a set of requests in context, varying on the following dimensions: power, distance, and degree of imposition of the request. For each combination, two request forms were presented: a polite and a nonpolite form. Polite forms used a variety of features associated with polite styles of speaking (e.g., using *please*, indirect forms, etc.). Nonpolite forms used more obvious direct requests with no politeness features. Two examples of the situations and requests are shown below, a request to a sibling and a request to a classmate (see the appendix for full details). The requests presented are shown in Table 3. The requests were presented in a random order, which was held constant across all respondents. The basis for using a constant random order was to remove one potential source of variability in the data.

Your older brother/sister has a football/basketball which he/she doesn't use much but which you'd like to use. So you say to him/her, "Would it be OK if I used your football/basketball?"

You want to borrow a pen from your friend at school. So you say to your friend, "Give me your pen."

PROCEDURE

The children were read each of the situations, followed by the requests. The situations systematically varied the age and familiarity of the other and the degree of imposition of the requests on the other. The child's task was to judge whether the request would be an effective way of asking, that is, whether the other person would be likely to do what was asked or give the child what they were asking for. The children were also asked to explain their judgments.

Table 3
Polite and Nonpolite Requests

Request Type	Request
Polite	Have you got a spare pen I could use?
Nonpolite	Give me that pen.
Polite	Hi that looks good, could I have a go?
Nonpolite	Give me a go.
Polite	Mum, could I have a drink?
Nonpolite	I want a drink.
Polite	Could I see that one, my friend said it is really good.
Nonpolite	I want to see that one.
Polite	Would it be okay if I used that football/basketball?
Nonpolite	I'm going to use your football/basketball now.

DATA ANALYSIS

From an initial inspection of the content of the children's responses and on the basis of the politeness literature, a preliminary set of categories was developed. The final set of categories used is shown in Table 4. The categories from "rights of the other" to "other's usual behavior" were collapsed into one category (reference to the other). This grouping reflects the strong thematic similarity between these categories. To validate the final set of categories, 20% of the main study data was recoded by a second rater using the categories shown in Table 4. The second rater was blind with respect to the experimental conditions and hypotheses for the research. Interrater reliability was computed using the kappa statistic ($\kappa = 81, p < .001$). This showed that the category scheme reliably classified a high percentage of the explanations the children produced.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figures 5a and 5b show the percentages of nonpolite and polite requests judged to be effective by immediate social context and group.

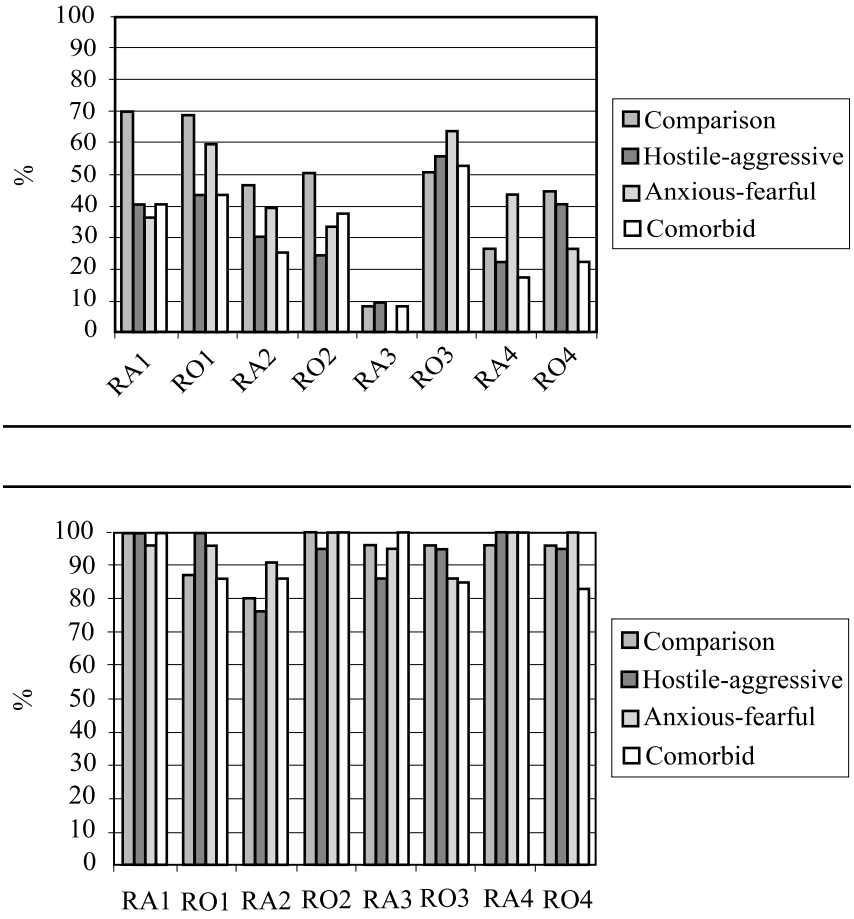
Visually comparing Figures 5a and 5b, the results suggested that requests using politeness strategies were consistently judged to be more effective than requests that did not include politeness strategies. The results in Figure 5a suggested that the comparison group tended to judge nonpolite requests as more effective, compared with all the behavior problem groups. Also, overall, requests for objects tended to be judged as more effective than requests for actions, and there was some suggestion of an interaction between age of intended hearer and group. Furthermore, there is a tendency for children in the comorbid group to judge polite requests as less effective, compared with children

Table 4
Types of Explanations for the Effectiveness of Requests

Explanation	Description
Rude	Explanations that describe the request as rude or lacking in manners.
Ask	Explanations that describe the request as asking the other.
Tell	Explanations that describe the request as telling or ordering the other.
Tone	Explanations that relate to how the request was produced rather than what was said. Often, expressions such as "nicely" or "meanly" were used to describe manner (e.g., "cos you said it in a nice way"). Explanations that referred to the wording of the request.
Reference to the other person's point of view	Explanations that refer to: rights of the other to possessions (e.g., "it's his stuff") feelings of the other (e.g., "she'd feel OK if you asked like that") the other as making different choices from time to time (e.g., "depends on what mood she's in") the basic idea that others are due consideration (e.g., "that's not the way to treat your sister") respect for other's time (e.g., "then he wouldn't have to wait till you've/I've finished") the other's right for their activities not to be interrupted (e.g., "Mum doesn't like to be interrupted when she's looking at dresses") the extent to which the activity, game, or toy is shared or not shared the acceptability of a request depending on whether the other is a close or a more distant friend (e.g., "it'd be OK if he was a *really* good friend") the other's typical behavior; appeals to normative behavior (e.g., "ya don't treat ya parents like that")
Please +/–	Explanations that refer to including or excluding *please* from the request (e.g., "you didn't say please," "it'd be better with a please in there").

in the other groups. The results in Figure 5b showed some evidence of ceiling effects, although it should be emphasized that this is likely to reflect social reality. The request situations presented were intentionally selected to represent everyday events, and it is likely that polite requests would normally be successful in these situations.

To explore the factors significantly influencing children's judgments, the results shown in Figures 5a and 5b were subjected to logit analysis. The best-fitting, most parsimonious model of the data is shown in Table 5. The statistically significant overall GFI, $\chi^2(52) = 97$, $p < .001$, indicated that the model did not provide a comprehensive description of the variation in the data; thus, some caution is required in interpretation of the findings. The first term in Table 5 is a main



Figures 5a and 5b. **Percentages of Request Forms Judged Effective by Politeness, Context, and Group.**

Note. RA = request for action, RO = request for object, 1 = sibling, 2 = parent, 3 = teacher, and 4 = classmate.

effect term indicating that overall, more requests were judged to be effective than not effective. The second term in Table 5 indicated that polite requests were judged as more effective than nonpolite requests overall, which supported Hypothesis 8.

The third term showed that hostile-aggressive and comorbid group children judged nonpolite requests overall as significantly less likely to be effective, compared with the comparison and anxious-fearful groups. The direction of this finding was unexpected. This result suggests that children without behavior problems and children with anxious-fearful behavior problems may judge the use of politeness features in requests

Table 5
Logit Model of Children's Judgments of the Effectiveness of Different Request Styles

Model Terms	Model Parameters
Judgment	–12.7
Judgment × Form[a]	18.9
Judgment × Group × Form	
Hostile-aggressive comparison	2.3
Anxious-fearful comparison	1.2
Comorbid comparison	1.9
Judgment × Power × Form	3.2
Judgment × Distance × Form	–3.2
Judgment × Request Type[b] × Form	4.2
Judgment × Distance × Power × Request Type	4.2
Judgment × Power × Form × Group	
Hostile-aggressive comparison	–2.4
Anxious-fearful comparison	–1.8
Comorbid comparison	–1.8

Note. Goodness of Fit Index: $\chi^2(52) = 97, p < .001$.
a. Form included politeness features/no politeness features.
b. Request for object/request for action.

to be less important in gaining compliance, compared with children with hostile-aggressive behavior problems. This provides some support for Hypothesis 10 because it suggests that children with hostile-aggressive behavior problems may rely more on the form of the request, that is, whether the request contains politeness features, in judging whether it will be effective compared with the other groups.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth terms in Table 5 indicated that power, social distance, and request type all influenced the relationship between the request form and children's judgments of the effectiveness of the request strategies. Specifically, nonpolite requests to more powerful others were judged as more likely to be effective than nonpolite requests to less powerful others, nonpolite requests to close others were judged as more likely to be successful compared with nonpolite requests to more distant others, and less imposing nonpolite requests (i.e., requests for objects) were judged as more likely to be successful compared with more imposing (i.e., request for action) nonpolite requests. These results provided partial support for Hypothesis 9. However, the effect for power is in the opposite direction to that predicted by politeness theory. Given the relatively limited fit of the model to the data, the remaining higher order terms were not interpreted.

To further explore differences in the understanding of linguistic politeness in requests by children with and without behavior problems, the children were asked to explain their effectiveness judgments. The explanations that the children produced were classified using the categories shown in Table 4. The results of the classification, with χ^2 analyses, are shown in Table 6.

Table 6
Frequencies of Explanations for the Effectiveness of Requests by Group With χ^2 Statistics

Explanation Type	Comparison	Hostile-Aggressive	Anxious-Fearful	Comorbid	χ^2	*p*
Polite	77	76	106	84	6.8	.01
Rude	51	50	64	46	3.5	.05
Ask	8	17	17	22	6.4	.01
Tell	7	4	11	17	9.7	.01
Tone	12	9	8	7	1.6	*ns*
Other person	126	70	99	70	23.8	.001
Please +/–	36	30	13	22	11.8	.01

The results indicated that the hostile-aggressive group used more explanations that described the request as polite or rude, compared with the other groups. The comorbid group used significantly more explanations that described the request as asking or telling the other. The comparison group produced more explanations that made reference to the other person's feelings, compared with the hostile-aggressive and comorbid groups, and they were also more likely to produce explanations that referred to the need to say *please*.

The results can be interpreted as showing that their judgment as to whether the request form is polite or rude represents a key aspect for all children in deciding whether a request strategy is likely to be effective. However, there is evidence that children may employ a range of other social reasoning strategies focusing on aspects of the social context. It is notable that explanations that related to the other's emotional state and to involvement with the other (i.e., feelings, consideration, respect for others, degree of friendship) were more often used by children in the comparison and anxious-fearful groups than by children in the hostile-aggressive and comorbid groups. This finding suggests that children with aggressive behavior problems may as a group be less likely to employ these other-oriented social reasoning strategies. Bernicot (1991) identified five types of explanations: nonexplanation, context related (the physical situation), content of the request (what was said), politeness of the request (that the request was polite), and how clearly the intent was conveyed. The explanation type referring to politeness of the request was similar to that produced in the current study; however, the other explanation types produced by the children in Bernicot's study did not occur in the current research. It seems likely that the differences in the kinds of explanations that the children produced may be related to the difference between the tasks in the two studies. Bernicot asked the children to explain why the request was or was not polite, whereas in the current study the child's task was to explain whether the request would be effective.

The first overall objective of this task was to explore the factors influencing children's judgments of the effectiveness of requests. The results showed that children's judgments of the effectiveness of requests were primarily influenced by the request form (i.e., whether the request contained politeness features), with a smaller effect from the social context (i.e., the power and distance relationship between the speaker and hearer and the degree of imposition of the request on the hearer). The results also showed that requests containing politeness features were judged to be more effective, regardless of the social context.

Overall, it is quite challenging to attempt to compare the findings with previous research because on detailed examination most studies seem to use somewhat different methods. The finding that children appear to rely primarily on the form of the request in judging whether a request will be effective is consistent with the findings of Bernicot (1991). Looking at the effect for age of the intended hearer, this can be compared with Garton and Pratt (1990). They reported no effect for age of intended hearer on children's judgments of effectiveness. Considering the familiarity dimension, Baroni and Axia (1989) reported a significant effect for familiarity of the hearer in children's attributions of polite and nonpolite requests.

The second overall objective of this task was to investigate the differences between the judgments of the effectiveness of different requests by comparison group children and children with behavior problems. The results showed that the comparison and anxious-fearful group children judged nonpolite requests to be more effective than children in the hostile-aggressive and comorbid groups. The direction of this finding may reflect the fact that children with hostile-aggressive behavior problems often have a history of negative interactions with others in the family. Work by Blum-Kulka (1990) indicated that in family interactions, a high level of directness and relatively little use of formal politeness may be seen as normal and appropriate by the participants. However, Blum Kulka's findings may reflect a history of positive relationships and interactions within the families she studied. Her description suggests that the family groups she studied did not include children with behavioral problems. The present research suggests that there may be a difference in the politeness styles used in interactions within the family involving children with hostile-aggressive behavior problems, compared with family interactions involving children who do not have these behavior problems.

Overall, the results from the comprehension task suggested that all children can use form and context in judging whether a particular request strategy is likely to gain the other's compliance, although request form appears to play a primary role. The results also indicated that children with hostile-aggressive behavior problems may be less likely than other children to take account of the social context in

judging the effectiveness of different request strategies. This may be one factor associated with these children experiencing fewer successful interactions compared with other children. However, from the current research, it seems most likely that there are bidirectional influences between language and nonlinguistic social interaction.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This work addressed two major theoretical issues regarding politeness in the context of 10- to 11-year-old children's requesting skills. The first was to compare the face-saving view of linguistic politeness described in Brown and Levinson's model, with the everyday or "folk" view of linguistic politeness as a normative way of speaking or register. The second was to explore the relationship between children's nonlinguistic social and behavioral adjustment and their linguistic politeness skills.

The findings from the production task supported the argument for a distinction between everyday and strategic or face-saving politeness in children's requests. The children used different combinations of strategies to signal explicit politeness, as compared with the combinations of strategies they used for requests to different others. This finding is within a single domain (requests), and with only two politeness strategies, some caution needs to be used in generalizing to all politeness. However, this result is broadly consistent with other research reviewed earlier (Fraser, 1990; Kasper, 1991), suggesting a distinction between strategic politeness and politeness as social indexing. There seems to be very limited work in English that is relevant to this distinction. Very approximately, the distinction seems to be between formal and informal registers or ways of speaking that are not specifically bound to the social context, although they are recognized as appropriate for some contexts as distinct to others, versus the strategic usage of different linguistic forms in response to specific aspects of the immediate social context. The current research suggests that these 10- to 11-year-old children are aware of a distinction of this kind in their use of polite language in requests.

It is of some interest that there is evidence from other research that children's knowledge and use of politeness routines, such as the use of *please* in requests, is associated with explicit socialization by parents (Gleason et al., 1984). This is consistent with the suggestion by Robinson (1974) of individual differences in the ways that mothers socialize children in the use of different linguistic forms. The findings from the current study may suggest that children with hostile-aggressive behavior problems receive this explicit socialization from parents but do not have the range and types of social interactions that would enable

them to learn the more complex socially modulated forms of politeness in requests.

The results from the production task also showed that children with hostile-aggressive behavior problems differed from the other children in their use of politeness in response to the social context of the requests. Specifically, children with hostile-aggressive behavior problems were less likely to use more indirect forms in requests to close compared with distant others and/or when making requests for action compared with requests for objects. This finding suggests that these children may be either less aware of, or less inclined to acknowledge, these social context factors in their use of language in interactions. By comparison, the groups of children studied did not differ in their use of different politeness features in requests where the children were asked explicitly to vary the everyday politeness of the requests.

There is a significant body of previous research examining children's ability to vary the requests they produce in relation to the social context. A number of studies (Axia & Argenti, 1989; Axia, McGurk, & Glachan, 1988; James, 1978; Wilkinson et al., 1984) have investigated how children vary their requests in relation to the age, social status, and familiarity of the hearer. Regarding the direction of the effect for indirectness, Blum-Kulka (1987) argued that contrary to prior research in this area, indirectness does not parallel politeness. She found that the most indirect request forms were not rated as the most polite. Blum-Kulka argued that politeness implies a concern with pragmatic clarity and that the most indirect forms were not sufficiently clear to the hearer to qualify as polite. She concluded that selection of appropriate forms required a compromise between clarity and face considerations. The current findings provide some support for her view. Specifically, when children are asked to make their requests explicitly polite, they use more direct, obvious forms consistent with Blum-Kulka's argument about the value of clarity.

The results from the evaluation task showed that for children with and without behavior problems, requests that contained polite features were judged to be more effective than requests that did not. This may indicate that the children understood the use of polite strategies in requests to be the socially approved way of requesting. The results also showed that nonpolite requests to adults were judged as more likely to be effective than nonpolite requests to other children. This finding may reflect the children's expectation that parents and teachers will normally comply with requests consistent with their social role (e.g., parents provide food for children). Nonpolite requests to close others were judged as more likely to be effective than nonpolite requests to distant others. This finding was consistent with politeness theory, which would predict that nonpolite requests to close versus distant others have less potential to threaten the other's face. Finally,

nonpolite requests for objects were judged as more likely to be effective than nonpolite requests for action. This finding was also consistent with politeness theory, because requests for objects were less imposing on the other than requests for action.

The results of the evaluation task also showed that the comparison group children judged nonpolite requests as more likely to be effective, compared with children in all the behavior problem groups. This finding suggested that children without behavior problems may have a higher expectation of gaining others' compliance, possibly reflecting these children's more positive interactions with others. This task also found that the hostile-aggressive and comorbid groups produced more explanations for the effectiveness of their requests, which referred to the requests being polite or rude, whereas children in the normal-comparison and anxious-fearful groups produced more explanations referring to the other's feelings. This finding suggests that children with hostile-aggressive behavior problems primarily refer to the form of the request in evaluating the effectiveness of different strategies, whereas children in the other groups also made use of social considerations (e.g., the feelings of the other).

A number of studies have examined children's judgments of the politeness of requests and their explanations for their judgments (Axia & Baroni, 1985; Baroni & Axia, 1989; Wilkinson et al., 1984). Wilkinson et al. (1984) examined 10-year-old children's judgments of the appropriateness of varying request forms in different social contexts. They found that the major factors resulting in requests being judged as appropriate were indirectness, a request for information rather than for action, and presence of *please*. These findings are broadly consistent with the findings of the current research. Bernicot (1991) explored 5-, 7-, and 10-year-old French children's judgments of the effectiveness of different request strategies. She found significant effects for form of the request, good versus poor cooperation between speaker and hearer, and age of the child. The effect for form of the request was broadly consistent with the current findings, with requests containing politeness strategies being judged as more likely to be effective. The other two factors have no comparison in the current study.

Before considering the broader implications of the findings of the two studies, it is necessary to review the strengths and limitations of the methodology used in this research. One issue was the selection and grouping of respondents. As discussed, the groups differed on gender distribution. Although there was no evidence of a difference for gender on the outcome variables, it cannot be ruled out that the gender difference may have contributed to the observed relationships between behavior problems and children's politeness skills.

A further issue concerned the testing process used in this research. The data for this study were based exclusively on children's responses to hypothetical situations. As has been recommended by a number of

researchers, to maximize the validity of the procedure, the request situations were developed to have face validity for children's everyday experience (e.g., Robinson, 1974). Thus, for the request situations, the names of the appropriate people were inserted (e.g., the child's brother or sister), and situations were constructed that were consistent with children's everyday experience. However, it is clear that the test situation that involved interacting with a male experimenter was to some extent an artificial situation. Thus, with this research, as with other politeness studies using elicited data, it is necessary to be cautious about making any strong generalizations to children's behavior outside of the test situation.

The first major objective of this research was to explore the distinction between first-order politeness and second-order politeness, as it is typically conceptualized in models such as Brown and Levinson's theory. There is relatively little previous research in the area of everyday politeness. Ferguson (1976) reviewed a body of work on politeness formulae (e.g., "thank you"), which he described as conversation rituals associated with specific events such as greetings among others. The use of these formulae seems likely to be an important part of what children (and adults, for that matter) understand as everyday politeness. Notably, the current research has shown that there seem to be other elements to everyday politeness and the use of formulae (e.g., the emphasis on pragmatic clarity). Using *please* in requests would seem to fit in the category of a politeness ritual and was clearly seen by all the children as a key feature of everyday politeness in requests.

This discussion touches on a very basic issue common to many theoretical domains in psychology. A great many psychological constructs, including intelligence and temperament, began as lay concepts that have been refined and elaborated into theoretical entities. The findings of the present research suggest that the theoretical concept of politeness, as elaborated in Brown and Levinson's model, does not adequately describe some aspects of the way that politeness works in these 10-year-old children's use of language in their day-to-day interactions.

The second overall objective of this research was to investigate the relationship between children's behavioral adjustment and their linguistic politeness skills. The current research suggests that children's sensitivity to context in producing polite strategies in requests may to some extent reflect their behavioral adjustment and their range of social experiences. There are also differences in the judgments that children with and without aggressive behavior problems make about the effectiveness of different requests and the ways that these children explain their judgments. It seems likely that this may be linked to characteristic patterns of interaction between children with aggressive behavior problems and their mothers during development. This is also consistent with the suggestion by Robinson (1972) of individual differences in mothers' socialization of children in the use of different

linguistic forms in question-answer interactions. Future longitudinal research on politeness and behavioral adjustment is suggested to explore this issue further.

The findings of the production study did not support key elements of Brown and Levinson's model of linguistic politeness. Specifically, there was no effect for distance of the hearer, contrary to one of the basic predictions of Brown and Levinson's computational model. It is notable, however, that other researchers have found similar results regarding the lack of an effect for distance in children's requests (see Meier, 1995). Children's judgments of the effectiveness of request strategies in different social context conditions matched fairly closely the predictions of Brown and Levinson's model. The apparent difference between children's responses to social context in these two tasks needs further investigation. It may be that this finding reflects the types of knowledge tapped by the two tasks; that is, the production task may tap knowledge of actual requests used in similar situations, whereas evaluation task performance may more strongly reflect knowledge of social norms of approved politeness.

The findings from the current research do not have direct implications for intervention with children with developmental behavioral problems, but rather suggest directions for research and development of intervention strategies. Becker (1988) noted that "pragmatic skills such as knowing how to make polite requests, take turns in a conversation, greet others, and make apologies are important not just for communicative competence but because it leads to them being more favourably perceived by their parents" (p. 175). Although further research is required, the present results support Putallaz and Gottman's (1981) suggestion that limited pragmatic language skills may result in and/or reinforce negative outcomes for children with developmental behavior problems.

The current findings provide evidence that children's politeness and being related to social context is influenced by a conventional or everyday concept of politeness, which is realized in distinct ways in their requesting strategies. The development of an adequate theoretical understanding of politeness will require further data on whether and how this distinction is realized in other aspects of children's language. The results of this research also provide some evidence of differences between children with hostile-aggressive behavior problems and other children in their use of politeness in requests. Further research is needed to investigate the extent to which this difference between groups is a general characteristic of children's pragmatic language skills.

In conclusion, this research suggests that a full account of children's use of politeness in social interaction needs to deal with the everyday concept of politeness and the use of politeness in the management of social interactions. Furthermore, this research has shown evidence

that children's politeness skills are linked to their broader nonlinguistic social behavior. Continuing research in this area has the potential to provide insight into the ways that children's ability to use language to manage social interactions emerges as part of their overall social and behavioral development.

APPENDIX

PRODUCTION OF POLITENESS INTERVIEW

Now I am going to read you some descriptions of situations where you need to ask other people for things. Some of these situations may not have happened to you exactly, but I'd like you to pretend. For each situation, I would like you to tell me how you would usually ask. Then I'd like you to tell me a really polite way to ask. Then I'd like you to tell me a really rude way to ask.

1. You've got a new board game and you want [name of sibling] to play it with you. How would you ask [name of sibling] to play it with you? [prompt as needed] How would you usually ask? What would be a polite way of asking? What would be a rude way of asking?
2. You're working on a math problem in class and you can't do it. You see [name of classmate] who knows how to do it. How would you ask him or her for help with the problem?
3. You've got a new board game and you want your mum to play it with you. How would you ask your mum to play the game with you?
4. You're working on a math problem in class and you need some help with it. How would you ask the teacher for help with the problem?
5. You're doing some drawing in class and you need another color texta for your drawing. How would you ask the teacher for another texta?
6. Mum's just come home with some shopping and you see that she's got some sweet biscuits and you think that you'd like to have one. How would you ask your mum for a biscuit?
7. Your pen's run out at school and you need another one to do some writing. You see [name of classmate] who's got a couple of pens. How would you ask him or her if you can borrow a pen?
8. You happen to see that [name of sibling] has got a new computer game that you like. How would you ask [name of sibling] if you could borrow it?

COMPREHENSION INTERVIEW

Now I am going to read you some ways of asking other people for things in different situations. Some of these situations may never have happened to you, but I'd like you to pretend. I'd like you to tell me if you think that the way I read out would be an effective way to ask in that situation. By effective, what I mean is do you think that if you asked that way that the person you were asking would be likely to do what you asked or to give you what you were asking for. [check tape is running; after each situation, say: Would that be an effective way to ask? If you are not sure, which do you think more, yes or no? Why is that?]

1. You're playing catch with your younger brother/sister and the ball goes over the fence. You don't feel like going to get it. So you say to your brother/sister, "Go get me the ball would ya?" [be careful with intonation]
2. You want to borrow a pen from your friend at school. So you say to your friend, "Have you got a spare pen I could use?"
3. Your friend has a new computer game that you'd like to have a go with. So you say to your friend, "Hi that looks good, could I have a go?"
4. You're out with your mum on a really hot day and you want to get a drink. So you say to your mum, "Mum, could I have a drink?" [careful with intonation]
5. You want to see a particular video which you don't think your parents will agree to. So you say to your parents, "I want to see that one."
6. Your older brother/sister has a football/basketball which he or she doesn't use much but which you'd like to use. So you say, "Would it be OK if I used your football/basketball?"
7. You want to borrow a pen from your friend at school. So you say to your friend, "Give me your pen."
8. You're playing catch with your younger brother/sister and the ball goes over the fence. You don't feel like going to get it. So you say to your younger brother/sister, "Get me the ball." [careful with intonation]
9. Your friend has a new computer game that you'd like to have a go with. So you say to your friend, "Give me a go." [careful with intonation]
10. You're out with your mum on a really hot day and you want to get a drink. So you say to your mum, "I want a drink."
11. You want to see a particular video [movie on TV if no video] which you don't think your parents will agree to. So you say to your parents, "Could I see that one, my friend said it is really good?"
12. Your older brother/sister has a football/basketball which he or she doesn't use much but which you'd like to use. So you say, "I want to use your football/basketball."

NOTE

1. The logit model parameters reflect the relative odds of Type 2 to Type 1 in the different levels of the independent variables. A statistically significant parameter value indicates that the relative odds of Type 2 to Type 1 requests differ significantly between levels of the independent variable. The parameters follow an approximately normal distribution; thus, parameters greater than +/–2 are statistically significant. It is also important to appreciate that the parameter values reflect the relative odds controlling for the effects of other variables in the model. As a consequence of these factors, care is required in relating the model back to the cell frequencies. A positive parameter value in this model indicates that the relative odds of Type 2 compared with Type 1 requests in the second level of the independent variable are greater than in the first level; a negative value indicates that the reverse is true.

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