

Requests and Imperative in Grammar References

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英文法書における依頼表現と命令文の取り扱い

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本研究では、依頼表現と依頼の際に使われる命令文が、使用の規範とも言える英文法書でどのように扱われているかについて、代表的な英文法書を比較参照することによって調査した。依頼表現を考える際は、命令文も考慮する必要がある。「命令文」と言うと、一般的に文字通り命令や指図をする際に用いられる強い表現を想像させる。そのため、使用は避けるべき、あるいは細心の注意が必要と言われることが多い。しかしその一方、「命令文」の形式であっても、その文が聞き手に強制する力の強さは場面によって異なり、必ずしも常に強い表現であるわけではないとの研究報告がある。本研究では、依頼表現の基礎知識として、助動詞の機能の理解が最も有用であると思われる一方、多くの場面で使用可能な無難な表現が紹介されていることを確認した。命令文に関しては、使用回避が無難であるように読み取れた。依頼表現と命令文は、使用状況や各表現の持つニュアンスの多様性、複雑さ、話し手が聞き手に不快感を与える危険性という点で共通しており、その使用法を学習者が理解可能な形で描写し尽くすのが困難であることが無難な説明につながっていると思われる。しかし、安全な表現だけを使用することに妥協せず、より実情的な情報を学習者に提供するためには、文法研究の逆の道を辿り、この結果を会話データに照らす調査が必要である。

1.Introduction

It is widely recognized that requests are made frequently in questions as Thomson & Martinet (1986, 108) says “Requests are usually expressed by the interrogative”; however, the imperative is also often used. It seems to be contradictory to use the imperative for requests since imperatives can sound like orders or commands, and a conflict can be observed between different research fields, especially, between imperative researchers and others. Based on previous research on imperative and/or politeness, this study will focus on the knowledge and information offered to English learners. More specifically, it aims to examine several English grammar references as standard knowledge resources to see how they explain the discernment in when the imperative form is allowed.

2.Requests in the Imperative Form

2.1 Imperatives in Politeness

Making a request is one of the typical cases where politeness needs to be taken into account. According to Brown & Levinson (1987), imperatives are classified into “Do the FTA¹” “1. without regressive action, baldly”(60) and this form can be used basically “where maximum efficiency is very important, and this is mutually known to both S and H² (95),” such as “great urgency or desperation (95),” or “to be addressed to H’s reluctance to transgress on S’s positive face³ (100),” like

¹ FTA = Face Threatening Act

In brief, FTA is something a speaker needs to do though he or she will impose financial and/or mental burdens on the hearer by doing that.

² S = Speaker, H = Hearer

³ “positive face” = “the positive consistent self-image or

when a speaker offers something preferable for the hearer. It should be mentioned here that Brown & Levinson (1987) also introduce “metaphorical urgency” and “metaphorical ‘entreaties’” as well as “task-orientation” and “in teasing or joking” (96-97).

Takizawa & Takizawa (2009) surveyed the degree of pleasantness or unpleasantness under the title of “Survey on Communication Styles” by asking American and Japanese students to choose one per question out of 1 Pleasant, 2 Somewhat pleasant, 3 Neutral, 4 Somewhat unpleasant, and 5 Unpleasant (188). In a situation where you are sitting near the windows and asked by your seniors, “Open the windows (191).” / “*Mado Akete* (186),” the average scores of American students are 4.3 (Male) and 4.4 (Female) while those of Japanese are 2.6 (Male) and 3.0 (Female) (25). This result implies that the English imperative can be inappropriate even in situations where Japanese would not be concerned. As stated above, in the fields of politeness, the imperative needs to be judiciously employed in situations requiring politeness.

2.2 The Features of the Imperative

Nishimitsu (1999) posits that imperative and request expressions are the same in contexts where a speaker encourages the hearer to do something and different in the degree of force. He concludes that both of them are in the category of “impositive” (271). Mori (2009) explains “the imperative form performs a tripartite function.” and “The proposed three distinct types of functions are to serve (i) as a typical imperative utterance such as a command, an order, a request, etc., ... (38).” In other words, Mori (2009) does not separate a request from a command and an order. These explanations reveal that the imperative and requests should be handled together and cannot be separated from each other.

More specific instances can be seen in the following papers. Takahashi (2011, 6) points out that “imperatives

vary as to the nature and degree of force a great deal more than indirect directives.” Mori (2011) explains, “English has only one form of imperative whose interpretation depends on the context, while in Japanese, ... depending on a variety of situations, there are different expressions, which show subtle different nuances (64, translation mine).” As seen above, in the field of linguistics, the attitudes towards the use of the imperative appear to be rather neutral.

2.3 A View from English Education

Narita (2008) makes an important point in an article entitled “*Gakkō-de Oshienai Bunpō-no Shikumi* [Grammatical Structures not Taught at School]” as follows:

Regarding the discernment of polite expressions, a research reports that the imperative is used too often together with *please* by relatively low levels of learners. This is because polite expressions are not taught comprehensively. If required knowledge is properly provided, even such learners will be able to learn to use subjunctives, the past tense, or progressive forms depending on the situation. (64, translation mine)

In summary, there seems to be a common understanding about the use of imperative forms depending on the field and the controversy could continue forever. In addition, there appears to be a similar confusion in the English education. Accordingly, it is determined to take this opportunity to review and carefully examine what the imperative is like and what request expressions should be like. It should be reasonable that this review will begin with grammar references for seeking better educational materials.

‘personality’ (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants (Brown & Levinson 1987, P.61)”

Table 1 Grammar References⁴

No.	Target	Title	Written by	Published in
1	Beginner	Basic Grammar in Use	Murphy & Smalzer	2011
2	Remedial	<i>Chūgaku 3-nenkan-no Eibunpō-wo 10-jikan-de Fukushu-suru Hon</i> [A Book to Review English Grammar Taught at Junior High Schools within 10 Hours]	Inada	2010
3	Remedial	<i>Eibunpō Kore-ga Saigo-no Yarinaoshi!</i> [English Grammar - the Last Remedial Textbook -]	Tajiri	2011
4	Intermediate	English Grammar in Use	Murphy	2004
5	Intermediate	<i>Daigaku-de Oshieru Eibunpō</i> [English Grammar to be Taught at Universities]	Hatakeyama et al.	2011
6	Advanced	Advanced English Grammar in Use	Hewings	1999
7	Practical	A Practical English Grammar	Thomson & Martinet	1986
8	Practical	A Communicative Grammar of English	Leech & Svartvik	2002
9	Practical	<i>Corpus katsuyō Longman Jitsuyō Eibunpō Jiten</i> An A - Z of English Grammar & Usage New Edition	Leech et al.	2003
10	Practical	<i>Hitsuyō -na koto dake Yasashiku Wakariyasuku</i> <i>Kaitai Shin-han Eikaiwa-no tame-no Eibunpō</i> [English Grammar for Conversation - To Study Only Essential Points Easily]	Sakai	2004
11	Practical	Practical English Usage	Swan	2005
12	Practical	<i>Ichiokunin-no Eibunpō</i> English Grammar for 100 Million Japanese	Onishi & McVay	2011
13	Comprehensive	<i>Sōkai Eibunpō</i> [Comprehensive English Grammar]	Takanashi	1970
14	Comprehensive	<i>Eibunpō Kaisetsu -Kaitai 3-han-</i> A New Guide to English Grammar	Egawa	1991
15	Comprehensive	<i>Gendai Eibunpō Sōron</i> A Comprehensive Descriptive Grammar of English	Declerck	1994
16	Comprehensive	<i>Kaitai-ban Eibunpō Sōron</i> A Better Guide to English Grammar	Yasui	1996
17	Comprehensive	<i>Gendai Eibunpō Kōgi</i> Lectures on Modern English Grammar	Ando	2005
18	Comprehensive	<i>Hyō gen-no tame-no Jissen</i> Royal <i>Eibunpō</i> The Royal English Grammar for Practical Expressiveness	Watanuki & Petersen	2006
19	Comprehensive	Cambridge Grammar of English A Comprehensive Guide	Carter & McCarthy	2006
20	Comprehensive	<i>Sōgō Eigo Forest</i> [Comprehensive English Forest]	Ishiguro (Ed.)	2009
21	Tips	<i>Sō-datta-no-ka ★Eibunpō</i> [I've got it. ★English Grammar]	Tanaka	2011
22	Tips	<i>Eibunpō, Native-ga Oshieru-to Kō Narimasu</i> This is how we say it!	Thayne & Monita	2011

⁴ English titles in brackets are translations by this author from the respective Japanese titles and not their original ones.

3.Method

Not only long-selling comprehensive grammar or usage books but also popular textbooks and some other grammar-related reading materials are examined and compared in various ways to describe the trends. However, diachronic changes are not carefully examined because it is thought that a lot of long-selling books are still available as helpful sources and also because the comparison of one of the targets results in no notable changes found between editions. Table 1 shows the target grammar references. The books are arranged in the order of textbooks (Beginner, Remedial, Intermediate, Advanced), practical English books (Practical), comprehensive grammar references (Comprehensive), and others (Tips), and then by year of publication. The books labeled as “Tips” are kinds of reading materials that provide readers with special information to discern subtle nuances between similar items in forms or meanings. Note that “requests” refer to requests, requests for permission, and instructions, which are for asking someone to do something, here. The procedure is outlined as follows.

Firstly, a simple check is carried out to determine whether requests and the imperative appear in the target books or not. This can be influenced by each author’s purpose and the type of book. After that, the focus is on requests from aspects of sentence forms, the imperative, and the interrogative.

Secondly, texts are examined to see which section requests are introduced in and how they are described. The results will reveal the relations between requests and grammatical items. Whether “request” is one of the section titles or not will be another point to check.

Thirdly, the comments on the uses of the imperative are compared and the trend is summarized.

4.Requests and Imperative in Grammar References

Imperative is a grammatical term while *request* is not. For example, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (6th ed.) (Hornby, A. S., 2000) clearly shows

“(grammar)” in the third definition of adjective and the second one of noun for *imperative* but not in *request*. This fact suggests that grammar references must explain the imperative in a certain way but the term “request” is not analyzed from a grammatical perspective. This might cause some difficulty in complete descriptions of requests.

4.1 Requests and Imperative in Grammar References

Table 2 shows whether each reference has any descriptions about requests and the imperative. Interestingly, requests are introduced and explained in all the target references while the imperative is not in some of them, which does not explain the above assumption that grammar references must explain the imperative in a certain way. It might be surprising that no information on the imperative can be found in textbooks for intermediate (No.4) and advanced (No.6). However, a possible reason would be that imperative sentences are so simple that the authors would have believed no additional information was necessary for higher levels of learners. This is a similar finding of Kuraya (Oshima) (2012, 249-250, 251) that there are no imperative sentences among the requests and request-related expressions picked up from the English writing textbooks for high schools. Nevertheless, some comments are made on the imperative by both of the books labeled as “Tips.” This might suggest that English speakers do indeed employ the imperative as a request.

Table 3 shows the sections related to sentence forms. Notable here is a difference in treatment of the imperative compared with Table 2. Table 2 shows whether the imperative is a target item or not, whereas Table 3 indicates whether requests are mentioned in the section of the imperative or not. The books for Beginner and Remedial tend to introduce some expressions applicable to requests though the term “request” is not clearly shown. For example, Murphy & Smalzer (2011, 74) (No.1, Beginner) explains, “We use come/look/go/wait/do/be, etc., when we tell somebody to

do something.” in “Unit 37 Do this! Don’t do that! Let’s do this!”; Inada (2010, 74) (No.2, Remedial) provides “One Point Lesson” to replace “Please ~” by “Will you ~?”. Onishi & McVay (2011, 105-106) (No.12, Practical) present a set of request expressions as the imperative or imperative-related expressions. They rank (1) *Please*, (2) *Will/Can you*, (3) *Would/Could you*, (4) *Would/Could you please* from the lowest level of politeness (only bold-faced words, italics mine) and suggest using (3) or (4). (5) *Won’t you* for solicitation and (6) *Would you mind ...ing* as a really polite request are also provided (only bold-faced words, italics mine).

Table 2 Requests and Imperative

No.	Target	Written by	Published in	Requests	Imperative
1	Beginner	Murphy & Smalzer	2011	Yes	Yes
2	Remedial	Inada	2010	Yes	Yes
3	Remedial	Tajiri	2011	Yes	Yes
4	Intermediate	Murphy	2004	Yes	No
5	Intermediate	Hatakeyama et al.	2011	No	Yes
6	Advanced	Hewings	1999	Yes	No
7	Practical	Thomson & Martinet	1986	Yes	Yes
8	Practical	Leech & Svartvik	2002	Yes	Yes
9	Practical	Leech et al.	2003	Yes	Yes
10	Practical	Sakai	2004	Yes	Yes
11	Practical	Swan	2005	Yes	Yes
12	Practical	Onishi & McVay	2011	Yes	Yes
13	Comprehensive	Takanashi	1970	Yes	Yes
14	Comprehensive	Egawa	1991	Yes	Yes
15	Comprehensive	Declerck	1994	Yes	Yes
16	Comprehensive	Yasui	1996	Yes	Yes
17	Comprehensive	Ando	2005	Yes	Yes
18	Comprehensive	Watanuki & Petersen	2006	Yes	Yes
19	Comprehensive	Carter & McCarthy	2006	Yes	Yes
20	Comprehensive	Ishiguro (Ed)	2009	Yes	Yes
21	Tips	Tanaka	2011	Yes	Yes
22	Tips	Thayne & Morita	2011	Yes	Yes

Table 3 Requests and Sentence Forms

No.	Target	Written by	Published in	Imperative	Interrogative
1	Beginner	Murphy & Smalzer	2011	Yes	No
2	Remedial	Inada	2010	Yes	No
3	Remedial	Tajiri	2011	Yes	No
4	Intermediate	Murphy	2004	No	No
5	Intermediate	Hatakeyama et al.	2011	No	No
6	Advanced	Hewings	1999	No	No
7	Practical	Thomson & Martinet	1986	No	Yes
8	Practical	Leech & Svartvik	2002	No	No
9	Practical	Leech et al.	2003	Yes	No
10	Practical	Sakai	2004	Yes	No
11	Practical	Swan	2005	Yes	Yes
12	Practical	Onishi & McVay	2011	Yes	Yes
13	Comprehensive	Takanashi	1970	Yes	Yes
14	Comprehensive	Egawa	1991	Yes	No
15	Comprehensive	Declerck	1994	Yes	Yes
16	Comprehensive	Yasui	1996	Yes	No
17	Comprehensive	Ando	2005	Yes	No
18	Comprehensive	Watanuki & Petersen	2006	Yes	No
19	Comprehensive	Carter & McCarthy	2006	No	No
20	Comprehensive	Ishiguro (Ed)	2009	Yes	No
21	Tips	Tanaka	2011	No	No
22	Tips	Thayne & Morita	2011	No	No

On the other hand, a few references provide sample sentences for requests in the section of the interrogative though Thomson & Martinet (1986, 108) (No.7, Practical) says “Requests are usually expressed by the interrogative:” in “104 Interrogative for questions and requests” as stated in Introduction. Onishi & McVay (2011) (No.12, Practical) raises another point by saying, your mother’s word “Why is your room always in such a mess?” is not a question to ask a question but tells you to clean your room instead (translation mine except “Why ...”). They explain that questions for requests are also not normal Yes/No questions. (533) The question tag is included in either the imperative or the interrogative depending on the book and introduced as a helpful tool

to soften the sense of command enough to be a request. The question tag is mentioned in Inada (2010, 80) (No.2, Remedial), Swan (2005, 471) (No.11, Practical), Onishi & McVay (2011, 520) (No.12, Practical), Egawa (1991, 456) (No.14, Comprehensive), Yasui (1996, 49) (No.16, Comprehensive), and Watanuki & Petersen (2006, 27, 190) (No.18, Comprehensive). Apart from the question tag, it can be concluded, from the above tendency, that the nature of requests is similar to the imperative rather than the interrogative even though the form of question is more common in making requests.

4.2 Requests in Grammar References

As mentioned in Section 4.1, *request* seems to be popular as a target item to be illustrated in grammar references. It is true that a limited number of books have a section whose title includes “requests,” but it should be said that there is no common title on this topic and a variety of section names are found instead. Tables 4 through 6 indicate which section has the information on requests: 4 for grammatical items, 5 for specific functions, and 6 for politeness.

Table 4 shows that the majority choose modal verbs as an appropriate category for requests, create subsections for each modal or a group of modals, and then arrange by function. It is notable that Onishi & McVay (2011) (No.12, Practical) insist in their introduction that they have carefully arranged items for the highest efficiency in learning English by reading it in consecutive order (6-7) and is one of the above major studies though they apply this arrangement just for *May* and *Can*. Some of the remaining works put functions before individual modals; others combine modals and functions. For example, Murphy (2004, 42) (No.4, Intermediate) has a section named “Unit 21 Will / shall 1” and a subsection “C Asking somebody to do something” in the stated section; Swan (2005, 100-102) (No.11, Practical) has “124 can and could (4): interpersonal uses (permission, requests etc.)”; Ishiguro (2009) (No.20, Comprehensive), which is mainly for high school students, has “can: permission and requests” and “may: permission” under

“Modal verbs for ability and permission (112-116)”
(translations mine). Ando (2005, 274-309, 313-330)

Table 4 Requests and Grammatical Items

No.	Target	Written by	Published in	Modal Verb	Tense/Aspect
1	Beginner	Murphy & Smalzer	2011	Modals	-
2	Remedial	Inada	2010	Modals	-
3	Remedial	Tajiri	2011	Modals -> each modal -> Functions	-
4	Intermediate	Murphy	2004	Modals -> Functions	-
5	Intermediate	Hatakeyama et al.	2011	-	-
6	Advanced	Hewings	1999	-	-
7	Practical	Thomson & Martinet	1986	Modal verbs + Functions	-
8	Practical	Leech & Svartvik	2002	-	-
9	Practical	Leech et al.	2003	each modal -> Functions	-
10	Practical	Sakai	2004	Modals -> each modal -> Functions	-
11	Practical	Swan	2005	Modals -> each modal -> Functions	future -> other uses future -> interpersonal uses progressive -> distancing
12	Practical	Onishi & McVay	2011	Modals -> each modal -> Functions	-
13	Comprehensive	Takanashi	1970	Modals -> each modal -> Functions	future -> intention subjunctive -> distancing
14	Comprehensive	Egawa	1991	Modals -> each modal -> Functions	future -> intention
15	Comprehensive	Declerck	1994	Modals -> Functions -> each modal	future -> intention
16	Comprehensive	Yasui	1996	Modals -> each modal -> Functions	future -> intention
17	Comprehensive	Ando	2005	Modals -> Tense -> each modal -> Functions	-
18	Comprehensive	Watanuki & Petersen	2006	Modals -> each modal -> Functions	-
19	Comprehensive	Carter & McCarthy	2006	-	present -> progressive past -> progressive present -> past
20	Comprehensive	Ishiguro (Ed)	2009	Modals -> Functions -> each modal	subjunctive
21	Tips	Tanaka	2011	Functions + each modal	tense and aspect future -> present intention
22	Tips	Thayne & Morita	2011	Modals -> each modal + Functions	-

(No.17, Comprehensive) employs a unique classification of dividing the modal verbs section into present and past tenses and then leading to each modal with functions.

In the sections of modal verbs, some modals are compared in terms of politeness level. Based on Takanashi (1970, 415, 421, 425) (No.13, Comprehensive), Swan (2005, 101, 318, 622) (No. 11, Practical), Carter & McCarthy (2006, 646, 697) (No.19, Comprehensive), and Ishiguro (2009, 114, 115, 116, 125) (No.20, Comprehensive), it would be reasonable to summarize that *would* is more polite than *will*, *could* than *can*, *may* than *might*, and for permission, *may/might* are more formal than *can/could*. In addition, Thomson & Martinet (1986, 135) (No.7, Practical) explain, “*Could you?* is a very good way of introducing a request. It is an alternative to *would you?* and a little more polite”; Murphy (2004, 74) (No.4, Intermediate) tells that “we also use *will* and *would* to ask people to do things (but *can/could* are more usual).” Although it is unclear here which is more polite, *can* or *would*, based on the information by Onishi & McVay (2011, 105-106) (No.12, Practical) in Section 4.1, *would/could* is more polite than *will/can*. Consequently, it would be acceptable to arrange the mentioned modals by politeness level as *might*, *may*, *could*, *would*, *can*, and *will*, and *could* would be basically safe to use in many cases.

Secondly, tense and aspect are focused. More specifically, future, past or subjunctive (past), and progressive are observed. Takanashi (1970, 380) (No.13, Comprehensive) and Egawa (1991, 217) (No.14, Comprehensive) introduce *will* as showing intentions in the future sections and do not present it in their modal verb sections. Declerck (1994, 152-153, 500-505) (No.15, Comprehensive), and Yasui (1996, 279, 172-173) (No.16, Comprehensive) provide some explanations about the use of *will* in the both their section on the future and their section on modals. Leech & Svartvik (2002, 168) made a similar comment in the “willingness” section that “here the future meaning of *will* is mixed with that of volition (see 129).” But this trend might be old-fashioned. The combination of

“future” and “intention” can be seen only in relatively old books. One possible reason can be seen in the section of modal verbs in Watanuki & Petersen (2006) (No.18, Comprehensive).

The term *will* is originally a modal verb showing intentions. However, intentions can be interpreted as feelings or ideas for the future, and it would be unclear what is different between *will* as a modal verb and as an auxiliary verb showing tense.

Many reference books like to differentiate *will* as simple “future” from *will* as a future intention. However, since *will* has a wide range of functions, it would be more important to know specifically what *will* can be used for rather than “intentional” or “unintentional.” (90, translation mine)

Other works explain *will* as functioning for either intention (in the present tense) or future instead of the combination of intention and future. This is the only instance of change found in the trends. Swan (2005) (No.11, Practical) also handles *will* for requests in the sections dealing with the future, but it seems that the mention is made to remind readers of exceptional uses of *will*, especially for “interpersonal uses” (188, 193, 194).

As stated earlier, Ando (2005) (No.17, Comprehensive) classifies functions into present and past forms. This point is also applied by Tanaka (2011) (No.21, Tips) in the section “Tense and Aspect (translation mine)” as inconsistency between time and tense. Carter & McCarthy (2006, 605) (No.19, Comprehensive) has a section titled “PRESENT TIME REFERENCES WITH THE PAST TENSE” and explains “for reasons of indirectness and politeness, the past simple and the past progressive may sometimes be used with present-time reference.” As Swan (2005) (No.11, Practical) has a subsection titled “2 distancing in questions, requests etc” under a section “426 past verb form with present or future meaning,” such inconsistent usage of tense is referred to as distancing. Related to

distancing, Swan (2005, 559) (No.11, Practical) explains another term *subjunctive*, “Older English had subjunctives, but in modern English they have mostly been replaced by uses of *should*, *would*, and other modal verbs, by special uses of past tenses (see 426), and by ordinary verb forms.” However, a few references still use “subjunctive mood” to describe the above inconsistency. For instance, Ishiguro (2009) (No.20, Comprehensive) introduce polite expressions in the section of subjunctive as below.

The subjunctive (past) mood weakens the directness and makes the expression more modest and polite. While the direct mood conveys declarative messages showing a reality, the subjunctive delivers a speaker’s personal idea or feeling. (351, translation mine)

For these reasons, it can be said that the effect of distancing and the subjunctive proves that the ordering of modals summarized earlier is reasonable.

One more technique of making requests is using the progressive. This can be effective due to its temporariness and incompletion as explained by Swan (2005, 456) (No.11, Practical). The gerund is also involved in requests, however, basically by introducing *mind* as an example of verbs followed by –ing only. In all the explanations above, the viewpoints from tense and aspect are important because of distancing and temporariness.

Thirdly, functions are focused. Tables 5 and 6 indicate which function is specifically fulfilled by request expressions. As shown in the table clearly, textbooks for higher levels and practical English books tend to deal with functions of requests. More specifically, the textbooks illustrate relatively clear practical purposes of requests, such as requests and permission (Table 5), while hidden theoretical sides of purposes of requests are described in practical English references, such as politeness (Table 6).

Table 5 Sections by Specific Function

No.	Target	Written by	Published in	Requesting	permission	Commanding
1	Beginner	Murphy & Smalzer	2011	No	No	No
2	Remedial	Inada	2010	No	No	No
3	Remedial	Tajiri	2011	No	No	No
4	Intermediate	Murphy	2004	Yes	Yes	No
5	Intermediate	Hatakeyama et al.	2011	No	No	No
6	Advanced	Hewings	1999	No	Yes	No
7	Practical	Thomson & Martinet	1986	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Practical	Leech & Svartvik	2002	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Practical	Leech et al.	2003	Yes	Yes	No
10	Practical	Sakai	2004	No	No	No
11	Practical	Swan	2005	Yes	No	No
12	Practical	Onishi & McVay	2011	No	No	No
13	Comprehensive	Takanashi	1970	No	No	No
14	Comprehensive	Egawa	1991	Yes	No	No
15	Comprehensive	Declerck	1994	No	Yes	No
16	Comprehensive	Yasui	1996	No	No	No
17	Comprehensive	Ando	2005	No	No	No
18	Comprehensive	Watanuki & Petersen	2006	No	No	No
19	Comprehensive	Carter & McCarthy	2006	Yes	No	No
20	Comprehensive	Ishiguro (Ed)	2009	No	No	No
21	Tips	Tanaka	2011	No	No	No
22	Tips	Thayne & Morita	2011	No	No	No

Requesting, which is the main theme of this section, seems to be a common section name among practical references. Leech et al. (2003, 564-567) presents several typical request expressions; Leech & Svartvik (2002, 175) (No.8, Practical) explains, “It is often more <tactful> to use a request rather than a command: i.e. to ask your hearer whether he or she is willing or able to do something.” Murphy (2004) (No.4, Intermediate) and Thomson & Martinet (1986) (No.7, Practical) combine requests with modals, and Swan (2005, 534-537) (No.11, Practical) briefly mentions requests in the ‘social’ language section. *Permission* is another common topic that comes with requests. Leech et al. (2003, 477-479) illustrates typical requests for permission with politeness level, which is more detailed than request: *I wonder if you would mind if, Do you mind if ...?, Could I (possibly) ...?, and Can I ...?* (only bold-faced words, italics mine). Thomson & Martinet (1986, 130) (No.7,

Practical) explains that out of *can I?, could I?, may I?, might I?*, “*could I?* is the most generally useful of the four, as it can express both formal and informal requests.” This judgment on *could* is equivalent to the suggestion by Thomson & Martinet (1986, 135) (No.7, Practical), which is related to the ordering of modals mentioned earlier. *Commanding* is one more important function which cannot be completely separated from requests but will be mentioned in the next section.

Finally, the theoretical aspects of requests are focused on. Sakai (2004, 66-68) introduces just “*Will you ...?*,” “*Could you ...?*,” and “*Would you ...?*” as polite request expressions that learners need to know. Note that Sakai (2004) is classified as Practical but Remedial might be more suitable because he tried to introduce only essential knowledge as its book title implies. *Politeness* is a broader concept including requests as Leech & Svartvik (2002, 34) (No.8, Practical) says, “Polite language behaviour is most observable in such speech acts as requesting, advising, and offering.” Swan (2005, 410) (No.11, Practical) has three sections titled “politeness” for introducing politeness saying by “we usually ask people to do things for us by making yes/no questions. (This suggests that the hearer can choose whether to agree or not.)” outlining main tools of “past tenses,” “progressives,” “future,” “modal verbs,” and “conditional and negative expressions” as distancing verb forms (411-412), and adding some more softening expressions (413). These tools are basically the same as those observed related to Table 4 in this paper. Leech et al. (2003, 499) also has a section named “Polite and not polite” and presents a set of examples to illustrate “a normal rule” that “more words increase the level of politeness (translations mine except the section title)” as below.

Instruction:

The door!

Imperative:

Close the door.

Imperative + please:

Please close the door.

Interrogative:

Can you (please) close the door?

Interrogative + reason:

Can you close the door, please? It's rather cold.

Subjunctive past:

Could you close the door, please?

Would you mind closing the door, please?

Extremely polite:

I wonder if you'd mind closing the door, please?

(The headings are my translations.)

Thayne & Morita (2011) (No.22, Tips) provide two tips: Interrogative rather than Imperative, and longer is better (180), and adds explanations for them. For the former, a request can sound polite by making the hearer feel that he or she can refuse it (182), which is identical to Swan (2005, 410) (No.11, Practical); for the latter, a speaker shows that he or she uses a longer and more polite expression by consuming valuable energy for the hearer (183), which is similar to Leech et al. (2003, 499) (No.9, Practical). From these explanations, it can be observed that practical references provide guidance from multiple points of view so that readers can refer to a specific item from any aspects they like to realize a proper usage.

4.3 Imperative for Requests in Grammar References

So far, it has been observed that a variety of tools and expressions can be used in making requests. This section will examine the comments on using the imperative form for requests to see if it is reasonable or not. First, Sakai (2004) (No.10, Practical) makes a favorable comment as follows:

Imperative sounds much softer than the impression of a Japanese term *imperative* and is widely used and useful. (27, translation mine)

As it is called *imperative*, imperative sentences are used as command, ... the imperative is more

frequently used to ask someone to do something. (28, translation mine)

However, some other books ask for careful attentions before using the imperative. For example, Tajiri (2011) (No.3, Remedial) says:

The imperative can be used when you want someone to do something or not to do something, but your wording might sometimes sound strong. (36, translation mine)

Table 6 Sections related to Politeness

No.	Target	Written by	Published in	Politeness
1	Beginner	Murphy & Smalzer	2011	No
2	Remedial	Inada	2010	No
3	Remedial	Tajiri	2011	No
4	Intermediate	Murphy	2004	No
5	Intermediate	Hatakeyama et al.	2011	No
6	Advanced	Hewings	1999	No
7	Practical	Thomson & Martinet	1986	No
8	Practical	Leech & Svartvik	2002	Yes
9	Practical	Leech et al.	2003	Yes
10	Practical	Sakai	2004	Yes
11	Practical	Swan	2005	Yes
12	Practical	Onishi & McVay	2011	No
13	Comprehensive	Takanashi	1970	No
14	Comprehensive	Egawa	1991	No
15	Comprehensive	Declerck	1994	Yes
16	Comprehensive	Yasui	1996	No
17	Comprehensive	Ando	2005	No
18	Comprehensive	Watanuki & Petersen	2006	No
19	Comprehensive	Carter & McCarthy	2006	No
20	Comprehensive	Ishiguro (Ed)	2009	No
21	Tips	Tanaka	2011	No
22	Tips	Thayne & Morita	2011	Yes

Onishi & McVay (2011) (No.12, Practical) advise readers to think over the context before using an imperative as below:

The imperative is the form to throw a request/demand directly to the hearer. The reasonable situations where imperative can be applied are extremely limited. (105, translation mine)

Leech & Svartvik (2002) (No.8, Practical) posts a similar notice:

In many circumstances, commands are <impolite>, and therefore we shall consider in 332-5 various ways of toning down the effect of a command. (174)

According to the target grammar references, main softening techniques are adding *please* or question tags. For instance, Carter & McCarthy (2006, 542) (No.19, Comprehensive) warns against the use of the bare imperative but simply suggests accompanying *please*. It appears that Sakai (2004, 28) (No.10, Practical) and Onishi and McVay (2011, 105) (No.12, Practical) agree with this point. In addition, Sakai (2004, 28) (No.10, Practical) explains that an imperative for ordering must sound forceful. Inada (2010, 73, 80) (No.2, Remedial) and Watanuki & Petersen (2006, 25-27) (No.18, Comprehensive) introduce both of the above techniques.

On the other hand, Swan (2005) (No.11, Practical) insists “Note that *please* does not change an order into a request (433).” Leech & Svartvik (2002) provides several softening techniques but warns against using the imperative, saying:

One way to tone down or weaken the imperative force of a command is to use a rising or fall-rise tone, instead of the usual falling tone: ...

Another way is to add *please*, or the tag question *won't you*: ...

However, if you are asking a favour, none of these alternatives is <polite>. (175)

Despite that, it should not be forgotten that sometimes, using commands can be the best strategy. Leech & Svartvik (2002, 174) (No.8, Practical) explains, “It can have a friendly effect, if the action is in the hearer's interest: *Help yourself*. Or it can be used jokingly: *Don't overdo it!*”; Leech & Svartvik (2002, 175) (No.8, Practical) says, “it is <not impolite> to use a command

when you are telling someone to do something for his or her own good.”

Furthermore, the imperative is not the only form that needs caution. It is revealed that *Will you ...?* and negation should be cautioned here. Ando (2005) (No.17, Comprehensive) points out, “*Will you ...?* can be a command depending on the context, and in that case, *will* is stressed (296, translation mine)”; Carter & McCarthy (2006, 649) (No.19, Comprehensive) points out, “Strong directives can be issued using *will* in the interrogative”; Thomson & Martinet (248) explains, “*will you* is more authoritative and therefore less polite.”; and Watanuki & Petersen (2006) (No.18, Comprehensive) explains, “‘*Will you help with the packing?*’ is a request by asking the hearer's intention but cannot be polite enough and a fierce tone sounds a kind of command (91, translation mine).” It is common that *will you ...?* is introduced as one of the polite requests, but the above notices show that this is one more expression that needs careful use. Regarding negation, Swan (2005, 617) warns, “*Won't you ...?* expresses a pressing offer.”; Watanuki & Petersen (2006, 190) (No.18, Comprehensive) comments that a negative question “*Can't you help me?*” can sound like an entreaty or a complaint; and Leech & Svartvik (2002, 176) (No.8, Practical) mentions a negative question “expects a positive answer (see 246), and is to that extent <less tentative> and more persuasive.” As a rare case, only one book explains that negation can be a tool to increase the politeness level: Carter & McCarthy (2006, 649) (No.19, Comprehensive) say, “A rarer, more formal use of *won't* occurs in polite requests and invitations,” but it would be safer to conclude that the negation should be avoided for requests.

Unfortunately, it has to be summarized that a more common understanding would be that it is safer to avoid using the imperative though the imperative itself can deliver a variety of nuances and some softening tools are available. However, it should also be noted that the imperative is not the only cautious form but also *will you ...?* and negation need special care.

5. Conclusion

In order to efficiently learn how to make an appropriate request, it would be preferable to understand modal verbs first. The information of tense and aspect could add more sophisticated techniques to the basic knowledge. Function-oriented descriptions can be seen more in the works which emphasize “practical,” “communicative,” or “usage.” However, it must be noted that some other items, such as intonation, tone, adverbs and supplementary clauses, remained unexamined here, and further studies would be required especially related to sound. It can be proved that sound is crucial in delivering a preferable nuance since Leech & Svartvik (2002) (No.8, Practical) provide plenty of phonological advice.

There are a lot of options of how to express a request, and while the imperative is one of them, its nuance varies depending on the context. Imperative specialists are rather neutral in the use of the imperative, whereas it is commonly observed that the target grammar references avoid suggesting that readers use the imperative for requests. This would probably be because the usage of imperative needs so sensitive discernment that it is hard to fully describe a proper usage. This may also be based on the fact that simple cautions are prevailing while some say that imperative with *please* or question tag is reasonable enough.

In conclusion, both of the uses of the imperative and those of requests are really sensitive because of their diversity, complexity, and possible risks. It might be easy and reasonable to employ a safer expression as a compromise, but for offering more accurate advice to English learners, it would be inevitable to challenge actual data of requesting to trace back grammar writers' work.

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