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ARTICLE

# Request Realisations in Cameroon Pidgin English

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ABSTRACT

Pragmatic investigations into Cameroon Pidgin English are rare and works on requests are non-existent. This study sets out to outline the rules that underlie requests in this language and the lexical and structural features that arise from them. The informants were 30 fluent Pidgin English speakers who were found communicating in Pidgin in public settings and who were willing to complete a writing exercise. The instrument used was a collection of ten request fragments that had occurred in natural Pidgin conversation. These informants were asked to compose a possible conversation between two familiar equals in which one of these fragments like "Put the potatoes in the bucket" could fit squarely. The frame adopted for data analysis was Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's 1984 research on requests and apologies, whose aim was to specify the particular pragmatic rules of use for a number of languages including English and German. The analysis revealed that the constituents of a request utterance were the same as the previous researchers had identified. The most frequent request strategy type used was "reference to preparatory conditions" (31.57% of 38 utterances) followed by "hedged performatives" (26.31%).

## 1. Introduction

Pragmatics research on Pidgins and Creoles, in general, and Cameroon Pidgin English in particular, are rare. Specifically, the speech act of requests in Cameroon Pidgin English has not attracted the attention of researchers. This study aims to tackle requests in this language, with the focus on the way request conversations are constructed, the strategies that its fluent speakers use to realise request acts, and the lexical and syntactic features that these speakers regard as appropriate. The following questions guided the investigation: What are the constituents of a typical request act? What common request strategy types are used? What syntactic and lexical features are used in the formulation of requests? What is the overall discourse structure of a request conversation? The theoretical and methodological frames for this study are Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's work (1984) which guided the study of requests in many cultures and languages including English, Danish, French, and German, as well as others[1]. The study will specify the pragmatic rules of use that fluent speakers follow to make appropriate requests in Cameroon Pidgin English. Ultimately, it will facilitate the identification of universal features and of cross-linguistic differences in the realisation of requests. The work is divided into four sections labelled: background to the study (2), theoretical frame and literature review (3), research

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design (4), and analysis and discussion (5). These are considered in turn below.

## 2. Background to the Study

Pragmatics is the study of the rules that govern the use of language in social interaction. Over the years, research interests in this level of language analysis have taken two directions. One direction is the use of language in social interaction in various cultures (cross-cultural pragmatic research) as can be illustrated by works like Awad Mohamed Youssef (2012)[2] and Mouad Mohammed et al (2015)[3]. The other direction is the rules that learners of a language need to know in order to communicate successfully in that language (interlanguage pragmatic research) as can be illustrated by works like Alireza Jalilifar (2009)[4] and Salvesen (2015)[5]. The present work, which falls in the latter division, focuses on the realisation of request in one specific language, i.e., Cameroon Pidgin English.

A request may be regarded as a demand for something from somebody or as a favour that the speaker is asking from the listener. To make a request therefore means to express a want that the listener has to satisfy for the benefit of the speaker. Requesting is a speech act, just like giving orders, making promises, or making complaints. When a speaker produces an utterance in an interaction, he or she expects the listener to react either verbally or non-verbally. At the centre of investigations on requests are four researchers, i.e., Austin, Searle, and Brown and Levinson. Austin (1962), in an in-depth study of speech acts, pointed out that in communication many things can be done with words including asking, thanking, ordering, requesting, warning, and threatening[6]. These are examples of speech acts which speakers perform when they make utterances.

Austin's speech act theory was refined by Searle (1969) who observed that each speech act has at least two parts, i.e., locutionary and illocutionary[7]. A locutionary act is the mere act of speaking or making an utterance, whereas an illocutionary act is the act that is realised through the force of the utterance such as thanking or warning. He identified a third act called perlocutionary act, which tends to evoke some effects on the listeners or the audience. Focusing on illocutionary acts, he found that they can be grouped into five types which he labelled representatives, directives, expressive, commissives, and declarations. Requests, which fall under directives in this classification, are: "an attempt to get hearer to do an act which speaker wants hearer to do, and which it is not obvious that the hearer will do in the normal course of events or of hearer's own accord"[7]. In his 1976 work, he grouped requests into three broad categories, i.e., those for information, for goods and services, and for permission[8].

Brown and Levinson (1987) worked out a theory of politeness at the centre of which is the notion of "face". They defined face as "a person's public self-esteem or self-image which can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction"[9]. As they noted, face can be divided into two parts which they called positive and negative. Positive face is what every human wishes to preserve: everyone wants his or her needs to be accepted by other people and everyone needs to feel that he or she matters in his or her social group. In communication, positive face surfaces in the form of positive politeness which in turn favours the use of certain expressions like nicknames and not surnames, the pronoun "we" and not "you". Negative face, on the other hand, refers to the speaker's right to do things as he or she wishes and the rejection of any form of imposition from other people. In communication, negative face surfaces in the form of negative politeness which in turn favours antagonism. Some acts are said to threaten face; they are referred to as Face Threatening Acts. Acts that threaten positive face include: orders, requests, suggestions, advice, warning, offers, and promises. Those that threaten negative face are: disapproval, criticism, complaint, accusation, insult, contradiction, and interruption. As requests threaten positive face, politeness is likely to lighten the weight of the imposition on the requestee and by so doing preserve the good rapport between the requestor and the requestee.

The present study, which draws extensively from these researchers' works, examines requests in Cameroon Pidgin English with the focus not just on how an individual request speech act is realised as many researchers have done, but also on how a complete request conversation is constructed.

## 3. Theoretical Frame and Literature Review

This section outlines the frame adopted for this study and reviews past works on requests in Cameroon Pidgin English. The most prominent investigation on speech act realisation in the literature is Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's 1984 work where they examined two speech acts, requests and apologies, in different languages and cultures, i.e., three varieties of English – American, Australian and British – Danish, Canadian French, German, Hebrew and Russian in the same 16 social contexts[1]. These researchers designed a discourse completion test consisting of incomplete discourse sequences representing different social contexts. Details on the situation were provided as well as information on the setting, the social distance between the interlocutors, their status relative to one another, and an incomplete dialogue that the informants completed

therefore providing the targeted speech act. Here is one illustrative discourse sequence sample that was designed to obtain a request[1]:

(1) At a students' apartment (Larry, John's room-mate, had a party the night before and left the kitchen in a mess.)

John: Larry, Ellen and Tom are coming for dinner tonight and I'll have to start cooking soon;

_____.

Larry: OK, I'll have a go at it right away.

From the answers given to (1) above, one can work out the preferences that native speakers have for realising a request for an action among familiar equals and the strategies they use.

A total of 400 informants for each language chosen completed the test with the required items. On the basis of the informants' answers, the researchers identified the units for analysis and the strategy types the informants used. The units for analysis, which were supplied by the informants, were found to include the following elements lettered a) to c): a) address terms; b) Head act; and c) Adjunct to Head act, with the nucleus being the head act, that is, the element which alone can realise the request. Here is an illustration: "Dany, could you lend me £100 for a week. I've run into problems with the rent for my apartment"[1]. This utterance can be analysed as follows:

a) "Dany" (address term)

b) "Could you lend me £100 for a week" (head act)

c) "I've run into problems with the rent for my apartment" (adjunct to Head act)

Regarding strategy types, three levels of directness were identified. These are:

a) the most direct level, which is realised by requests containing imperatives, performatives and hedged performatives;

b) the conventionally indirect level, which is realised by indirect speech acts marked syntactically by expressions like "could you do it" or" would you do it";

c) the non-conventional indirect level, which realises the request by referring to an object in the vicinity e.g. "Why is the window open" meaning "Close the window!" or "It's cold in here" meaning "Close the window!".

These three levels of directness were further divided into nine request strategy types numbered 1 to 9 below and labelled as follows:

1). Mood derivable (the grammatical mood of the verb marks its illocutionary force as a request e.g. Leave me alone, clean up that mess, please

2). Explicit performatives, e.g. I am asking you not to park the car here.

3). Hedged performatives, e.g. I would like you to give your lecture a week earlier

4). Locution derivable, e.g. Madam you'll have to move your car

5). Scope setting, e.g. I really wish you'd stop bothering me.

6). Language specific suggestory formula e.g. Why don't you get lost? How about cleaning up? So, why don't you come and clear up the mess you made in the kitchen?

7). Reference to preparatory conditions e.g. Could you clean up the kitchen, please? Would you mind moving your car, please?

8). Strong hints (partial reference to object or to elements needed for the implementation of the act e.g. You've left the kitchen in a right mess.

9). Mild hints (utterances indirectly pragmatically implying the act) e.g. I'm a nun. (in response to the persistent boy, i.e., I cannot listen to your flirtatious moves)

These strategy types may be accompanied by various syntactic manipulations including the use of downgraders and upgraders, hedges, downtoners and intensifiers. The present work uses the frame thus outlined.

Regarding works on requests in Cameroon Pidgin English, they are rare. The only study that has broached the topic is Nkwain's doctoral thesis (2011)[10], in which he used Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987)[9] to explore the various strategies and underlying features marking politeness in this language. Using the questionnaire technique, he elicited data from fluent speakers of Pidgin in various contexts. Various questions were asked to generate data for the study. Data for the analysis of request were obtained from answers to three specific questions. These were:

- How would you politely request for a repetition of what - your interlocutor said and - you did not hear?

- Someone requests your help or for something and you are not able to help out, how would you politely make him/her understand your situation by promising to do something later?

- How would you politely request for some money, food, water, salt etc?

From these data, he identified seven types of requests in the corpus, which he labelled and exemplified as shown below:

- Polite turn requests: these are said to be used to solicit a speaking turn in a conversation (p. 166)

*A fit tok tu?* (Can I equally talk?)

*A beg, lisen tu!* (Please equally listen!)

- Volition-based requests: the speaker is said to use language to put the hearer in a position to do something if he or she wishes or desires to do so (197):

*if yu want-am* (…If you want)

*if yu laik* (…If you like)


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- Ability-based requests: they are said to give the hearer the latitude to assess their capacity or ability to perform a particular task before doing so (197):

*Yi fain fo brok ol de fayawut nau if yu fit* (It is good to split all the wood now if you can)

*Kari-am ol if yu get de pawa* (Carry all of them if you have the power)

- Time-based requests: the hearer is said to have the latitude to choose when he or she can perform the task (198):

*Yu fit du-am eni taim yu want-am* (You can do it whenever you want)

*Yu fit kam eni taim yu want-am* (You can come whenever you want to)

- State of being-based requests: these are said to be based on the hearer's feeling (198):

*Yu fit join wi if yu fil as to* (You can accompany us if you feel as to)

*Stop ivin nau sef if yu fil as tu.* (Stop even now if you feel as to)

- Overt requests: the requestor gives the requestee the latitude to perform the task when he wishes (199):

*Yu fit go eni pleis yu want-am* (You can go anywhere you want)

*Yu fit chus eni pesin yu want-am.* (You can choose any person you want)

- Requests for repetition: they are said to be used in conversations to handle problems of misunderstanding (p. 213):

*A bek, A no hia weti yu tok!* (Please I did not hear what you said!)

*Yu fit ripit weti yu tok!* (Could you repeat what you said!)

The descriptors used in this thesis do not seem to have come from the frame adopted by this researcher. They will therefore not be considered further.

## 4. Research Design

The present investigation does not use the discourse completion test designed by Blum-Kulha and Olshtain (1984)[1], which many researchers have adopted. It uses full made-up conversations based on provided authentic request fragments. To illustrate, the informants were given request fragments such as "Lend me some money" and "Pick up my father at the bus station for me" (see Appendix) and were asked to design a possible conversation between two familiar equals in which these fragments could be used. Familiar equals such as two clerks in an office, two neighbours or two classmates were chosen to avoid having to handle issues of variability along the social distance dimension.

A list of ten request fragments was extracted from the data collected in 2005 for the compilation of the dictionary of Cameroon Pidgin English[11][12][13].These ten fragments were presented to potential informants who were found communicating in Pidgin English, especially in bars and pubs. For the choice of these informants, two criteria were considered: they were to be heard speaking Pidgin, and they were to be able to write out a conversation in Pidgin and read it aloud. All other sociolinguistic parameters were ignored as indexical information; therefore age, gender and the like were not relevant for this study. The towns chosen were: Bamenda (the headquarters of Northwest Region of Cameroon where Pidgin is the dominant lingua franca), Buea (the headquarters of the Southwest Region which is the birth place of Pidgin in Cameroon), and Yaounde (the capital city of the country where Pidgin speakers from various localities reside). In each of these towns, one research assistant was contacted. When the researcher and his assistant found two or more people communicating in Pidgin, they sat by these people, greeted them and commented positively on their use of Pidgin. Then they were asked whether they would be willing to join in an exercise they were conducting, which consisted in writing down a conversation in Pidgin. Some retorted that they did not know how to write in Pidgin but they were encouraged to write anyhow. When these people opted to do the exercise, they were given a pen and a piece of paper, and were shown a list of ten short sentences which were in fact ten request fragments. They were asked whether they had ever heard something like these sentences in a conversation and the answer was always yes. Then they were asked to choose one of these sentences and write out a possible conversation in which such a sentence or any variant of it had occurred. Usually, the two people or the whole group of people joined in the exercise, helping out the person writing with spelling tips or word choice. When the conversation was written out, we then asked one of these people to read it aloud in order for the text to be recorded. Finally, the recorded text was played back to the people, who were then thanked for having helped with the research. In return, we offered the pen to the person who wrote and shared a beverage with them when they were only two people. When they were three or more, they were given a pen each.

Once a sentence was chosen from the list of ten, that sentence was removed, and the next informants were shown a list of the remaining nine sentences. The process continued in the same way until the last informants were given just one sentence to write. When the first two sentences of the list were used in conversations in a town, the research assistant for that town was asked to finish off the remaining eight sentences, following the same procedure.

In all, ten conversations were written in each town, for a total of 30 conversations from the three towns, and each request fragment was used in three conversations composed in three different towns.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

From the 30 conversations collected, 38 request utterances were identified. The extra 8 utterances came from the fact that some informants made two requests in their conversations, as will be seen later. This section first considers the constituents of a typical request act (5.1); then it examines request strategy types (5.2), the syntactic and lexical features that are used in the formulation of requests (5.3), and the discourse structure of request conversations involving familiar equals (5.4). These are considered in turn.

### 5.1 Constituents of a Typical Request Act

A typical request act is said to include three constituents, i.e., an address term, a head act, and an adjunct to head act, as the example cited above shows. Below five request acts from the corpus are reproduced; the original request is in italics, followed by its word-for-word translation and its English equivalent. The constituents of each request are identified thereafter.

(1) *Ma gel, A bek eh, yu fit helep mi wit ten tauzin Frank* (My girl, I beg, you can help me with ten thousand Francs! = My friend, can you lend me ten thousand Francs, i.e., about £10!)

(2) *De tin na se A bi wan kam bek da ya bak fo travel. A bek, yu fit helep mi wit-am?* (The thing is that I wanted come beg that your bag for travel. I beg, you can help me with it? = I came to see you about your travel bag. Would you please lend it to me?)

(3) *Plis yu fit helep mi put-am fo boket?* (Please you can help me put it in bucket? = Please help me to put it in the bucket! or please put it in the bucket for me!)

(4) *Ma, A bek, yu go fit helep mi go tek papa fo pak on da monde wen hi rich?* (Mother, I beg, you will capable help mi go take father at park on that Monday when he reach? = My friend, I beg, would you be so kind as to go to the bus station on Monday and pick up my father when he arrives?)

(5) *A bi wan bek yu weda ma smol broda fit kam ste wit yu fo som taim. Som mai anti dem di kam fo visit an yu no se wa haus smol no; spes no de, A bek.* (I wanted beg you whether my small brother can come stay with you for some time. Some my aunts are come for visit and you know that our house small, isn't it? Space not is. = I would be grateful if you could house my junior brother for some time. Some of my aunts are coming for a visit and you know that our house is small. There is no space.)

In (1), there are two constituents: one address term (*ma gel*) and one head act (*A bek eh, yu fit helep mi wit 10 tauzin Frank*). In (2), there is one head act which is repeated, surely for emphasis (*A bi wan kam bek da ya bak fo travel. A bek, yu fit helep mi wit-am*). In (3), there is one constituent, the head act: *Plis yu fit helep mi put-am fo boket?* In (4), two constituents are identified: one address term (ma) and one head act (*A bek, yu go fit helep mi go tek papa fo pak on da monde wen hi rich*). Finally in (5), there are two elements: one head act (*A bi wan bek yu weda ma smol broda fit kam ste wit yu fo som taim*) and one adjunct to the head act (*Som mai anti dem di kam fo visit an yu no se wa haus smol no; spes no de, A bek*).

On the basis of these five illustrations, it can be concluded that the request head act is an obligatory element which can occur alone as in (3) or can be repeated as in (2). In addition, the request utterance may include an address term as in (1) and (4) and an adjunct to the head act as in (5). In other words, the request units identified by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain[1] are attested in Cameroon Pidgin English. The constituents thus identified can be tabulated as shown below.

### 5.2 Request Strategy Types

As the review above indicates, a total of nine request strategy types were identified in different languages and cultures. These strategy types are reproduced below, together with their equivalents in Cameroon Pidgin English.

As can be seen, the dominant request strategy type is

**Table 1.** Elements of Request Types

| Utterances | Address terms | Request head acts | Adjuncts |
|---|---|---|---|
| *1* | *Ma gel* | *A bek eh, yu fit helep mi wit ten tauzin Frank* | |
| *2* | | *De tin na se A bi wan kam bek da ya bak fo travel. A bek, yu fit helep mi wit-am?* | |
| *3* | | *Plis yu fit helep mi put-am fo boket?* | |
| *4* | *Ma* | *A bek, yu go fit helep mi go tek papa fo pak on da monde wen hi rich?* | |
| *5* | | *(5) A bi wan bek yu weda ma smol broda fit kam ste wit yu fo som taim.* | *Som mai anti dem di kam fo visit an yu no se wa haus smol no; spes no de, A bek.* |


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**Table 2.** Request Strategy Types in Cameroon Pidgin English

| Request strategy types (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984)[1] | Request strategy types in Cameroon Pidgin English | Proportion N=38 |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Mood derivable (the grammatical mood of the verb marks its illocutionary force as a request e.g. Leave me alone, clean up that mess, please | *A bek go tek-am bring-am fast. A wan jus de gaun on Fraide fo som hot wiken pati.*<br><br>(I beg go take it bring it fast. I want use the gown on Friday for some hot weekend party. = Please go, take it, and bring it fast. I want to use it for an exciting party on Friday.) | 8<br><br>(21.05%) |
| 2. Explicit performatives e.g. I am asking you not to park the car here. | - | - |
| 3. Hedged performative: I would like you to give your lecture a week earlier | *A bi wan aks se mi yu helep mi wit ya buk mi A go kopi ma on not dem.*<br><br>(I wanted ask that you help me with your book make I go copy my own notes. = I would like you to lend me your notes so that I can write out mine.) | 10<br><br>(26.31%) |
| 4. Locution derivable: Madam you'll have to move your car | - | |
| 5. Scope setting: I really wish you'd stop bothering me. | *Masa, A bi wan mek yu help mi wit 5,000 Francs. A get som ogent tin we A wan du wit-am*<br><br>(Mister, I wanted that you help me with 5000 Francs. I get some urgent thing that I want do with it = My brother, I would be grateful if you could lend me 5,000 Francs, i.e., £5. I have an urgent need to attend to.) | 6<br><br>(15.78%) |
| 6. Language specific suggestory formula: Why don't you get lost? How about cleaning up? So, why don't you come and clear up the mess you made in the kitchen? | - | |
| 7. Reference to preparatory conditions e.g. Could you clean up the kitchen, please? Would you mind moving your car, please? | *Ma, A bek, yu go fit helep mi go tek papa fo pak on da monde wen hi rich?*<br><br>(Mother, I beg, you will able help me go take father at park on that Monday when he arrives = My friend, could you please go to the bus station and welcome my father when he arrives?) | 12<br><br>(31.57%) |
| 8. Strong hints (partial reference to object or to elements needed for the implementation of the act e.g. You've left the kitchen in a right mess. | *Yu no se de bon John na fo April?*<br><br>(You know that they delivered John it is in April? = Do you recall that John's birthday is in April?) | 2<br><br>(5.26%) |
| 9. Mild hints (utterances indirectly pragmatically implying the act): I'm a nun. (in response to the persistent boy, i.e., I cannot listen to your flirtatious moves) | - | |

number 7 (reference to preparatory conditions), with a score of 31.57% of the 38 cases. It is followed closely by number 3 (hedged performative), with 26.31% of the 38 cases. Four of the nine strategy types are not present in the corpus. These are: explicit performative (number 2), locution derivable (number 4), language specific suggestory

**Table 3.** Common Linguistic Features Used in Requests

| Lexical items and syntactic constructions | Examples | Proportion N=38 |
|---|---|---|
| bek (A bek, A bek yu…) | *A kol na fo bek yu se mek yu fain mi somtin fo hol bele. Hongri de ya man.* ( = Can you kindly get me something for lunch. I am very hungry. | 32 (84.21%) |
| fit (yu fit tek, yu fit go…) | *A se eh, A bek yu fit fain mi moni lak ten tazin? A go gi yu bak by mont en.* ( =Please dear, can you borrow me ten thousand francs. I will give you back by month end.) | 20 (52.63%) |
| helep (helep mi…) | *A bek yu fit helep mi chek ma chikala fo yi lon. But if yu get taim yu fi jo tek yi go hospito. Yi di sik we A no de mi taun.* (=Please can you help me and check on my girlfriend at her house? Or if you have time you can help take her to the hospital. She is sick and I am not in town.) | 18 (47.36%) |
| mek (mek yu gi mi, mek dem du…) | *A fo laik-am mek yu gi mi smol moni fo pe Joan an Martha mek dem du de wok an if yu fit gi mi som moni tu fo bai sit dem fo de fam. A bek yu Pa Joe.* (=I would want to ask you for money to pay Joan and Martha to do the work and some money for the seeds please Pa Joe.) | 8 (21.05%) |
| wan (A wan se, A bi wan aks se…) | *A bi wan se mek yu helep mi wit de moni. A go gi yu bak afta tri mont.* (=So I want you to help me with the money. I will pay back after three months.) | 8 (21.05%) |

formula (number 6), and mild hint (number 9).

### 5.3 Lexical and Syntactic Features Used in Requests

There are a number of lexical and syntactic features that are frequently used in the formulation of requests. A close look at the data shows that the following lexical items and syntactic constructions are common. These are:

### 5.4 Discourse Structure of Request Conversations

Thus far, this analysis has dwelled on how individual request speech acts are constructed. The present sub-section deals with how a complete request conversation is built; it therefore focuses on the discourse structure of request conversations in Cameroon Pidgin English. Previous works on discourse in this language are rare. One of them is Kouega (2008)[11][12], where the methods of discourse analysis developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975)[14] and Ventola (1982)[15] were used to describe market transactions. Another is Kouega (2009)[16], where the frames set up by Schegloff and Sacks (1973)[17] and Coronel-Molina (1998)[18] were used to analyse telephone openings and goodbyes. These same frames are used to describe the complete request conversations from which the individual request speech acts described in the preceding sub-sections were extracted.

A request conversation has a canonical structure that includes three elements, i.e., greeting, one request exchange or more, and leave-taking. Here is an illustration, drawn from a conversation set in the market context in one of the 30 texts collected:

1A. *Helo Sa, gut yam fo 500.* (Hello Sir, good yam for 500. = Hello Sir, I have good yams for 500 here, i.e., about 50 pence.)

2B. *A wan na poteto.* (I want it is potato: = No, I want potatoes instead.)

3A. *Na potato bi dis, 250.* (It is potato is this, 250. = OK, here are potatoes, for 250, i.e. 25 pence)

4B. *A bek, yu fit tek 150?* (I beg, you can take 150? = Could you bring the price down to 150, i.e., 15 pence?

5A. *No bi 150, bot na 200.* (Not is 150, but it is 200. = No, I can't take 150; give me 200)

6B. *Wel.* (Well = OK!)

7A. *Ha meni hip yu wan sef ?* (How many heap you want even? = How many heaps do you need, by the way? NB. Such items as potatoes are generally sold in heaps or in buckets, as scales are hardly used.)

8B. *A wan na fo.* (I want it is four: = I want four heaps, i.e., about 5 kilograms)

9A. *Fo hip di kos 800.* (Four heaps are cost 800. = Four heaps will cost 800 i.e. about 80 pence)

10B. *Plis, yu fit helep mi put-am fo boket? Na ya moni bi dis!* (Please you can help me put it in bucket? It is your money is this! = Please, can you help me put it in this bucket! Here is your money!)

11A. *Tank yu Sa.* (Thank you, Sir. = Thank you Sir.)

12B. *Bai bai.* (Bye bye = Bye!)

13A. *Bai bai* (Bye bye = Bye bye!)

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In this conversation, the greeting is limited to the utterance *Helo Sa* in 1A, and leave-taking is the pair 12B and 13A. There are two request exchanges; the first request is the utterance *A bek, yu fit tek 150?* in 4B. This utterance initiates the process of bargaining, which is a common practice in market transactions in the cultures of Cameroon. The second request is in 10B, where the buyer asks the seller to help him put the potatoes in a bucket: *Plis, yu fit helep mi put-am fo boket? Na ya moni bi dis!*

The focus of this study is on the request exchange. The central element of this exchange is the request utterance, i.e., that utterance which contains the request head act, the address term as well as the adjunct to head act that were outlined earlier. In the conversation above, there are two request utterances: 4B and 10B. In some conversations in contexts other than the market, the request utterance may be preceded by a long justification, with the requestor taking a long time to explain why he has to make the request. Here is an example drawn from the corpus:

1A. *Helo Paul, ha yu de?* (Hello Paul, how you are? = Hello Paul, how are you?)

2B. *A de fain. Hau bodi?* (I am fine. How body? = How are you?)

3A. *Bodi fain. A bek A get som smol wahala.* (Body fine. Please, I get some small problem. = Please, I have a problem.)

4B. *Na weti bi de wahala.* (It is what is the problem. = What is the problem?)

5A. *Ma broda, A bek, no veks; A rili nit ya help. Fiva kach ma pikin fo nait. A kari yi go hospitul. Wen A rish de, na yi dokto sij-am se de pikin taifoit. So yi se mek A kam weti teti tauzin bifo yi go fit wok fo yi sikin. So A bi wan se mek yu helep me witi de moni. A go gi yu bak afta tri mont.* (= My brother, please, do not get angry with me. I really need your help. My child had a fit of fever last night. I took him to the hospital. When I got there, the doctor diagnosed typhoid. He asked me to bring 30,000 (i.e., £30) for the drugs. I therefore wish that you should give me that money. I will pay back in three months' time.)

6B. *Weeeh! Ma sista, ashia, A bek tai hat. Na so laif de. Bot no wori, A go sen yu de moni na-na so fo Express Union. No wori fo pei-am bak. A jos wan helep.* (= Gosh! My sister, what a pity! Be courageous! Such things happen in life. But do not worry yourself! I will send the money to you right away via the Express Union Money Transfer Company. Do not worry yourself over paying back. I just want to help you.)

7A. *Tank yu plenty. Papa* Got go bles yu fo mi. (Thank you very much. God the Father should bless you for me.)

8B. *Na notin ma sista.* (Do not worry yourself my sister.)

In this conversation, the requestor explains why she needs assistance: her baby fell sick in the night, she took him to the hospital, he was found to be suffering from typhoid, the doctor has asked for 30,000 Francs - about £30 - to rescue the child, she does not have that money, and that is the reason why she has to make a request.

Below is another example from the corpus in which the requestor takes time to explain his needs before making the request:

1A. *Mama Joseph oooh!* (Mother Joseph. = Joseph's mother!)

2B. *Yeees, Pa.* (Yes, father. = Yes, Sir.)

3A. *Yu bi di tok se na weti hapin fo da fam fo daun haus?* (You had been saying that it is what happen to that farm at down house? = What did you say was happening to the farm below the house?

4B. *No bi A tel yu se taim don kach mi. Ren don stat fol we A nova wok-am.* (Not is I tell you that time has catch me. Rain has start fall that I never till it. = Didn't I tell you that I have been caught up by time? Rains are falling and I have not yet tilled the farm.)

5A. *Yu bi wan du hau nau?* (You are want do how now? = What do you want to do now?)

6B. *A fo laik-am mek yu gi mi smol moni fo pe Joan an Martha mek dem do de wok. An if yu fit gi mi som moni tu fo bai sit dem fo de fam. A bek yu, Pa Joe.* (I to like it that you give me small money to pay Joan and Martha that they do the work. And if you can give me some money too to buy seeds for the farm. I beg you. = I wish that you give me some money to pay Joan and Martha who will till the farm for me. Then I will need some money to buy seeds to be planted on the tilled land)

7A. *Oke. A don hia.* (OK. I have heard. = OK. I have heard.)

8B. *Tank yu.* (Thank you. = Thank you)

Here the requestor needs money for two things: paying labourers who will till her farm and buying seeds to plant on the tilled farm. There is an emergency as she is late, the rain having started to fall. As the explanation is well put, the requestee has no choice but to grant the request.

When this explanation is left out or is not readily understood, the requestee asks for clarification before committing himself, surely to avoid shouldering a heavy imposition that may require considerable effort on his behalf. Here is an illustration from the corpus:

1A. *Mary! Hau fo yu?* (Mary! How for you? = Mary! How are you?)

2B. *Joy, A de fain. An yu?* (Joy, I am fine. And you? = Joy I am fine. And you?)

3A. *A de fain.* (I am fine. = I am fine.)

4B. *Ok oooh!* (OK. = OK)

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5A. *A bi wan aks weda yu fit helep mi wit ma asainmen. A no go de sukul tumoro.* (I wanted ask whether you can help me with my assignment. I not will be school tomorrow. = I am wondering if you could help with my assignment. I will not go to school tomorrow.)

6B. *Helep yu hau? Fo pas-am?* (Help you how? To pass it? = How can I help you? To hand it over to the teacher?)

7A. *Yes, A don rait-am; na onli fo pas-am.* (Yes, I have write it; it is only to pass it. = Yes, I have written it; It is just to hand it over to the teacher.)

8B. *OK problem no de. A go go pas-am. Bring-am fo has fo ivinin.* (OK problem not is. I will go pass it. Bring it to house in evening. = OK, there is no problem. Bring it to my house in the evening.)

9A. *Tank yu plenti, Mary!* (Thank you much, Mary! = Thank you very much, Mary!)

10B. OK Joy

11A. *Si yu fo ivinin.* (See you in evening. = See you in the evening.)

12B. *Yes, fo ivinin.* (Yes, in evening. = See you.)

As can be seen, the requestee here, who is a female student, asks a crucial question: "How do you want me to help you? Is it to hand over the assignment to the teacher or to write the assignment for you?" If the answer was to write the assignment, obviously the requestee would not have granted the request. Luckily, the requestor had already done the assignment and simply wanted the requestee to hand it in to the teacher.

In short, as the 30 interactions written by the participants have shown, the discourse structure of a request conversation comprises three elements, i.e., greeting, request exchange, and leave-taking. The request exchange may be limited to the request utterance, i.e., the utterance that the requestors formulate to realise the request. Usually, this utterance is preceded by a long explanation that disarms the requestees and therefore forces them to grant the request. Conversely, the requestees may take time to ask for clarification from the requestors before committing themselves.

## 6. Conclusion

This work has examined a collection of 30 request conversations in Cameroon Pidgin English that were constructed by fluent speakers of this language. The analysis revealed that the main constituent of a request segment is the request head act, which may be preceded by an address term and followed by an adjunct to head act, as Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984)[1] found. The dominant request strategy types used were "reference to preparatory conditions (31.57% of the 38 utterances) and hedged performatives (26.31% of the 38 utterances). Common lexical items and syntactic constructions that are found to signal requests include: "A bek yu…" (84.21% of the 38 requests) and "yu fit helep mi" (52.63%). Finally, the discourse structure of request conversations is found to include three elements, i.e., greeting, request exchange, and leave-taking. The request exchange may contain just the request utterance. Occasionally, it is preceded by an extensive explanation whose purpose is to disarm the requestee before the request utterance proper is uttered. However, when the requestees feel that the weight of imposition may be too heavy for them to bear, they may seek clarification before committing themselves. The present research was limited to request conversations involving familiar equals. Future research will extend the description by checking for example whether parameters such as social distance or interlocutors' statuses have any effects on the structure of requests in this language.

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## Appendix

Below are ten utterances you may have heard in conversations in Pidgin. Write one conversation between two friends in which one of the utterances fits squarely. Do not hesitate to use any common variants of these utterances.

1. Gi mi moni (gi mi ya buk, gi mi ya gaun.) (Give me some money/Give me your book/Give me your gown!)
2. Helep wit asaimen: (Help with assignment!)
3. Find mi lisablet. (Get a razor blade for me!)
4. Go tek ma papa fo mi. (Go and pick up my father for me.)
5. De bon John fo April. (John was born in April.)
6. Put-am fo boket. (Put it in the bucket!)
7. Fain mi somtin fo hol bele. (Get me something to eat!)
8. Bai-am an send-am fo mi (Buy it and send it to me!)
9. Chek ma bebi fo mi. (Call on my girlfriend for me!)
10. Tek ma broda ste wit yi. (House my brother for me!)